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KOOSJE

(By John Strange Winter.)



ONCE UNDER the name of Koosje van Kampen, she lived in Utrecht, that quaint city of the Venetian of the north.

She lived in the house of a professor who dwelt on the Minster street, a quiet, aristocratic part of the city, and once or twice every week you might have seen her, if you had been there to see, busily engaged in washing the red tile and blue slate pathway in front of the professor's house. You would have seen that she was very pleasant to look at, this Koosje, very comely and clean, whether she happened to be very busy or whether it had been Sunday, and with her very best gown on she was out for promenade in the Baan after duly going to service.

It was not likely that such a treasure could remain long unnoticed and unthought after. Servants in the Netherlands are not so good, but that they might be better, and most people know what a treasure Prof. van Dijk had in his Koosje. However, as the professor conscientiously raised her wages from time to time Koosje never thought of leaving him.

But there is one bribe no woman can resist—the bribe that is offered by love. As Prof. van Dijk had expected and feared, that bribe ere long was held out to Koosje, and Koosje was too weak to resist it.

Npt that she had intended to tell him at first. She was only three and twenty, and, though Jan van der Welde was as fine a fellow as could be seen in Utrecht and had good wages and something put by, Koosje was by no means inclined to rush headlong into matrimony with undue hurry. It was more pleasant to live in the professor's good house to have delightful walks arm in arm with Jan under the trees in the Baan or around the Singels, parting under the stars with many a lingering word and promise to meet again. It was during one of those very partings that the professor suddenly became aware as he walked placidly home of the change that had come into Koosje's life.

However, Koosje told him blushing that she did not wish to leave him just at present. So he did not trouble himself about the matter. He was a wise man, this old authority on osteology, and quoted oftentimes, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." So the courtship sped smoothly on.

Koosje had been on an errand for the professor, one that had kept her out of doors some time, and it happened that the night was bitterly cold. The cold indeed was fearful. The girl had delivered her message and ran on through Oude Kerkhof as fast as her feet could carry her when just as she turned the corner into the Domplein, a fierce gust of wind, accompanied by a blinding shower of rain, assailed her. Her foot caught against something soft and heavy, and she fell.

"Bless us!" she ejaculated blankly. "What fool has left a bundle on the path on such a night—pitch dark,

with half the lamps out and rain and mist enough to blind one?"

She gathered herself up, rubbing elbows and knees vigorously, casting the while dark glances at the obnoxious bundle which had caused the disaster. Just then the wind was lulled. The lamp close at hand gave out a steady light, which shed its rays through the fog upon Koosje and the bundle, from which came a faint moan. Quickly she drew nearer, when she perceived that what she had believed to be a bundle was indeed a woman, apparently in the last stage of exhaustion.

Koosje tried to lift her and struggled on for a few steps that lay between her and the professor's house.

"Oh, professor!" she gasped out, but between her struggle with the elements and her race down the passage her breath was utterly gone.

The professor looked up from his book and his tea tray in surprise.

"What is the matter, Koosje?" he asked, regarding her gravely over his spectacles.

"There's a woman outside—dying!" she panted. "I fell over her."

"You had better try to get her in, then," said the old gentleman, in quite a relieved tone. "You and Dortje must bring her in. Dear, dear! Poor soul! But it is a dreadful night."

The old gentleman shivered as he spoke and drew a little nearer to the tall white porcelain stove.

He wondered why he should have every luxury and this poor creature should be dying in the street amid the wind and the rain. It was all very unequal. It was very odd, the professor argued, leaning his back against the tall, warm stove. It was very odd indeed. His reverie was, however, broken by the abrupt re-entrance of Koosje, who this time was a little less breathless than she had been before.

"We have got her into the kitchen, professor," she announced. "She is a child, a mere baby, and so pretty! She has opened her eyes and spoken."

"Give her some soup and wine—hot," said the professor without stirring.

"But won't you come?" she asked.

