

CHAPTER XVIII

FOY SEES A VISION

Never since that day when, many years before, she had bought the safety of the man she loved by promising herself in marriage to his rival, had Lysbeth slept so ill as she did upon this night. Montalvo was alive.

Montalvo was here, here to strike down and destroy those whom she loved, and triple armed with power, authority, and desire to do the deed. Well she knew that when there was plunder to be won, he would not step aside or soften until it was in his hands. Yet there was hope in this; he was not a cruel man, as she knew also, that is to say, he had no pleasure in inflicting suffering for its own sake; such methods he used only as a means to an end. If he could get the money, all of it, she was sure that he would leave them alone. Why should he not have it? Why should all their lives be menaced because of this trust which had been thrust upon them?

Unable to endure the torments of her doubts and fears, Lysbeth woke her husband, who was sleeping peacefully at her side, and told him what was passing in her mind.

"It is a true saying," answered Dirk with a smile, "that even the best of women are never quite honest when their interest pulls the other way. What, wife, would you have us buy our own peace with Brant's fortune, and thus break faith with a dead man and bring down his curse upon us?"

"The lives of men are more than gold, and Elsa would consent," she answered sullenly; "already this pelf is stained with blood, the blood of Hendrik Brant himself, and of Hans the pilot."

"Yes, wife, and since you mention it, with the blood of a good many Spaniards also, who tried to steal the stuff. Let's see; there must have been several drowned at the mouth of the river, and quite twenty went up with the Swallow, so the loss has not been all on our side. Listen, Lysbeth, listen. It was my cousin, Hendrik Brant's, belief that in the end this great fortune of his would do some service to our people or our country, for he wrote as much in his will and repeated it to Foy. I know not when or in what fashion this may come about; how can I know? But first will I die before I hand it over to the Spaniard. Moreover, I cannot, since its secret was never told to me."

"Foy and Martin have it."

"Lysbeth," said Dirk sternly, "I charge you as you love me not to work upon them to betray their trust; no, not even to save my life or your own--if we must die, let us die with honour. Do you promise?"

"I promise," she answered with dry lips, "but on this condition only, that you fly from Leyden with us all, to-night if maybe."

"Good," answered Dirk, "a halfpenny for a herring; you have made your

promise, and I'll give you mine; that's fair, although I am old to seek a new home in England. But it can't be to-night, wife, for I must make arrangements. There is a ship sailing to-day, and we might catch her to-morrow at the river's mouth, after she has passed the officers, for her captain is a friend of mine. How will that do?"

"I had rather it had been to-night," said Lysbeth. "While we are in Leyden with that man we are not safe from one hour to the next."

"Wife, we are never safe. It is all in the hands of God, and, therefore, we should live like soldiers awaiting the hour to march, and rejoice exceedingly when it pleases our Captain to sound the call."

"I know," she answered; "but, oh! Dirk, it would be hard--to part."

He turned his head aside for a moment, then said in a steady voice, "Yes, wife, but it will be sweet to meet again and part no more."

While it was still early that morning Dirk summoned Foy and Martin to his wife's chamber. Adrian for his own reasons he did not summon, making the excuse that he was still asleep, and it would be a pity to disturb him; nor Elsa, since as yet there was no necessity to trouble her. Then, briefly, for he was given to few words, he set out the gist of the matter, telling them that the man Ramiro whom they had beaten on the

Haarlemer Meer was in Leyden, which Foy knew already, for Elsa had told him as much, and that he was no other than the Spaniard named the Count Juan de Montalvo, the villain who had deceived Lysbeth into a mock marriage by working on her fears, and who was the father of Adrian. All this time Lysbeth sat in a carved oak chair listening with a stony face to the tale of her own shame and betrayal. She made no sign at all beyond a little twitching of her fingers, till Foy, guessing what she suffered in her heart, suddenly went to his mother and kissed her. Then she wept a few silent tears, for an instant laid her hand upon his head as though in blessing, and, motioning him back to his place, became herself again--stern, unmoved, observant.

Next Dirk, taking up his tale, spoke of his wife's fears, and of her belief that there was a plot to wring out of them the secret of Hendrik Brant's treasure.

