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AN ANSWER.

If that I held myself aloof,  
It was not that my thoughts were cold  
But they were cast in simple mould;  
And if I walked as one apart,  
'Twas but the fashion of my heart.

So if to-day they stand aside,  
It may not be they are unkind—  
'Tis but a custom of the mind—  
Why should they either hear or see  
New need of sympathy in me?

And it is better so; for I  
Have left whatever I had before,  
And they are asked to give no more;  
Dear, you have me, and I have you,  
And God is with us—He is true.  
—Ave Maria

THE POOR GENTLEMAN

CHAPTER VIII.

De Vlierbeck had caused every thing that was to be sold to be carried into the most spacious apartments, where, aided by his daughter, he passed the entire preceding night in dusting, cleaning and polishing the various articles, so that they might prove more attractive to competitors. He had no personal interest in his labor; for, his funded property having been sold some days before at great loss, it was certain that the sale of his remaining possessions would not exceed the amounts of his debts. It was a noble sentiment of honor and probity that compelled him to sacrifice his rest for his creditors, so as to diminish as much as he could the amount of their losses. It was clear that De Vlierbeck did not intend to prolong his stay at Grinselhof after the sale, for among the articles to be offered were the only two bedsteads in the house, with their bedding, and a large quantity of clothes belonging to him and his daughter.

Very early in the day Lenora went to the farmhouse, where she remained until it was all over. At ten o'clock the saloon was full of people. Nobles and gentlefolks of both sexes were mixed up with brokers and second-hand dealers who had come to Grinselhof with the hope of getting bargains. Peasants might be seen talking together, in low voices, with surprise at De Vlierbeck's ruin; and there were even some laughed openly and joked as the auctioneer read the terms of sale?

As the salesman put up a very hand some wardrobe, De Vlierbeck himself entered the apartment and mingled with the bidders. His appearance caused a general movement in the crowd; heads went together and men began to whisper, while the bankrupt was stared at with insolent curiosity or with pity but the greater with indifference or derision. Yet, whatever malicious feeling existed in the assembly; it did not last long, for the firm demeanor and imposing countenance of De Vlierbeck was never on any occasion more in, stinct with that dignity which inspires respect. He was poor; fortune had struck him a cruel blow; but in his manly look and calm features there had beamed a brave and independent soul which misfortune itself had been unable to crush.

The auctioneer went on with the sale. Assisted in his description of the various articles by Monsieur De Vlierbeck, who informed the bidders of their origin, antiquity, and value. Occasionally some gentleman of the neighborhood, who, in better days, had been on good terms with Lenora's father, approached him with words of sympathy; but he always managed to escape adroitly from these indiscreet attempts at consolation. Whenever it was necessary for him to speak, he showed so much self command and composure that he was far above the idle compassion of that careless crowd; yet if his countenance was calm and dignified, his heart was weighted down by absorbing grief. All that had belonged to his ancestors—articles that were emblazoned with the arms of his family and had been religiously preserved as heirlooms for several centuries—were sold at contemptible rates and passed into the hands of brokers. As each historical relic was placed on the table or held up by the auctioneer, the links of his illustrious race seemed to break off and depart. When the sale was nearly over, the portraits of the eminent men who had borne the name of De Vlierbeck were taken down from the walls

and placed upon the stands. The first—that of the hero of St. Quentin—was knocked off to a dealer for little more than three francs! In the sale of his portrait, and the laughable price it brought there was so much bitter irony that, for the first time, the agony that had been so long torturing De Vlierbeck's heart began to exhibit its traces in his countenance. No sooner had the hammer fallen, than, with downcast eyes and a sigh that was inaudible even to his nearest neighbor, the stricken nobleman turned from the crowd and left the saloon, so as not to witness the final sacrifice of the remaining memorials that bound him to his race.

