

CHAPTER IV

THREE WAKINGS

There were three persons in Leyden whose reflections when they awoke on the morning after the sledge race are not without interest, at any rate to the student of their history. First there was Dirk van Goorl, whose work made an early riser of him--to say nothing of a splitting headache which on this morning called him into consciousness just as the clock in the bell tower was chiming half-past four. Now there are few things more depressing than to be awakened by a bad headache at half-past four in the black frost of a winter dawn. Yet as Dirk lay and thought a conviction took hold of him that his depression was not due entirely to the headache or to the cold.

One by one he recalled the events of yesterday. First he had been late for this appointment with Lysbeth, which evidently vexed her. Then the Captain Montalvo had swooped down and carried her away, as a hawk bears off a chicken under the very eyes of the hen-wife, while he--donkey that he was--could find no words in which to protest. Next, thinking it his duty to back the sledge wherein Lysbeth rode, although it was driven by a Spaniard, he had lost ten florins on that event, which, being a thrifty young man, did not at all please him. The rest of the fete he had spent hunting for Lysbeth, who mysteriously vanished with the Spaniard, an unentertaining and even an anxious pastime. Then came the supper, when once more the Count swooped down on Lysbeth, leaving him

to escort his Cousin Clara, whom he considered an old fool and disliked, and who, having spoilt his new jacket by spilling wine over it, ended by abusing his taste in dress. Nor was that all--he had drunk a great deal more strong wine than was wise, for to this his head certified. Lastly he had walked home arm in arm with his lady-snatching Spaniard, and by Heaven! yes, he had sworn eternal friendship with him on the doorstep.

Well, there was no doubt that the Count was an uncommonly good fellow--for a Spaniard. As for that story of the foul he had explained it quite satisfactorily, and he had taken his beating like a gentleman. Could anything be nicer or in better feeling than his allusions to Cousin Pieter in his after-supper speech? Also, and this was a graver matter, the man had shown that he was tolerant and kindly by the way in which he dealt with the poor creature called the Mare, a woman whose history Dirk knew well; one whose sufferings had made of her a crazy and rash-tongued wanderer, who, so it was rumoured, could use a knife.

In fact, for the truth may as well be told at once, Dirk was a Lutheran, having been admitted to that community two years before. To be a Lutheran in those days, that is in the Netherlands, meant, it need scarcely be explained, that you walked the world with a halter round your neck and a vision of the rack and the stake before your eyes; circumstances under which religion became a more earnest and serious thing than most people find it in this century. Still even at that date the dreadful penalties attaching to the crime did not prevent many of the burgher and lower classes from worshipping God in their own fashion.

Indeed, if the truth had been known, of those who were present at Lysbeth's supper on the previous night more than half, including Pieter van de Werff, were adherents of the New Faith.

To dismiss religious considerations, however, Dirk could have wished that this kindly natured Spaniard was not quite so good-looking or quite so appreciative of the excellent points of the young Leyden ladies, and especially of Lysbeth's, with whose sterling character, he now remembered, Montalvo had assured him he was much impressed. What he feared was that this regard might be reciprocal. After all a Spanish hidalgo in command of the garrison was a distinguished person, and, alas! Lysbeth also was a Catholic. Dirk loved Lysbeth; he loved her with that patient sincerity which was characteristic of his race and his own temperament, but in addition to and above the reasons that have been given already it was this fact of the difference of religion which hitherto had built a wall between them. Of course she was unaware of anything of the sort. She did not know even that he belonged to the New Faith, and without the permission of the elders of his sect, he would not dare to tell her, for the lives of men and of their families could not be confided lightly to the hazard of a girl's discretion.

