

CHAPTER XIX

THE FRAY IN THE SHOT TOWER

The door was opened by Hague Simon, the bald-headed, great-paunched villain who lived with Black Meg. In answer to his visitor's anxious inquiries the Butcher said, searching Adrian's face with his pig-like eyes the while, that he could not tell for certain whether Meg was or was not at home. He rather thought that she was consulting the spirits with the Master, but they might have passed out without his knowing it, "for they had great gifts--great gifts," and he wagged his fat head as he showed Adrian into the accustomed room.

It was an uncomfortable kind of chamber which, in some unexplained way, always gave Adrian the impression that people, or presences, were stirring in it whom he could not see. Also in this place there happened odd and unaccountable noises; creakings, and sighings which seemed to proceed from the walls and ceiling. Of course, such things were to be expected in a house where sojourned one of the great magicians of the day. Still he was not altogether sorry when the door opened and Black Meg entered, although some might have preferred the society of almost any ghost.

"What is it, that you disturb me at such an hour?" she asked sharply.

"What is it? What isn't it?" Adrian replied, his rage rising at the

thought of his injuries. "That cursed philtre of yours has worked all wrong, that's what it is. Another man has got the benefit of it, don't you understand, you old hag? And, by Heaven! I believe he means to abduct her, yes, that's the meaning of all the packing and fuss, blind fool that I was not to guess it before. The Master--I will see the Master. He must give me an antidote, another medicine----"

"You certainly look as though you want it," interrupted Black Meg drily. "Well, I doubt whether you can see him; it is not his hour for receiving visitors; moreover, I don't think he's here, so I shall have to signal for him."

"I must see him. I will see him," shouted Adrian.

"I daresay," replied Black Meg, squinting significantly at his pocket.

Enraged as he was Adrian took the hint.

"Woman, you seek gold," he said, quoting involuntarily from the last romance he had read, and presenting her with a handful of small silver, which was all he had.

Meg took the silver with a sniff, on the principle that something is better than nothing, and departed gloomily. Then followed more mysterious noises; voices whispered, doors opened and shut, furniture creaked, after which came a period of exasperating and rather

disagreeable silence. Adrian turned his face to the wall, for the only window in the room was so far above his head that he was unable to look out of it; indeed, it was more of a skylight than a window. Thus he remained a while gnawing at the ends of his moustache and cursing his fortune, till presently he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

"Who the devil is that?" he exclaimed, wheeling round to find himself face to face with the draped and majestic form of the Master.

"The devil! That is an ill word upon young lips, my friend," said the sage, shaking his head in reproof.

"I daresay," replied Adrian, "but what the--I mean how did you get here? I never heard the door open."

"How did I get here? Well, now you mention it, I wonder how I did. The door--what have I to do with doors?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Adrian shortly, "but most people find them useful."

"Enough of such material talk," interrupted the sage with sternness.

"Your spirit cried to mine, and I am here, let that suffice."

"I suppose that Black Meg fetched you," went on Adrian, sticking to his point, for the philtre fiasco had made him suspicious.

"Verily, friend Adrian, you can suppose what you will; and now, as I have little time to spare, be so good as to set out the matter.

Nay, what need, I know all, for have I not--is this the case? You administered the philtre to the maid and neglected my instructions to offer yourself to her at once. Another saw it and took advantage of the magic draught. While the spell was on her he proposed, he was accepted--yes, your brother Foy. Oh! fool, careless fool, what else did you expect?"

"At any rate I didn't expect that," replied Adrian in a fury. "And now, if you have all the power you pretend, tell me what I am to do."

Something glinted ominously beneath the hood, it was the sage's one eye.

"Young friend," he said, "your manner is brusque, yes, even rude. But I understand and I forgive. Come, we will take counsel together. Tell me what has happened."

Adrian told him with much emphasis, and the recital of his adventures seemed to move the Master deeply, at any rate he turned away, hiding his face in his hands, while his back trembled with the intensity of his feelings.

"The matter is grave," he said solemnly, when at length the lovesick and angry swain had finished. "There is but one thing to be done. Your

treacherous rival--oh! what fraud and deceit are hidden beneath that homely countenance--has been well advised, by whom I know not, though I suspect one, a certain practitioner of the Black Magic, named Arentz----"

"Ah!" ejaculated Adrian.

