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THE HAPPINESS OF BEING RICH.

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CHAPTER III.

(Continued.)

The schouwveger had sunk into a chair and sobbed aloud, overcome by the fright he had experienced. The silence lasted a short time, during which Pauw stood awaiting an answer, with amazement increasing every moment.

"If I am not to know," he muttered, "I won't ask any more about it; but, father, what will the neighbors say? Heaven knows, you have roused up more than fifty of them out of their beds with your frightful cry of 'Fire, fire.'"

"Your father was dreaming," said Dame Smet; "he can't get the legacy out of his head. Go to bed again, Pauw."

"What's that I hear now?" moaned the schouwveger, in fresh surprise.

The street seemed to shake beneath the rumbling of heavy wheels, coming at a great pace. "Oh, 'tis the artillerymen going with their guns to the camp at Brasschaet," said Pauw; "but 'tis odd they should come through our street."

"What can it be?" exclaimed Dame Smet; "they are stopping at our door."

Pauw opened the window, gave a look into the street, and turning round into the room again, said, with a loud laugh—

"Well, here's a joke! 'tis the fire brigade, with all their engines and pipes."

There was a tremendous knocking at the door; every blow echoed distressingly through the heart of the schouwveger, who lay so crushed by his terror that he was unable to utter a word.

Pauw thrust his head out of the window again, and asked the men who were thundering with all their might at the door, "Holloa! what's the matter down there? Go about your business, and let folks sleep in peace."

"Where is the fire?" exclaimed a voice.

"Where is the fire?" repeated Pauw. "Why, in the oven of oily Schram, the baker, to be sure; it's eight houses off, on the right hand side of the way, close to the green grocer's."

"I'll teach you how to cut your jokes up there," said the sergeant of the fire brigade. "Open the door this minute, or I'll break it open by force."

"Don't put yourself in a passion, sergeant," said one of the firemen; "'tis Pauwken-Plezier; and if he tried to speak otherwise, the funny rogue couldn't do it for his life. Just let me manage him."

He went under the window and called out—

"Pauwken, has there been any fire in the house?"

"Yes, there's a fire every day, an hour before dinner."

"No tricks, now, Pauwken. I was just coming through the street with my comrade, and your father was screaming, 'Fire, fire,' as if the whole parish was in flames."

"Yes, it was my father, talking in his sleep; he was only dreaming aloud."

The sergeant now broke out in a towering passion:

"Come, come—I'll teach you to make fools of the police. Corporal, run and call the commissary; we will break open the door and fine the insulting scoundrels."

The word commissary struck on the ear of the schouwveger; he started up, and cried out at the window, with a beseeching voice—

"Oh, firemen, my good fellows, have patience only a minute; I'll run down and open the door."

He left the chamber, followed by his son. As they descended the stairs, he groaned, with tremulous voice—

"Pauw, my boy, our house is bewitched! Oh, now all the fire brigade will come in. I am more dead than alive; I am quite ill with—"

"But, father, the firemen won't eat us all up, surely?" said the young man.

"Ah, you don't know, child, what your father will have to put up with," moaned Master Smet, in a dejected tone. "Pauw, they will search the house all over to see where the fire was. Since we can't help it now, you lead them round, for I can't stand on my legs."

The young man unlocked the door, while his father placed a chair close to the chest in which his treasure lay, and sank down on it, exhausted and breathless.

Five or six firemen then entered the room. The sergeant recognised the young man and seized him in a threatening manner by the shoulder, exclaiming—

"Ha, you young vagrant, you'll make sport of the fire brigade, will you? How will you like to sit in the stocks, eh?"

Pauw sprang back, and cried, with a loud laugh—

"Look you, Mynheer Fireman, talk of the stocks as much as you like; but I am a free man; and if you dare to lay your hands on me, I'll teach you how to run, though I'm only a schouwveger, and don't wear a copper hat."

Seeing that Pauw was awkward flax to spin a good thread out of, the sergeant turned to Master Smet, and asked, angrily—

"Tell me, where's the fire?"

"Well, my good man, it is a mistake; there has been no fire here."

"Ha, you want to conceal it, to escape paying the fine."

"Oh, no; I thank you ten thousand times for all your trouble; there has been no fire here."

"And you frighten folks by shouting, 'Fire, fire.'"

"Yes, a man has odd dreams sometimes," stammered the schouwveger. "Just look at me, sergeant; I'm all of a shake; my nerves are out of order."

"Get up," said the sergeant, imperatively, "and let us see all the chimneys."

"I can't stand up," moaned the schouwveger, with a voice of entreaty. "My legs sink under me. Pauw, go round with Mynheer."

The sergeant made a sign to the corporal that he should follow the young man. Then he said to Master Smet—

"You sit there by your chest as if you were afraid we were going to steal your money."