Herein lay the real reason why, although Dirk was so devoted to Lysbeth, and although he imagined that she was not indifferent to him, as yet no word had passed between them of love or marriage. How could he who was a Lutheran ask a Catholic to become his wife without telling her the truth? And if he told her the truth, and she consented to take the risk,

how could he drag her into that dreadful net? Supposing even that she kept to her own faith, which of course she would be at liberty to do, although equally, of course, he was bound to try to convert her, their children, if they had any, must be brought up in his beliefs. Then, sooner or later, might come the informer, that dreadful informer whose shadow already lay heavy upon thousands of homes in the Netherlands, and after the informer the officer, and after the officer the priest, and after the priest the judge, and after the judge--the executioner and the stake.

In this case, what would happen to Lysbeth? She might prove herself innocent of the horrible crime of heresy, if by that time she was innocent, but what would life become to the loving young woman whose husband and children, perhaps, had been haled off to the slaughter chambers of the Papal Inquisition? This was the true first cause why Dirk had remained silent, even when he was sorely tempted to speak; yes, although his instinct told him that his silence had been misinterpreted and set down to over-caution, or indifference, or to unnecessary scruples.

The next to wake up that morning was Lysbeth, who, if she was not troubled with headache resulting from indulgence--and in that day women of her class sometimes suffered from it--had pains of her own to overcome. When sifted and classified these pains resolved themselves into a sense of fiery indignation against Dirk van Goorl. Dirk had been late for his appointment, alleging some ridiculous excuse about the

cooling of a bell, as though she cared whether the bell were hot or cold, with the result that she had been thrown into the company of that dreadful Martha the Mare. After the Mare--aggravated by Black Meg--came the Spaniard. Here again Dirk had shown contemptible indifference and insufficiency, for he allowed her to be forced into the Wolf sledge against her will. Nay, he had actually consented to the thing. Next, in a fateful sequence followed all the other incidents of that hideous carnival; the race, the foul, if it was a foul; the dreadful nightmare vision called into her mind by the look upon Montalvo's face; the trial of the Mare, her own unpremeditated but indelible perjury; the lonely drive with the man who compelled her to it; the exhibition of herself before all the world as his willing companion; and the feast in which he appeared as her cavalier, and was accepted of the simple company almost as an angel entertained by chance.

What did he mean? Doubtless, for on that point she could scarcely be mistaken, he meant to make love to her, for had he not in practice said as much? And now--this was the terrible thing--she was in his power, since if he chose to do so, without doubt he could prove that she had sworn a false oath for her own purposes. Also that lie weighed upon her mind, although it had been spoken in a good cause; if it was good to save a wretched fanatic from the fate which, were the truth known, without doubt her crime deserved.

Of course, the Spaniard was a bad man, if an attractive one, and he had behaved wickedly, if with grace and breeding; but who expected anything

else from a Spaniard, who only acted after his kind and for his own ends? It was Dirk--Dirk--that was to blame, not so much--and here again came the rub--for his awkwardness and mistakes of yesterday, as for his general conduct. Why had he not spoken to her before, and put her beyond the reach of such accidents as these to which a woman of her position and substance must necessarily be exposed? The saints knew that she had given him opportunity enough. She had gone as far as a maiden might, and not for all the Dirks on earth would she go one inch further. Why had she ever come to care for his foolish face? Why had she refused So-and-so, and So-and-so and So-and-so--all of them honourable men--with the result that now no other bachelor ever came near her, comprehending that she was under bond to her cousin? In the past she had persuaded herself that it was because of something she felt but could not see, of a hidden nobility of character which after all was not very evident upon the surface, that she loved Dirk van Goorl. But where was this something, this nobility? Surely a man who was a man ought to play his part, and not leave her in this false position, especially as there could be no question of means. She would not have come to him empty-handed, very far from it, indeed. Oh! were it not for the unlucky fact that she still happened to care about him--to her sorrow--never, never would she speak to him again.