"I see you know the man. Beware of him. He is, indeed, a wolf in sheep's clothing, who wraps his devilish incantations in a cloak of seditious doctrine. Well, I have thwarted him before, for can Darkness stand before Light? and, by the help of those who aid me, I may thwart him again. Now, attend and answer my questions clearly, slowly and truthfully. If the girl is to be saved to you, mark this, young friend, your cunning rival must be removed from Leyden for a while until the charm works out its power."

"You don't mean--" said Adrian, and stopped.

"No, no. I mean the man no harm. I mean only that he must take a journey, which he will do fast enough, when he learns that his witchcrafts and other crimes are known. Now answer, or make an end, for I have more business to attend to than the love-makings of a foo--of a headstrong youth. First: What you have told me of the attendances of Dirk van Goorl, your stepfather, and others of his household, namely, Red Martin and your half-brother Foy, at the tabernacle of your enemy, the wizard Arentz, is true, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Adrian, "but I do not see what that has to do with the matter."

"Silence!" thundered the Master. Then he paused a while, and Adrian seemed to hear certain strange squeakings proceeding from the walls. The sage remained lost in thought until the squeakings ceased. Again he spoke:

"What you have told me of the part played by the said Foy and the said Martin as to their sailing away with the treasure of the dead heretic, Hendrik Brant, and of the murders committed by them in the course of its hiding in the Haarlemer Meer, is true, is it not?"

"Of course it is," answered Adrian, "but----"

"Silence!" again thundered the sage, "or by my Lord Zoroaster, I throw up the case."

Adrian collapsed, and there was another pause.

"You believe," he went on again, "that the said Foy and the said Dirk van Goorl, together with the said Martin, are making preparations to abduct that innocent and unhappy maid, the heiress, Elsa Brant, for evil purposes of their own?"

"I never told you so," said Adrian, "but I think it is a fact; at least there is a lot of packing going on."

"You never told me! Do you not understand that there is no need for you to tell me anything?"

"Then, in the name of your Lord Zoroaster, why do you ask?" exclaimed the exasperated Adrian.

"That you will know presently," he answered musing.

Once more Adrian heard the strange squeaking as of young and hungry rats.

"I think that I will not take up your time any more," he said, growing thoroughly alarmed, for really the proceedings were a little odd, and he rose to go.

The Master made no answer, only, which was curious conduct for a sage, he began to whistle a tune.

"By your leave," said Adrian, for the magician's back was against the door. "I have business----"

"And so have I," replied the sage, and went on whistling.

Then suddenly the side of one of the walls seemed to fall out, and through the opening emerged a man wrapped in a priest's robe, and after him, Hague Simon, Black Meg, and another particularly evil-looking fellow.

"Got it all down?" asked the Master in an easy, everyday kind of voice.

The monk bowed, and producing several folios of manuscript, laid them on the table together with an ink-horn and a pen.

"Very well. And now, my young friend, be so good as to sign there, at the foot of the writing."

"Sign what?" gasped Adrian.

"Explain to him," said the Master. "He is quite right; a man should know what he puts his name to."

Then a monk spoke in a low, business-like voice.

"This is the information of Adrian, called Van Goorl, as taken down from his own lips, wherein, among other things, he deposes to certain crimes of heresy, murder of the king's subjects, an attempted escape from the king's dominions, committed by his stepfather, Dirk van Goorl, his half-brother, Foy van Goorl, and their servant, a Frisian known as Red Martin. Shall I read the papers? It will take some time."

"If the witness so desires," said the Master.

"What is that document for?" whispered Adrian in a hoarse voice.

"To persuade your treacherous rival, Foy van Goorl, that it will be desirable in the interests of his health that he should retire from Leyden for a while," sneered his late mentor, while the Butcher and Black Meg sniggered audibly. Only the monk stood silent, like a black watching fate.

"I'll not sign!" shouted Adrian. "I have been tricked! There is treachery!" and he bent forward to spring for the door.

Ramiro made a sign, and in another instant the Butcher's fat hands were about Adrian's throat, and his thick thumbs were digging viciously at the victim's windpipe. Still Adrian kicked and struggled, whereon, at a second sign, the villainous-looking man drew a great knife, and, coming up to him, pricked him gently on the nose.