"Happily," he said, addressing Foy, "neither your mother nor I, nor Adrian, nor Elsa, know that secret; you and Martin know it alone, you and perhaps one other who is far away and cannot be caught. We do not know it, and we do not wish to know it, and whatever happens to any of us, it is our earnest hope that neither of you will betray it, even if our lives, or your lives, hang upon the words, for we hold it better that we should keep our trust with a dead man at all costs than that we should save ourselves by breaking faith. Is it not so, wife?"

"It is so," answered Lysbeth hoarsely.

"Have no fear," said Foy. "We will die before we betray."

"We will try to die before we betray," grumbled Martin in his deep voice, "but flesh is frail and God knows."

"Oh! I have no doubt of you, honest man," said Dirk with a smile, "for you have no mother and father to think of in this matter."

"Then, master, you are foolish," replied Martin, "for I repeat it--flesh is frail, and I always hated the look of a rack. However, I have a handsome legacy charged upon this treasure, and perhaps the thought of that would support me. Alive or dead, I should not like to think of my money being spent by any Spaniard."

While Martin spoke the strangeness of the thing came home to Foy. Here were four of them, two of whom knew a secret and two who did not, while those who did not implored those who did to impart to them nothing of the knowledge which, if they had it, might serve to save them from a fearful doom. Then for the first time in his young and inexperienced life he understood how great erring men and women can be and what patient majesty dwells in the human heart, that for the sake of a trust it does not seek can yet defy the most hideous terrors of the body and the soul. Indeed, that scene stamped itself upon his mind in such fashion that throughout his long existence he never quite forgot it for a single day. His mother, clad in her frilled white cap and grey gown,

seated cold-faced and resolute in the oaken chair. His father, to whom, although he knew it not, he was now speaking for the last time, standing by her, his hand resting upon her shoulder and addressing them in his quiet, honest voice. Martin standing also but a little to one side and behind, the light of the morning playing upon his great red beard; his round, pale eyes glittering as was their fashion when wrathful, and himself, Foy, leaning forward to listen, every nerve in his body strung tight with excitement, love, and fear.

Oh! he never forgot it, which is not strange, for so great was the strain upon him, so well did he know that this scene was but the prelude to terrible events, that for a moment, only for a moment, his steady reason was shaken and he saw a vision. Martin, the huge, patient, ox-like Martin, was changed into a red Vengeance; he saw him, great sword aloft, he heard the roar of his battle cry, and lo! before him men went down to death, and about him the floor seemed purple with their blood. His father and his mother, too; they were no longer human, they were saints--see the glory which shone over them, and look, too, the dead Hendrik Brant was whispering in their ears. And he, Foy, he was beside Martin playing his part in those red frays as best he might, and playing it not in vain.

Then all passed, and a wave of peace rolled over him, a great sense of duty done, of honour satisfied, of reward attained. Lo! the play was finished, and its ultimate meaning clear, but before he could read and understand--it had gone.

He gasped and shook himself, gripping his hands together.

"What have you seen, son?" asked Lysbeth, watching his face.

"Strange things, mother," Foy answered. "A vision of war for Martin and me, of glory for my father and you, and of eternal peace for us all."

"It is a good omen, Foy," she said. "Fight your fight and leave us to fight ours. 'Through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God,' where at last there is a rest remaining for us all. It is a good omen. Your father was right and I was wrong. Now I have no more to fear; I am satisfied."

None of them seemed to be amazed or to find these words wonderful and out of the common. For them the hand of approaching Doom had opened the gates of Distance, and they knew everyone that through these some light had broken on their souls, a faint flicker of dawn from beyond the clouds. They accepted it in thankfulness.

"I think that is all I have to say," said Dirk in his usual voice. "No, it is not all," and he told them of his plan for flight. They listened and agreed to it, yet to them it seemed a thing far off and unreal. None of them believed that this escape would ever be carried out. All of them believed that here in Leyden they would endure the fiery trial of their

faith and win each of them its separate crown.

When everything was discussed, and each had learned the lesson of what he must do that day, Foy asked if Adrian was to be told of the scheme. To this his father answered hastily that the less it was spoken of the better, therefore he proposed to tell Adrian late that night only, when he could make up his mind whether he would accompany them or stay in Leyden.

"Then he shan't go out to-night, and will come with us as far as the ship only if I can manage it," muttered Martin beneath his breath, but aloud he said nothing. Somehow it did not seem to him to be worth while to make trouble about it, for he knew that if he did his mistress and Foy, who believed so heartily in Adrian, would be angry.

