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DROLL PETER

A Novel

FELIX TIMMERMANS

TRANSLATED BY
Maida C. Darnton
and
Wilhelmina J. Paul

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**DROLL
PETER**

Chapter I

THE VILLAGE

THE rosy little peach tree dripped raindrops and sunlight upon the mother soon to be who sat churning in its shade. The glistening cock crowed on a long shrill note. The child Pieter grew restless within the body of his mother, and was born and swaddled and cradled in the tavern, "The Promised Land," that very morning.

On the roof there was a stork's nest and high above it stretched a rainbow. . . .

Tears were in the mother's eyes when first she sat up in her bed to feed her lusty boy the rich milk from her great breasts. In the near-by cemetery she saw the small mound of earth, with a black cross upon it, beneath which her husband had lain buried for a month.

She was the widow of a gaunt farmer who had worked much and spoken little; but just before his death he had said with a sigh: "What a pity that our only child is coming so late in our lives . . . that I shall never see him. . . . If it's a boy, let him be a sailor. . . . I always wanted to go to sea."

Now she said aloud to her dead husband, as if he were sitting beside her bed, rubbing his bristly beard: "Ah, Theodore, I am nearly fifty years old. I shall be in my grave long before the child receives his first communion."

In the front room next to this, Jo Kratzer, the midwife and corpse washer, was keeping the tavern going as usual, quiet and orderly. She had the right to the first swallow from each freshly opened bottle, and as she usually made that swallow a long one she hobbled home every night with a very red nose. After the first visit to church, celebrated with a feast of currant bread and honey-beer, the mother herself again poured the beer, with her child upon her arm.

She lived only for her baby and sometimes she would raise him above her head, like a chalice, and say: "I never dreamed there could be so much happiness in this world!"

Bright springtime lay over the village and the River Dommel, bringing a sweet profusion of smells and colors of flowers, of manure, butter and red radishes ; and birds swarmed out of the silent foliage and the pine woods. The young child became saturated with this wholesome air, with the bright hues and the sunlight, with the smells of earth and of beer, with the winds and the long twilights, with the stars and the silence.

The mother ate the vegetables, the bread, the salt pork, the eggs, the fruits and all the riches of the earth, and she poured the spirit of the glorious land of Brabant into her child through her breasts. His big brown eyes gazed with astonishment and curiosity at everything and his little hands snatched eagerly at colors.

Towards the end of September, when the flowers sum up their lives to offer their last, deepest fragrance, **the** child would reach for them with little fingers like



red crabs, seize them, and after a long eager look, suddenly devour them.

* * *

The village entered the heart of the little boy through his eyes. When he was two and a half years old, he took it in for the first time, his eyes were opened truly and it became part of himself.

The time of year had come when twilight is the color of ripe pears.

Above thatched roofs and naked trees the smoke rose straight as a candle in the clear, clean winter air. The lonely little church, with its heavy rude tower carrying a little auxiliary turret as a mother carries her child, disappeared gradually like a blue grape smothered in the silver down of evening. Tranquil, the River Dommel clearly reflected the image of the village. The silence of the heath, the fields and the pine forests folded in the silence of the mill, the houses and the barns.

He was never to forget this simple scene, so full of Brueghel colors. With its people and its legends it entered his heart with possessive strength in this holy, tender hour.

He was like a field where the seed has fallen.

He began to draw.

* * *

First he drew little men: two circles, four straight strokes and many buttons.

When he was five years old, he drew the people who

drank beer at his mother's tavern. You could recognize the driver by his whip, the shepherd boy by his curly sheep, the bee-keeper by the big animals that circled around him.

Seeing was his delight. He saw always as though he were seeing for the first time: astonished, happy, eager. Every glance meant a discovery for him.

With the zest of a man drinking good wine, he devoured lines and colors with his eyes.

His heart was like a clear mirror. The mills turned with the winds and they turned in his heart also. The clouds wandered in the air and they wandered in his heart as well. The seasons followed one another and none of these movements, none of these colors, was lost in him.

He howled because the rainbow disappeared so quickly. When the snow lay sleeping on the earth, he was silent with joy. He used to be afraid of the moon, but not when he looked at it with one eye closed. Soon he drew the willows and other trees from nature, buttercups, a horse standing before the tavern, the blacksmith, the cocks and the clownish pigs.

When he was seven, drawing was his favorite occupation: he drew constantly. He was almost like a clock wound up. But now he drew not only what he saw or remembered, he drew the pictures of his fancy, tales of saints and angels, beautiful ships, Genevieve of Brabant and scenes from the Passion of our Dear Lord.

He grew up, lost his milk teeth, still drawing and sketching until his mother complained of the condition



of her walls and doors, scribbled all over with tiny figures of men and Madonnas.

But she had only her one boy and she doted upon him. She bought charcoal and paper for him in the city ; she would have flayed herself if he had needed her skin to draw upon.

When the passion for drawing seized him, he could not be restrained ; it was stronger than his will, and his blood pounded as though he were in a fever.

It seemed as if another being were drawing within him.

He was very curious and when he was nine years old, it was clear that he was going to have a very pointed nose. He stuck that pointed nose into everything and when it emerged, a drawing hung upon it!

The mother was in great terror of storms and waves and so was in no hurry to send her son off to sea.

Meanwhile he was singing in the village choir and she would have liked to see him enter a monastery. Jerome, the village priest, a Franciscan and a good giant of a man, loved Pieter, and taught him to read and to write. In return the boy helped him to hew wood, plant beans, strain honey, draw the wine and kill the pigs ; he even helped him with the baking and brewing, for the priest managed everything for himself. At home Pieter drew pictures of it all, even to the services in church and the procession in which he took part. And the kermess! All the paper in Brabant wasn't enough for his pictures of that! The sports and folk games, the Dragon Play, the musicians, the booths with their toys, the pancakes and rosaries, the dances, the



topers, the bowlers, the brawlers: he drew a whole almanac full!

He frolicked with his playmates in the fragrant woods and tried to lose himself in them and wander away, hoping to reach the strange foreign lands of which he dreamed. He told long stories to his friends, himself astonished at his own lies, yet proud because they slipped so smoothly and cleverly into his tales. He felt a little guilty, too. "They are out before I know it," he sighed.

He went bathing with his friends in the River Pommel and ran away with their clothes, so that the whole village would laugh at their plight. He made rhymes and merry songs, he knew all the children's games with words and music ; he was always there when expeditions for stealing eggs and apples were on foot, he was the fastest skater on the ice pond and altogether the liveliest boy among them.

All this life of his childhood sank deep into his heart and there he treasured it tenderly. In the long evenings, when he sat under the dim light of the oil lamp with his paper before him, he had merely to dive down into himself and bring up a handful of clear, untarnished memories.

He used to have such frightful dreams of purgatory and Hell that a drop of sweat broke out on each separate hair. Even in broad daylight he would turn white as chalk at the mere thought of the souls in Purgatory, or when the priest preached about them. He could only calm his pounding heart by placing his hand upon his scapulary.

He had given a drawing to the little daughter of Long Louis, the miller. Emil, his red-haired friend, stood beside him, chewing a big red carrot. In the drawing, a man stood on the threshold of "The Promised Land," beckoning to another man. Pieter had written a joke under the picture, and he was reading it to the girl: "Will you come along and have a beer?" "No." "Why not?" "Because I always have two." While he was still reading, Emil splashed a handful of chewed carrots on the drawing.

Pieter's blood swelled in his veins until it flamed over his whole face, and he knocked Emil sprawling. When he had him by the throat, he suddenly became frightened and very pale and shouted: "You dirty scoundrel! It's lucky for you I believe in purgatory, or I'd wring your wispy neck!"

He often tried to draw the frightful pictures of his secret fantasy } but he always had to give it up after a little because such terrible things floated to the surface in his thoughts that his stomach tied itself in knots. Yet he loved to draw the lions and dragons that the wind molded in the heavy clouds while he lay alone in the grass, staring at the sky.

He read books of travel and the lives of the saints which the priest loaned him. First he copied all the woodcuts and copperplates, but as he drew he would begin to change the stories, until under his hand the most impossible cities arose upon the most impossible cliffs.

He could leave nothing untouched. His pencil caught everything—a withered leaf, the extravagant

wake-feasts, icicles hanging from the roofs, the guests at "The Promised Land," and even the stories they told him of great cities and strange countries, of wars and pestilence, of heretics and Protestants, of the Emperor Charles V, Luther, and the Pope at Rome. He drew the castle of the count, the count's family and their slender greyhound; the sowers, the plowmen, the huts, the women and the tales the people told each other. The whole village flowed out beneath his fingers.

It was awkward work as yet, but not careless—never careless} his drawing was very clear in form and firm of line; he finished quickly, but he never made a stroke without holding his breath with the effort. Drawing was as natural to him as breathing and sweating.

The priest showed him a missal which a monk had decorated a hundred years ago, and Pieter almost wished he could melt into incense and ascend to heaven in his adoration of this luminous, holy thing. The priest permitted him to turn the pages and Pieter shuddered with joy at sight of the flowers, saints and devils painted in gold and the most dazzling unearthly colors. "The floor of Heaven is carpeted with pages like that," said pious Father Jerome. Pieter sighed, "Then I am afraid I shall be looking at the floor up there more than at our Lord."

Time passed and now he liked to play with girls better than with boys and when he was alone at home, he drew their pictures, giving them their proper clothing and bodily shapes; but when he tried to draw their faces he was so anxious that he fairly sweated blood over them.

So he grew up, forever sniffing out new things with his pointed nose, and with his big brown eyes wide open and searching in his ruddy face. Soon he drew so well that every one could recognize himself and all the others in his pictures. Then the village priest, who had never shown the slightest interest in all this drawing, said to him (he happened to be in the sacristy): "You drew Long Louis so well, suppose you draw me now." And the big man with his red face and graying hair, broad and powerful in his cinnamon-brown Franciscan habit, stood posing for his portrait. "Hold the pose more firmly," said Pieter, and the father drew his double chin down, hard as boxwood. Pieter drew eagerly, painstakingly, with tongue hanging out as usual. When he finally showed his drawing, Father Jerome stood on the paper, with slanting eyes, a dog's nose, and a chin like a frog's belly. The priest almost burst with rage and threatened to give Pieter a good beating. Pieter, dressed in his red choir gown, slipped into the church where some people still lingered, and pretended to be very busy with the lights. After a moment he peeped slyly into the sacristy and saw Father Jerome with the drawing in his hands, laughing with all his heart.

That was just like him: he always showed his crusty outside first, but beneath he was as pure and tender and wholesome as a white roll.

At the age of ten, Pieter, from the window of his attic, discovered the horizon—distance, space, infinity! He would sit up there for hours, dreaming and drawing. This attic window had a new charm for him. Unconsciously he felt that the life of men and animals is



bound to the earth and that everything tiny and impotent crawls alone on the spacious surface of the globe, at whose core is Hell. He knew things and people only as part of a great whole, part of the landscape and the distance, like leaves upon a tree. And everything that he drew, from this time on, seemed as if viewed from an attic window. He longed passionately for heights, trees, mills, churches. When he read about the mountains of Switzerland, his blood raced wildly through his veins.

How beautiful it was to look into the distance from Long Louis' mill, doubly beautiful when the grain was ripe and fragrant!

He would climb up into the tallest poplars and sit for hours musing in the belfry, with his head pressed against the louver-windows. The higher the better, for then he felt free, as though he was no longer a human being weighted down to the earth.

Oh, to fly over the world, like the angels! "If it were only for the sake of having wings, I should never want to sin again!" he cried, while hanging a banner from the tower window for the kermess and gazing out into the glorious wide world.

* * *

The new snow had spread over the earth in honor of the feast of Twelfth Night on the morrow. Everything was now fresh and bright as if wrapped in thick cotton wool—the roofs, the paths, the bottle-green ice, the tree branches, the piles of manure, the window ledges, the long arms of the well sweep. Only vertical



objects had kept their own color, but they seemed darker by contrast with the white all around them. Over all this the brown sky hung like a smoky ceiling, and silence was clamped down upon it like a lid; there was only the gleam of color from the cock on the manure pile and the sputtering smithy fire in the distance.

And Pieter, standing in his attic, with his tongue caught between his teeth, had begun to draw it all. He felt he was seeing snow for the first time. He glowed with happiness. His eager, amazed eyes explored the scene. The landscape grew upon the paper in charcoal and colored crayon. The whole attic room, whose windows until then had served only for hanging out flags at kermess, was now littered with scraps of paper covered with little human figures and all sorts of things. He had even sketched a whole procession on one side of the beams and filled it in with color.

From his attic window he drew the great black nut tree with the blue wayside shrine of Our Lady against its thick trunk, the lonely little yellow church, and beyond it the bluish purple of the misty forest, the mud huts and farmhouses with their smoking chimneys. He added to this all the white willows and the other tall trees on the village common. In place of the farmhouse on the right, he painted "The Promised Land"—you could recognize it clearly by its sign with the grape bearers on it—and his mother standing in the doorway, with Pieter himself beside her. It was his first oil painting!

Through the white silence, smelling of cold and turf, a little man walked with a bundle of twigs on his back.

A few quick strokes and the little man stood plainly on the paper, and tick, tick, tick with the charcoal, and there was the line of his footprints! A crow lighted on one side of the white willows, and one, two, three, he caught him!

Pieter waited to see if anything else would show up, aiming with his pencil like a hunter ready to shoot. At that moment a fat man wrapped in a dirty sheepskin waddled from behind the churchyard wall. He was nicknamed Tomato-Toad. Pieter turned away angrily. No, he wouldn't draw him. "And that filthy brute is going to be my new father!" he said contemptuously. "He knows that mother has new beer in the house for to-morrow and he'll get his belly full for nothing, the lazy lout! He's not thirty yet, and she's sixty—she's crazy, absolutely crazy!"

He saw him enter the tavern, with his fat grin, and heard his mother's laughter and the clinking of their glasses. Pieter spat towards the sound of the Toad's laughter.

Repelled and full of contempt, he drew a picture of the fellow, a puffy, scrubby-bearded, purplish face, with slit eyes. Disgusted, he crossed it out at once as one spits out bad drink. At that moment he saw Cornelius, the barefoot monk who had arrived yesterday to preach the Twelfth Night sermon and whom he had served that morning at early mass. He saw him from the rear with his round, bald, reddish head gleaming above the brown Franciscan habit, and drew him, clumsy as a log. "Wait!" said Pieter, jumping up and snatching a handful of snow from the thatched roof. Rolling it into a

ball, he aimed it at the shiny red head. Splash! a hit! The snowball smashed like an egg. Pieter ducked quickly and laughed like a waterfall. Quiet.

He raised his head slowly and cautiously } first he saw the church, then the little shrine, and then bang! a snowball burst on his nose, and below the priest stood laughing. "Hey, young man," he chuckled, "two can play at that game! Next time you'll have to hide better." Looking foolish, Pieter wiped the snow from his face.

"Do my eyes deceive me?" cried the Father. "Didn't you serve at the altar this morning?"

"Yes, Father Cornelius."

"Well, well! In the morning you serve at mass, and later on you hide and throw snowballs at me!"

"No, Father Cornelius, I did it without thinking. I had just been drawing . . . look." And turning red with shyness, he leaned out and displayed a drawing fastened on a board. The Father came nearer and looked up towards the low window. "Well, that's good," he said, "it isn't at all bad from a distance." He advanced another step. "Why, it really isn't bad when I examine it closely. Of course, I'm no expert, but I'd say that you can really draw! The deuce! That's well done. Ah ha, I'm in it too, I see! Did you do it all by yourself? Well, it's very good. . . . But, my boy, you mustn't paint snow. No, no! Nobody's ever done that, it's not done!"

"But I think it's beautiful, Father, just see how beautiful!"

"No, snow has no color. You must paint the green

earth with its flowers, its fresh bright tones and half-tones, like Memling and the Van Eyck brothers, like Roger Van der Weyden and Geerten van Sint-Jans, and as Quentin Matsys used to do. They can paint! You can look at their paintings with a magnifying glass. You can fairly smell the flowers!"

Pieter stared at him round-eyed like a pious soul feeling within him, for the first time, the spark of divine grace. "Yes," the Father went on, "you ought to come to Antwerp some day where the great artists live. There you can see their works in the churches and cloisters. Oh, my boy, they are indescribably beautiful! The whole world comes to see them, people even come from Italy. Emperor Charles keeps on buying them all the time. And you ought to see the 'Entombment,' by Quentin Matsys! It's as big as a house! And painted so exquisitely you can count the hairs on the heads of the saints. You can't get the crowds of admirers away from it! If you keep on like this, my boy, you may become one of them—but not if you paint snow!"

"Really, Father Cornelius?" asked Pieter, so happy that his legs trembled like reeds.

At that moment his mother bounced out, and Tomato-Toad stood in the doorway. Both had heard the whole conversation from below. "You're going to be a sailor, and nothing else!" she called up to Pieter. "You'll fall and hurt yourself if you hang out of the window like that! Get away from there!" Then she said to Father Cornelius, "Yes, Father, when my first husband was dying, he said that our boy was to be a sailor, and . . ."

"Man proposes, and God disposes," admonished the

Father, "and if He has decided that your son is to be a painter, then all the sailors in the world can stand on their heads, and he'll be a painter just the same!"

"Father," Tomato-Toad broke in harshly, "I'm to be his father soon, and then it will be all up with this drawing nonsense! Then he'll be a sailor or I'll apprentice him to a trade. I'll be master then and I'll say what's what."

"Is he going to be your new husband?" asked the Father. "Yes? Well, little woman," he laughed, "I really took him for your eldest son. That's how young your second bridegroom looks to me! Congratulations! I hope for your sake it's not true that young fellows marry old women just for their money! Good-by!"

The Father walked away slowly, round as a church bell in his brown habit. The door slammed hard, and through the floor Pieter heard the curses of his future stepfather. He slapped his thighs with glee at the tough morsel the Father had given that pair to chew over.

But then a hallowed mood came over him. He turned again towards the snowy landscape and repeated Father Cornelius' words to himself: "If you keep on like this, you'll be a great painter too!" He was on fire. His future lay before him as though a curtain had been drawn aside. He saw glorious visions of Antwerp and a thousand paintings. "If you keep on like this, you'll be a great painter too," he whispered.

His mother called for him to come and eat, but he called back that he wasn't hungry.

The afternoon passed, cold and silent, and the red-

D R O L L P E T E R

dish-brown moon rose early above the blue snow. "To Antwerp," he sighed. In the tavern below, and all over the village, he heard them singing Twelfth Night carols. His friends in gay masquerade costumes straggled through the snow, twirling the Star of Bethlehem. But this time he did not even think of joining them. He was burning with new life. Three times during the evening he heard heavy brawling in the tavern, but he scarcely listened. He was being reborn. He shed his old skin, and suddenly he leaped up like a flame, beat his fists against the wall and cried out stubbornly as though fighting with some one: "I will! I will! I will be a painter!" With these painful words his heart was set free. He was like a mother who has rescued her child from a fire.

* * *

In the spring, when the first pale yellow cowslips bloomed along the brooksides and in the wet woods and the frantic magpies were again dancing in the paths, his mother celebrated her wedding with Tomato-Toad. Pieter thought sadly of his dead father whom he had never known, but he went along like a good little boy in the long, merry wedding procession, playing on the bagpipes which he had rented from a German for a half-dozen glasses of beer. In the evening Pieter was wretchedly sick: his stomach was ready to burst with all the broad beans and baked ham he had eaten. He was sorry he liked this dish so much. "But why must it taste so good?" he said.

Tomato-Toad was so delighted with his lucky mar-



riage, he was full as a loaded cannon for nearly two weeks. He got into brawls with several men who laughed at him for marrying such an old woman and had come off with a fine pair of black eyes.

Tomato-Toad, who had smiled and flattered his way through the whole courtship, now showed his real self: greedy and fat, snapping up everything like a pike. First he gave up his trade as a potter. He wanted to get hold of the money-bag and run the tavern himself. But his wife would not let go, and since she refused to give him the money-bag, he simply took it.

When his wife kept on nagging and complaining about this, he threw her out with a flourish as one empties a bucket of water } and Pieter, who was getting ready to hurl a jug at his head, was given a kick which landed him beside his mother like a dishrag.

The worst of it all was that the people who saw this laughed about it. That hurt Pieter more than anything. The poor woman, broken-hearted, came in again for the sake of her son, and her son followed for the sake of his mother.

Tomato-Toad was now master of the house. He began to drink like seven Knights Templars in one, he gambled, he idled about with loose women, and he was always picking quarrels with the customers, brawling about anything and nothing. The fat snail was eating holes in the prosperity of "The Promised Land."

Pieter's mother went to Father Jerome for advice. "Just wait, I'll see to this myself," said he, reaching among the smoked hams in the chimney corner and



bringing forth his medlar cudgel. She knew what that meant, and ran after Father Jerome, wringing her hands: "If only he doesn't kill you, Father!"

"I'll come nearer killing him!" he snapped back at her.

Tomato-Toad was coming up from the cellar with a foaming jug. Whack! He got a blow on his purple face which caused his slit eyes to pop open like a pair of old button-holes. "And if ever you lay a finger on her again, I'll beat you to a jelly, you dog!"

Tomato-Toad slunk away without a word, still holding on to his jug. But he came home that night with a mighty jag and beat up mother and son once more and threw them out in their nightshirts. "Now call your priest again and let him see how pretty you look in your shirt tails!"

They did not dare to knock at any door for fear of being laughed at. So they crept into the hayloft and waited for the morning, until Tomato-Toad would be pleased to let them in again, jeering.

Now he was absolute master in the house and life was Hell for Pieter's mother, who was palsied with terror. He guzzled away the last of their money, and "The Promised Land" was drained dry.

There was no money to buy beer, and the brewer refused credit. At first, Pieter's mother tried hard to keep the tavern going. Sometimes she managed to save a little money secretly by selling eggs, the milk of her lean cow, or a flitch of fresh bacon, and to buy a small barrel of strong beer; but even before she could hang out the wreath of broom as a sign that fresh beer was on

tap, the Toad would be lying with bloated belly under the open cock. They grew poorer and poorer and at last the unhappy woman lost all her courage. Patient and unresisting, she allowed herself to be beaten like a dog. She withered, grew old and went completely to pieces. And Pieter, who got more beatings than food, picked up a little money now and then by helping Long Louis at the mill ; he also helped with the threshing and plowing, went along as a servant in the hunting parties from the castle, and did odd jobs for the priest and the sexton, and there was no more talk of being a sailor.

But his drawing! It tingled in his fingers like humming bees, in spite of all his misery, neglect, blows and fear of Tomato-Toad. He could not give up drawing. If he had no paper, he would draw on the stable and house walls, on the sides of wagons, on anything with a flat surface that would hold a picture ; and he colored his drawings with the juice of crushed flower petals. He carried drawing before him like a lamp shining on his path, and his face and heart were still turned toward Antwerp. Now he really could have gone there. "But then mother will get all the beatings alone," he said, "and as it is I share them with her."

* * *

The morning plowed its way over the land, bringing with it great sausage-shaped, milk-white clouds and the smell of butter in the air. Everywhere the cocks were crowing and the mills were beginning to turn: the horizons greeted each other!

Pieter was standing up in a meadow, bending over

and looking at the world with his head between his legs. Spring breathed its gentle airs from the far-away south upon the brooks and rivers. The trees were still black and leafless, and the whole land lay there before him naked and open, clear and fresh, even to the farthest blue distance. The sun in a holiday mood was daubing the brown earth with tiny splashes of lettuce-green.

Distances and the hills drew him on. He forgot the little cow he was guarding, who was to drop a calf at the next full moon; he forgot his hunger and Tomato-Toad, his stepfather; he even forgot his mother, who had been lying for days moaning, her face yellow as a turnip, dying—perhaps already dead. Yesterday she had received extreme unction, and early this morning her feet were cold. But he was devouring the world with his eyes. He let beauty drip into his heart. Peasants in red undershirts were scattering seed, and the plows were turning back long furrows in gleaming chunks that looked good enough to eat. The white clouds with their blue rifts were listening in silence to a shepherd playing his pipes before the shrine, and birds were flashing like gay pennants over the old brown woods. The sun was searching with long fingers for the silver waters of the mills.

"It's like stained glass in the church windows!" rejoiced Pieter. "It's blue as the Madonna's cloak! It's like banners waving in a church procession!" He felt as though spring itself was gently nudging him.

The budding hedges and all the animals, great and small, quivered with joy; the young fish were leaping high in the glittering Dommel; you could fairly smell

the pairing and mating in the air and the joy of soon laying eggs. And spring was tickling Pieter, too, from his toes to the roots of his hair, in a way that he could not yet understand nor express. He clenched his fists for the joy of being alive and shouted: "Up and to it! To it!" But ah, just see how spring with her enchantments is weaving a new paradise for us! Why, it's all as new and fresh as on the first day. But looked at this way, with your head between your legs and your eyes near your toes, everything upside down, it's all twice as beautiful and remote, twice as richly colored and precious, twice as much I don't know what! And Pieter cried: "All I need is a pair of eyes on my bottom and the colors to paint with!"

* * *

A face red as a radish, cleft by laughter, was sticking on a long neck through a round hole of the wooden windmill. It was Long Louis.

"Hey, Pieter, don't forget the feast to-night at 'The Masked Monkey' for the doughty Bowlers of St. Stephen—those lads with the wild balls and the tall thirst. It'll be your first time there as marker! Be sure to bring your pipes. It's going to be a splendid feed!"

"My stomach's already caved in, I'm so hungry," Pieter called back.

"Suppose we play cards for a while, and get ourselves good and hungry! I'll fetch a jug of fresh beer from 'The Lost Paradise!'"

Pieter at once tied his cow up tight to a tree **and**

made a dash for the mill, panting for a drink of good beer.

"How's your mother?" asked Long Louis.

"*Piano*" said Pieter, cautiously,

"I heard a dog howl last night," said Long Louis, with a troubled face, as he picked up his gray jug with the blue bird on it.

"Oh, Louis," said Pieter, suddenly glad that he could pour out his heart for once, "I pray to God that she may die soon, never get well again! Then she'll be out of this Hell! Just look what that swine has done to her! If I didn't hold myself in, I'd take a sledgehammer and drive his tomato-head so far down into his belly he could look through his navel like a keyhole!"

"You'll be worse off when she's dead," replied Long Louis. "What'll you do then?"

Pieter wanted to answer: "I'll go to Antwerp." But he guarded this secret project as tenderly as though it were a beautiful soap bubble. So he merely said: "God and the miller will decide that!"

The miller, dusty white with flour, walked off on his bandy legs to fetch more beer. Pieter stuffed his mouth full of husked wheat and stuck his head through the round peephole.

"How beautiful!" he whispered as he looked into the distance. A gentle wind carried the smell of beer and manure to his nose. And over there lay the village of mud huts between the dark forest and the narrow white river.

On the common, the children were romping in their shirts, and two rosy little pigs were sniffing at each

other's tails. A crowd of beggars and cripples were asking alms before the drawbridge of the castle, while within the walls of its shady garden laborers were busy with sickle and spade. The six taverns were resounding with the noisy singing and shouting of drunkards, while the little church, forsaken and crumbling behind a row of willows along the Dommel, seemed waiting, with open door, for the faithful. The village, either from indifference or wantonness, had spread towards the taverns rather than towards the church. The sturdy priest Jerome was pacing up and down in his orchard, between the old apple trees, reading his breviary. On him alone lay the task of steering towards Heaven the spiritual ox-cart of these people, whose lively sins were piled helter-skelter upon it like cabbages and turnips. But now a ray of sunlight pointed to the forlorn hut where Pieter's mother lay dying. "If she dies to-day, I can't go to the feast," sighed Pieter, consumed with hunger. He caught a whiff of Purgatory and was frightened at his own wickedness. He closed one eye to shut out the sight of the hut while the other roamed rejoicingly over the landscape, through which meandered the sparkling River Dommel, clear and fresh, between reeds and water-lilies, towards the distance, cloudy-blue like incense smoke. Off yonder in that blue, Antwerp must lie, teeming with painters and golden ships, overladen with fruits from the promised lands of the East

"I'm coming!" cried Pieter, "when my mother is dead," he added softly. The forest echoed three times, "I'm coming!"

"And here I am," said Long Louis. They took twms

in drinking from the jug. "That's beer by the grace of God!" said Long Louis, smacking his lips. "Your step-father really is a scoundrel!" he laughed. "He's sold all your mother's clothes for a quart of brandy and he's sprawling down there by the manure pile, snoring away. He said, 'She's not going to get up again anyway.'" "

Pieter trembled with anger like an aspen leaf, but Long Louis went on without stopping: "Heavens and earth! I stopped by a second in 'The Masked Monkey' and took a look at the pots. My, what food! What sausages, this long!" and he measured up to his own shoulder while Pieter's mouth watered. "And the hams that are baking! My wife's coming along, she's crazy about ham, especially the fat, and I'm all for the fat and the lean! . . . But you're going to miss it, because your mother will be dead by to-night, Jo Kratzer says."

"But she's very strong," said Pieter, quickly, "she can stand a lot." Then he looked down gloomily and muttered, "Come on, let's play cards!"

"Buck up," said the miller, "at least you ought to be glad that your mother wasn't smothered in the cradle. Besides, we've all got to die, even if we do like to live a long time. Life is just smoke and mist, anyhow, and there is only a step to the grave; what blooms to-day must wither to-morrow, and clubs are trumps!" *

They played cards while the sails of the windmill turned above them. It was quiet in the milky twilight of the grain room, interrupted by an occasional word or

* A pun. Literally, the Cross is trumps, *Kreuz* meaning both **Cross** and, in cards, the Club.

a sudden cry of triumph. At the end of each game, the winner was allowed a drink from the jug as long as he could swallow without drawing his breath. So they won and they drank until the Angelus sounded at noon. Long Louis licked the beer from his lips and said, "I never forget my prayers." He prayed and then spat through the door in a long, handsome curve.

"I don't either," said Pieter and followed suit.

That afternoon the sky looked like a sheep market. It was enough to make you laugh. Silence lay heavy on the land. The cow was munching the tender grass and the daisies ; Pieter lay on his belly between the four walls of the mill, now silent, staring at a thatched hut across the Dommel. In that little hut lived Rosalie, a child pretty as a picture. Perhaps he'd marry Rosalie some day, or perhaps little Marie, the sexton's daughter, whose hands were always sticky from dipping candles. She was nice enough to eat, but rather stupid. Once when he had climbed the belfry with her, 'way up where the bells hang, to hunt for an owl's nest, he had given her a good sound kiss, and instead of keeping quiet about it, she had told her father, so that she got a sound beating, too. Since then she didn't tell. Then there was Long Louis' daughter whom he really liked very much, and Philippa at "The Sturdy Drummer," and Sophie, and Eulalie, and many another dear little creature. A glance of their eyes, a turn of their fingers, and he was in the clouds. At that time he loved them all, but which one should he marry?

Jo Kratzer came hobbling up the hill, waving her stick at him. "She's come to tell me that *she's* dead," sighed Pieter, freed from the heavy load of delay. He sprang up in sheer relief. "Hurry up," cried Jo in her nasal voice, "your mother won't last much longer! They've already lighted the blessed candle!"

"I'll come right away," he called back. Then he whispered to himself, "I won't go. Why isn't she dead now, if she has to die!"

He stayed where he was, sitting and staring into the distance. But he did not see the distance, he saw purgatory. It was a darkness full of eyes, quiet, wandering, seeking eyes; eyes lurking in broken pots, eyes in bottles, on finger-tips, on the points of a crucifix, in bird-cages, in dark tunnels; and trellises of grapevines whose fruits were clusters of eyes. . . .

Then he saw a tall farmer climbing out of his dog-cart at the sunny crossroads near by, to speak with a plump milkmaid. Suddenly the peasant leaned over, seized the girl around the body and gave her a good long kiss. She kissed him too, and Pieter jumped up like a flash to make a sketch of the scene. He took a piece of charcoal out of his pocket and drew the pair of lovers on one of the white walls of the mill, already scribbled over with all sorts of little figures and village scenes. Now love, too, was added to his collection! It was full of fire! He laughed, but at that moment a broad shadow rose threateningly on the wall and suddenly and swiftly Pieter was soundly boxed on both ears. With a loud yell, he turned round. The priest in his brown habit, bending over him like an Old Man

of the Mountains, roared: "Why are you doing that?"
"Because they're doing it over there, too!"

The priest stamped a hole in the floor in his rage. "Along with you! To your mother! She is dying! Or you won't see her alive any more!" With one hand on the scapulary and the other leading the little cow, Pieter prayed silently: "Oh, if she were only dead now! If she were only dead now!" The priest followed him, red in the face and spitting from excitement, and inveighed against the wicked world and the village. He scourged their passion for beer and brandy, their gluttony, their greedy bellies, their worship of the flesh, their Christianity that ended at the navel, and prophesied death, hell and brimstone for them.

The storm roared round Pieter's head as though the roof were falling in and he became as frightened as though he alone had committed all these sins. He closed his eyes so as to hear no more, but when there was no end to it, he opened them again. Then he suddenly burst into a wild laugh and struck his thighs with joy. "Look there! There!" he pointed, doubling over with laughter.

The little dogcart was tearing down the bright road. You could see nothing except the cart and the jumping, barking dog, but at the back four dangling legs stuck out.

* * *

The room was wretched and forlorn and smelled of rotten turnips. On its clay wall a few drawings and pictures were yellowing with age and from the low beams hung broken baskets and dried herbs. The Toad,

bloated and dead drunk, sat before the sickroom, moaning with open mouth and thick tongue, while the tears streamed from his slit eyes. When he saw the priest, he fell on his knees and cried: "Oh! help to keep her alive a little longer! I will have many masses said, with many candles. What shall I do without her? I'll hang myself! Hang myself!"

"You hang yourself?" said the priest contemptuously, fixing his eyes on the sweaty face of Tomato-Toad. "Then it's only a pity you didn't do it four years ago—you might have saved the money for masses. But you'll burn like a torch! Like ten torches! Get away, you swine!" He was about to push him aside with his foot, but Pieter got in first and gave the Toad such a crashing kick in his round head that he pitched forward, soft as a snail. Then the boy was pushed into the room, where it was damp and cool as in a newly plowed field at evening, with a heavy, musty smell. The blessed candle was burning. The room was filled with women, mumbling their beads under their hooded cloaks to delay death. A little table was littered with bottles, dishes, pots and shells filled with medicine, earthworms, and oil. There had been some brandy too, to strengthen her heart, but Tomato-Toad had drunk it all up and filled the bottle with water. "It won't help her any more now, and besides she's lost her sense of taste," he had said.

At the bedside of the sick woman and on a chair lay a medley of sacred objects, medals of wax and copper, scapularies, holy water, the bones and the blood of a stigmatized saint, as means to avert death.



The blind magician from the forest of the Eight Beatitudes had walked around the house seven times; a miracle doctor had applied leeches again, and now "Motley Jim," a holy medicant with only one leg, was standing at the foot of the bed. He wore a cloak completely covered, inside and out, with the parchment pictures of saints sewed on it; all the saints were there, one for every day of the year, to be sure to keep in their good graces. When the year was half over, he turned his cloak inside out. For a penny "Motley Jim" had said his homemade, rhymed prayers against the coming of Death. But Pieter saw the white figure bending over his mother's gasping form with a grin; he was strangling her, his skeleton fingers around her throat.

How wretched she looked as she lay there in her white cap! She was yellow as wax, her eyes like dark flames, her mouth with its cracked lips wide open; thin as a skeleton with deep hollows everywhere but for her swollen belly, and on her thin, sinewy arms toil-scarred, discolored hands.

Pieter could not bear it any longer and in pity, fear and horror he prayed; "O Lord, don't let her appear at the Last Judgment looking so; that isn't her true face. That's Tomato-Toad's work!" A magpie alighted on the window ledge; every one saw it and stopped praying. It was strange. It seemed as though some incorporeal presence were now entering. Silence rose like water in a flood. The magpie stuck its head through a hole in the window pane, but it smelled the odor of death and flew away, scolding loudly like some one who feels cheated.

Now silence prevailed. It had swallowed up the prayers, and for this the dying woman had been waiting. Her eyes began to blink. The priest pressed the blessed candle into her stiff hand. "Down on your knees!" he commanded. It sounded like a blow of the fist on the table, and he began to say the prayers for the dead. They all knelt except "Motley Jim," who had to squat because of his wooden leg. All the saints on church banners, stained glass windows, paintings, shrines in fields and on trees, now marched by double quick, hastily greeted with "Pray for us," recited in unison. The dying woman was gasping like a draughthound. Suddenly she ceased breathing. A heavy silence lay upon her. "She has finished," thought Pieter, glad that all was over. But with a cry she shot up like a spring, tossing her legs among the sheets until her feet stuck out of the bed. Some of the sacred relics fell to the ground, a little plaster figure had its head broken and a cracked bottle began to leak over the floor. The women jumped up as if they had been stung by wasps. But the gigantic priest pressed the dying woman down upon the bed again, wrenched the candle from her clenched fist, sat on her legs with his heavy body and prayed on.

She howled and screamed. Pieter trembled with fear. He prayed: "Oh! dear God, let her die, take her into your bosom or beside it, but take her!" The women huddled behind one another, the beggar held his hat with the cockfeathers before his eyes, but not before both at once. "Pray!" thundered the priest. But the Toad who had looked on through a crack in the



door, now cried: "The devil is in her! The devil is in her!" And grunting like a pig, he ran out with arms upraised.

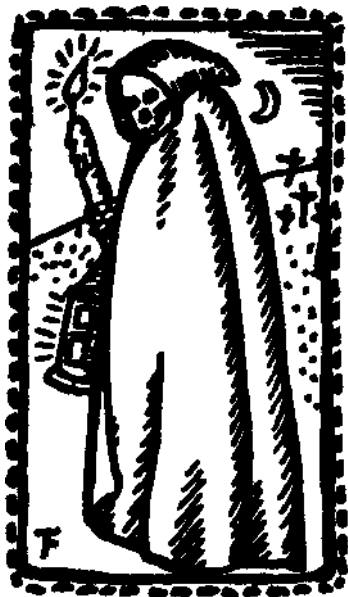
The women shuddered with fear. They shoved and struggled forward, but all could not get through the narrow door at once. Though the priest stormed, struck the table so hard that the bottles rattled and pushed the women aside, it was all in vain. They were on fire with fear. They screamed and yelled, and in a mad stampede some fell to the ground and others fell upon them, their naked knees convulsively struggling against one another.

Pieter, meanwhile, as though rooted to the spot was gazing at his mother who had clutched him with her hard hand. With her last gleam of consciousness, she begged in terror: "My boy, pray for me every evening ; it is so terribly dark where I am going." It was too much for him. Terror overwhelmed him and he fell down unconscious. The priest just managed to catch him by his collar, while he tried to keep the women in order with his other hand. But driven by frenzy, the women ran out, crying, "The devil is in her!" "Mottley Jim" hobbled out behind them, moaning: "I've lost my hat! My Sunday hat! and it's the only one I've got!"

When Pieter regained consciousness, a sheet covered his mother's body. While he was making the sign of the cross over her with holy water, he observed that her head, her belly, and her feet, standing up beneath the white cloth, formed three elevations.

* * *

The harsh, clanging sound of the passing bell rang through the evening twilight, golden as a ripe pear. Great flocks of crows came flying from the forest of the Eight Beatitudes to the belfry for they had heard the bells. As it grew darker, a mist spread over the



fields and the silver horns of the great moon rose behind a row of white willows.

The jolly fellows of the Society of Doughty Bowlers wandered arm in arm from tavern to tavern, singing aloud until they landed in "The Masked Monkey" where they were going to cram themselves full to bursting with ham, sausage, and boiled rice and fill up the



chinks with mighty draughts of beer. Tomato-Toad went along, to drown his grief.

"May he choke to death!" whispered Pieter, as he leaned against the doorpost and heard them in the distance. His hunger had passed and he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. To stuff themselves till they were ready to burst was their greatest pleasure. How pitiful! And a great sense of peace came over him. He felt that behind the outward aspect of things something pure and bright lay concealed, revealing itself in the simple symbols of the silver crescent moon and of the heavens, blue as a soap bubble—and this something was happiness for which every one longed.

From within he now and then heard water splashing, the rattling of dishes, or the noise of a table being pushed aside. Jo Kratzer was washing his mother's corpse by candle light. When she came out again in her cloak, she said: "I'm going to milk my goat quickly and then I'll come back with Ziete and red Kiene to watch by her."

She had left the candle burning. Pieter remained standing at the door. A great peace descended over all the world. No sound of human voices was heard. Only the earth lived, letting spring and her incense rise as she grew fragrant and increased. The door stood open. Behind him in the bedroom, lighted by a candle, lay his dead mother. He did not dare to look around. He knew that she lay there with the blessed boxtree in her folded hands, upon her lips the smile of all the dead who have suffered much. He felt that her cold hands which had always been cold were

trying to move, trying to beckon for the warm breath of his mouth.

How gladly he would have comforted her poor hands! But he was on fire with terror. He was really ashamed of himself and to excuse himself in his own eyes, he said: "I'll go to see whether the frogs have begun to mate." Without looking back, without locking the door, he went away whistling, but when he had turned the corner he began to run as fast as his legs would carry him until at last, with a sense of happy relief, he fell on his knees before a shrine to Our Lady, where he prayed devoutly for the peace of her soul, as she had desired. The silvery crescent moon disappeared behind a cloud, thin as paper.

* * *

Tist Mastel, the wheelwright's servant, who had been standing behind a tree, suddenly came dashing headlong into "The Masked Monkey," roaring: "Folks! Hold me! A ghost! A ghost rose out of the well!"

All was confusion as if a bomb had been thrown among them. A few brave fellows, drawing their knives, went forth to look into things. Off there in the mist something was disappearing, hovering over the ground, fluttering hither and thither. Trembling, they crossed themselves. "It's the ghost of old Trees of 'The Promised Land,'" some one quavered. Their stomachs tightened, they had lost their appetites. The women wanted to go home and suddenly remembered that they had to look after their sick children. The

THE VILLAGE

men went along because their wives were afraid, they explained. They went off in little groups, huddled close together. But those who lived at a distance in the open country said they weren't afraid ; they waited for the morning to clear up everything and began to drink away their fear in beer and brandy.

They were following the example of Tomato-Toad, who lay snoring under a bench, full as a sack of meal. Sausages were left on their hooks, hams remained untouched on the table, the boiled rice had a covering of skin from standing so long. The innkeeper of "The Masked Monkey" and his skinny wife felt like walking on their hands for joy that so much was left over from the feast! The ghost was seen several times that night. Hunchbacked Mie Salamander, who was gathering herbs by the light of the half-moon to concoct ointments, saw it shuffling over the churchyard, and Andries, the butter-man, had seen it reeling around the mill. . . .

When morning, rosy and golden, fresh and misty-blue, broke on the horizon, Pieter crept from the wooden shed of the roaring water-mill and drew on his shirt again, with which he had intended to strike terror into Tomato-Toad when he had let it wave from a beanpole. Now he heard what an uproar the ghost had caused in the village.

"So you see there aren't any ghosts, we make them ourselves," he laughed to himself, pleased with this discovery. But he turned green with rage when he learned that Tomato-Toad had slept through all the



excitement, snoring like a bear. "Then it's all been no use," he grumbled. His mother was to be placed in her coffin that very day, because it was feared that her disease, which nobody knew, might spread. He went to the wheelwright who was to make the white coffin with its black cross. Tist Mastel was still in bed, sick from fear of the ghost and from too much beer. "Your mother's ghost was at my door, too," he boasted. "It rattled the latch, but I made the sign of the cross, and it disappeared howling! That's God's truth!"

"You liar! I wasn't anywhere near here!" Pieter felt like saying. But he turned white and thought that perhaps this had been the real ghost of which he was so afraid.

"Help me a little," said the wheelwright, "I'll have them give you some bread and butter," and Pieter obediently handed him the black nails. . . .

When the final strokes of the hammer were echoing through the village in the twilight and the heavens had a mind to rain, the gravedigger over in the churchyard spat upon his hands and whistling "My darling is a maiden fair," he began to dig the grave by the light of his big lantern.

* * *

After his mother had been lowered into her rectangular grave, while the rain fell upon them, Pieter ran away. He had to be alone with his silent grief. He wandered about the whole day in the slippery fields, gray and misty as if sweating beneath the drizzling sky,

When he came home that evening, the house was empty. At the funeral feast—provided with the money obtained from selling the cow and with the help of the neighbors' dishes—Tomato-Toad had got into a row with the nephew of a cousin of his departed wife and had smashed three of his ribs with a threshing fork. The proud lord of the castle who was captain of the guard had ordered his servants to seize Pieter's stepfather, and tied to the wagon and struggling to get free, he had been taken to the city jail. And now Pieter was alone in the world! Free and alone! He trembled with joy! Alone with his bagpipe, a scapulary on his chest, charcoal and crayon in his pockets, twelve professions and thirteen misfortunes and a great longing for the distant future glowing in his heart like a smithy fire!

The next morning he washed his face, and without a word to any one he started on his way. He crossed over the stone bridge out of the village, but the whole village accompanied him like a reflection in a crystal sphere: all the seasons of the year, all the people, all the windows, the tower, the dusky living rooms, the children's games, the songs, the birds' nests, the girls, and the proverbs, all the fragrance and all the colors—all accompanied him, as clear and distinct as the tail of a comet. Wasn't he handsome in his white stockings, his cockfeathers and the spoon on his green hat, his plum-colored breeches, his red waistcoat and gray jacket with its muttonleg sleeves, tight-fitting to his hips and then hanging over his thighs in round folds?

Just see him stepping out! His big brown eyes **are**

shining, his sniffing, pointed nose is shining, all his freckles are shining.

Milky clouds were drifting across the sky, a lark was soaring up to heaven on the thread of its song, "Piet, piet, pirrewiet," and Pieter, too, sang:

"Toward the Orient we'll be riding,
To the Orient we will go!"

And he was going toward the west, toward Antwerp. He was just about to wave his hat in a farewell greeting to the church tower, when he was seized by his collar.

"Where are you going?" asked the priest, who had caught hold of him, from the other side of the hedge.

"Pm just taking a little walk," Pieter wailed.

"But first you're going to chop some wood for me!" and the priest lifted him bodily over the hedge into his garden. "I'll have an extra plate set for you later. And this afternoon we'll plant beans," and in this unexpected manner Pieter came to live with the priest.

He slept in a little room with a lovely view over the fields and to the four winds. Soon it was covered with all kinds of drawings. And after he had worried Father Jerome for a long time, the priest brought him colors mixed with the white of eggs from town, and he was allowed to copy pictures out of the sacred missal. He fairly lost himself *in* the book. And when, after drawing for three hours, he recovered consciousness, he was so happy that he said: "Dear God, when I die, lay my soul like a dried flower between the leaves of this book . . ." But he simply could not endure the

flat-chested, thin-lipped maidservant who always went about spick and span. Over and over again he drew her little head with its sleepy eyes, he made fun of her, annoyed her, and almost frightened her to death one night when she was about to get into bed and found a stuffed man there.

One day she came, with arms defiantly akimbo, to the Father and her thin lips hissed: "You must choose between me and this silly lad."

The good priest was greatly troubled. But after long consideration he recalled a distant cousin, Oel-papper, who was burgomaster of a little village on the Scheldt River and who appeared on the scene only when there was to be a family feast among his relatives. He'd go a day's journey on foot for that.

"Cousin," he had said, "if there should ever be a lad running around here, without a home and work, just send him to me. I can always get him a place with my friend Wabblefat, the dikereeve of the Pigfarm. There they grow fat as snails, so that the clothes on their bodies split and the buttons fly all around the neighborhood."

And one beautiful spring day when the beeches were gorgeous in their ruby garments and the storks were building their nests on the roof of "The Promised Land," Pieter with his bagpipe and many little rolls of paper climbed up on the cart of a draper and rug merchant who was going in the direction of Bergenop-Zoom. Under the protection of St. Christopher he was setting out into the world to seek his fortune.

He loved change! There he would begin to draw



D R O L L P E T E R



and next year go to Antwerp! His heart was glowing like a tulip. He sang and he played his pipes. He examined the Oriental carpets, and the man told him of Venice and of the cities upon the hills. He smelled the world, the distance. His heart opened like a window.

* * *

Chapter II

THE FAT

TWO days later they arrived at the little village on the Scheldt. Pieter looked up Oelpapper who was just digging in his garden. At first he made a wry face and said: "I won't give anything!" But when he learned what it was all about, he was at once ready to go along to Wabblef at. Oelpapper was a pale, broad-shouldered man with a skin that seemed too loose for him, like a wrinkled stocking slipping down. He went ahead in silence.

Two stone's throws outside the village rose the high thatched roof of the Pigfarm, surrounded by an orchard in the splendor of its white blossoms and by a canal with ducks upon it. As Pieter stepped over the little, round bridge, a cloud of odors smelling of butter, the stables, milk, bacon and honey blew upon him; and behind the fruitful, marshy fields, where the workmen in the distance looked like tiny dots, shone a glistening curve of the Scheldt on which galleons with taut sails were driving forward in the sunlight!

"The Promised Land," said Pieter. But then he caught sight of a figure in a little window looking out upon the green landscape, a figure with an enormous, crimson face surmounted by a white nightcap. Above a chin three stories high and a mouth as big as a well,

shone a round, red pugnose while frog-eyes bulged out of creases of fat. He was greedily biting into a fat sausage. It was Wabblefat.

