

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MASTER

In the sitting-room, speaking more slowly and with greater caution, Foy continued the story of their adventures. When he came to the tale of how the ship *Swallow* was blown up with all the Spanish boarders, Elsa clasped her hands, saying, "Horrible! Horrible! Think of the poor creatures hurled thus into eternity."

"And think of the business they were on," broke in Dirk grimly, adding, "May God forgive me who cannot feel grieved to hear of the death of Spanish cut-throats. It was well managed, Foy, excellently well managed. But go on."

"I think that is about all," said Foy shortly, "except that two of the Spaniards got away in a boat, one of whom is believed to be the head spy and captain, Ramiro."

"But, son, up in Adrian's chamber just now you said something about having made a map of the hiding-place of the gold. Where is it, for it should be put in safety?"

"Yes, I know I did," answered Foy, "but didn't I tell you?" he went on awkwardly. "Martin managed to drop the thing in the cabin of the *Swallow* while we were lighting the fuses, so it was blown up with the

ship, and there is now no record of where the stuff was buried."

"Come, come, son," said Dirk. "Martha, who knows every island on the great lake, must remember the spot."

"Oh! no, she doesn't," answered Foy. "The truth is that she didn't come with us when we buried the barrels. She stopped to watch the Spanish ship, and just told us to land on the first island we came to and dig a hole, which we did, making a map of the place before we left, the same that Martin dropped."

All this clumsy falsehood Foy uttered with a wooden face and in a voice which would not have convinced a three-year-old infant, priding himself the while upon his extraordinary cleverness.

"Martin," asked Dirk, suspiciously, "is this true?"

"Absolutely true, master," replied Martin; "it is wonderful how well he remembers."

"Son," said Dirk, turning white with suppressed anger, "you have always been a good lad, and now you have shown yourself a brave one, but I pray God that I may not be forced to add that you are false-tongued. Do you not see that this looks black? The treasure which you have hidden is the greatest in all the Netherlands. Will not folk say, it is not wonderful that you should have forgotten its secret until--it suits you to

remember?"

Foy took a step forward, his face crimson with indignation, but the heavy hand of Martin fell upon his shoulder and dragged him back as though he were but a little child.

"I think, Master Foy," he said, fixing his eyes upon Lysbeth, "that your lady mother wishes to say something."

"You are right, Martin; I do. Do you not think, husband, that in these days of ours a man might have other reasons for hiding the truth than a desire to enrich himself by theft?"

"What do you mean, wife?" asked Dirk. "Foy here says that he has buried this great hoard with Martin, but that he and Martin do not know where they buried it, and have lost the map they made. Whatever may be the exact wording of the will, that hoard belongs to my cousin here, subject to certain trusts which have not yet arisen, and may never arise, and I am her guardian while Hendrik Brant lives and his executor when he dies. Therefore, legally, it belongs to me also. By what right, then, do my son and my servant hide the truth from me, if, indeed, they are hiding the truth? Say what you have to say straight out, for I am a plain man and cannot read riddles."

"Then I will say it, husband, though it is but my guess, for I have had no words with Foy or Martin, and if I am wrong they can correct me. I

know their faces, and I think with you that they are not speaking the truth. I think that they do not wish us to know it--not that they may keep the secret of this treasure for themselves, but because such a secret might well bring those who know of it to the torment and the stake. Is it not so, my son?"

"Mother," answered Foy, almost in a whisper, "it is so. The paper is not lost, but do not seek to learn its hiding-place, for there are wolves who would tear your bodies limb from limb to get the knowledge out of you; yes, even Elsa's, even Elsa's. If the trial must come let it fall on me and Martin, who are fitter to bear it. Oh! father, surely you know that, whatever we may be, neither of us is a thief."

Dirk advanced to his son, and kissed him on the forehead.

"My son," he said, "pardon me, and you, Red Martin, pardon me also. I spoke in my haste. I spoke as a fool, who, at my age, should have known better. But, oh! I tell you that I wish that this cursed treasure, these cases of precious gems and these kegs of hoarded gold, had been shivered to the winds of heaven with the timbers of the ship Swallow. For, mark you, Ramiro has escaped, and with him another man, and they will know well that having the night to hide it, you did not destroy those jewels with the ship. They will track you down, these Spanish sleuthhounds, filled with the lust of blood and gold, and it will be well if the lives of every one of us do not pay the price of the secret of the burying-place of the wealth of Hendrik Brant."

