

CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER'S GIFTS ARE GOOD GIFTS

At a few minutes to eight that morning a small crowd of people had gathered in front of the Witte Poort at Leyden waiting for the gate to be opened. They were of all sorts, but country folk for the most part, returning to their villages, leading mules and donkeys slung with empty panniers, and shouting greetings through the bars of the gate to acquaintances who led in other mules laden with vegetables and provisions. Among these stood some priests, saturnine and silent, bent, doubtless, upon dark business of their own. A squad of Spanish soldiers waited also, the insolence of the master in their eyes; they were marching to some neighbouring city. There, too, appeared Foy van Goorl and Red Martin, who led a pack mule; Foy dressed in the grey jerkin of a merchant, but armed with a sword and mounted on a good mare; Martin riding a Flemish gelding that nowadays would only have been thought fit for the plough, since no lighter-boned beast could carry his weight. Among these moved a dapper little man, with sandy whiskers and sly face, asking their business and destination of the various travellers, and under pretence of guarding against the smuggling of forbidden goods, taking count upon his tablets of their merchandise and baggage.

Presently he came to Foy.

"Name?" he said, shortly, although he knew him well enough.

"Foy van Goorl and Martin, his father's servant, travelling to The Hague with specimens of brassware, consigned to the correspondents of our firm," answered Foy, indifferently.

"You are very glib," sneered the sandy-whiskered man; "what is the mule laden with? It may be Bibles for all I know."

"Nothing half so valuable, master," replied Foy; "it is a church chandelier in pieces."

"Unpack it and show me the pieces," said the officer.

Foy flushed with anger and set his teeth, but Martin, administering to him a warning nudge in the ribs, submitted with prompt obedience.

It was a long business, for each arm of the chandelier had been carefully wrapped in hay bands, and the official would not pass them until every one was undone, after which they must be done up again. While the pair of them were engaged upon this tedious and unnecessary task, two fresh travellers arrived at the gate, a long, bony person, clothed in a priest-like garb with a hood that hid the head, and a fierce, dissolute-looking individual of military appearance and armed to the teeth. Catching sight of young van Goorl and his servant, the long person, who seemed to ride very awkwardly with legs thrust forward, whispered something to the soldier man, and they passed on without

question through the gate.

When Foy and Martin followed them twenty minutes later, they were out of sight, for the pair were well mounted and rode hard.

"Did you recognise them?" asked Martin so soon as they were clear of the crowd.

"No," said Foy; "who are they?"

"The papist witch, Black Meg, dressed like a man, and the fellow who came here from The Hague yesterday, whither they are going to report that the Heer Adrian routed them, and that the Broekhovens with the Jufvrouw Elsa got through unsearched."

"What does it all mean, Martin?"

"It means, master, that we shall have a warm welcome yonder; it means that some one guesses we know about this treasure, and that we shan't get the stuff away without trouble."

"Will they waylay us?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders as he answered, "It is always well to be ready, but I think not. Coming back they may waylay us, not going. Our lives are of little use without the money; also they cannot be had for

the asking."

Martin was right, for travelling slowly they reached the city without molestation, and, riding to the house of Dirk's correspondent, put up their horses; ate, rested, delivered the sample chandelier, and generally transacted the business which appeared to be the object of their journey. In the course of conversation they learned from their host that things were going very ill here at The Hague for all who were supposed to favour the New Religion. Tortures, burnings, abductions, and murders were of daily occurrence, nor were any brought to judgment for these crimes. Indeed, soldiers, spies, and government agents were quartered on the citizens, doing what they would, and none dared to lift a hand against them. Hendrik Brant, they heard also, was still at large and carrying on business as usual in his shop, though rumour said that he was a marked man whose time would be short.

Foy announced that they would stay the night, and a little after sunset called to Martin to accompany him, as he wished to walk in the Broad Street to see the sights of the town.

"Be careful, Mynheer Foy," said their host in warning, "for there are many strange characters about, men and women. Oh! yes, this mere is full of pike, and fresh bait is snapped up sharply."

"We will be wary," replied Foy, with the cheerful air of a young man eager for excitement. "Hague pike don't like Leyden perch, you know;

they stick in their throats."