The professor hesitated. He hated attending in cases of illness, though he was properly a qualified doctor and in an emergency would lay his prejudice aside.

"Or shall I run across for the good Dr. Smith?" Koosje asked. "He would come in a minute, only it is such a night!"

At that moment a fiercer just than before rattled at the casements and the professor laid aside his scruples.

He followed his housekeeper down the chilly, marble flagged passage into the kitchen. In an armchair before the opened stove sat the rescued girl—a slight, golden haired thing, with wistful blue eyes and a frightened air. Every moment she caught her breath in a half hysterical sob, while violent shivers shook her from head to foot.

The professor went and looked at her over his spectacles, as if she had been some curious specimen of his favorite study. But at the same time he kept at a respectful distance from her.

"Give her some soup and wine," he said at length, putting his hands under the tails of his long dressing gown of flowered cashmere—"some soup and wine, hot, and put her to bed."

"Is she then to remain for the night?" Koosje asked, a little surprised.

"Oh, don't send me away!" the golden haired girl broke out in a voice that was positively a wail, and clasping a pair of pretty, slender hands in piteous supplication.

"Where do you come from?" the old gentleman asked, much as if he expected she might suddenly jump up and bite him.

"From Beijerland, mynheer," she answered with a sob.

"So! Koosje, she is remarkably well-dressed, is she not?" the professor said, glancing at the costly lace headgear, the heavy gold headpiece which lay on the table, together with the great gold spiral ornaments, and filigree pendants—a dazzling head of richness.

"Very well dressed, indeed, professor," returned Koosje, promptly.

"And what are you doing in Utrecht in such a plight as this, then?" he asked, still looking at a safe distance.

"Oh, mynheer, I am all alone in the world," she answered, her blue misty eyes filled with tears. "I had a month ago a dear, good, kind father, but he has died, and I am indeed desolate. I always believed him rich, and to this day, with a gesture that included her dress and the ornaments on the table, I have ever been accustomed. This I ordered without consideration such clothes as I thought needful. And then I found there was nothing for me but a hundred guilders to call my own when I left was paid."

"But what brought you to Utrecht?" he sent me here, mynheer, in his last illness, only of three days' duration, he made me gather all together and come to this city, where I was to ask for a Mevrouw Baake, his cousin. Mevrouw Baake of the Singers Fabrik, said Dortje in an aside to the others. "I lived servant with her before I came here."

"I had heard very little about her, only my father had sometimes mentioned his cousin to me. They had once been betrothed," the stranger continued. "But when I reached Utrecht I found she was dead—two years dead. But we had never heard of it."

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed the professor, pityingly. "Well, you had better let Koosje put you to bed, and we will see what can be done for you in the morning."

"Am I to make up a bed?" Koosje asked, following him along the passage.

The professor wheeled around and faced her.

"She had better sleep in the guest room," he said, thoughtfully, regardless of the cold which struck to his slippery feet from the marble floor. "That is the only room which does not contain specimens that would probably frighten the poor child. I am very much afraid, Koosje," he concluded, doubtfully, "that she is a lady, and what we are to do with a lady I can't think."

With that the old gentleman shuffled off to his own room, and Koosje turned back to her kitchen.

On the morrow matters assumed a somewhat different aspect. Gertrude Van Floote proved to be not exactly a gentleman. It is true that her father had been a well-to-do man for his station in life and had very much spoiled and indulged his one motherless child. Yet her education was so slight that she could do little more than read and write, besides speaking a little English, which she had picked up from the yachtmen frequenting her native town. The professor found she had been but a distant relative of the Mevrouw Baake to seek whom she had come to Utrecht, and that she had no kinsfolk upon whom she could depend, a fact which accounted for the profusion of her jewelry, all her golden trinkets having descended to her as heirlooms.

"I can be your servant, mynheer," she suggested. "Indeed, I am a very useful girl, as you will find if you will but try me."