Then Ramiro spoke to him very suavely and quietly.

"Young friend," he said, "where is that faith in me which you promised, and why, when I wish you to sign this quite harmless writing, do you so violently refuse?"

"Because I won't betray my stepfather and brother," gasped Adrian. "I know why you want my signature," and he looked at the man in a priest's robe.

"You won't betray them," sneered Ramiro. "Why, you young fool, you have already betrayed them fifty times over, and what is more, which you don't seem to remember, you have betrayed yourself. Now look here. If you choose to sign that paper, or if you don't choose, makes little difference to me, for, dear pupil, I would almost as soon have your evidence by word of mouth."

"I may be a fool," said Adrian, turning sullen; "yes, I see now that I have been a fool to trust in you and your sham arts, but I am not fool enough to give evidence against my own people in any of your courts. What I have said I said never thinking that it would do them harm."

"Not caring whether it would do them harm or no," corrected Ramiro, "as you had your own object to gain--the young lady whom, by the way, you were quite ready to doctor with a love medicine."

"Because love blinded me," said Adrian loftily.

Ramiro put his hand upon his shoulder and shook him slightly as he answered:

"And has it not struck you, you vain puppy, that other things may blind

you also--hot irons, for instance?"

"What do you mean?" gasped Adrian.

"I mean that the rack is a wonderful persuader. Oh! it makes the most silent talk and the most solemn sing. Now take your choice. Will you sign or will you go to the torture chamber?"

"What right have you to question me?" asked Adrian, striving to build up his tottering courage with bold words.

"Just this right--that I to whom you speak am the Captain and Governor of the Gevangenhuis in this town, an official who has certain powers."

Adrian turned pale but said nothing.

"Our young friend has gone to sleep," remarked Ramiro, reflectively.

"Here you, Simon, twist his arm a little. No, not the right arm; he may want that to sign with, which will be awkward if it is out of joint: the other."

With an ugly grin the Butcher, taking his fingers from Adrian's throat, gripped his captive's left wrist, and very slowly and deliberately began to screw it round.

Adrian groaned.

"Painful, isn't it?" said Ramiro. "Well, I have no more time to waste, break his arm."

Then Adrian gave in, for he was not fitted to bear torture; his imagination was too lively.

"I will sign," he whispered, the perspiration pouring from his pale face.

"Are you quite sure you do it willingly?" queried his tormentor, adding, "another little half-turn, please, Simon; and you, Mistress Meg, if he begins to faint, just prick him in the thigh with your knife."

"Yes, yes," groaned Adrian.

"Very good. Now here is the pen. Sign."

So Adrian signed.

"I congratulate you upon your discretion, pupil," remarked Ramiro, as he scattered sand on the writing and pocketed the paper. "To-day you have learned a very useful lesson which life teaches to most of us, namely, that the inevitable must rule our little fancies. Let us see; I think that by now the soldiers will have executed their task, so, as you have done what I wished, you can go, for I shall know where to find you if I

want you. But, if you will take my advice, which I offer as that of one friend to another, you will hold your tongue about the events of this afternoon. Unless you speak of it, nobody need ever know that you have furnished certain useful information, for in the Gevangenhuis the names of witnesses are not mentioned to the accused. Otherwise you may possibly come into trouble with your heretical friends and relatives. Good afternoon. Brother, be so good as to open the door for this gentleman."

A minute later Adrian found himself in the street, towards which he had been helped by the kick of a heavy boot. His first impulse was to run, and he ran for half a mile or more without stopping, till at length he paused breathless in a deserted street, and, leaning against the wheel of an unharnessed waggon, tried to think. Think! How could he think? His mind was one mad whirl; rage, shame, disappointed passion, all boiled in it like bones in a knacker's cauldron. He had been fooled, he had lost his love, and, oh! infamy, he had betrayed his kindred to the hell of the Inquisition. They would be tortured and burnt. Yes, even his mother and Elsa might be burned, since those devils respected neither age nor sex, and their blood would be upon his head. It was true that he had signed under compulsion, but who would believe that, for had they not taken down his talk word for word? For once Adrian saw himself as he was; the cloaks of vanity and self-love were stripped from his soul, and he knew what others would think when they came to learn the story. He thought of suicide; there was water, here was steel, the deed would not be difficult. No, he could not; it was too horrible. Moreover, how dared