"I hope so, I hope so," said the host, "still I pray you be careful. You will remember where to find the horses if you want them; they are fed and I will keep them saddled. Your arrival here is known, and for some reason this house is being watched."

Foy nodded and they started out; Foy going first, and Red Martin, staring round him like a bewildered bumpkin, following at his heel, with his great sword, which was called Silence, girt about his middle, and hidden as much as possible beneath his jerkin.

"I wish you wouldn't look so big, Martin," Foy whispered over his shoulder; "everybody is staring at you and that red beard of yours, which glows like a kitchen fire."

"I can't help it, master," said Martin, "my back aches with stooping as it is, and, as for the beard, well, God made it so."

"At least you might dye it," answered Foy; "if it were black you would be less like a beacon on a church tower."

"Another day, master; it is a long business dyeing a beard like mine; I think it would be quicker to cut it off." Then he stopped, for they were in the Broad Street.

Here they found many people moving to and fro, but although the company were so numerous it was difficult to distinguish them, for no moon shone, and the place was lighted by lanterns set up on poles at long distances from each other. Foy could see, however, that they were for the most part folk of bad character, disreputable women, soldiers of the garrison, half-drunk sailors from every country, and gliding in and out among them all, priests and other observers of events. Before they had been long in the crowd a man stumbled against Foy rudely, at the same time telling him to get out of the path. But although his blood leapt at the insult and his hand went to his sword hilt, Foy took no notice, for he understood at once that it was sought to involve him in a quarrel. Next a woman accosted him, a gaily-dressed woman, but she had no bow upon her shoulder, so Foy merely shook his head and smiled. For the rest of that walk, however, he was aware that this woman was watching him, and with her a man whose figure he could not distinguish, for he was wrapped in a black cloak.

Thrice did Foy, followed by Martin, thus promenade the right side of the Broad Street, till he was heartily weary of the game indeed, and began to wonder if his cousin Brant's plans had not miscarried.

As he turned for the fourth time his doubts were answered, for he found himself face to face with a small woman who wore upon her shoulder a large red bow, and was followed by another woman, a buxom person dressed in a peasant's cap. The lady with the red bow, making pretence to stumble, precipitated herself with an affected scream right into

his arms, and as he caught her, whispered, "Are you from Leyden, sweetheart?" "Yes." "Then treat me as I treat you, and follow always where I lead. First make pretence to be rid of me."

As she finished whispering Foy heard a warning stamp from Martin, followed by the footsteps of the pair who he knew were watching them, which he could distinguish easily, for here at the end of the street there were fewer people. So he began to act as best he could--it was not very well, but his awkwardness gave him a certain air of sincerity.

"No, no," he said, "why should I pay for your supper? Come, be going, my good girl, and leave me and my servant to see the town in peace."

"Oh! Mynheer, let me be your guide, I beg you," answered she of the red bow clasping her hands and looking up into his face. Just then he heard the first woman who had accosted him speaking to her companion in a loud voice.

"Look," she said, "Red Bow is trying her best. Ah! my dear, do you think that you'll get a supper out of a holy Leyden ranter, or a skin off an eel for the asking?"

"Oh! he isn't such a selfish fish as he looks," answered Red Bow over her shoulder, while her eyes told Foy that it was his turn to play.

So he played to the best of his ability, with the result that ten

minutes later any for whom the sight had interest might have observed a yellow-haired young gallant and a black-haired young woman walking down the Broad Street with their arms affectionately disposed around each other's middles. Following them was a huge and lumbering serving man with a beard like fire, who, in a loyal effort to imitate the actions of his master, had hooked a great limb about the neck of Red Bow's stout little attendant, and held her thus in a chancery which, if flattering, must have been uncomfortable. As Martin explained to the poor woman afterwards, it was no fault of his, since in order to reach her waist he must have carried her under his arm.

Foy and his companion chatted merrily enough, if in a somewhat jerky fashion, but Martin attempted no talk. Only as he proceeded he was heard to mutter between his teeth, "Lucky the Pastor Arentz can't see us now. He would never understand, he is so one-sided." So at least Foy declared subsequently in Leyden.