"Good heavens!" said Pieter with a sigh, "he looks like the moon in a birdcage." Oelpapper was whispering something to the man and was offered a drink. Meanwhile Wabblefat in a piping voice that was smothered in fat cried: "I'll give board and lodging and three ducats a year! No more! I have too many servants now! Everybody wants to come here. But I'll take you in to please the priest and because you're an orphan. Will you accept the contract-penny? You will? Then come here!" Pieter took the earnest-money and crossed himself with it. And then his happiness was shattered. "You can begin taking care of the pigs," said Wabblefat. "The farmhands will show you what to do." Then he turned to Oelpapper, who had been drinking steadily, took the jug out of his hand and said contemptuously: "To bring me a skinny her-ring like that! . . . but you'll get your ham from me just the same."

"When I sneeze, my breeches slip down," Pieter sighed, sick with hunger and disappointment. Wabblefat was as big as a tree. When he walked, it seemed as though the horizon were moving. His impudent face with its white nightcap was always eating and drinking. He seemed to be running after his belly and his legs groaned like cartwheels. He had to sit down to see his feet; his arms hung at his sides like the half-opened sails of a windmill because of the clumps of

fat beneath his armpits, and his short fingers at the ends of his thickly wadded hands shone like little red sausages.

His white shirt beneath his open, red waistcoat showed his chest, covered with curly, auburn hair. He was an ox, and towards his servants he was as snappish and surly as a cuttlefish } he would have liked them to have backs of iron and mouths of wood, for he felt that moderation in eating is excellent in others. For them a meager, bluish mess of buttermilk, a thin bean soup, turnips with a watery sauce, and black bread with a mere suspicion of fat on it were quite good enough. Sundays they got a few scraps and rancid bacon. "I have to keep them on short rations or they won't work," he used to say. He got hold of orphans to be his stable-boys (Oelpapper recruited them for him, receiving a ham for each victim); as men servants he had vagabonds, riffraff that couldn't get a decent place elsewhere, and as maids, pretty young hussies.

He always sat watching in the little window, eating and holding his jug of beer between his knees. When he saw anybody in the field resting his arms on his hips from exhaustion, he would whistle shrilly and they would work on in desperation. He ruled like a king, treated his servants like cowed dogs and often let them have a taste of his stick. "Working-people, worthless people," he used to say. He spied behind hedges and bushes, seduced the pretty servant girls and when they were pregnant he drove them away, pursued by the dogs and the yells of his whole over-blown family.



For his wife and children were just as fat, red, lazy and greedy as he. "Everything for us and nothing for others" was their motto. In their room chains of sausages hung from the low ceiling right down to their mouths so that they could bite into them without getting up. The babies, while still in their cradles, played with sausages and nibbled at them. The mother had hair, eyelashes and brows as yellow as wheat and the daughters looked like her, while the sons all had their father's frog-eyes. The mother's figure was almost lost behind her enormous breasts and every year she added to the Wobblefat family a new little lump of flesh with creases in its arms and legs like hams. All the prosperous peasants within seven hours' distance were related to Wobblefat; those within the next seven hours' distance were relatives of relatives and so it went on. They were all rich, powerful and tyrannical. Their friends were burgomasters and officers, barons and government officials, who connived at irregularities for a ham or a few yards of sausage. Meanwhile they sucked the life out of the small farmers, reducing them to poverty until they had no way out save to make brooms. Then the Fat would send them a few left-overs, so that they were even praised and honored for their charity and their kind hearts. So they ruled and married and increased within their own group: the Fat with the Fat. And whoever opposed them was beaten to death or forced to drink vinegar until he was a mere skeleton. The Fat were like fortresses, ruling the land with evil might. But above them all rose Wobblefat like a threatening thundercloud.

"From the Fat, good Lord, deliver us," Pieter prayed early and late.

* * *

After two months he was still herding pigs, he lived in the pigpen, and had neither seen nor heard of the three ducats with which he had hoped to buy colors to paint with. But he forgot the torturing hunger that gnawed at his vitals and his impatience to escape when he could drive the pigs to the cool Scheldt where many galleons sailed by, and when he could draw. He drew like a house afire. Soon his little paper rolls were completely covered and he began to draw on the back, very small, to save space. To his colors he added the juice of fresh flowers. One day he cut his finger while carving the head of Father Jerome in wood. On seeing his blood flow, he cried: "I must make use of that!" He quickly painted the sexton bearing a great banner in the procession and used the blood for the banner and the choirgown. "O God!" he prayed, "let my blood be of all colors and I'll cut my whole body in pieces."

After dinner too, when the fifteen men and maid servants used to sit at the table for a brief quarter of an hour until Wabblefat rang the signal bell, Pieter drew their poor wrecks of faces, ravaged by poverty and hard labor. His sketches were sometimes crooked and distorted, but the likeness was always there. Gradually they began to like it. Now and then some of them would grow angry, but they soon cooled off. Only one nursed his wrath—the fishheaded shepherd, Crabkoker, a little man with long arms.

One Sunday, after they had eaten their watery soup and the servant girl was just bringing in the rancid bacon, Wobblefat rushed in with a flail, cursing and storming because a rabbit was missing.

"One of you has been stealing again!" he yelled. "Who did it? Let him confess! I'll kill him and tear out one of his eyes!"

And since nobody apparently wanted to sacrifice an eye, he told the servant girl to take away the bacon. "None of you will confess? Then there'll be no bacon for your thieving snouts!"

They had to be satisfied with the thin soup and mashed turnips, without bacon. They were silent, bitter, humble and afraid. But after he had gone away, laughing at them scornfully, they began to curse and gnash their teeth. "He just made that up to cheat us of the bacon!" Maledictions like "May he choke, die, have a stroke," were heard on every hand. Pieter, spurred on by the general fury, took one of his last pieces of paper from his pocket and drew a caricature of the master. He drew him twice as fat as he was—and that wasn't easy—with such a frightful belly that he had to shove it ahead of him in a wheelbarrow. Oh, that did amuse them! It was a fine revenge. The whole circle of faces, distorted by hatred, looked admiringly at the drawing over Pieter's shoulder.

"Look out for the master," a starved milkmaid, who was very fond of the all-unconscious Pieter, whispered warningly.

Pieter was just about to tear up the paper when the shepherd Crabkoker, who was still angry at him,

wrenched it suddenly from him and ran with it in triumph to Wabblefat who was sitting in another room with his bloated family and there enjoying a huge roast, egg-sauce and a good, rich soup.

The men servants, timid and cowardly, shuffled out and the starved milkmaid with the rabbit eyes began to weep in advance. Pieter was paralyzed with fear when he saw Wabblefat coming, filling the whole doorway with his body. Sullen, crimson with rage, he stood there and then fell upon Pieter like an ox. Without a word, without a curse, but all the more terrifying, he belabored him with blows and kicks and after he had left him lying on the ground more than half dead, he gave him a final kick with his heavy boot that almost cracked the boy's skinny body in two. Then at last he bellowed at him, while he rolled his fists as though he were making dough: "Aha! So you'll make fun of me in your drawings! That's over now! You'll do no more drawing! You're in my hands till Easter by your contract. But you won't get much fun out of it! You'll not sit at this table again. And if you dare to run away I'll have you put in prison in Antwerp and burnt at the stake for heresy. I can do it! Now I'll show you what it means to anger a good man."

* * *

Pieter now lived on dry bread, a few scraps and turnips. There were always turnips, boiled turnips, raw turnips, but always turnips and turnips over again. Luckily he got a bit of bacon on Sundays} and he would play with it for half a day like a cat with a

mouse. He did not venture to eat it so that he might have it the longer. The little milkmaid with the frightened rabbit eyes now and then brought him some of her food secretly, but the rest of them would have preferred to swallow their plates along with their meals.

"To-morrow I'll run away," he would say, and he always knew where he would go: to Antwerp, to his village, to the south, to the mountains. But when the morrow came, he stayed on from secret fear of Wobblefat. And then he would suddenly scent danger everywhere: the priest would send him back; in Antwerp he would be taken for a heretic or a miscreant; before he could reach Italy, he would die of hunger somewhere on the way or be hanged by robbers; and everywhere dwelt the Fat, who would catch him and bring him back. There was always the fear of Wobblefat and always stomach ache from hunger. Oh! the tortures of never having enough to eat! He now regretted that he had not gone to the feast the night his mother died, in spite of all. He picked off the cornstalks, and when he got the chance, without being caught at it by the moonfaced Wobblefat whom nothing escaped, he would lie down under a cow and drain her udders so that the warm white stream of milk, white as one of the Seven Virtues, would squirt down his throat. Even in his dreams his fear of Wobblefat clutched at his heart. He fled from him, hid, and turned his head away to avoid those terrible eyes, the eyes of a grinning hyena that still pursued him. Ah, to be always so helpless in the grip of fear: fear of Tomato-Toad first, fear of purgatory, and now fear of Wobblefat. Never to feel quite

free and so full of the joy of living that one's body hummed like the strings of a fiddle! There was plenty of joy in him, but it did not venture to burst forth. Sometimes the memory of his native village enfolded him like a fragrant cloud, and how he then longed for Long Louis' mill, for the scents of the forests of oak, for all the village folk, for the beer, for the Dommel River and the sacred missal! One day he made up his mind to write to the priest, but when he was about to begin he had no paper.

His life grew sad and hopeless. He felt that he could not bear it until Easter. Summer wasn't even over ; then the leaves must first fall from the trees ; then snow must lie on the ground again ; and then the new buds must once more come forth on the trees; no, he simply couldn't stand it so long. His inspiration was crumbling away from hunger, fear, hope deferred over and over again, and irresolution } his youth was withering. Sometimes he would pray to the Madonna at a little field shrine to take him away from the earth, but he always stopped at once for fear that she might answer his prayer.

He no longer played his bagpipes except to strike up "In Paradisum" and then he felt better while he wept. Gradually even his drawing failed him. There was no longer any dash, music, fire in it. But sometimes when his eyes wonderingly discovered a beautiful line, a contour, or the glorious color of an object, something would leap up in him and despairingly, in a frenzy, he would begin to draw in charcoal or chalk on anything at hand, on a woodshed, on a wall, in the sand, or on



the barks of trees. But then he would again fall into the depths of despair, stamp upon the ground in impatient fury, fling up his arms as though warding off an evil spirit and then drop on his knees and sob: "Oh, Mother, Mother! Why did you leave me so utterly alone?"

* * *

In this state, embittered, with torn clothes and a torn heart, he sat on the banks of the broad, bright Scheldt with twenty grunting pigs beside him. He saw himself sitting there, dirty, pale and thin, with his bony knees, crusted with filth, showing through his breeches, and the ridges of his spine standing out like a string of beads under his ragged red waistcoat. Hunger and misery of soul had stretched him a bit. He heard his bones rattle. "If I should glide into the Scheldt, I'll be done with it all," he said with a sigh. "I'll have got rid of my guardian angel. And who could still protect a life like mine that scarcely holds together!"

But in spite of his dull grief the clear beauty of the morning entered into him through all his pores. He lived again and saw anew. The high arched heavens were of a vivid blue, and the earth was a luscious green. Masses of clouds white as eggs wandered along one after the other in the sun and the breeze; the wind-mills were turning away as though they would go up to Heaven and the little waves in the river stuck out their silvery tongues. It would be wonderful to ride horseback on the clouds, leaping from one to the other, and be wafted far off into the distance. But there he lay with the swine, bound by his contract-penny and his

fear. He turned over the leaves of his book of sorrows.

But at that moment a galleon from Antwerp came swiftly driving on, with sails taut, gay banners and pennants, with ropes humming and sailors singing at the mast. The sun exulted in the golden carving of the stem, where water nymphs and cornucopias surrounded the national coat of arms in many colors. The ship was sailing to another country. O Freedom! To sail along toward the blue lands with sweet morning hours, with fruits, mountains and rich carpets! Ah! To dance on the waves! And he jumped up and shouted, with his hand at his mouth: "Ho, there! Ho! May I come along? May I sail with you?"

The ship glided by, bowing gracefully in the wind.

"So Pm to die here," and he sighed with disappointment. But behold, like a beautiful miracle, the sun lay upon the world. The shadows looked like dark emeralds falling over the bright fields, and there was the vision of this slender galleon seen from the rear! How dark it now looks against that white cloud and how it gleams again beneath the golden flood of sunlight! Hurrah! Hurrah! His fingers tingled to draw the scene like lightning, but, Lord, he hadn't any paper, nothing but a pig! And with a bit of blue chalk quickly, passionately and clearly he drew on the rosy back of a pig lying lazily in the sun, the golden galleon moving majestically towards the East.

"The Fat can't prevent this at least!" He reviled them and then hummed with joy when he saw how good his drawing was.

* * *



The harvest was over. Now it was kermess time in all the land and there were feasts of boiled rice in the dwellings of the Fat. The Thin took part in the procession and offered candles so that they too might become Fat. Above all, there was Wobblefat's feast at the Pigfarm. A white pennant bearing a picture in color of St. Martin in the act of giving his cloak, hung out of the attic window. All the Fat of the neighborhood had been invited to gorge and swill with the Fat of the Pigfarm and they had come in their two-wheeled carts, whose axles creaked beneath the weight of their families. The noise of laughing, feasting people in the best room, whose doors and windows were open, reached Pieter's ears and the smell of the good roasts reached his nostrils. He sat in the shed by the lazy pigs, basking themselves in the copper sun of September. While the Fat were filling their big bellies with the rich food and streams of beer and wine and stuffing it all in until the sweat rolled down their bodies, he sat there with shrunken stomach and bowels hollow as macaroni through which the wind whistles and howls as in an empty house with loosened doors.

And now he could hear the village kermess over yonder! Lapped peacefully in pine forests and stubbly fields, the village lay there, gay with flags and pennants. He could even hear the joyful sounds acclaiming the Play of St. George, the merry shouts of the children, the thunder of the bowling alleys, the singing and shouting and blustering of the drunken roisterers and the alluring strains of the bagpipes!

The mad whirl of dancing was in full swing. A rod

had been fastened to the highest sail of the windmill, now silent, and on a crossbeam were fastened gay, artificial birds. You shot at them with bow and arrow and the arrows were rising in a steady stream ; when a bird was hit there was much rejoicing and a round of beers. And then to catch the rich, pleasant smell of pancakes and fried sausage! Oh! to smell one's fill at one of the little booths! But he had to take over the Sunday service among the pigs to-day, too. It was a fiendish plot. He hadn't even been able to watch the procession that morning, but had only gone to early mass. He longed for evening, for the girl with the rabbit eyes had promised to bring him a pancake.

For fear that they might eat him out of house and home, Wabblefat had sent every one who wasn't absolutely needed away for the day. The farmyard lay deserted in the sun ; a bluish-green peacock strutted up and down as though specially engaged for this performance and the chickens picked up what was thrown to them from the window. Along the shady passage between the kitchen and the best room the maids and men servants had been rushing and panting for hours, incessantly bearing in more jugs and roasts and pastry on doors that served as trays. There was much ado in the house that day, for food was being prepared on two hearths, one in the great room and one in the kitchen. Spits were turning, sauces were sizzling in the pans and everything sent odors out into the sunny air, already filled with the fragrance of the fruit glowing quietly on the trees.

Pieter began to dream of Adam and Eve. They

were forbidden to eat only one of the fruits of the earth, he could eat none of them. The men and maids were doing their best not to leave anything over. Their hands and faces were shiny with grease. They fell upon the food like tigers. One had swallowed a whole chicken leg which now stuck in his throat.

"He'll die, he'll choke!" they all shouted together, while the man danced and jumped and rolled about in agony. They were about to call Wobblefat, when out of sheer fright, the fellow swallowed it down. Pieter crept towards the kitchen in the hope of catching a fat morsel. But they pushed him away in their greedy excitement. They had scarcely begun to join the ranks of the Fat, and already they denied their brother. Downcast he slunk back to the pigs and piously folding his hands, he prayed: "O Blessed Mother of God, let me die, let me come to you, but with a stomach full of good food."

To die with a full stomach, that was all that remained of the ardent fire of his dreams and his longing for the blue distance. But say what you will, how could you help it when you hadn't satisfied your hunger for five months and your belly was growling from all those turnips! Oh, to bite into a liver-pie now until you can scarcely breathe ; to let sweetbreads slip down your gullet, to gnaw at a capon bone in its rich juice, and to sip cider that tickles your nostrils with its fragrance! And now he felt profoundly and strongly that he was out of place in the world ; he was a mistake. There are people like that and they want nothing better than to be released from the world. He wanted to die. But



T H E F A T

then he heard Wobblefat with drunke
to sing:

" At Kieldrecht, at Kieldrecht,
The girls are very spry,
Till midnight they're a-dancing,
Till noon abed they lie."

They had no music. The bagpipe player whom they had been expecting had probably got drunk on the way or had some accident; in short, they had no music.

" If I should play for them a little in the meantime, God knows whether I won't get a plate full of rich morsels. . . ." And quick as a sparrow, reckless from hunger, he takes his bagpipe, steps up to the house as he plays, stands before a window and plays, and his music charms them all like magic. They sing along and beat time with spoons and hands and feet; happiness descends upon the festive board like a wreath. In amazement he sees the heaped-up titbits and the fat people around the table, among them Oelpapper. There they are sitting now, the Fat, all in their best, bright clothes, the men with gay little hats, the women with flowing white caps: the families of Wobblefat, of Fatneck, of Buttermilkfarmer-Meatball, of Goiter-Toad, of Braggart and others. It is a fantastic picture of double chins, necks fat as bacon, sausage fingers, bellies like barrels and breasts like balloons, at some of which a round ball of a child is being suckled. As they sing they eat; they are crimson from their labors and shine as if varnished ; they are dressed to look like plums without the down on them. The daughters of

Wobblefat, with their hair as yellow as flax, are squeezing the song out of their fat throats and closing their eyes with the effort. The mother is laughing, as always. The sons, with a defiant air, look like frogs that have blown themselves up and shake their fingers as they sing. The rest are eating, drinking and singing all at once, so as not to miss anything. The table is groaning beneath earthen and pewter jugs and pitchers, flowered dishes containing geese, calves' kidneys, roast pigs, pigs' feet, calves' heads, sausages, hams, bacon, legs of mutton, carps, partridges, woodsnipe, rabbits in a dirty black sauce, a whole Noah's Ark of roasted animals in wild confusion. They are eating this and tasting that and then beginning all over again. Oelpapper has stuck a chicken leg into his hat for later on, and some have hung sausages from their belts—you needn't be hungry to enjoy them, for they always taste good.

On the floor there are more dishes of meat, platters of puddings and pastries. At the hearth the sweating maids are turning pieces of meat on spits over the flames ; the dogs with their puppies and the household cats are devouring pieces that were not well done or overdone. Tuns of foaming beer flow into the tankards, the wine streams into the cans and beneath the table the children are playfully pressing out grapes and putting pancakes on their heads. From the low beams of the ceiling hang long chains of sausages and rows of hams, sides of bacon and smoked haunches dangle down ; the ceiling bends under their weight. In the dusky fireplace, too, everything is crammed full of hams and sides of bacon. Everything is fat here: the

meat, the fruit, the sausages, the people, the dogs, the cats, the two canaries and the flies buzzing around the righteous. The greasy air hangs steaming on the leaded windowpanes and leaves a crust on the image of the Madonna, the only thin being in this house, who is praying for them, forgotten, on a mantelpiece. And there in the midst of the tableround, first to be seen but last to be mentioned since he surpasses all, Wobblefat stands like a mountain about to totter, with beaker raised high, a purse, a knife and a sausage at his belt, and sings. He, too, is singing with his eyes closed, perhaps because he knows the song by heart. He is like a setting sun, strained to bursting like a balloon, and stained with dark spots of wine and food. The blood is mounting to his head from the exertion of his singing which sounds as comical as the bleating of a young kid.

The humming music of the bagpipes delights him, one can see: he nods his head from side to side, he laughs, and then his frog-eyes open in appreciation of the music. But when he sees Pieter standing there, he begins to laugh horribly, like a volcano. At this laughter Pieter feels as if his bones were shivering to pieces. A terrible fear overwhelms him. He dares neither to run away nor to remain and blows on his pipes for all he is worth, as if they could save him: "At Kieldrecht, at Kieldrecht."

"Stand still, you blockhead!" Wobblefat calls, and suddenly his sons remember that they are supposed to be angry and they cast furious glances at Pieter who stands as though glued to the spot by Wobblefat's command. And to the guests who are now watching the

scene in silent amazement, the dikereeve cries: "See, that's a sketcher, he's always making sketches of me to mock at me. He's come again now to spy upon us. But I'm going to sketch him for a change. Stand still! Or I'll have them catch you!—Cousins, follow my lead! So!"

Wabblefat throws a gnawed bone at Pieter's head and at once a rainstorm of bones roars around his ears amid the fierce howls of these merry boon companions. Oelpapper, too, takes part in the sport. Pieter tries to ward off their attack by raising his arm to his forehead; but suddenly a ham-bone darkens his sky. Bang! He gets a blow on the eye that makes him see stars and with a wild cry of pain he dashes away amid the loud shouts of joy of the revelers.

Frightened out of his wits he creeps into the pigpen. His last bit of courage to face life is destroyed and in tears he moans: "O Mother, take me away from here, please take me away; it can't be as dark anywhere else as here."

* * *

The sun was just setting when Pieter, firmly resolved, jumped up like a spring. He looked through the little window. The heavens, yellow as a lemon, were exulting and the broad farmhouse stood out against the sky in a dark blue mass. It was like a stomach that devours the whole land and the soul of the people. Within they were still eating and drinking for the sheer joy of destruction. "There's still something left and there mustn't be anything left over," they cried, and so they threw capons into each

other's faces and broke the plates. Some of them fell asleep with their heads on the table. One of these fat mealsacks lay down under the cool, open sky, another vomited out of the window, and a third drew a drunken servant girl into the dark orchard.

In the village the loud hum of the bagpipes and the shrill sound of the fifes, like the buzzing of large insects, could now be heard. The noise of the kermess was held fast in the trees; but above them, in the pure gold of the heavens, a crystal silence reigned, animated only by the fluttering swallows. Pieter spat contemptuously at this world, at these people, who consumed the kindness of others and left over only the naked bones of hatred. He looked with longing up to the clear sky where God awaited him. He removed his scapulary, hung it on a nail and tied a greasy rope around his neck. Now he had only to stand on a pail, kick it away and he would be hanged! . . .

"Just listen to the drunken, stupid laughter in there! The cowards! . . . Just wait, Wabblefat will burst, he'll choke when he sees me hanging dead—may God strike him dead!" And hastily, furiously, and defiantly, but clearly and distinctly he drew, with his charcoal, on the board wall a picture: Wabblefat, screwing tight a winepress under which a haggard wretch was being squeezed to death, and he wrote beneath: "Wabblefat fattens on the sweat and blood of the Lean." And full of unbridled hatred and dark revenge he eagerly added: "Wabblefat has killed me!"

He smiled. "I'd like to live long enough to see the result of this." He was about to step on the bucket

when he suddenly remembered, "I haven't prayed for my mother to-day!" And when he had said his three *Ave Marias*, he remained on his knees. The door was ajar, and a stripe of golden sunlight fell upon the scapulary. Once more he was looking down from the mill into the distance. From afar everything seemed so warm, so fragrant and blue. He was now standing in one of those distant dreamlands. "O Blessed Mother of God, give me courage, let me come to you!" he whispered.

A pig thrust its wet snout through the crack of the door, pushed the door open and came walking in as if on tiptoes, letting in a broad beam of sunlight at the same time. Pieter hurled a piece of wood at the snout of this disturbing reveler and prayed: "O Blessed Mother of God, forgive me for doing this deed among the swine!" Why was he still waiting? He remained kneeling with hands hanging irresolute, ready to snatch at the sun. His heart was pounding straight up into his throat. He was warding off a haunting fear, locking it away behind the closed door of his own mind, but it trickled through like dry sand from one's hand: Hell, the fear of Hell! He collapsed like dough that has been pricked. The thought kindled his imagination. Hell for suicides! And in one instant terror consumed his clean white purpose, turning it black till it crumbled like a piece of burnt paper.

He wept and sobbed . • • and then, with a cold shudder, he sprang up suddenly and decisively. Something in him had changed, and what had appeared impossible for the past five months now seemed as noth-

ing. Racked with suffering, weary and exhausted and suddenly aged by many years, he put on his scapulary, took his bagpipe and set his ragged little hat on his head, through whose holes his hair stuck out like a brush. Quietly, passively, without joy but with decision, he left the Pigfarm where everybody was lying dead-drunk, but where one of them had lighted the candle before the image of the Madonna on the mantelpiece. When he stood on the bridge, he wanted to turn back.

"The girl's going to bring me some pancakes; it would be unkind not to wait for her!" He stood still and deliberated. "She'll forget it anyway," he wished. And with knees bent forward he walked across the stubble-fields towards nowhere. The full moon rose red above the woods. He entered the forest. And the farther he got away, the more his whole past seemed a dream, a fairy tale. He was limping for he had a nail in his shoe, through whose holes his feet showed at toe and heel, and on his back the rope, which he had forgotten to remove, still dangled.

It had now been raining steadily for three days—a fine, melancholy rain, gray and cold. And during this rain the village priest from Brueghel appeared at the Pigfarm to fetch Pieter away and send him to Antwerp as a painter.

Wobblefat was just slicing off a piece of ham for himself when the big priest entered, happy and smiling. He glanced at the ceiling where the hams hung

like sleeping bats, and through the open door of the bedroom he saw Wabblefat's wife and children still lying in bed drunk, lazy and exhausted, with belching stomachs, sour from the three days' feast.

"May I have a word with you?" asked the Father.

"You may even have two," piped Wabblefat, devouring his slice of ham. "Sit down for a moment."

As he sat down, the priest said: "I've come to fetch little Pieter of Brueghel."

"What! Are you the priest who sent him to me and don't you know that, that . . . that—" croaked Wabblefat, but in his rage his words were choked in his fat throat.

"Be silent," replied the Father, triumphing over him. "I know that he must stay till Eastpr because of the earnest-money, but I will make up your loss, doubly!"

"But don't you know, don't you know that . . . that it's too late, too late, that this scoundrel, this Judas! . . ."

"Silence! It's not too late, I've brought money along! Much money! Listen!" And Wabblefat was silent, amazed that any one dared to command him and hoping that the priest would have news about Pieter.

"Listen!" the priest repeated. "About a month ago, Mr. Pastein came to inquire if there was anything to sell in our village; you know he buys works of art and jewels for Emperor Charles. He's a good friend of Pieter Coecke. You never heard of Pieter Coecke? The greatest artist in Antwerp—he was at the court of the Sultan in Turkey—and he's a writer and musi-

cian, too. Well, then, this friend of mine, Pastein, saw some drawings at my house that little Pieter had left behind. He painted them when he was living with me. Pastein threw his arms up in delight and cried: 'This boy is a great artist! Where is he? He must go to my friend Coecke. Coecke will receive him with open arms. I'll write him to-day what a discovery I've made. Find him, Father! I have discovered a great artist!' Yes, Mr. Dikereeve, that's what my friend Pastein said and he wrote to Antwerp that very day and went on to Cologne the next day. I would have written you, but I had to go to Bergen-op-zoom anyway, where my sister is married to a skipper, and so I thought I might as well go a few steps further and arrange things myself. And here I am! How much do you want so that I can take the boy along at once?" And he held out a little bag full of coin.

Wobblefat was sweating at every pore. He was black with rage that Pieter was gone. What an exorbitant bill he might have presented! But on the other hand he was quivering with joy that Pieter had missed this great piece of good luck. And these two feelings, contending against each other, drove his blood wildly through his veins.

"He is dead!" he cried, with envious exultation.

"Dead? Dead? You're mad!" cried the priest, jumping up as if he had been sitting on a dagger. "And you didn't send me word? Nor my cousin Oel-papper?"

"Yes, dead since last Sunday," cried Wobblefat scornfully. "Dead, but without leaving a corpse be-

hind! But if I find him, dead or alive, I'll beat him till he's as flat as a medlar stick,"

With eyebrows severely raised the priest asked: "Dead without leaving a corpse behind? I don't understand! Dead or alive, you say? Do you know that he is dead? And what has a stick to do with this? Answer, or I'll throw you into purgatory!" The rough village priest of Dommel, good as gold, had suddenly got the upper hand in him.

"Come along and see for yourself!" cried Wobblefat, horrified and furious at the priest's boldness, cursing like a carter and driving his knife into the table. "Come along!" and he led the way to the pigpen where he pointed out Pieter's drawing and what was written beneath.

The priest closed his eyes. "The poor lad took his own life," he said and he looked at Wobblefat slowly and bitterly. "You treated him too badly!"

Wobblefat danced about with rage as if he were standing on live coals. "What!" he stormed. "You see! It's always so—now I'm to blame! It was just his terrible wickedness—and that's all the thanks for all my kindness." He tried to squeeze out a few tears as he turned away and rubbed his eyes with his fingers, wet with spit, but it didn't work.

"Just ask my men!" he cried. "Ask Oelpapper. I handled him as gently as a raw *egg* because you had sent him. But he always provoked and angered me. He couldn't stand me and always made drawings of me to make fun of me. And now he does this—to bring me to the gallows!" His bloodshot frog-eyes

were rolling wildly in his red face. "You can see that I'm innocent!" he bellowed. "When they told me that he couldn't be found, leaving nothing but this drawing, I was cunning enough not to remove this accusing sentence"—and he pointed to "Wobblefat has killed me." "Doesn't that prove that I'm innocent! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Wobblefat laughed like a neighing horse. "Before he was dead, he couldn't write that I killed him, since he was still alive; and he couldn't write it after he was dead either, since he was no longer alive. Ha! Ha!" But then he began to threaten again, with fists clenched: "To make me seem a murderer! I'll kill him! He must go to prison, to the stake, the heretic!"

"And have they searched everywhere?" the priest asked sadly, not heeding his rage.

"They're still searching, and if they find him . . .," Wobblefat cursed.

"And he might have become a great artist!" the Father lamented. "Perhaps he even died without the last sacraments!"

Suddenly he seized Wobblefat as he stood there threatening, shook him till he quivered like jelly and shouted gruffly: "I'm going to start an investigation! And though you were twice as fat and lord of everything from here to the sun, if any harm has come to the boy through your fault, I'll tear you in half so that the two pieces can be hung to dry on a rope! Do you understand, you misbegotten sea-dog?"

The priest walked off with heavy tread, pursued by the wild curses of Wobblefat. On his way he re-

peated many prayers for the repose of the dead boy's soul, while now and then he cast a searching glance at the brooks and hollow trees to look whether Pieter Brueghel was not hanging there on a branch or drifting along somewhere on a stream.

* * *

Chapter 111

VERONICA

PIETER wandered eastward, drawn thither by his love for his native village, like a pigeon to its cote, and the priest followed in the same direction. They were walking along the same way, one behind the other, separated by only a half hour's distance. If Pieter had waited a bit or if the Father had gone a little faster, they would have met. The Father was praying for the peace of Pieter's soul and Pieter was whistling:

"Oh, darling, tender maiden,
How sweet to live with you!"

He had now been wandering about for three days beneath a steady downpour, from one forest to another, and had managed to beg an occasional piece of bread and butter. Now, on the fourth day since he had fled from the Pigfarm, he saw that the weather was changing. This morning the sky had fallen apart like a wet cloth and the golden, young sun shone forth between the clouds like a yellow walnut. He felt autumn in the trees, all gold and brown, and breathed the fragrance of abundant ripe fruit. He walked faster and the good Father, too, still tramping behind him, was urged on by the sun shining upon him from the side. The road was a long one, with many turns **and** bordered by yellowing poplarsj **if they had tried,**

they might have caught sight of each other in the distance. But the Father was too engrossed in praying and Pieter in whistling, "How sweet to live with you!"

So Pieter arrived at a quiet, wretched village whose little church tower rose among red beeches. The whole village common lay under water, gleaming in the sunlight. Ten mud huts and the little brown church, built of a metallic stone, were reflected on its smooth surface, on which drifted dead leaves. The water had risen up to the church, whose door stood open, while the ten huts were closed. It was so still and deserted that it seemed one might have walked about in one's shirt; but if one had tried it, all the doors would have opened and one would have been greeted with ringing laughter. The silence was profound, only the soft sunlight gleamed through the red trees; nothing stirred, nothing made a noise—except a bird's laughter now and then and the leaves drifting down from the trees.

Pieter was overcome by a feeling of reverence when he saw the quiet little church; and since his shoes had as many holes as a sieve, he did not have to remove them first. He walked straight through the water into the empty church. . . .

A half hour later Father Jerome entered the village and felt like praying in the quiet little church. Confound it, then he must take off his shoes because of the water in them! He had already seated himself on a tree stump to untie them, but he felt that he was being ridiculous and petty, so he kept them on and passed by the church with a pious greeting. But he thought to himself: "Our angelic father, Saint Francis, would

have taken off his shoes. . . . Well, yes, it's true," he added, smiling to himself, "Saint Francis hadn't any shoes on. . . . But if he had been wearing shoes . . ." and he continued to accuse himself and to excuse himself. In short, the Father walked on morosely and then disappeared. It seemed as if Providence had willed it so.

Pieter still remained in church through the dark red twilight. He was lost to the world, as if fastened to the spot and stirred to the soul with amazement and wonder before a little painting by Hieronymus Bosch representing the Temptation of St. Anthony. With his blood showing blue in his veins, the pale saint stands out against the golden background and around him rise insolently the Seven Deadly Sins who have assumed human form. Like deadly spiders they lurk in our hearts and suck our blood.

But St. Anthony has arisen and driven them out of his heart where there must be room only for God, and see, now they gnash their teeth and groan, they curse and hiss in poisonous rage ; and the more they rage, the uglier they are, with their jaws dripping poison, their slanting, shiny eyes, their bestial noses and cracked lips, their green teeth, their bursting cheeks and monstrous breasts. They are leprosy, the plague, all Evil, trying to capture the heart: but St. Anthony, with his dark eyes glowing in his pale face, stands transfigured, radiant with inspiration, listening to the divine Illumination which he now hears singing triumphantly in his spirit. . . .

While the village priest keeps on his shoes and is

traveling onward, a new horizon is opening up before Pieter. His legs are trembling with excitement. He feels as though he had painted this picture. His whole heart is in it } he feels as though he were turning the pages of his own soul. Oh! these grimacing faces are the very same that haunt his dreams and his life, Tomato-Toad, Oelpapper, Wabblefat, loathsome lumps of sin. In his own soul, too, he sees dark powers, evil things that he must fight against, above which the saints rise shining in glory and in which other men perish.

And in this same moment he discovered the true goal of his life: painting. To paint so! To be able to paint so! To paint like Bosch! To paint his sins, but to paint the light of his soul as well, to paint his village, his fear, his joy; to paint the whole world and Hell and Heaven; to paint himself to death, to dissolve in colors! And that night in a silent wood he prayed, while he wrung his hands: "God, dear, sweet Lord, and all ye saints and angels together, let me become a painter like that!"

* * *

In a steady, fine drizzle he passed through a succession of little pine woods, and what remained in his spirit of a wild dream of the night before and of Bosch's painting was like the skeleton of a dried leaf, a tender nostalgia for something that had no being. Conscientiously he followed the narrow path that led over the endless heath in fantastic turns. This fine, driving rain, the grayish-blue distance, the silence and the complete solitude made him know the melancholy joy of

wanderers and vagabonds. He sat down on a little hill, sat there as though all things had come to an end and as though nothing would ever begin again. . . . After a flock of birds of passage had flown slowly above his head, he noticed that the lowlands seemed to be steaming in the mist. He took his bagpipe, closed his eyes and played. He felt the fine rain tickling his face with coolness. And over the heath where the purple glow of flowers was disappearing, his song rose slowly, so much at one with and related with the gray tone and vague outlines of things that the heath itself seemed to be singing.

When he opened his eyes again, he saw a girl coming toward him. He played on, but now he no longer closed his eyes. . . . When she had come up closer and he saw how poor and frail she was, his song ended with a slow groan. The bag collapsed, he sighed, was silent and waited. He wanted to remove his hat, but he let it be because it was so full of holes.

She was barefooted and her feet were gray from the sand; around the great toe of her right foot a blood-drenched cloth was wrapped. Her slender body was lost in a long dress much too large for her and in a torn green cloak. She wore a white cloth on her dark hair and a big scapulary on her breast; on her arm hung a willow basket in which Pieter noticed some slices of bread. She stood still five steps away from him. They looked at each other and he saw that she was very pale and thin and had eyes yellow as honey. She smiled confidently, and then asked, closing her eyes: "Don't you want to play some more?"

"My song is ended," he answered, somewhat embarrassed.

She came nearer. "I heard you playing from far off in the distance," she said, closing her eyes again, "and because I liked it so much, I came faster."

"Oh, that's nice," he remarked, still more embarrassed.

"Where do you live?" she asked, and she smiled again and closed her eyes.

"Nowhere," said Pieter.

"And where are you going?"

He was very proud and glad of this friendly interest. "I don't know yet } and you?"

She pointed with her thin hand. "There, far behind the woods, to the Rat-Holes, to Crackleg. But he isn't my father. I am a foundling, and they named me Veronica. He had both his legs run over, when he was drunk and fell out of a beer-wagon ; but when he goes begging, he always says that a dragon in Egypt bit off both his legs; and then he shows the jawbone of an ass, and insists that it came from the dragon with seven heads."

"You're a foundling?" Pieter asked, greatly touched. "It must be jolly to live in doubt as to whether one is the child of a prince or not."

"Oh, there's no such doubt for me," she laughed sadly. "I was found wrapped in rags in the snow beside the church."

"It would suit you very well to wear the clothes of a princess," said Pieter decidedly, admiring her with his big eyes.

She gave a forced laugh and his glance had done its work; in confusion, she quickly asked him, "And where do you come from?"

He was just about to say, "From the Fat" He was ready to tell her his whole history, but suddenly he grew a bit suspicious and at the same time was very eager that she should be interested in him, and so he said: "I come from beyond the sea . . . from the City that lies on the Mountain." She looked at him questioningly. That was just what he wanted, and so he let himself go: "There the weather is always beautiful, there the cherries grow as big as a fist; for seven pennies you can get a whole hive of honey. There are always banners and processions there. . . ."

"Yes?" she asked with curiosity, and happy and listening intently she threw herself on her knees before him and with her eyes closed, she asked, "And do they speak like us there?"

"We learn all languages, but the real language there is very different." He recalled his choirboy Latin—"*Matinos tempo melioris* means: To-morrow the weather will be better. And when you love anybody there, you say: *Amos tua.*"

The word had escaped him unwittingly; he blushed to his ears in pleased surprise.

He gave her a little nudge and she hastily asked him: "And why did you go away from there?"

With hands clasped about his crossed knees, he eagerly began to talk, swinging a leg up and down, and she listened open-mouthed with a look of profound reverence in her yellow eyes.

"Well, I was on my way here in a golden galleon, to get to know the country, when a storm arose and dashed the boat against a rock, where it crashed into a thousand pieces. I believe that many people on board were drowned. A piece of the wreck, a carved water nymph from the stem, brought me to the Scheldt. My clothes had been washed from my body, and I had such beautiful clothes! I couldn't go to Antwerp naked, so I sat in the reeds by the river with my golden water nymph and waited for somebody to come along. A peasant who drove by in his wagon gave me these clothes and this bagpipe in exchange for my water nymph. And now I'm going to look at all the paintings that are hanging in the churches. I want to be a painter, an artist, but my colors, my money, everything was lost but myself."

He looked eagerly at the bread in her basket. She noticed this and without asking him, she took out a slice, broke it in two and gave him half. She sat down beside him and both began to eat ravenously, silent and smiling at each other. Suddenly he held his bread crust out into the rain. "Sauce," he said solemnly. She almost choked with laughter.

"Tell me, am I not robbing you . . . Veronica?" he asked, offering her a piece of bread as big as a fingertip, all that was left of it.

"I'll go begging and get some more," she laughed, and confidentially she added: "I really do only the pilgrimages. I've just come from the Abbey at Postel, where I lighted a candle for a child that is bewitched,

and next week I have to go to the Precious Blood at Hoogstraeten."

"And can you really stand it? Taking such long journeys?" he asked her with deep concern.

"I have to, because Crackleg wants me to. He has the people pay him in advance. It brings in a lot of money, and when the people for whom I pray don't get what they want, he beats me with the jawbone of the ass. But I often have my prayers answered. When I pray, I forget everything, for I always see Our Dear Lady."

"I think I read that in your eyes," he said with conviction, and he held her hand compassionately and reverently. "You must not stay there."

She laughed, looking in wonder at his hand and hers, then at him, and then at their hands, in turn. She closed her eyes. And after a while she looked at him again and said, "When will you go back there?"

He suddenly repented that he had lied to her so, for he saw how firmly the poor child believed it all. And why should one tell such a beautiful, sweet girl something that isn't so! But while he was thinking this he was at it again: "I shall go back in the spring-time. Then the boats will once more be going in that direction. Oh, it is so beautiful there in the spring-time! Roses everywhere. And the golden domes of the hundred churches are so responsive to the light that they all begin to sing when the sun shines on them. • • •"

And he went on telling stories, telling them for half

an hour on end, and she listened to him devoutly and full of enthusiasm. Suddenly she seized his other hand and said, with fire in her words and with fire in her eyes which this time she did not close: "I would like to stay with you always."

"I too . . ." he sighed.

"Oh, how beautiful that would be!" she said blissfully.

"We'll make it beautiful, Veronica . . ." They smiled at each other happily. He didn't know exactly what he was about; it seemed as if a splash of sunlight had fallen upon him. Because of a lie, he was now sitting here, hand in hand with a girl who saw Our Dear Lady and who was fragrant with prayer, who had eyes like yellow honey, eyes she closed in speaking, who was beaten with the jawbone of an ass when she didn't work miracles. He looked at her as though she were a divine being and saw that she was shivering and that her thin arms were covered with goose-flesh.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "Shall I breathe upon your hands?"

Her eyes grew wet and a tear rolled down her cheek. He did not dare ask her why she was weeping, but he removed the tear with his forefinger.

"I am not going to live much longer," she said, smiling, her voice sad but firm.

He straightened up. "You are very pale," he said, his eyes big with interest.

"That's in the blood of the Cracklegs," she said calmly. "When they're sixteen years old, they dry up. They get it from their mother. Four children have

died of it. Of course I'm not one of them, but I drank the disease in with my foster mother's milk. Now it's my turn. It began last winter. In your country, I know I should get well."

And now his cup was full. How longingly, hopefully and trustingly this child looked at him! He could not tell any more lies now. It was as if he were murdering somebody. But how could he tell her the truth without crushing her fresh, tender happiness. He grew hot with embarrassment. "And how parched she seems, waiting for a kind word," he thought, "now I have to keep on lying for her health's sake." Hesitatingly he said: "Yes, you might get well there."

"But until then?" she asked, troubled and pleading.

"Until then? Until then? . . . Well . . . I get around a bit . . . just about everywhere. I'll come to see you now and then . . . and . . . and . . ." He felt as if he had to roll away a heavy stone resting on him. Suddenly he gave a forced laugh. "And if I should tell you now that I won't ever go back! . . ."

She looked at him in astonishment, but he did not dare to look into her eyes. "Another stroke," he thought } "the last; my Guardian Angel, help me to get the words out of my mouth." He went on: "And now if I should tell you that there isn't such a country, that I was lying the whole time, that . . ."

"Then I wouldn't believe you," she burst forth, "then you'd only be saying it so as not to have to take me along."

The difficult moment was now passed and he looked at her, quietly, sympathetically, sadly. "Well, child,

there's no such thing } no such thing. It isn't true what I've been telling you. I'm just a lad from Brueghel on the Dommel. . . . I didn't dare tell you anything else. . . . I didn't know you'd believe it so firmly; but I'm from Brueghel. Last winter my mother died. . . ." And his whole history flowed from his heart.

Sad over the disappointment that smashed her brief happiness to bits, she grew more mature in her pity and kindness because of his misery and his desolation. She looked at him through her tears, shaking her head, and when he ended with: "and when I saw you coming over there, I didn't know why I became so happy," she leaned her head against his shoulder. "How good that feels!" he sighed.

"You must come and live with us!" she said, suddenly sitting up and with an air of motherly command. "If you play the bagpipe, the Cracklegs will be glad. . . . And if they aren't . . . why then . . ." He read the rest in her eyes.

"Yes, we should always stay together," he sighed. She stroked his hands, his face, and pressed closer to him. From far away in the distance, he remembered that he was to be a great artist some day. But the girl was too beautiful, love was too pleasant in his meager life for him to withstand.

"Later, when she is dead, poor girl, I shall have time enough," he thought. He let his dreams of becoming a great artist fall to pieces like faded flowers, and took the girl into his arms. "Every one must have somebody to love more than himself," he murmured, looking into her honey-yellow eyes. Their heads leaned against



each other, drawn by their eyes, and they kissed each other, as poor people kiss each other, hastily and ashamed. And then suddenly they had nothing more to say. Words were now too heavy, too difficult. They just smiled at each other. He breathed upon her cold hands and thought of the cold hands of his mother.

And so they sat in the fine gray rain and in the deepening twilight, crouched together like two wet rabbits, small and helpless, but white with joy within.

From the lowlands a thick mist rose and evening came dragging on sadly out of the distance. "Shall we go on?" she asked him lovingly. "We shall surely find a hut."

He got up willingly and let himself be led by her hands like a lamb. And hand in hand, he with his bagpipe and full of unsuspected kindness and goodness, she with her little basket, with prayers and the odor of death in her clothes, they passed silently in the evening and in the rain, over the gentle, endless, silent heath.

* * *

Chapter IV

THE LEAN

SIX dilapidated huts buried beneath the snow and closely huddled together, with the bare, black branches of a few trees above them, and for the rest, everywhere only a forlorn, monotonous snowy plain stretching beneath a gray sky—nothing more. Far down on the horizon there was a yellow rift in the clouds through which glimmered the dawn. A row of willows led to the village where two windmills on a hill were turning. The Lean awoke with stomachs as empty as a church, embittered and cursing. With forefingers moistened with spit they searched for dry breadcrumbs in the cracks of the table and scratched the empty pots and pans with their nails for a forgotten strip of lard. But as always everything had been devoured. The fine favorable days for begging were over: Christmas, the Feast of the Innocents, New Year's Day, Twelfth Night. Their bellies felt limp and hollow. It was a hard winter, the snow stayed on the ground waiting for more snow. There was talk everywhere of war, famine, pestilence, bands of robbers, plundering heretics and burning at the stake, of the Evil Hand, of sorcerers and ghosts. People locked their doors, their hearts and their purses in fear and suspicion. The Seven Works of Christian Charity shrank to nothing. A sullen silence lay over the uneasy land. But the Fat had

bacon in their frying-pans and beer to their hearts' content. The Lean crept away into their holes like rabbits, to flee from Death, and they prayed: "O Lord, let another rich man die!" because of the distribution of bread after the burial.

But to-day was the Feast of St. Anthony with the Pig, on which the peasants reverently offered pigs' heads, feet and ears before the Saint's image, and these were sold after mass for the benefit of the church.



And the Thin came there in crowds! One after another the doors were opened and the families came forth: Onion-reed with his blind wife Pauline and their red-haired dog; Fly-skeleton with his troupe of children, each of whom carried a saint's image; the bachelor Crab who carried his crutches on his back and put them under his armpits just before reaching the village} and lastly, the families of Scratchear and Crackleg. Crackleg, the grim, legless man with the reddish-brown bris-

tie-beard, sat in a little wagon, which he pushed forward with two little boards in the form of flatirons. From his chest hung the shiny brown jawbone with which he ruled over the inhabitants of the Rat-Holes like a burgomaster. He was cursing because of their slow advance and was scolding his yellow-skinned wife, who was carrying a suckling and was followed by several ragged children, grandfather without a right hand, a half-witted woman with thick lips, and Pieter from Brueghel with his bagpipe and a faded crimson cloak thrown about his thin shoulders. Veronica was lying in the hospital off yonder, dying.

And this ragged, foul-smelling crowd with shoulders drawn high because of the cold, followed the narrow way like dogs in search of food. The bell from its lofty steeple summoned all people, churchgoers and beggars, along the snowy roads. And the mills ground the corn as though no one were hungry, and as though all stomachs were as well stuffed as those of the sparrows. • . •

Within the white church, the image of St. Anthony with the Pig rose high above a mountain of pigs' heads. Pale, with a bit of blood here and there, with closed eyes, they lay pell-mell, piled one above the other. The church was crowded; the beggars stood in the back. A gaunt Dominican monk was calling down from the pulpit that there was to be a new war and famine; that they had drawn all these plagues upon themselves because of their sins and must do penance to remove the burden of evil.

And when the heavy chords of the organ announced

the end of mass, the beggars rushed out into the open and crowded together in two rows. To the throngs pouring from church they displayed their naked, crippled arms and legs, their blind eyes, and they howled the tale of their miseries into the ears of the Fat.

With voice long drawn out, Crackleg whined: "Have mercy! My two legs were bitten off by a dragon with seven heads in the land of Egypt on my return from the Holy Land."

The grandfather sobbed: "My hand was cut off by the Turks because I would not vow to accept Mohammed!"

Fly-skeleton exhibited an arm covered with sores: "Take heed, and give! Because I would not give to a poor man who had this disease, I was cursed with the same plague!"

Blind Pauline croaked: "I was struck blind by lightning in the church procession." The older children yelled and all the little children screamed as though they had been wound up like clocks.

Pieter made his bagpipe hum; other bagpipes hummed along and voices rose complainingly, rosaries were rattled off, there was crying and wailing on every side. The beggars displayed their deformities, their scapularies and the images of saints. It was a linked dance of fearful misery, in double file.

But the people gave nothing. Suspicious and sullen, they hurried along homeward. A fat little farmer in a sheepskin laughingly threw three pennies among the mob and all the beggars fell upon the gift in a knot of wrestling bodies, long arms and grasping, clawing

hands. They used their crutches as weapons and pulled one another's hair.