"Father and mother," said Foy again, "while we are gathered here there is something I wish to say to you."

"What is it, son?" asked Dirk.

"Yesterday I became affianced to Elsa Brant, and we wish to ask your consent and blessing."

"That will be gladly given, son, for I think this very good news. Bring her here, Foy," answered Dirk.

But although in his hurry Foy did not notice it, his mother said nothing. She liked Elsa well indeed--who would not?--but oh! this brought them a step nearer to that accursed treasure, the treasure which from generation to generation had been hoarded up that it might be a doom to men. If Foy were affianced to Elsa, it was his inheritance as well as hers, for those trusts of Hendrik Brant's will were to Lysbeth things unreal and visionary, and its curse would fall upon him as well as upon her. Moreover it might be said that he was marrying her to win the wealth.

"This betrothal does not please you; you are sad, wife," said Dirk, looking at her quickly.

"Yes, husband, for now I think that we shall never get out of Leyden. I pray that Adrian may not hear of it, that is all."

"Why, what has he to do with the matter?"

"Only that he is madly in love with the girl. Have you not seen it? And--you know his temper."

"Adrian, Adrian, always Adrian," answered Dirk impatiently. "Well, it is a very fitting match, for if she has a great fortune hidden somewhere in a swamp, which in fact she has not, since the bulk of it is bequeathed to me to be used for certain purposes; he has, or will have, moneys also--safe at interest in England. Hark! here they come, so, wife, put

on a pleasant face; they will think it unlucky if you do not smile."

As he spoke Foy re-entered the room, leading Elsa by the hand, and she looked as sweet a maid as ever the sun shone on. So they told their story, and kneeling down before Dirk, received his blessing in the old fashion, and very glad were they in the after years to remember that it had been so received. Then they turned to Lysbeth, and she also lifted up her hand to bless them, but ere it touched their heads, do what she would to check it, a cry forced its way to her lips, and she said:

"Oh! children, doubtless you love each other well, but is this a time for marrying and giving in marriage?"

"My own words, my very words," exclaimed Elsa, springing to her feet and turning pale.

Foy looked vexed. Then recovering himself and trying to smile, he said:

"And I give them the same answer--that two are better than one; moreover, this is a betrothal, not a marriage."

"Ay," muttered Martin behind, thinking aloud after his fashion, "betrothal is one thing and marriage another," but low as he spoke Elsa overheard him.

"Your mother is upset," broke in Dirk, "and you can guess why, so do not

disturb her more at present. Let us to our business, you and Martin to the factory to make arrangements there as I have told you, and I, after I have seen the captain, to whatever God shall call me to do. So, till we meet again, farewell, my son--and daughter," he added, smiling at Elsa.

They left the room, but as Martin was following them Lysbeth called him back.

"Go armed to the factory, Martin," she said, "and see that your young master wears that steel shirt beneath his jerkin."

Martin nodded and went.

Adrian woke up that morning in an ill mood. He had, it is true, administered his love potion with singular dexterity and success, but as yet he reaped no fruit from his labours, and was desperately afraid lest the effect of the magic draught might wear off. When he came downstairs it was to find that Foy and Martin were already departed to the factory, and that his stepfather had gone out, whither he knew not. This was so much to the good, for it left the coast clear. Still he was none the better off, since either his mother and Elsa had taken their breakfast upstairs, or they had dispensed with that meal. His mother he could spare, especially after her recent contact with a plague patient, but

under the circumstances Elsa's absence was annoying. Moreover, suddenly the house had become uncomfortable, for every one in it seemed to be running about carrying articles hither and thither in a fashion so aimless that it struck him as little short of insane. Once or twice also he saw Elsa, but she, too, was carrying things, and had no time for conversation.