He ceased, pale and trembling, and a silence fell upon the room and all in it, a sad and heavy silence, for in his voice they caught the note of prophecy. Martin broke it.

"It may be so, master," he said; "but, your pardon, you should have thought of that before you undertook this duty. There was no call upon you to send the Heer Foy and myself to The Hague to bring away this trash, but you did it as would any other honest man. Well, now it is done, and we must take our chance, but I say this--if you are wise, my masters, yes, and you ladies also, before you leave this room you will swear upon the Bible, every one of you, never to whisper the word treasure, never to think of it except to believe that it is gone--lost beneath the waters of the Haarlemer Meer. Never to whisper it, no, mistress, not even to the Heer Adrian, your son who lies sick abed upstairs."

"You have learnt wisdom somewhere of late years, Martin, since you stopped drinking and fighting," said Dirk drily, "and for my part before God I swear it."

"And so do I." "And I." "And I." "And I," echoed the others, Martin, who spoke last, adding, "Yes, I swear that I will never speak of it; no, not even to my young master, Adrian, who lies sick abed upstairs."

Adrian made a good, though not a very quick recovery. He had lost a great deal of blood, but the vessel closed without further complications, so that it remained only to renew his strength by rest and ample food. For ten days or so after the return of Foy and Martin, he was kept in bed and nursed by the women of the house. Elsa's share in this treatment was to read to him from the Spanish romances which he admired. Very soon, however, he found that he admired Elsa herself even more than the romances, and would ask her to shut the book that he might talk to her. So long as his conversation was about himself, his dreams, plans and ambitions, she fell into it readily enough; but when he began to turn it upon herself, and to lard it with compliment and amorous innuendo, then she demurred, and fled to the romances for refuge.

Handsome as he might be, Adrian had no attractions for Elsa. About him there was something too exaggerated for her taste; moreover he was Spanish, Spanish in his beauty, Spanish in the cast of his mind, and all Spaniards were hateful to her. Deep down in her heart also lay a second reason for this repugnance; the man reminded her of another man who for months had been a nightmare to her soul, the Hague spy, Ramiro. This Ramiro she had observed closely. Though she had not seen him very often his terrible reputation was familiar to her. She knew also, for her father had told her as much, that it was he who was drawing the nets about him at The Hague, and who plotted day and night to rob him of his wealth.

At first sight there was no great resemblance between the pair. How could there be indeed between a man on the wrong side of middle age, one-eyed, grizzled, battered, and bearing about with him an atmosphere of iniquity, and a young gentleman, handsome, distinguished, and wayward, but assuredly no criminal? Yet the likeness existed. She had seen it first when Adrian was pointing out to her how, were he a general, he would dispose his forces for the capture of Leyden, and from that moment her nature rose in arms against him. Also it came out in other ways, in little tricks of voice and pomposities of manner which Elsa caught at unexpected moments, perhaps, as she told herself, because she had trained her mind to seek these similarities. Yet all the while she knew that the fancy was ridiculous, for what could these two men have in common with each other?

In those days, however, Elsa did not think much of Adrian, or of anybody except her beloved father, whose only child she was, and whom she adored with all the passion of her heart. She knew the terrible danger in which he stood, and guessed that she had been sent away that she should not share his perils. Now she had but one desire and one prayer--that he might escape in safety, and that she might return to him again. Once only a message came from him, sent through a woman she had never seen, the wife of a fisherman, who delivered it by word of mouth. This was the message:

"Give my love and blessing to my daughter Elsa, and tell her that so far I am unharmed. To Foy van Goorl say, I have heard the news. Well done,

thou good and faithful servant! Let him remember what I told him, and be sure that he will not strive in vain, and that he shall not lack for his reward here or hereafter."