When Pieter saw and heard all this he said: "Poor wretched people! But how beautiful to watch! How beautiful! It ought to be drawn!" For since Veronica was being nursed by the sisters in the hospital, he had grown calmer again and he could not see anything without feeling a tingling desire to draw it, even if only with his finger in the air.

After the sale of the pigs' heads in the vestibule of the church, there was scarcely a scrap left over for the poor, not a foot, not an ear. The beggars, and Crackleg above all, reviled the Dominican: "How would anybody give anything when he paints the specter of famine for them! He has the money for the pigs' heads, at least! And we can look on! But his convent will go up in smoke! We'll make tallow candles out of his flesh!"

The beggars went along the streets to beg at the houses, and Pieter went into "The Everlasting Lamp," where he played jolly songs and made faces, so that they all had to laugh, and they gave him much. Keeping enough over to satisfy Crackleg, he secretly bought some dried figs, black pudding and a little cake, and laden with these, he rang the bell at the door of the Convent where incurables only were taken care of. It had cost much effort to have Veronica admitted; there was room for only twelve people, so that some one would first have to die. Fortunately somebody died.

Pieter himself had pushed Veronica through the snow on the sled. Crackleg had said: "If she only gets

well by springtime for the pilgrimages, I shan't have to feed her all this time." Aside from that the Crack-legs didn't in the least trouble about her. Pieter remained with them in order to be near Veronica. He was allowed to visit her every week and for half an hour he would sit at her bedside. Then a thousand stars shone in his soul. There she lay, blue and thin in her little bed, in her white gown. Every week she grew a little thinner and the skin over the bones of her head and hands grew more transparent. He gave her the little package of figs; they exchanged a few words, held each other's hands and then sat there silent, looking at each other, no longer knowing what to say, until Veronica would repeat the question: "Tell me again of the City on the Mountain; I so love to hear it."

And then he would begin to tell the story, at first a bit embarrassed, but almost at once full of eager interest. He told about the country where gay shells lay along the shore, singing the song of the sea like ringing crystal goblets, and where one could see the fragrance of flowers rising like colored incense; and where he would place her in a golden portal, with flowers and fruits and beautiful rugs at her feet, or would *let* her be driven along in a gondola in the evening over waters as bright as moonlight from the shining goldfish and the mother-of-pearl shells.

These dreams were more beautiful and more real than her life and she listened to them with devout faith.

"And when the spring melts the snow . . . then
• . . then . . . we'll go to the warm Isle of Sicily;

we aren't tied to anything here," Pieter said sadly, convinced that by then she would long be dead.

"Yes, we'll do that; we can live everywhere," she said, holding his hand more tightly. But after he had gone, she said to the sisters: "He really believes that I shall still be here in the springtime, but I won't live to see Easter."

* * *

The beggars again gathered at the cemetery wall: each group chose its separate place where the collections of food and money were delivered. Each received a share of the food at once and at once devoured it greedily. Crackleg kept the money for himself and since he had a cold, as he said, he went to "The Everlasting Lamp" to warm his lungs with brandy. Then he went with his whole family toward the fields behind the hill, to beg at the farmyards. Each group had chosen a different direction for itself.

Lonely and endless, the fields stretched out beneath the heavy, frozen snow. You could fairly taste the cold in your mouth like metal. The farmyards and the houses were closed like walnuts, snowed in deep. Nothing stirred. Whenever they stopped at some farmyard, they heard nothing but the barking of the dog; then they would begin to sing a hymn to St. Anthony before the door, while Pieter accompanied them with his bagpipe. But the peasants did not open the doors; they would calmly let the beggars look at the icicles hanging from the roof and snarl scornfully: "We'll give nothing." If at last after long begging, they handed out something through a crack in the door,

they did it with a false laugh, out of fear. And when the doors were opened, the hot fragrance of fat and roasting was wafted on the frozen faces of the beggars. Indoors there was much carousing and singing in honor of St. Anthony. Crackleg, pouring forth one curse after another, had himself drawn through the snow by two of the bigger boys and stormed against priests, peasants, fat-bellies, kings and popes. The youngest baby kept crying steadily and the two youngest toddlers, tired and cold, let themselves be dragged along at the skirts of their mother, who indifferently let them do as they liked. Grandfather leaned on the arm of the half-witted woman and Pieter came along behind, thinking of the following week when he would be seeing Veronica. So the group hobbled on over the snowy fields, before each mouth a little banner of frozen breath and in each heart a weaker will to live.

And as they stepped out of the forest in the twilight, the sluggish, heavy snow again fell upon them.

* * *

All the beggars and the cripples from the Rat-Holes met once more in the hostelry, "The Four Last Drinks," at the crossroads. There each bought his household supply of candles, lard, vinegar and other things out of the share they had received or had somehow got possession of. (It often happened that a chicken or something else that was useful would run right between your legs!) And when they were all together, the whole group would start off once more toward the huts. If the days of begging had been productive, they



Would have a grand carouse at "The Four Last Drinks" and return drunk, singing and dancing to their holes. But now times had been hard for many months, and to-day was an especially bad day. They spoke not a word except to mutter an occasional curse or malediction, and the snow piled up on their heads and shoulders. Crackleg, who had himself drawn along on his wagon, now had a bottle of brandy under his arm. He had wormed it away from the bearded widow at "The Four Last Drinks" by many promises and hard luck stories, and though she was usually suspicious, she had yielded in the end.

"Come over afterwards, and drink a little glass of brandy over our bad success!" he called to the others. "I'm selling drink to-day." For now and then Crackleg played innkeeper and sold brandy; then there would be dancing, and singing in his hut, brawling and fighting. But he ruled them sternly with the jawbone of the ass and struck fiercely at their shins. Fly-skeleton had once begun to sell brandy too, but that very evening Crackleg with his redoubtable weapon broke up everything to bits there. He would brook no competition. "If I only had legs," he would say sometimes, "I would kill all the rich people, one after the other, and Emperor Charles, that blood-sucker with a face like a basin of holy water, first of all."

Grumbling, they fought their way painfully through the falling snow. On the way they met a tall man in a bearskin. He had straw in his boots and had drawn his cap and his coat so close together that only his round red nose shone out between them. He stood still and

spread out his arms wide, blocking their way. First he cautiously turned his head in all directions, and then out of the shabby, moth-eaten bearskin his thin, stubble-bearded face with its sore little eyes emerged. With abrupt, awkward gestures, he began to talk, to call to the ragged people gathered about in a voice, shrill as a clarionet:

"Brothers in Jesus Christ! I salute you! And I pray for you! I beseech you to listen to my words. I am sent by the Brotherhood of the Naked Sword, to bring glad tidings to the poor. They say that we are heretics. They are liars who say this, because we revere Our Blessed Lady, and serve the Pope of Rome and Emperor Charles. But we oppose the rich and all who hold with the rich, even if it were the Pope of Rome, and that fine fellow, Emperor Charles, himself. You are poor. I can see that. I should be lying if I spoke otherwise. But why are you poor? I will tell you! Because the money that you lack is in the pockets of the rich. That's it! They keep you poor. And the rich say: 'It is blessed to be poor.' But they themselves eat until their bellies are fat and round. The poorer you are, the richer they are. And this won't change unless they are burned like crackling thorns. They choke and gasp in their own fat and their leavings are your nourishment. You feed on what they have licked themselves full. You must beg—oh, that's splendid for them! Then they can give! Don't you see! Then they can give and so get into heaven. You are allowed to be the ladder by which they reach heaven! And you must beg and be glad if your flesh is covered with



sores ; that awakens pity } you must be glad if you are
blind } that opens their hands to give alms ; you mothers
must pinch your children so that they will cry ; that
opens their hands! Good God!" (and here he raised
his little blue eyes to heaven) "thou, who hast offered
thy beloved son to the world, and hast let him be cruci-
fied to be an example to the rich, behold how wretched
these poor brothers are because the rich despise thy
word! Destroy them! Exterminate them! Every-
where the earth teems with the poor and the crippled,
with beggars ; never was there a time like this. It is
the eighth plague of Egypt. But not thou, O Lord
God, sendest these plagues upon us; the rich send them
upon us the while they refuse to help their brothers!
God created the world for all, but they take your land
and your house, and you may perish. What is here for
you? Nothing. What is there for them? Every-
thing! You must not longer endure this. You must
not mourn! At them! At them! Arise! Bestir your-
selves! Rise and assert yourselves! You are human
beings, not dogs! And the secret Brotherhood of the
Naked Sword will help you! But you must help us!
Be ready! Join us when our dark hordes move over
the land! Before the corn is threshed, the nights will
be red with fire and blood, and your feet will have to
push their corpses aside only to march on. In the cities,
knives are being sharpened even now! By night sparks
are flying from the whetstones. Keep the oil ready
in your lamps, because it will come at night—quite
suddenly, I say! I know that at any moment I may
be seized and burned at the stake. But my blood is

yours!" (He laid his hand upon his heart,) "Since this morning I have not eaten a thing, but Love is above all!" At once several handed him bread, a carrot, a rind of bacon. "That's not necessary! Not necessary!" He protested, but he accepted it. "God will reward you. Be ready! If you should need me, just ask for me. My name is Baskwadder."

Again his face plunged down into his shabby bear-skin and, bending forward, Baskwadder disappeared in the snowstorm.

Now a fire burned in the hearts of the beggars that broke forth in wild cries and exultant curses. Crackleg almost smashed his little wagon to bits. Pieter, too, was kindled by the flame. Why had he not understood this before? And he clenched his fists and bawled along with the rest: "They must be made to believe it! They must believe it!"

But after they had gone a bit farther upon their way, his enthusiasm died away like ashes. "If Veronica had not been poor, I had not found her. . . . All is good as it is," he sighed gratefully.

* * *

Now they sat there devouring their share, some at the table, the others at a smoldering fire of wet wood.

Grandfather distrustfully climbed up the ladder with his portion which he wanted to eat in the hay and dry leaves that were his bed. The child was still crying, its mother gave it a bit of bread that she had chewed, and Crackleg dipped his bread into the brandy. A candle lighted the slanting hut, on whose ceiling and mud

walls hung a jumble of old clothes, pots and baskets. One could hear nothing but the smacking of lips and the gnawing of bones.

The door was opened. Outdoors the snow was still falling heavily, like white dots upon the darkness. Fly-skeleton came in growling. "A little glass of whiskey to the success of the Naked Sword," he cried, with a juicy oath to follow.

Maledictions upon the rich began anew. Then there was a knock at the door. They looked up surprised for among the poor, people come in without knocking. The half-witted woman opened the door. A huge mass of flesh, heavily wrapped in snow and furs, came in laughing, spreading the fragrance of smoked ham about him. And from the fat, red face a voice said: "Ah, good folks, good evening! I want to get to the Nuns' Farm, to our Cousin Butterlump! There they're having a St. Anthony's Feast with pigs' feet and ears. I'm the son of Goiter-Toad—you've surely heard of him, haven't you? And in this snow storm I don't seem to be able to find the Nuns' Farm. If somebody will go with me, I'll give him a silver penny."

Pieter jumped up with furious resentment in his heart: "Perhaps he too threw bones at my head!" he thought. He wanted to jump at him like a dog, but Crackleg was ahead of him. "So! So! Just look at the fellow! You want to eat pigs' feet? And fill your stinking body with beer? You come to mock at us! But see here what we eat, your leavings, filth and rotten meat!" Crackleg held out a bone to him. "Just lick



at that for a whole evening and then tell us if you've had enough!"

"Mother! Mother! They're killing me!" howled the young lad and tried to run away. But Fly-skeleton, thin as a lathe, with a knife in his hat, stood scornfully before the door with his arms spread wide. "Let him taste it," Pieter cried. "Then he can tell them at home how good it tastes!" And he pressed his hat closer down upon his head so that he might not be recognized.

"Yes," said Crackleg, tugging joyfully at his red hair, "that's an idea! He shall know how poor people's fare tastes, the food that the Fat give us so that they may get to Heaven!"

"The others must see that too!" said Fly-skeleton, fetching the whole crowd. The lad howled and wanted to run off again.

"Stand still, or I'll smash your thighs in two!" called Crackleg, and with his legless body he sprang about wildly, swinging the jawbone of the ass. "Sit down, if the chair will hold you!"

The people all came running, curious and revengeful, and they laughed at the fat lad who sat before a pile of rags, weeping.

"Eat!" snarled Crackleg. Suddenly the lad fell upon his knees and folded his hands, with fingers, like ten newborn little mice huddling together.

"I'll have a ham and a string of sausages brought here for every one of your families. I promise it; I swear it—this very week!"

"Then you may go," cried Crackleg, and the others

added: "But you'd better bring them! or we'll set fire to your roof!" The door was opened ; the people made way.

"Thank you, thank you kindly," said the youth, and whining like a little dog he ran out into the snowy night.

Crackleg clapped his hands and rejoiced: "This week there will be a feast of ham in the Rat-Holes!"

"A brandy! A brandy!" everybody shouted now. "Our time has come! Long live Baskwadder!" "Music!" called blind Pauline. And Pieter had to play. The children were sent to bed up the ladder; then the ladder was removed and the table pushed to one side. Pieter played roundelays, and the people danced, drank and sang. Those who had been hobbling around on crutches that very morning now out-danced all the rest. A frenzy of joy had seized them all; they were like devils in the flickering light of the candle. And while he played, Pieter was thinking: "If only we had no stomachs, how beautiful life would be!"

* * *

Shrove Tuesday was being celebrated in the city near by, so the inhabitants of the Rat-Holes journeyed thither. They arrived at noon and as usual Pieter had to take over the taverns. He played, sang, made faces, and collected much money, while the image of Veronica, wavering and strange, occupied his thoughts. Here and there snow still *clung* to the roofs, held fast by the biting, frosty air. The little town was gay and humming with song and life. To get a spoonful of

joy, to eat a good morsel or to earn a few coins, people had come from all sides, on foot, in sleds or on skates over the black ice. Every one was eating and drinking because to-morrow Lent, the long period of fasting, was to begin, with a cross upon one's brow, and then there would be short rations for forty days. There were hordes of beggars and cripples too like flies around a honeypot. But how different this was from last year! People were now so stingy; they turned over every penny three and four times if it was intended for some one else, but they themselves ate until they were round as dumplings, to be prepared for the prophesied time of famine. The beggars with real and simulated ailments crept and walked from door to door, sang and moaned and sat in great crowds before the fragrant cookshop, "The Golden Goose," before taverns and inns and before the doors of the church. The Lenten sermons had begun: a priest was to tell when the world was to come to an end. Pieter would have liked to hear it; he felt a bit troubled about the state of his soul, but he could not leave the gay throng and especially not the masqueraders who in their crazy costumes and droll masks were rioting and dancing in the streets from one public house to the next, making sport of people everywhere. Above all he was fascinated by the battle enacted in the big market place between Fat Carnival and Lean Lent. Men weighing more than two hundred-weight, laden with sausages and other good food, had to fight with the very lean, armed with fish and meager Lenten fare like onions, herring and oatmeal porridge. They rushed at each other, throwing fish

and meat and other food as ammunition. The crowd laughed itself sick. And when Lent, a thin woman, had been vanquished, as always, and Fat Carnival allowed her to reign for forty days in the year and once a week, the whole market place began dancing and skipping again while the beggars greedily searched the floors for the food that had been thrown on the ground and trodden underfoot.

And still dancing, the fat and lean actors betook themselves to "The Red Nightingale" where a banquet was prepared for them,

Pieter recovered from his laughter and considered whether or no he should buy paper somewhere, to draw all this at home—this and many other things which he had kept locked away in his heart since he had known Veronica.

He did not know why, but to-day he was full of anxiety about her. He did not wish to think of Veronica and tried to drive her pale visage from his thoughts. He was glad that just now he had been able to laugh and rejoice unrestrainedly with the others, and had forgotten her entirely } but now he was once more alone with her and she drew him—drew him without a word to the hospital back there in the village where she lay dying.

"What good would it do, if I went there to-day—they wouldn't let me in anyway," he sighed. "I'll see her day after to-morrow,—that is visitors' day." He shook her off and decided to buy some paper.

He went. The service was now over and the people came streaming out of doors. The waffle merchants

and the venders of sweets, the beggars and the peddlers, all began to rattle off their litanies. Devout women hiding their faces in their hooded capes, timidly hurried home. But many masqueraders lay in wait for them and with piping voices began to revile them, and in phrases of double meaning to blame them for all the misdeeds of their whole family, particularly when there was a large crowd to hear. Over there they were raising one of the "praying sisters" on high and carrying her around in a circle in spite of her struggles. Some practical jokers had fastened on the back of another woman a sign which read:

"I'm a praying monkey
Because I need a donkey."

But Pieter also noticed that two women in hooded capes retreated to a retired alleyway where they put on masks and then, singing and swinging their arms, plunged into the crowd. He sang so as not to think of Veronica. As he came into a quiet street, he happened to glance into a little chapel where many candles were burning before the image of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. And at once it occurred to him to pray for Veronica.

He sat before the ancient image of the Madonna, darkened by time. "Soon you will draw from her heart the sword of illness, when she dies," he murmured; but with anxious apprehension he started up suddenly, "but not yet, Blessed Mother of God, not yet, not yet. . . ."

He had been considering how to use the money he



had collected: a part for Crackleg, another part to buy something good for Veronica for the day after tomorrow and another part for drawing paper. But now with this sharp fear in his heart, with Veronica's pale, fixed face in mind, he said suddenly: "See, here is the money with which I meant to buy paper. I offer it to you—don't let her die just yet . . . let the sword stay in her heart a little while longer," and he put the coins into the iron collection-box. Sighing, unconvinced, he looked at the slit in the flat iron box through which the money had disappeared.

Outside a great commotion arose and he rushed out of the chapel. "What's the matter? Are they whipping a praying sister?" he called to some people passing by. "Oh, much better than that!" they called to him. "The fat peasants of the Lambfarm want to show the city what they're going to stuff themselves with tonight." And Pieter joined the throng.

* * *

Surrounded by musicians, children, a great crowd of people, by the poor and the crippled, the fat peasants came along, with spoon on hat, singing, on foot and in wagons, displaying what they were going to eat that evening. Before them walked the men servants and the maids in white aprons, carrying upon stretchers and doors pewter dishes and baskets of food. It was overpowering, a challenge to kindle wrath in the hearts of the poor. There were pigs' heads, roasts, whole mountains of cutlets, legs of mutton, ribs of pork, sucking pigs. Two men servants carried on their shoulders a



sausage as big as a thigh. Two others, like the grape-bearers of the Promised Land, had a whole bundle of pigs' feet and ears on a pole ; two others dragged along on an unhinged door a mountain of freshly plucked fat geese ; others proudly displayed hares, fine fish, and strings of snipe.

The fat women and men who were on foot came dancing along, zigzag, to the music of the bagpipes. Those on the wagons threw coppers and cakes among the populace, preferably into the shops or houses to have the fun of seeing the beggars and children rush in, smash things and start a fight with the owners. And they liked to see the beggars, big and little, lame and halt, run along, hobble along, with hands stretched out, as though drawn on, through their empty stomachs, by the meat and the superabundance of food. The Fat shone in greasy ostentation.

Pieter hadn't dreamed that there were so many Fat in the world. He recognized Fatlump again, the son of Goiter-Toad, who hadn't as yet sent the promised hams to the Rat-Holes ; the family Bigpaunch and their whole tribe. There on a wagon, proud and monstrous, stood Wobblefat! And quick as a flash, Pieter's little hat came down over his face and his bagpipe disappeared under his cloak.

Now they couldn't recognize him and he ran along. In the big market place, the peasants once more danced around in a circle, hand in hand, and then went to "The Golden Goose" to drink a good glass of beer in honor of the day and to brag and show off their abundance. The beggars crowded one another to the side, while

they whined and begged, shouted and cursed. But the Fat gave nothing away. At the cemetery stood two Begging Friars, watching the tumult. The Dumpling from Lambfarm called them over, and their arms were heaped full of bacon, geese and sausages ; this unloosed a storm of curses and maledictions among the poor.

At that moment a scrawny old beggar grabbed a duck;; the servant was about to give him a kick, but another beggar caught hold of his *leg* ;ust in time. The servant slipped on his heels, and the whole door full of geese fell to the ground. Head over heels the beggars rushed upon it and crutches and fists flew up and down. The other servant drew his knife, was knocked on the head and, with a cry, fell down backwards. The knife whizzed through the air in a great curve. The Fat now came running up. They left the procession and their wagons and threw themselves with might and main upon the Lean. But the Lean were like wolves and knocked holes into the Fat. The writhing mass looked like a clenching fist. The other servants were hemmed in and had to defend themselves, their food and their masters; but they preferred to let the food go rather than to be beaten. Of course they got the beating anyway.

Servants and little tradesmen who had got mixed in the mob and had found this a good opportunity to catch a goose or a rabbit, quickly stuffed what they could seize under their cloaks and with solemn faces hurried away. The gay masqueraders ;oined the fray. The people streamed in from all sides and to see better, they climbed up on the cemetery wall.

The Fat were now threatened on all sides} but since they were accustomed to rule and were defending their honor, they rushed into the fray furiously, striking about them and stamping with the heavy, brutish assurance of success. The women joined in the fight. On both sides they scratched fiercely, kicked, struck furious blows, screamed, pinched, drew blood, cursed and pulled each other's hair. They snatched away the innocent geese, sausages and hares destined for the feast. They used what edibles they could as weapons of defense and swung their hams like clubs. They drew flashing knives and struck crashing blows with spoons, crutches and cudgels. Some fell to the ground and others rolled in the snow, holding fast to each other's throats. Those of the Lean who got away with their booty at once were the cleverest} but greed had clutched them and they always wanted more and more. Pieter looked on and ran excitedly up and down along the wall of the cemetery, like a bobbin.

"Oh, if only they wouldn't recognize me, how I'd strike at them now! . . . How fine it would be to take part in all this! Why be afraid always! . . . Why always seek an excuse . . . ," he grumbled to himself as he clenched his fists, his blood boiling.

Suddenly a wild cry of pain was heard. One of the Fat had been struck with Crackleg's jawbone of an ass and, howling, he hobbled on one leg to a corner where he squirmed in agony like a worm. Scrawny women scratched up fat faces till they looked like a map, while the Lean were themselves shaken by the hair like medicine bottles. One woman bit into the bright red cheek

of a fat man who was almost crushing her to death against his body, big and clumsy as a bear's.

"I'm going to ;join this! I'm going to ;join!" cried Pieter, now determined to dash into the fray ; but at that moment, to his relief, he saw that the hired soldiers with iron helmets and gleaming lances were running towards the market place.

"The soldiers, the soldiers!" the people cried as if with one tongue. And the Lean knew as always that they, and not the Fat, would have to take to their heels. Slippery as eels they made away, sliding out of the clumsy fists of the Fat who kept hold of two poor women only and a man covered with horrible sores. Proud of their victory they all hammered away at these unhappy three until the mercenaries dragged them off to the vaults of the town hall.

The Fat stood there now with shining flesh, but it was a sorry victory: all their food had been stolen, befouled or trodden under foot. They almost burst with rage. Pieter laughed. The battle had lasted less than ten minutes, but the work of destruction was complete and beautiful.

Fatlump's shirt was hanging out of his breeches, another had a deep gash in his head. A fat woman complained that one of her ribs was sticking through her left breast. One had lost a piece of his ear, another had a black eye, and there was not one of them whose clothes had not been torn and whose face had not been scratched.

With their clenched fists raised threateningly against the Lean in the far distance, they cried in a wild hub-

bub: "We'll kill them if they come begging again! . . . We won't give another penny! The beggars from the Rat-Holes were in this, too! . . . We'll burn down their huts! . . ." But all their shouting and threats only made them more ridiculous ; at last, looking foolish, they betook themselves, still cursing and threatening, to the cookshop, "The Full Kettle," redolent of glorious Shrove Tuesday dishes.

"That's settled!" sighed Pieter, and he was sorry that he bore no wounds of this glorious battle against these fat swine. Now he must go on, making the rounds of the taverns and playing his bagpipe and at six o'clock meet the others at the church and go back with them to the Rat-Holes.

He got out his bagpipe } but then he suddenly felt uneasy again about Veronica. He stood still, murmuring: "I've enough money so I won't get my ears boxed. If I just bring the money, it's all the same to them when I get home. . . ."

He hesitated a bit, saw the masqueraders whirling around in wild confusion and looked at the sky, which was turning green in the approaching twilight.

"Veronica, wait just a little, just a little while," he cried pleadingly, and with hasty steps he left the turbulent city behind him.

* * *

He walked along the hard roads beside the shimmering fields, on which the frozen snow was still lying.

"I don't have to hurry so," he laughed } "she isn't dead yet } too bad that I didn't get a jar of honey for



her." And he began to run, driven on by fear like a stag by the hunter's horn.

It was quite dark when he recognized the village by a few lights. The heavens were so full of stars that now and then a few fell down. For every star that fell he could make a wish. And he wished a thousand times and more: "Let me see her once again!" He ran like some one catching his own shadow. And when the knocker sounded upon the door, the noise sent a shudder through all his veins.

The Sister who kept the door looked through the little barred window, holding a lantern in her hand. And quietly, like one accustomed to deal with the sick, he said: "Sister, as I was passing, I thought I'd ask about Veronica. Has she had a good day . . . Will you tell her that day after to-morrow I'll bring her a jar of linden honey. . . ." But he got no farther, and he stared at the red-cheeked sister's mouth as upon an eye that was piercing his heart.

"Come in, my boy!" he heard her say. The door was opened and he felt her take him by the hand, heard her say all sorts of things, but what they were he did not know. But very distinctly he saw a white corridor with vaulted ceiling and long shadows, saw a door open and then he came into a little, musty room, where on a stretcher lay three things, each under a shroud.

The Sister pointed to the middle shroud. And just as at his mother's death, he noticed three elevations: the head, the folded hands, the upright feet. The Sister knelt down and prayed and he too knelt, but he did

not pray, but looked in consternation upon the white shroud.

The simple-hearted Sister arose, beckoned to him and drew the shroud aside. There lay Veronica, in her coarse shift, a rosary around her thin hands, her head bound with a cloth to hold her mouth closed. There she lay like a doll of green wax, like that of which Madonnas are made, with closed eyes and the suggestion of a smile upon her white lips ; like a frail ornament, like a pale statue. There was no odor of death, no mystery, no terror here. Pieter marveled that he did not weep, and was sorry for it. He did not even think that it must be cold under the thin shroud. And as he gave her his blessing, his fingers remained upon her forehead, cold as ice.

"Now she will never again open her eyes, since she will now always commune with God," he thought. "And yet it is just as if it were not she," he wanted to say to the Sister, sad and disappointed. He would so have liked to weep and moan; but when the Sister saw that this boy was looking at her so pleadingly with his big eyes, she thought he wanted to be comforted, and so she said as she covered the face of the dead girl with the shroud: "My boy, she died so beautifully! The whole morning she hadn't said a word. We sent the gardener to tell you that she was dying, but there was nobody at home. And she waited, waited, and kept looking at the door. When the Angelus was rung at noon, she said: 'Our Dear Lady is raising me on high by the arms, very high, and I see the ocean, and upon



a high mountain a city with many rainbows above . . . ' And then she went out quietly like a candle ; she kept repeating devout verses and sometimes she'd murmur something in Latin: *Amos tua* . . . I think it was, or something like that."

At that the tears streamed from Pieter's eyes, in joy and pain.

"She was a holy child," the Sister added. And Pieter, deeply touched, kissed her hand, hard from work, and began to sob from happiness so that, ashamed, he held his hands before his eyes and stumbled out. . . .

"Day after to-morrow, at seven in the morning she'll be buried," the Sister called after him.

* * *

Chapter V

ANTWERP

PIETER wandered on, hither and thither, for many days, restless as the springtime which sends forth its snowdrops like feelers while snow and rain storms are still beating down upon the earth.

He slept in barns, played the bagpipe and begged.

He heard of great combats between the beggars and the rich peasants. It appeared that they had burned down the barn of Bullneck near Herenthals. The mutilated head of one of the Fat had been found in a tree, and a headless corpse on whose bloated belly the crows were picking had been seen floating in the Nethe. The huts of some of the beggars had been destroyed, lean peasants had been hanged by the Fat and much more had happened to strike terror into the heart of the listener. The farther these tales of horror were carried across the country, the shorter they became, but the agony was piled on all the thicker. And Pieter always added a few more atrocities for the benefit of the people who asked him about the riots. He could not forego carving in the soft, white bark of a tree the picture of the dead man drifting down the Nethe with the greedy ravens on his belly. "Our stomach is always the loathsome monster of the body," he said, with a sigh. He went on his way, always approaching nearer to his native village. Fragrant memories were drawing him

there as the water carries a straw along. And the farther he went, the more the vision of the departed Veronica vanished from his heart.

It was very strange. So long as he was among people, he lived only through them ; their character and their will dominated him entirely. So it had been with his love for his mother, his fear of Tomato-Toad and of Wabblefat, with his love for Veronica and his fear of Crackleg. But when he was once away from these people, out of the range of their breath, they became transformed into dreams, figures in a story of whom he had the most vivid memory, to the least detail, but who no longer belonged to his life and left his heart quite cold. And so the pale image of Veronica was now clearly stamped on his heart like a picture, but without any connection with his actual life. He carried the picture with him, but it did not live.

Only his dull native village still lured and called him wherever he went.

And so he walked toward it with complete understanding of his changed attitude and as a disillusioned being. He now realized how empty were his dreams. He was tired of deceiving himself. He wanted to become a peasant now, a simple peasant. His longing to become an artist had vanished as if Veronica, whom he had kept alive by the play of his imagination, had used it up entirely. Not even a thimbleful of idealism was left. He would now be a farmer and he knew why. Nothing would ever come of his painting anyway. First of all, to become a painter he must attend a school and have years of training. Who would accept him?

And then he recalled Quentin Matsys. "He was a smith and suddenly became a painter," Father Cornelius had said. "Seeing is believing," grumbled Pieter, "first see and then believe." After all, he was only a boy from the banks of the Dommel, a poor country lad and not a hair's breadth better than the others.

He would remain a peasant, would live in the lonely village, work hard, make his way and attain his goal. On Sundays he would play cards, bowl and drink a mighty tankard of Dommel beer so that he might sweat hard at his labor during the week. He would marry one of the one-and-twenty girls he loved, or perhaps another, have a rosary of children crowding around his table, with a steaming kettle of broth in their midst, and a hearth full of hams!

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!" cried Pieter, and in his character of peasant about to be, he tried to visualize the four seasons of the year. But he saw them instead as four paintings.

He began to whistle shrilly so that the sound cut through the quiet February day, one of the seven beautiful days that February had spread over the world. He passed a little convent church, standing solitary on a hill and now announcing the beginning of vespers with the chime of its mellow bells. The little church was open ; he saw candles burning and a monk ringing the bell. He felt like going in and praying that he might become a good peasant. But he passed by. "No, it won't do," he said, "there might be some painting hanging there that would destroy my peace of mind. . . . I'll be a farmer!"

And he went on whistling along the black, slushy road that looked like plum sauce in the sunlight. The road curved from one thatched farmhouse to another, as if from sheer politeness, and in the poplars and willows bordering it he smelled the breath of new life and of spring.

An old man with a wooden chest on his back and rags wound around his legs was walking ahead. When he saw Pieter, he stood still, waiting, and then continued on his way with the boy. They talked about the war, about Emperor Charles and the famine.

"Do you come from far?" asked Pieter. The bristly-bearded man said that he had been in Switzerland.

"And what are the mountains like there?" asked Pieter.

"I saw Calvin there," the man replied and he told of Geneva where Calvin lived; then he added that before this he had seen Luther burning the papal bull in the market place at Wittenberg; he had heard Ignatius of Loyola preach and seen a heretic burned at the stake now and then.

"This man has the whole world in himself," thought Pieter as he listened to him; and when the old man told how horribly heretics were tortured, Pieter cursed in rage from his inmost soul.

At that the man thawed. "Don't curse God, young friend, but curse those who have committed these atrocities. I see that your heart is in the right place; you are able to hear God's word. See, here is the prayer that we distribute and that we repeat so that we may be freed from those vipers!" And from the false bottom

of his chest that was filled with twine, shoe polish and boot laces, he took a roll of paper from which he unwound a sheet.

In a solemn voice, he read, after first looking carefully all about him: "Where thou, O Lord, didst not have a stone whereupon to lay thy head, we see those who claim to be thy representatives on earth stifling in luxury. God is our Lord, and no man can be thy vicar, since thou, O Lord, thyself becamest a man. . . ."

Pieter had listened devoutly and eagerly, but then he suddenly noticed that the back of the paper was blank, white as a milky cloud in springtime, white, white, white as paper! Paper! How long since he had seen it! He was like a sailor who has caught sight of land. His blood rose like a fiery column. He no longer listened for he could think only of this white paper and all that one could draw upon it!

And while the man continued to read with fanatical enthusiasm, the passion for drawing had again been violently aroused in Pieter, the old spirit had become alive in him once more and had stirred him to the depths. "Give me this prayer," he said enthusiastically, "give me several copies, I will distribute them among my friends."

"God be praised!" said the old man gratefully. "Thank God that I met you upon this road, and have been allowed to sow new seed! I see that you are trembling with zeal! God be praised!" And he took some ten sheets from the roll.

Pieter kissed his old brown hands and the tears came into the man's eyes. "I shall now follow this bypath,"

said Pieter after a time during which he had heard in silence, without listening to the old man's preaching. "A friend of mine lives down this way."

The man thanked him and gave him his blessing. Not ten minutes later, Pieter was standing on the threshold of a little farmhouse asking for some charcoal, to heal a friend's wound. The lean old wife of the peasant let him fill his hat. Upon the smooth surface of a tree stump he spread out the paper and drew. It overwhelmed him. He drew the painting by Bosch. Yes, that was how it was! . . . with caricatures like these and St. Anthony in all his glory. And he drew Wabblefat, Crackleg . . . no, not Veronica ; but he drew heaven with some big angels. "She is among them," he said.

The good old primal spirit was at work again. It hummed in him and grew, and he drew until the dusk fell. Then he carefully folded the papers together and walked on, happy and gay, not beneath the stars, but as if he were passing among them. He went on until, as in all fairy tales, he saw a light shining in the distance. There a grandfather and a grandmother were sitting by the hearth, a child was asleep in an old willow cradle, a goat lay under the table, and a cow, between two posts, was sticking her head into the little room. A thin young woman was mixing cow fodder in a barrel. He was allowed to warm himself and to sleep in the hayloft. He told them he had seen Calvin and had witnessed the burning of a hundred heretics.

"And may I draw you?" he asked when he saw how clearly the round head of the grandfather was defined

against the light from the hearth. He drew him and the mother too, and then the cow as well. The heart of these poor people of the lonely heath was deeply stirred by his tales, but he himself was like a young cat struggling to get out of a trap. The desire to become a farmer had been blown away completely. And as he lay in the hay he could not sleep a wink. He was consumed with an inner fire.

"To-morrow I shall go to Antwerp!"

A new life opened up before him, glorious and spacious, flooded with light and color. Seven days he has been on the way, sauntering toward his village, to become a peasant, a dull peasant . . . and no sooner does he see a piece of white paper than the artist shows through the peasant's skin, like a face beneath a torn mask. He struggled, stumbled and twisted about. He no longer prayed: "O Lord, let me become an artist!" for he felt that it could not be otherwise.

The artist was caught within his being, in all the branches of his veins like some unfamiliar creature, like a lamb caught in a thornbush. If you tried to tear him out, two would die: Pieter and the artist in him.

* * *

But before he directed his steps towards Antwerp, he wanted to say farewell to his village. He was only three hours' distance from it. He could smell it even here. One would rue it the rest of one's days to have been so near and to have turned one's back on it. And so he walked towards it, bearing his paper pages like a sacred relic. In Antwerp it would all be very simple ;



he had only to look up the artists, show them these pages and everything would be in order. On the way he decided that he would visit Long Louis, the priest and the sexton, and drink another long draught of the good beer at "The Masked Monkey"; and then he would begin painting with a bang! He whistled a soldier's march as he went. Now he recognized the wintry heath again with its brown patches. And how splendid the sky looked in the east wind with those tall, white clouds like a cathedral against the blue background! They looked gray as they drifted on high and then turned black as they poured down great masses of snow. Everywhere it was black and white, like storks. See! Over yonder the whole landscape, the pine woods and the fields have disappeared beneath the whirling snow; while here on this side everything is glowing in the light that danced above the threatening masses of towering clouds, looking like enormous cauliflowers and seeming in a mood to quake and thunder. Over there again, how green the fields are in that splash of sunlight! And the far distance, blue as incense smoke, was beautiful enough to make one raise one's arms in worship. Pieter called out: "God of all Rainbows, grind me on your palette! Transform me into colors!" He kept discovering new beauty all around him. "Had I known that it is so beautiful here, I would have returned long ago!" he said.

Shortly after midday he crossed the stone bridge and saw his village lying before him double—in the air and in the water: the steeple, the straw-thatched huts, the willows, the bent poplars, and the mill—a little nest of

human beings! A great white cloud, like an angel, placed a halo around the dark profile of the village! "How beautiful . . . but how small!" he murmured. He smelled the turf and the stables, the silence and the beer. He clearly realized how quiet it was only when he heard the sound of a whetstone buzzing somewhere. And now he suddenly looked into all the people and into all the houses. Ah, these people, who always talked about one and the same thing: Saturdays about the market ; Sundays about beer, bowling and card playing ; week days about the high cost of living, the cattle and the confinements, and evenings, about everything sad and ghostly. Suddenly he felt a great pity for these people, he who was to live in Antwerp, that horn of plenty where all the fragrance of the world is gathered together.

"One more step and you will be out of the picture. But first I must shake hands with my village folk," he said, feeling very noble-spirited. "I'll march in playing my bagpipe, and they'll be so surprised they'll choke over their porridge."

He began to blow his bagpipe and then he suddenly saw the priest coming along a bypath, his mantle bellying in the wind. "Hey!" Pieter cried boisterously. He waved his hat. "It's me, your choirboy, Pieter! Or don't you know me any more!"

The priest first held his hands over his eyes to see better, then he threw his arms up in astonishment and in joy like a dove about to fly. But Pieter could not see his joy from the distance and thought suspiciously: "What does that mean?"

With joyful heart but with outstretched fist and swinging his medlar stick ominously, the priest came running toward him. He simply couldn't manage to speak without threats that were now meant to be playful. But Pieter heard something like: "Wretch! Good for nothing! . . . to scare us like that! Come here, so that I may beat you up, so that I . . ." And then he heard no more; he tore off, sweating with terror. "No, no, I won't go back again to the Fat, no, never!" he called, and ran as he had never run before, as though his heart were flying before him like a bird that has flown and that he must catch. He seemed to hear Wobblefat gasping, he heard all the Fat running behind him with their thudding elephant's legs. He ran in a cloud of gasping, greasy breath around him. But here was a broad brook. He took a running jump and dashed in up to his knees. Then he looked back and there he saw the priest coming along, swinging his arms, calling and scolding.

Pieter dashed off again. "For he's capable of jumping right over the brook," he thought. "No, bad priest, not till after Easter will I think of visiting you again. You're not going to send me back to those scoundrels, dear Father!" And he disappeared in a pine forest which folded him at once into its quiet and its mysterious peace.

Though the father shouted desperately into the quiet of the forest—for he, too, had jumped into the brook—though he called: "Come, my lad, do come, you needn't be afraid,—I only scolded and threatened from habit. I will take you to Antwerp, to Pieter Coecke, you're to



be an artist. . . ." Pieter did not hear him and the forest was silent. . . .

That evening the big village priest is sitting, sad and still excited, before the red flames of his hearth fire, while outdoors the wind is knocking against the houses and howling in the trees. He says his beads and murmurs: "O Lord, this is now the second time that I have failed to reach this lad. . . . I do not understand your message. Isn't it his destiny to be an artist?"

The wind rattles the roof, the beams groan under it. The lean maid is about to run out in terror. The father is praying for travelers on the roads and sailors on the sea; he is thinking of Pieter and of his brother-in-law. And then he prays for himself: that in future he may not grow excited so quickly, for that was why Pieter had fled.

His prayer is over. He sees the maid sitting there looking frightened. And at once he begins scolding again.

"Pray, instead of staring up at the ceiling!" he snaps at her suddenly. But he repents at once. "Will I never improve?" he cries in despair and then gives the cat a kick so that she flies under the kitchen closet.

* * *

On a Tuesday evening, with his bagpipe under his faded red, ragged cloak and his hat drawn down over his face, Pieter, in a thin flurry of snow, arrived at the gates of Antwerp. Some power, some holy power, drew him on. There, in the St. Willibrordus Quarter, fifteen mills were turning. And he saw, beyond the

snowy walls, behind curtains of falling snow, great gray towers and gabled houses reaching toward the sky. It was Antwerp! It was as quiet as though the city were in slippers, as though no one lived there. The snow had subdued every noise, A few people, bending forward and looking black against the snow, were crossing the bridge over the moat. A little man with a bundle



of twigs on his head was walking ahead of Pieter and a strange, yellow dog was running behind him, his tail between his legs as if to warm his lean belly. Pieter's heart was beating hard with emotion, joy, fear, longing and many other feelings. He had longed for it so many years! The dream of Antwerp had molded his life like dough—and now he would soon be there, would soon be in its midst. He is feeling so blissful he will have to creep in, for his legs can not sustain so great a happiness. He will be there directly, in a mo-

ment! But he takes every step with leaden feet and every step seems to last longer than an hour . . . and suddenly a whole forest of soaring fears shoots up in him. All his grounds for fear now overwhelm him: the Spaniards will capture him, will take him for a thief, will search him—and find nothing but his bagpipe and his drawings. Great God! He suddenly feels that he has a snake under his arms, for his drawings are done on heretical prayers! His throat stiffens! If they are found, he will be burned at the stake! He stands still, and quick as lightning he has torn the drawings under his cloak into a thousand pieces which he thrusts under the snow. "To-morrow I'll make new ones," he comforts himself.

With a new sense of freedom he goes on. He had not known what had oppressed him so. But this feast is too beautiful to last, something will break the spell. . . . At the last moment, he will meet Wobblefat on the bridge, Tomato-Toad, the village priest or somebody else who will bring about his fall and accuse him, and then the Spaniards will throw him into jail.

But he goes on! . . . Curses! And if Death on horseback with a thousand scythes and all the bones of his skeleton bars his way, he will go on ; he must go to Antwerp, even though it were with a bullet and many swords in his heart. Fear or no fear! In! And he goes on! He presses his snow-covered hat further down over his eyes and keeps his hand on his scapulary. It is as if a thought from his scapulary were rising, through his hand, to his shoulders and to his head. Suddenly he assumes a different attitude. He throws

back his head and his dirty face shows naked and cold in the snow. "The filthy Spaniards are sucking us dry under pretense of defending the faith. Well, I'm going to see how much they care for faith," he tells himself. He takes out the scapulary and pretends to be praying, his eyes raised to heaven, like a praying sister's. He crosses the bridge behind the little man with his bundle of twigs and before the dog that acts as though he belongs to Pieter Brueghel, and tries to smuggle himself in too. Now the great moment is at hand. Once over the bridge, he must go through a tunnel that cuts through the wall of the rampart. It will be like something in a dream! And who knows what will be behind and whether this tunnel really has an end. . . .

Now the bridge is behind him. He casts a quick glance to one side. In the watch-house soldiers with iron helmets and fur robes are sitting, playing cards on a tall drum. They don't even look at him. "So it wasn't even necessary to play the saint," he thinks angrily. But he hasn't got there yet—he must still go through the dark tunnel. He does not change his attitude. He does not dare to go faster for fear of betraying himself. He suddenly feels that all the soldiers have come out and are looking after him. And he has to keep himself in hand not to run away like a deer. Every step is agony. And everything that is against him, all the evil powers within and without, screech around him, with pointed swords and pointing fingers. But he does not change his attitude and goes on. Another step, another, another,—now he will soon

burst! . . . Another step! A smile cleaves his face in two when he feels the fine snow upon it once more. All the evil powers have relaxed their grip upon his spirit.

"I am here, Mother!" he sighs. And he must subdue his words lest they resound through the air in wild shouts of joy. "My God! I am here!" he whispers, thanking God. But he does not change his attitude. He tramps through the snow. Houses glide by; he goes out of one street and into another. And then he falls full length down into the snow. But he does it to kiss the soil of Antwerp!

* * *

Now he was in Antwerp! Truly! Astonished and timid as a hare, he looked at the tall gabled and wooden houses with iron staffs before the windows, at the fountains, at the street crossings and at the signboards.

Over there arose the squat Tower of Saint James; and farther on above all the towers and the roofs, the slender spire of Our Lady soared into the sky, beneath a veil of falling snow.

Then at last fear fell from him like a mantle! And now he needed a hundred eyes. As though drawn by a magnet he went toward this tower, through a narrow, dark alley whose tall houses came so close together that you could easily box your neighbor's ear from your attic window. There was scarcely a person to be seen in this snowy silence, only a few freight-sleds with many bells on the horses. Everything was new to him; he looked up, to the side, behind him. But once when



looking around he saw four soldiers coming along, and in front of them was a gaunt man in a bearskin. He recognized him at once.

"Baskwadder! He's a traitor . . . he has recognized me . . . they are after me. . . ." He nearly died of fear. He put his hand on his scapulary and tried to make himself invisible. Stiff and slender, he walked on. Behind him rattled the steel of the soldiers. They had only to reach out their arms. . . . He came to a tavern, "The Three Friends," and ran in quickly as though it were a lifeboat. But the soldiers entered too, behind him! He uttered a cry and was about to throw himself on his knees. But Baskwadder pointed to a blond-bearded man sitting at a table talking with an old woman. Suddenly there was a noise of broken tankards and jugs, a cry for help—and the four soldiers were dragging the man out. He lost his hat and Pieter picked it up. The poor woman ran behind them, wringing her hands and crying: "My son is not an Anabaptist, master soldiers! He only listened for two minutes to a German preacher, not longer. He is not an Anabaptist. He is not an Anabaptist!"

The man pleaded and looked helplessly and yet encouragingly at the old woman, who had thrown her arms around him. But a heavy soldier gave her a blow on the chin that made her reel and fall backwards into the snow like a bundle of straw. Then the man struggled, struck and stamped in rage, but the soldiers made him tame by belaboring him with their lances and then dragging him off. None of the people who came running to the scene raised the woman. All of them,

the innkeepers too, cowardly and timid, withdrew into the houses.

"He has not paid," said the innkeeper's wife angrily.

Pieter was astonished not to see Baskwadder anywhere. The snow fell upon the old woman. He did not know what to do ; suddenly he realized that he had the prisoner's hat in his hand and ran after him to restore it.

He does not know how it comes about but suddenly it seems as though the chimneys, the tiles and the gables were repeating the story to each other. It seems as though the houses smelled it. Doors and windows are opened. Anxious, curious faces look out into the cold. Pieter hears snatches of sentences: "A heretic . . . an Anabaptist . . . burn him . . . the stake . . . into ashes." The man is to be burned. They all know it, see it, and Pieter marvels that nobody will stop the soldiers! These people—they seem to be made of putty, without sinews or backbone, nothing. They don't grow hot. They look like cows on a ship and simply say: "I wouldn't like to be in his place. . . . That's what comes of being a heretic."

Pieter runs along as though he were chained to the man—because of the hat. Grown people and children run along, eager for trouble . . . and the farther one goes, the wilder grow the rumors. He hears some one say: "A heretic who worked magic."

"He celebrated the Sabbath with German servant girls."

"He's one of those who cut the hearts out of little children to make ointments."

"He sucked the blood out of the shoulders of young girls."

At the corner of the Toad-Moat and St. James' Market, a hairy butcher with bloody hands stood laughing in his doorway. He called to his thin neighbor, wrapped in fur, who was leaning out of his narrow window: "They ought to make sausages out of these heretics. Damn it! Oh, if they'd let me do as I pleased! I'd pickle them!"

His thin neighbor laughed and piped up: "We'll soon see him burning like a torch in honor of Emperor Charles! I love to see such torches!"

Pieter suddenly could not go on, spellbound by the sight of the blood on the man's hands and by his words. Astonished and anxious, he listened to them both. Other people also stopped to hear.

"No," said the butcher: "I'll stick to my trade. I like it better when their heads are stuck up on pikes the way they did with the six last year. That was a fine kermess-week. They should have been carried around in a procession."

"And last month, when they pulled the bowels out of that German Anabaptist—remember?"

"Oh, it went much too fast. They should have gone about it slower. They should have let me manage that! . . ." And they kept on shouting more and more horrible cruelties at each other.

"Devils, devils," thought Pieter, trembling with horror.

But suddenly, as though he had risen out of the earth, a little man with a reddish-brown beard stood

challengingly before the butcher and with deep contempt in his melancholy, gray eyes, he asked: "Tell me, you foul-mouthed wretch, why do you stay at home if you'd like to be in all that? Be an executioner—the Spaniards always need more of them! But you're too much of a coward for that. You seem very bold with your tongue, but I'll wager if anybody points a finger at you, you have to change your breeches! Look at him, standing there with his calf's head!"

The people laughed.

"Are you a heretic too?" The butcher tried to throw suspicion on the old man. But the latter came closer and shouted at him: "Must one be a heretic to have a heart in one's breast, you monster?"

"Look at yourself, you disgusting redhead! If you weren't so old, I'd beat you flat as a fig with this fist of mine!"

The crowd, eager for a quarrel and a fight, crowded around the two men who were grinning at each other with faces filled with hate.