A shudder ran through all the limbs of the schouwveger, and a cold perspiration stood on his forehead.

"You shall pay dear for your jest," continued the sergeant; "you'll have to pay the fine."

"Is that all?" muttered the poor terror-stricken Smet. "Make me pay the fine two or three times over, if you like; only, for God's sake, get out of my house."

Dame Smet, who had dressed herself in the meantime, now came into the room with a smiling countenance; and, soon as she saw how the matter stood, she said in an easy tone to the chief of the fire brigade—

"Sergeant, here's an odd affair. Don't be vexed about it; it was quite unintentional. I'll tell you about it. You must know that we have had news of my aunt in Holland."

The schouwveger stretched out his hand with a gesture of entreaty to implore his wife to be silent; but she paid no attention to him, and went on—

"We are to have a legacy; I don't know how many thousand crowns. This news has come so suddenly on my husband that he has a fever in his brain—poor man! He has been dreaming that the house was on fire; but you see, my fine fellows, I don't wish you to have all your trouble for nothing. Drink a pint of our health, and be assured that we are very grateful to you for your promptitude and kindness."

With these words, she put a five-francs piece into his hand.

At this moment Pauw came down stairs with the corporal. The latter advanced to the sergeant, brought his hand to his policeman's cap in military fashion, and said in a pompous tone—

"Sergeant, there has been no fire in the house."

After sundry admonitions not to dream so loud another time, the fire-brigade left the abode of the schouwveger. His wife thereupon shut the door and locked it after them.

Raising his hands, the schouwveger said, with a sigh—

"Good heavens! if poor men only knew what a bother it is to be rich, they would never wish it. Here is a fine business."

Dame Smet took him by the shoulder, and, pushing him towards the stairs, said, half in anger and half in scorn—

"Yes, a pretty mess you make of everything. I ought to be vexed with you, but I pity your childish fancies. To-morrow we'll talk it all over. Go and sleep now, Sebenedus; and if you must dream of thieves and gendarmes, try to dream quietly. Money has made a fine fellow of you. Look at him, how he stands there like an idiot with the palsy."

Without speaking a word, thoroughly crushed down, and beside himself with the fright he had experienced, the poor schouwveger turned and slowly mounted the stairs to his bed-room.

CHAPTER IV.

The morning after these nocturnal freaks, Dame Smet was on her legs betimes, and ran off to the corner shop to chatter and gossip about my aunt in Holland and the grand legacy they were going to have; and when the wife of the grocer ventured to express, with some scorn, her disbelief of Dame Smet's oft-repeated story, the latter took out of her pocket a handful of gold-pieces and laid them on the counter, as vouchers for the truth of her statement. Thereupon the four or five dames who were in the shop at the same time lifted up their hands, and cried out in amazement, as if they had been favored with a sight of all the treasure of California.

Half an hour later, not a single person in the neighborhood could plead ignorance of the fact that Jan-Grap, the chimney-sweeper, had got a legacy of three huge bags of gold. Everybody was making inquiries, and everybody was giving

answers; so that in a very short time Jan was endowed by the liberality of his neighbors with more than a hundred houses, and about twenty ships at sea.

While Dame Smet was running all over the city to visit the *magazines des modes*, and to give her orders to a celebrated milliner, Pauw remained at home, at her request, to await the appearance of his father, who was somewhat indisposed by his night's adventures.

And now Dame Smet had been about a quarter of an hour at home; she was standing before the looking-glass, admiring the brilliancy of the huge golden pendants she had suspended to her ears.

Pauw came down stairs at the same moment, and, in reply to a question of his mother's, he said—

"Father isn't sick, he is out of sorts, and worn out by the strange adventures of the night; but he'll be down in less than an hour."

"Well, Pauw, just look at me," she exclaimed, exultingly; "what do you think of these ear-rings? Don't they suit me famously?"

The young man looked at his mother. The impression which the jewels made upon him could not have been most favorable, for he shrugged his shoulders, and replied, with a smile—

"I don't know, mother; but the ear-rings, under your plaited cap, look as if they had lost their way somehow."

"Now, now, wait a little; we will soon mend that," said the dame. "Only wait a few days, and your mother will come out in such style that you shall see whether any *my lady* on the Meur can compare with her. She will wear a *chapeau* with feathers in it, a velvet *pelerine*, a purple silk gown, and coffee-colored boots. And then she will promenade up and down the street, with a darling little parasol in her hand, so grand and so stately that everybody shall see of what a good family I am."

"Well, if there is no remedy for it," said Pauw, sighing, and shaking his head, for mercy sake, mother, go and live somewhere else; for such a grand *my lady* in our little schouwveger's den will be enough to make me feel awful."

"I don't feel inclined, mother, to be pointed at all my life long and laughed at by everybody."