The last of our three friends to awake on this particular morning, between nine and ten o'clock, indeed, when Dirk had been already two hours at his factory and Lysbeth was buying provisions in the market place, was that accomplished and excellent officer, Captain the Count

Juan de Montalvo. For a few seconds after his dark eyes opened he stared at the ceiling collecting his thoughts. Then, sitting up in bed, he burst into a prolonged roar of laughter. Really the whole thing was too funny for any man of humour to contemplate without being moved to merriment. That gaby, Dirk van Goorl; the furiously indignant but helpless Lysbeth; the solemn, fat-headed fools of Netherlanders at the supper, and the fashion in which he had played his own tune on the whole pack of them as though they were the strings of a fiddle--oh! it was delicious.

As the reader by this time may have guessed, Montalvo was not the typical Spaniard of romance, and, indeed, of history. He was not gloomy and stern; he was not even particularly vengeful or bloodthirsty. On the contrary, he was a clever and utterly unprincipled man with a sense of humour and a gift of bonhomie which made him popular in all places. Moreover, he was brave, a good soldier; in a certain sense sympathetic, and, strange to say, no bigot. Indeed, which seems to have been a rare thing in those days, his religious views were so enlarged that he had none at all. His conduct, therefore, if from time to time it was affected by passing spasms of acute superstition, was totally uninfluenced by any settled spiritual hopes or fears, a condition which, he found, gave him great advantages in life. In fact, had it suited his purpose, Montalvo was prepared, at a moment's notice, to become Lutheran or Calvinist, or Mahomedan, or Mystic, or even Anabaptist; on the principle, he would explain, that it is easy for the artist to paint any picture he likes upon a blank canvas.

And yet this curious pliancy of mind, this lack of conviction, this absolute want of moral sense, which ought to have given the Count such great advantages in his conflict with the world, were, in reality, the main source of his weakness. Fortune had made a soldier of the man, and he filled the part as he would have filled any part. But nature intended him for a play-actor, and from day to day he posed and mimed and mouthed through life in this character or in that, though never in his own character, principally because he had none. Still, far down in Montalvo's being there was something solid and genuine, and that something not good but bad. It was very rarely on view; the hand of circumstance must plunge deep to find it, but it dwelt there; the strong, cruel Spanish spirit which would sacrifice anything to save, or even to advance, itself. It was this spirit that Lysbeth had seen looking out of his eyes on the yesterday, which, when he knew that the race was lost, had prompted him to try to kill his adversary, although he killed himself and her in the attempt. Nor did she see it then for the last time, for twice more at least in her life she was destined to meet and tremble at its power.

In short, although Montalvo was a man who really disliked cruelty, he could upon occasion be cruel to the last degree; although he appreciated friends, and desired to have them, he could be the foulest of traitors. Although without a cause he would do no hurt to a living thing, yet if that cause were sufficient he would cheerfully consign a whole cityful to death. No, not cheerfully, he would have regretted their end very

much, and often afterwards might have thought of it with sympathy and even sorrow. This was where he differed from the majority of his countrymen in that age, who would have done the same thing, and more brutally, from honest principle, and for the rest of their lives rejoiced at the memory of the deed.

Montalvo had his ruling passion; it was not war, it was not women; it was money. But here again he did not care about the money for itself, since he was no miser, and being the most inveterate of gamblers never saved a single stiver. He wanted it to spend and to stake upon the dice. Thus again, in variance to the taste of most of his countrymen, he cared little for the other sex; he did not even like their society, and as for their passion and the rest he thought it something of a bore. But he did care intensely for their admiration, so much so that if no better game were at hand, he would take enormous trouble to fascinate even a serving maid or a fish girl. Wherever he went it was his ambition to be reported the man the most admired of the fair in that city, and to attain this end he offered himself upon the altar of numerous love affairs which did not amuse him in the least. Of course, the indulgence of this vanity meant expense, since the fair require money and presents, and he who pursues them should be well dressed and horsed and able to do things in the very finest style. Also their relatives must be entertained, and when they were entertained impressed with the sense that they had the honour to be guests of a grandee of Spain.