"Ah! You think I'm rusty, judging by my color," said the old man. "But I've too much oil in my body for that, you big toad! The man who wants to beat me to a fig must be made of better stuff than you, you scorpion! Look here!" And with that he sprang at the huge butcher like a squirrel, and with his left hand seized his hair like a sailor catching hold of the rigging of a mast, and with his other hand clenched to a fist he struck his red face a succession of short, swift blows. And then just as quickly as he had jumped up, before

the butcher even realized what had happened, the old redhead slipped away in the crowd, and was gone.

The people, laughing and admiring, cried: "Jan Nagel! Jan Nagel!"

And the butcher, whose nose was streaming blood, turned to the onlookers like a helpless child and said: "Did you see that? To attack a decent man in such a cowardly way? He must go to jail! You'll be witnesses in court. You saw it! You'll be witnesses in court. • . ." But at the word "witness," the crowd shook the dust from its heels. Even the neighbor's narrow window was closed. And Pieter, who also feared to be called as witness, found himself several streets away from the scene.

There he stood now as though lost in the confusion of people and of wagons, still holding in his hand the prisoner's hat. His heart was pounding with excitement and the agony he had just suffered. He saw it all before him: the man's fear and his pleading, the mother falling over like a statue—he still felt this fall again in all his limbs—the cowardice of the crowd, the evil fantasy that was carried from one person to another like a devil and then the noble gesture of this glorious creature, Jan Nagel! "What a man!" thought Pieter with admiration. "An inexorable nail! * Ah, if I had only a hundredth part of his spirit!"

From a tavern, "The Lump of Butter," came the sound of singing and noisy merrymaking. Rich people passed by, speaking of money and ships. "It's just as if I were in Jerusalem," thought Pieter. Aiid he

* *Nagel* means a nail.

thought how Jesus had been betrayed by Judas and how the Blessed Mother must have run along behind the hired soldiery. And hadn't there been a Simon of Cyrene who helped carry the cross?—Then he looked at the hat that he didn't know what to do with.

He passed a chapel ; the door stood wide open. He looked in and was about to throw in the hat, to get rid of it.

"But no, that won't do, it's the hat of a heretic," he said, "somebody who doesn't love Our Dear Lady." And he went on with the hat still in his hand.

* * *

There was still a fine snowfall, as though the sky were being filed down. He came to the charity foundation of Peter Pot, where bread was just being distributed. It was swarming with beggars and cripples who were pushing one another aside, with hands stretched out to receive bread from the sisters. Then he realized how ravenously hungry he was.

He asked a lousy man, covered with sores: "Can every one get bread here?"

"You look starved enough, they won't refuse it to you," he answered. "Where are you from?"

"From Brussels," lied Pieter. "Can one sleep here too?"

"Not strange rats like you. You'll have to do like the rest of us—sleep in a wagon or a shed, or if you've any money, in 'Louse-Heaven.' There you sleep on a line that they cut in the morning and then everybody wakes up all at once."

"Where are the wagons?" Pieter asked. . . . But at the moment he saw two Franciscans passing by. "Father Cornelius!" The name escaped his lips involuntarily.

"Do you know him?" asked the man with the sores.

"Yes, he's my uncle," lied Pieter. "Wait, I'll hurry to greet him. Hold this hat, will you?" He gave the hat to the beggar and ran after the two priests.

He did not dare to go straight up to them, but followed them from afar, among the people, through many streets and alleys. "If it's really Father Cornelius," laughed Pieter, "then my fortune's made."

At the monastery in the Minorite Street they let the knocker fall against the portal and entered. Pieter, too, now approached the pointed portal with a glad heart. He lifted the knocker high to let it fall with full force; but suddenly he seemed very ridiculous to himself. Why that wasn't Father Cornelius! How could he recognize any one by the back of the head?

And cautiously he put down the knocker like a cup of milk filled to the brim; then he sighed and turned away. But on the way he thought: "Why did I believe it was he, if it wasn't?" Again he saw before him that winter day when he had thrown a snowball at the Father's bald head. As though with a telescope, he brought that head nearer to his vision. "It *is* he!" said Pieter, "or else it's his brother!" Firmly convinced he went back, and "Bang! Bang! Bang!" he let the knocker fall decidedly again and again—and in the corridor within the walls seemed to be crumbling beneath the noise.

Astonished, the porter, a ruddy man, opened the door. "What's the matter? What's the matter?" he asked, sputtering from out of his sunny beard.

"At once—Father Cornelius—at once!" gasped Pieter.

"Does anybody want the last sacraments?"

"If that were all! It's not for somebody who's about to die, but for somebody who just wants to begin to live. Please say it is a message from his friend, the parish priest at Brueghel; he'll know the rest } just say it's the choirboy himself!"

The brother departed to the rattling music of his many keys. At the end of the corridor, behind a burning candle, hung a picture of the Madonna.

"O Blessed Mother of God," Pieter prayed, "help me to lie a little bit—then I'm saved, and I'll never be a burden to you again." There the porter was returning with Father Cornelius.

"What is the message from the priest at Brueghel, my friend? Is he sick? Does he want me to preach for him? How did you find me here? I just arrived yesterday from my monastery in Ghent." He rubbed his little hands together with pleasure.

"Well," replied Pieter eagerly, "His Reverence said to me: 'You'll certainly find Father Cornelius either in Antwerp or in Ghent!' He has sent me to you. I'll tell you why. My mother is dead. . . . You remember—don't you—that I threw a snowball at your head . . ."

"Ah, yes, yes, you're the lad who could draw so well?"

"It is working," thought Pieter. "Because of your words, my mother got the idea into her head I should become a great artist, and if you won't mind my saying so, Father, I did too. Fortunately my stepfather is in jail, and when my mother died, her last words were: 'Now go to Father Cornelius, he will do as he promised and apprentice you to a painter in Antwerp.' The priest at Brueghel wrote a letter to you, which I put with my drawings} but while I was sleeping in a cart, some vagabonds stole all my things and my clothes too, so that I was glad that they left me a few of their old rags. And I've just come from Brueghel, after walking five days. The priest at Brueghel hopes with all his heart that you'll make a real artist out of me."

Father Cornelius had been listening kindly, but now he scratched his bald pate in perplexity. "But, my dear friend, you certainly heeded my words too carefully! I can scarcely have said that. I don't understand anything about painting. And why didn't you write first? I'm from Ghent . . . I don't know any painters here. . . ." And he looked at the Brother Porter, who said: "We have Father Alex here, who occupies himself greatly with building—he's always dealing with these artists; there was one here just now. . . ."

"Come, we'll go to Father Alex," said Father Cornelius, seeing Pieter's crestfallen face. Pieter wasn't play-acting any longer but he knew that his face could not possibly express the deep sadness of his soul, and so he helped it along a bit.

Father Alex was in his cell, working over a plan for a building by the light of an oil lamp. He was a slen-

der, intelligent young priest, with a quiet smile on his lips. After he had listened devoutly to Father Cornelius' story and been more and more touched by Pieter's pleading glances, he said: "To-morrow I'll take you to the greatest artist in Antwerp, to my friend Pieter Coecke. Too bad that you haven't anything to show! . . . But wait! I have an idea. Maybe you can spend the night here? . . . If Father Guardian will allow it . . . I'll ask him at once. Then I'll give you paper and pencil, and you may draw awhile this evening, for Coecke doesn't take anybody that comes along. He's court painter to the Emperor." Then he looked at Pieter's clothes. "There must be a suit hanging up in the attic—it belonged to a brother who died."

Pieter could no longer contain himself and in tears he kissed the Father's hands.

* * *

His little white cell contained only a bed and a table, while on the wall hung a crucifix and a St. Francis. He was given bread and butter and a pickled fish, a little mug of beer, a pencil, a roll of paper, and a thick processional candle.

In its rosy glow he sat at the table, and drew all the riches of his heart, the whole content of his life; he gave himself over completely to the impelling urge of his vocation. He drew with such zeal that his thin shoulder ached, and his tongue was clenched between his teeth. He was carried away and drew quickly, feverishly, passionately. He was sorry that it wouldn't go

faster. He drew as well as he could, very carefully, with clear, straight lines and broad surfaces to which he gave form by a few shadows. He thought above all of the painting by Bosch, of its strength, its clearness and simplicity. Everything that he drew was done in that manner.

Sometimes he would look with pleading eyes at St.



Francis or the crucifix. And on the paper he drew horses, his stepfather, a stork, his village so and his village thus, the painting by Bosch, the Fat, the Lean, processions, kermesses, illustrations of Hell, his whole life, his sufferings, his wrath, his faith, his fear, his whole soul. He drew the man whom the soldiers had led away, the old woman falling down, Baskwadder preaching in order to betray the people; Jan Nagel as he worked away at the butcher's face. He turned over

the pages of his whole heart. He was like the young rosebud in which, all unconscious, the full-blown flower lives, still young and folded in tight, but in all the fullness of promise.

Outside the fine snow was still falling slowly. One of the inner shutters had not been closed and showed the snow piled up to a cushion behind the little green panes. He has no time to look at it; his bread-and-butter too is lying there untouched; the beer in the pewter mug is getting stale. He thinks of Veronica and draws the mountains and landscape for which she so yearned. His drawings are lying on the table and on the floor. He keeps on drawing feverishly, through the night. These are perhaps the holiest hours of his life; his heart has mellowed in offering this rich oblation. If this does not succeed, then back, quietly, to the swine!

Suddenly the morning Angelus rings in the new day, still hidden in darkness. The whole monastery resounds with it. Pieter jumps up and prays with his red hands raised on high: "Please let me be an artist!"

Through the keyhole a deep voice says: "You shall be one, and a great one, too."

Pieter grows rigid with terror, but Father Alex enters laughing. "Now let me look at your drawings near to," he says, "for one can't see everything through a keyhole."

* * *

It was a wide house of red brick, with pointed arches and gables rising in tiers. After they had waited in the ante-room, a limping man servant in a white apron

led them through richly furnished rooms to Master Coecke. Pieter's eyes almost popped out of his head. There was a suite of four rooms, with paintings on the gilded leather covering of the walls, with richly carved closets on which stood Delft pottery, with heavy tables, soft carpets, and crackling wood fires in the broad fireplaces supported by caryatids. Through the tall, slender windows, adorned with brilliant coats of arms and scenes, the bright light came streaming in from the snowy courtyard. At the end of these splendid chambers was a broad staircase with a curtain of rosy damask, through which trickled a subdued brightness. The sounds of zither playing and mixed voices reached them.

When they had arrived at the top, in the bright light, Pieter noticed on a turnplate a woman veiled in gauze and flowers, lying in a large shell. She was being sketched by some young painters. He heard her laughing out loud and knew at once that she was laughing at him, "or maybe at Father Alex," he consoled himself. Eight young gentlemen in velvet, and stiff, frilled ruffs, were painting, reading, or playing the zither. There was a delightful jumble of all sorts of models, classic statues, banners, armor, rugs, vases, large paintings and drawings. The limping servant led them to a dais, and there behind a screen of gilded leather and heavy Oriental rugs, in the midst of a pile of cushions, Arabian tankards and Moorish weapons, helmets, bows, swords and shields, sat Master Coecke, dressed as a Turk, in green silk the color of moonlight, with a feathered turban on his head and a curved scimitar at his side, painting "The Last Supper." It was sharply defined

in color and form in the Italian manner, full of theatrical movement, with much life in the gestures and draperies. The parts that were finished were smoothly varnished.

"This is no place for you," thought Pieter. "If you don't get out of the door as fast as ever you can, you'll be thrown out of the window."

Master Coecke had a broad face, with a short, square, brown, curly beard, a long, horizontal mustache, a straight nose, prominent reddish cheekbones, and keen eyes beneath his wrinkled forehead. Everything in his face was architecturally correct, but in his keen eyes there lay a shadow of mistrust, pleading and uncertainty.

He offered his two guests small Arabian chairs, but after Father Alex had greeted him, introduced Pieter and described his passion for painting, Coecke drew his brows even closer together.

"From Brueghel?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Were you a choirboy there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Did you live with the priest there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And you left some drawings hanging there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Just a moment, please."

"Yes, Sir."

Pieter began to feel anxious. Now it would come out that the priest knew nothing of the whole story he'd been telling.



Master Coecke drew forth a letter from a case and from this letter a few small drawings. "Do you know this?"

"I drew this," said Pieter, looking in astonishment and fear at Master Coecke who asked questions like a judge in a criminal court and behaved like a magician.

"Mr. Pastein wrote me about you when he spent the night with your parish priest some time ago," said Coecke. "Why didn't you come before? Why didn't the priest let me hear from him again?"

Pieter didn't know what to say and couldn't make head nor tail of all this. "I have been away, Sir."

"And now the priest has sent you here?"

That was a dangerous question, and Pieter replied calmly: "And Father Alex brought me here."

"I suppose you have some other drawings with you?" Coecke looked at them very carefully. "Not bad, not bad, but you have much to learn, my lad!"

"That's just what I want, Sir, to learn as much as possible and as soon as possible," Pieter ventured to say.

"I have too many students," said Coecke. "These young men pay me twenty *gulden* a day. I will take you on as an apprentice,—then you can learn the mystery of colors. It just fits in very well, Father Alex; I need several such apprentices. And so the boy will gradually grow familiar with colors and with art. Madam Verhulst, my wife, will be able to use you for her miniature painting, too. You'll get board and lodging, and your wages will depend on your work."

The tears were rolling down Pieter's cheeks: it had worked. When Coecke looked at Father Alex inquir-

ingly, Pieter laughed in embarrassment and said: "I was just thinking of my mother, Sir."

"Good, good!" said Coecke. "You will learn to draw quite differently with me. See, these horses, these farmyards, these people—they are all seen too much with the eyes of a peasant; it's too Gothic. You must become modern. But what's this!" he said, holding out a drawing. "See! see! isn't this Jan Nagel?"

"I saw this yesterday, Sir, when this man struck the butcher," Pieter explained.

And Coecke began to laugh heartily, with his mouth round in his square face. "Capital! Capital! Jan Nagel! Jan Nagel!"

"He works here," said Father Alex to the astonished Pieter.

"Yes, he transfers the sketches of paintings to the canvas," said Coecke, and he began to laugh anew.

At that moment the limping servant came from behind the curtains with a crying child in his arms. "Master," he said, handing the child to Coecke, "Maria will not be quieted by me nor by Madam."

"And where's the maid?"

"She's out getting meat, Master."

"And I have visitors. It's always the same story!"

"I told Madam, Master; but she thought that the Reverend Father would surely excuse it since Maria is always quiet and good with her father and since the Reverend Father knows the child so well anyway. She is busy just now with a miniature—the nostril of Proserpina—. Something very difficult, she said."

"And I'm supposed to work!" Coecke laughed, will-

ingly taking the child, "receiving visitors all day, instructing, writing letters, attending conferences, and then on top of all that, playing nursemaid on account of Proserpina's nostril. But I could eat her up, our Maria!" And he pressed the child ardently against his cheek. "Isn't she like one of Raphael's models for the Infant Jesus, with her blue eyes and golden hair?" he cried. He raised the child on high and now she crowed and laughed and clapped her little hands. "But now run along," said the happy father. "Come, give the Reverend Father your hand, and that gentleman, too. Last month she took her first step, and now she can climb up here all alone! Come, give the Father your hand."

The child came over to Father Alex roguishly and slapped his big open hand } then she went to Pieter and gave him her little hand. He made a face at her, and she giggled and pointed at the feather in his hat. He lifted Maria up and bent down so that she could reach the feather. She stroked the feather and tugged at it in delight.

Master Coecke laughed with pleasure and then said to the Father and to Pieter: "I said you must become modern j that is, you must do homage to the beauty of mankind, as I do who first introduced this idea in our country, before even Bernaerd van Orley who believes that he did it. I have spoken with Michelangelo, with Raphael and da Vinci, the greatest geniuses of all times. They are humanists! Humanism, that's it! That means: to see the divine beauty in human beings, the beauty of all things. Do you know what Michelangelo

said to me? He said: Gothic art is good for women.—Of course Memling and van Eyck are able painters—but they did not see the beauty, the grace, the flexibility, the harmony of the human body. What sort of Eve did Van Eyck paint? Nothing at all. She should be the gentle, abundant mother of mankind, toward whose breasts all generations of the earth look up in praise and gratitude! That's how I understand Eve! But the Gothic artists have clothed their people in heavy draperies, or they lost themselves in diabolical dreams like Bosch, that queer fellow—they have despised life!"

He drew the curtain, to dull the loud chatter and laughter of his pupils. Maria meanwhile had pulled the feather from Pieter's hat, stuck it into her mouth and brushed over Pieter's face with it.

But between two strokes of the feather brush by Maria, Pieter who did not as yet know anything about the humanists but who loved the painting by Bosch as though it were his own, ventured to ask: "Don't you consider Bosch beautiful, Sir?"

Coecke drew his curved scimitar: Pieter drew his head between his shoulders. "Just wait. We'll make you waver in your partiality for Gothic artists!" said Coecke.

A door was slammed, and an angry voice was heard below in the studio. Master Coecke jumped up, drew the curtains apart, and there stood Jan Nagel scolding the pupils and the woman model: "Will you keep your mouths shut? First they play a musical instrument such as I have *lying* in my attic at home by the dozens, then there is so much noise and stupid laughter that one can't



draw a stroke! I want quiet! And if there isn't more quiet, I'll stop working to-day."

Coecke found it difficult to forbid the noble young gentlemen anything, so he said cautiously: "Please be a bit more quiet. Do just try to keep your minds *on* your work, it grows dark so early in winter."

Jan Nagel withdrew, grumbling, but Coecke called to him.

"Come over here, Jan, I want to show you something!"

Jan came still grumbling, swinging his shoulders, his hands in his pockets, and waited silently, with an ill-tempered expression on his face.

"Look here!" said Coecke.

Jan looked at the drawing with his melancholy, gray eyes. "Who did that?" he asked abruptly.

"This lad, who's going to be our apprentice."

"Were you there?"

"Yes, Sir," said Pieter while Maria pulled his hair. "I thought it beautiful—what you did there."

Jan Nagel pointed his forefinger at Pieter.

"If you listen to me, I'll make a real fellow of you!" He brandished his fists in the air as he spoke. "And a great one, too! Damnation! Damn it! Many of our great artists couldn't achieve that!"

Pieter looked at him, reverently and gratefully. Maria has suddenly become very quiet. There, she has wet him through. Coecke and the father laugh with all their might, and Pieter, shy but gay, said: "That's the blessing on my good fortune!"

Just then the man servant comes limping in. "Mas-

ter, the Assistant Secretary of His Majesty Emperor Charles is here, with two Spanish noblemen."

Coecke jumps up, completely confused, pushes the curtains aside, so that he can be seen painting from a distance. "Quick!" he calls. "Quick!" To Pieter: "Go into the kitchen with the child!"—To the Father: "Good afternoon, Father, come again later, or perhaps I'd better come see you!"—To Jan Nagel: "Go, go, or stay!"—and to the pupils: "The model in position! Draw!"

In the turn of a hand, everything was in order, and everything had disappeared that was to disappear—and Coecke painted.

As he was going into the kitchen, redolent of ham and eggs, Pieter made the sign of the cross and gratefully kissed Maria on her cheeks, soft as peaches.

* * *

For three days Jan Nagel, with Master Coecke's permission, had been showing Pieter the city of Antwerp. The boy was lost in wonder. He rejoiced when he saw the Scheldt with its glorious, gay array of thousands of ships, galleons and galleys, smelling of war and distant countries. He had sighed before the beauty of the many works of art in the studios, in the churches, convents, and private dwellings; but above all the Church of Our Lady with its tower had won Pieter's heart: it was like a piece of lace wrought by the sun. "One couldn't make a more beautiful candle for Our Lady!" he said. And when he walked about in the tall, seven-vaulted room, as though between the pipes of an organ,

and then stood in the light of the heavenly glass frames before the glorious "Entombment" of Quentin Matsys, as before the most magnificent sunrise that ever transfigured a morning, the tears trembled in his eyes from admiration, and he said in a stifled voice: "God helped to paint this, and that is why this church is so beautiful!"

But when in an Italian merchant's collection he saw various works of Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter's heart opened wide and overflowed with visions roused by all these pictures of devils, temptations of St. Anthony, purgatories and peasants. "That's how I must paint, and that's how I *can* paint!" The art of Bosch had stirred him to the depths; he was ill from it; he saw nothing else and spoke only of this artist. At last Jan Nagel said suddenly: "I'm sick to death of you and your Bosch. I, too, regard him as one of our very best painters, but you can't appreciate that yet. You'll only see that later when you have learned to paint; for heed what I say now: you look too much to the subject matter. That doesn't in the least matter. It doesn't make any difference what you paint: the flesh of women, eggs, fish, fruit, landscapes, entombments, devils, St. Anthonies or angels—if it's painted well, it's good. Thoughts, emotions, mysticism, and all that sort of talk, is all rot, the stuff they write in books. A true hand!—a true brush stroke!—that's what counts!"

"Of course," said Pieter cautiously, "everything must be painted well,—but an angel that is painted well out of pure imagination, is surely more than a cracked pitcher that is painted well."

"If it's painted well, the pitcher too is an angel!" said Jan, running his fingers through his reddish-brown hair in his excitement.

Pieter had no reply to make to this.

"But I'll tell you something else," Jan Nagel continued in a loud voice, without noticing that he was in the street and that it was full of crowds from the exchange. His fingers danced in the air as he laid down the law. "Do you see that rotten fish head there in the gutter? Well, it disgusts me! I don't like fish—but well painted, that fish head is just as mystical as an angel, and more mystical if it's painted better. Mysticism means: to know. Mysticism means: to force God to appear in color. What do I care about Coecke's mulberry-colored saints and his porcelain-colored Venuses, if they are not caught more firmly in the color? Yes, caught! We painters must capture. We capture God with our colors, just as a saint captures God with his prayers. And He loves it. And I'll venture to say, and I'll say it again: 'A good painter is a son of God!'"

* * *

It was twilight when they arrived in the narrow dark alleys of the St. Andrews Quarter. Suddenly Jan Nagel said: "Well, now I've shown you about all that is to be seen here. Now we'll go to my friend Schlagkopf,—he is an alchemist, who will one day be burned at the stake. Come with me!"

Pieter followed Jan Nagel down a narrow alley, wet and slushy from the melting snow; thick drops trickled down from the roofs.

"This is, unfortunately, a brewery that was aban-



done because of lack of good water," said Jan Nagel as they entered the yard, where beams and stones lay around and a few crazy sheds stood. He knocked at a sort of stable-door. "Here lives my friend Joseph Schlagkopf."

A little, hunchbacked young man opened the door. He smelled of smoke, looked black as a negro, and had big wondering eyes, with much of the white showing. "Is Master Neptusurio at home?" asked Jan Nagel.

"The stars have arranged it so that you will now find the Master within," said the little man courteously, in a weak, piping voice.

"Good! Tell the stars that I thank them and the Master that I am here with a young friend who'd like to meet him." They followed the young man, who led the way through two empty chambers until they came to a low, badly lighted room smelling vilely of soot. They found Joseph Schlagkopf in the midst of a jumble of bottles, tankards, retorts, funnels, pots, books, sand-clocks, wood and all sorts of distilling apparatus. He was reading a book and stirring something in a kettle that stood on a little stove. He was so absorbed that the hunchback had to pull his sleeve to attract his attention. He jumped up angrily; but when he saw Jan Nagel his face assumed a solemn expression, and he greeted him devoutly. "Brother," said he in a voice that seemed subdued as from all too great love; then he greeted Pieter, "May I call him brother, too?" he asked.

"Why not?" said Jan Nagel. "The people I bring are good people!"

Schlagkopf took the kettle from the smoking charcoal fire and came to them. He was a pale, thin man, with a half beard—the other half had been chewed off—and vague, blue eyes. "I won't go with you to-day, Jan Nagel, because I am just about to find gold by means of a different formula but of course with the sacred number seven."

The hunchback pricked his ears so as not to miss a word, and his white eyes gleamed in his black face. He even forgot to sift the coals for the fire.

* "Yes let me call you brothers for we are all drops of one and the same God whom we clothe with the same substance and my substance is of the same ether as your substance only that it has different vibrations which difference is due to a more passionate life in God" said Joseph Schlagkopf speaking rather fast, but clearly and with assurance, without hesitating or fumbling, like a leaking water-faucet. He spoke without any commas and periods, interrogation points or anything else. Everything he said had a beginning and an end, but in between there was no pause.

They all sat down on boxes or little barrels. Joseph stuck his hands into the wide sleeves of his moth-eaten cassock, edged with shabby fur. "Yes brother" he said to Pieter, "I can see by the light that radiates from you that you are not yet consecrated God burns in us that's one seven times the fire will veil itself in flesh and blood seven times return that is two he who then still lives in sin and evil desires will have his fire quenched that is

* The omission of punctuation in this and the next paragraphs is intentional.

Hell and God is the great architect he builds with the same substance ether which has different vibrations in every being coarse or fine quiet or loud do you understand me gold is of the same substance as lead now listen attentively gold and lead are the same only the vibrations are seven times one thousand times different seven the sacred number do you understand now you block-head why there are seven days in the week the key to every mystery is seven give me the number seven and I will fold the world together like a towel I take lead I let it attain the proper vibrations in the fire add a little gold to it and something else that I won't tell and out of a pound of lead I have a pound of gold I make as much gold as I wish I create worlds through numbers I invoke spirits through numbers there are swarms of spirits around me look around and you will see Jupiter and Helen when I pronounce the sacred number seven with the proper number of vibrations the whole house trembles from each stone spirits come by the hundreds of thousands you too think no doubt that the devil is as big as a man on the tip of my little finger two can sit when I pronounce the number seven properly then you no longer see me only hear my breath I make ointments and oil but that is for the common herd of men and to earn a little money and I heal everything I will talk of that later and I make gold to help the world in its need but I make something else too nobody knows that I will tell you the philosopher's stone is in me not in some pot or kettle it is the flame the fire the spark in the builder it is to subjugate the body to attain peace no longer pleasure hate fear or anger or vexation the

harmony of the stars to conquer fate I do not exaggerate when I say that I am here living my seventh life and I am no spirit I am actually in my fifth life but through the power of my will concentration and dedication I have skipped two matter is vanquished I can say it is consummated I have nothing more to seek for myself here on earth but to help others ahead to be sure as I am doing for this friend who is in his fourth life I shall help him this year into his fifth I have arrived at the peace spoken of in books as the Silence of the Great Swan that is sanctity."

At that the hunchback fell upon his knees, kissed the shabby cassock and said: "Master, I will do everything! Command, command, help me to attain the fifth life, keep me in the holy light of numbers; I have given you my money, save me from my sins!" His words expressed pleading and fear. Joseph stroked his long, coal-black hair, and said in the same tone as before: "O holy quiet evening fire that burns upon the hill."

A door next to the stove was opened, and a sick, emaciated woman, sallow under her white headcloth, with one child on her arms and another tugging at her skirt, came in and begged: "Joseph, can't you give me a few pennies? One can be registered at the Convent of the White Brothers against toothache, and I am suffering much pain from toothache again."

"What" said Joseph jumping up, not shouting, only placing stronger emphasis on his words, "toothache heartburn if it isn't one it's the other in this way you prevent your soul from turning into gold and the gold in the pot of the elixir of life go I'll give nothing I

have to get a little money to make gold out of lead and she wants that money to give to St. Appollonia endure it don't feel it and so you will help the plan of God and you will more quickly attain your third life for you are only in your second." His eyes were bloodshot and his veins stood forth like whipcords beneath his skin.

"Silence, fool," cried his wife, "with your talk of gold } soon I shall have a dead child in my arms. What do I care about the plan of God! God is good, but you are a fool } when God sends us a little something through some charitable person, you melt it away, you fool, fool!"

At that rage got the better of him. He threw his arms in the air and knocked over a pitcher. The hunchback timidly hid behind a barrel, and the woman pointed scornfully at her husband with her fist, "There he stands! He talks about quiet and almost bursts with anger."

Then Joseph became so wild with rage that he broke a huge stone jar into bits. "What use is quiet and calm" he cried, "when one is constantly irritated get away away away or I'll knock in your head wretched woman."

"Hold on, my dear fellow," said Jan Nagel, taking hold of his collar. "Come, we'll drink a glass of beer. Quick! Change your clothes!" He pushed him into the other room, and gave the woman some money. Joseph was back again in a moment, dressed, or rather he had changed his brown cassock for a green one. "Come let's get away from this materialistic rubbish."

The hunchback threw himself at his feet. "Master, may I read the Mysteries of Ambrose?"

Joseph considered a moment, then he said solemnly: "You may but none of the other books." And he raised the man servant's chin and stared deep into his eye, until the hunchback closed his. Before the three had got out of the door, the little fellow was sitting in the window eagerly turning the pages of a thick tome.

"This man has sacrificed his fortune for you," said Jan Nagel reproachfully.

"To the honor of God," replied the Master coolly. He turned to Pieter saying: "Brother you must understand that I was not angry with my wife I only pretended to be so that she would go away I can do that by magic as well but with my own family I don't like to do that shall we go to 'The White Horse' the beer is good there."

Everything that Joseph said had made a deep impression upon Pieter. It was so new, so puzzling, so vague, so fascinating. "Soon I'll believe it myself," he thought. The three of them walked along in single file, one after the other.

"Do you believe what he says?" Pieter quietly asked Jan Nagel.

"You must never ask me that again," said Jan Nagel, cold as ice.

* * *

The tavern had brown, smoky walls and a young mistress with dimples in her arms. The foaming tankards were placed upon the table and the yellow candles burned in their black iron candlesticks.



"We will drink to our good Antwerp," said Jan Nagel.

"Wait Brother," suggested Joseph, "Pieter young brother you must not be surprised at my coming here to drink beer beer is a vibration of matter that I value not for the sake of the beer but because of the number we live by numbers and I come here to mislead people for suspicion is likely to fall on solitary students the flame in me loses nothing by this since I have attained peace the silence of the Great Swan and I can always find my way back to the solitary center of my being that is the difficulty for people in this world God is praiseworthy in all the vibrations of matter because they are his vibrations but one must always retain one's center of being remain independent of evil desires God is praiseworthy in a flower in iron lead and also in this arm of Caroline's." And at that he pressed a kiss upon her tender flesh; but he got a resounding box on the ear from her soft hand.

"Do you feel the vibrations?" asked Jan Nagel.

"The kiss was gold the box on the ear was lead."

"Cheer up," said Jan, "it's the same substance.—And now," he said to Pieter, "we will drink to beautiful Antwerp. But first I should like to give you four pieces of advice. Your spirit is still fresh and alert, and this beer will soon make it dance. So let it be spoken now before the Antwerp beersickness cheers your blood too much." Joseph was about to interrupt. "No, Master, be silent, until we have drunk; then you may again speak what you will!" And he turned to Pieter once more: "I will say it to you now, afresh, then you

can always think it over afresh. If you want to become a great artist, hearken to my words: Never meddle with politics} it consumes your strength, and you can *no* longer speak straightforwardly. Never meddle with theology; let it be all one to you whether Adam had a navel or not and whether the snake talked or not—you won't paint any the better on that account. Drink just enough always to retain the good taste, and let the girls alone. Above all: let the girls alone. These are the four golden counsels of Jan Nagel. Did you understand them? You needn't follow them for my sake. I told them to you only for your own good. Did you understand them? For to-morrow your work will begin!"

"Yes," said Pieter.

"Then try to follow them and you will be a great painter, I feel it! We will drink to beautiful Antwerp and its newcomer: Pieter Brueghel!"

They raised their tankards and lifted them to their lips. "My Guardian Angel, glide down my throat with this beer and snatch away everything that may harm the artist in me!" said Pieter Brueghel.

And he drank such a big draught that he had to gasp for breath.

* * *

Chapter VI

AT MASTER COECKE'S

PIETER sat in his clean little workroom, simple as a peasant's, holding Maria on his lap and drawing masks for her. Since the child had pulled the feather from his hat four years ago, she couldn't be kept away from him. He had become Maria's comrade, told her endless stories, went walking with her and picked flowers with her, took her along on his errands, made drawings for her, constantly invented new games and all sorts of jolly things for her, carried her on his shoulders when solemn parade or processions, pageants or incoming ships were to be seen. Oh! she had become a beautiful child, with thick golden curls as though she had been born with her hair dressed, with round peach-like cheeks, a little round nose and soft dimples in her hands, with truly blue, laughing eyes, that shone like a spring morning. Pieter sometimes took her in his arms, pressed her against his cheeks, where a brown beard was beginning to sprout and cried: "Oh, my darling sugar lump! You're good enough to eat! My sweet sugar plum!"

The child's love for him made him radiant with joy and pride. He boasted of it. It pleased him immensely when Mother or Father Cocckc asked her to stay with them, and she preferred to go to Pieter. She even ate with him in the kitchen. Her partiality for

him lent him a certain importance in his own eyes, and that was just what he needed for his lack of self-confidence was a fault that made him shy, timid and lonely. Bunglers, because of their pompous self-importance, were admitted into the Guild of St. Luke, and he—in spite of his abilities, whose strength and fertility he well knew—remained unnoticed because he did not sufficiently display his talent. He was regarded as a hired apprentice, a peasant boy who merely mixed colors, drew up and stretched canvas, put the priming on panels, took care of the brushes, copied well and made quite original drawings in the manner of Hieronymus Bosch. Often he was dissatisfied with himself, because he lacked the strength of self-confidence. Sometimes he acted as though he had it. But after three days he could not stand it any longer, and all that was left to him was a feeling of homesickness. And it was Maria, this little blonde girl, who made him more satisfied with himself by her affection for him.

For Pieter these years had been four years of hope, four years filled with work, patience and courage, and with repeated stomach aches, due, he was sure, to his experiences among the Fat. His growth as an artist had been continuous, slow but sure, like that of the grain that has its part in autumn, winter, spring and summer. Pieter was confident that its fruit would strengthen his heart. He waited for it, while he worked and offered the sacrifice of his youth, longing for distant countries and for freedom} for he was tied to the jovial but strictly executed discipline of Coecke's house in which he lived, slept, ate and worked.

They were good to him! He could enjoy the alluring delights of snow and rain, autumn and sunshine in the house and in occasional, hasty errands that took him outside the city gates. He waited and worked full of hope. Once he had mastered this special work, he would be better paid and would be able to save enough to complete his apprenticeship—perhaps Master Coecke wouldn't charge anything—and so become Master of the guild. To become Master! To be free in his art! This was his indestructible hope, his constant longing. He did all sorts of trifles for Coecke, copied, was allowed to do small bits on the paintings—for there was much work to do—and it was difficult between times to draw anything for himself, as he liked to do, from life, from memory, or from other paintings. But almost every evening he sat until far into the night in his bedroom drawing or reading by the light of a candle. On Sundays and holidays he would draw in the afternoon, indoors, or outdoors when it was his day off.

And so a consoling solitude came into his life and little news reached him of the new art, even though he was in the midst of it. It did not reach him because he did not desire it and he did not desire it because it had no charm for him. Sometimes he tried his hand at it, but it would not work. All the artists and students with whom he happened to talk were full of Italy and modern art, the glorification of the human being. But he saw all the sins, the ugliness, the reality of the poor and the crippled which are yet so beautiful. And even though a part of his heart agreed with the others, he was not moved by this new art, he could not believe

■ AT MASTER COECKE'S ■

in it, become inspired by it, sob before it, as with Bosch, Matsys, Geertgen van St. Jans, Bles and others. "It's not for me, it doesn't belong to me," he said. He did not like to take part in these conversations ; he was sick of them. He lived a quiet, retired life, read and worked, and excepting Maria, his only friends were Jan Nagel, Joseph Schlagkopf, and the houseman Marus, with his red seaman's face, a man who stimulated Pieter's imagination mightily when he told of the wars in which he had been on land and sea, and who didn't like it that Pieter refused to go with him on his free Sundays to play cards for beer, but preferred to scribble little figures on paper . . .

He now painted all sorts of masks on a piece of paper—of himself, Master Coecke and his wife, the servant girls, the man servant, and the students. Painted in bright colors, they were all easily recognized, and their faults, which they thought to keep hidden, were clearly expressed. Maria always crowed with pleasure when she recognized a familiar face in these comic caricatures. "Make a mask of me, too, and of Jan Nagel!" she cried.

"No, my sugar plum, I can't do that for you don't wear a mask nor does Jan Nagel. Jan Nagel has only a false nose, for I'm convinced he believes in Joseph Schlagkopf; happily, I don't any longer." But of course, Maria couldn't understand this. "Get down from my knees now," he added, "and look at these pictures! If your father learns that I'm playing again,

there'll be a smash! Now, that the leaves are falling, I'll paint a few into the painting . • ."

The sun of a fine September morning threw a square of light into the comfortable, bluish room and across books, paintings, pottery, drawings, plaster figures and all sorts of painting utensils, everything as *neatly* arranged as a gardener's beds. The inner court with a fountain of Neptune and rose creepers around the pedestals of the Greek and Roman statues was as fragrant as ten barrels of balsam, as sometimes happens in September, and the sun sent clouds of sweet odor into the room. While Maria looked at pictures, Pieter worked at a painting that had been begun. It represented Actæon, the Greek hunter, at the moment when he sees fair Diana at her bath in a woodland lake, tries to surprise her and as a punishment is changed into a deer with large antlers and later devoured by his fifty dogs.

"It's lucky the dogs don't know about that yet and so don't have to be painted into the picture!" said Pieter with a sigh. Master Coecke had made the design. Pieter had to transfer it to the canvas and was now painting the leaves, the trees, and the water with the water-lilies. Jan Nagel, with the joy of the true artist, would paint in the two figures with vigor and life, and last of all Coecke, dressed as a Turk or in some other picturesque costume, would work at the painting in the presence of wealthy and noble visitors, would gradually paint it soft and smooth as porcelain with his brush strokes and destroy all its beautiful orig-

inal strength, as was the fashion at that time; and he would receive much praise and applause for it.

Jan Nagel sat in his lofty room in the attic, for he wanted to hear the wind and see the clouds ; and Pieter was lodged next to the kitchen, close to its rich odors and a plump servant girl. Luckily there was a new one quite often. Pieter found that Jan Nagel had given too many pieces of advice four years ago for him to follow all—especially the one in regards to the girls. Couldn't one become a good painter if, now and then, between two strokes of the brush, one snatched a kiss, behind the door, from the pretty, seductive mouth of a servant girl? He, at any rate, often snatched them and found them very agreeable.

Jan Nagel had to work up in the attic, could not sign his name to a picture, was a mere workman, a servant—but that didn't matter to him! All he cared about was to be able to paint—to enjoy the sacred joy of painting. But Pieter, while painting in the dark foliage of the trees, said to himself: "I want to be free and a master! It's different with Jan Nagel—it's enough for him to paint. But I want to . . . well, I don't know, but something more than just painting." And at once thousands of things flashed into his mind, like a bundle of thousands of crystals, that he would paint.

"Master Coecke is kind and will help me, even though his ideas about art differ from mine," said Pieter, thinking of his master. "Poor fellow," he murmured.

Coecke was a good man and a good painter, and he

might have become a much better painter if he had had time for it. But he never found the peace that the heart needs for its growth. With him it was not merely a question of the work, he wanted to preserve his great reputation and to gain even greater fame. In addition, he had to examine the work of his eight or ten students, arrange for new designs and materials, and receive the purchasers of his work, nobles, bishops, prelates, courtiers of the Emperor Charles, and the Emperor himself. He lectured and published articles about all sorts of arts and crafts and about his travels in Turkey where he had learned to weave carpets; he translated works on art from the Italian ;he drew designs for glass frames and for carpets;j he made woodcuts, engraved, traveled, he had to receive visitors and make visits, and go out to dinner in the evening, here and there ; he spent much time at his toilet, had to be rich and maintain the state of a rich man. And to the name of the best painter among the moderns, he wanted to add the title of knight or baron. He had sacrificed much to that end. When he thought of this title his neck stiffened, his beard became squarer and his eyes glanced sideways, as though he were getting ready to have his portrait painted. The son of a plain citizen from the small town of Aalst, he had gone far. By his energy, his tact, his talent, his adaptability and his ability to get along with people, he had achieved the glory of being court painter to Emperor Charles!

There were people who hung out banners for him out of pure admiration, and others who did this when it was a question of obtaining a good post, for he had

a certain influence at court. There were still others who fairly burst with rage when they thought of his success and reported all sorts of ill about him. But he had a good heart; he was sorry that he had enemies,—he was well disposed toward every one, forgot all malice and gladly helped when his help was asked. No one dreamed how much satisfaction he got out of this. And if one paid him honor as the greatest painter, one could ask anything of him. For he was painfully aware that he was not the greatest painter—and praise was a sweet narcotic for this pain. His youth had been rather stormy and somewhat disreputable; and where others would have retired timidly, he stepped forth boldly. It was no obstacle to him on the road to fame.

He had three sets of children, not to mention a fourth. After his first wife's death, he had lived with a mistress who presented him with two children. After her death, out of the goodness of his heart he took her children to those of his first wife; he married a second time, and again had children, of whom Maria was the youngest. He surrounded himself with the pomp of great names, noble patrons and long titles. Beneath these he concealed the consciousness of his inferiority. But if he held it down here, it popped up over there like a cork above the water. He had much vexation. Furthermore he had no time. He laid most of his weakness to this fact, and was glad that he had found an excuse for himself. He envied his assistant Jan and his boy Pieter, who, radiantly happy, could paint in peace through long, unbroken days.

But sometimes he was seized with a profound longing, like homesickness, for color and for his paint brushes. It could so overwhelm him that he would cancel an appointment or leave the most sumptuous banquet at some friend's house in order to work far into the night. "Not yet a Raphael!" he would say with a weary sigh. The next day he would again be sitting—and gladly!—in his white gloves in the stupefying confusion of learned scholars, philosophers, diplomats, titles, and banquets. His wife accompanied him in rustling silks and deserted her beloved miniatures. He cherished a deep love and veneration for her; and she, a good woman who loved Coecke and made an idol of him, did all this gladly for his sake and because of the dignity to which she attached great weight.

He was deluged with orders for designs for carpets and stained glass windows, for paintings, portraits, drawings, etchings, and woodcuts. This great, famous painter who, from lack of time, accomplished almost nothing alone, would make the most unpretentious woodcuts entirely alone. Then he would withdraw from the others, throw off his turban and the rest of the rubbish, and in his shirt sleeves, happy as a Sunday fisherman with a lucky catch and beaming with joy, he would cut all sorts of figures into the wood. He got too much pleasure from this to give it over to any one else. But he did it in secret. He didn't mind people's knowing that he did it—but that he had such a good time doing it. For that sort of thing was not proper for him and would have made Emperor Charles' court

painter, who was to become a knight, seem rather ridiculous.

Pieter sighed. How beautiful were Gothic figures compared with this manner of representing human beings: all the thighs equally long, every nose according to a pattern, every eye a copy of every other eye, all of the same size; not one of these is a failure, no one is shy. Fully grown, without having been born, they come out of a box, without a scratch, not carried and formed by nature and by life. Life forever! But, while Pieter was painting the water and trees, he thought of the Dommel; the fragrance of herbs was wafted to him, memories unfolded like roses that are opening, and he found himself in the midst of his village! It stood there before his eyes. And in Diana's glade over there, he painted the water-mill of Brueghel in the distance, and the willow beneath which he and his friends took off their clothes when they went in bathing.

"How are you, my good village?" he murmured.

"Destroyed," he answered in a whisper. For in the previous year the wandering troupes of Maarten van Rossum had plundered it and murdered half its inhabitants.

Since then Pieter wanted to see his village again, but he could not pluck up courage; he feared to find it too wretched, and postponed his intended visit again and again. He would so have loved to go there, if only to see the good village priest, who now fortunately knew everything about him from his own letters. To-morrow he would write to him that in winter



when the snow was again on the ground, he would come for a few days. He must have been thinking out loud, for Maria said: "Then I'll go along." But then Master Coecke entered, in a doublet of silver wire and with squeaking yellow top-boots, ready for the chase. He came rushing in nervously. "I never get a moment's peace!" And he said to Pieter: "My boy, my boy, fame is glorious, but it is a heavy burden. There is nothing pleasanter than just to play with colors and their shades by one's self!" Then he added, imperiously: "That painting must be finished to-day. Lord de la Viola wants it to-morrow in his pleasure-house at the Hospital Meadow, otherwise he won't take it at all. It can be hung on the wall, wet. And Jan Nagel isn't here to paint the flesh! He hasn't come these two days, and not a word from him have I heard! I sent him to find a model for the goddess of the sea, and he simply hasn't come back! They tell me he had a fight with his wife, and, it seems, lost an eye, your fine friend! And here I'm sitting with this painting to plague me! Not one of my assistants that can come anywhere near doing it. And I can't decline this chase; it's at the hunting estate of the Cardinal, at Kantekraeh! God knows how many noblemen will be there! And the Cardinal is such a good buyer! . . ."

He walked up and down, looked at Pieter's drawings and little paintings, in the manner of Bosch, hanging on the wall—with scorn for the subjects, but with a keen eye for the good execution.

"Father," cried Maria, "when the snow is on the ground, I'm going far, far away with Pieter."

"I say," cried Coecke to Pieter, almost pleading, "you do it. You can do it; if you want to you can. You paint quickly, and to-morrow I will go over it, and he can have it by noon."

"I'll try," answered Pieter, straightening up for joy and thanking Coecke for the honor he was doing him.

"Good! You shall have two ducats," said the master, now relieved. "Keep Actæon a deep brown, and paint Diana with rose amber and white—and use a blue down, in the shadows. The fleeing nymph of course must not be so bright as Diana . . ."

"Good, Master," said Pieter mischievously, "I will give her fine, clean, fat feet."

"There you go, back *to* that subject again!" Coecke flew up, flinging his silvery arms on high. "There you go, dragging in your Gothic artists again, with their skeletons and their ugly truth! You want to be a great painter and don't even understand the beauty of human beings! What is not beautiful in life, you must avoid in art. And the beauty of life is not perfect, but we artists must perfect it. If you don't understand that, you'll grind colors the rest of your life, you'll remain a servant, and prime canvases. You must idealize! . . . What's wrong?"

"I am looking at this rose, Master, as nature and the sun have made it beautiful . . . it has grown; and now look at this daisy . . . isn't it beautiful, too? And this first sunflower? What more do you want?"

"To go hunting!" Coecke cried out with decision and haughtily; "and see to it that you finish this painting, get a model for the goddess of the sea and tell Jan

Nagel that he can come to paint, even if he has only one eye!"

With that Coecke gave Maria a last kiss, slammed the door and was gone.

Pieter began to paint the flesh. Yes, yes, Coecke would help him to become a master ; this was a great step forward. "And yet I will not change my style," he said

* * *

When the painting was finished and the flesh painted to Pieter's satisfaction, he asked Coecke's wife if Maria might go with him to see Jan Nagel. Madam Coecke laid great stress on propriety, and in all matters pertaining to the household, she had to be consulted first. When her sense of propriety had been duly satisfied, she gladly gave her consent, so as to be able to devote herself undisturbed to her difficult art of miniature painting. She was much loved in the house, for there was something gentle and confiding about her. She was rather stout, was very even-tempered, and in the portraits that Coecke made of her she filled up the whole painting.

Maria had a clean dress put on her, Pieter took off his apron, and they went off together. Just as they arrived at the palace, the prisoners behind their bars were receiving bread from some charitable women.

"Don't look, dear child, don't look at such inhuman sights. Look at the many ships!"

There the galleons, the galleys and the freight-ships with their flags lay anchored or sailed. The water danced between them and toward Anstruweel they lay

crowded close together, waiting. It was a veritable forest of beflagged masts, a slowly floating city. And the setting September sun was strewing all the colors of fruit over them! There was a smell of pitch, cinnamon, hides, pepper, nutmeg, fruit. All the newly discovered continents were here pouring out their wealth of colors and fragrance. A magic power, a longing for the unknown, drew the people of the city toward the water again and again. There lay their dreams spread out before them, and there it swarmed with merchants, citizens, servants, wagons, idlers, peddlers, sailors, children, and enticing girls.

"Here one could draw! Here there would be plenty of material for drawing! The men and the ships!" whispered Pieter. But he had to go on.

"Come; we're going to Jan Nagel; we want to see the eye he's lost, that he probably keeps in a bowl." They went across the fish market. It was Thursday and the fresh fish for the morrow had arrived and, in all their varied colors, lay in great heaps in the stalls and booths. Oh, beautiful! these gray-white codfish like October clouds, beside the blue-striped mackerel, like knights in Japanese armor; these others threaded with the red soul of the coral plant; the soles like batik from the Orient; the backs of the herring like a glance into dark waters, and their bellies mystically engraved with gold-leaf; and all these fish in all their colors and all shades of color!

"Pieces of sunset!" said Pieter. "Just look, Maria, how beautiful these fish are! One feels like diving into them and their colors!" But at that moment he no-

ticed a young, blooming maid who was washing and rinsing the fish. She had her sleeves rolled up, soft, rosy bare arms, red hands that were damp from turning the fish, a pair of sturdy legs, and snow-white breasts. And what lively eyes she had, and how heartily she laughed! "A pretty child of a thousand weeks, she's the spirit of the sea!" Pieter thought admiringly. She was pulling the dirty skin from a scaly ray, and sticking out her tongue in the effort.

"Just like me," said Pieter. With a jerk, she skillfully pulled off the green skin, and a clean rosy-white row of ribs could be seen, bright and shining like the gleaming dawn. He suddenly thought of the goddess of the sea. Where could he find a better model than this girl, glad and fresh, as though she had just arisen from out of the reeds and the water.

"Tell me, Mermaid," Pieter asked, "wouldn't you like to be a model for the great artist Coecke, for good money,—have your pretty bare skin painted as the goddess of the sea?"

"Here's a skin for you," the girl cried, slapping the ray's skin into his face. "Only day before yesterday an old man asked me that, too. I don't know what you want of me!"