he enter the other world so unprepared, so steeped in every sort of evil? What, then, could he do to save his character and those whom his folly had betrayed? He looked round him; there, not three hundred yards away, rose the tall chimney of the factory. Perhaps there was yet time; perhaps he could still warn Foy and Martin of the fate which awaited them.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Adrian started forward, running like a hare. As he approached the building he saw that the workmen had left, for the big doors were shut. He raced round to the small entrance; it was open--he was through it, and figures were moving in the office. God be praised! They were Foy and Martin. To them he sped, a white-faced creature with gaping mouth and staring eyes, to look at more like a ghost than a human being.

Martin and Foy saw him and shrank back. Could this be Adrian, they thought, or was it an evil vision?

"Fly!" he gasped. "Hide yourselves! The officers of the Inquisition are after you!" Then another thought struck him, and he stammered, "My father and mother. I must warn them!" and before they could speak he had turned and was gone, as he went crying, "Fly! Fly!"

Foy stood astonished till Martin struck him on the shoulder, and said roughly:

"Come, let us get out of this. Either he is mad, or he knows something. Have you your sword and dagger? Quick, then."

They passed through the door, which Martin paused to lock, and into the courtyard. Foy reached the gate first, and looked through its open bars. Then very deliberately he shot the bolts and turned the great key.

"Are you brain-sick," asked Martin, "that you lock the gate on us?"

"I think not," replied Foy, as he came back to him. "It is too late to escape. Soldiers are marching down the street."

Martin ran and looked through the bars. It was true enough. There they came, fifty men or more, a whole company, headed straight for the factory, which it was thought might be garrisoned for defence.

"Now I can see no help but to fight for it," Martin said cheerfully, as he hid the keys in the bucket of the well, which he let run down to the water.

"What can two men do against fifty?" asked Foy, lifting his steel-lined cap to scratch his head.

"Not much, still, with good luck, something. At least, as nothing but a cat can climb the walls, and the gateway is stopped, I think we may as well die fighting as in the torture-chamber of the Gevangenhuis, for

that is where they mean to lodge us."

"I think so too," answered Foy, taking courage. "Now how can we hurt them most before they quiet us?"

Martin looked round reflectively. In the centre of the courtyard stood a building not unlike a pigeon-house, or the shelter that is sometimes set up in the middle of a market beneath which merchants gather. In fact it was a shot tower, where leaden bullets of different sizes were cast and dropped through an opening in the floor into a shallow tank below to cool, for this was part of the trade of the foundry.

"That would be a good place to hold," he said; "and crossbows hang upon the walls."

Foy nodded, and they ran to the tower, but not without being seen, for as they set foot upon its stair, the officer in command of the soldiers called upon them to surrender in the name of the King. They made no answer, and as they passed through the doorway, a bullet from an arquebus struck its woodwork.

The shot tower stood upon oaken piles, and the chamber above, which was round, and about twenty feet in diameter, was reached by a broad ladder of fifteen steps, such as is often used in stables. This ladder ended in a little landing of about six feet square, and to the left of the landing opened the door of the chamber where the shot were cast. They

went up into the place.

"What shall we do now?" said Foy, "barricade the door?"

"I can see no use in that," answered Martin, "for then they would batter it down, or perhaps burn a way through it. No; let us take it off its hinges and lay it on blocks about eight inches high, so that they may catch their shins against it when they try to rush us."

"A good notion," said Foy, and they lifted off the narrow oaken door and propped it up on four moulds of metal across the threshold, weighting it with other moulds. Also they strewed the floor of the landing with three-pound shot, so that men in a hurry might step on them and fall. Another thing they did, and this was Foy's notion. At the end of the chamber were the iron baths in which the lead was melted, and beneath them furnaces ready laid for the next day's founding. These Foy set alight, pulling out the dampers to make them burn quickly, and so melt the leaden bars which lay in the troughs.

"They may come underneath," he said, pointing to the trap through which the hot shot were dropped into the tank, "and then molten lead will be useful."

Martin smiled and nodded. Then he took down a crossbow from the walls, for in those days, when every dwelling and warehouse might have to be used as a place of defence, it was common to keep a good store of

weapons hung somewhere ready to hand, and went to the narrow window which overlooked the gate.