Now that of a grandee has never been a cheap profession; indeed, as many

a pauper peer knows to-day, rank without resources is a terrific burden. Montalvo had the rank, for he was a well-born man, whose sole heritage was an ancient tower built by some warlike ancestor in a position admirably suited to the purpose of the said ancestor, namely, the pillage of travellers through a neighbouring mountain pass. When, however, travellers ceased to use that pass, or for other reasons robbery became no longer productive, the revenues of the Montalvo family declined till at the present date they were practically nil. Thus it came about that the status of the last representative of this ancient stock was that of a soldier of fortune of the common type, endowed, unfortunately for himself, with grand ideas, a gambler's fatal fire, expensive tastes, and more than the usual pride of race.

Although, perhaps, he had never defined them very clearly, even to himself, Juan de Montalvo had two aims in life: first to indulge his every freak and fancy to the full, and next--but this was secondary and somewhat nebulous--to re-establish the fortunes of his family. In themselves they were quite legitimate aims, and in those times, when fishers of troubled waters generally caught something, and when men of ability and character might force their way to splendid positions, there was no reason why they should not have led him to success. Yet so far, at any rate, in spite of many opportunities, he had not succeeded although he was now a man of more than thirty. The causes of his failures were various, but at the bottom of them lay his lack of stability and genuineness.

A man who is always playing a part amuses every one but convinces nobody. Montalvo convinced nobody. When he discoursed on the mysteries of religion with priests, even priests who in those days for the most part were stupid, felt that they assisted in a mere intellectual exercise. When his theme was war his audience guessed that his object was probably love. When love was his song an inconvenient instinct was apt to assure the lady immediately concerned that it was love of self and not of her. They were all more or less mistaken, but, as usual, the women went nearest to the mark. Montalvo's real aim was self, but he spelt it, Money. Money in large sums was what he wanted, and what in this way or that he meant to win.

Now even in the sixteenth century fortunes did not lie to the hand of every adventurer. Military pay was small, and not easily recoverable; loot was hard to come by, and quickly spent. Even the ransom of a rich prisoner or two soon disappeared in the payment of such debts of honour as could not be avoided. Of course there remained the possibility of wealthy marriage, which in a country like the Netherlands, that was full of rich heiresses, was not difficult to a high-born, handsome, and agreeable man of the ruling Spanish caste. Indeed, after many chances and changes the time had come at length when Montalvo must either marry or be ruined. For his station his debts, especially his gaming debts, were enormous, and creditors met him at every turn. Unfortunately for him, also, some of these creditors were persons who had the ear of people in authority. So at last it came about that an intimation reached him that this scandal must be abated, or he must go back to Spain, a

country which, as it happened, he did not in the least wish to visit. In short, the sorry hour of reckoning, that hour which overtakes all procrastinators, had arrived, and marriage, wealthy marriage, was the only way wherewith it could be defied. It was a sad alternative to a man who for his own very excellent reasons did not wish to marry, but this had to be faced.

Thus it came about that, as the only suitable partie in Leyden, the Count Montalvo had sought out the well-favoured and well-endowed Jufvrouw Lysbeth van Hout to be his companion in the great sledge race, and taken so much trouble to ensure to himself a friendly reception at her house.

So far, things went well, and, what was more, the opening of the chase had proved distinctly entertaining. Also, the society of the place, after his appropriation of her at a public festival and their long moonlight tete-a-tete, which by now must be common gossip's talk, would be quite prepared for any amount of attention which he might see fit to pay to Lysbeth. Indeed, why should he not pay attention to an unaffianced woman whose rank was lower if her means were greater than his own? Of course, he knew that her name had been coupled with that of Dirk van Goorl. He was perfectly aware also that these two young people were attached to each other, for as they walked home together on the previous night Dirk, possibly for motives of his own, had favoured him with a semi-intoxicated confidence to that effect. But as they were not affianced what did that matter? Indeed, had they been affianced, what