That was all. Tidings reached them that the destruction of so many men by the blowing up of the Swallow, and by her sinking of the Government boat as she escaped, had caused much excitement and fury among the Spaniards. But, as those who had been blown up were free-lances, and as the boat was sunk while the Swallow was flying from them, nothing had been done in the matter. Indeed, nothing could be done, for it was not known who manned the Swallow, and, as Ramiro had foreseen, her crew were supposed to have been destroyed with her in the Haarlemer Meer.

Then, after a while, came other news that filled Elsa's heart with a wild hope, for it was reported that Hendrik Brant had disappeared, and was believed to have escaped from The Hague. Nothing more was heard of him, however, which is scarcely strange, for the doomed man had gone down the path of rich heretics into the silent vaults of the Inquisition. The net had closed at last, and through the net fell the sword.

But if Elsa thought seldom of Adrian, except in gusts of spasmodic dislike, Adrian thought of Elsa, and little besides. So earnestly did he lash his romantic temperament, and so deeply did her beauty and charm appeal to him, that very soon he was truly in love with her. Nor did the fact that, as he believed, she was, potentially, the greatest heiress

in the Netherlands, cool Adrian's amorous devotion. What could suit him better in his condition, than to marry this rich and lovely lady?

So Adrian made up his mind that he would marry her, for, in his vanity, it never occurred to him that she might object. Indeed, the only thought that gave him trouble was the difficulty of reducing her wealth into possession. Foy and Martin had buried it somewhere in the Haarlemer Meer. But they said, for this he had ascertained by repeated inquiries, although the information was given grudgingly enough, that the map of the hiding-place had been destroyed in the explosion on the Swallow. Adrian did not believe this story for a moment. He was convinced that they were keeping the truth from him, and as the prospective master of that treasure he resented this reticence bitterly. Still, it had to be overcome, and so soon as he was engaged to Elsa he intended to speak very clearly upon this point. Meanwhile, the first thing was to find a suitable opportunity to make his declaration in due form, which done he would be prepared to deal with Foy and Martin.

Towards evening it was Elsa's custom to walk abroad. As at that hour Foy left the foundry, naturally he accompanied her in these walks, Martin following at a little distance in case he should be wanted. Soon those excursions became delightful to both of them. To Elsa, especially, it was pleasant to escape from the hot house into the cool evening air, and still more pleasant to exchange the laboured tendernesses and highly coloured compliments of Adrian for the cheerful honesty of Foy's conversation.

Foy admired his cousin as much as did his half-brother, but his attitude towards her was very different. He never said sweet things; he never gazed up into her eyes and sighed, although once or twice, perhaps by accident, he did squeeze her hand. His demeanour towards her was that of a friend and relative, and the subject of their talk for the most part was the possibility of her father's deliverance from the dangers which surrounded him, and other matters of the sort.

The time came at last when Adrian was allowed to leave his room, and as it chanced it fell to Elsa's lot to attend him on this first journey downstairs. In a Dutch home of the period and of the class of the Van Goorl's, all the women-folk of whatever degree were expected to take a share in the household work. At present Elsa's share was to nurse to Adrian, who showed so much temper at every attempt which was made to replace her by any other woman, that, in face of the doctor's instructions, Lysbeth did not dare to cross his whim.

It was with no small delight, therefore, that Elsa hailed the prospect of release, for the young man with his grandiose bearing and amorous sighs wearied her almost beyond endurance. Adrian was not equally pleased; indeed he had feigned symptoms which caused him to remain in bed an extra week, merely in order that he might keep her near him. But now the inevitable hour had come, and Adrian felt that it was incumbent upon him to lift the veil and let Elsa see some of the secret of his soul. He had prepared for the event; indeed the tedium of his

confinement had been much relieved by the composition of lofty and heart-stirring addresses, in which he, the noble cavalier, laid his precious self and fortune at the feet of this undistinguished, but rich and attractive maid.

Yet now when the moment was with him, and when Elsa gave him her hand to lead him from the room, behold! all these beautiful imaginings had vanished, and his knees shook with no fancied weakness. Somehow Elsa did not look as a girl ought to look who was about to be proposed to; she was too cold and dignified, too utterly unconscious of anything unusual. It was disconcerting--but--it must be done.

By a superb effort Adrian recovered himself and opened with one of the fine speeches, not the best by any means, but the only specimen which he could remember.