"Patience, patience, Pauw," answered the happy dame. "Your father won't change houses yet; he has his reasons. But only let us get the legacy, my boy! I've got such a beautiful house in my eye; that large *porte-cochere* on the St. James's market."

"Do you know what I'm thinking, mother?" asked the young man, with a sad smile. "I'm thinking that all three of us are out of our senses; and as for the legacy, if I had ten crowns in my pocket, I wouldn't give them for the egg that isn't laid yet."

"Ha! you wouldn't give the crowns for it, eh?" exclaimed his mother. "Look, there's something like a proof for you, you unbelieving Thomas!"

Pauw sprang back in astonishment, and kept his dazzled eyes fixed on the handful of gold-pieces which his mother had taken out of her pocket and held before his face with an exulting laugh.

"Well, now, what do you say to that?" asked she. "Have you ever seen so much money in all your life before? Are these only clouds driven before the wind, as your father was saying?"

"But the lad could not speak; he did nothing but stare at the gold pieces."

"Have you lost your tongue?" said his mother, jestingly. "You stand there as if you had seen something uncanny."

"Whew," said Pauw, quite bewildered; "well I may, when you deal me such a stunning blow as that."

"And this handful of gold is only a trifle compared with what we shall have."

"Well, mother, mother dear, are we then really rich?"

"Rich as Jews, Pauw."

"Ha, ha! what a life we'll have! And Katie, poor thing, she'll be out of her senses with joy."

He began then to cut some extraordinary capers, and sang out cheerily—

"Schouwvegers gay, who live in A. B."

But his mother placed her hand on his mouth, and stopped his song, by saying, in a tone of rebuke—

"Fie, Pauw! singing a poor man's song—a low song! You must learn to behave like a lad who is of a good family."

"You are right, mother," stammered Pauw, in confusion; "I must make another little song—"

"No, no; no more singing or jumping about. A rich man must be grave and solemn."

This seemed to disconcert Pauw a little.

"Then mustn't I be merry any more?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, on the sly—when you are by yourself; and if you like to toss off a good flask when nobody sees you, the neighbors can't talk

about it. That's the way rich men manage."

"When I'm by myself! Do you fancy, mother, I drink beer for the sake of drinking?—Why, if I had no friends with me, I'd a great deal rather drink water."

"Beer, beer! rich men don't drink beer; they don't care for anything but wine."

"And I don't like wine."

"Oh, you'll soon learn to like it. But the first thing you have to learn is to leave off your loose way of walking up the street, and your joking and quizzing."

"But mustn't I laugh any more, then?"

"In the street? No, certainly not. You must carry your head up in the air, hold yourself upright, and look stiff and stern."

"As if I was always vexed with everybody?"

"No, as if you were always abstracted and full of thought. There's nothing so vulgar as laughing and being merry."

"I don't quite fancy that. 'Tisn't worth while to be rich, if you can't have some pleasure out of your money."

Dame Smet sat down majestically at the table, as if she were going to say something very important and memorable.

"Pauw," said she, "just sit down a minute. I have something to say to you. You have sense enough to take my meaning. 'Like seeks like.'"

"Yes, and the devil ran away with the chimney-sweeper—at least, so the proverb goes on to say."

"Don't joke now, Pauw; and listen attentively to what I have to say. 'Like seeks like.' What would you say if you saw the son of a baron marry the daughter of a drysalter?"

"I should think it odd."

"Don't you think, Pauw, now we are so rich, that people would think it a disgrace if you were to marry a poor girl?"

The lad trembled with fear.

"Gracious! mother, what are you driving at?" he exclaimed, anxiously.

"Look, now, Pauw. The shoemaker's Katie is a good and virtuous lass; I have not a word to say against her. And if we had remained poor people, you would have been married to her before the year is out; but now—you see the whole city would laugh at us."

"Well, let them laugh, if they like," said Pauw, firmly. "I'd rather be a chimney-sweep with Katie than a baron with anybody else;—and look you, mother, you mustn't harp on this string, or I shall be as cross as a turnpike gate."

Dame Smet put on a cunning expression, and said, in her blandest and most insinuating tone—

"But, Pauw, don't you think that Leocadie, in the corner shop there, over the way, is a comely lass? Black eyes—fine figure—always so well dressed—and such nice free manners; and there's heaps of money there, Pauw! If you would only set your cap at her, now—"

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed the lad. "Leocadie! that pale shrimp of a girl, with her ribbons and her curls! why she's a walking perfumer's shop; I wouldn't have her if she was the king's own daughter. She is always *parle franse* with those mincing rascals. No, no, I won't have such a weathercock as that; when I marry, I'll take care that my wife is really my wife."

"What!" cried his mother, "are you not ashamed to sit there and dare to take away the good name of people who have four houses, all their own property?"

"I don't want to take away anything, mother; only I won't hear you speak of that gilded grass-hopper."