Presently, at a hint from his lady, Foy turned down a side street, unobserved, as he thought, till he heard a mocking voice calling after them, "Good-night, Red Bow, hope you will have a fine supper with your Leyden shopboy."

"Quick," whispered Red Bow, and they turned another corner, then another, and another. Now they walked down narrow streets, ill-kept and unsavoury, with sharp pitched roofs, gabled and overhanging so much that here and there they seemed almost to meet, leaving but a ribbon

of star-specked sky winding above their heads. Evidently it was a low quarter of the town and a malodourous quarter, for the canals, spanned by picturesque and high-arched bridges, were everywhere, and at this summer season the water in them was low, rotten, and almost stirless.

At length Red Bow halted and knocked upon a small recessed door, which instantly was opened by a man who bore no light.

"Come in," he whispered, and all four of them passed into a darksome passage. "Quick, quick!" said the man, "I hear footsteps."

Foy heard them also echoing down the empty street, and as the door closed it seemed to him that they stopped in the deep shadow of the houses. Then, holding each other by the hand, they crept along black passages and down stairs till at length they saw light shining through the crevices of an ill-fitting door. It opened mysteriously at their approach, and when they had all entered, shut behind them.

Foy uttered a sigh of relief for he was weary of this long flight, and looked round him to discover that they were in a large windowless cellar, well furnished after a fashion by oak benches and a table set out with cold meats and flagons of wine. At the foot of this table stood a middle-aged man, prematurely grey, and with a face worn as though by constant care.

"Welcome, Foy van Goorl," said the man in a gentle voice. "Many years

have passed since last we met; still I should have known you anywhere, though I think you would not have known me."

Foy looked at him and shook his head.

"I thought so," went on the man with a smile. "Well, I am Hendrik Brant, your cousin, once the burgomaster of The Hague and its richest citizen, but to-day a hunted rat who must receive his guests in secret cellars. Tell me now, did my daughter, Elsa, reach your good father's house in safety, and is she well?"

So Foy told him all that story.

"As I thought, as I thought," said Hendrik. "Ramiro knew of her journey and guessed that she might carry some letter. Oh!" he went on, shaking his fist in a kind of frenzy, and addressing the two women who had played the parts of Red Bow and her servant, "who among you is the traitor? Can it be that you, whom my bounty has fed, betray me? Nay, girls, do not weep, I know that it is not so, and yet, in this city, the very walls have ears, yes, even this deep vault gives up its secrets. Well, if only I can save my fortune from those wolves, what do I care? Then they may take my carcase and tear it. At least, my daughter is safe--for a while, and now I have but one desire left on earth--to rob them of my wealth also."

Then he turned to the girl decked out in the gay clothes, who, now that

the chase was over, sat upon a bench with her face hidden in her hand, and said, "Tell me your story, Gretchen," whereon she lifted her head and repeated all that happened.

"They press us hard," muttered Brant, "but, friends, we will beat them yet. Eat now, and drink while you may."

So they sat down and ate and drank while Hendrik watched them, and the man who had led them to the vault listened without the door.

When they had finished, Brant bade the two women, Red Bow and the other, leave the cellar and send in the sentry, replacing him as guards. He entered, a hard-faced, grizzled man, and, taking a seat at the table, began to fill himself with food and wine.

"Hearken, my cousin Foy," said Brant presently, "this is the plan. A league away, near to the mouth of the great canal, lie certain boats, a score or over of them, laden with trading goods and timber, in the charge of honest men who know nothing of their cargo, but who have orders to fire them if they should be boarded. Among these boats is one called the Swallow, small, but the swiftest on this coast, and handy in a sea. Her cargo is salt, and beneath it eight kegs of powder, and between the powder and the salt certain barrels, which barrels are filled with treasure. Now, presently, if you have the heart for it--and if you have not, say so, and I will go myself--this man here, Hans, under cover of the darkness, will row you down to the boat Swallow.