"Without," he began, "the free air waits to be pressed by my cramped wings, but although my heart bounds wild as that of any haggard hawk, I tell you, fairest Elsa, that in yonder gilded cage," and he pointed to the bed, "I----"

"Heaven above us! Heer Adrian," broke in Elsa in alarm, "are you--are you--getting giddy?"

"She does not understand. Poor child, how should she?" he murmured in a stage aside. Then he started again. "Yes, most adorable, best beloved,

I am giddy, giddy with gratitude to those fair hands, giddy with worship of those lovely eyes----"

Now Elsa, unable to contain her merriment any longer, burst out laughing, but seeing that her adorer's face was beginning to look as it did in the dining-room before he broke the blood vessel, she checked herself, and said:

"Oh! Heer Adrian, don't waste all this fine poetry upon me. I am too stupid to understand it."

"Poetry!" he exclaimed, becoming suddenly natural, "it isn't poetry."

"Then what is it?" she asked, and next moment could have bitten her tongue out.

"It is--it is--love!" and he sank upon his knees before her, where, she could not but notice, he looked very handsome in the subdued light of the room, with his upturned face blanched by sickness, and his southern glowing eyes. "Elsa, I love you and no other, and unless you return that love my heart will break and I shall die."

Now, under ordinary circumstances, Elsa would have been quite competent to deal with the situation, but the fear of over-agitating Adrian complicated it greatly. About the reality of his feelings at the moment, at any rate, it seemed impossible to be mistaken, for the man was

shaking like a leaf. Still, she must make an end of these advances.

"Rise, Heer Adrian," she said gently, holding out her hand to help him to his feet.

He obeyed, and glancing at her face, saw that it was very calm and cold as winter ice.

"Listen, Heer Adrian," she said. "You mean this kindly, and doubtless many a maid would be flattered by your words, but I must tell you that I am in no mood for love-making."

"Because of another man?" he queried, and suddenly becoming theatrical again, added, "Speak on, let me hear the worst; I will not quail."

"There is no need to," replied Elsa in the same quiet voice, "because there is no other man. I have never yet thought of marriage, I have no wish that way, and if I had, I should forget it now when from hour to hour I do not know where my dear father may be, or what fate awaits him. He is my only lover, Heer Adrian," and as Elsa spoke her soft brown eyes filled with tears.

"Ah!" said Adrian, "would that I might fly to save him from all dangers, as I rescued you, lady, from the bandits of the wood."

"I would you might," she replied, smiling sadly at the double meaning of

the words, "but, hark, your mother is calling us. I know, Heer Adrian," she added gently, "that you will understand and respect my dreadful anxiety, and will not trouble me again with poetry and love-talk, for if you do I shall be--angry."

"Lady," he answered, "your wishes are my law, and until these clouds have rolled from the blue heaven of your life I will be as silent as the watching moon. And, by the way," he added rather nervously, "perhaps you will be silent also--about our talk, I mean, as we do not want that buffoon, Foy, thrusting his street-boy fun at us."

Elsa bowed her head. She was inclined to resent the "we" and other things in this speech, but, above all, she did not wish to prolong this foolish and tiresome interview, so, without more words, she took her admirer by the hand and guided him down the stairs.

It was but three days after this ridiculous scene, on a certain afternoon, when Adrian had been out for the second time, that the evil tidings came. Dirk had heard them in the town, and returned home well-nigh weeping. Elsa saw his face and knew at once.

"Oh! is he dead?" she gasped.

He nodded, for he dared not trust himself to speak.

"How? Where?"

"In the Poort prison at The Hague."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen a man who helped to bury him."

She looked up as though to ask for further details, but Dirk turned away muttering, "He is dead, he is dead, let be."

Then she understood, nor did she ever seek to know any more. Whatever he had suffered, at least now he was with the God he worshipped, and with the wife he lost. Only the poor orphan, comforted by Lysbeth, crept from the chamber, and for a week was seen no more. When she appeared again she seemed to be herself in all things, only she never smiled and was very indifferent to what took place about her. Thus she remained for many days.