"I'll take this skin along to keep my colors in," laughed Pieter. "So, so, my redheaded friend has asked you too! You see I'm not wrong. But I see your body,, your mouth, and my eyes have a good memory. Well then, even if you should hide in the skin of a **whale**, I'll paint you!" He **drew** out his sketchbook, stepped

back a few paces and quickly drew her as goddess of the sea, arising naked from the waves, beside a dolphin.

"See, I'll give you this," he said, handing her the little sketch. She looked at it in surprise. "So I will draw you life size, in bright colors, and all Antwerp will be able to see it. Good-by!"

He waved his hat and went away, laughing, with Maria. But a clear voice called after him. He looked around } the girl had left her booth. She was red as a cherry and trembling.

"Stay here a minute, Maria," he said and laughingly went toward the girl.

"Sir," said she, looking at him with despair and rage, "if you dare—I will scratch the eyes out of your head!"

Pieter admired her. "What a piece of nature," he thought.

"See here," he said, "let's compromise: I promise not to draw you if I may have a kiss from those coral lips."

She stared at him, testing the truth of his words. She glanced down and blushed. "Come here," she said with decision. She took an empty fish basket, held it high before her face so that no one should see it—behind them there was a wall—and gave him not one, but three kisses that sounded like the song of a nightingale. But Maria had come along and seen it.

"Come," said Pieter, walking quickly away. He turned around again, thinking, "Now she'll tear up the sketch." But she was just sticking it into her apron. She saw that he observed her, turned red as a crab

from shame, and since she did not know how to help herself, she stuck out her tongue at him, mockingly. Then she seized a huge codfish to clean it.

"Listen," said Pieter to Maria, "don't tell anybody about this—will you?—especially not your father nor your mother, and decidedly not Jan Nagel, and not the new maid Tillie, either, and nobody else, do you hear?"

Jan Nagel lived over there at the corner, in a fruit shop, whose gable was adorned with steps and a Madonna. The windows, in which the setting sun was now flaming, had a fine view on a curve of the Scheldt.

* * *

Pieter's admiration of and affection for Jan Nagel were like a plant that keeps putting forth new buds. How often he had drawn him from life and from memory! And he had a head to delight an artist: bright red hair, that stood up wildly on his head and around his pale, thin-skinned face; but his short beard was yellow, stiff, and hard; no mustache, so that his mouth with its scornful lower lip showed; a large nose that bent forward a bit, and beneath the long eyebrows of his high forehead, melancholy, gray eyes. He always wore a little red cap. His thick birdlike neck, which showed all the muscles and veins like a bundle of ribbon and string, sprang up from a broad back, tired from sitting in a bent posture. He was not short, but he bagged in at the knees, and had thick, muscular legs. Pieter had often drawn him so.

"A fine man! A fine man!" said Pieter when he

thought of him. He was known to all as a genius that had failed, but as the strongest, bravest, most independent and modest person, too, feared for his sharp tongue and his hard fists. He feared neither death nor devil, cared nothing what one thought of him, and acted as seemed right to him. He seemed to have been born with a paintbrush in his hand; painting was in every drop of his blood. He had but one wish: to work, and this work was painting. He painted at Coecke's in the attic. He had to be alone and to have quiet, and he needed much room in which to walk up and down and swing his arms. There the man sent out sparks. There his red bush of a head became a glowing fire; had you stroked his hair with your hand, the sparks would have fallen from your fingers. He painted with passion and rage as though he were fighting. He dashed the picture on the canvas, rubbed his thumb over it, scratched it with his finger-nails. His brushes stroked, splashed, and squeezed the sacred color—as he called it—to spread it, broad, soft, juicy and fiery. He worked with his hands and his teeth; for when he was in an artistic frenzy, he did not take time to fetch a cloth or a knife in order to scratch out a bad place; he simply licked it off with his tongue—he fairly bit it out with his teeth. Creation burst in flames from him: it had to be done rapidly, at one jolt, in soft color; and when he did not finish a painting at one sitting, he could not sleep at home; he would get up half a dozen times to look at the Scheldt, or he took a walk in the middle of the night or rowed on the Scheldt and was back at Coecke's at the first crowing of the cocks.

Sometimes when he made no headway, he would curse and pray at the same time} and if things continued to go badly, he would throw his brushes aside, and go far, far away into the fields and solitude, until he had walked himself tired and half-dead, and then he would come home again, whistling like a schoolboy. Sometimes, too, he would begin to sing at his work} but possessed by painting, he would forget to keep on singing, and the last word of a sentence would stick in his throat. So some morning you might hear him begin: "A herring in a pan, with a little buttersauce, buttersauce, buttersauce," and then sing "buttersauce" a thousand times. He never quite finished anything, for he couldn't do this; he was too fiery to concern himself with the little details—everything remained sketchy. He cared only for the feast of color and brush. "The rest is for blockheads and nuns," he said. And then when the painting, in his opinion, was done, rough, powerful, and noble, glowing, in a word, like a piece of primeval nature, then he sank down, weary and broken, wiped a few tears from his eyes, and said admiringly and trembling with joy: "God, what glorious things thou workest through our hands!" Then he would look at the work long, holding his forefinger before his closed mouth and his little finger upward like a little tail—his characteristic attitude when he beheld beautiful things.

He was quite indifferent when people considered his work—torn fresh from his soul—not beautiful, too coarse, too brutal, not finished enough. His favorite remark was: "One must see the brush strokes} they are

the paths, the cries of the soul." But his heart was always torn when they carried his work downstairs, where it was botched with soft brushes, prettified, painted over with cotton batting and varnish by Master Coecke who then, with a self-important air, placed his name under it.

"Jan Nagel wouldn't be a bad painter, for he knows his colors," said Coecke—and everybody repeated his remark—"if he had the gift of modeling. Where he stops, art just begins." He was called "The Dauber," who painted with cows' tails. One day, in order to revenge himself, he had come down to Coecke's students with a neat, smooth, delicate "Expulsion from Paradise" on which one could even see the dewdrops on the flowers. But he made short shrift of their admiration, their delight and their astonishment, and cried: "If you really think that in future I will waste holy color on such childish tricks, I'd rather stamp it under foot! Is that clear?"

He hung the painting up in the attic and wrote beneath it: "This is how not to paint."

Nobody valued his work, so it was used only for further working over. But neither money nor the honor offered him of becoming Master in St. Luke's Guild could induce him to change his style. And since he, who wanted to paint all day long, was not in a position to buy colors, to hire models and secure materials, he painted for Coecke, and remained a paid servant, a "dauber," whose work was bungled by the Master. He painted everything: landscapes, flesh (dead and living), flowers, fruit, still life, portraits, everything} he never

talked about the subject or its meaning: if it was well painted, good, tender, and noble in color and properly composed, then it was good. "An apple, a breast, an eye, a horizon, everything is good, if it is well painted—and color is the soul of everything."

He had to be alone. He allowed no one up in his attic, not even Coecke, never spoke a word to his model during work, and got bored and had to restrain his curses and rage while the model was resting. Pieter alone was allowed to watch him, but without the little chatterbox, Maria; and Pieter looked on him as a wonder, wrestling with a spirit, like Jacob wrestling with the angel. From Jan Nagel he learned to see colors and harmonies, learned how to value a skillful stroke of the paintbrush and to apply it, and learned—but Jan didn't know this—how to live more boldly. Pieter's troubled heart and irresolute will were strengthened and invigorated by this man who relentlessly pursued his free, simple, single-minded life, who was firmly compounded of will and courage, with still another element: a deep longing which made his rough strength attractive. Jan Nagel had a big, sturdy, stout wife nicknamed the Turkey Hen, whose real name was Rosa, but whom he always called Mirabella.

"She is good; I love her dearly," he said to Pieter, "but she must leave me my freedom. Unfortunately not one woman in the world understands that. She doesn't leave me my freedom—I take it."

Sometimes he would not come home for two days and then he would suddenly enter and ask quite simply: "Isn't the soup ready yet?" They had no children.

The woman had charge of a little fruit and dried fish shop. He liked that very much. "It's the colors that attract her," he said. "Every day I am surrounded by new heaps of beautiful things."

Mirabella was extremely jealous and nearly burst with rage when merely from pure love of color he said: "What a fine neck that girl has—just look at that ivory color!" or: "Ah, if only that girl would pose for me!" or something similar. Then they would sometimes beat each other so that the whole neighborhood would come running to the scene. But that very evening they would go together to "The Light in the Lantern" at the corner and drink their tankard of strong beer with a portion of dried sole. He could defend and protect her, too, very bravely.

He remained poor and unknown as an artist—and was happy because he could paint every day, free from care. He had tried to paint at home, too, but it wouldn't do. For three years now a still life had been standing on his easel ; it wouldn't do. He had to walk up and down, stand far back from his subject and even, at worst, dance about the room. "And a woman doesn't understand that ; she thinks that painting goes just like knitting a stocking," He liked being at Coecke's, valued him very much and his work a little. "He knows something," he would say. At Coecke's, who sold everything that was painted anyway, he was allowed to paint what he wanted, had every model and everything else he desired. Jan Nagel had no imagination and did not want any. He could not understand how anybody—Pieter, for example—could dare to draw or paint



anything that was not actually before his eyes. He thought it stupid. "This apple is this apple, and it is this apple that entrances me with its color j I don't have to paint one that I don't see."

Between him and Pieter there were many fruitful debates about such matters, during which Maria would slowly fall asleep. Only three days ago, Jan had said: "The great spirit of Leonardo da Vinci can go hang for all I care, but I should like to kiss his feet because he can paint snakes so well. As for the rest, he might as well write it in a book. Painting is painting. . . ."

When they entered Mirabella was just weighing some blue plums. She told them at once she had given him a beating because he had asked a young girl at the fish market whether she would pose as his model, in the nude.

"And Pieter just got a kiss from that girl!" said Maria.

"You lucky bird!" growled a voice, and there in the doorway stood Jan Nagel, with a black cloth tied over his right eye, in one hand a juicy yellow pear and in the other a book, "The Praise of Folly," by Erasmus.

* * *

Chapter VII

THE MAGPIE

A LIGHT fog hung over the quiet, moist, warm autumn woods. There was a smell of oaks and of the dry leaves that fell incessantly from the trees and lay on the ground like a soft carpet. Pieter walked through it, enjoying the rustling beneath his feet. Then he would listen for a long time to the silence, the distance, the dying life of autumn. He went deeper and deeper into the forest, between the straight tree trunks. For hours he had been walking so, simply going on in true Brueghel fashion: free, alone, aimless, with a quiet fire in his heart, full of homesickness and happiness.

This morning he had taken a painting to the Lantern-court, outside the city. Attracted by the mysterious spirit of the woods, he wanted to return by a round-about way through the forest. But once in it, the forest held him captive. It was so beautiful, so good, it held him bound by its spell, and with dragging feet he went farther and farther into the twilight of the yellow and red foliage. Like a new pleasure, he felt his old, suppressed passion for nature.

When he saw the sun sinking away, dull red in a blue mist, he returned.

Evening had come when he reached the tavern, "The Magpie"—a quarter of an hour outside the city walls—and at a table out of doors he drank his mug of

strong beer. The air grew sultry, and everything looked blue in the glow of evening. In the house it was dark and still, while in the barn a cow was groaning like a foghorn. Pieter ordered another mug, for now at vintage time beer tasted very good. The maid who brought it had big, red hands that smelled of milk. He had not noticed the girl before, but now he saw that she was simple and beautiful, standing against the evening sky. Her black eyes with their long lashes looked at him calmly and amiably, and her throat seemed white and soft.

"We'll have an early winter," she said with a tremulous voice ; "there was a heavy frost last night."

"You are mistaken, my child } it rained the whole night } I heard it."

"Here there was ice on the water, thick as my finger ; I saw it."

"She lies so well that she believes it herself," Pieter thought, looking admiringly at her throat. He was completely carried away by her figure, did not know what to say and sighed: "See how red the moon is rising above the woods."

"I used to be afraid of it."

" I , too, when I was very little."

She rested her hand on the table ; this hand was dark red like an apple. Pieter laid his white hand upon it and asked: "What is **your** name?"

"Anna!"

"My name is Pieter."

They looked at each other long in silence. Then

dragging feet were heard crunching over the sandy floor within,

"Take care, my uncle is coming."

She drew her hand back. The fat innkeeper, in his white apron, stood in the doorway. The girl again looked at Pieter keenly, closed her eyes in delight, and went into the house.

Pieter sighed. "It is quiet," he said after a while to the double-chin.

"Yes, on Fridays at about this time, it always is," hummed the deep voice of the innkeeper, "but on other days the place here is swarming with guests."

Pieter was thinking of the niece and wanted to speak of her. "Your niece said that you had a frost here last night."

"What niece?"

"Why, Anna, who brought the beer."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the innkeeper. "The servant girl! Has she been lying again? She can't say *ten* words without telling nine lies. Niece! Ha! Ha! She is just as little my niece as the hindquarters of our cow! And freezing last night? Sir, it poured! But I could run straight up the walls, with rage at her. You can beat her as much as you please, she keeps right on lying. . . ."

"Perhaps I misunderstood her," Pieter excused Anna. "It doesn't matter anyway—sometimes one says a thing just to talk. . . . What do I owe?" • . .

He was in a hurry to get away. . . • Before he crossed the bridge, to lose himself in the city, he looked

around once more. The moon hung mysteriously, like a face, above the forest, and there, somewhere behind that brook, reflecting the moon, "The Magpie" must lie. There lived Anna, she of the white throat and the red hands.

"Too bad that she lies so . . ." sighed Pieter heavily. "How beautiful is nature," he thought, gazing into the distance. "I believe I should like always to live in the country." And happily he went toward Antwerp.

The next morning he was grinding colors on a square stone and Maria stood beside him on a little chair. He was thinking of Anna. They had just begun to sing together "Our mother buys a herring, a herring without a head" when Madam Coecke entered, her stout body draped in velvet folds. She was carrying a small roll of parchment. "Where were you fished up?" she laughed. "We began to believe we'd not see you again!"

"Ah, Madam," he apologized, blushing, "I was caught in the woods. It was so beautiful there. . . . I could not resist . . . autumn has such magnificent colors . . . and I forgot my work . . . but I shall make it up to-day, Madam."

Calm as always, but less jovial than usual, she said, while he stared at the wart with the three hairs on her chin: "You must not forget that you are in service among strangers. Simply to stay away a whole day like that is not permitted anywhere. The Master was looking for you. Let this be the last time, otherwise you

can't stay here." Then she unrolled the parchment upon which Coecke had sketched a St. Paul. "See, a garland of oak leaves must be drawn around here. Indicate the color on a few leaves, I'll do the rest myself then. You can paint the saint, too. It is for the Duchess of Sint-Joris, in a great hurry . . . and I have another whole prayer book, for which you must provide amusing drawings. Then I'll color them myself."

That is how it went almost always: she painted miniatures with pleasure and love, but she had no talent whatever for creating. Coecke helped her, and Pieter helped even more. In spite of this, she was happy in what she could do, and when her work was praised, she always felt like mentioning her assistance. But she didn't do it, after all.

Pieter no longer heard what she was saying. He saw everything in a whirling fog. When she had gone, he stood there, staring ahead of him.

"What is it?" Maria asked.

"Nothing, nothing." He felt as though his ears had been boxed. He smiled at her sadly. He suddenly seemed to himself like a prisoner, an ordinary servant who gets paid for his services, a dog, a lemon to be squeezed and thrown away. He walked up and down the room, stood still, closed his eyes, his mouth, his hands, and his heart.

"Sit down, sit down," said Maria, anxious and troubled about him, "you'll fall if you stand there with your eyes closed." And her little hands pushed him into the chair.

"Come, my sugar plum," he said, "go in to the gar-



den now and play or into the kitchen. Come, and later I'll tell you about Orson and Valentine."

She climbed up on his lap and pulled at his budding beard. "No, tell me now } oh, yes, about Orson and Valentine."

He swallowed his wrath and told the story in a slow, sad voice. It was as though he were whispering a song, a melancholy song. He saw the forest, Anna's white throat, and he felt the urge toward freedom: To be alone, independent, and free to let the heart follow its wild chase!

Maria had fallen asleep on his lap.

"If I could take you along, I would go away from here to-day!" he said with decision. "But it's you two, you and Jan up there. . . ."

"Leave me out of the question and give me some color," croaked a voice,—Jan Nagel was standing in the doorway.

"Oh, Jan, I need you!" said Pieter, sighing. "Listen!" And Jan listened to him.

"You have to get away from here," he growled at length. "You should have gone away long ago, but you've got to feel that sort of thing yourself. Nobody can tell you. If I were younger, I'd go along. You must now stand on your own feet. Here you'll never amount to anything. You must earn your livelihood by work. Try to get some copying from Coecke, then you won't starve. A little poverty won't hurt you; in fact, it'll do you good. An artist is like a medlar; they must both lie on straw to turn out well. I never got away from the straw! If I were young, I'd

go along, yes, yes, I . . . I wish you much luck . . ."

and he pushed his thumb and forefinger into his eyes, to keep back the tears.

A week later Pieter was to move to "The Magpie." His things were packed and he was having his last meal at Master Coecke's. There was country sausage with red cabbage which he was so fond of eating. What wasn't he fond of eating, though? But he didn't touch his food. When you've lived somewhere five years, and the people have been so kind and good to you, and there's an old codger, Marus, who waits for hours to play a game of cards or to tell you about the wars in which he took part,—and there's been for the past two months a rosy servant girl who cuts your slices of bacon a little thicker, and whom you have kissed soundly off and on,—and then there is dear little Maria who hangs at your coat tails all day long, and who loves you as much as her own parents,—and then there is your old, red-haired friend, Jan Nagel, whom you might almost call Grandfather, but who is the best and strongest friend, whose glorious character and whose ardent spirit have strengthened your soul and made it more beautiful, who has taught you to see, to admire and to paint gratefully—then it almost breaks your heart to have to leave these people. Pieter didn't know at which end to begin with his sausage. He drank a swallow of beer to make his hollow insides feel better. He threw a tortured glance at Tillie, Marus, and Maria. And suddenly he got up. "Even if I should wait an hour longer, I have to go anyway. . . . I'm going. . . . Good-by, Marus ; good-by, Tillie. . . ."

Tillie stared at him blankly ; her lower lip began to quiver ; her mouth hung open slackly, her eyes closed, and the tears spurted out like the juice from a lemon that is cut in two. With a cry that was strangled in her throat she hid her face in her apron, and weeping dolefully let her head sink down upon her plate.

Marus took the sausage from her plate and laid it beside his own. "It's salty enough without tears," he said, "silly goose!"

Pieter scratched his head in dismay. "Haven't been careful enough, after all," he thought. Awkwardly he patted her on the shoulder, surprised and moved by her love for him. "Tillie, I'm not going to stay away! Why do you cry so! I'll probably be getting work or bringing it here every week. I'm to do some copying for Master Coecke and to make little sketches for the Madam. Come, child, don't cry so. . . ."

He tried to get away quickly; he was ashamed that she should show her love so openly. "And then I'll be telling Maria new stories again. Come here, so I can give you another kiss!"

He lifted Maria up high. Although the child had been hearing all week that Pieter was leaving, she hadn't thought anything about it ; but now that she saw it was really going to happen and that her big friend was going away, she was indignant, felt injured and deceived, struggled away from him and left the kitchen howling.

Pieter used this opportunity to take to his heels. With a bang, the gate shut behind him. He ran around



the corner and with leaden feet went out into the rain. Anna's form rose lightly before his eyes ; she was awaiting him.

"The Magpie" was a good inn. On his second day, Pieter painted the signboard with its magpie over in gay colors. On the third day, he kissed Anna's red hands, despite her lie; on the fourth day he kissed her mouth, and on the fifth he had a visit from Maria and Tillie.

"Maria hasn't been at peace since you left," said Tillie, and she added in a whisper, with a sigh, "And I haven't been at peace either ; it's making me quite ill."

He kissed Maria and Tillie, too—but the latter when no one was looking—and he said that he had been thinking of them too, and he was very sorry for her, since he saw how much she loved him and suffered because of it. The three of them went walking in the forest. It was a bright, frosty November day, and in the distance the landscape seemed like a Gobelin tapestry. And while Maria ran ahead in her little fur cloak, Pieter said anxiously to Tillie: "You must not fall in love with me so much, Tillie ; you know I'm not going to marry."

"I can love you as much as I please," she hissed, while her steel-gray eyes, fierce and angry now, pierced his. Her jaws were moving convulsively.

"As long as you don't misunderstand me, it's not so bad," said Pieter, "for I don't like to deceive anybody."

Her stormy eyes filled with tears and her white teeth bit her lower lip.



"Come, don't cry," he comforted her weakly.

"Not cry?" she flung at him. "I'll cry when I please. Or perhaps you think it's fun for me to know that you're going to marry somebody else? Or perhaps you think that I didn't see how this stable-girl here at 'The Magpie' looked daggers when she saw you going away with us just now?"

"I'm never going to marry," said Pieter decidedly.

"Nonsense!" she contradicted him scornfully and swore, "you kiss too well for that! Isn't it enough to make one dash one's head against the wall to know that here you walk beside me as shy as a calf, and that afterwards, all fire and flame, you'll take another into your arms and that you'll marry still another! And—I love you so!"

"Listen to me," he said, "I shall never marry; an artist must not marry. . . . I live only for my art. . . ."

"And for me, too, don't you, Pieter?" asked Maria who had just come up to them.

"For art and our Maria!" he said and gave a forced laugh. He lifted her up and placed her on his shoulder.

And so they went on and he was glad that Tillie could no longer speak of her love. But his pity for her increased when he saw her so embittered, so full of longing, so furious and so desperate. He hoped that she would soon forget him now. He was going to rejoice about it but remembered Anna. In Anna's heart, too, he had allowed love to grow. "That will end in the same desperate way," he thought. "Her love, too, must be stifled" He felt uncomfortable, irritated.

He regarded love as a burglar in his life, something that wanted to destroy him. He feared it, yet it was so sweet an experience!

"Now I have three sweethearts on my back," he thought, smiling. "The two heavier ones will have to be dropped ; Maria can stay there ; she is light to carry." Scarcely had he made up his mind to keep away from all love affairs when there came over him again that sweet desire, and he realized suddenly how good, how divine, love may be. How beautiful it was—that angry face of furious Tillie, glorious and elemental like a little animal. Oh, to throw himself upon this girl's breast, to embrace her warmly! Now he noticed for the first time how beautiful she was ; now he regretted having neglected her; now he knew how dear she was to him and how passionately he yearned to keep on loving her! And so there was Anna, too: gentle and amiable, quite different and yet as irresistible. With a shudder he threw off his desires. And yet, yet . . . we'll think it over! . . . He was like a mouse that sees the trap and knows the danger but wants to smell the cheese none the less.

He had no time to think about it longer for Maria kept asking him all sorts of questions, begged him to sing her a song, set riddles, and awaken the echoes. Meanwhile Tillie walked on beside him with the face of a person who has a headache and demands consideration. He smiled at her amiably but she shrugged her shoulders in scorn: she did not want alms.

When they returned from the woods, the sun was sinking behind the city like an over-ripe strawberry

whose rich juice has colored the whole sky. Maria and Tillie wanted to leave. Then Pieter had a clever idea, as he thought.

"I must tell you something," he whispered to Tillie.

They walked around the house once more. He saw that Anna was watching them from the kitchen window—just what he wanted. "Do look at the pretty little rabbits," he said to Maria, "white ones, with pink eyes." When the child turned around toward the stable, he kissed Tillie and she kissed him again, with eyes closed. . . .

They had gone.

He went into the kitchen. There stood Anna. "I saw you, you coward," she reproached him angrily, "kissing that snake." And to his amazement this gentle Anna grew as hot as a coal fire, flaming from the bellows. "And if you dare look at me now, I'll put your eyes out with my knitting-needles! I almost left my sweetheart, the dear boy, for you, and he's the son of a wealthy farmer in the marshlands."

"I won't look at you again, Anna," said Pieter, accepting her prohibition on the spot and glad that she had a lover to console her. "I was too quick at kissing }
I should have thought first, because I'll never marry
• . . forgive me. . . . I'll not kiss you again."

"You won't be allowed to, you coward!" she said, amazed and indignant.

"So all is over between us. Good-by, Anna." Pieter went upstairs, greatly relieved ; but his feet were like lead. "You fool!" he said to himself. But he had got rid of love, and that was the main thing! As he

opened the door of his room, he heaved a deep sigh of relief and said happily: "Art, art! Now to work! Every day a battle! What bliss! What bliss!" The window was open, disclosing a horizon of wood and heath. There, on the little table, lay his working material, neatly arranged: ink, pencils, colors and paper!

He closed the window and lighted a candle. The desire to draw overwhelmed him. He sat down at once as though he were on fire and began to draw "The Four Seasons" for Master Coecke. He grew quiet, very quiet; happiness enveloped him like a cloud. He closed his eyes and saw his village; he saw the priest, the snow, the cock on the manure pile. First he wanted to draw winter and he began to work, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

Neither at supper that evening nor at the noon meal the next day, which Pieter ate with the innkeepers, the two servant girls and the old man servant in the kitchen, did he trouble about Anna nor she about him, and things went so well that he said to himself, quite pleased: "It is as though nothing had ever happened."

He worked joyfully and with all his might. To be able to create! Even though it was according to the wish and will of others! To have ten hands too few to give his imagination free rein! The circle of the world of his ideas and of his memories soon hung on the walls, defined in many drawings.

But the following week, after every one was in bed and he was still drawing by the light of two candles, he

heard a strange noise that made him listen. "It must have been the wind," And he went on drawing at a "Last Judgment" with many devils, as he remembered it from the conceptions of his childhood. All week he had been busy with devils, perhaps because of the penitential sermon of a priest in the Cathedral. Again he heard the noise, like a disembodied breath. It must be behind the door. He went over and laid his ear to the door. Some one was standing there. He turned pale. "Who is there?" he whispered. No answer. He was about to seize his knife that lay on the table. He did not dare get it, but in his excessive terror he flung open the door. There stood Anna in her petticoat and red night-jacket, with naked black feet, her red hands before her face, and wept. Then she let her hands fall.

"I cannot sleep," she sobbed, "if you are angry with me."

He drew her in and closed the door. Although he felt that it was unwise to do so, he took her into his arms to comfort her. He laughed at her in a fatherly way when he saw the tears running down her round nose and her black eyes looking at him gratefully, like a dog that is being petted. "I am not angry," he said, "but I don't want to deceive you, my child,—you know I am an artist. . . ."

"But I am fond of you, Pieter, and though I know that you won't marry me, I'd be so glad to have you be fond of me, too. Kiss me, Pieter, as much as you like. Oh, I love you so!"

She looked at him enticingly and as if sure of victory. He felt her bare, soft arms, forgot everything



he had made up his mind to do, and gratefully kissed her childlike face. She offered him her white throat, he kissed it, and felt as though he had kissed milk. She laid her head upon his breast, she raised herself against him on her toes, seeking his mouth with her mouth, and she threw her soft, white arms around his neck. A dark power flowed through his whole being.

"But your lover from the marshland?" he asked searchingly, himself surprised at his passion at this moment of its interruption.

"There is no lover," she sighed, "never was one. I just lied to you. For you I would lie myself into Hell."

"Come," he said hoarsely, and was going to embrace her again, when suddenly, as though in a hundred visions, swift as a flash of lightning, he saw—amid the transparent forms of Jan Nagel, his mother, the parish priest, Hell, flames, angels and devils—a swarm of sins and virtues, ranged one behind the other, like transparent slides } and behind them shone for only a moment the pale St. Anthony by Hieronymus Bosch, on a background of gold. That decided him.

"Quick! Quick! Away! Some one's coming ; run off," he said artfully.

"Yes, yes," said she, hastily collecting herself in fear of being discovered.

Gently but quickly he pushed her out of the room, after kissing her hand. Then—the door closed, lights out!

And he heard through the wall the creaking of the stairs beneath a cautious, slow step, stealing upstairs. "She is gone," he sighed. "How in the world is one



going to rid oneself of all this . . . when the cheese itself runs after you? . . . I can't manage it alone," He wanted to call upon some one in heaven to help him. But, no, he was afraid that his prayer might be heard. And temptation was so sweet!

* * *

Sometimes he felt a sense of emptiness when he was at work and could not lay his hand on the pretty head of little Maria, as he used to do. It would even happen that he began to tell a story and then stopped in confusion when he noticed that there was no listener. "I didn't know I loved her so much," he said in astonishment. And when he delivered his work at Coecke's, he delayed to see the child, to tell her stories, and sometimes he passed the whole day in this manner. Of course Tillie always got the usual pound of kisses coming to her, but they no longer tasted so good. They were flat. She no longer drank them so greedily ; she merely let herself be kissed.

Of course he visited Jan Nagel every time he came, for he missed him like salt at a meal. He used to go up to his attic and say "Good day" } Jan would nod, and Pieter would sit down silently near him. He would watch him paint, and see his burning zeal when at work; Jan seemed to him a part of primitive nature, in which the divine, lavish power of the soil struggled and foamed, to burst forth into colors.

Sometimes when he had sat there watching him for hours in silence, he would go away, with a quiet "Good-by." Jan would nod and go on working. But Pieter's

soul had then always grown larger. It was a feast for him, too, when Jan visited him at "The Magpie." Then they wandered far into the woods and the heath, without saying ten words, except now and then an exclamation of wonder. And afterwards, far into the night, they drank several jugs of the good old "Magpie" beer.

"That is food and drink," said Jan Nagel ; and when the beer began to show its effect, he would make big speeches about the sacred art of color and would begin to sing.

But meanwhile Pieter's difficult love affair with Anna came to a surprising end. He tried to be alone with her as little as possible, now and then gave her a hasty kiss or a little caress to keep her quiet, but he dared not hope that things would stay so ; for she was not like Tillie, who grew angry, indifferent, and hostile. She followed him like a dog, begging and pleading incessantly for love, with lies and complaints. He struggled against his growing desires, his sensual images, but he felt with a sort of pleasure that he would succumb anyway. He was like a drunkard who has succeeded in passing by the public house for a day, only to make up for it again the next day, doubly and triply. Pieter began to think: "He who struggles may fall too."

But on one of these days when his heart was so weak that he had to keep himself in hand not to stand at Anna's door, he heard a great commotion downstairs. Curious as always, he ran down the steps. "Perhaps there'll be something to draw," he thought. But from

the bottom step he saw and heard the innkeeper's usually quiet wife standing, with fists clenched and scolding, before the weeping Anna.

"I just saw it, you kissed each other. You kissed my husband, there, behind the door } and you dare to deny it? Where is the scoundrel?"



"No, something flew into my eye, and he was getting it out!" whimpered Anna.

"You liar, you liar! You wicked creature! Get out! Ah, she wants to tempt my husband! Get out! Get out! . . . And she has scarcely begun to live—a young thing of eighteen years!"

Cautiously Pieter withdrew upstairs, more astonished at the fact that Anna was still so young and yet so

vigorous than at the adultery of which she had probably been guilty.

The next day Anna, with a white cap on her head and a package under her arm, went away weeping, back home to her village, to the silent solitude of the heath. She looked smaller and smaller in the distance. Pieter looked after her from the woods, and sighed: "I should have embraced her once more ; it might have done her good: she was so charming. . . . She might have made a good wife. . . . Too bad that she lied. . . ."

Gradually he became convinced that it was only on Anna's account that he had come to "The Magpie." Then a sharp pain overcame him and he clenched his teeth. He felt himself growing very lonely. Whom had he left? He could not keep back a tear, but before the second came, he said: "Now my heart is free and single, now we will be able to work well!"

* * *

It was pleasant at "The Magpie." There was peace for work, much to do, simple, nourishing food, good beer, an oak forest near by, an endless heath with pine forests behind and no plague of girls any more. The innkeeper's wife had prudently engaged, in addition to the old servant, another with a hunchback and a black mustache ; she could work like a horse and fry roosters on the spit so that they shone like brown, dripping suns. "I could kiss you!" Pieter would cry, but he never did it; he licked his fingers instead.

What wonderful models Pieter found at "The Magpie"! The people that went in and out there to drink,

to eat, to sleep or to do all three, were made to draw: cattle dealers with their cattle and their stupid servants, drivers, peddlers, book and picture dealers, money changers, farmers, hired soldiers, travelers and what-not. On market days there was a jolly, eager turmoil, the noise of horses, wagons and cattle, a coming and going of people from all directions, sometimes from as far as Denmark. He drew it all. And the news these people brought! The whole world gathered there. They told stories of Emperor Charles and his adventures—merry and sad—of wars, volcanoes, Father Ignatius Loyola, of the plague, Luther and Calvin, of heretics, torture chambers, funeral piles and miracles, of good and bad Popes, famine and drought, comets, murders and new saints. It was a time of angels and of devils. And Pieter listened intently. He sat with these people at the heavy beer-tables or in a circle around the flaming hearth, and he heard how wicked, cruel and quarrelsome the world was.

The world was an evil globe with a crust only as thick as a finger, within which Hell was raging. Heaven was so high above and God so far away! Men lived in the midst of the Seven Deadly Sins. Every one felt that great things would happen, that terrible punishments were threatening } but they all tried to forget their fears in laughter, eating, drinking or praying.

Sometimes Pieter felt himself responsible for all that was to come, and then his heart contracted in fear of the horrible images which oppressed him. He escaped from his fear by drawing, drawing, drawing. He removed its sting by portraying it in pictures and

also in prayer. He often sat in the neighboring church of the Franciscan convent in which there was a pure, pleasant fragrance of peace and of incense, and read the beloved prayers in his old prayer book.

He had to keep a tight hold on himself not to slide and fall on the slippery path of evil. The Seven Deadly Sins lay heavy on his heart and he had to drive them away over and over again. But when they suck your blood, it is sometimes as pleasant as a short nap; for everything that's been forbidden tastes so good! Often he had to pray for a long while to grow strong again; and it was always his art by which God captured him again, his art which made him forget everything evil in himself and in others. Then he would draw and paint as long as there was a bit of light in the sky. And after his work was completed, the jug of beer tasted like an angel, and he could sing again, loud as a trumpet.

Various societies of the country met at "The Magpie": St. Sebastian's Guild, the Bowling Brothers, the Loyal Card Players and others—Pieter was a member of them all. All these societies had banquets where a whole hog or a whole calf had to be washed down in streams of beer. He ate with them—and bravely!—and saw to it that a jolly spirit should prevail at the festive board.

But he was not only an eating member; he was an active member as well. On Sundays he would shoot at the bull's eye with his arrow, bowl and aim at the birds fastened to the sails of the windmill. But in the midst of a game, attracted by a color, a memory, a sound or



a fragrance, he would suddenly disappear. Then he would walk alone on the peaceful bypaths along the fields of grain, over the heath or into the woods. He liked to be alone, he sometimes stayed away a whole day—yet he was as wild and boisterous as a child. People thought him queer, droll and gay, and began to call him Droll Pieter Brueghel.

In the solitude that he loved so well he gained a deeper knowledge and understanding of Nature and her varying aspects, according to the seasons. His eyes and his spirit drank at Nature's fountain. How beautiful it was in the fresh coolness of a fair spring morning to plunge into the young woods into which the sun is sending its bundle of golden arrows while the trees are dripping with joy ; in summer, to watch the storm clouds growing dark above the heath and to listen to the merry sounds of the kermess coming from the next village; in the melancholy autumn evenings, to walk in the dying forest while the moon's silver crescent shines among the trees; and in the wintertime, to tramp in the soft snow or to go skating on the broad moats of the castles ; and then the rain, and the wind and every kind of weather!

"The weather is always beautiful, but different!" he shouted with joy. He had become part of the grandeur of nature, was an organ like a tree in which the seasons of the year lived and had their being. He was like a flower, like a part of the air, the wind and the growth of the soil. His fruits were his drawings. And he drew everything he saw or could imagine: the good and the evil in him, his virtues and his sins. When he looked at

anything the picture remained in his memory forevermore. For art he was at once all fire and flame; and for love too, which he anxiously avoided—but for nothing else. He was himself surprised and sorry that in everything he saw its good and bad sides. He could not get excited in conversation as others did, but only when work was concerned. For his art he would leave everything.

"This flame Jan Nagel kindled in me," he thought. And he continued to make copies for Coecke and miniatures for Coecke's wife.

Incidentally he painted for himself and now and then sold a drawing or a small painting to some traveler, but without signing it, because he was not a Master of St. Luke's Guild. He managed to get along with his income which he used so thriftily that he always had something left over.

And so he passed two years at "The Magpie," in joyous labor.

One day when he was drawing a farmer's wife who was waiting for some one in front of "The Magpie," with her basket of eggs carefully balanced on her knees, a heavy voice said: "I will buy that drawing!"

Pieter turned around and saw a merry, richly dressed gentleman with a white ruff about his neck above which his face, in the wreath of its beard, shone as rosy and polished as an apple that has been rubbed against one's sleeve. "If you have any more, I'll buy them too!" he cried. "I'll buy them all!"

When Pieter had led him up to his room and he saw



the drawings there, he shouted with glee: "Marvelous! Glorious! Powerful! To-morrow I'll bring Cock* along,—then you Ye made! Cock of 'The Four Winds.'" He shook Pieter's hand enthusiastically and said: "May I introduce myself now? Hans Franckert from Nuremberg, poet, grain merchant and many things more! Come, let us go down to drink a tankard to our better acquaintance, or ten tankards—as you like! I feel like Columbus: I have discovered a new world!" And he tucked his arm into shy Pieter's as though they were brothers.

Four days later after Hieronymus Cock had seen Pieter's drawings, he laid away in his iron chest a contract in which Pieter agreed to submit all his drawings at so much each, to Cock and Cock alone. Meanwhile Pieter, in recognition of what he owed him, had gone to Coecke to ask if this were agreeable to him. Coecke advised him to accept the offer. "For you'll never be a Master-painter anyway, if you go on like this." And he again implored all the gods of Olympus to persuade Pieter to become modern.

"Ah, Master," said Pieter, "I am a simple peasant and will probably die a peasant." He kissed his hands in gratitude for these first years in Antwerp. "I will do what I can."

From then on Hieronymus Cock began to try to influence all the artists and scholars who daily filled his house with their wise discourses to attain his end that Pieter be received as Master in St. Luke's Guild. Cock was a sly fox. In his youth he had been on the road to

* Hieronymus van Cock, a well-known art publisher.

becoming a great painter, like his brother Matthias. With a happy heart and full of fine enthusiasm he journeyed to sunny Italy ; and while his brother and others at sight of the great Renaissance artists burned with enthusiastic reverence and trembled with impatience to get to work themselves, his courage melted away like a candle in the sun. He felt so profoundly and strongly the greatness, the power, the lightning inspiration of these geniuses and at the same time grew so conscious of his own impotence and the mediocrity of his talent that his spirit was broken. With a curse and a sigh, beneath the vaulted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he said: "Never again will I touch a paintbrush."

His fire was extinguished. Without hope he returned to Flanders. But he was a philosopher! And on the way he had ample time to decide how he would earn his daily bread and beautify his life. When he arrived at the good city Antwerp he had found a way; fortunate circumstances helped to bring about the realization of his plan. He wanted to begin an art business—but he had no money. And so in all haste his wealthy aunt, who lived in the Beguine Convent at Lier, died. She bequeathed to him and his brother several pots of gold ducats. "A good soul," said Cock, "one must be grateful for everything."

And he ordered paintings, bought and sold oils and water colors, had copper-plates and etchings made of old and new paintings and of sketches, Italian and others, and married a voluptuous, blond Dutch woman, Katharina Volk, young and fresh as a tulip. She played the harp beautifully. His shop in Kaiser Street



he named "At the Sign of the Four Winds." Everything was to be found there: antiques and biblical works, Gothic and modern, merry and hellish paintings, still lifes, landscapes, and marines ; everything was represented. And on his sign he had the following verses painted:

"To please the palate of the crowd
This COOK * prepares his dishes proud.
Let him who does not like this fare
Just spit it out and go elsewhere.
But COOK requests about his failures not to bawl,
For some one else in turn will surely for them fall."

Business went well. Cock had had a keen nose, for Pieter's drawings had a brilliant sale. And Cock promised him that as soon as he had become Master in St. Luke's Guild and had the right to sign his name to all his works, he might take a journey to Italy at Cock's expense.

Cock had great influence and his business was famous. It meant honor, almost fame, for any artist to have his works appear in "The Four Winds" in copper-plate, for they were really spread from there to all the four winds. But Pieter's case was difficult. He was the only one among the younger painters who still worked in the barbaric, peasant manner of the Gothic school. All the artists like Frans Floris, Pieter Coecke, Willem Key and the other great and small masters of St. Luke's Guild who visited the house of Cock, which had become an intellectual and spiritual center, were from convic-

* In Flemish *Cock* means cook.

tion, or a mania to follow the fashion or lack of independence, disciples of the new movement. They surely could not slap their own faces or deny their principles by receiving in their midst one whose work, like a challenging gale, flew straight in the face of their own learned, beautiful, earnest and solemn paintings.

But Cock was calm; he didn't want to force Pieter down their throats; in another year Pieter's talent would have developed so that he would be able to set it before them like a seductive apple tart and they would have to bite into it.

Pieter worked much and gladly. He was allowed to draw what attracted him, from life or paintings. And so he could wander around to his heart's desire in all the lanes; he drew men, farmyards, castles, the pictures of his fantasy—and he drew after the manner of Bosch's paintings. But he was surprised that Cock seemed in no hurry to have his drawings etched in copper, but rather kept them in boxes with others.

"Later they will all come up again," said Cock, "just let me alone and I'll roast a fat rooster for you some day."

All the great, the nobles and the wealthy, learned intellectuals and the most gifted artists, were proud to visit at the house of Cock. And Cock was always a welcome guest among them, for he had an inexhaustible fund of stories, could chat wittily about his faults, his unsuccessful love-affairs and his disappointments; he made verses and composed the music for them; he drank old malmsey wine with them in the arbors of their country places and liked to have his feet—and

those of his blond wife—beneath their heavily laden, gleaming tables.

He decorated the rooms of the wealthy, for it was a high honor for one rich man to be able to say to another, "Cock did my rooms" ; and for this reason too, the artists bowed low before him with Italian courtesy. He grew rich. Unfortunately his Holland tulip did not present him with children! But in that, too, he was a philosopher: he became reconciled to this, as every one must who stands facing a quenched fire in his heart. He had his portrait painted and engraved in copper; it shows an irregular face above a frill, velvet clothes with glittering sleeves of brocade—while he points with his index finger to a skull which he holds in his left hand.

* * *

Pieter often went to Cock's now to deliver sketches or draw them in ink. He became acquainted with the famous men there and enjoyed this, but showed little inclination to listen to their eternal talk about the Renaissance. Sometimes, full of the desire for knowledge, he would lend an ear, but soon, while they glowed with enthusiasm, he would think of some peasant sowing a newly plowed field, and how, in April, the horizons are drenched in the bright color of Rhinewine. Then he would quietly slip out to visit Jan Nagel and to hear him praise, in vehement words, the sacred art of painting; or else, drawn by a secret desire, he would go to Joseph Schlagkopf. The vogue and mystical character of this religion strongly tended to set one dreaming about it, but for fear that he might believe it, he did not

dare to read the books Joseph had lent him. Of tenest, however, he returned to "The Magpie," in the fragrance of the woods, there to work, to work hard, like a cobbler who must get a pair of boots finished for the coming kermess-Sunday. Now and then Hans Franckert would visit him and it was fun to watch them when the four of them—Pieter, Jan Nagel, Hans Franckert and Joseph Schlagkopf—sat together drinking beer and swapping stories.

"The biggest sausage in the world has two ends," said Hans, "but beer has none!"

Pieter lived in the sweet hope of becoming master, with Cock's help, and then he would see Italy! In his solitude he could often think of this, as a frog beneath the ice thinks of spring, not merely to see the works of art, the basilicas and the cathedrals, but to taste the pleasure of traveling into the wide world, alone and small, through endless dark forests, up hill and down daley to climb high cliffs and to discover new distances in the far distance and off there somewhere in a fairy city by the sea to see a girl with eyes yellow as honey or to meet some gentle, tender Anna.

He closed his eyes and shuddered with happiness.

* * *

But one day Jan Nagel came to him, downcast.

"What's the matter?" asked Pieter.

"I have been dismissed," said Jan and was silent again. After much questioning and plaguing, he burst forth. "Why, this twaddler, this Emperor Charles, wants his son Philip to come to Flanders next year.

And so there are to be great festivities to welcome him everywhere with pomp and ceremony—naturally we'll have to pay the bill. My master has been commissioned to decorate Brussels and Antwerp. So he is going over to Brussels now to supervise all the work. Never again will the world see so much beauty at one time—at our expense. But I hope with all my heart that it will rain dirt—dirt, dirt, dirt! What am I to do now without my master? Tell me, what can I do? May Emperor Charles burst and his son Philip too! Isn't it enough that they light funeral piles for us? Now they must take away the ground from under me and my master too. I don't want to go to Frans Floris, and the devil himself can't drag me to Brussels. But it will cost me my life. My life!" And he gnashed his teeth in rage.

"I could drink up the ocean and knock in the head of any one who laughs!"

He stamped his feet and kept on drinking. He became drunk with beer and rage and Pieter had to take him home.

* * *

Coecke moved to Brussels and Jan had lost all his moorings: he painted in this studio and that, but he did not like it anywhere. "My attic," he complained, "my attic!" Then he tried to work at home, but it would not go. He read a great deal, was often at Joseph Schlagkopf's and at Pieter's, or went walking alone on the banks of the Scheldt. But Pieter never saw a happier man than old Jan Nagel when on the day that

THE MAGPIE

Philip arrived at Antwerp, it poured down all that the sky held. He danced like a little monkey.

It kept on raining as long as Philip remained in Antwerp, and Jan laughed. But Joseph Schlagkopf said without any commas: "I saw it in my goblet the rain is the trouble that is to fall upon our land as many drops as now fall so many tears our eyes will shed in his reign let us lament and drink a jug of beer and seek the philosopher's stone."

But Pieter worked on, busy as a bee.

* * *

Chapter VIII

TO ITALY

Qu a beautiful morning in August, when the mists lay like clouds of incense above the meadows, Pieter Brueghel, now Master in St. Luke's Guild, set out on a little white horse for Italy.

Before he disappeared at a bend in the road, he turned around and with his little feathered hat waved a farewell to "The Magpie" where his 'friends, Jan Nagel, Hans Franckert and Joseph Schlagkopf, raised their tankards into the air.

* * *

He rode up hill and down dale, through endless forests; from difficult mountain heights he discovered bright plains with rivers, round trees and forests, a city in a splash of sunlight, and behind them the alluring blue of other mountains! He drew everything, at once astonished and bewildered. For hours he would sit dreaming before a waterfall or in the evening before a fire on the summit of a mountain, listening to the gentle humming of his bagpipe. Sometimes he would remain in the comfortable inns of the little cities. But always when he went on, he carried with him a number of sketches of people, city views and landscapes.

He traveled through the eastern part of France, past castles and vineyards. He drew the singing vintners

as they picked the grapes, bore them away and crushed them beneath their feet in great vats. He drew and he drew: it was like a disease.

Once, at the first gray dawning of the day, he saw from his bed beneath tall pines, off there above the dark blue of the night, the snowy Alpine peaks shining like gods in the heavens. He fell upon his knees. He rode into the rugged, threatening Alps as though under triumphal arches, hat in hand, proud and amazed. Beneath him were the dangerous enticing depths; above him, the threatening grasp of soaring cliffs; he was often hemmed in between narrow, dark ravines, but always with exulting wonder he greeted the new distances which opened up before his eyes! Deep silence reigned over all, like a holy being! "I have not deserved this!" sighed Pieter blissfully.

It was a perpetual miracle: the morning dawn in whose golden mists the mountains seemed twice as gigantic; the sunsets which lingered in a rosy glow upon the snowy summits, while all else sank into the evening's blue; the smiling villages in the deep green valleys; the mirror of the lakes, like holes in the earth; and the dark pine forests towering in gay patches on the overpowering heights! Ah, it was beautiful! And then the changing weather that clothes the mountains and garnishes them with light and color; the dazzling sun, the swollen clouds above and below him and their shadows traveling with them upon the earth below; the steaming rain and the rainbows in the waterfalls; the wind that blows exultantly through the bending forests, up toward the snowy peaks. And the silence! The

eternal silence! "How beautiful is the garment that God has embroidered over the world!" said Pieter. "Here one can still perceive the fingers of God! Now I know, too, how small we are," he said, and said and cried all sorts of things in sheer rapture. He was almost mad with delight, shattered by all this beauty* And he drew. He devoured the Alps with his eyes. He filled his heart and his paper with them.

Ah, while one is walking over the highest mountains, to have the blissful feeling that the world is at one's feet! He stood on tiptoe, opened his arms and rejoiced: "Almost I am an angel!" And the strange notion he had when he found himself in the deep valleys that the whole world was coming toward him menacingly, like the waves of the Red Sea—but then he felt frightened and driven onward like a deer, eager to be up there on the heights again where the wind blew against him and he felt like the pennant of a mast above the dashing waves. Each day was a feast! He slept in the huts, drank the rich milk, and blew the melancholy Alpine horn; and on warm October evenings, before the door of the simple, thick-kneed mountain folk, he would, to please them, play on his bagpipe the dear intimate songs of Flanders. The forests which spread out over the mountains swallowed the tones, and in the silence which lay serene over mountains and valleys it was beautiful to think of distant Flanders.

Slowly he wandered on, his neck outstretched, his eyes searching and rejoicing, without haste, because he had to be nowhere and could stay everywhere. Here and elsewhere he wanted to build a little hut. But ever

again he was lured by distance as by a new world that opened up, and by beauty which dreams of distant things and always eludes us like a fleeing bird.