The sun was about an hour or two above the horizon. A deathlike silence had taken the place of the noise, bustle, and vulgarity that ruled at Grinselhof during the morning; the solitary garden walks were deserted, the house door and gate were closed, and a stranger might have supposed that nothing had occurred to disturb the usual quietude of the spot. Suddenly the door of the dwelling opened, and two persons appeared upon the sill, one, a man advanced in life, the other, a pale and serious woman. Each carried a small package and seems ready for travel. Lenora was dressed in a simple dark gown and bonnet, her neck covered by a small square handkerchief. De Vlierbeck was buttoned up to the chin in a coarse black greatcoat, and wore a threadbare cap whose large visor nearly masked his features. Although it was evident that the homeless travellers had literally stripped themselves of all superfluities and had determined to go forth with the merest necessities of decency, there was something in the manner in which they wore their humble costumes that distinctly marked their birth and breeding. The old man's features were not changed, but it was difficult to say whether they expressed pleasure pain, or indifference. Lenora seemed strong and resolute, although she was about to quit the place of her birth and separate herself, perhaps forever, from all she had loved from infancy—from those aged groves beneath whose shadows the dawn of love first broke upon her heart,—from that remembered tree at whose feet the timid avowal of Gustave's passion had fallen on her ear. But a sense of duty possessed and ruled her heart. Reason in her was not overmastered by sensibility; and, when she saw her father tottering at her side all her energy was rallied in the effort to sustain him.

They did not linger at the door, but crossing the garden rapidly, directed their steps toward the farm-house, which they entered to bid its occupants farewell. Bess, and her servant-maid were in the first apartment below.

"Mother Bess," said Monsieur De Vlierbeck, calmly, "we have come to bid you good-by."

Bess stared a moment anxiously at the travellers, and, lifting her apron to her eyes, left the apartment; while the servant-maid leaned her head against the window-frames and began to sob as if her heart would break. In a short time Bess returned with her husband, whom she had found in the parlor.

"Alas! is it true, sir," said the farmer, in a stifled voice;—"is it true that you are going to leave Grinselhof, and, that perhaps, we shall never see you again?"

"Come, come, mother Bess," said the poor bankrupt, as he took and pressed her hand; "don't weep on that account; you see we bear our lot with resignation."

Bess raised her head, threw her eyes once more over the humble dress of her old master, and began to cry so violently that she could not utter a word. Her husband strove manfully to repress his emotion; and, after an effort or two addressed Monsieur Vlierbeck in a manly way;—

"May I ask the favor of you; sir, let me say a word or two to you in private. De Vlierbeck entered the adjoining room, where he was followed by the farmer, who shut the door carefully.

"I hardly dare, sir," said he, "to mention my request; but will you forgive me if it displeases you?"  
"Speak out frankly my friend," return

ed De Vlierbeck, with a smile.  
"Look you, sir," stammered the tender hearted laborer. "Every thing that I have earned I owe to you. I had nothing when I married Bess; and yet, with your kindness, we have managed to succeed. God's mercy and your favor have made us prosperous; while you, our benefactors, have become unfortunate and are forced to wander away from their home—God knows where! You may be forced to suffer privations and want; but that must not be: I would reproach myself as long as I live. Oh, sir continued he, as his voice faltered, his eyes filled with tears. "all that I have on earth is at your service?"

De Vlierbeck pressed the hard hand of the rustic with a trembling grasp, as he replied,—

"You are a worthy man indeed, and I am happy that it was once in my power to protect and serve you; but I cannot accept your offer, my friend, keep what you have earned by the sweat of your brow, and not concern yourself for our future fate, for, with God's help, we shall find means to live."

"Oh, sir," said the farmer, beseechingly, and clasping his hands in an attitude of entreaty, "do not reject the trifling I offer you!—he opened a drawer and pointed to a heap of silver.—

"See?" said he "that is not the hundredth part of the good you have done us. Grant me this favor, I beseech you: take this money, sir; and if it spare you a single suffering or trial I shall thank God for it on my knees?"

Tears streamed down the wan and wrinkled cheeks of the poor gentleman as he replied—

"Thanks! thanks! my friend; but I must refuse it. All persuasion is useless. Let us leave this room!"

"But sir" cried the farmer in astonishment "where do you intend to go? Tell me for God's sake!"

"I cannot," replied Monsieur De Vlierbeck "for I don't know myself; and even if I did prudence would make me silent."

Uttering these words he returned to returned to the other room where he found everybody in tears. He saw at once that for his own sake as well as his daughter's he must end these trying scenes; and accordingly, in a firm voice he told her it was time to be gone. There were a few more tender and eager pressures of hands, a few more farewells a few more last looks at the old homestead and its surroundings and the bankrupt pair sallied forth with their bundles and passing the bridge just at sunset, departed on foot across the desolate moor.