Although this demeanour on Elsa's part was understood and received with sympathy and more by the rest of the household, Adrian soon began to find it irksome and even ridiculous. So colossal was this young man's vanity that he was unable quite to understand how a girl could be so wrapped up in the memories of a murdered father, that no place was left in her mind for the tendernesses of a present adorer. After all, this

father, what was he? A middle-aged and, doubtless, quite uninteresting burgher, who could lay claim to but one distinction, that of great wealth, most of which had been amassed by his ancestors.

Now a rich man alive has points of interest, but a rich man dead is only interesting to his heirs. Also, this Brant was one of these narrow-minded, fanatical, New Religion fellows who were so wearisome to men of intellect and refinement. True, he, Adrian, was himself of that community, for circumstances had driven him into the herd, but oh! he found them a dreary set. Their bald doctrines of individual effort, of personal striving to win a personal redemption, did not appeal to him; moreover, they generally ended at the stake. Now about the pomp and circumstance of the Mother Church there was something attractive. Of course, as a matter of prejudice he attended its ceremonials from time to time and found them comfortable and satisfying. Comfortable also were the dogmas of forgiveness to be obtained by an act of penitential confession, and the sense of a great supporting force whose whole weight was at the disposal of the humblest believer.

In short, there was nothing picturesque about the excellent departed Hendrik, nothing that could justify the young woman in wrapping herself up in grief for him to the entire exclusion of a person who was picturesque and ready, at the first opportunity, to wrap himself up in her.

After long brooding, assisted by a close study of the romances of the

period, Adrian convinced himself that in all this there was something unnatural, that the girl must be under a species of spell which in her own interest ought to be broken through. But how? That was the question. Try as he would he could do nothing. Therefore, like others in a difficulty, he determined to seek the assistance of an expert, namely, Black Meg, who, among her other occupations, for a certain fee payable in advance, was ready to give advice as a specialist in affairs of the heart.

To Black Meg accordingly he went, disguised, secretly and by night, for he loved mystery, and in truth it was hardly safe that he should visit her by the light of day. Seated in a shadowed chamber he poured out his artless tale to the pythoness, of course concealing all names. He might have spared himself this trouble, as he was an old client of Meg's, a fact that no disguise could keep from her. Before he opened his lips she knew perfectly what was the name of his inamorata and indeed all the circumstances connected with the pair of them.

The wise woman listened in patience, and when he had done, shook her head, saying that the case was too hard for her. She proposed, however, to consult a Master more learned than herself, who, by great good fortune, was at that moment in Leyden, frequenting her house in fact, and begged that Adrian would return at the same hour on the morrow.

Now, as it chanced, oddly enough Black Meg had been commissioned by the said Master to bring about a meeting between himself and this very young

man.

Adrian returned accordingly, and was informed that the Master, after consulting the stars and other sources of divination, had become so deeply interested in the affair that, for pure love of the thing and not for any temporal purpose of gain, he was in attendance to advise in person. Adrian was overjoyed, and prayed that he might be introduced. Presently a noble-looking form entered the room, wrapped in a long cloak. Adrian bowed, and the form, after contemplating him earnestly--very earnestly, if he had known the truth--acknowledged the salute with dignity. Adrian cleared his throat and began to speak, whereon the sage stopped him.

"Explanations are needless, young man," he said, in a measured and melodious voice, "for my studies of the matter have already informed me of more than you can tell. Let me see; your name is Adrian van Goorl--no, called Van Goorl; the lady you desire to win is Elsa Brant, the daughter of Hendrik Brant, a heretic and well-known goldsmith, who was recently executed at The Hague. She is a girl of much beauty, but one unnaturally insensible to the influence of love, and who does not at present recognise your worth. There are, also, unless I am mistaken, other important circumstances connected with the case.

"This lady is a great heiress, but her fortune is at present missing; it is, I have reason to believe, hidden in the Haarlemer Meer. She is surrounded with influences that are inimical to you, all of which,

however, can be overcome if you will place yourself unreservedly in my hands, for, young man, I accept no half-confidences, nor do I ask for any fee. When the fortune is recovered and the maiden is your happy wife, then we will talk of payment for services rendered, and not before."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" gasped Adrian; "most learned senor, every word you say is true."