At length Adrian wearied of it and departed to the factory with the view of making up his books, which, to tell the truth, had been somewhat neglected of late, to find that here, too, the same confusion reigned. Instead of attending to his ordinary work, Martin was marching to and fro bearing choice pieces of brassware, which were being packed into crates, and he noticed, for Adrian was an observant young man, that he was not wearing his usual artisan's dress. Why, he wondered to himself, should Martin walk about a factory upon a summer's day clad in his armour of quilted bull's hide, and wearing his great sword Silence strapped round his middle? Why, too, should Foy have removed the books and be engaged in going through them with a clerk? Was he auditing them? If so, he wished him joy of the job, since to bring them to a satisfactory balance had proved recently quite beyond his own powers. Not that there was anything wrong with the books, for he, Adrian, had kept them quite honestly according to his very imperfect lights, only things must have been left out, for balance they would not. Well, on the whole, he was glad, since a man filled with lover's hopes and fears was in no mood for arithmetical exercises, so, after hanging about for a while, he returned home to dinner.

The meal was late, an unusual occurrence, which annoyed him; moreover, neither his mother nor his stepfather appeared at table. At length Elsa came in looking pale and worried, and they began to eat, or rather to go through the form of eating, since neither of them seemed to have any appetite. Nor, as the servant was continually in the room, and as Elsa took her place at one end of the long table while he was at the other, had their tete-a-tete any of the usual advantages.

At last the waiting-woman went away, and, after a few moment's pause, Elsa rose to follow. By this time Adrian was desperate. He would bear it no more; things must be brought to a head.

"Elsa," he said, in an irritated voice, "everything seems to be very uncomfortable here to-day, there is so much disturbance in the house that one might imagine we were going to shut it up and leave Leyden."

Elsa looked at him out of the corners of her eyes; probably by this time she had learnt the real cause of the disturbance.

"I am sorry, Heer Adrian," she said, "but your mother is not very well this morning."

"Indeed; I only hope she hasn't caught the plague from the Jansen woman; but that doesn't account for everybody running about with their hands full, like ants in a broken nest, especially as it is not the time

of year when women turn all the furniture upside down and throw the curtains out of the windows in the pretence that they are cleaning them. However, we are quiet here for a while, so let us talk."

Elsa became suspicious. "Your mother wants me, Heer Adrian," she said, turning towards the door.

"Let her rest, Elsa, let her rest; there is no medicine like sleep for the sick."

Elsa pretended not to hear him, so, as she still headed for the door, by a movement too active to be dignified, he placed himself in front of it, adding, "I have said that I want to speak with you."

"And I have said that I am busy, Heer Adrian, so please let me pass."

Adrian remained immovable. "Not until I have spoken to you," he said.

Now as escape was impossible Elsa drew herself up and asked in a cold voice:

"What is your pleasure? I pray you, be brief."

Adrian cleared his throat, reflecting that she was keeping the workings of the love potion under wonderful control; indeed to look at her no one could have guessed that she had recently absorbed this magic Eastern

medicine. However, something must be done; he had gone too far to draw back.

"Elsa," he said boldly, though no hare could have been more frightened, "Elsa," and he clasped his hands and looked at the ceiling, "I love you and the time has come to say so."

"If I remember right it came some time ago, Heer Adrian," she replied with sarcasm. "I thought that by now you had forgotten all about it."

"Forgotten!" he sighed, "forgotten! With you ever before my eyes how can I forget?"

"I am sure I cannot say," she answered, "but I know that I wish to forget this folly."

"Folly! She calls it folly!" he mused aloud. "Oh, Heaven, folly is the name she gives to the life-long adoration of my bleeding heart!"

"You have known me exactly five weeks, Heer Adrian----"

"Which, sweet lady, makes me desire to know you for fifty years."

Elsa sighed, for she found the prospect dreary.

"Come," he went on with a gush, "forego this virgin coyness, you have

done enough and more than enough for honour, now throw aside pretence, lay down your arms and yield. No hour, I swear, of this long fight will be so happy to you as that of your sweet surrender, for remember, dear one, that I, your conqueror, am in truth the conquered. I, abandoning----"

He got no further, for at this point the sorely tried Elsa lost control of herself, but not in the fashion which he hoped for and expected.

"Are you crazed, Heer Adrian," she asked, "that you should insist thus in pouring this high-flown nonsense into my ears when I have told you that it is unwelcome to me? I understand that you ask me for my love. Well, once for all I tell you that I have none to give."

This was a blow, since it was impossible for Adrian to put a favourable construction upon language so painfully straightforward. His self-conceit was pierced at last and collapsed like a pricked bladder.

"None to give!" he gasped, "none to give! You don't mean to tell me that you have given it to anybody else?"