"Well, suppose you have no liking for Leocadie—you shan't marry her."

"No?"

"No?"

"Well, then, I won't be a rich man—not I."

"You will wait till we are in our proper position; and then some *mamsel* or other—"

"Some *mamsel*? I shouldn't know how to speak to them. No, no; I won't have anybody but Katie! Father has promised me already that he would take care I married Katie; and he said, too, that we should have such a merry, such a jolly wedding."

"Father will change his mind when he is a little used to being rich. You must forget Katie, I tell you."

"I cannot forget her—I don't want to forget her—and I won't forget her. Such a dear, good child; she would die for Pauw, if necessary—and I am to break her heart and despise her, now that we are rich. If I thought I could ever dream of such a thing, I would dash my head against the wall there."

"I don't wish you to see her any more," insisted his mother.

"Father has told me to go and see her this morning, that she might not hear about our legacy but me."

tender entreaty, "you must still have a heart?—Only think now, you have regarded Katie as your daughter these five or six years past; you have loved her as your own child. She loved you, too, so much that we were often forced to laugh at her; it was always 'Mother dear, this,' and 'Mother dear, that;' the ground wasn't good enough for you to set your foot on. When she was here to keep you company, there was never a door opened but Katie jumped up to shut it, for fear you should catch cold; she watched your eyes to divine your wishes—and no wonder; the dear child has no mother of her own. When you were ill for more than three months, I am sure she cried three days at a stretch. Every morning she went to the church to pray for you; she watched whole nights long by your bedside; and when your illness became dangerous, she shed such floods of tears, and was in such a state of grief, that the neighbors hardly knew which to pity most, you or poor Katie. I always loved Katie; but since I found out that she would have given her life for yours, I have loved her ten times more. I have quite a reverence for her time; and all the *mamsels* in the city put together are not worth my Katie!—Oh, don't punish her for her goodness! She would break her heart and die—and you, mother, you would lay her in her coffin as the recompense of her love."

The tears flowed fast from the young man's eyes as he spoke these words. Before he had half finished, his mother became so deeply affected that she had bent her head down to conceal her emotion. Wiping her face with her hands she cried out—

"Pauw, lad, leave off, do; you would fetch tears out of a flint. Where did you get your words from? It is all quite true; the poor child would pine away. And she has never shown us anything but pure disinterested kindness and affection. It is a pity things should turn out so; she is not a girl fit for your station in life; but rich or not rich, we are human beings, still, and have hearts. Come, come, run off to Katie; fine clothes will set her off, and I will do my best to teach her good manners."

"Oh, mother, thanks, thanks!" shouted Pauw, intoxicated with joy. "Do with me whatever you like. If I must mount spectacles, and wear yellow gloves, and set everybody laughing at me, I don't care only if you won't vex Katie."

He rose up, and was leaving the house.

"Pauw, hold your head up!" said his mother, authoritatively. "A rich man doesn't wear a cap like that; and here is a satin neckerchief for you, with red and blue stripes. Come to the glass and I'll put it on for you."

With whatever vexation the young schouwveger might regard the gaudy colors of the satin, there was no help for it; so he meekly and patiently allowed the magnificent neckerchief to be tied round his neck; then he sprang out of the door, with a joyous farewell to his mother.

She called after him reprovingly—

"Pauw, Pauw, no skipping and jumping; behave yourself soberly, as becomes your position in life!"

The sunny side of the street was, as usual, crowded with young lace-stitch workers, enticed from their close rooms by the beauty of the weather; and among them were most of the old dames of the street, basking in the sun and stitching away at their children's clothes.

To please his mother, Pauw had altered his whole bearing, and stalked majestically along, with his head erect, and a conscious stateliness about his whole person.

As soon as he came in sight of the girls, all ran up and looked at him with their eyes wide open, and with an expression of wonder and even of awe, as if a miracle had taken place before their faces.

This general observation annoyed Pauw excessively. His face glowed with the crimson of shame; and his head began to feel as if it were a pin-cushion, and the girls were filling it with pins. He made great efforts to vanquish his emotion; and, going up to the girls who were sitting not far from the shoemaker's door, he said, in an apparently unembarrassed tone of voice—

"Why, Annetieken, what are you cutting such a face of wonder as that for? Do you fancy I am an elephant or a shark? Eh, you wonder!" shouted he to a group of dames who were staring at him with their necks stretched out, "what's the matter with you?"

No one laughed; there was a considerable interval before even Annetie ventured to say to him, with a deferential manner and a quiet voice—

"Mynheer Pauw, I wish you good luck; but I am vexed, after all."

"Vexed! why?"

"Why, the street will be so dull, now that the merry Pauw is become a rich Mynheer, and is going to live on the Meur."

"Come, now, have done with your mynheers. I am Pauwken-Plezier, just as I was before."