This, his triumphal march, now here, now there, lasted until the first snowstorms drove him from the Alps. He cast one more glance at the mighty mountains shrouded in mist behind which wild black winter clouds were whirling. Here he had seen a hundred paintings, on which human beings would be like tiny ants beneath the divine, annihilating and omnipotent power of the magnificent landscape: The Fall of St. Paul, St. Anthony in the Desert, The Penitent Magdalen, Moses beholding the Promised Land, and many others. "I thank you!" he cried to the Alps. And he removed his hat as before all the Kings of Earth. Then he rode into the lovely Land of Oranges.

* * *

"Italy is the breast of art, and now to suck it dry!" said Pieter, holding a juicy orange in each hand.

With heart pent up he rode into Milan. He saw the works of Leonardo da Vinci whose snakes Jan Nagel so admired. He felt that into this quiet, harmonious beauty with its smile of spring something of Joseph Schlagkopf's confused religion had leaked through. "Something alchemistic," said Pieter. In the art of da Vinci lay an enigma that attracted mysteriously and at the same time repelled, like ice. "On my return journey I will look at these things more closely," and he gave a sigh of relief. Wide-eyed he regarded the marble cathedral which, with its hundreds of towers and



saints and its thousand ornaments, blossomed like a white nosegay. But a feeling of restlessness drove him on and on. He would be able to look at the many frescoes and the collections of paintings more calmly on his return journey, and he attached himself to an army squadron. But he soon lagged behind, held fast by the beauty of the landscape, enchanted by the tender azure sky and the soft distance with its blue hills.

Sometimes he would take a roundabout way in order to visit a distant city that shone upon a hill. He rode through the gate, past the fountain in the market place, where black-eyed women drew water. Sometimes he stayed in for weeks in such a little hill town. His whole plan that he had worked out with Cock was thrown over. He simply went on toward that distant spot which lured him most to drawing and followed by-paths, for there was nothing that he could be missing. He joined pilgrims, merchants and other travelers, but he liked best to go alone.

And he saw many cities. He was amazed at the beauty, the industry and the variety of the works of art of every kind that he found everywhere. He especially admired the grace, the harmonious and masterful composition of the paintings, and particularly their triumphant colors! "Compared with them our moderns at home are just syrup!" he said. "They have painted many pictures of Jesus, to be sure, but unfortunately they have always forgotten the poor." After looking at innumerable "Last Suppers" and "Carrying the Crosses," he always saw before his eyes the feasts of his Flemish peasants and the rabble when some one was

dragged off to the gallows or to the stake. At these sad spectacles he had always thought of Christ carrying the cross.

Involuntarily the idea came to him to paint the life of Jesus amid the swarming crowds of Antwerp and Brabant. When he got home again, he would do that! Meanwhile he would see things here. He saw, saw, but



it was too much for him: his head was buzzing so from the many frescoes, paintings, sculptures and churches he had seen that when he reached Florence, he was almost afraid to enter. But he did enter it in the end to entrust a package of drawings for Cock to some merchants who were traveling to Flanders; perhaps he went too, to admire the Italian primitive painters whose works delighted him. The rest he decided to see on his return.

The landscape—the hills, the mountains and valleys with their vineyards, the rugged cliffs with their dark



ravines and dazzling snowy summits, the views, the vistas—it was this Italian landscape that made his soul expand! And he drew everything with indefatigable passion. What joy it was to lose his way and then to stumble into a monastery of smiling Franciscans, to be regaled by them with dried fish and a jug of wine; or what a surprise to come upon some rural tavern at the foot of the cliffs, to fall in love with the daughter, to gather flowers with her and then to learn that she was married—and so to be up and away that very night! And to ride on so, to wander about here and there, without haste and yet with the pleasant feeling of getting farther and farther on,—to ride through seasons and adventures, to gather grapes by the wayside and sometimes enjoy sound sleep beneath the open sky; to be himself a piece of movable nature and to drink in the light, the air, the sun and the colors; and then to capture this mighty force in his drawings—ah, but it was good, it was beautiful! And yet he missed the clouds, the fogs, the rain and the snow of his native land.

"Here one misses our changeable, moody weather," said Pieter. "Here one knows the sky by heart, at home it plays upon a new string every day."

He went on slowly, always exulting and drawing; he passed by many a city—and in carelessness and freedom, the months and the seasons slipped by quickly until, after a year and a half, burned brown by the sun and playing his bagpipe, he appeared before the walls of Rome. With childlike reverence he knelt before the Pope and received his blessing.

He dwelt in Rome, but he went about more in the

alleys, in the poorer quarters and around the fountains, to observe the people in their daily doings, than among the ancient ruins and before the paintings in the churches. He had more than enough of the Renaissance. He was overwhelmed by "The Last Judgment" of Michelangelo and folded his hands in reverence before the "Stanze" of Raphael. But the next day he no longer thought of them, and he did not return a second time. When he visited the churches, it was to pray. Titian alone enchanted him so that he could not keep his eyes away from his landscapes.

He drew many views of the ancient city and of the neighboring hill towns. He felt that he should stay here a year and after a fortnight decided to rent a dwelling on the river bank in order to make his larger drawings there. Later he would continue his journey. But just then he happened to visit Ostia, Rome's ancient seaport, and for the first time in his life he saw the sea. His wonder was so great, his admiration so strong, that he was overwhelmed by a passionate love for the sea. And this sudden love could find no better expression than in going on board a ship. He needed not even a single night to make up his mind. The unrest which was driving him on and on of course had its share in bringing about this decision, and the next morning he was sitting under the taut, creaking sail of a galley, on his way to Palermo. The ship spread its wings and floated away over the waters. Here was a new happiness in his life—this finding Infinity and ever again fleeing from it, this pursuit of Infinity in the hope of never reaching it!

And now he remembered that his father, a true peasant, had always wanted to be a sailor and had hoped that his son would be one. Here he was now a bit of a sailor! The day before they were to land one of those wild storms arose that dashed the ship down, lifted it on high on mountains of water, shook it back and forth on the dancing billows, tore the sails to tatters and threw people down from the rope-ladders. There was cursing and praying and Pieter looked on in astonishment and admiration. "That's meant to be painted," said he. When on the following morning the calm sun threw emerald patches of light upon the dark troubled waters, they discovered in the distance still other sails tumbling about on the billows. The ship, leaning weakly on her side, entered a small bay of Sicily to recover. It was a day's journey from Messina.

After Pieter had slept the whole day in a fisherman's hut, he sat in the evening in the grape arbor of a rustic tavern with a jug of sweet wine. There lay the quiet sea with an Ionic pillar of moonlight upon it, and the blue mountains and cliffs seemed to be covered with milk.

In front of him a fat peasant lay snoring, leaning backward, open-mouthed. After Pieter had drawn him, under the magic of the night he suddenly felt the moment had come to write to his good friend, Jan Nagel.

He wrote that after an unforgettably beautiful storm he had landed safely in Sicily; that the Alps were simply unbelievable, the landscape could not possibly be imagined any more beautiful and that art here

smelled of Paradise! On his return journey he would devote greater attention to the cities and the works of art. To-morrow he was going to Messina and he would travel through Sicily for half a year.

To his amazement he found that he had not got beyond the first page, and he closed with many greetings to his friends and a "Sun- and Grape-greeting" to Jan.

And when on the following day he walked to Messina over the hot cliffs, there, at a bend of the road and from a slight elevation, he had a marvelous view of the Straits of Messina. He stood there abashed. "I thought that visions like this were reserved only for saints and the departed!" he whispered in admiration. Below him lay the azure water with white, rippling waves and beautiful ships whose sails were taut with joy. Over there the brown ruin of an old tower rose out of the water. The white city of Messina seemed to be bathing in the ocean and behind it .Ætna was smoking. And on the other side, like mother-of-pearl growing out of the glorious water, along the rugged cliffs bright Reggio rose with its towers, its domes and viaducts. And over all reigned the mighty life-giving sun! This view was unsurpassable. "A dream come true. Here Veronica might have lived!"

He drew it. "It isn't necessary for me to go farther; anything more beautiful can't be found and can't be desired!" He drew it once again. He drew it five times more.

"If this were in Flanders, I would build my hut here." And at once he felt a longing for his own country, a homesickness that he had been hiding in a dark

corner of his heart. How strange—just because he had seen the most beautiful thing in his whole journey and in his whole life, homesickness sprang up within him like a bubbling fountain. And he drank in the fragrance of his own country which awoke within him triumphantly in the midst of the sunshine, in this symphony of light, flowers and grapes. Brabant lived in his heart, he had brought it along with him—now it broke open like a walnut. It was the breath of his heart. He saw it and felt it, he was a part of it and it suddenly called him back as with the cry of a mother who has lost her child. "I come! I come!" he stammered. Homesickness overwhelmed him and he began to weep like a little child.

* * *

And so, instead of continuing his journey through this earthly Paradise, he went to look for a ship in Messina that might land him in Naples. From there he would return home on horseback by the shortest route through the cities. Most of the ships, however, were damaged by the storm and there was only a chance that one would sail by the following week. But a galley lay at anchor that was to sail for Venice on the morrow. How alluring: to see Venice, to return by water, to be at home two years sooner than he had planned—but then he would see no more of Italy! He lay awake the whole night, trying to decide. But the next morning he was sitting on a coil of rope and watching Messina grow smaller and smaller in the distance. "I will send my letter to Jan from Venice, otherwise I'll be in Ant-

werp before it is. And the first thing that I'll do is to visit my village!" he thought.

After many weeks, Venice rose, tender as a water-color, in the sunset, out of the mist and the water like a garden blossoming in the ocean. "Beautiful, beautiful! but not for me, a bit too magnificent for a peasant lad," he said on the second day. Here he greatly admired Tintoretto. And now he rode on, always drawing, into the Plain of Lombardy, into the hills, through the steep Dolomites over the Brenner Pass and then through the friendly, pious Tyrol. Now that the cooler air of the climate he knew surrounded him, he advanced more rapidly and easily. He remained nowhere longer than one night. When he left the mountains, he rode into the black forests and one day from a wooded hill he saw the Rhine! He threw his hat into the air! And after he had journeyed weeks and months, afoot and then again on horseback or by boat, he came through Aachen and Maastricht, to the Limburg Heath, He drank the hearty beer, black as coffee, in the fair city of Diest and in Scherpenheuvel he went to pray.

And now he had smelled his own stable.

It was snowing, it was freezing! "Good! That suits me exactly!" cried Pieter. "This is something quite different from Italy!" He stretched out his open hands to catch the snowflakes.

And two days later in the early afternoon of the first Sunday in January, with beating heart he drove in on a wagon, up to St, George's Gate of Antwerp. He was trembling with excitement. They were skating on the



frozen moat along the rampart. He laughed. He must draw that! Quickly he drew a few lines and little men on the paper. And now he rode into the good city of Antwerp. First of all into the Church of Our Lady to light a thick candle in gratitude! In front of the church along the beautifully carved gray stones sat, like fragments of eternity, the poor, the crippled, the lame and the beggars, whining for alms.



"The Italian painters have seen Jesus no doubt, but they have forgotten the poor of Capernaum! Our monkey-artists, too, of course! But I will paint you and I greet you!"

Twilight fell. Yes, it was still the good old city of Antwerp. But he had no time to look at it longer now. Straightway to Jan Nagel! He found Mirabella alone in the kitchen, playing cards in the brown light of the

oil lamp. "He is not at home," she said sadly, "he's been loafing for three days."

"I wrote him a letter from Italy. I couldn't send it any faster, so I brought it myself. Here it is. Ml come again to-morrow and . . . Maybe he's at Joseph Schlagkopf's?"

She shook her head. "No, he's been burned at the stake for sorcery," she said, "and since then Jan is finished, completely finished, without a soul," and she began to weep.

"You don't say, Turkey Hen!" Pieter cursed, aghast. . . . He could not say another word, could not grasp another idea. "I'll come again to-morrow." He staggered out. He stood in the cold, dark street, suddenly alone and deserted ; felt himself a stranger, lost and restless, like some one spied upon and pursued by some Baskwadder or other. Where should he go? He had imagined everything so gay here and now he felt the shudder of death. To be suddenly so alone! Should he go to Cock? But Cock would be sitting in his stately rooms among learned scholars and masters before whose arrogance he felt shy and abashed ; and what would he do there, with this grief that was strangling him!

Not knowing where to go, involuntarily, as though his feet had not forgotten the way, he went out of the city gate along the dark country road and walked into "The Magpie," noisy with its Sunday crowd. . . . What rejoicing! "The artist! The painter! Droll Pieter!" they cried.

An hour later he was sitting in his old room before the red flames of the hearth fire, weeping. "Poor Joseph, poor Jan!" So he sat for a long time and when he pushed back his chair, he saw his leather traveling coat, heavy with many drawings, "How happily Joseph might have lived somewhere off there, beneath a palm!" said Pieter, looking at a drawing of mountains. And he took out another drawing, and another, and another ; one after another they fell to the floor and so he recalled to memory a part of his journey. When he held in his hand the drawing which he had just made at St. George's Gate, he felt urged to draw the little figures clearly in ink and to add the wagons on the bridge, the towers behind the ramparts and the spectators who were laughing at a woman skater who had fallen down and exposed her bottom. But thinking sadly about the changes that had taken place during his absence, he put the following wise saying in rhyme beneath the picture:

"Upon the ice of Antwerp the city people skate
Across, around, and up and down, gaped at by every
one;
One slips, one falls, another succeeds in standing
straight.
Ah! learn from this my picture how we still choose to
run
To worldly things and slide thus, the foolish and the
wise,
On transitory pleasures, more brittle than the ice."

"Beautiful land," he said, deeply moved and full of enthusiasm. "My first drawing in this country that is



worth anything. There will be much still to reap! There is seed enough!" He looked around at all the drawings lying about him, glad of all the work that awaited him. "That requires a sign of the cross! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." And then, in a corner of this ice scene, he wrote: "P. *BRUEGEL* 1553."

* * *

Chapter IX

THE MERRY ART OF DRINKING

IN the crowded taproom of the tavern, "The Magpie," in the glow of many candles, the artists with their friends and other inquisitive guests, toppers and parasites, sat calling, laughing, drinking, while they awaited the six men from Brussels who were to compete in drinking with the famous painter, Frans Floris.

He was sitting there with an earthen jug before him and around him sat Mostaert, Cock, Hans Franckert, Hans Bol, Lucas de Heere, Pieter Brueghel, finished and half-baked artists, and his eager students who paid him twenty *gulden* a day. Back of them stood his hangers-on, the idly curious, toppers, gamblers, people with dry livers and other lovers of beer and wine. There was a noise like the beating of drums. Suddenly stocky, short-necked, broad-shouldered Frans Floris with his short blond beard and his—unfortunately!—reddening nose, arose, raised his foaming Frankfurter tankard on high and cried while his fine gray eyes sparkled challengingly: "One might almost think they were afraid, these drinkers from Brussels! Let them come! I will let a whole avenue of tankards like this roll down my throat and still stand up straight like a candle and paint one of my best pictures—one before which the world will kneel! They call me the Incomparable, the Flemish Raphael, but also the Flemish

Bacchus. Well, this latter name, too, I accept. To-day I'll show these famous contra-basses from Brussels my Titanic capacity. They shall burst before I give up. But where are they? They don't seem to be thirsty. Meanwhile I'll keep the way open!"

He whirled his tankard and was about to raise it to his lips when Cock's hand restrained him. "Stop, Flor! Remember it is our honor, too, that you must defend. It's not a question of the Flemish Raphael against Pieter or Jan, but Antwerp against Brussels. You've emptied two tankards, even more, while these fellows are as empty as the smock you've taken off and they have as powerful a draft as you. In the name of Antwerp, do not drink another drop now!"

"I shouldn't be the giant I am if I troubled about such spinsterish fears. I don't get drunk, merely happy. My knees never give in. Once, and once only, I fell down from drunkenness, but it was the drunkenness of great souls that overwhelms only saints and geniuses. It happened when my friend Michelangelo unveiled 'The Last Judgment.' Then I trembled, sweated and had palpitation of the heart; and that evening at the banquet at which the Pope and many Cardinals, princes and counts were present, at the third glass I broke down in the arms of my friend Michelangelo. But I was drunk with that sublime beauty which makes noble tears flow from our eyes. As for the rest, I would drink the whole fleet of Spain empty. Just look!"

He sprang on his chair and emptied his tankard while the people cheered him. There he stood, high above them all, with his white neck ruff and his black velvet

garment with rose-colored slashes, and rejoiced in his strength, his daring and his great fame.

Then the door was thrown open with a flourish and behind two bagpipe players entered, singing, the six formidable drinkers, the famous contra-basses, with feathers on their hats, merry and gay, with cold noses. A whole wagon load of people from Brussels followed, more toppers, parasites and friend of Faro.* They all crowded in so that everybody had to draw in his belly and his elbows. The room was so full that if any one had had a stroke, he would not have had room to fall.

After they had finished their song, they were greeted with loud acclaim ; they returned the greeting, apologized for their tardiness because their wagon had got stuck in the mud, spoke a few words to Floris and then sat down at a table where ham, cheese, mustard, radishes, pickled herring, dried fish and smoked meat were served, everything salty and sharp, to provoke and promote thirst. The fattest of the men from Brussels, their leader, nicknamed Pot-belly, who was slightly gray and had a round, warty face, crammed several slices of ham into his mouth and bit the head off a pickled herring.

"The head is the best of all, just as it is with rabbits," said Pot-belly. Four others said the same thing and followed suit ; but the fifth, a long thin chap, merely passed his tongue over his lips and was silent as a fish. He seemed to be the most stubborn foe, determined to win.

* *Faro* is the name of a well-known beer of Brussels.

"The homely servant girl and two clumsy, broad-shouldered serving men brought in seven round-bellied, foaming tankards. Floris arose and spoke: "I greet you, men of Brussels, who have come to be vanquished! Welcome! See, I will take my tankard last each time, so that you may be convinced that neither has it a false bottom nor was such or such a spice put into it. Choose your tankard!"

When each of the men with the comic faces made in the Land of Cockaigne held his tankard in his hand, Floris took his, held it on high and spoke: "In three drafts it must be emptied! Long live Antwerp!"

"Long live Brussels!" shouted the others—the sixth didn't even say so much as that, as if speaking had meant eating while he was bent on drinking. Then they drank! As the seven heads with tankards over their faces bent over backwards and the others looked on, silent and curious, Brueghel, who had come to get a good laugh, suddenly thought of St. Anthony: "They drown the God within themselves."

In three drafts the tankards were empty. The men of Brussels—all but the thin one called Onion—reached for the mustard, radishes and meat. Floris took a portion of each, consuming it while seven tankards were again brought in. After the second tankard Master Floris let a herring's back slide down his gullet and said to Pot-belly: "Because of this beer Emperor Charles was born in Flanders; when he was still an angel he was allowed to choose, Burgundy or barley beer, and he chose the golden growth of our Brabant fields! Therefore we dedicate this draft to him!"

And the third tankard disappeared in three drafts down their throats, gulping like those of snakes.

"With this beer I could drink ten Florisses under the table. If I should drink it for a month, my wife wouldn't need to smoke any more bacon, she'd just slice it from my paunch," cried Pot-belly, boastfully.

"The man who invented this beer deserves to be placed upon the pinnacle of heaven," declared another fellow from Brussels with a frog-mouth.

"And he'd fall down, he'd get so tipsy from it," said a little redhead with a strong chin. "But you can't drink me down! I was a brewer's apprentice for seven years and was chased away because the barrel was in me more than I was in the barrel and it didn't suit my boss that I never got drunk!"

"I'll drink till the beer is all gone," bragged the biggest of them all, a dark-haired colossus with high, straight shoulders, "and if anybody cheats here, I'll plant this knife in him." And he drove a dagger into the table top.

"I wanted to become a priest," explained another dark, powerful fellow with inflamed eyes, "a priest-butler in charge of the wine cellar, of course. If I hadn't broken my leg at the time, I should have been one, too. As it was, it became too difficult to limp down into the cellar} but the old Father who was chief butler said: We'll never get another like you. You never showed it, though you left nothing over for the other priests."

So each one boasted of his capacity and girth but

Onion solemnly emptied his tankard, said never a word, was even chary of laughing and merely passed his tongue over his lips so that he might lose no drop of the precious beer. The fifth tankard had been drunk and the men from Brussels were still as fresh and sober as though they were about to begin. Many Antwerpens lost courage. The beer was going to Florists head: he grew red in the face. But then only he began really to radiate; he looked up, grew blissfully tipsy and the true, merry Flor came to the surface. " I , " he cried, "the greatest painter of the Netherlands! the Incomparable! —it is not I who say this, it is written in the books—I am here drinking on a wager with ordinary contrabasses, hired toppers from Brussels. That's not worthy of me. But I do it to maintain the honor of Antwerp. And a great man must be able to do all things! Am I not a sculptor, an architect, a musician and a poet? And yet who can paint as much, as magnificently and as fast as I? I painted for Philip II, while he sat beside me, my 'Victoria' with figures of many warriors and captives, in six hours! Who can do the like? I feel the fire awaking in me and emitting sparks; the spirit is overpowering me! When I work, I live; when I play, I die; and when I drink, I want to work. Therefore: Drink!"

After the ninth tankard had been emptied, they all enjoyed a momentary intermission. Then came the tenth. The men from Brussels went on steadily eating ham, mustard and pickled herring—all but the thin one. The fat Pot-belly's laughter accompanied them

like the clicking of castanets. The friends of Antwerp were growing anxious and Floris, too, felt a bit alarmed when he saw the six sitting there so cheerfully and drinking on.

"Don't eat any more," Cock whispered into his ear. When the tenth tankard was raised on high the frog-mouthed fellow suddenly jumped up; a fountain gushed from his mouth and he fell down under the table like a wet rag.

"Ha!" rejoiced Floris, "the one who spoke of the pinnacle of heaven was the first to fall!"

They drank on. . . . After the tenth tankard the dark, powerful man who had wished to become a priest stammered: "Wait a moment, I'm going out." He staggered out and fell asleep, crouching in the light of the full moon.

"Four left!" exulted Flor. "But the fewer they grow, the stronger they are," chuckled Pot-belly. When the eleventh tankard was brought in, the red-haired brewer's apprentice looked at Flor smilingly, was about to say something jolly but tumbled forward and fell with his nose in the tankard. Flor was delighted and cried with a laugh: "He likes smelling better than drinking." The giant tried to get up and seized his dagger. "If I lose, I'll stab him!" he drived. He brandished the dagger but the fat leader punched him in the belly and the giant tumbled back like a broken plaster figure. "Two left!" cried Floris, and his courage and that of his friends grew. "Courage, Pot-belly and Onion!" the Brussels party called to them. "Courage, Flor!" called the Antwerpers. "The

Cookie-eaters" * would have preferred to fight for their contra-basses, but the "Sinjores" † were too numerous and had daggers too.

The twelfth tankard! At the first swallow, Onion the Silent got stuck and suddenly began to laugh and laugh uproariously ; he could not stop. First one and then another joined in the laughter and soon the whole hall was laughing. It sounded like a poultry yard full of hens wanting to lay eggs. "I didn't expect this of him," cried Flor. "So it lies between us two!" But now that the last of his side was laughing continuously, the fat leader no longer felt like laughing.

Then came the thirteenth tankard and Floris called to Pot-belly: "Twenty more such little tankards of this excellent beer for me! I greet you, double contra-bass, but soon you'll be under the table!" The fat fellow opened his mouth to reply but when he saw with amazement that Floris, standing upright, had emptied his tankard at a draft, tears suddenly flowed from his eyes and hung on his warts; he sighed, wiped away his tears and gave Floris his wet hand. "You have conquered," he said, "I can do no more. . . ."

It seemed as though the walls were afraid to support the storm of rejoicing that followed for they fairly shook. "A tankard for each of you," cried the victorious Floris who was now wearing—no one knew how it came about—a crown of grape leaves, "and for me a Frankfurt jug of good old Rhine wine. Saddle my horse! Come along, you fat son of Brussels, come out-

* Nickname for citizens of Brussels.

† *Great lords*, nickname for citizens of Antwerp.



side and see what I can do!" And straight as a candle Floris stepped out, through a double row of crowding beer lovers, directly to his white horse which his pupils had led out of the stable. The moon and the torches lighted his way. They brought him a full jug of wine and to show his skill in guzzling to all the spectators and especially to the fat fellow, he stood on one leg and emptied the jug at one draft. Then he mounted his horse and put his cap on backwards so that the feather hung down his back instead of down the side. With a sweeping gesture he stretched his arm forward: "Whoever would like to see the most beautiful picture being painted and to see me working like a sun, let him come along. When Aurora with her rosy fingertips touches the earth, I shall have painted a Venus born of the foam of the sea! Long live genius!" And all who were curious about this work of art and the parasites, who hoped for another tankard, ran along, and so did Pieter.

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Before Floris' beautiful house in Hospital Street they halted. The moonlight poured down upon its gable. There was a portal with pillars of gray marble in the classic manner, a loggia and arcades in the Italian style beneath which frescoes in coppei-color represented the liberal arts. With a sweeping gesture of his gloved hand, Floris addressed them: "Go in! This is the 'Burning Thornbush,' there is the fire which Prometheus stole from heaven: I share it with men." The crowd entered—artists, pupils and street rabble. He pre-

ceded them and showed them the magnificently furnished rooms by the light of the candles and torches which the pupils carried. "Here I sleep during my working hours—at other times I sleep with my wife," he said, leading them into a room shining with gilt leather and other glories. In the center stood a bed with ornate columns, rose-colored curtains and golden fringes, as though meant for a king. Beside it was the great studio in which a rich collection of pictures, textiles, tapestries, roses, vases, tankards and armor seemed in the glow of the candlelight to be lying as if half asleep.

A large white canvas, stretched on a frame, was placed on the easel and, while one of his pupils offered every one present a glass of white wine, Floris took his paintbrush and palette and was about to begin to paint, but again he felt impelled to say a few more words: "For a long time I have not been working, I have slept too long, drunk too much, sat around too much among my friends and received too many princes and counts. But that doesn't matter. I will catch up; I can do more in one hour than others can do in a week. It's the divine fire! I painted the Hercules Room for Claes in Markgrave Street in a fortnight: ten paintings, from here to there, in a fortnight! And now, before dawn, my adored Venus will greet the new day. I begin! Let some one play the guitar: music inspires art!" And he began to paint Venus in life size. First, with thin brown paint, he drew a graceful outline and within and around it he applied the forms and colors with in-

credible swiftness and skill, now the sky, then the flesh, then again the sparkling waves, the cupids and the dolphins surrounding the main figure.

"I am fire and flame!" he said continually and they looked on—amazed—but began to grow sleepy. The guitar sounded languid. Suddenly the door was flung open, a voice croaking like a raven was raised and there stood the little fat wife of Floris in her nightgown, with her hair done up in curlers and a flickering torch in her hand. Everybody was silent and listened.

"You scoundrel! You coward!" she cried, threatening with her fist. "Get out of here, clear out with this band of parasites! I don't want to see you again! I would rather be married to a cobbler than to such a drunkard who squanders his money on women and thieves and leaves his wife and children in debt. A beautiful house and no money! Who pays the taxes for this house? Get out with this rabble, or I'll call the night watch!"

Floris merely laughed and said jeeringly: "Good day, dear wife Clara! These are my friends! Ah, my friends, you probably can't understand a word since my wife is talking Greek? Fortunately I understand the language and will translate for you. She spoke just so to the Countesses of Egmont and Horn, who dined here with their husbands and the Prince of Orange, She said just now: 'Dear, sweet Flor, at last I see you again! Where have you been all this time, my beloved? There is a warm jug in my bed to warm your feet, for without you we cannot live nor be merry! Come quickly to me for my love is better than wine!'"

"You fool, you fool!" she croaked. "Are you beginning again with your Greek? But I will humiliate you even if the King himself were present." And she slammed the door, whimpering as she went.

Floris continued to paint busily; the guitar was now silent; and before the first rays of the sun trickled through the curtains, Venus actually stood there in all her glory, between dolphins, tritons and little cupids. "What do you think of it?" cried Floris, turning around proudly. But they were all asleep on the overstuffed chairs and benches—all but Pieter Brueghel, who had remained standing behind him in amazement and admiration.

"I am throwing pearls before swine," grumbled Floris peevishly. "You alone will be a great artist—if you stick to the great masters and not to your peasants. When are we going to see something of yours? A few Venuses and gods?"

"When you stop doing them, Master."

Floris laughed and fell asleep in his chair. Pieter gazed at the head of the artist. Gently he stroked his reddish face, murmuring, full of sympathy: "Poor bass viol; poor upstart, nourishing yourself on Michelangelo; poor Icarus soaring to heaven with wax wings, to the sun which melts them—I remember you drew the poor fool in a Rhenish picture. All you Renaissance artists are made of the same dough! Why don't you stay here on earth: the world is so beautiful! . . ."

And in his mind's eye he once more saw the beautiful Straits of Messina vividly before him; and down there in the waters, in the midst of all this splendor, he



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saw, helpless and tiny, the two rosy struggling legs of Icarus, who had fallen into the water! He shook off the sleepy feeling that was coming over him, arose and walked forth into the bright, awakening morning.

A new painting had begun to grow in him.

* * *

Chapter X

ILLNESS

ILL and limp and thin, Jan Nagel sat muffled in pillows and covers at the open window. The glistening Scheldt was crowded with ships this fair spring morning. "The Praise of Folly" lay open on his thin knees. Upon the window-sill lay other books: Plutarch, Thomas a Kempis, "Reynard the Fox," "Eulenspiegel," "The Legend of Beatrice" and Rabelais' "Pantagruel."

He glanced casually at the view and then again into his book. Now and then he closed his right eye wearily, but with a sudden jerk and shiver he would open it again. For months he had been struggling stubbornly against this eye which was constantly closing against his will.

Pieter sat near him, silent. For two hours they had been sitting there together in silence, needing no words.

Jan sat there like a plucked chicken, with his thin, scrawny neck and his stiff, dry hair around his bare pate. Pieter was turning over the leaves of an old book. Below they heard the noise of wagons and people.

After they had been sitting so a long time, Pieter arose and said: "Well, I must be on my way. Till tomorrow."

"What's the news?" asked Jan.

"Same old thing. Almost every day people are being burned at the stake—living torches!"

Jan growled, closed his other eye too, and cried brokenly: "I saw them burn Joseph Schlagkopf!" And he poured out his heart for the thousandth time: "And between two clouds of smoke, I saw his tortured face. Why did I have to go there! I heard his flesh roasting and hissing,—and then the smell of burned flesh! . . . The devil! The devil! . . . And the people were laughing about it. That broke my heart! • . ."

And after a silence he said reproachfully, opening his tired eye angrily: "I don't understand how you can stick to this priest-ridden church!"

"I don't understand it either," said Pieter dully. "It lies deeper in my heart than all I read, or hear or see.

"It is curious, Jan ; even though doubts sometimes assail me and rend me, though I believe everything and nothing and curse the Inquisition and everything connected with it or even smelling of it ; though I myself am full of evil desires ; in spite of everything I cling to my early faith and, after being tossed here and there, I always find it unchanged in my heart again. And then I thank God! For while Joseph Schlagkopf spoke or while any Anabaptist speaks, I am in their power, and for a while after, too: then I am rent in two and I must be careful not to cause trouble. Thank God, my heart is naturally rather timid or I should do strange things. Then I throw myself into my work, the inner struggle ceases, I forget it ; and when I have become

quiet and calm again, the parts that were torn asunder are joined anew and I am whole again.

"Yes, Jan, sometimes I would even like to be a saint. Last week it got hold of me very strongly, after I had seen a stained glass window, but it doesn't last long with me. Always I am Pieter Brueghel again. Nothing lasts long with me except work! Painting and drawing! I have work enough for a thousand years! I believe artists should seek nothing except much work and beautiful work. You used to tell me that so often: Work, work!"

Suddenly Jan growled, set on fire by those last words, "All else is nonsense." He began to rejoice; a flame, a star burned in his emaciated body. "Yes," he cried. "Work! Paint! Yes, I say it again and again, don't talk about God, but capture God in color. . . ." But as he said the words, the flame had died down again. Jan broke down as he looked at his thin fingers, and then he lamented like a poor wretch: "Oh, oh, I am completely burned out. I am falling into ashes. . . . God! God!" He cursed: "A few sparks, a few sparks now and then . . . but it doesn't last an hour. I no longer dance before my colors. I no longer bite into color! . . . I would like to be dead, dead like a rotten pear. . . , Ah, dear Pieter, how beautiful it used to be to tremble in a fever of color. . . . Now my palette slips from my thumb from sheer weakness."

He grasped Pieter's hand and let the tears flow from his deep, melancholy, gray eyes over his sunken, yellow face down into his bristly, stiff red beard.

Pieter knew what to do in such moments of depression. He took "Reynard the Fox" and began to read aloud—and Pieter read slowly and well:

"The pleasant feast of Pentecost was come;
 The woods and hills were clad in vernal bloom ;
 The full awakened birds from every tree
 Made the air ring with cheerful melody."

After a while Jan listened devoutly, ceased to struggle against his right eye and let it close quietly, but in his left there was the light of laughter.

* * *

Chapter XI

HANS FRANCKERT

PIETER now lived in Antwerp again, in a narrow alley behind the magnificent St. James' Church in the house of a pious old woman who was fortunately half deaf. He had come back into the city because he needed larger quarters, because it was better for his sales, because "The Magpie" had grown too noisy for him, because the innkeeper's wife was dead and the innkeeper was now married to a vixen, and for many other reasons that one always has at hand when one wants something. He worked hard for Cock, drawing fantastic conceptions that sprang from his present fancies or from those of the days of his youth ; deviltries, moralities, impressions from his* travels, landscapes, ships and peasant scenes, which Cock then had engraved and sold to great advantage. He also designed the paintings of children's games, proverbs, Temptations of St. Anthony, Ways of the Cross, The Land of Cockaigne, but he never succeeded in finishing them } it took too long for him. He had such an excess of material that he never could catch up; for him this was a beautiful time for work, with material in abundance and models in superabundance. "I need twenty arms," he cried. He worked like a mole. And he would not have got out of the house for days at a time, if the genial



and inquisitive Hans Franckert hadn't taken him by the arm and dragged him off to drink beer somewhere, to take part in a kermess, to visit the girls, or the mystery plays or the literary sessions of the Chamber of Rhetoricians, or to look at a procession, signboards, pilgrimages or old castles. Hans was always discovering something new, and so the supply always increased. Then there were Hans' spicy tales, his love affairs and his banquets! The barn was full to overflowing! . . .

Pieter was standing at his window in his shirt, looking out upon St. James' tower, bright in the moonlight, and at the shining roofs of the city. He was breathing in the fresh fragrance of spring after a heavy, furious rainstorm. He could still hear it dripping in gutters and barrels. All the stars and a slender segment of the moon shone in the heavens. He stood musing, absorbed in the scene. In these moonlit houses, beneath all these roofs—fragile covers which, like folded hands, must sustain the power of the heavens and of the elements—there was now darkness and peace; every one lay sleeping. And the flowers, too, in the little gardens and in the window boxes were closed. In this youthful, luscious night dwelt a mighty spirit of goodness as though, above the roofs, the peaceful breath of sleeping humanity had taken on form and color: quiet, the pure, azure quiet toward which every one aspired—the long-desired consummation: "It is fulfilled"

And then the sun would rise again to waken men, like the flowers wet with dew, for the daily battle. Then you would again hear the same old: "I am right

and you are wrong." Then the eternal conflict would once more begin, pitilessly: rich against poor, fat against thin, treasure chests against savings banks, body against soul, sin against virtue, neighbor against neighbor, country against country—and every one thinking only of himself, and the big fish eating the little fish. So it goes on incessantly until one would like best to wander off into the mountains and to live alone like a hermit. And yet, in the heat and dust of this battle one could find in everything something of that spirit which draws men upward ever again to pure happiness and to God, as if to the restoration of a shattered divine order. Now, in this universal slumber one could feel something of the peace for which every human being longs. Pieter sighed. But suddenly a voice called up to him from the street below: "Hello, Pieter, are you ready?"

"Yes, Hans, I've got to put on my breeches and find my fishing rod."

They went fishing.

* * *

The sun was peeping over the woods as the two men walked towards the Herenthals Gate. Red-golden in the mist and tinting the sky with delicate colors, it rose on the horizon like happiness unforeseen, strewing diamonds over the lush green growth below. Strings of pearls dropped from the trees and the devout murmur of prayers on rosaries hung in the poplars.

Hans Franckert, rosy-faced in his blond wreath of beard, regarded the landscape through Pieter's eyes and kept silent in admiration, like Pieter; but the silence



lasted too long for him, and he began to tell stories again out of his inexhaustible supply. He was a true Nuremberger who liked to laugh, eat and drink, preferably in the company of artists and scholars. He had composed several sonnets which had been praised for their purity of form. For fear lest he might later make worse ones, he simply stopped writing poetry but he took pleasure in calling himself a poet and was a member of the Chamber of Rhetoricians. He was now a wholesale dealer in colonial products. He was known on the exchange as a reputable merchant and was highly esteemed by artists because he bought a great deal. He had written a cookbook and liked to be flattered as a connoisseur of the table, good food, cooking and eating. He always provided the meats and the mushrooms himself, and at great banquets he would run into the kitchen every ten minutes to look after things. He was proud of his ability to recognize a wine with eyes closed and from its fragrance alone to tell its origin and its year. It was a pleasure to watch him taste wine ; first he would look at the half-filled glass with a tender glance, slowly inhale its bouquet, shut his eyes for a moment and with closed lids sip the wine, letting it slide slowly down his throat, look reverently at the empty glass, pass his tongue over his palate, close his eyes again as though to lose himself in this blissful memory, and then say in a whisper, as if it were a secret, to one of those present: "God is good."

His beautiful Italian wife who came from white Verona found it hard to get used to the country here. She was sensitive to the rough northern climate and



when the sun shone, she would let it bathe her splendid, bare shoulders, "i l mio sole d'Italia." She sang to the lute. Hans Franckert thought her beautiful and was madly in love with her, even though he could make love to others too, and liked to caress a soft chin where he found it. He called her *Mia Madonna*, but he would have liked better to have her gentle and dreamy, quieter, with less pathos and less play-acting ; but he did not tell her so. He called Italy the Land of Chimney-sweeps. So they squabbled continually but only on the surface, not about each other's faults but about the faults of each other's country. When their child was baptized in Antwerp, each was glad that it had not been born in the land of the other. He was named neither Giovanni nor Johann, but was called Jan. He too greatly loved this country, the heath and the Scheldt, but above all the childlike, open-hearted, devout, warm Flemish people.

Hans had at once found Pieter to be a man after his own taste ; a fellow like that, full of a jumble of contradictory sensations and feelings, who knew how to express them in a thousand drawings, suited him exactly. He warmly called him "Brother," and Pieter then simply said "Brother," too.

The two "brothers," Hans and Pieter, now went a-fishing. Pieter of course had his sketchbook with him.

And how glorious it was to sit carefree, at some quiet, motionless canal, that stretched, bright and gleaming, through the flat land; to see a clean tavern near by, with lindens before the door and three merry daugh-

ters in the household ; to stretch out full length in the grass, as though a part of the earth, and fix one's eyes upon the peaceful distance ; to follow the flight of a heron or a cloud—and to forget the fish that is biting.

What delight it is, too, to pull up a pike, to throw out the hook again with new bait and new courage and to feel convinced that one will bring home a full basket!

But the fish did not bite. And it was really not necessary. Pieter began to draw the old, white willows—that was what he had come for to-day—and Hans was in the kitchen with an apron tied around him, busy at frying a complicated kind of pancake containing ham, malmsey wine and young soy beans. The three daughters helped him watch over it, and now and then he would pluck, like a cherry, a kiss from their lips. Then they would eat and drink; play cards with a driver and a sailor, who were of course drawn, too, and added to Pieter's sketches with the proper colors written beside them: bright-brown coat, black breeches, blue waistcoat, dirty-white shirt with red stripes, yellow hair. After that they went rowing with two of the girls, past the contemplative water-lilies. And the astonishing thing about the fresh air along the water's edge is that your stomach immediately feels empty again. And so to another meal: a calf's head with a sour sauce that was green with tender herbs. But Pieter—he couldn't help himself, he had to leave Hans alone with the girls and the food—felt like lying down again, stretched out full length, as though to feel himself one with the earth, his fingers pressed into the soil like a child at the breast of its mother.

Toward evening, saturated with the fields and the

light and the air, they started home with empty nets but full of good thoughts. Hans bought some fish at a dealer's at the Schutter place, and so, with two big fish in their net, they came home.

* * *

There was a kermess at St. Job's. Scarcely had the procession entered when the bagpipes began to hum, the flutes to rejoice and the drums to beat. The merry crowd danced arm in arm, full of sunlight and unrestrained joy. There on a wooden stage built up on empty beer vats, the mystery play of little Marie of Nymwegen was shown for the edification of the populace, and after that a juicy farce that made one feel at once like taking a girl in one's arms.

The booths steamed and smelled of pancakes and hot sausage. Others sold rosaries, candles, toys, pictures, songs and book. The Play of St. George was given. There was shooting with the crossbow at the bull's eye or at the birds on the windmill. A fool with bells amused the children; and here and there people danced, chatted, sang, drank, played boisterously, kissed and fought in every way and fashion. The people streamed in and out, offering sacrifices and praying, giving alms to the beggars and cripples, and performing their devotions at the fourteen stations of the Way of the Cross, around the church. The hot sun burned down upon all, and now and then a cool breeze came along which sent the sand whirling up in little columns and whipped the colored pennants into graceful folds.

"The farmers to their kermess are true,
Though they must fast the whole year through,"

Pieter rhymed scornfully, standing beneath a linden tree and getting the noisy crowd down on paper with swift strokes.

"Hear my words, but do not follow my example. You didn't stay at home yourself! And it is better to die with a fat kermess in one's stomach than to dry up of boredom!" said Hans solemnly.

"You're right! I know it by my thirst!" cried Pieter.



"But I want to win that tankard!" exulted Hans. And in a jiffy they were bowling with the peasants. In order to get about more freely at the kermess, they had both dressed as peasants. Pieter, who had been a marker long ago, was especially lucky and he kept knocking down all the ninepins again and again. After they had at last quenched their thirst, they watched the maids coming from the various farmyards to the kermess,

with or without a sweetheart. They wore snow-white caps, their mouths were ready for laughter, they smelled healthily of the stable and of smoke, like hams. Pieter and Hans went looking for the very young, tender ones who had come without a swain: they got hold of four at a stroke—the bigger the crowd, the greater the fun. They danced round dances with them, boisterous wreath dances, drank, danced again, shining with perspiration and pleasure, went along the booths to buy sweetmeats, then into "The Three Crowns" to eat sausage and boiled rice . . . and then back to the dance! Hans told some of his *ten* thousand and one tales, there was more dancing, and then—for at a kermess, amid four graces, the hours pass all too swiftly—the girls were taken home, singing and kissing, through the warm fields of grain and the steaming meadows to their farms. The dogs barked and beneath the serene sky, studded with stars, their singing sounded like the crowing of cocks.

When everything grew quiet around them, they heard still other singers on other roads. And when the last girl had been kissed—the clock was just striking two—the two "brothers," arm in arm, started back toward Antwerp, laden with many drawings, full of fun, beer and a mighty drowsiness.

They agreed that each in turn might sleep for the distance of ten trees. Good ; so they went on. Hans sleeps with head forward and when they had reached the tenth tree, Pieter woke him; then he could sleep while Hans stayed awake. And so they kept turns until the morning colored the sky with fiery bands of clouds. Then they dipped their heads into a brook, to the great



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terror of the frogs. Pieter joined in the song of a lark, soaring on high, for he was standing before a new horizon full of work.

"Next Sunday we'll go to the kermess at Hoboken!" said Hans, smacking his tongue.

* * *

Chapter XII

BERTHA

THE two "brothers" took their way through the Deurne Gate very early in the morning for the wedding was to take place far off in the Kempen district at Magerhal. When they had left the last house behind them, they took off their cloaks. There they stood and made fun of each other to see themselves in peasant clothes with great, hobnailed boots, white cotton stockings much darned at the knees, red waistcoats, shirts without collars, hands dyed brown, Pieter with a green, and Hans with a red velvet hat. Hans, with his yellow garland of beard around his round face and Pieter with a brown St. Nicholas beard and their own natural, red faces—they looked like two genuine, unadulterated peasants in their Sunday best.

"I am Andrew Poundcake, the miller of Cowtailmill on the Maas. Don't forget what you've learned, and don't give yourself away! Let's hear you say it," ordered Hans.

And Pieter said, in singing tones like the farmers from the Maas district: "'Day, my dear little cousin. I hasten to congratulate you on your wedding," and Hans added: "We heard of it through a traveling draper." They poked each other in the ribs and almost split their sides with laughing.

They went on and vowed to drink a tankard in every

tavern along the way, in honor of the earthworm of Magerhal ; for that region is such wretched, dried-up country that the people took the first lobworm they found and chained him to the town hall, as one of nature's wonders.

It was very necessary for them to drink, for the sun was burning down and groaning over the quiet countryside of heath and pine forest} the air was hot as an oven and every good jug of cool beer that they poured down their parched throats, they diligently sweated out again. Pieter enjoyed the heat, the beer and the jolly tavern signs by the wayside. "Art! Beautiful art!" he cried, admiring the radiant light flooding the world. But Hans complained as he puffed along: "Food doesn't taste good when the weather is so warm. Ah, I'd rather tramp through the snow than through this soft sand. Pff! Pff! I say, do you remember that time in Zwyndrecht on the Scheldt? That was a lark! And nobody recognized us, even though the farmer from whom I had bought two hams sat next to us."

"What a pity I didn't have my sketchbook along that time!" cried Pieter. "But Pve got it with me this time. It shall be heavy with all that goes into it today!" And he told Hans he had drafted two wedding scenes in oil, but had not gone on with them because Cock was always demanding more drawings.

Cock sold the copper-plate prints of these drawings like hot cross-buns. Every traveler sent several of them home or took some along ; and in the houses of burghers and peasants these drawings, with rhymes and prov-

erbs added, hung like precious stories on the walls, over the hearth or on the tall backs of the benches. Pieter went on telling of his work and his plans ; he told of the paintings he wanted to do: weddings, a carnival, church processions, all the proverbs, the Fall of Icarus, Mount Calvary, kermesses; and he became excited, impatient to get to work once more, and complained that this feast was again going to set him back a day or two.

"It's seed, seed, seed!" cried Hans. "Everything you see makes you richer. Some time or other it will all slip from your paintbrush like an egg! Just remember the view of the Straits of Messina and the other things in Italy. For you, seeing is working."

"But one could die of it too! I let the Fall of Icarus take place in that Italian landscape. But he is so small amid all that beauty that he can scarcely be seen ; his head's in the water and you can only see his legs struggling. He isn't noticed by anything or any one ; that's his greatest punishment, the fool! And when I painted the peasants in the foreground, I was thinking of my father,—I don't know why, but I liked it that way."

"That's so strange about you: you are full of contradictions. You are always praising the wonderful composition of the Italians and admiring their skill in directing everything so harmoniously and easily to a center of interest or focus—and you have no focus yourself in any of your pictures! With you, every thing or every figure in your many paintings and drawings is of equal value. With you the focus is every-

where. You are a contradiction in everything. You praise the Italians—and there isn't a sign of their influence in your work. You always want to go traveling and you're hardly out of the gate when you whine to be back home again. You always preach morality and aren't much better than I am. When doubt takes up its abode in you, I always hear you talking about God. While your mouth says one thing, your heart is thinking of the opposite! You're a queer fellow! Come, we have to drink on that: To Janus with the two faces!" They walked on toward a tavern.

"And what about you?" Pieter inquired mockingly.

"I read Thomas a Kempis," said Hans. "He said man is inconsistent and the flesh is weak! I am too, thank God! I'd be sorry to have it otherwise} but only my confessor knows this about me. But you're a grown-up child: you show everything like a poor player who lets everybody see his cards. But please, in the name of all your drawings, don't change. It is only because you are so that your art is so, too. Through your drawings I read your heart. And if you were to hide your heart, then we'd only get to see a few manikins. Come, Pieter, don't trouble about it. God is good, and there's another tavern!"

And so, saturated with the heat, the sun and beer, red and perspiring, they came to a secluded farm at Magerhal. Many guests had already arrived, and all were awaiting the bride who was just being adorned with a veil and a crown. The two "brothers" politely made her a deep bow, rattled off their good wishes in a language that she could scarcely understand and as a

wedding present gave her a pewter pitcher and a pair of silver clasps for her cloak. Everybody thought the presents so beautiful and so expensive that the two "Cousins" were at once held in high esteem. The bride was large and of the color of red cabbage ; she had a modest smile and would soon be a mother; the bridegroom was an elderly, lean, gray peasant, who could not see very well and had to be addressed through a speaking trumpet, but he was very rich.

"They want to make him a father to get his money away from him," Hans whispered to Pieter. To the bride's parents they said, both talking at once in a kind of Limburg dialect: "'Day, Uncle and Aunt Poundcake. We're bringing our dear cousin this little present."

"I hardly know you," answered the farmer, proud and shy.

"Well," said Hans, "we're quite closely related. The niece of the sister of your great-grandfather married the brother of my cousin, whose mother was the sister of my first wife's father, and this one here"—pointing to Pieter—"is the son of our uncle."

"Oh, yes," the father laughed proudly and the mother nodded while she held the pewter pitcher tight in her hand, "we have so many relatives; there are some everywhere. I couldn't count them."

"I can sometimes hardly keep them straight myself," replied Pieter, "and of course Uncle Hans may have forgotten several cousins in counting them up just now. But my mother often told me about you although she did not know you."