Then you must board her, and at the first break of dawn hoist her sail and stand out to sea, and away with her where the wind drives, tying the skiff behind. Like enough you will find foes waiting for you at the mouth of the canal, or elsewhere. Then I can give you only one counsel--get out with the Swallow if you can, and if you cannot, escape in the skiff or by swimming, but before you leave her fire the slow-matches that are ready at the bow and the stern, and let the powder do its work and blow my wealth to the waters and the winds. Will you do it? Think, think well before you answer."

"Did we not come from Leyden to be at your command, cousin?" said Foy smiling. Then he added, "But why do you not accompany us on this adventure? You are in danger here, and even if we get clear with the treasure, what use is money without life?"

"To me none, any way," answered Brant; "but you do not understand. I live in the midst of spies, I am watched day and night; although I came here disguised and secretly, it is probable that even my presence in this house is known. More, there is an order out that if I attempt to leave the town by land or water, I am to be seized, whereon my house will be searched instantly, and it will be found that my bullion is gone. Think, lad, how great is this wealth, and you will understand why the crows are hungry. It is talked of throughout the Netherlands, it has been reported to the King in Spain, and I learn that orders have come from him concerning its seizure. But there is another band who would get hold of it first, Ramiro and his crew, and that is why I have been left

safe so long, because the thieves strive one against the other and watch each other. Most of all, however, they watch me and everything that is mine. For though they do not believe that I should send the treasure away and stay behind, yet they are not sure."

"You think that they will pursue us, then?" asked Foy.

"For certain. Messengers arrived from Leyden to announce your coming two hours before you set foot in the town, and it will be wonderful indeed if you leave it without a band of cut-throats at your heels. Be not deceived, lad, this business is no light one."

"You say the little boat sails fast, master?" queried Martin.

"She sails fast, but perhaps others are as swift. Moreover, it may happen that you will find the mouth of the canal blocked by the guardship, which was sent there a week ago with orders to search every craft that passes from stem to stern. Or--you may slip past her."

"My master and I are not afraid of a few blows," said Martin, "and we are ready to take our risks like brave men; still, Mynheer Brant, this seems to me a hazardous business, and one in which your money may well get itself lost. Now, I ask you, would it not be better to take this treasure out of the boat where you have hidden it, and bury it, and convey it away by land?"

Brant shook his head. "I have thought of that," he said, "as I have thought of everything, but it cannot now be done; also there is no time to make fresh plans."

"Why?" asked Foy.

"Because day and night men are watching the boats which are known to belong to me, although they are registered in other names, and only this evening an order was signed that they must be searched within an hour of dawn. My information is good, as it should be since I pay for it dearly."

"Then," said Foy, "there is nothing more to be said. We will try to get to the boat and try to get her away; and if we can get her away we will try to hide the treasure, and if we can't we will try to blow her up as you direct and try to escape ourselves. Or--" and he shrugged his shoulders.

Martin said nothing, only he shook his great red head, nor did the silent pilot at the table speak at all.

Hendrik Brant looked at them, and his pale, careworn face began to work.

"Have I the right?" he muttered to himself, and for an instant or two bent his head as though in prayer. When he lifted it again his mind seemed to be made up.

"Foy van Goorl," he said, "listen to me, and tell your father, my cousin and executor, what I say, since I have no time to write it; tell him word for word. You are wondering why I do not let this pelf take its chance without risking the lives of men to save it. It is because something in my heart pushes me to another path. It may be imagination, but I am a man standing on the edge of the grave, and to such I have known it given to see the future. I think that you will win through with the treasure, Foy, and that it will be the means of bringing some wicked ones to their doom. Yes, and more, much more, but what it is I cannot altogether see. Yet I am quite certain that thousands and tens of thousands of our folk will live to bless the gold of Hendrik Brant, and that is why I work so hard to save it from the Spaniards. Also that is why I ask you to risk your lives to-night; not for the wealth's sake, for wealth is dross, but for what the wealth will buy in days to come."