"As I thought," he said. "They can't get in and don't like the look of the iron spikes, so they are fetching a smith to burst it open. We must wait."

Very soon Foy began to fidget, for this waiting to be butchered by an overwhelming force told upon his nerves. He thought of Elsa and his parents, whom he would never see again; he thought of death and all the terrors and wonders that might lie beyond it; death whose depths he must so soon explore. He had looked to his crossbow, had tested the string and laid a good store of quarrels on the floor beside him; he had taken a pike from the walls and seen to its shaft and point; he had stirred the fires beneath the leaden bars till they roared in the sharp draught.

"Is there nothing more to do?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Martin, "we might say our prayers; they will be the last," and suiting his action to the word, the great man knelt down, an example which Foy followed.

"Do you speak," said Foy, "I can't think of anything."

So Martin began a prayer which is perhaps worthy of record:--

"O Lord," he said, "forgive me all my sins, which are too many to count, or at least I haven't the time to try, and especially for cutting off the head of the executioner with his own sword, although I had no death quarrel with him, and for killing a Spaniard in a boxing match. O Lord, I thank you very much because you have arranged for us to die fighting instead of being tortured and burnt in the gaol, and I pray that we may be able to kill enough Spaniards first to make them remember us for years to come. O Lord, protect my dear master and mistress, and let the former learn that we have made an end of which he would approve, but if may be, hide it from the Paster Arentz, who might think that we ought to surrender. That is all I have to say. Amen."

Then Foy did his own praying, and it was hearty enough, but we need scarcely stop to set down its substance.

Meanwhile the Spaniards had found a blacksmith, who was getting to work upon the gate, for they could see him through the open upper bars.

"Why don't you shoot?" asked Foy. "You might catch him with a bolt."

"Because he is a poor Dutchman whom they have pressed for the job, while they stand upon one side. We must wait till they break down the gate. Also we must fight well when the time comes, Master Foy, for, see, folk are watching us, and they will expect it," and he pointed upwards.

Foy looked. The foundry courtyard was surrounded by tall gabled houses,

and of these the windows and balconies were already crowded with spectators. Word had gone round that the Inquisition had sent soldiers to seize one of the young Van Goorls and Red Martin--that they were battering at the gates of the factory. Therefore the citizens, some of them their own workmen, gathered there, for they did not think that Red Martin and Foy van Goorl would be taken easily.

The hammering at the gate went on, but it was very stout and would not give.

"Martin," said Foy presently, "I am frightened. I feel quite sick. I know that I shall be no good to you when the pinch comes."

"Now I am sure that you are a brave man," answered Martin with a short laugh, "for otherwise you would never have owned that you feel afraid. Of course you feel afraid, and so do I. It is the waiting that does it; but when once the first blow has been struck, why, you will be as happy as a priest. Look you, master. So soon as they begin to rush the ladder, do you get behind me, close behind, for I shall want all the room to sweep with my sword, and if we stand side by side we shall only hinder each other, while with a pike you can thrust past me, and be ready to deal with any who win through."

"You mean that you want to shelter me with your big carcase," answered Foy. "But you are captain here. At least I will do my best," and putting his arms about the great man's middle, he hugged him affectionately.

"Look! look!" cried Martin. "The gate is down. Now, first shot to you," and he stepped to one side.

As he spoke the oaken doors burst open and the Spanish soldiers began to stream through them. Suddenly Foy's nerve returned to him and he grew steady as a rock. Lifting his crossbow he aimed and pulled the trigger. The string twanged, the quarrel rushed forth with a whistling sound, and the first soldier, pierced through breastplate and through breast, sprang into the air and fell forward. Foy stepped to one side to string his bow.

"Good shot," said Martin taking his place, while from the spectators in the windows went up a sudden shout. Martin fired and another man fell. Then Foy fired again and missed, but Martin's next bolt struck the last soldier through the arm and pinned him to the timber of the broken gate. After this they could shoot no more, for the Spaniards were beneath them.

"To the doorway," said Martin, "and remember what I told you. Away with the bows, cold steel must do the rest."

Now they stood by the open door, Martin, a helmet from the walls upon his head, tied beneath his chin with a piece of rope because it was too small for him, the great sword Silence lifted ready to strike, and Foy behind gripping the long pike with both hands. Below them from the

gathered mob of soldiers came a confused clamour, then a voice called out an order and they heard footsteps on the stair.