"And even if you weren't relatives at all," the scrawny mother decided, now holding the silver cloak clasps, too, in her hand, "you'd be welcome just the same. You must come along to church and stay here for the feast afterwards."

"And how is the cattle?" asked Hans. Here they had arrived at their common passion: feed and cattle—and human beings had lost all importance for them. They were worth seeing, these peasants and their wives, lean or broad-shouldered, round as a ball or thin as a spindle, with faces red and shining like apples or gray and wrinkled like walnuts, with deep folds in the cheeks and many little lines on their dark necks, with cracked hands and with fingers made shorter from much work. Ah, Pieter liked them } he loved them in spite of their many faults—hadn't city people faults too? But their nearness to nature, their oneness with the earth, their primitive force was so overwhelmingly beautiful, it spoke so clearly in their carriage and their gestures, in their hands and faces and in the glance of their eyes: they were living plants. Had not this passion to portray life possessed him, he felt that he would have become a peasant, a simple peasant rooted in the soil. Reverently he stroked the peasant's dress he wore. Then they went to church in a procession, behind the music of the bagpipes. On the way back they visited all the taverns in the village and then the feast was held in the big barn.

"Now it means keeping my eyes open and working," said Pieter to Hans. "You keep them busy and I'll draw." He sat at a corner of the table and could look

across the whole party. It was a long table with about seventy-five people around it and the children were given their bowls on the floor. Ah, but it was a fine scene to paint! He recalled all the "Last Suppers" in Italy, and the "Marriage at Cana" by Tintoretto of Venice, who also liked to portray his people sitting at long tables, seen from a corner. Pieter had his sketch-book between his knees, but he did not draw a line. He was sitting beside a girl whom he had to look at silently because of her simple beauty. And now that he was once more suddenly seized by his love for country life and was longing passionately for his own village, the idea occurred to him—as if he had been thinking the matter over for months—to marry this girl whose name was Bertha. How beautiful it would be to live with her in the midst of the heath and to paint in her peaceful, childlike presence—he was thinking of her gentle, blue eyes as he mused in this waking daydream. What more did one need than such a quiet, gentle, modest wife, almost a child as yet, and one's painting? She was so innocent, in her white cap and her close-fitting red bodice, with her little mouth whose upper lip remained open like a rabbit's. She had nothing to say and only looked at him. But eyes are potent! These confused him completely; and in halting words—just to say something—he told her of Italy in his usual language, for he had forgotten all about the Limburg dialect and she did not notice it. He felt himself gradually losing himself and melting away in her being. "Bertha, I love you," he said suddenly in the midst of a sentence. "Oh, sir . . ." she sighed, shyly. Then



he noticed his mistake, began to speak the dialect once more, and then took her hand. "Come," he said caressingly, "come outdoors with me ; I have something to say to you."

Hans was telling jokes incessantly, so that all the people around him were shaking with laughter, and drinking steadily for he could not eat this peasant fare—except the ham.

Pieter walked with Bertha along the fields of grain and began to tell these blue eyes that still kept looking at him happily and a bit stupidly and conquering him, how much he loved her ; in fact, he began almost to excuse himself. She did not know what to reply, but seemed to enjoy his telling her so ; and when he confessed to her, as he took her two hands in his and looked into her blue eyes, "Bertha, I want to marry you; you must be my wife," she closed her eyes, let her head fall a little to one side and allowed him to kiss her tenderly and passionately.

The sun had already set, but there was still a greenish glow in the burning sky; and in the twilight now creeping over the heath, sweet wild odors spread over the earth. The world lay before them great and silent. Pieter felt as he put his arms about her that happiness always comes unexpectedly, like misfortune, and is just as simple. "Here in this quiet solitude, in a little straw-thatched house, to live with you and paint, and grow my own radishes and cabbage!" He told her who he was and asked where she would meet him on the following Sunday.

Nothing surprised her and she found everything

beautiful and good. "At the second crossroads, coming from Antwerp?" she asked shyly.

"Yes, wait for me there ; I'll be there at three o'clock;5 then we'll set the wedding day, seek a place for our house and then we can spread the news."

They returned. Behind the barn he gave her another solemn kiss, and then went with her among the people who had formed a big circle outdoors, in the light of the torches, to admire the jolly dances which Hans was performing with the tall bride. . . .

When Pieter and Hans were walking home in the sultry night, amid the fragrance of turpentine from the pine forest, Hans laughed: "I invited the peasants to my wedding on the Maas, in October. I told them that I was getting married again and they're coming. We'll have to watch them, eh? We'll die laughing!"

"And they won't come in vain," said Pieter, "for on that day I shall marry Bertha." And he set forth his plans to Hans.

Hans ridiculed him with no end of jokes and sang satirical songs about this love affair until they came to the gates of Antwerp.

* * *

Until now Pieter in his whole life had longed for only three things so ardently, restlessly, desperately yet happily. First it had been Antwerp, then Italy, and now it was Bertha.

Never before had he adorned himself as he did now. He carefully dressed his long beard, bought himself **new** boots and a new feather for his black velvet hat.

He arrayed himself in black velvet and wore a sword, yellow gloves and what he had always thought too troublesome—a high, stiff ruff, like a white dahlia, about his neck!

He, the peasant boy, dressed himself like a knight, like a prince. He seemed a bit ridiculous to himself, but it was for Bertha! His heart had been singing for joy the whole week; he felt as young as a canary bird and had not had the slightest stomach ache! "My magic goddess, who releases me from earth!" he cried. For Bertha, this tender, slender, stupid dear girl, innocent as a daisy, he could not make himself beautiful enough! Oh, to be a king for only a day and to place a rich crown upon her white cap! "To serve you as a monk serves the Madonna!" he sighed. Never had he been so happy! And without telling any one anything about it, he hired a cinnamon-brown horse with a fox-tail and rode, without his sketchbook, through the scorching heat of noon to Bertha.

The wide heath with its fragrance of dark pine forest, the silence, the heat, the motionless clouds, the feeling of Sunday and in the distance a dear girl expecting him, made him rejoice. He felt like a giant, felt himself virginal, new, freshly awakened and teeming with life, like Michelangelo's Adam. Bertha had brought about all this!

With head turned sidewise his horse trotted over the sandy, burning road. And there, the girl with the big eyes and the white cap, in a bodice red as a radish, a green pleated skirt, and a nosegay of cornflowers in

her hand, was Bertha! He kissed her and he kissed the flowers.

"Now I know it for sure," he told her, folding her joyfully in his arms, "you are going to be my darling little wife!"

They walked on, leading the gentle horse behind them, over the narrow roads, past the moor, or sat in the cooling shadows of the pine forest. Skillfully he wove her a crown of pine needles and heath grasses—for had he not woven many such, years ago, for his sweethearts on the Dommel? The more he looked at her, the more he marveled and grew happy. She smiled always and thanked him with her blue eyes. She said "Yes" and "No," had no other words—sighed and smiled. He himself had only the same thing to say over and over again, and so he passed the time with kisses and caresses. . . .

Now she was sitting on his horse with the little crown on her head, and he was leading the horse by the rein. Every five steps he would look up at her with a devout smile. And so they remained a long while on the solitary heath, until the sun disappeared behind lofty rosy storm clouds. Pieter led her back to the crossroads. There they exchanged lingering kisses and took leave until the following Sunday. Here she would be waiting for him and then they would go together to her parents, little peasants who had only one cow, to arrange the wedding. At that she sighed sadly, while he held her hand: "I dreamed last night of cats."

"Yes, and . . ."

"That means treachery . . ." she said sadly.

Pieter consoled her and they kissed again. It was only after many stars had studded the sky that they were both at peace again.

After he had ridden off, he looked around once more. There she stood in the middle of the road, looking after him. The white nodding cap was a vague, pale dot against the black pine forest. He halted for a moment. "Beautiful," he said happily. "I can scarcely believe it—that everything is so beautiful and so simple."

He went off at a quick trot to escape the storm, for he wanted to wear these princely clothes again next Sunday when he visited her.

He rode through Wyneghem in the sultry darkness. He was to meet Hans Franckert at the kermess there—to go home together, thought Pieter—to remain there together, thought Hans.

He rode through the village, lighted by torches and oil lamps, where the people were dancing wildly and boisterously to the music of bagpipes ; but the pure love and the simple picture of Bertha which he carried in his heart made him feel a profound distaste for all this whirling and jumping; it seemed clumsy and beastly.

The sweating crowd and their warm breath made the sultry air heavy and dirty. Seen from his horse, high above their heads, it all seemed—in the red light of the torches, beneath the brooding storm—to be a part of hell. "I'll not stay here," he said, filled with disgust. He looked for Hans. There, before the tavern, "The Horse Bayard," he was sitting consuming beer and sausage, with the fat village brewer, several other men and four loud-laughing girls.

Hans went to meet him. "At last! It certainly took a long time, this visit to Bertha! My God! but she must be a sticking-plaster! . . ." And then Hans almost fell over laughing when he saw Pieter in his princely clothes. "She must be a regular witch to get you to button on a double ruff} a witch to keep you away so long from beer and dancing! Tell us about it! Tell us about this maid of the heath! Of course you're as tired of her now as of cold boiled rice!"

"Come along with me," said Pieter, "I don't want to stay here. I'll tell you all about it on the way! I want to get home before the storm."

"And I, after the storm," cried Hans, laughing. "I'm sitting with the brewer and Master Verdicht, the burgomaster of Wyneghem, a grand fellow! He's had experiences! He can drink! Come, to hear and see and taste! Wonderful beer!"

"No, I'm going on," said Pieter abruptly. "Will you come along?"

"The evil hand has touched you," asserted Hans. "I must see this Bertha who can get you to pass by a kermess without even a jug of beer and without a dance! And you such a good dancer . . ."

"I'm going," said Pieter.

"Ah, come, just a little tankard," Hans coaxed. "I never saw you so stubborn before. Your eyes will pop out of your head! I've found a fine fat, juicy morsel for you. An old friend of yours! We've been drinking your health! And," whispered he, "if I hadn't refrained because she had such beautiful memo-

ries of you, I would have taken her for a walk in the meadow! Lord, boy, how that woman loves you!"

"Who is it?" asked Pieter, eager and curious.

"Have you had so many sweethearts? Well, so much the better} we've got to create happy memories for ourselves. Tell me, didn't you once live in 'The Magpie'?"

"Anna!"

"So you haven't forgotten her either! She's the one! She's expecting you. She is dancing over there now. And you may expect her any day now that she knows where you live!"

"How do you know that it is Anna?" Pieter asked, suddenly becoming embarrassed.

"From her tongue, for she can't write. Or did you think that we drank our beer in silence? You can do that, but not I."

"She probably told you a pack of lies—she can't help herself," said Pieter, evoking the image of Bertha to protect him against a darkness that seemed threatening. "Listen, Hans, tell her that she must not come to my quarters. She has no business there. She must not come. I won't have it!" He grew alarmed. He felt himself borne up by a wave from a solid foothold. He lost his assurance. "Hans, dear Hans, you absolutely must tell her that . . . that . . . but no, I must tell her myself, or she won't listen."

Pieter dismounted. They ordered more beer and after he had shaken hands with the talkative, lean burgomaster and the groaning brewer, he sat down while

the girls giggled, still holding the horse's bridle. He was conscious that he was sitting there with the eager desire to see Anna again. It reminded him of an artery that had been stopped and that begins to bleed afresh. He could have wept with anger, for he knew that for hours he would now be carrying a vague foreboding in his heart, like a thorn.

The burgomaster was telling stories, the girls were giggling, the brewer laughing out loud, and Hans nudged Pieter again and again in his enjoyment of them—but Pieter was not listening. He sighed. He felt he should have gone on. But there came Anna!

Flushed, laughing and tired, with wisps of hair hanging from beneath her cap, she sank into a chair. "Here she is," said Hans.

She arose, embarrassed at seeing a gentleman like this. "'Day, sir ; is it you, Pieter?" she asked, amazed. She sat across the table from him and while she laughed at the jokes of the burgomaster, she constantly ogled and smiled at Pieter.

And he, alas, could not resist girlish eyes, especially not when those eyes had once before destroyed his peace of mind and it had been so beautiful. The old temptation again overwhelmed him. During the intervening years Anna's beauty had grown more opulent } she was in full bloom, no longer childlike, but still like a fresh fruit, a really beautiful woman, with long black lashes around her gray eyes. He was deeply moved. As a reminder of the early days of their acquaintance, she still had the same clumsy, red hands. And at the same

moment he experienced again the mild evening when she had smelled of cow's milk and he had admired her white neck.

"Not yet married?" she asked him, apparently uninterested.

"No," he laughed } but he did not add that he was planning to be. "And you?"

"In October," she whispered across the table, and then went on laughing with the others at the long-nosed burgomaster's story. She was very pretty!

"Shall we dance?" he asked. "I have something to tell you." For he did not want her to visit him. He tied his horse to a ring in the wall; but when he was dancing with her and felt her swaying shoulders beneath his fingertips, he forgot to tell her.

Bertha! He remembered Bertha. But is it a sin to exchange a few pleasant words in the meantime with an old acquaintance? Moreover, he intended to tell Bertha all about it next Sunday. The thought reassured him, and he pressed Anna's hand harder.

"And where are you living now?" he asked.

"In Antwerp. I am employed there," she said, to his amazement, "in Coppenholle Street, by two old people, Dierck, just across from the bakery . . . until October. Then I'm to be married."

"Are you going home to-day?"

"Yes, later on, with my bridegroom, if he comes. He had to bring in the hay for his master in Wommelghem, before the storm comes,—otherwise I shall go alone."

"May I take you home then?" Pieter asked quickly.

She answered neither yes nor no, but asked: "Do you remember 'The Magpie'?"

He collected himself, tried to carry it off lightly but found himself plunging into it more deeply. They danced again and then drank the good beer together—bottled happiness. He pressed her hands and kissed her mouth while dancing. He was wholly in Anna's power—Bertha he remembered only now and then, as a vague glimmer, like a fish beneath the water—and both of them hoped and said that the bridegroom would not come now so that they might go home together.

Then the storm broke; it came with a crash of thunder, sharp streaks of lightning and the roar of a heavy rain. It seemed as if this earthly globe would crack beneath the noise of the thunder. But the horse was in the stable, and they sat in the sultry taproom, close together, with the others, drinking, singing, caressing each other and whispering. His white double frill hung crushed and limp from perspiration beneath his long, brown beard and his face was red and glowing like an oven.

When the storm had passed, a pleasant, moist freshness, full of the fragrance of hay and flowers, lay over the world, after the heat of many weeks. It was a joy to breathe in it and to go walking! "Let the horse stay there, I'll have it fetched to-morrow!" Pieter said to the tavern keeper, who winked at him meaningly when he saw Anna on his arm. "Your bridegroom probably won't come now," said Pieter.

"No, he won't come now," said Anna. "Come, let's go home." And they went off without saying a word

to the others, arm in arm beneath the fresh, clear, starry sky, toward Antwerp. It is only a short way from the village of Wyneghem to Antwerp; but when one has found some one again of whom one once said: "She might have made you a good wife," then the way can be a very long one.

He called himself a blockhead for not looking up



Anna long ago. What a gentle, sturdy woman she was, mighty as a mountain! How harmless and simple was Bertha in comparison; one had to give her a push to start her moving. He thought: "One can only judge wisely by comparing." He kissed Anna but he knew definitely that he would marry Bertha. He had promised and he loved her—but why was she not as lively as Anna? But he must not think of Bertha now! To-

morrow the affair with Anna would be over and then he would draw up his love for Bertha, untouched and unsullied, from the depth of his heart.

At last they entered the city gate and came to St. James' Church. The streets were silent and dark, and at the corner of Toad-Moat they saw the night-watchman disappearing with his lantern and lance.

"I live here behind the church," said Pieter. "Come, I'll take you to Coppenholle Street."

"I don't live there," she whispered, as though she were afraid of waking something in the silence.

"What? but you said . . ." he, too, whispered.

"I live in Brecht, six hours from here. I am going back."

Suddenly he understood all } he was deeply disappointed.

"So, you still tell lies . . . still . . ." His voice grew loud with indignation.

But Anna boldly laid her hand on his mouth and whispered: "I've told you before: for you, I would lie myself into Hell. When Mr. Franckert told me that you were coming, I made my plan at once; I wanted to be near you, go with you, kiss you and love you . . . and now I am going back . . . come, one more kiss; perhaps we shall never meet again."

An oil lamp standing before a statue of the Madonna threw a faint light upon her features and upon some of the carving on the dark-gray church.

"She is beautiful," he thought. "Shall I send her off like a dog into the dark night?"



"Come with me—you can spend the night at my place," he said coldly and with an air of reserve,

* * *

He sat in his studio, by the open window. The night air poured in sweet as balsam. The dark, voluted outline of St. James' Tower rose mightily into the starry sky.

Ah, everything had turned out differently from what he had thought. There lay his white neck ruff, limp as a rag; the feather on his hat was crushed; and upstairs Anna lay sleeping in his bed. He was to call her at seven, because she wanted to be at home early.

He tried to think of Bertha, to desire her; but he merely thought with a sigh of the coming day. "God is tempting me greatly," he felt. He wanted to pray. "It's of no use anyway," he decided.

Stroking his beard, he awaited the morning with painful foreboding.

* * *

And it happened just as he had feared; and though Hans cursed him soundly and called him a silly ass, a coward and a babe in arms—Anna remained living with him.

* * *

The next Sunday a girl in a white cap stood at the broad, lonely crossroads on the way to Magerhal with yellow flowers in her hand and waited in vain for her handsome knight.



Long after it was dark she stumbled homeward, her
apron held up to her weeping eyes,

* * *

Henceforth Pieter, when he opened his eyes in the
morning or attended mass in St. James' Church, could
daily murmur into his long Capuchin beard: "O Lord,
forgive the sins I am about to commit to-day!"

* * *

Chapter XII 1

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

A YEAR and a half later, in February, Jan Nagel expired in Pieter's arms. The day he was buried a heavy February fog lay over the land, so thick that Pieter, when he fell back a bit, could no longer see the coffin in which Jan Nagel was being carried to the churchyard. Two men carried him upon a bierj their steps resounded hard on the frozen road. A fat priest went ahead, praying, with the choirboy who carried a lighted torch.

Pieter was the only one who followed the coffin. Hans Franckert had to go to the exchange, and the other artists had long since forgotten Jan. At the news of his death, they recalled with pity the impetuous "Dauber" of Master Coecke who had unfortunately never understood what art was. Pieter was alone, quite alone, the only one to accompany this great heart, this ardent human being, this noble spirit and rare painter to his grave.

"Good for nothings," said Pieter contemptuously.

He shuddered, but with a sigh he added: "I should like to be in your place, Jan!" For he thought it was a fitting time to die. Life was sad and terrifying. Misery had come like a stormcloud over Flanders. Spain was torturing good, childlike Flanders, praying as if in ecstasy, and making a martyr of her with chains,

■ LIGHT AND DARKNESS ■

funeral pyres and insolent hirelings. It was the Masacre of the Innocents.

Just as the Eagle of Rome sent his hordes to Bethlehem, so the Eagle of Spain sent his soldiery upon the villages of Flanders, murdering, robbing and raping its daughters in their alcoves. Fear poured over the fields, the villages and the cities like a mighty river. Every edict of the King of Spain was like the bursting of a new dam. Trade and commerce withered away and famine, of which everybody had talked so long until it really came, squeezed their stomachs like dishrags. But in the castles and in the homes of the wealthy peasants the windows were lighted up at night for sumptuous feasts. All sorts of diseases, old and new, attacked mankind, overwhelming people with terrible pain, or gnawing like invisible mice at their lips, noses and fingertips. There were bad shepherds in plenty; the good shepherds were ridiculed, and the common people imitated the bad ones: they wallowed in stupid, bestial pleasures, and he who lacked the means took them from others.

It was not rare, while taking a walk, to see a corpse floating in the water or hanging on a tree, or in the evening, to see a peasant's house going up in flames. Never had so many candles burned in the churches and never had so many pilgrimages been undertaken—but this was from sheer superstition or unspeakable fear; at the same time magic and the black arts were practiced, and those who were white, thanks to the Holy Spirit, could be counted on the fingers. The overstimulated imagination demanded violent and marvelous

things: the stake and funeral pyres, executions, wars, saints bleeding from their hands and feet, banquets with huge pastry-tarts out of which women danced forth. And everywhere there was arguing, even in taverns and at the festal board, about predestination and the question whether the snake had really spoken.

The people eagerly visited the lay-preachers and in the evening they attended the sermons of the divines. There was quarreling about a single letter, fighting over a comma, war about a sentence. Like insects, worms and wolves hundreds of beggars and cripples, full of evil intent, ran and slunk along the roads and streets and byways. Like an azure mountain covered with violets, the artists and poets lived outside the heart and the pulsebeat of their time, always busy with rosy Venuses and allegorical figures wandering beneath foliage, golden-brown as syrup. The wind always fluttered in every veil and every garment so that much-admired lines might be introduced over and over again.

But Pieter stood in the midst of his time disgusted, with the taste of death in his mouth. He wanted to get away from it, to have nothing to do with it, to hide himself in the shelter of his art—but the spirit of the times entered into him through all his pores; he experienced his time as a tree experiences autumn. He was part of it; in him too this faith and superstition, this searching, this fear, this greed for pleasure and for sin—he had only to think of Anna—grew rankly. His drawings of the "Seven Deadly Sins" which Cock had published, his plates "The Big Fish Eat the Little Ones," "The Temptation of St. Anthony," "The Alchemist,"

"Faith," "The Seven Works of Mercy" and many others gave proof of this. Ah, to outgrow all this, like St. Anthony! But it was too difficult for him ; it was like this fog, through which he could not see. His troubled conscience tried often to roll away the stone, but it pressed so pleasantly upon him. And his work—it was filled with what he was and what he absorbed from his time. . . . He had only to think of Anna, whom he did not love enough to marry and yet too much to be able to live without her. He felt disgusted with himself. Ah, to know no more of life . . . and to sink down like Jan into the inexorable grave!! . . .

When he took the spade and let a little earth fall upon the hollow-sounding coffin, he suddenly felt the skeleton within him, moving mockingly ; and behold, it was as if the skin and muscles had fallen from the grave-digger and only his skeleton remained ; through the priest's fat body he saw his thin skeleton; and in the choirboy, a little skeleton with delicate bones. He saw the skeleton in a group of people bearing another corpse to the grave, and in all those who met him on the way like ghosts rising out of the mist and disappearing into it again. He saw the skull and the white skeleton behind their trade and their work, their quarrels, their vanity and their merry feasts. The bell-ringer was a skeleton and so, too, were the drunkards yonder, the baker at his oven and the smith. The smith became a volcano, spitting forth skeletons like sparks that fell like a rain of bones into the streets. Death was everywhere!

He went out into the fields to escape these human

skeletons. Here deep silence reigned. One could almost hear the fog moving. But he got lost, came to the gallows and suddenly saw before him, in the fog, a skeleton hanging on high. There it hung, big and powerful, transparent, like a lace banner in honor of Death who was holding a solemn procession throughout Flanders. He went on and heard many voices and



wagons approaching. He heard a drum—in his imagination he saw a skeleton beating the drum. People with stupid, curious faces emerged out of the fog, crowding around a wagon upon which sat a judge holding a staff and a priest with a crucifix in his trembling hand who with fiery words was addressing two men tied together. They were heretics, pale and emaciated from the damp, dark prison; but they were not listening to him, they were staring with fanatical gaze into the sky, awaiting the new Jerusalem. In the other

wagon lay bundles of wood, and there sat the executioner who would soon start the fire, wrapped in his fur cloak, with legs crossed.

Wagon, crowd, and mounted soldiers disappeared in the fog. But just because he had seen them in the fog, detached from the landscape, he carried away their picture as though it were painted in his eyes.

"It seems as if Jan Nagel, by going down into the grave, has opened up all the coffins," Pieter said with a sigh. He entered a little church to pray; later he drank strong beer at a tavern, but it was no better: a skeleton was saying mass in the church, a skeleton filled his tankard. "Confound it!" said he. "I'll not leave my house again for a week."

He did no work all that day; he sent his two apprentices home and like the executioner, he sat down cross-legged, buried in his long beard, before the hearth, looked at the flames and thought of Jan Nagel, of the two heretics and of victorious Death, whom we always try to outwit, but who in the end lures us into his trap or seizes us with his white claws. . . . Anna poured out a tankard of warm beer for him. It was strange: in her he did not see the skeleton, in her he was aware only of Sin. She sat down quietly beside him, with her knitting, happy and contented, like a mother adapting herself to the moods of her child. In the glow of the flames and in the quiet which Anna did not disturb, there grew within him his idea for the "Triumph of Death," great and mighty, with a view upon half the world and a multitude of skeletons, swarming pell-mell like ants. . . . And what if he should use the two

heretics as the two murderers in his "Carrying the Cross"? But they look so little like murderers! Still that doesn't matter: it is too overwhelming to leave them out of it.

That whole evening he sat sketching wicked mercenaries, stupid crowds, and swarming skeletons. At supper he took his plate upon his knee and would not leave the warm hearth.

"It is snowing," said Anna, "thick flakes." She knew that he loved the snow.

"She's probably lying again," he thought, and did not even look up.

The hearth fire crackled, and now and then the wind roared in the chimney. Later, at bedtime, when he saw the snow himself, he suddenly felt himself back in his own village, deeply imbedded in snow as on that day when Father Cornelius talked to him about Antwerp. How sad it was in Antwerp and how peaceful perhaps in his own village!

And with an ardent desire to be there and to live there, he said enthusiastically: "Anna, now that it is snowing, I am going to visit my village to-morrow; it is almost twenty years since I saw it!"

This was agreeable to Anna, just as everything about him was agreeable to her. He could not fall asleep as usual. Well, at last he would see his dear old village again! he mused. He was as happy as a child that is expecting St. Nicholas on the morrow. He was already thinking of settling there to live a retired life with his art and with Anna, whom he would then marry anyway, in spite of all her lies and something more that he

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could not name. For he had to admit that she did take good care of him ; and even though she understood nothing of his art, she did incite him to work. And she loved him so! What more did he need? He kissed her gratefully as she lay sleeping, and hour after hour he heard the rattle of the nightwatchman.

* * *

Indignation almost strangled him when at last from the bridge he saw his village lying there in the snow beneath the gray sky. He had hoped to ride in singing, but he entered it like one in a funeral procession.

War and devastation had reduced the village by half. He saw huts, destroyed or falling down, that had not had the courage to rise again. Nothing remained of the parsonage; the old house in which he had lived still stood there, but without a signboard. The church was roofless, and of Long Louis' good old mill only the low, smoky walls remained standing. The castle was a heap of ruins and the place swarmed with croaking ravens.

How sad and desolate the village lay here on the Dommel, frozen and covered with snow, with fringes of icicles around its straw-thatched roofs, with its chimneys smoking, deserted, forgotten in the infinity of snow and wintry silence!

Not a human being was to be seen, not a hammer to be heard in the smithy.

Over there still hung the sign of "The Masked Monkey." He dismounted, entered and ordered a tankard of beer from an old woman, who dried her

wet nanas on ner apron ana looicea at mm witr distrust. He did not wish to declare who he was; it would be better not to. He ordered a tankard for the woman, too, talked of the weather and the snow, and then suddenly asked slyly: "Didn't a man called Tomato-Toad live here? I used to come through this village often, on business. What became of Tomato-Toad?"

The woman grew more animated, now that she could talk. "No, he lived over there at the corner, in 'The Promised Land.' But he hanged himself later. He had beaten his wife half to death. She was a widow with one son. They used to say he had become a great painter; but, it seems the boy, too, came to a bad end. So it goes with these queer fellows."

"Well, well, . . ." said Pieter. "And the village priest, old Father Jerome, what became of him?"

"Oh, the good Father," the woman whined. "The soldiers of Maarten van Rossum broke his leg for him and later he slowly grew childish. They took him into the monastery across the Dommel, but he doesn't recognize any one any more. I believe last year, Tist, the coffin-maker's man, still saw him in the garden, where he was wrangling with the flowers. Such a good man • . ."

"And Long Louis, the miller?"

"Why, the scoundrels of Maarten van Rossum assaulted his daughter and then murdered her; then they burned down his mill. He began to drink, then. One day he was gone and nobody ever found out what became of him."

"So those beasts ravaged everything around here frightfully?" asked Pieter.

"It's a good thing that the grass is growing over it. But when I think of it, I can still see it plainly before my eyes. It was the time between daylight and the dark, when they came. Not a house was spared. They assaulted the women and murdered the men who defended them, before the eyes of their mothers; the people who fled had their houses burned down. Oh, when I think of the evening when the castle and the houses were in flames! We saw it from the woods . . . my sister too . . ." The woman, trying to recall the most violent scenes, told of horrible atrocities, and Pieter thought of the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem. At this moment, a dirty peasant in a red dressing gown entered. "A glass of brandy, to wash the dirt out of my throat," he said. Pieter at once recognized red-haired Emil, who had once thrown the chewed carrots upon his drawing} but he did not want to be recognized. He paid, went out and rode out of the village.

On the bridge, he turned around and looked back once more, downcast and disappointed. He shivered with cold and sadness. He was sorry that he had seen his village again; it had blossomed like a fragrant rose in his memory} now it lay dead within him, just as he was dead to his village. Only the fragrance, the old memory remained. "No one can take that from me," he murmured with reverence. But he had not even the heart to raise his hat before that which was left.

* * *

Pieter Brueghel gradually felt himself growing lonely. Jan Nagel was dead; his village was dead. *And* ever since Anna lived with him, he no longer went with Hans Franckert in search of old beer, kernesses and feasts. He had had enough of them; moreover he often had stomach ache, and gladly stayed quietly at home with Anna—and she with him; and he had too much work to miss an hour willingly. Now and then Hans would visit him, tell stories and laugh, but Pieter was no longer to be had as boon companion. Hans found this tiresome and went off with other friends.

Pieter no longer even carried his drawings to Cock. Cock could fetch them himself or let them be fetched. He liked Cock himself very much; but he could no longer endure "The Four Winds." More than ever it swarmed with arrogant Renaissance worshipers who regarded Pieter's work pityingly as ordinary illustration, in which they valued only the good drawing. But Pieter said: "The pencil is my own, I paid for the paper, and what goes on it is my business." He was undecided about everything else, but he would have no one tell him about his art. He portrayed things as he saw them, at one stroke, full of confidence and power.

"You bury yourself like a mole!" Cock said to him one day. "What are you doing all this time?"

"I'm doing just as the moles do; I'm burrowing."

And in his solitude in which Anna silently accompanied him like a dog, without disturbing him, waiting patiently for his love and for the promised marriage, he burrowed out of his memories and old drawings

material for new work in heaps. So it used to be, so it was now. So it had been with all his pictures. He thought of the Fat and the Lean, and he drew "The Big Fish Eat the Little Ones," "Savings-boxes and Treasure-Chests," "The Fat Kitchen," "The Lean Kitchen," "The Fat and the Lean" . . . But he no longer felt the least resentment about it. He now saw everything from a certain distance, from above, and he knew very well that the Lean would act exactly the same way if they were fat. He had experienced it. He forgave them, for they could not help it ; their spirit had been caught fast in the human body, in the flesh.

He had only to think of Italy, of the Alps, to paint his magnificent mountain landscapes. He felt again his old fear when he drew Purgatory, Hell, the last judgment. And in the seven pictures of the Deadly Sins, he gave to his various desires the strangest, most impossible animal forms from his early dreams. The landscape of his village, the kernesses, his whole past supplied material for hundreds of drawings; and he thought of the death of his mother when he drew the "Death of Our Lady." Cock sold the engraving of these drawings like hot cakes, and placed philosophic or didactic rhymes below them when Pieter did not.

It was only now that Cock brought out many of the little landscapes which Pieter had drawn for him when he lived at "The Magpie." He had let them lie until Pieter had made a name for himself. So, many pictures appeared many years after they had been made.

Pieter worked, burrowed as though his life depended

upon it, as though he had only a week longer to live. Anna could persuade him only with the greatest difficulty to come to the table at noon and at night she had to torment him to go to bed. "The fire of Jan Nagel has gone into you," said Hans.

But since Pieter had seen his village again, had again absorbed its color and felt that his memories of it were sacred, nothing could keep him from painting away.

Color suddenly charmed him to the exclusion of all else. His drawings were left lying neglected} he was done with ghost stories and deviltries} he had freed himself of them when he drew them. The garden of colors was now in bloom, for everything has its season. In morning freshness, like a bee, he had at last begun to paint, happy as a child, secretly rejoicing. Paintings begun long ago—like "The Battle between the Fat and the Lean," kermesses and a "Crucifixion"—he let lie. He took a new canvas and himself made fresh, soft shining colors!

One beautiful spring morning, at the open window, with flowers and St. James' Tower before him, he began seriously to paint—with his tongue hanging out of his mouth and his long brown beard trembling with the effort—"The Proverbs of the Netherlands." The colors grew like happy flowers. Ah, this blue, this bright red, this dirty yellow, this dark gray and this soft moss-green! His eyes sparkled; he forgot time and place, hunger and thirst; he was away, taken up in the arms of his great, long-desired Beloved, the Art of Painting!

* * *

After the "Proverbs," which he had received as the good bread of wisdom from the mouths of his village comrades, "The Children's Games" had their turn. He placed them all on the great canvas, seen from above, in order to show as much as possible—a device remaining to him from his attic window days and his journeys in the mountains. Also as if seen from an attic window, he painted "The Battle of Carnival with Lent," "The Triumph of Death," a "Way of the Cross," and many others.

Hans made him short visits at regular intervals, now and then enthusiastically bought a painting at a high price and then sold it to wealthy nobles from Italy, Spain or Germany.

So Pieter lived happily, carried away by enthusiasm for his art. Out in the world, however, he was overcome by fear and the restlessness of his time, and then he would burrow down again into his work, like a mole.

Just so he was full of fear, unrest and indecision whenever he thought of marrying Anna. In order not to be disturbed at his work, he tried not to think of this and kept postponing it . . . postponed it over and over again. "It will work out very well in the end," he thought. Ah, if Anna had only been a painting, he would quickly have finished painting her and made her more beautiful. But that was just the trouble. If he only knew what was best! What *was* best? And he postponed it again . . . he was afraid that marriage would take him by storm and interfere with his work:—he did not himself know why or how, but a vague foreboding made him cautious and undecided.

Properly considered, it would be best to marry: then he would be rid of this anguish, this burden, these gnawings of conscience, this impossible situation; furthermore, she was good, faithful and careful of his wishes, but then he grew suspicious again and feared that, once he had married her, she would no longer be so amiable. And her lies! This lying for nothing and nothing again, boded no good. But he thought so only at the times when he did not wish to marry her; at other times, it seemed merely an innocent amusement. Lying was in her flesh and blood. Warnings, reproaches, pleadings, nothing helped. She lied before she even thought of it. He had tried to break her of the habit. They had agreed—but neither of them believed in the bargain—to record every one of her lies on a tally-stick and when it was full, she would have to leave his house. He took a long stick and made the notches close together, so that she might have time to improve.

Sooner than either of them had dreamed, in scarce a fortnight, the stick was full—and then he took a new one. When this one, too, was full, he kissed her upon her closed eyes with their enchanting long lashes and said: "I cannot live without you, lie as much as you please."

"Let us get married, Pieter, then my lying will die of itself."

"Yes, yes, next winter, when I am finished with this piece of work."

Sometimes she would weep because she was after all

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only his kitchen-maid ; and threaten to leave him, if he did not marry her. But he was always able to pacify her and . . . and to postpone the matter. And in order not to think of it, he began to paint again. Like a snail, he crept into the shell of his art.

* * *

Chapter XIV

MARIA

YES," said Cock, as they sat together before the hearth—Anna had gone to church—"little Maria, whom you carried on your arm, is a divinely beautiful child! If I had the time, I would compose a sonnet and it would begin like this:

Never has painter molded Nature into Art
So well as Nature wrought in her the highest beauty ;
Never has Springtime painted more and richer
colors . . .

It doesn't rhyme, but, my boy, you ought to see her: charming, friendly, young, tender, fresh, and blond, the loveliest flower of Brussels!"

"I'll do that some time," said Pieter, who listened to all this as to an old-forgotten fairy tale. "I always think of her still as small, a little monkey, up to my knees." He seemed suddenly to be smelling carnations and violets. How many nosegays had he not gathered for her in the fields and meadows? And within him arose the desire to see once more this fairy princess who had loved him so, to see her and to kiss her, as he used to do. This longing made him tender and gentle ; he seemed to be walking beneath a brighter sky. But the air soon became sultry again in the sensual hum-

drum of his life with Anna, and the leaf-gold of fairy-land that had just rustled in his heart, vanished before this earthly passion and the ardor of work . . .

But in the spring he had to visit a Spanish nobleman in Brussels to take him his "Temptation of St, Anthony." Pieter would have preferred sending it, but the nobleman had such a fine collection of paintings and had been so long urging him to come to see them that he had finally decided to make the journey, Pieter had admired the paintings, pocketed his cash, and drunk a bottle of sweet, brown wine in honor of the occasion. With his blood boiling and slightly tipsy, he went out into the open air. He blinked at the sun, sparkling in the windows. Pigeons were flying about, radishes were being offered for sale, and from a tavern near by came the sound of song.

"Ah, every period has its own misery, and it's all the same to me, I paint!" he said gayly. He entered a Moorish shop at the market place, and bought a necklace of blue beads for Anna. Then he bought a large rice cake which they would eat together, with a beaker of wine. He was now more firmly and quietly determined than ever to marry Anna next autumn. He could not get along without her ; she was good ; he was used to her—if he married any one else he would first have to get used to her—and, after all, he need not feel ashamed to be seen in public with her anywhere.

He stood admiring the enchanting Gothic townhall with its innumerable attic windows, and his eyes followed the slender spire upon whose summit of soaring flowers and columns shone the golden St Michael.

How fine it must be to turn about up there with St. Michael on top of the devil! For a moment he felt like freeing himself of his burden of sensuality. He felt hungry for the mussels which were cooked so deliriously at the fish market, fragrant and spicy—but it would be jolly, too, to have a look over the whole landscape. The wagon would not return until five o'clock, so he had ample time. His tongue and his eyes fought it out, And vision triumphed over palate. "I'd rather turn black with hunger than miss the view," thought Pieter—and he walked along High Street and climbed the hill beyond, known as the Cricketmeadow.

He threw his arms up in the air! How glorious! Before him the gently rolling country of Brabant lay open like a book of miniatures, with villages and mills on the summits of the hill, with little rivers, farmyards and church towers in the little plains of the valleys, with other, bluer hills behind. And the little woods, creeping over the hills and over the carpets of field and meadow! And above it all the tender glory of spring which borders brooks and roads with flowers and sings exultantly in the white pear trees behind red box-hedges. O glorious land of Brabant! Wherever one sets one's foot, milk flows forth! How arid is Italy in comparison! To see spring and to smell it in the air, to feel it with eager fingertips! How beautiful! Where now are Spain, Emperor Charles and the funeral pyres of Philip?

"Beloved sky!" cried Pieter, bewitched with all this beauty, "upon your garment, I would live like a lady-bird! . . . Ah, yes, here I will live with Anna," he

went on, less poetically and with more constraint. He turned around, and there below lay Brussels surrounded by its turreted walls and its moat. It was a closely crowded mass of houses and churches, with market places and gardens between, and traversed by laughing streams of water. Suddenly Cock's words recurred to him: "Maria, whom you carried on your arm, is a divinely beautiful child. . . . Never has painter molded Nature into Art." . . . He descended Cricket-meadow Hill and was at the horse market sooner than he expected.

"Don't you know where the widow, Madam Coecke, lives? It must be at the horse market!" he asked a woman who was carrying a basket of savoy cabbage.

"Over there, opposite the pump, to your left at the corner," she answered.

Pieter walked towards the tall gabled house. He suddenly felt ridiculous and became embarrassed. Would he not seem presumptuous? Wouldn't it look as if he wished to intrude? Yet, on the other hand, it would be discourteous, now that he was in Brussels, not to visit her. And if he hadn't been told about Maria, he would have gone there anyway. It was his duty! And he let the knocker drop, stroked his beard, and looked to see if he had any spots on his waistcoat and if his finger nails were clean; he was still thinking definitely that this year he would paint "The Triumph of Death" and marry Anna. . . . He was just going to buy a bunch of flowers from a passing flowergirl when the heavy, iron door opened, and before him stood a fresh and blooming young lady, with bright blond curls,

blue eyes and a delicate, noble face that glowed out of its white lace collar like a ripe fruit. The slender body was sheathed in light-gray silk which fell from the hips in broad, rustling folds. He was suddenly happy and embarrassed and stammered in amazement: "I am Pieter Brueghel."

Laughingly she apologized for opening the door herself, but the maid was just getting butter. Her little rosy hand lay like a rare, exotic flower in his big brown peasant hand, and she drew him in, happy and giggling with glee. "Mother, mother!" she cried. "Do come! You can't guess who's here! Come here!"

"Ah, Maria . . ." he sighed full of astonishment and admiration. "If I had dreamed this," he added to himself.

She drew him into the solemn reception room which was full of paintings by Pieter Coecke. And there, through another door, came Madam Coecke, calm and earnest, in a black gown with a white collar. She now had snow-white hair and wrinkles in her forehead and was even stouter than she had been. Her cheeks hung down to her double chin, and this made her seem more dignified and commanding than ever. She still assumed the same old attitude, as though posing for her portrait, with her little hands, which held a white lace handkerchief, folded upon her waist.

"This is Pieter, my old friend!" crowed Maria joyfully.

Madam Coecke laid her little hand on her broad breast as if in alarm. "Pieter Brueghel! Pieter! Lad! Lad! We have never seen you again since we

moved to Brussels." Her mouth was twisted as if in painful remembrance, and there was a certain reproach in her last words,

Pieter felt that he must now speak of her husband, and with mournful face half turned away he said, while he looked at Maria: "Master Coecke's death was a very sad loss!"

"It was a fatality for art," she answered, full of pride and veneration. She sighed, sat down, offering him a chair, closed her eyes for a moment and in a solemn, sad tone, seeking sympathy, she told of her husband's death.

Pieter noticed how beautiful her head was, outlined against the gilded leather of her chair—Maria stood behind him, with a hand upon his chair—and he kept saying "Yes" or simply nodding, assumed a sympathetic expression,—but heard not a word of what she told him. He knew only one thing: If Anna were like Maria, he would have married her the very first day.

He pushed back his chair and laid the package for Anna on the table. "I am sitting in your way," he said to Maria. Now he could see her and enjoy looking at her while he pretended to listen to her mother and kept nodding.

The mother felt a mystic veneration for her departed husband. And so in the course of the conversation she came to talk of the good old days in Antwerp, when Pieter was serving them as an apprentice. There was something humiliating in the term "apprenticed servant," as she used it. Pieter saw this opportunity to arouse Maria's sympathy and he hastened to say: "Yes,

I still remember it perfectly. It seems as if I can still feel myself carrying you in my arm. How often haven't I taken you walking? Do you remember the time we went to see Jan Nagel? And that you preferred to be with me rather than with your father and mother? But I loved you, too, like my own child. And now you have grown up! But, Maria! Miss Maria! I can scarcely believe my eyes that it is you!"

"I remember it all very well," laughed Maria. "In the woods I sat on your shoulder!"

"And you're not yet married?" asked Madam Coecke, seemingly without interest.

"No, dear Madam . . ." he said briefly.

There was a sudden silence. He thought: "They know that I am living with Annaj that's why they're not asking more." He blushed. Nobody knew what to say,

"It is very beautiful here—up there on the Cricket-meadow. Beautiful to paint! I must draw it some day soon!"

"And then I suppose you'll come here too, won't you, to chat about old times?" Maria asked innocently.

"Mr. Pieter is always welcome," said Madam Coecke, and he could not tell whether she meant it. Then she led the conversation to painting, and Maria had to fetch the miniatures which her mother had recently painted, for she still painted.

They were mythological subjects, quite in her husband's manner, but in weaker, paler colors. "Pretty . . . beautiful . . . very nice," said Pieter, and much more besides.

"You are of course still working in your old manner, judging by the etchings one sees of your work," she said disdainfully. "Well, yes, the people don't understand us, and there must be painters like you, too."

"Yes, yes," agreed Pieter, while he admired Maria.

Madam Coecke began to explain just what her husband thought about art and how he had written about it in his books. Meanwhile Pieter was watching Maria who was gracefully pouring yellow wine into thick, green glasses. "What lovely arms she has," he thought.

When he was outside again and had left the horse market, he ran up to Cricketmeadow Hill once more and saw Brabant falling to sleep in a thin, bluish mist, beneath a delicate pearly sky, amid sweet odors. And he whispered, murmured, praised, prayed and exulted all at once: "I did not know that she is so beautiful. . . . It is too much. . . . O Lord, be gracious unto me . . . I am caught! Maria, why, why are you so beautiful, holahi, holaho . . . Damn it!" he suddenly rejoiced, "Now I've forgotten Anna's package." He returned, but on the way he lost courage. "It might be too conspicuous. The mother would think that I left it there on purpose." He went into the city. The wagon had of course gone long ago. He went into a tavern called "The Cat Can't Catch the Mouse" in a street at the market place, and he grew quite blissful from the beer and his memories of Maria. He recalled those early days with all their charm and kindness and again felt her tiny dimpled hands and her soft angel cheeks against his face. He had forgotten it all; but



now it stood clearly before his eyes, a sign, he thought, that he had carried his love for her in his heart untarnished. In him, too, it was springy his hands dripped with the odors of herbs and flowers ; he was like a gentle flickering breeze. "But,"—and that was the great question—"will she be as fond of me as I am of her?" The main thing, however, was that he loved her!

He felt young and strong, bold, eager for daring deeds and love. "Please, another tankard!" he cried.

He spent the night at the "Commerce-Court" and the next morning rode back to Antwerp in the heavy-laden mail coach, feeling ten years younger and merry as a child.

But the nearer he got to Antwerp, the darker grew his mood. "Poor Anna," he sighed, "I left my heart and your cake with Maria."

"Hans, dear Hans, my brother!" Pieter rejoiced, seizing Hans with his thick hands. "She is so beautiful! It makes one melt away! A blond head out of a da Vinci painting! It would be impossible for me to paint her! Nobody could do it! Ah, those blond curls, and she—so delicate, a perpetual dream, and those blue eyes that make one happy!"

"You make me sick with your loves!" Hans remonstrated. "It is ridiculous. Once it's Anna, then it's Bertha, then it's Anna again, and now it's Maria. And each time you say: 'Now, now at last I have found her!' You only have to see an apron and you blaze like a torch, instead of laughing about it heartily as I do.

You are a regular bull's eye. There are more arrows in your heart and more swords than in the heart of Our Lady!"

"A great sword," cried Pieter, "will pierce your heart, and this sword is in it now!"

"Be sensible, old boy! Have you thought of Anna in all this?"

Pieter sighed. "I haven't let Anna know anything about it ; but she feels that there's something wrong with me—partly because I don't like to stay at home any more } I can't work any more and I pay less attention to her. She hasn't asked any questions but sometimes I see tears in her eyes; ah, I am sorry for her. Hans, isn't it strange how suddenly something can change! I still remember very well when I stood before Maria's door I had made up my mind to marry Anna—and when the door opened and I saw Maria, it was all over! That was a fortnight ago. Next week I shall see her again."

Hans seized Pieter's shoulder. "Listen to me, stay at home with Anna, as you used to do; stay away from Brussels for a month, and you will have forgotten the blond girl absolutely and entirely. That's your duty to Anna. And if it isn't over by then, . . . well . . . But it will be over. I know you: out of sight, out of mind! Please, not another word about it!" And he called to the mistress of the inn who in this fine weather was sitting outdoors under the awning and knitting: "Felicia, an order of beer for each of us!"

* * *

But a week later Pieter was in Brussels, listening to Madam Coecke who, occupied with her embroidery, sat in the arbor with him and told him about her departed husband. He lied to her, saying that he had been obliged to visit the nobleman again and so had taken the opportunity to wish her good day. When Madam Coecke returned his string of beads—she had given the rice-cake to a poor man—he told her that he required it for a Mary Magdalen that he was going to paint.

The little garden was gay with flowers shining in the sun. The window of the back room was open and there Maria was playing hymns upon a spinet. "Evidently," thought Pieter, "to get away from this endless, sad widow's tale, or else from embarrassment. She looked at me before, longer than necessary ; one doesn't look at a person so steadily if one has no use for him; and when she saw that I noticed it, she blushed, so . . ." While he was apparently listening to the mother, he was looking at Maria's back. "How can I get into that room without letting this severe old lady notice my intention?" he thought. He had already made a remark about the music, but he did not dare to return to the subject. "And yet," he decided, "Maria shall know of my love to-day, if I have to whisper it through the key-hole and if her mother should burst." He was all impatience, as though happiness were about to slip from him. He mustered courage to say suddenly, after Madam Coecke had sighed once more: "Oh, I left my handkerchief lying over there, I'll get it and come back at once, Madam!" and off he went;

When Maria saw him come in, she was about to rise, with a grateful smile.

"Maria, play on," Pieter whispered to her, and stood behind her so that Madam Coecke could see him. "Maria, play on ; I want to tell you something that I don't want your mother to hear. So play on. Play on!" She did as he said. "Maria, I have loved you all this time. When I saw you again, a fortnight ago, everything blossomed again . . . like flowers that lay asleep . . . Oh, Maria . . . I did not dare to tell you . . . play on, please . . . I am bolder than I thought . . . some one told me of you . . . I saw you again . . . I could not sleep any more . . . play on . . . play on . . . Now I have come to . . . Maria, may I tell you . . . Oh, yes, yes . . . please play on!"

