

Suddenly, the sound of a horse hoof on the Naarden road. Five minutes suffice to bring in the rider, and to tell the news. Naarden had fallen. At that very moment the atrocities of Woerden were being acted all over again. Defence! who could dream of defence?—By this time to-morrow Muiden will be in the hands of the French: by this time the day after to-morrow, Amsterdam itself.

Muiden!—and Egbert idle at Weesp?—He had a treasure there more precious in his eyes than all the ingots in the Stadhuys at Amsterdam. He would ride at once. His horse was in the little inn of the town; it bore the sign of the Roode Leeuw, and a huge red monster dangled and creaked, backwards and forwards, over the entrance arch. Let others take what care they would of horses, or money, or goods, he would see Elsje and Gerard at Amsterdam, as fast as human energy could carry them thither.

It is nearly midnight. He rides out of the little town. Now there is not sight nor sound, save a ruddy glow to the north-east. No! that is not the break of day, though day *will* break in that quarter. It is the glare of the flames, even then rioting through miserable Naarden, and lighting up scenes which a man could hardly believe to exist on this side hell. Across rich pasture and promising barley fields, over polder and fen, still he presses onward, traversing that low flat slip of land protected only by the dyke from the waters of the Zuyder Zee.

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'Master Kampen! Master Kampen!'

The old man was in his first sleep. There had been a long and anxious consultation. Everything was prepared for flight. Men, women, and children, were to start for Amsterdam at the dawn of day.

'Master Kampen! Master Kampen!'—and a heavy hand shook the cottage door.

The lattice opened above. 'Who is there? and what do you want?'

'An Order from the States. Come down at once.'

The old man is standing in the doorway, and has broken the seal of the envelope. 'What! open the dyke gates?'

'It was so carried at ten o'clock in the Stadhuys. Let the sea have the country rather than the French! was in every one's mouth.'

'Then I must go and get assistance: we shall want twenty men at least. God help this miserable country!'

'So He will, Master Gerard, if we help ourselves. Have with you to the village.'

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All is expectation on the edge of the dyke. Before you, the calm waters of the Zuyder Zee, rippling in the moonshine. Behind you the rich fertile pastures of South Holland and the Sticht of Utrecht. At your feet, that wonder-

ful erection of timber, beams of thirty inch oak, braced with cross riveters, and studded with massy nails: flood-gates, hanging on a mountainous mass of Norwegian granite,—bolts and bars, and under-girders,—the very triumph of the carpenter's art. Men, and women, and children on the great dyke: closer to the gates, Gerard van Kampen, a ponderous mallet in his hand,—the village blacksmith and his men with crowbars, and the sturdiest youngsters of the village, with pickaxes and spades and mattocks.

'At it again, lads!' shouted the Warden of the Dyke; 'God have mercy on the man who is on Diemermeer polder now!'

'Amen,' said a venerable old man who stood by. 'In half an hour it will be twelve feet under water.'

'Twelve, Master Van Helst? Work away, lads,—a good fifteen. So I say again, God have mercy on the man who is there.'

You ought to say *Amen* to that prayer, dear Elsje: you have the deepest interest in that polder. For even now its thick mist is rising above Egbert Vandenvelde, and forming in the moonlight such a halo round his head as that with which we encircle the glorified.

The brave dyke resists stubbornly. There is heaving, and pushing, and hammering: mighty strokes are rained down on staple and bar: axes and hatchets bite fiercely on upright and cross beam: saws cut into the heart of the English oak: but the great mass quivers not yet.

'It will be daylight before we are through,' said Gerard van Kampen. 'Try again, lads, with a will!'

A wild confusion of clamour and strokes,—yes, it trembles now. More than one huge timber has given its terrible death groan. More than one staple has been snapped in two. It shakes in good earnest. Here and there a little cataract of water gushes out, through the wounds of the erection. 'Now,—stand back, all! Back! Philip van Erckel! It is going!'

One terrible struggle of the yet palpitating timbers, and then, with a roar like ten thousand wild beasts, the Zuyder Zee leaps through the breach. A stream, forty feet broad and twenty feet deep, rushes into the country. Down go cottages and hayricks; carts and cattle and the wreck of farms are dashed along by the flood: the land is as the Garden of Eden before it, and behind it a foaming waste of waters. The dyke sides crumble away; it is as though the Zuyder Zee were pouring itself at once over the land; women and children shriek with terror: even the boldest of the men look ghastly white in the moonshine.

And the roar of that water proclaims to the Great Monarch, 'Thus far shalt thou come, but no further!'

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Egbert Vandenvelde is half way across Diemermeer polder. His spirited little pony has