would it matter? Still, Dirk van Goorl was an obstacle, and, therefore, although he seemed to be a good fellow, and he was sorry for him, Dirk van Goorl must be got out of the way, since he was convinced that Lysbeth was one of those stubborn-natured creatures who would probably decline to marry himself until this young Leyden lout had vanished. And yet he did not wish to be mixed up with duels, if for no other reason because in a duel the unexpected may always happen, and that would be a poor end. Certainly also he did not wish to be mixed up with murder; first, because he intensely disliked the idea of killing anybody, unless he was driven to it; and secondly, because murder has a nasty way of coming out. One could never be quite sure in what light the despatching of a young Netherlander of respectable family and fortune would be looked at by those in authority.

Also, there was another thing to be considered. If this young man died it was impossible to know exactly how Lysbeth would take his death. Thus she might elect to refuse to marry or decide to mourn him for four or five years, which for all practical purposes would be just as bad. And yet while Dirk lived how could he possibly persuade her to transfer her affections to himself? It seemed, therefore, that Dirk ought to de cease. For quite a quarter of an hour Montalvo thought the matter over, and then, just as he had given it up and determined to leave things to chance, for a while at least, inspiration came, a splendid, a heaven-sent inspiration.

Dirk must not die, Dirk must live, but his continued existence must be

the price of the hand of Lysbeth van Hout. If she was half as fond of the man as he believed, it was probable that she would be delighted to marry anybody else in order to save his precious neck, for that was just the kind of sentimental idiotcy of which nine women out of ten really enjoyed the indulgence. Moreover, this scheme had other merits; it did every one a good turn. Dirk would be saved from extinction for which he should be grateful: Lysbeth, besides earning the honour of an alliance, perhaps only temporary, with himself, would be able to go through life wrapped in a heavenly glow of virtue arising from the impression that she had really done something very fine and tragic, while he, Montalvo, under Providence, the humble purveyor of these blessings, would also benefit to some small extent.

The difficulty was: How could the situation be created? How could the interesting Dirk be brought to a pass that would give the lady an opportunity of exercising her finer feelings on his behalf? If only he were a heretic now! Well, by the Pope why shouldn't he be a heretic? If ever a fellow had the heretical cut this fellow had; flat-faced, sanctimonious-looking, and with a fancy for dark-coloured stockings--he had observed that all heretics, male and female, wore dark-coloured stockings, perhaps by way of mortifying the flesh. He could think of only one thing against it, the young man had drunk too much last night. But there were certain breeds of heretics who did not mind drinking too much. Also the best could slip sometimes, for, as he had learned from the old Castilian priest who taught him Latin, *humanum est*, etc.

This, then, was the summary of his reflections. (1) That to save the situation, within three months or so he must be united in holy matrimony with Lysbeth van Hout. (2) That if it proved impossible to remove the young man, Dirk van Goorl, from his path by overmatching him in the lady's affections, or by playing on her jealousy (Query: Could a woman be egged into becoming jealous of that flounder of a fellow and into marrying some one else out of pique?), stronger measures must be adopted. (3) That such stronger measures should consist of inducing the lady to save her lover from death by uniting herself in marriage with one who for her sake would do violence to his conscience and manipulate the business. (4) That this plan would be best put into execution by proving the lover to be a heretic, but if unhappily this could not be proved because he was not, still he must figure in that capacity for this occasion only. (5) That meanwhile it would be well to cultivate the society of Mynheer van Goorl as much as possible, first because he was a person with whom, under the circumstances, he, Montalvo, would naturally wish to become intimate, and secondly, because he was quite certain to be an individual with cash to lend.

Now, these researches after heretics invariably cost money, for they involved the services of spies. Obviously, therefore, friend Dirk, the Dutch Flounder, was a man to provide the butter in which he was going to be fried. Why, if any Hollander had a spark of humour he would see the joke of it himself--and Montalvo ended his reflections as he had begun them, with a merry peal of laughter, after which he rose and ate a most excellent breakfast.