He paused a while, then went on: "I think also, cousin, that being, they tell me, unaffianced, you will learn to love, and not in vain, that dear child of mine, whom I leave in your father's keeping and in yours. More, since time is short and we shall never meet again, I say to you plainly, that the thought is pleasing to me, young cousin Foy, for I have a good report of you and like your blood and looks. Remember always, however dark may be your sky, that before he passed to doom Hendrik Brant had this vision concerning you and the daughter whom he loves, and whom you will learn to love as do all who know her. Remember also that priceless things are not lightly won, and do not woo her for her fortune, since, I tell you, this belongs not to her but to our people and our cause, and

when the hour comes, for them it must be used."

Foy listened, wondering, but he made no answer, for he knew not what to say. Yet now, on the edge of his first great adventure, these words were comfortable to him who had found already that Elsa's eyes were bright. Brant next turned towards Martin, but that worthy shook his red head and stepped back a pace.

"Thank you kindly, master," he said, "but I will do without the prophecies, which, good or ill, are things that fasten upon a man's mind. Once an astrologer cast my nativity, and foretold that I should be drowned before I was twenty-five. I wasn't, but, my faith! the miles which I have walked round to bridges on account of that astrologer."

Brant smiled. "I have no foresight concerning you, good friend, except that I judge your arm will be always strong in battle; that you will love your masters well, and use your might to avenge the cause of God's slaughtered saints upon their murderers."

Martin nodded his head vigorously, and fumbled at the handle of the sword Silence, while Brant went on:

"Friend, you have entered on a dangerous quarrel on behalf of me and mine, and if you live through it you will have earned high pay."

Then he went to the table, and, taking writing materials, he wrote as

follows: "To the Heer Dirk van Goorl and his heirs, the executors of my will, and the holders of my fortune, which is to be used as God shall show them. This is to certify that in payment of this night's work Martin, called the Red, the servant of the said Dirk van Goorl, or those heirs whom he may appoint, is entitled to a sum of five thousand florins, and I constitute such sum a first charge upon my estate, to whatever purpose they may put it in their discretion." This document he dated, signed, and caused the pilot Hans to sign also as a witness. Then he gave it to Martin, who thanked him by touching his forehead, remarking at the same time--

"After all, fighting is not a bad trade if you only stick to it long enough. Five thousand florins! I never thought to earn so much."

"You haven't got it yet," interrupted Foy. "And now, what are you going to do with that paper?"

Martin reflected. "Coat?" he said, "no, a man takes off his coat if it is hot, and it might be left behind. Boots?--no, that would wear it out, especially if they got wet. Jersey?--sewn next the skin, no, same reason. Ah! I have it," and, drawing out the great sword Silence, he took the point of his knife and began to turn a little silver screw in the hilt, one of many with which the handle of walrus ivory was fastened to its steel core. The screw came out, and he touched a spring, whereon one quarter of the ivory casing fell away, revealing a considerable hollow in the hilt, for, although Martin grasped it with one hand, the

sword was made to be held by two.

"What is that hole for?" asked Foy.

"The executioner's drug," replied Martin, "which makes a man happy while he does his business with him, that is, if he can pay the fee. He offered his dose to me, I remember, before--" Here Martin stopped, and, having rolled up the parchment, hid it in the hollow.

"You might lose your sword," suggested Foy.

"Yes, master, when I lose my life and exchange the hope of florins for a golden crown," replied Martin with a grin. "Till then I do not intend to part with Silence."

Meanwhile Hendrik Brant had been whispering to the quiet man at the table, who now rose and said:

"Foster-brother, do not trouble about me; I take my chance and I do not wish to survive you. My wife is burnt, one of my girls out there is married to a man who knows how to protect them both, also the dowries you gave them are far away and safe. Do not trouble about me who have but one desire--to snatch the great treasure from the maw of the Spaniard that in a day to come it may bring doom upon the Spaniard." Then he relapsed into a silence, which spread over the whole company.

"It is time to be stirring," said Brant presently. "Hans, you will lead the way. I must bide here a while before I go abroad and show myself."

The pilot nodded. "Ready?" he asked, addressing Foy and Martin. Then he went to the door and whistled, whereon Red Bow with her pretended servant entered the vault. He spoke a word or two to them and kissed them each upon the brow. Next he went to Hendrik Brant, and throwing his arms about him, embraced him with far more passion than he had shown towards his own daughters.