Now, as a rule, the professor vigorously set his face against admitting young servants into his house. They broke his china, they disarranged his bones, they meddled with his papers, and made general havoc. So, in truth, he was not very willing to have Gertrude Van Floote as a permanent member of his household, and he said so.

"But we had never heard of it," Koosje had taken a fancy to the girl,

and, having an eye to her own departure at no very distant date—for she had been betrothed more than two years—she pleaded so hard to keep her, promising to train her in all the professor's ways, to teach her the value of old china and osteologic specimens, that eventually, with a good deal of grumbling, the old gentleman gave way and, being a wise as well as an old gentleman, went back to his studies, dismissing Koosje and the girl alike from his thoughts.

Just at first Truide, poor child, was alarmed.

She put away her specimen ornaments, and some lilac frocks and black skirts were purchased for her. Her box, which she had left at the station, supplied all that was necessary for Sunday.

It was great fun. For a whole week this young person danced about the rambling house, playing at being a servant. Then she began to grow a little weary of it all. She had been accustomed, of course, to performing such offices as all Dutch ladies fulfill the care of china, of linen, the dusting of rooms and the like—but she had done the mas a mistress, not as an underling. And that was not the worst. It was when it came to her pretty foot having to be thrust into klompen and her having to take a pail and syringe and mop and clean the windows, and the pathway and the front of the house the game of maid servant began to assume a very different aspect. When, after having been as free as air to come and go as she chose, she was only permitted to attend services on Sundays and to take an hour's promenade with Dortje, who was dull and heavy and stupid, she began to feel positively desperate, and the result of it was that when Jan van der Welde came to see Koosje, Miss Truide, from sheer longing for excitement and change, began to make eyes at him.

Just at first Koosje noticed nothing. She herself was of so faithful a nature that an idea, a suspicion, of Jan's faithlessness never entered her mind. When the girl laughed and blushed and dimpled and smiled, when she cast her great blue eyes at the big, young fellow, Koosje only thought how pretty she was and it was just a thousand pities she had not been born a great lady.

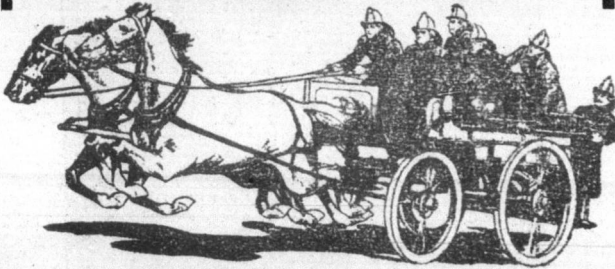
And thus weeks slipped over. Never very demonstrative herself, Koosje saw nothing. Dortje for her part saw a great deal. But Dortje was a woman of few words, one who quite believed in the saying, "If speech is silver, silver is silence." So she held her peace.

Well, in the end there came what the French call un denouement—what we, in forcible modern English would call a smash—and it happened thus: It was one evening toward the summer that Koosje's eyes were suddenly opened and she became aware of the free and easy familiarity of Truide's manner toward her betrothed lover, Jan.

"Leave the kitchen!" she said, in a tone of authority.

But it happened that at the very instant she spoke Jan was furtively holding Truide's fingers under the cover of the table cloth, and when on hearing the sharp words the girl would have snatched them away he, with true masculine instinct of opposition, held them fast.

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"What do you mean by speaking to her like that?" he demanded, an angry flush overspreading his dark face.

"What is the maid to you?" Koosje asked, indignantly.

"Maybe more than you are," he retorted, in answer to which Koosje deliberately marched out of the kitchen, leaving them alone.

As she went along the passage the professor's bell sounded and Koosje, being close to the door, went abruptly in. The professor looked up in mild astonishment, quickly enough changed to dismay as he caught sight of Koosje's face.

"How now, my good Koosje? What is the trouble?" he asked gently.

"It's just like this, professor," cried Koosje, settling her arms akimbo and speaking in a high pitched, shrill voice. "You and I have been warming a viper in our bosoms, and viper-like, she has turned around and bitten me."