It is hard to bid farewell and quit the spots with which, even in a summer's journey we have formed ageable associations; put harder far it is to bid adieu forever to the home of our ancestors and the haunts of our youth. This dreadful trial was passing in De Vlierbeck's heart. From a distant point on the road where the domain of Grinselhof was masked by thickets, the wanderer turned his eyes once more in the direction of the old chateau. Big tears stood in his eyes and slowly rolled on his hollow cheeks as he stood there, silent and motionless, with clasped hands gazing in to vacancy. But night was rapidly falling around the wayfarers; and recalling him to consciousness with a kiss, Lenora gently drew her father from the spot till they disappeared in the windings of the wood.

CHAPTER IX.

Monsieur De Vlierbeck had not gone a week, when a letter addressed to him from Italy reached the village post office. The carrier inquired of Farmer John where the old proprietor of Grinselhof had fixed his residence; but neither from him, the notary, nor any one else in the neighborhood, could he discover the bankrupt's retreat. The same fate awaited three or four other letters which followed the first from Italy; and, indeed no body bothered himself any more about the wanderers except the peasant, who every market day pestered the country folks from every quarter with questions about his old master. But no one had seen or heard of him.

Four months passed slowly by, when one morning a handsome post chaise

stopped at the door of our old acquaintance the notary and dropped a young gentleman in travelling costume.

"Where's your master?" said he impatiently to the servant, who excused the notary under the plea of his present engagement with other visitors, but invited the stranger to await his leisure in the parlor.

The youth was evidently disconcerted by the delay; for he placed the apartment with rapid strides and seemed altogether absorbed by some anxiety or disappointment which made him extremely restless. The notary's visitors seemed to be either very tedious clients or engaged in very important business; for more than a half an hour elapsed before the functionary made his appearance. He came into the room ceremoniously, prepared to measure his words and reception by his visitor's rank; but no sooner did he perceive who it was than his calculating features relaxed into a professional smile, and he advanced rapidly toward Gustave with outstretched hands.

"How are, how are you, my dear sir?" said he. "I have been expecting you for several days, and I am really happy to see you at last. I am greatly flattered by the confidence you are disposed to place in me, and I am ready, whenever you pleased, to devote myself to your affairs. By the way, I suppose there is a will?"

A shadow passed over Gustave's brow and his face became serious as he took a portfolio from his overcoat and drew forth a package of papers.

"I am pained, sir, at your loss," said the notary. "Your excellent uncle was my friend, and I deplore his death more than that of any one else. It pleased God that he should die far away from his home. But such, alas! is man's fate. We must console ourselves by the reflection that we are all mortal. Your uncle was very fond of you, and I suppose you have not been forgotten in his last moment?"

"You may see for yourself," said Gustave as he placed the package on the table.

The notary ran his eyes over the papers, and as he perused them, his face exhibited by turns surprise and satisfaction.

"Permit me," said he, "to congratulate you Monsieur Gustave; these documents are all in order and unassailable. Heir of all his fortune. Do you know, sir that you are more than a millionaire?"

"We will speak of that another time," said Gustave interrupting him rather sharply. "I called on you to day to ask a favor."

"You have but to name it sir."  
"You were the notary of Monsieur De Vlierbeck?"  
"I was."

"I heard from my uncle that Monsieur De Vlierbeck had become very poor. I have reasons for desiring that his misfortunes may not be prolonged."

"Sir," said the notary, "I presume that you intend to do an act of kindness, and, in truth, it could not be bestowed on a worthier man, for I know the cause of his ruin and sufferings. He is a victim of generosity and honor. He may have carried these virtues to imprudence and even to madness, but he deserved a better fate."

"And now sir," said Gustave, "I want you to let me know with the least amount of details possible, what I can do to assist De Vlierbeck without wounding his pride. I know the conditions of his affairs, for my uncle told me all about them. Among other debts there was a bond for four thousand francs, which belongs to the heirs of Hoogbeaen: I want that bond immediately even if I have to pay four times as much as it is worth."

The notary stared at Gustave without replying.

"You seem disconcerted by my demand," said Gustave somewhat anxiously. "Not exactly," returned the notary; "but I do not altogether understand your emotion, although I fear the news I must impart will affect you painfully. If my anticipations are correct I have cause to be sorry for you, sir!"

TO BE CONTINUED