"Look out; they are coming," said Martin, turning his head so that Foy caught sight of his face. It was transfigured, it was terrible. The great red beard seemed to bristle, the pale blue unshaded eyes rolled and glittered, they glittered like the blue steel of the sword Silence that wavered above them. In that dread instant of expectancy Foy remembered his vision of the morning. Lo! it was fulfilled, for before him stood Martin, the peaceful, patient giant, transformed into a Red Vengeance.

A man reached the head of the ladder, stepped upon one of the loose cannon-balls and fell with an oath and a crash. But behind him came others. Suddenly they turned the corner, suddenly they burst into view, three or four of them together. Gallantly they rushed on. The first of them caught his feet in the trap of the door and fell headlong across it. Of him Martin took no heed, but Foy did, for before ever the soldier could rise he had driven his pike down between the man's shoulders, so that he died there upon the door. At the next Martin struck, and Foy saw this one suddenly grow small and double up, which, if he had found leisure to examine the nature of that wound, would have surprised him very little. Another man followed so quickly that Martin could not lift the sword to meet him. But he pointed with it, and next instant was shaking his carcase off its blade.

After this Foy could keep no count. Martin slashed with the sword, and when he found a chance Foy thrust with the pike, till at length there were none to thrust at, for this was more than the Spaniards had bargained. Two of them lay dead in the doorway, and others had been dragged or had tumbled down the ladder, while from the onlookers at the windows without, as they caught sight of them being brought forth slain or sorely wounded, went up shout upon shout of joy.

"So far we have done very well," said Martin quietly, "but if they come up again, we must be cooler and not waste our strength so much. Had I not struck so hard, I might have killed another man."

But the Spaniards showed no sign of coming up any more; they had seen enough of that narrow way and of the red swordsman who awaited them in the doorway round the corner. Indeed it was a bad place for attackers, since they could not shoot with arquebuses or arrows, but must pass in to be slaughtered like sheep at the shambles in the dim room beyond. So, being cautious men who loved their lives, they took a safer counsel.

The tank beneath the shot-tower, when it was not in use, was closed with a stone cover, and around this they piled firewood and peats from a stack in the corner of the yard, and standing in the centre out of the reach of arrows, set light to it. Martin lay down watching them through a crack in the floor. Then he signed to Foy, and whispered, and going to the iron baths, Foy drew from them two large buckets of molten lead, each as much as a man could carry. Again Martin looked through the

crack, waiting till several of the burners were gathered beneath. Then, with a swift motion he lifted up the trap-door, and as those below stared upwards wondering, full into their faces came the buckets of molten lead. Down went two of them never to speak more, while others ran out shrieking and aflame, tearing at their hair and garments.

After this the Spaniards grew more wary, and built their fires round the oak piers till the flames eating up them fired the building, and the room above grew full of little curling wreaths of smoke.

"Now we must choose," said Martin, "whether we will be roasted like fowls in an oven, or go down and have our throats cut like pigs in the open."

"For my part, I prefer to die in the air," coughed Foy.

"So say I, master. Listen. We can't get down the stair, for they are watching for us there, so we must drop from the trap-door and charge through the fire. Then, if we are lucky, back to back and fight it out."

Half a minute later two men bearing naked swords in their hands might be seen bursting through the barrier of flaming wood. Out they came safely enough, and there in an open space not far from the gateway, halted back to back, rubbing the water from their smarting eyes. On them, a few seconds later, like hounds on a wounded boar, dashed the mob of soldiers, while from every throat of the hundreds who were watching went

up shrill cries of encouragement, grief, and fear. Men fell before them, but others rushed in. They were down, they were up again, once more they were down, and this time only one of them rose, the great man Martin. He staggered to his feet, shaking off the soldiers who tried to hold him, as a dog in the game-pit shakes off rats. He was up, he stood across the body of his companion, and once more that fearful sword was sweeping round, bringing death to all it touched. They drew back, but a soldier, old in war, creeping behind him suddenly threw a cloak over his head. Then the end came, and slowly, very slowly, they overmatched his strength, and bore him down and bound him, while the watching mob groaned and wept with grief.