It was about half-past five o'clock that afternoon before the Captain and Acting-Commandant Montalvo returned from some duty to which he had been attending, for it may be explained that he was a zealous officer and a master of detail. As he entered his lodgings the soldier who acted as his servant, a man selected for silence and discretion, saluted and stood at attention.

"Is the woman here?" he asked.

"Excellency, she is here, though I had difficulty enough in persuading her to come, for I found her in bed and out of humour."

"Peace to your difficulties. Where is she?"

"In the small inner room, Excellency."

"Good, then see that no one disturbs us, and--stay, when she goes out follow her and note her movements till you trace her home."

The man saluted, and Montalvo passed upstairs into the inner room, carefully shutting both doors behind him. The place was unlighted, but through the large stone-mullioned window the rays of the full

moon poured brightly, and by them, seated in a straight-backed chair, Montalvo saw a draped form. There was something forbidding, something almost unnatural, in the aspect of this sombre form perched thus upon a chair in expectant silence. It reminded him--for he had a touch of inconvenient imagination--of an evil bird squatted upon the bough of a dead tree awaiting the dawn that it might go forth to devour some appointed prey.

"Is that you, Mother Meg?" he asked in tones from which most of the jocosity had vanished. "Quite like old times at The Hague--isn't it?"

The moonlit figure turned its head, for he could see the light shine upon the whites of the eyes.

"Who else, Excellency," said a voice hoarse and thick with rheum, a voice like the croak of a crow, "though it is little thanks to your Excellency. Those must be strong who can bathe in Rhine water through a hole in the ice and take no hurt."

"Don't scold, woman," he answered, "I have no time for it. If you were ducked yesterday, it served you right for losing your cursed temper. Could you not see that I had my own game to play, and you were spoiling it? Must I be flouted before my men, and listen while you warn a lady with whom I wish to stand well against me?"

"You generally have a game to play, Excellency, but when it ends in my

being first robbed and then nearly drowned beneath the ice--well, that is a game which Black Meg does not forget."

"Hush, mother, you are not the only person with a memory. What was the reward? Twelve florins? Well, you shall have them, and five more; that's good pay for a lick of cold water. Are you satisfied?"

"No, Excellency. I wanted the life, that heretic's life. I wanted to baste her while she burned, or to tread her down while she was buried. I have a grudge against the woman because I know, yes, because I know," she repeated fiercely, "that if I do not kill her she will try to kill me. Her husband and her young son were burnt, upon my evidence mostly, but this is the third time she has escaped me."

"Patience, mother, patience, and I dare say that everything will come right in the end. You have bagged two of the family--Papa heretic and Young Hopeful. Really you should not grumble if the third takes a little hunting, or wonder that in the meanwhile you are not popular with Mama. Now, listen. You know the young woman whom it was necessary that I should humour yesterday. She is rich, is she not?"

"Yes, I know her, and I knew her father. He left her house, furniture, jewellery, and thirty thousand crowns, which are placed out at good interest. A nice fortune for a gallant who wants money, but it will be Dirk van Goorl's, not yours."

"Ah! that is just the point. Now what do you know about Dirk van Goorl?"

"A respectable, hard-working burgher, son of well-to-do parents, brass-workers who live at Alkmaar. Honest, but not very clever; the kind of man who grows rich, becomes a Burgomaster, founds a hospital for the poor, and has a fine monument put up to his memory."

"Mother, the cold water has dulled your wits. When I ask you about a man I want to learn what you know against him."

"Naturally, Excellency, naturally, but against this one I can tell you nothing. He has no lovers, he does not gamble, he does not drink except a glass after dinner. He works in his factory all day, goes to bed early, rises early, and calls on the Jufvrouw van Hout on Sundays; that is all."

"Where does he attend Mass?"

"At the Groote Kerke once a week, but he does not take the Sacrament or go to confession."