She was playing false notes, blushed violently and said, with a muffled, painful voice, "Let me think it over . . . I am so much younger than you . . . I could not sleep either because of it. . . ."

"Play on. Play on!" . . . "Thank God! . . . In a fortnight, I will ask your mother for . . . but play on, Maria! . . ."

"And I have wept so much . . . they said you have another love, Pieter . . . that . . ."

"Play on . . . I love no other . . . no more . . . play on, begin all over again, and if I loved any one, it would be over now . . . tell me, may I come again? . . ."

"Yes, Pieter, . . . yes. . . ."



"Play on! . . . Angel! . . . My guardian angel. . . . Thank you . . . thanks . . . play on."

He hurried back to her mother and sat down beside her. "Maria plays well," he said, "better than I had thought . . . Master Coecke always liked music so much."

And the mother went on telling her story. But inside the spinet was silent.

* * *

Hans Franckert had at first refused when Pieter asked him to explain everything to Anna, but he did it in the end. Pieter waited in "The Three Idlers" until his friend fetched him.

"Come quickly! Come! Or she'll go quite mad!"

Now Pieter stood there dismayed and looked at Anna who, broken-hearted and weeping, was leaning against Hans Franckert's shoulder.

"I thought so," sobbed Anna. "He was never at home any more, never. Before that you couldn't get him away from me. But I did not dare to think of it for fear of making my trouble greater. Tell me, Pieter, what has suddenly become worse about me? Because I lie? . . . Ah, for the past month, I haven't the courage to lie any more. They were only little lies, to make me and you happy, to surprise you. I never did you any harm! How can you suddenly love some one else, while I stand at the door waiting for you . . . Ah, I see, you don't move. Oh, how my heart aches! Every morning I awoke with the hope that it had only been a bad dream that you didn't love me any

more. Five years I waited for you, and now you'll drive me forth for another like a dog into the rain, back to my village, where I will never, never see you again. . . ."

"Do be quiet, won't you? You're driving me crazy," Pieter remonstrated angrily.

"If only you were crazy, ill, so that no one would look at you, then I would have you alone, and could kiss you . . . ah, Pieter, kill me, there . . ." and she tore open her jacket.

"Oh, why waste so many words?" said Pieter, weak and desperate. "I'm not married yet!"

"Jesus, Mary!" she cried, tearing her hair. "Even though I lived with him in sin, I have kept my faith in you! Help me! Help me!"

"Come, Anna, calm yourself!" Hans tried to console her.

And again she pleaded with Pieter: "I gave myself to you, for five years I was your toy, and now you drop me like a wash-cloth. Ah, . . . Jesus, Mary, help me. • . ." And she wept and sobbed on Hans Franckert's shoulder.

But suddenly she stood up, threatened him with her fist and laughed madly. "Ha, I understand you: you want to get rid of me, to make room for the other! But I won't go, my dear, I won't go!" She almost sang the words. "You'll have to throw me out, drive me out! And I know this: you haven't the courage for that, no, no, you haven't!" She pleaded again, with tears on her long lashes.

"Isn't it better, then, that you go of your own ac-

cord, as I advised you to before?" Hans asked her, kindly.

She shook her head slowly and said decidedly: "You'll have to carry me out dead, dead . . . dead. . . ."

"Come, go to sleep now," Hans said consolingly. "Come!" And unresistingly she let herself be led upstairs.

"Don't say anything more to him now," said Hans. "I'll talk with him again. Love is a madness."

Downstairs Pieter was still standing dismayed, chewing his nails. He saw no way out. He looked at his paintings and his drawings standing about on easels and hanging on the walls. "What nonsense all this is in comparison with human hearts," he sighed.

...

Pieter could not bear it longer and the next day he rode to Brussels on horseback. He alighted at "The Mottled Ox" and half an hour later he let the iron doorknocker fall upon the heavy door of Maria's home. He thought of how he used to dream of doors covered with iron which would not open.

But this one did open and the maid led him into the reception room. He had to wait a long time and meanwhile gazed indifferently upon Coecke's mythological and Turkish paintings and wood carvings which hung upon the walls in great numbers.

At last she whom he had expected came: the mother whom he feared, bringing with her an icy breeze. This

was one of those iron-clad doors. He grew very hot.

"Madam."

"Please be seated, Sir! What gives me the honor of seeing you here a third time?"

"Madam, I presume that you know it. . . ."

She rose suddenly and her words cut sharp as knives, "And I know more, Sir! I know that you are living with a mistress in Antwerp! I know all, Sir: that you have been living with her for four years, and are about to marry her—a wicked, dirty baggage! It is a shame!" She stamped her foot. "But you may do what you cannot stop doing! However, while you are living with this creature in sin, you dare to turn my daughter's head, to woo her, as though she, too, were a common street-wench! Sir! I forbid you ever to enter this house again. You have deceived us, us who picked you up out of the gutter and made you a well-known artist! It's a disgrace! And the poor child is ill in bed because of it all!"

"So—because of love!" thought Pieter with sudden, overwhelming joy, but at once he was discouraged again and annihilated. But while this woman talked and cut the love between him and Maria in two, a force, a power rose within him as at that time when he found Pater Cornelius in Antwerp. He must save himself and Maria by telling the whole truth, seasoned of course with a few lies; and fearlessly, he leaped into the midst of the flames. He, too, had risen and stood facing Madam Coecke. "Madam, it's true, I live with a servant girl, or rather, I have lived with her. You are



human enough, I hope, to understand me, Madam. I shall leave your house and never enter it again: but I have the right to justify myself." And he told her everything: how he had come to know Anna at "The Magpie," of his work, his friendship with Franckert, his journey to Italy, how he came to take Anna into his house, how she had cared for him so that he might work, that he had meant to marry her,—everything.

"Then I saw," he continued, "a month ago, your daughter Maria. Mr. Cock had told me how beautiful and modest she is. All the old memories were revived. I could not imagine how the little child whom I had carried on my arm could be a grown young lady. I kept thinking about it: it was like a young, beautiful dream that would not let me go, that called me and lured me. And when I saw her, . . . everything was changed. I cannot express it, but the love or rather the affection I felt for Anna flowed away as through a sieve. Now I knew for the first time what love is. Madam, I love Maria and will love her through all eternity! And she loves me too! Here I stand and I have come to ask you to give her to me as my wife. . . . Now throw me out!"

"So the servant girl is no longer with you?" asked Madam Coecke.

Pieter blushed. "Yes, Madam, but she will go away. She is leaving."

"But what business has she there with you now?" Her eyebrows were frowning hard.

"You can imagine how unhappy she is . . . she knows all, Madam. . . . Naturally it is hard for her."

She nearly burst, and trembled with rage. "But really, Sir! You are asking for the hand of my daughter while this woman is still settled in your house! You must understand that your first duty, before you came here, was to throw her out!"

"She won't go, Madam!"

"She won't go! Ah! Ah! And you can't throw her out. That seems a bad business to me, Sir. Leave my house! I cannot bear this. You insult me as a woman and as a mother. Go!" She opened the door, panting with rage.

But Pieter remained standing, firmly resolved and conscious of his strength. "Won't you advise me? . . ."

"Throw this person out of your house, and then we can continue our conversation."

"Madam, I have not the courage." And then he shouted: "No, I haven't the courage. You understand! You must understand. As a woman, you must understand what it means for this girl to be thrown out like a dog, by some one who only a month ago would have married her! Here it is not a question of love, Madam, but of mere humanity."

"What do you think of doing, then?" she asked, at once dismayed and challenging, crushing her handkerchief in her hand.

"She will leave, Madam. She will go of her own accord. She sees that I am in earnest about it."

"And if she doesn't go?" Madam Coecke stood up straight, pushed her breast forward and pulled in her double chin.

Pieter sighed. Everything depended on this ques-



tion! And suddenly, in desperation, as though quite lost, he seized her beautiful plump hands.

"Madam!" he implored, "I stand here like a child. Ah, tell me what to do, tell me, as a mother, as a woman, as both. You must find a way out. Do it for Maria's sake! I will do whatever you say! But do not ask me to commit the cruel deed of throwing her out. Madam, you are so good, you . . ." He shook her little hands, he kissed them and pressed them in his own.

And Madam Coecke, seeing him so humble, so wretched and so helpless, had a wonderful opportunity to warn, to command, to give advice and to teach. She grew gentler and more amenable. He had touched her weak spot. "Let me think it over," she said. But she did not think it over and said, cleverly and condescendingly: "I understand you well, Sir, of course I understand your difficult situation. There will be nothing left for you to do but to leave Antwerp and live here in Brussels until you marry. I can see through this girl very plainly: she will not leave you in peace. . . . These are years of trial for you. . . . I forgive you your former sins. Your present behavior in this matter will decide whether you are worthy of my daughter. Leave the girl first, and then I shall expect you to talk over this matter further."

"Yes, Madam."

What neither he nor any one else would have dared to think of, this woman, this "pepper-caster," did in the turn of a hand!

"How I must love Maria, not to beat up such a heart-

less future mother-in-law as she," he thought. And then he pondered: "How can I save my paintings? If Anna finds out that I am trying to smuggle them out, she's quite capable of hacking them to pieces."

"Oh, how weak and how strong love makes human beings!" he said, as the iron door closed behind him and the sun once more shone upon him.

* * *

Pieter wanted to get away to-day, to-day! But he did not succeed in getting away so simply, right under Anna's eyes. He had made up his mind to disappear quietly with his paintings whenever she should be away a day or even a half day. But she seemed to suspect that he was trying to deceive her. She did not set foot outside the door, and since Pieter did not wish to make her suspicious, he could not rescue anything.

When once he was away, perhaps Hans would find a way out, otherwise the paintings would just have to go to the devil! He had enough of weeping, he had enough of Anna, the house and his inability to paint } he had enough of everything. And he longed for Maria. It was a week now since he had promised her dignified mother to leave Antwerp. If he hesitated a few days more, she would refuse him, finally. This fear and the desire to make his fair, beautiful Maria his wife as soon as possible, had given him the courage to depart to-day. And so he sat there, on a richly carved chest, stroking his beard and looking at Anna, who had laid her head on the table and was weeping. The sun was shining upon her back and the roses were

peeping in at the open window. He had just said: "Go for a little walk along the Scheldt. It will do you good."

"No, I won't go away," she wept. "I won't stir a foot. I will stay with him. I know he won't let me in again, once I go out. He can carry me out dead from here. And now let me alone! And be quiet."

He was silent, looked at the beautiful St. James' Tower and then at his paintings. And again she spoke to herself—she had done this for several days and he was beginning to fear that she might lose her reason. Ah, it was so pitiful to listen to her: "No, I won't go back to my village, it's too far away from him. . . . His wife will be happy with him. . . . I would have been so. . . . And off there somewhere, forgotten and deserted, I shall dry up in the melancholy pine woods and he won't even know where I am buried."

"Ah, Anna, everything will work out well," Pieter managed to say.

"There he's talking again," she laughed through her tears. "I can tell him this too: everything will work out well! He means that I will forget him. But it's he who will forget his wife soon enough. How lucky it is that most men begin to have enough of their wives as soon as they are married. How lucky!" And suddenly she turned to him—he saw that she had become thin and that her eyes were red with weeping and swollen: "What if we always remained as we are, Pieter! And did not marry? You don't have to marry me. You don't have to caress me and kiss me, but let me stay with you quietly. Pay me like an ordinary

servant girl, and scold me when I burn the food. Wouldn't that be all right? But, ah," she laughed again, "he's tired of me even before we are married. He wants to get me into a trap to get rid of me here. But I won't go into it. I won't even look at it."

And while she sat there, weeping into her red fists, telling the story of her love for the hundredth time, Pieter looked at the paintings hanging there, with their bright colors and their innumerable jolly little figures. He shook his head in perplexity.

"They call me a droll painter," he was thinking, "if they only knew what a sad wretch painted them! . . . My friends," so he addressed his paintings mentally, "I am about to leave you now. Will I ever see you again? . . . I must be very much in love to be able to leave you so, mustn't I, my friends! . . . I marvel at it myself that I could fall so deep in love that I can see dear, good Anna go to pieces and leave you, my dear little manikins and landscapes, like a drunkard. But Maria . . . Ah, Maria has turned everything topsy-turvy. . . . Farewell, my paintings! Farewell, my drawings! Farewell, my friends. . . . Farewell. . . ."

"Well, Anna, I'm going over to Cock's," he said as he arose, with a deep sigh.

"He's going away again," she wept. "How late will it be to-night when the master comes home? But I will wait for him and his food will be ready as always. How often have I cooked for him in vain! But I am only his servant girl. I cook the food. Then he can't chase me away. . . ."

"What a great love! What a great love!" he



thought, shaking his head. He glanced round the room once more, looked at the "Battle of the Fat" and the drawings in which the Fat were displaying their superfluity of hams and sausages. He saw the sketch for a "Bearing the Cross" and a painting he had just begun of the "Massacre of the Innocents" } and over there a pen-and-ink drawing, rolled up, of the portrait of Jan Nagel. "But that I must take with me." And he tore it quickly from the wall. "Now I won't look around again!" But before he closed the door entirely, he looked at Anna for a while through the crack. She lay bent over her fists, weeping } roses were in the background and part of the glorious St. James' Tower. "What a great love," he said. "Enough to soften a stone! Lord, hold me, lest I fly into her arms!" But he cast the temptation from him when he thought of her eyes red with weeping. He rushed quickly out of the house to flee this temptation and when he was out of doors, it left him. He looked around once more at the gable behind which he had been so happy.

"Who would have thought it?" he sighed.

"Farewell, beautiful Antwerp!" he said, when he saw Our Lady's Tower, rising like a slender spire of lace into the bright afternoon sky. At "The Light in the Lantern" he said good-by to his friend Hans. . . .

* * *

And while he sat weeping in the cart that was taking him to Brussels forever, he unrolled Jan Nagel's likeness. He could not see it in the dark, but he knew **how** lifelike Jan appeared in it

M A R I A

"Dear old friend," he said, "you would have managed much better, wouldn't you?"

The wagon rocked back and forth, his head shook and the tears ran down into his beard. It was a gentle summer's evening and he smelled the hay, lying in round piles in the meadows.

* * *

Chapter XV

BRUSSELS

PIETER was living temporarily in the "Commerce-Court," was paying more attention to his beloved than to his work, and a year later, in the month of May, when a whole forest of candles was burning before the statue of Our Lady, he married his fair Maria in the ancient church, Our Lady of the Chapel, down in High Street. They moved into a corner house in the same street. Behind the house lay, alluringly, Cricket-meadow Hill whence Pieter could look over all the hills and distances of Brabant. "Beautiful enough to paint!" he said, and he painted it.

He felt at ease here, among the people dwelling in the steep, noisy streets. It was the same populace with the same sterling stamp and molded from the same dough as he had known in Antwerp in the St. Andrew's Quarter on the Scheldt, where Jan Nagel had lived ; just as brave, childlike, good, passionate, sly and merry. It was a populace of contra-basses, of toppers and gluttons, who lived recklessly from day to day, of men who fought in their shirt sleeves and then drank their beer together—but the bad blood had first to be driven out through the nose or with a black eye. They cursed and scolded about the monasteries, but down in the motherly church, Our Lady of the Chapel, they dedicated most of the candles before the image of the Madonna.

It was a populace healthy and full of life, that granted that God was a good man, that called Monday Sunday's brother, and treated it accordingly. They enjoyed life, but they were sturdy fellows when they worked ; for hadn't they borne Antwerp and Brussels up to the weather vane on the Tower of Our Lady and



up to the Golden St. Michael on the Brussels Town-hall, on their shoulders, straight into heaven? They had made the city, these men with their robust joy of living and their feeling for justice} who wear their hearts on their tongues ; who beat their wives—but who scold and swear and burst into a rage when injustice is done ; and who, when they feel themselves powerless, tear their hair and bite into their own fists, and then—

as now, under the Spanish rod—fetch out old "Reynard the Fox" to read. It was they who sang the mocking songs ridiculing the King of Spain and his hirelings; who longed for freedom as a thirsty pigeon for water, but meanwhile made no sour faces, delivered no long speeches, but were members of many societies with as many banquets as there were societies, and who kept their courage high with a laugh, with eating, drinking and singing, with shooting and angling, with kermess and dance. The gallows stood black and threatening above their heads; but they danced beneath it, hands on hips, legs in air, with their mouths full of songs and jokes.

"A people like this can't be killed," said Pieter.

And he had locked these people as deeply into his heart as he had the frank farmers of the Dommel. The people from the country and from the narrow streets are the salt of the cities, the lungs of society. He would have liked to drink beer with his neighbors in High Street, give mystery plays and share in their every other pleasure. But he was irresistibly drawn to his work: he still had a whole world of things to tell! He was a member of all the societies: of the Archers, even of the Fowlers; member of all the brotherhoods—and there were many in Brussels—that carried lanterns in the procession. Almost every day there was a meeting, and in the winter a weekly banquet with roast rabbit or something as good. He was always there with all his heart, for their ways of speech were color to him, their conversations were paintings. But his work would not let him go, he had to free himself of the pictures

that filled his heart to overflowing. It was like picking apples where new ones grew continually. There was no end to it. It overwhelmed him. The time of seeing and receiving was past: now it was the uninterrupted time of Harvest and of Work—with many pains between, caused by his stomach.

He felt happy with Maria who had already presented him with two children, a boy and a girl. He lived alone, with all this work growing slowly but incessantly. Now and then he took a turn into the woods, alone or with Maria, and in the evenings he sometimes read a merry book or taught his children how to draw. Sundays he often visited a village kermess near by with his whole family, and then they would eat boiled rice in the taverns adorned with banners. He no longer went traveling, but every year at Eastertime Madam Coecke, in a cart, visited her sister in Aalst. Maria and the children had to go with her. After several weeks, Pieter would fetch them, but he would remain a few days in the malt country, take walks and draw the big farmyards and the people there.

Through the whole house, which was kept in perfect order by Maria and a servant girl and where the clock ticked peacefully, his drawings and his paintings hung like stories that cried for more stories. The paintings he had left with Anna had been restored to him, for Hans Franckert had been able to win her over. With the noblest emotion of love for Pieter, she had said: "Take them, or he will always think of me with anxiety, and it is better that he be happy." And then she had returned to her country village in the Kempen district

that lay lost and forgotten amid the pine forest, and never again did Hans and Pieter hear of her. Many of those paintings had been sold, but downstairs beneath the image of the Madonna in the living-room hung his "Fall of Icarus," a painting that vividly recalled to him his whole early life: that must never leave his house!

He worked, worked like spring itself, assisted by two young apprentices, in a rear room of the first floor. But round about him his era, with its religious wars and with its wrenching free from the narrow Gothic worship of God alone, developed into a personal, more sunny and freer worship of mankind. The battle between the old times and the new times went on in the realms of thought, in science, in faith and in art: all values were revalued. It was a time of free choice; the time of submissiveness was over. But Pieter did not wish to choose, he did not dare to choose—to choose meant a loss for him—and he remained full of doubt and of faith, just as before, took something from everything, and became the most complicated person of the most complicated era. He would have preferred to stay out of hearing of the heartbeat of his time, but his ears were listening keenly to discern whether his country's illness was not yet over.

Among the few visitors whom he received—buyers, old friends and artists who painted his portrait, for he was now famous—there was a barefoot friar named Edgardus who kept him informed about the urge toward freedom and the growing resistance to Spain, not among the heretics, but in the monasteries and castles and in **the** circles of the faithful, under the pledge:

"Freedom from Spain!" There they were preparing the insurrection that was to burst forth against Spain with the help of a French army } and it would already have taken place had not the iconoclasm which had succeeded, especially in Antwerp, in knocking off the heads of the stone saints, prevented it for the time being. When Pieter heard of this iconoclasm he had wept and torn his beard: he called the heretics blockheads, simpletons, cave men, men without a spirit, without a heart and without art. "Murder people, if you must, but not works of art! Kill me, but do not touch my work!"

And every time that the Father came to report something new about the coming uprising Pieter exulted, in spite of his pain: "Now it will begin, now it will begin!"

* * *

Fresh beautiful snow! Snow upon the hills of Brabant! He must look at that! And so Pieter, whose beard is already a bit gray, goes out into the fields in the afternoon with his sketchbook and his son Pieterke. How fresh and soft it is underfoot! They go far away, always up and down, while Father Pieter sings.

From the summit of a hill they see the village and the brown woods hidden away in the distant silence of snow, and above, in the gray sky, a swarm of crows. "I must draw that!" he says.

But first he must see that the child is amused. Father Pieter rolls a heavy snowball so that he himself cannot push it farther, and says, "Pieterke, do help me!"

And the little fellow of four years, wrapped warm

in wool and fur, pushes with all his might, with his clever little fingers, against the ball. They push with united forces.

"Now it's going easy," cries the father. "Oh, but you are a strong fellow!"

The little boy believes it and opens his eyes wide. "Yes, aren't I, Father?"

"Now another ball for his head!"

At last a big snowman is outlined in white against the horizon of the hills of Brabant. Pieter puts several sticks on his head.

"This is the King of Spain with his crown," he says. "Now throw at it, so that his head falls off; in a few minutes we'll make that arch-scoundrel, the Duke of Alva. Meanwhile I want to draw something."

Pieterke rolls a snowball and throws it at the snowman, but far to the side.

"If you're throwing at a king, you must hit him, or else he'll laugh you to death! Look—this is the way to do it!"

In the solemn stillness of the snow, father and son throw snowballs at the King of Spain. A few sticks fly out of the wooden crown, but all the other balls that Pieter smashes against this round, silent face stick there.

"Let him go," he says, "for he's just getting fatter; and we'll let Alva lie quietly in the snow; it is better that he should not be born, either in the snow or anywhere else! We'd better go to the village and eat some ham and eggs!"

The little boy crows with joy.

Soon they are sitting in the brown, silent village be-

neath the snowy, thatched roof of a tavern, eating hot ham and scrambled eggs and drinking cold beer with it. And doesn't it taste good! Pieterke's face is all yellow from the eggs. There in a corner they are playing cards and throwing dice; and before the flaming hearth four men are telling tales about the war against the Turks, the Huguenots and the new victims of the tyrant Alva, whom the King of Spain, Philip I I , has made regent, and who with cold calculation is sucking the Flemish folk dry and murdering it—and the rich are helping him. They tell, too, of the new victories of the rebels, nicknamed "The Beggars," of the luxury in the monasteries and of the accursed tithes.

"Ah," suddenly says a man with high shoulders, "it's all the same to me what they believe, if only they keep their hands out of our pockets. Whether Mother Eve had fair hair or black doesn't concern me—no doubt she had hair! To every man his due—but I think it's quite right that these heretics who preach division of property and want to divide up all the wealth should be strung up on the gallows and quartered! They'll bring the world to rack and ruin. That would be a fine state of affairs! The piece of land that I've sweated over my whole life long so as to own it, would be divided up, and some lazy fellow who never turns a hand, except to hold his brandy glass, he'd get half! That's the last straw! I'm not surprised that so many are taking part! For all I care, they can all be hanged!"

"I don't care what they believe; but if you'd think about it a little, you fool, you'd see that these people are bringing happiness into the world!" replies another

man with a thick beard. "Now all the money and property is owned by the rich, the rest of us must make the best of it! Everything they have comes from the sweat of the poor. Look at the thousands of beggars! It's all because the wealthy have too much! Don't you understand that, you fool? And would it be so bad if the rich had half they own taken away from them to rid the world of all its wretchedness? I think it would be only fair!"

"Because you have nothing, you can talk!"

"Have nothing? If I hadn't had so much misfortune and illness, I'd be richer than you!"

But the high-shouldered man says contemptuously: "I have had just as much misfortune and illness as you, but I worked!"

"You mean to say I haven't worked?" snarls the bearded fellow. "But you let others work for you. Your wife got hunchbacked pulling the plow, while you looked on, and you're so stingy that you don't even wash yourself!"

"You're a dirty scoundrel! I just paid for the tankard in your hand. You always sponged on others."

"Do you dare to say that again?" shouts the stubble-beard, jumping up.

"Yes," says he of the high shoulders, suspicious and timid but ready to fight.

Slap! and Slap! again. Now they are fighting and rolling on the floor, amid curses.

"Come, my boy," says Pieter, "the snow is better to look at} all this quarreling and fighting is always about money and property; and it smells here, I believe, of Baskwadder." He pays and they go out.

When they are outdoors, the snow looks blue now and the sun is sinking through a long rift in the clouds, languidly red, indifferent, without radiance, behind the trees of Brabant. They walk along in the twilight, over the snowy hills toward home, Pieterke holding his father's hand. Pieter's beard is wet from his breath, the little boy is cold,

"There's a song for that," says Pieter, "the only song that drives away the cold. But when you sing it, you must run!"

And they run along together, singing: "Adam had seven sons—Seven sons had Adam— They did not eat, they did not drink, they were like me, I really think. Adam had seven sons."

By the time they have reached the Halle Gate, Pieterke is warm again and he is allowed to sit on his father's shoulder all the way home.

* * *

In the soft candle-light falling upon the table, Pieter sat in the living-room scribbling men and trees on paper, while Pieterke, with his cold red feet in his mother's warm white hands, sat before the flaming hearth, telling about the snow man, the ham and eggs, and the quarrel in the tavern.

"Yes," said Pieter, "it's the same everywhere: hate, envy and fighting. We are happiest in our own shell here."

He smiled at Maria who was soon to become a mother for the third time. Over there in the cradle which now and then moved as if of its own accord,

slept the little daughter and the cat, rolled into a ball on the foot-pillow. Suddenly he became conscious of the great happiness that he owed to his art and to his family. He went to Maria and whispered into her ear: "I wish there would be twins ; the more, the dearer!" And he kissed the shell of her ear.

Maria had become a sturdy woman with strong arms, and clear, open, blue eyes, beneath her mass of sparkling blond curls. "Good enough to eat! The model of a careful, happy mother!" and Pieter looked at her full of admiration and gratitude. With her, under the glance of her eyes, in the calm ease of her graceful gestures, he could forget the evil, dark life outside. They were spiders out there, spinning nets and sucking one another dry, to remain master or to become master. When he looked at Maria, he forgot it all. "Do what you please—I work!" he growled at the miserable world. With Maria he felt safe as under a sheltering mantle, in a strong castle, behind trusty walls. It sometimes happened that when he was wandering somewhere through the villages, attracted by some new distant view, he would suddenly turn back because he missed her smile. He knew and respected her faults—who is without them? She had inherited something of the dignity, the domineering tone, the imperiousness, the "abbess-manner" of her mother,—not too much to complain of but still enough to feel it. "How fortunate that she has this fault," he thought, "it cures me of my own faults or at least softens them."

The one-eyed, red-haired maid—Pieter had often drawn her—came to lay the table.

"I won't eat," said Pieter, "my stomach doesn't wish to be disturbed." At that moment a troop of soldiers went rattling by, Spaniards whom the King, in fear and to awaken fear, had left in Flanders, and whom the Duke of Alva used to drag people to the gallows or the scaffold, or to ravage villages and cities as a punishment before he had them go up in flames.

There was a loud knock at the door. Pieter and Maria looked at each other anxiously: could the Spaniards have learned of the visits of Father Edgardus and of Pieter's cartoons?

"Pieter, the drawings!" she warned him anxiously. "If they find them, then . . ."

"They can't find them, and I can always explain them differently," said Pieter confidently.

"Open the door, Emerans!" He took Maria's hand and laid his other hand on Pieterke's shoulder. Maria turned a troubled glance on the child in the cradle. They heard a voice and then whispering in the corridor.

"There is a gentleman here peddling buttonholes and last year's snow," said the maid, looking clever. And then Hans Franckert came in, laughing, red-faced and wrapped in furs.

"Ah! ah! just in time to eat with us! Did you get stuck in the snow? How are you? How are things going?" They shook hands happily and joy reigned unconfined. Pieter's pains had disappeared from fright and from joy!

"Emerans! Get a goose at the cookshop and a hare!" Maria ordered.

"And mussels!" cried Hans. "I saw some lying in

the window. I know a new way of preparing them. You take a lemon, a nutmeg, and . . . But how are you, Pieter? I haven't seen you for a whole year!"

"Painter and invalid by profession, but now it's over!"

An hour later they were sitting before the fragrant meal and the delicious wine which a priest who was butler of his monastery had bestowed on Pieter, and were telling stories and laughing in the best of spirits.

Suddenly Hans said: "Do you know, I feel like drinking a good Lambik!" *

"I haven't tasted any for a year and a day!"

"You ass! Here you live in Brussels and I have to call your attention to it. Come. . . • Madam Maria, we'll be home very early,—in the early morning hours!"

He kissed Maria's hand and then they went to look for the genuine, old Lambik—liquid manna—and they found it, of course, in narrow Peter's Alley.

Weak in the legs, arm in arm, they hummed a song and staggered blissfully home in the icy-cold moonlight which lay ghostlike over the snowy roofs, the towers, and the streets.

"You must come over often to see me, brother Hans."

"Yes, brother Pieter, if my wife didn't always growl about it, I'd come every week, for I am very fond of you!"

"And I of you."

They clasped each other's hands, embraced and reeled

* *Lambik* is a famous beer of Brussels that is kept in bottles.

on, without haste, singing their song. And it was as still everywhere as though the moon were listening to them.

* * *

Pieter with his two apprentices sat at work by candle light. He was busy at a sketch for the painting, "The Bird-Nester," thinking, as he drew the rascal up in the tree, of himself and the bright expanse along the Dommel. The older of the two students, a redhead without a gleam of imagination but who copied well and clearly, just as a shadow repeats an outline, was transferring a peasant dance to a small canvas, telling as he did so that there was a ghost on Cricketmeadow Hill; he had seen it himself.

"And of course you ran away from it?" laughed the other boy, who had rough black hair.

"I run away!" answered the redhead, scornfully. "I threw a stone at it, but it went straight through him."

"You must make the sign of the cross," said the dark one, "then they fall to pieces and on the spot where they were, there's a pool like buttermilk- The witch who was burned last month up at the gallows had a whole jug full of it at home. I always do that," he laughed. "At the Red Monastery the ghosts have a procession every first Friday of the month; they are monks that didn't confess all their sins. Now, when you make the sign of the cross, they all disappear in the pool."

Pieter, who usually allowed them to babble on, said nothing now, laughed to himself and quietly went

downstairs. After a while he came back and went on drawing. The two apprentices were now working away silently.

Suddenly Pieter said: "Boys, will you get the varnish and the oil bottles out of the cellar? The maid isn't here, and the stupid creature put them down there. I need them at once. Here is a candle. Hurry and don't touch the wine and the sausages."

The two youths went down into the cellar, still under the influence of their ghost stories and dragging their feet. The candle in the hand of the redhead shook. Neither wished to be first or last, so they went side by side. But scarcely were they in the cellar when they heard the rattling of chains over in the corner and a white form arose in the darkness.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" they cried, rushing upstairs. "Help! Mother! Mother! Father! A ghost! A ghost! With green eyes! With flaming fingertips!"

Pale, dismayed, trembling with fear, they dashed into the studio where Pieter laughed at them and jeered at them. "Come, you frightened rabbits, we'll go down and get it!" He made them go along. Against their will and inclination, they had to go into the cellar, and there, from the corner, Pieter took a chain and a white cloth, both hanging on a rope that led by means of a few hooks up to his studio.

Now they joined in the laughter and roared. "But," said the redhead, "on Cricketmeadow Hill there's a real ghost!" Pieter gave him a box on the ear. "You're exactly like me," he said.

* * *

Chaper XVI

THE LONG JOURNEY

THREATENING storm clouds were massing from all sides around Brussels. Towering above the city, they looked like a circle of narrow crags, menacing battering-rams waiting for a sign to crash upon the thin roofs. How small and flat the proud city seemed beneath this mighty array of storm columns!

Heat brewed and danced over the roofs. In the little alleys behind High Street where there was always brawling and singing and yelling, all was quiet as the grave now. Scarcely a hen cackled. Behind lay Cricketmeadow Hill, deserted in the fiery glow, and from its slope new waves of heat kept streaming into the streets and houses. And farther behind lay the green hills of Brabant, parching beneath the strangling heat as from an oven.

In the studio all the windows with their leaded panes stood wide open. The two apprentices were on their way to deliver a painting, and Pieter, without jacket and waistcoat and with his shirt open, was painting a snow scene: a white background with willows and in the foreground a little church beside a little frozen river where several urchins were skating. And beside Pieter—as though to feel in the midst of things—on an easel, stood his large snow landscape, finished these three years, which he so loved; the one with the lean hounds

and the huntsmen beneath the black trees, upon the slope of a hill ; to the left, before a tavern, with its sign half torn away, there is the flaming red of a butchered pig } in the center and in the background stretches an endless expanse of snow and of the villages of Brabant, and in the distance, to the right, rise the naked precipices of the snowy Alps. Evening is spreading its wings over all. Grayish-green, the heavens are arched above the earth and ward off the light—as though for ever. There is a feeling of approaching snow in the air.

Exhausted, the huntsmen are returning into the valley, where several skaters are still enjoying themselves on the green ice. A wagon is plodding along over the road to the next village, and over there, at a bend of the river, a chimney is burning somewhere and people are trying to extinguish the fire. Some people are staggering home with bundles of twigs and brushwood, and in the black trees ravens are waiting for the evening in order to forget their hunger. Everything is small, transitory and sad in the infinity of snow and silence ; cruel winter holds everything in his power. And yet, see how gay it looks, how gayly it is painted! While the exultant glee of the child, rejoicing over the snow, speaks from the canvas—for Lady Halle is shaking the beds and making the feathers fly—one hears at the same time the mournful human heart. The painting is like the artist himself: merry and sad, doubting and believing, mystical and sensuous, cowardly and courageous. It is a genuine Brueghel! So were all his paintings, so this new "Winter," too, became. He painted

the yellowish snow eagerly, with tense devotion, quite absorbed in his work, his tongue as usual hanging out of his mouth, and outlined the tangled branches of the trees with a little brush. The perspiration dripped into his beard,—he did not feel the heat. He lived only in his painting. He himself was the painting.

The child in him was always the germ-cell of his art and the urge to impart it to others. So he lived in all his paintings, in his whole work that stood about here and hung on the walls or adorned other people's houses,—to his annoyance, even King Philip's collection in Madrid. For in spite of the growing popularity of the Renaissance, Pieter always reaped approval because in his work one stood before a part of his self. Always in all his work, the child was present: his joy and his fear, his wonder and his faith; and the evil, anxious, dark time in which he lived—and did not wish to live—permeated all his creation with the seriousness of a disillusioned man. But he painted with delight! Good heavens, what joy it was to sit there and brush away!

He no longer drew: everything was now directed to painting exclusively! Ah, to see the growth of colors, like flowers that are unfolding: to explain the relationship that tied together his merry, crowded figures with one another, with the houses, the landscapes, and the sky! For everything was of equal value in his color-stories: a blade of grass growing from beneath a stone was as important as a stork flying along the sky, with neck stretched forward, or the people yonder at their work. He treated each thing as the center of interest. Everything was now more solid and resolute than in his

earlier work. Each work was bound *to his* heart by a thousand threads, without his being able to justify it himself. Each color, each line had its secret source and cause. Not a single painting ever became the complete, absolute expression of an emotion. It always became a jumble of memories, sorrows, sins, joys, hate, mockery and longing for his village. In it was the fragrance of Veronica, of his mother, Bertha, Anna or Maria, of himself, of a bird he had seen somewhere, or of a face behind some window, of a word or a sentence. It contained everything and something more than that } it was the reproduction of his confused heart ; it was the clear and truthful story of his heart. So it was with his "Mad Greta," his "Triumph of Death," his Proverbs, his kernesses, his landscapes—November with the cows and the dark clouds, January with the Three Kings—and so it had been with his drawings, too. He painted himself and expressed his people. And when he painted his people, he expressed himself. He and his people! Both panting for freedom, but too timid; both filled with a childlike faith, eager for pleasures and for God, quiet, passionate, crafty, loyal and rebellious, foolish and wise.

He and Flanders! One heart and one soul!

* * *

And he painted a swaying skater on the bend of the river. It was he himself, it was his friend . . . it was the Dommel . . . how jealous his neighbor would be . . . with Bertha it was warm and good . . . in yon-

der hut there was *good* beer to be had . . . the Tomato-Toad got drunk on it . . . he quickly painted a signboard . . . Yes, the beer was excellent . . . the turf smells good in the twilight. . . .

But suddenly Maria comes running in anxiously, her youngest child in her arm.

"Pieter, Pieter, to-morrow they're going to behead the Counts of Egmont and Horn after all! They are announcing it with the beating of drums! What more won't we have to live through! Do be careful with those cartoons mocking the Spaniards! Burn them! If they should be found, then . . ."

He dropped his brush—at first somewhat disturbed, but soon finding his way back to clear reality—and took her gently in his arms. He always obeyed her, except in the matter of these drawings.

"They are well hidden. You need have no fear. Ah, Maria, I foresaw the fate of these two counts. Alva would kill his own mother if she did not obey the law; you can read that in his steely eyes. He is too equally balanced, like the people who consider only the letter of the law. We people of the spirit weigh a bit more on the left side, because the heart is there. He has no heart, or it is exactly in the middle,—which is just as bad. But I say, Maria, I am calm: the insurrection which is growing slowly will at last burst forth. The stupid image-breakers simply postponed it. But the dough is rising again: the Catholics of the Netherlands against the Catholics of Spain! Father Edgardus knows it is so. Do you see those storm towers? And



do you see how [dark.it](#) is getting? So the storm towers of our freedom are growing, to throw the Spaniards out of our country!"

Suddenly there was a streak of lightning, like a fiery cry, straight across the heavens!

They both made the sign of the cross. And Pieter prayed: "Lord, deliver us from all evil and from Spain!"

While a fine rain was falling outdoors and the trees were strewing the first autumn leaves over the roads, Pieter walked up and down in excruciating pain. He could hear the children below and Maria who was singing.

He sighed: "Every house has its cross to bear, and mine is in my stomach." In the next room, the apprentices were laughing. Whether he lay in bed now or went walking in the fields, he always felt his stomach, like a piercing finger, uninterruptedly, enough to make you climb up the wall in agony! It had changed him greatly. He looked at himself in the mirror. He now had a yellow skin, sunken cheeks, and large eyes which seemed accustomed to feeling pain. The long, thick beard made him seem even more sickly. He walked up and down like a polar bear, while beautiful color was calling to him! There stood his "The Magpie on the Gallows" beneath which two peasants danced, waiting for the finishing touches of the brush. There was a knock at the door. It was Father Edgardus! What luck!

"Sit down! How are things?"

There was much talk back and forth, until the lean Father, with his sparkling black eyes and his sly nose, said: "Bad!"

"How so bad?"

"You are under suspicion," the Father whispered cautiously. "They have captured a French heretic who says he was at your house, too, to buy a painting. . . ."

"Yes, he was here," cried Pieter, "but how should I know that he is a heretic?"

"You can be at ease on that account, though it's not out of the question that you may be summoned. Hide your drawings against the Spaniards ; we won't be able to show them publicly as soon as I had expected."

"Why not? What's wrong?"

"I was just going to tell you." And after the Father had seated himself, he began, with his fingertips pressed together: "I believe that our endeavors have gone to the devil } and for the reason, as I was told by a superior court, because all who rebel against the Spaniards inevitably drop their faith. People can't separate the ideas 'Spain' and 'Faith.' They are regarded as one and the same, and that takes all the impetus out of our insurrection. When you realize that whole villages, including their spiritual leaders, are going over to the Reformation, and that there are others who perform divine services and preach against Rome! Everything that is anti-Spanish gets into the channel of the Reformation. We choose between freedom and faith."

"How so?" asked Pieter in amazement.

"Yes, Pieter, choose: To become a 'Beggar' and

rebel against Spam and lose one's faith,—or to remain Spanish and preserve one's faith. And faith comes first. Which would you choose, Pieter ?"

"I? . . . I . . . I choose between freedom and faith? I choose? Why must I always choose between two things that are equally dear to my heart? Father, I have three children downstairs;—just listen to the innocent joy reigning below there—and now ask me which of them I should kill!"

"So it is, Pieter ; that's what is happening to us," sighed the Father. "I choose faith."

"Damn it !" cried Pieter, furiously. "Father, let me swear! For years now I have been waiting, longing, hoping joyfully for something. And now you come along and say: 'Choose between your head and your body!' Ah, I know myself well enough to realize that I cannot live without my faith, weak though it may be. Yet at the same time I feel myself a rebel, and so I would be a rebel of Catholic faith. Why not? Why shouldn't that be possible? Naturally I'm not causing an uprising, I don't even take part in it, I simply paint ; but I am with it in thought. To dream such a dream, to carry it within oneself year in, year out, and then, at the end, simply to tear it up! That's it! That's the worst! No, I will not choose: I shall simply remain a rebel and a believer, too; I will not desert my people! There's an end of it! The deuce! Jan Nagel told me so: 'Don't stick your fingers into politics, for it will swallow up your whole body!' It's true! I was a fool! I could slap *my* own face! Instead of working and

■ THE LONG JOURNEY ■

painting trees! 'I don't care two straws about that,' Jan Nagel would say to everything that distracted him from his painting. . . . Well, Father, I say so too: I don't care two straws about you. I don't mean you, but any sort of politics. I don't care two straws about it! Well, that's over! . . . • Father, do come to see us often, sit at our warm hearth and say your rosary, taste my wine, look at my paintings and tell us of the flowers in your garden, of everything that you like,—but not another word of politics; no, of politics which misuses religion, not a word, not a syllable! Give me your hand on it!"

The Father gave him his hand,—and then something of Pieter's hope and of his dream was smashed.

* * *

To Maria he did not mention either the preparations for an uprising, nor that he was under suspicion. But that same evening, when Pieter and Maria had gone to bed, he suddenly asked:

"Maria, are you asleep?"

"No, Pieter, and you?"

"I'm not either."

"What's wrong?"

"Shall we visit my village in the spring . . . • ?"

"Yes, Pieter, and . . . • ?"

"Wouldn't you like to live in the country?"

"Certainly, Pieter, if it's best for your art and for **the** children."

"One can live there so beautifully and so health-



fully ; I believe I could work there very well, and then my health would probably improve, too! It is so quiet there: one speaks only of intimate things there. . . ."

* * *

The next day, he began his painting "The Bird-Nester," full of longing for his village on the Dommel.

He remained undisturbed, even though he felt that he was being watched. But from a sort of stubbornness that clung to him like fate, he would not destroy his satirical sketches.

Alone and quietly he lived with his good Maria, went to church with her, or walked with her outside the ramparts.

Pieter lived to experience the downfall of his people. The northern provinces fought themselves free of Spain and sacrificed their faith. Here, the faith was preserved; but Spain, the great executioner, kept the people petty, stupid, bound and gagged, squeezed it dry, erected gallows and funeral pyres,—and the people fell into dumb submission, lost all its power of resistance and self-respect ; in all strata of the population, the enemy found stupid subservience and servility.

Full of sorrow for his time, and increasing pains, he painted, while the snow was falling outdoors: "The Parable of the Blind." It is a peaceful landscape, with the church in the background, lying quiet and inviting at the foot of a little hill. Before it, to the right, a cool brooklet is disclosed, with its waving reeds and sparkling water-lilies. In the foreground, in the direction of the brook, the six blind men advance, in their

wide, heavy mantles, leading one another by their long staff or laying a hand on the shoulder of the one in front. Their old, withered, stupid beggars' faces are raised appealingly ; but their eyes are closed, or show only dull, white balls, or empty hollows. One after the other they will fall into the brook, just as has happened with the first two.

Around this drama a gentle soft summer's day blooms. Silence, peace and sunlight reign supreme. His whole era lies in that picture: the rending of one's neighbor's convictions; the blindness of all; his doubts lie in it, his shattered dream, his faith, his longing for peace, his whole heart and his whole soul—the whole of his own spirit and of his time. When the painting was finished—it was several days before Christmas—he let his palette and his brush slip out of his hand.

"Now, it seems to me, I have nothing to do but suffer pain," he sighed.

* * *

It was, in fact, his last painting. He received a commission from the city of Brussels to paint the works then being executed at the Canal of Willebroeck. But nothing came of it. "It's all over with me," said he.

He busied himself only with suffering and became pitifully thin. Day by day he grew older: his back bent under the pain, his beard became quite gray, his arms long, and his mouth stood open with silent anguish. The two apprentices could soon stay at home, for work had ceased. Spring brought him a slight surcease from pain and he went walking with Maria and the children.

Now and then Hans would visit him, and precious Cock, too: but what can one tell a man who is doubled over with pain? After a few empty, courteous remarks, each hurried away. He could not even read any more } but he kept hoping that when his greatest pains had passed, he would settle in Brueghel. Often in the chapel, like a child he would ask all the saints for that grace and light candles before the miraculous picture of Our Lady. He talked with the neighbors in High Street and the alleys, followed their advice and tried their home remedies, or the concoctions of herbs which Maria's mother prepared for him. He often sat in his studio and could look at his paintings for hours and live it all over again with grateful emotion. He could no longer paint: he had material enough, but how could one paint when his suffering made him call for pen and ink to make his last will and testament!

He made it, too, and let the notary add that "The Magpie on the Gallows" belonged unconditionally to Maria. "This painting is a mockery of Spain through our people; they can't conquer us!" he said. He loved this picture especially, with its silvery green, paradisaic springtime and its glorious far view into the distance, with the peasants dancing beneath the threatening gallows, with the magpie, his favorite bird, chattering and scolding on the cross-beam, and the little peasant in the corner performing an urgent business. He would have liked to place the **Duke of Alva beneath this** little peasant!

In August he had to go to bed. It was only then that he begged Maria to fetch the daring satirical sketches and to burn them. He wanted to see them once more, and to experience anew the passionate emotion of earlier days. There were some directed against Alva, the tithe, the Emperor and his hirelings,—but no, it would cause him too much vexation.

"Salvation is not yet at hand} and, Maria, I should not want your white body to be roasted." The sketches were soon only a little pile of black ashes on the hearth. It was all that remained of his rebellion!

He stroked Maria's curls and kissed her. "I have always loved you, loved you most of all; I have told you all my love affairs, but in you they were all combined!" He kissed her moist eyes.

"Now I can see it," he said later. "I was weak, a weak creature; but it had to be so, Maria, or I should never have painted so—Hans told me that once—and I should not like to have painted otherwise than I did."

And again he said: "Maria, have you ever noticed this: I have drawn and painted thousands of little men who dance and eat and drink; everybody is glad when he looks at my work, and laughs; but did you ever notice that not one of my figures laughs! Confound it, that I should just be discovering that now, when I have finished my work. Isn't that a discovery! . . . Maria, let the last sacraments be brought now, but first call the children again; I should like to tell them another of these merry tales."

* * *



A fortnight later he was much better again. "I had just lain down, out of pure courtesy," he said, "but it's not my turn yet. What luck!"

He felt so well that he could get up again and take a walk. The physician had said: "Be careful, and don't get too tired!" But he saw how up there, on Cricket-meadow Hill, the flowers in the garden and in the convent sparkled in the soft sunlight! It was September: the flowers were lavishing their colors and their odors, for they could feel winter approaching} and the trees were full of pears and apples. There was fruit in plenty, too much to be consumed in one year. "Maria," he said, "how beautiful it must be to enjoy autumn over Brabant from up there!"

"If you will go slowly, we might look at it; come!" She gave him her arm, he clung to her, and they climbed up at a leisurely pace.

"How beautiful the wine-red velvet of your dress looks with your golden curls!" And mischievously, like a boy, he pinched her arm. "You have always been my best medicine, you know!"

She did not know just what to say, "And you will begin to paint again now, won't you, Pieter?"

"Yes, dear heart; I still have a whole basket full of material. I can paint for another hundred years. I feel that now, so clearly."

When he stood up there, at the hedge of the convent garden in which the trees were heavy with fruit, and saw Brabant lying there in a golden mist of sunshine, he cried out: "Why didn't we live up here? That's what we should have done! Just see how beautiful!"

And he pointed out the white river in the valley, the windmill, the other mills, the villages, the farmyards, the woods, the narrow roads, and way behind, the other hills—and everywhere the flowers and the fruit that could be seen from afar.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he whispered and looked at the landscape with boundless admiration.

Suddenly he said: "But if one looks at it between one's legs, Maria, with one's head down, then it's twice as beautiful!"

"Better not do that now, Pieter," Maria implored him.

"Darling," he said coaxingly, "it's very simple. I used to like doing it so much years ago. Everything is twice as beautiful that way, twice as distant, twice as much of everything."

"Come, Pieter, another time!"

"If I die of it, then it's all over with me anyway. See, just a moment!" He took her hand, kissed it and bent forward. Lower, a bit lower, a bit lower. Now he saw the landscape far and wide, with the whole beauty of face reversed.

"Maria! It's glorious! Just see how beautiful! That's how we ought to be able to paint it! It's so strange that there are things that become more beautiful when one stands with head on the earth! God knows how beautiful the world would be if we all went around with our heads down below, if we could see everything like this then . . ."

But at that, with a startled cry, he fell over forward and spat blood. Maria called for help, knelt down, got

up again, called once more, kissed him, shook him,—and the monks came running and carried him, full of sun and blood, through the fruit garden into a small, bright room. Quickly they lighted the blessed candle, and read the prayers for the dying. . . .

And with his big, cold, brown hands in Maria's small, white hands, looking at her gratefully with eyes growing dim, he died smiling, a gentle death, going out like a candle, without a sigh or a groan, quietly as a flower that withers.

* * *

The street was crowded full of people—neighbors, little folk, double-basses, nobles, painters, Spaniards, secret heretics, children and monks—when, highly honored and deeply lamented, he was buried in the beautiful motherly church, Our Lady of the Chapel, in which he had come so often to pray.

And there rests to this day the fairest heart of all Flanders.

THE END