"Yes, I do," she answered, for by now Elsa was thoroughly angry.

"Indeed," he replied loftily. "Let me see; last time it was your lamented father who occupied your heart. Perhaps now it is that excellent giant, Martin, or even--no, it is too absurd"--and he laughed

in his jealous rage, "even the family buffoon, my worthy brother Foy."

"Yes," she replied quietly, "it is Foy."

"Foy! Foy! Hear her, ye gods! My successful rival, mine, is the yellow-headed, muddy-brained, unlettered Foy--and they say that women have souls! Of your courtesy answer me one question. Tell me when did this strange and monstrous thing happen? When did you declare yourself vanquished by the surpassing charms of Foy?"

"Yesterday afternoon, if you want to know," she said in the same calm and ominous voice.

Adrian heard, and an inspiration took him. He dashed his hand to his brow and thought a moment; then he laughed loud and shrilly.

"I have it," he said. "It is the love charm which has worked perversely. Elsa, you are under a spell, poor woman; you do not know the truth. I gave you the philtre in your drinking water, and Foy, the traitor Foy, has reaped its fruits. Dear girl, shake yourself free from this delusion, it is I whom you really love, not that base thief of hearts, my brother Foy."

"What do you say? You gave me a philtre? You dare to doctor my drink with your heathen nastiness? Out of the way, sir! Stand off, and never venture to speak to me again. Well will it be for you if I do not tell

your brother of your infamy."

What happened after this Adrian could never quite remember, but a vision remained of himself crouching to one side, and of a door flung back so violently that it threw him against the wall; a vision, too, of a lady sweeping past him with blazing eyes and lips set in scorn. That was all.

For a while he was crushed, quite crushed; the blow had gone home. Adrian was not only a fool, he was also the vainest of fools. That any young woman on whom he chose to smile should actually reject his advances was bad and unexpected, but that the other man should be Foy--oh! this was infamous and inexplicable. He was handsomer than Foy, no one would dream of denying it. He was cleverer and better read, had he not mastered the contents of every known romance--high-souled works which Foy bluntly declared were rubbish and refused even to open? Was he not a poet? But remembering a certain sonnet he did not follow this comparison. In short, how was it conceivable that a woman looking upon himself, a very type of the chivalry of Spain, silver-tongued, a follower--nay, a companion of the Muses, one to whom in every previous adventure of the heart to love had been to conquer, could still prefer that broad-faced, painfully commonplace, if worthy, young representative of the Dutch middle classes, Foy van Goorl?

It never occurred to Adrian to ask himself another question, namely, how it comes about that eight young women out of ten are endowed with an intelligence or instinct sufficiently keen to enable them to

discriminate between an empty-headed popinjay of a man, intoxicated with the fumes of his own vanity, and an honest young fellow of stable character and sterling worth? Not that Adrian was altogether empty-headed, for in some ways he was clever; also beneath all this foam and froth the Dutch strain inherited from his mother had given a certain ballast and determination to his nature. Thus, when his heart was thoroughly set upon a thing, he could be very dogged and patient. Now it was set upon Elsa Brant, he did truly desire to win her above any other woman, and that he had left a different impression upon her mind was owing largely to the affected air and grandiloquent style of language culled from his precious romances which he thought it right to assume when addressing a lady upon matters of the affections.

For a little while he was prostrate, his heart seemed swept clean of all hope and feeling. Then his furious temper, the failing that, above every other, was his curse and bane, came to his aid and occupied it like the seven devils of Scripture, bringing in its train his re-awakened vanity, hatred, jealousy, and other maddening passions. It could not be true, there must be an explanation, and, of course, the explanation was that Foy had been so fortunate, or so cunning as to make advances to Elsa soon after she had swallowed the love philtre. Adrian, like most people in his day, was very superstitious and credulous. It never even occurred to him to doubt the almost universally accepted power and efficacy of this witch's medicine, though even now he understood what a fool he was when, in his first outburst of rage, he told Elsa that he had trusted to such means to win her affections, instead of letting his own virtues and

graces do their natural work.

Well, the mischief was done, the poison was swallowed, but--most poisons have their antidotes. Why was he lingering here? He must consult his friend, the Master, and at once.

Ten minutes later Adrian was at Black Meg's house.