"Yes, friend Adrian, and I have not told you all the truth. For instance--but, no, this is not the time to speak. The question is, do you accept my terms?"

"What terms, senor?"

"The old terms, without which no wonder can be worked--faith, absolute faith."

Adrian hesitated a little. Absolute faith seemed a large present to give a complete stranger at a first interview.

"I read your thought and I respect it," went on the sage, who, to tell truth, was afraid he had ventured a little too far. "There is no hurry; these affairs cannot be concluded in a day."

Adrian admitted that they could not, but intimated that he would be glad

of a little practical and immediate assistance. The sage buried his face in his hands and thought.

"The first thing to do," he said presently, "is to induce a favourable disposition of the maiden's mind towards yourself, and this, I think, can best be brought about--though the method is one which I do not often use--by means of a love philtre carefully compounded to suit the circumstances of the case. If you will come here to-morrow at dusk, the lady of this house--a worthy woman, though rough of speech and no true adept--will hand it to you."

"It isn't poisonous?" suggested Adrian doubtfully.

"Fool, do I deal in poisons? It will poison the girl's heart in your favour, that is all."

"And how is it to be administered?" asked Adrian.

"In the water or the wine she drinks, and afterwards you must speak to her again as soon as possible. Now that is settled," he went on airily, "so, young friend, good-bye."

"Are you sure that there is no fee?" hesitated Adrian.

"No, indeed," answered the sage, "at any rate until all is accomplished. Ah!" and he sighed, "did you but know what a delight it is to a weary

and world-worn traveller to help forward the bright ambitions of youth, to assist the pure and soaring soul to find the mate destined to it by heaven--ehem!--you wouldn't talk of fees. Besides, I will be frank; from the moment that I entered this room and saw you, I recognised in you a kindred nature, one which under my guidance is capable of great things, of things greater than I care to tell. Ah! what a vision do I see. You, the husband of the beautiful Elsa and master of her great wealth, and I at your side guiding you with my wisdom and experience--then what might not be achieved? Dreams, doubtless dreams, though how often have my dreams been prophetic! Still, forget them, and at least, young man, we will be friends," and he stretched out his hand.

"With all my heart," answered Adrian, taking those cool, agile-looking fingers. "For years I have sought someone on whom I could rely, someone who would understand me as I feel you do."

"Yes, yes," sighed the sage, "I do indeed understand you."

"To think," he said to himself after the door had closed behind the delighted and flattered Adrian, "to think that I can be the father of such a fool as that. Well, it bears out my theories about cross-breeding, and, after all, in this case a good-looking, gullible fool will be much more useful to me than a young man of sense. Let me see; the price of the office is paid and I shall have my appointment duly sealed as the new Governor of the Gevangenhuis by next week at furthest, so I may as well begin to collect evidence against my worthy

successor, Dirk van Goorl, his adventurous son Foy, and that red-headed ruffian, Martin. Once I have them in the Gevangenhuis it will go hard if I can't squeeze the secret of old Brant's money out of one of the three of them. The women wouldn't know, they wouldn't have told the women, besides I don't want to meddle with them, indeed nothing would persuade me to that"--and he shivered as though at some wretched recollection.

"But there must be evidence; there is such noise about these executions and questionings that they won't allow any more of them in Leyden without decent evidence; even Alva and the Blood Council are getting a bit frightened. Well, who can furnish better testimony than that jackass, my worthy son, Adrian? Probably, however, he has a conscience somewhere, so it may be as well not to let him know that when he thinks himself engaged in conversation he is really in the witness box. Let me see, we must take the old fellow, Dirk, on the ground of heresy, and the youngster and the serving man on a charge of murdering the king's soldiers and assisting the escape of heretics with their goods. Murder sounds bad, and, especially in the case of a young man, excites less sympathy than common heresy."

Then he went to the door, calling, "Meg, hostess mine, Meg."

He might have saved himself the trouble, however, since, on opening it suddenly, that lady fell almost into his arms.

"What!" he said, "listening, oh, fie! and all for nothing. But there, ladies will be curious and"--this to himself--"I must be more careful."

Lucky I didn't talk aloud."

Then he called her in, and having inspected the chamber narrowly, proceeded to make certain arrangements.