"That sounds bad, mother, very bad. You don't mean to say that he is a heretic?"

"Probably he is, Excellency; most of them are about here."

"Dear me, how very shocking. Do you know, I should not like that excellent young woman, a good Catholic too, like you and me, mother, to become mixed up with one of these dreadful heretics, who might expose her to all sorts of dangers. For, mother, who can touch pitch and not be defiled?"

"You waste time, Excellency," replied his visitor with a snort. "What do you want?"

"Well, in the interests of this young lady, I want to prove that this man is a heretic, and it has struck me that--as one accustomed to this sort of thing--you might be able to find the evidence."

"Indeed, Excellency, and has it struck you what my face would look like after I had thrust my head into a wasp's nest for your amusement? Do you know what it means to me if I go peering about among the heretics of Leyden? Well, I will tell you; it means that I should be killed. They are a strong lot, and a determined lot, and so long as you leave them alone they will leave you alone, but if you interfere with them, why then it is good night. Oh! yes, I know all about the law and the priests and the edicts and the Emperor. But the Emperor cannot burn a whole people, and though I hate them, I tell you," she added, standing up suddenly and speaking in a fierce, convinced voice, "that in the end the law and the edicts and the priests will get the worst of this fight. Yes, these Hollanders will beat them all and cut the throats of you Spaniards, and thrust those of you who are left alive out of their

country, and spit upon your memories and worship God in their own fashion, and be proud and free, when you are dogs gnawing the bones of your greatness; dogs kicked back into your kennels to rot there. Those are not my own words," said Meg in a changed voice as she sat down again. "They are the words of that devil, Martha the Mare, which she spoke in my hearing when we had her on the rack, but somehow I think that they will come true, and that is why I always remember them."

"Indeed, her ladyship the Mare is a more interesting person than I thought, though if she can talk like that, perhaps, after all, it would have been as well to drown her. And now, dropping prophecy and leaving posterity to arrange for itself, let us come to business. How much? For evidence which would suffice to procure his conviction, mind."

"Five hundred florins, not a stiver less, so, Excellency, you need not waste your time trying to beat me down. You want good evidence, evidence on which the Council, or whoever they may appoint, will convict, and that means the unshaken testimony of two witnesses. Well, I tell you, it isn't easy to come by; there is great danger to the honest folk who seek it, for these heretics are desperate people, and if they find a spy while they are engaged in devil-worship at one of their conventicles, why--they kill him."

"I know all that, mother. What are you trying to cover up that you are so talkative? It isn't your usual way of doing business. Well, it is a bargain--you shall have your money when you produce the evidence."

And now really if we stop here much longer people will begin to make remarks, for who shall escape aspersion in this censorious world? So good-night, mother, good-night," and he turned to leave the room.

"No, Excellency," she croaked with a snort of indignation, "no pay, no play; I don't work on the faith of your Excellency's word alone."

"How much?" he asked again.

"A hundred florins down."

Then for a while they wrangled hideously, their heads held close together in the patch of moonlight, and so loathsome did their faces look, so plainly was the wicked purpose of their hearts written upon them, that in that faint luminous glow they might have been mistaken for emissaries from the under-world chaffering over the price of a human soul. At last the bargain was struck for fifty florins, and having received it into her hand Black Meg departed.

"Sixty-seven in all," she muttered to herself as she regained the street. "Well, it was no use holding out for any more, for he hasn't got the cash. The man's as poor as Lazarus, but he wants to live like Dives, and, what is more, he gambles, as I learned at The Hague. Also, there's something queer about his past; I have heard as much as that. It must be looked into, and perhaps the bundle of papers which I helped myself to out of his desk while I was waiting"--and she touched the bosom of her

dress to make sure that they were safe--"may tell me a thing or two,
though likely enough they are only unpaid bills. Ah! most noble cheat
and captain, before you have done with her you may find that Black Meg
knows how to pay back hot water for cold!"