"Is it Truide?"

"Truide," she affirmed disheartenly.

"Yes, it is Truide, who but for me would be dead now of hunger and cold or worse. And she has been making love to that great fool Jan van der Welde, great oaf that he is, after all I have done for her, after me dragging her in out of the cold and rain, after all I have taught her. Serves me right for being so soft hearted! I'll be wiser next time after I fall over a bundle and leave it where I find it."

"No, no, Koosje. Don't say that," the old gentleman remonstrated, gently. "After all, it may be but a blessing in disguise. God sends all our trials for some good and wise purpose."

"Ah!" sniffed Koosje scornfully.

"This oaf, as I must say you justly term him, for you are a good, clever woman, Koosje, as I can testify after the experience of years has proven that he can be false; he has shown that he can throw away substance for shadow for, of a truth, that poor, pretty child would make a sad wife for a poor man, yet it is better you should know it now than at some future date, when—when there might be other ties to make the knowledge more bitter to you. What are you going to do—punish her or turn her out or what?"

"I shall let him marry her," replied Koosje, with a portentous nod.

Fifteen years had passed away. The old professor of osteology had passed away with them, and in the large house on the Domplein lived a baron, with half a dozen noisy, happy, healthy children. There was a new race of neat maids, clad in the same neat livery of lilac and black who scoured and cleaned, just as Koosje and Dortje had done in the old professor's day.

What had become of Dortje Pennoot? But on the left hand of the busy, bustling, picturesque Oude Gracht, there was a handsome shop filled with all manner of cakes, seedling confections and lippers, from absinth to boudin, or of attack to chertreuse. In that shop was a handsome, prosperous, middle-aged woman, well-dressed and well-mannered, no longer Professor van Dijk's Koosje, but the Jeannette van Kampen.

Yes, Koosje had come to be a prosperous tradeswoman of good position, respected by all. But she was Koosje van Kampen still. The romance which had come to be so disastrous and abrupt an end had satisfied her for life.

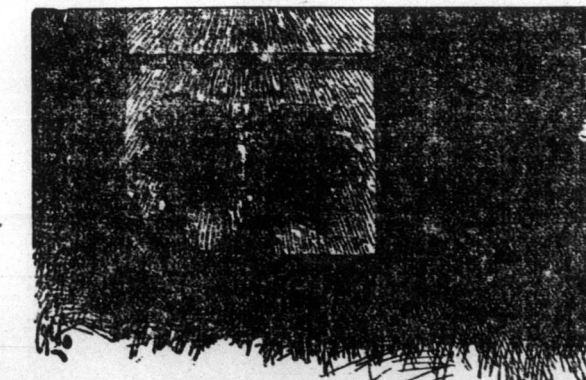
I must tell you that at the time of Jan's "bride," after the first flush of rage was over, Koosje declined to show any sign of grief or regret. She was very proud, this Dutchess-like servant maid, far to offend to let those by whom she was surrounded imagine she was wearing the willow for the faithless Jan, and when Dortje, on the day of the wedding, remarked that Koosje remarkably cool on the subject of matrimony, Koosje, with a careless out-turning of her hands, palms upmost, answered that she was right.

Very soon after their marriage Jan and his young wife left Utrecht for Amsterdam, where Jan had promises of higher wages, and thus they passed, as Koosje thought, completely out of her life.

"I don't wish to hear anything more about them, if you please," she said, severely and emphatically to Dortje.

But not so. In time the professor died, leaving Koosje the large legacy with which she set up the handsome shop in the Oude Gracht, and several happened one day that Koosje was sitting in her shop sewing. In the large inner room a party of ladies and offi-

(Continued on Page 40.)



A CONTROVERSY AVERTED.

First Old Maid—Sh-h-h. Samantha, there's a burglar in the room! Second Old Maid (with a sigh)—Well, Matilda, I suppose he's yours by right of discovery.