"Farewell, foster-brother," he said, "till we meet again here or hereafter--it matters little which. Have no fear, we will get the stuff through to England if may be, or send it to hell with some Spaniards to seek it there. Now, comrades, come on and stick close to me, and if any try to stop us cut them down. When we reach the boat do you take the oars and row while I steer her. The girls come with us to the canal, arm-in-arm with the two of you. If anything happens to me either of them can steer you to the skiff called Swallow, but if naught happens we will put them ashore at the next wharf. Come," and he led the way from the cellar.

At the threshold Foy turned to look at Hendrik Brant. He was standing by the table, the light shining full upon his pale face and grizzled head, about which it seemed to cast a halo. Indeed, at that moment, wrapped in his long, dark cloak, his lips moving in prayer, and his arms uplifted

to bless them as they went, he might well have been, not a man, but some vision of a saint come back to earth. The door closed and Foy never saw him again, for ere long the Inquisition seized him and a while afterwards he died beneath their cruel hands. One of the charges against him was, that more than twenty years before, he had been seen reading the Bible at Leyden by Black Meg, who appeared and gave the evidence. But they did not discover where his treasure was hidden away. To win an easier death, indeed, he made them a long confession that took them a still longer journey, but of the truth of the matter he knew nothing, and therefore could tell them nothing.

Now this scene, so strange and pathetic, ended at last, the five of them were in the darkness of the street. Here once more Foy and Red Bow clung to each other, and once more the arm of Martin was about the neck of her who seemed to be the serving-maid, while ahead, as though he were paid to show the way, went the pilot. Soon footsteps were heard, for folk were after them. They turned once, they turned twice, they reached the bank of a canal, and Hans, followed by Red Bow and her sister, descended some steps and climbed into a boat which lay there ready. Next came Martin, and, last of all, Foy. As he set foot upon the first step, a figure shot out of the gloom towards him, a knife gleamed in the air and a blow took him between the shoulders that sent him stumbling headlong, for he was balanced upon the edge of the step.

But Martin had heard and seen. He swung round and struck out with the sword Silence. The assassin was far from him, still the tip of the long

steel reached the outstretched murderous hand, and from it fell a broken knife, while he who held it sped on with a screech of pain. Martin darted back and seized the knife, then he leapt into the boat and pushed off. At the bottom of it lay Foy, who had fallen straight into the arms of Red Bow, dragging her down with him.

"Are you hurt, master?" asked Martin.

"Not a bit," replied Foy, "but I am afraid the lady is. She went undermost."

"Mother's gifts are good gifts!" muttered Martin as he pulled him and the girl, whose breath had been knocked out of her, up to a seat. "You ought to have an eight-inch hole through you, but that knife broke upon the shirt. Look here," and he threw the handle of the dagger on to his knees and snatched at the sculls.

Foy examined it in the faint light, and there, still hooked above the guard, was a single severed finger, a long and skinny finger, to which the point of the sword Silence had played surgeon, and on it a gold ring. "This may be useful," thought Foy, as he slipped handle and finger into the pocket of his cloak.

Then they all took oars and rowed till presently they drew near a wharf.

"Now, daughters, make ready," said Hans, and the girls stood up. As they

touched the wharf Red Bow bent down and kissed Foy.

"The rest were in play, this is in earnest," she said, "and for luck.

Good-night, companion, and think of me sometimes."

"Good-night, companion," answered Foy, returning the kiss. Then she leapt ashore. They never met again.

"You know what to do, girls," said Hans; "do it, and in three days you should be safe in England, where, perhaps, I may meet you, though do not count on that. Whatever happens, keep honest, and remember me till we come together again, here or hereafter, but, most of all, remember your mother and your benefactor Hendrik Brant. Farewell."

"Farewell, father," they answered with a sob, and the boat drifted off down the dark canal, leaving the two of them alone upon the wharf. Afterwards Foy discovered that it was the short sister who walked with Martin that was married. Gallant little Red Bow married also, but later. Her husband was a cloth merchant in London, and her grandson became Lord Mayor of that city.

And now, having played their part in it, these two brave girls are out of the story.