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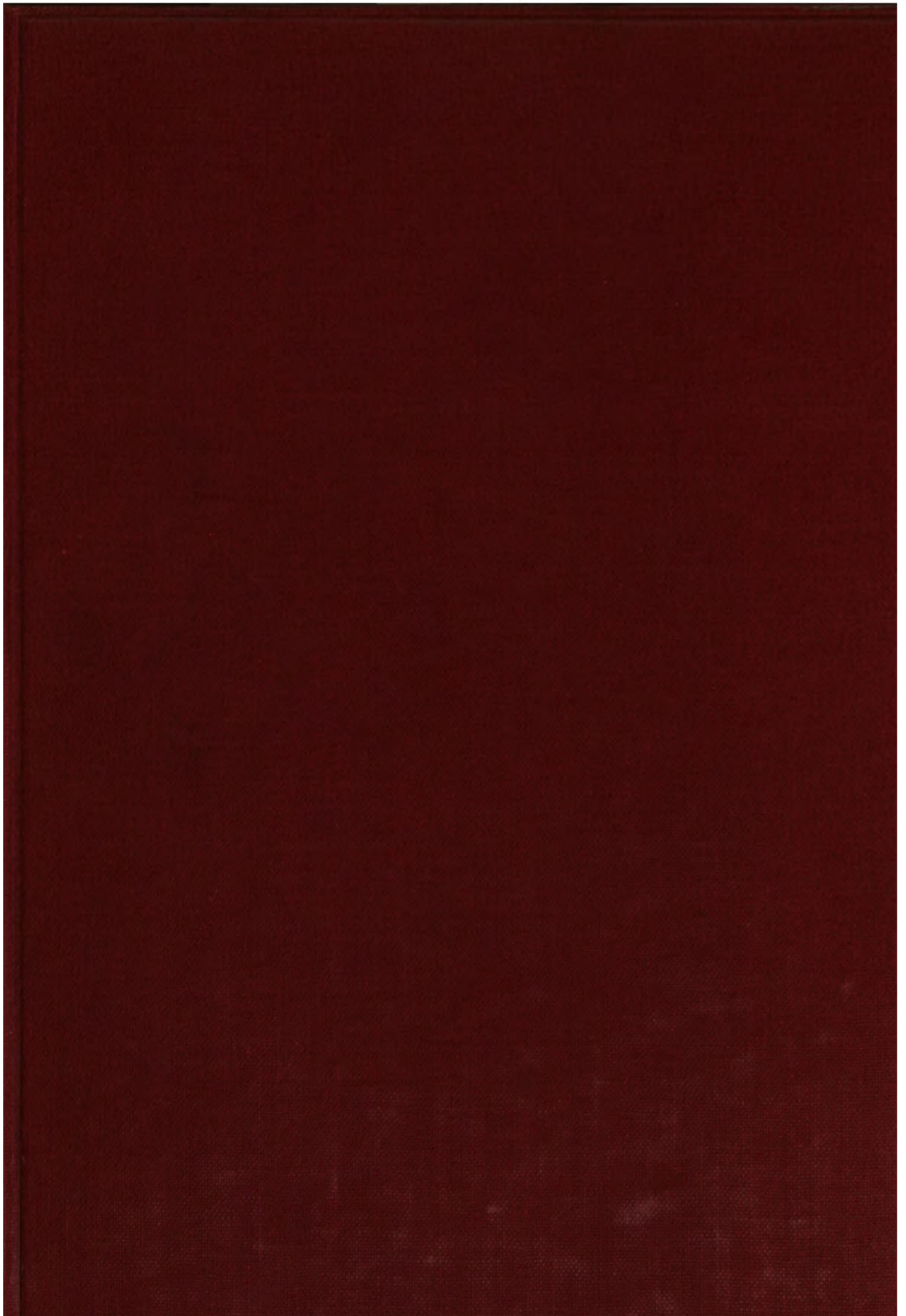
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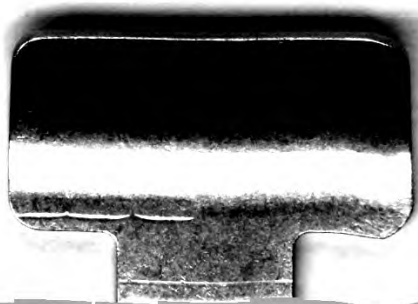


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*The Soul of Nicholas Snyders*

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*Amateurs wishing to perform this play  
should apply to Samuel French, Ltd.,  
26 Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.2*

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*The Soul of Nicholas  
Snyders*

*A Mystery Play in Three Acts*

By  
*Jerome K. Jerome*

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*Hodder and Stoughton*  
*Publishers*                      *London*



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*Made and Printed in Great Britain  
Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., London and Aylesbury*

# THE SOUL OF NICHOLAS SNYDERS

## THE CHARACTERS

*Nicholas Snyders, a Miser.*

*Christina, his Handmaid.*

*Jan, a Sailor. In love with Christina.*

*Dame Toelast, a rich old woman. Betrothed to Nicholas.*

*Pieter Bles, Mate of the "Van Dyke."*

*Vrouw Molenaar, a Widow.*

*A Burgomaster.*

*A Barber.*

*An Artist.*

*A Pedlar (of strange wares).*

*A Child.*

## PERIOD

*Once upon a time*





## ACT I

### SCENE

*Interior of the Mill. One sees but half of it: a vast semicircular apartment, built of great carved beams and columns; with dark recesses, lending themselves to shadows. When the great door at back is open, one catches a glimpse of the busy quay of Zandam where the ships lie; and beyond, the shores of the Zuyder Zee, studded with windmills, villages, and spires.*

*A great double staircase leads to a gallery just above the door, from where another staircase leads to the upper part of the Mill.*

*On the right is the great desk, littered with papers, ledgers, and files. Behind it, the iron safe and the great cupboards where Old Nick piles his purchases. Scattered about—on the floor, thrown over chairs and banisters, hanging from beam and pillar—are pictures, draperies, curious outlandish things: other of Old Nick's purchases.*

*Opposite to the desk, is the high-tiled stove with its huge chimney reaching to the ceiling. Old Nick's high-backed chair is near to it. Cabinets and carved wooden presses are around the walls wherever there is room for them.*

*Christina sits at the head of the desk, near to Old Nick's left hand (when he is there). A huge ledger is propped up, open, before her. She is adding up figures. She would be a marvellously pretty girl of about twenty,*

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*if it were not for her frightened, worried, hunted look. She is dressed in a simple frock that has seen much wear. The only ornaments about her are a pair of gold earrings and the white lace cap upon her head.*

*There comes a knock at the door. Christina starts and drops her pen.*

*The door opens and there enters Burgomaster de Haas. He is stout, elderly, pompous ; condescending towards the lower orders and occasionally laboriously genial. He wears a long fur cloak and a heavy gold watch-chain. He closes the door behind him and comes forward.*

BURGOMASTER. Ah ! And how is my little friend Christina this afternoon ?

CHRISTINA [*she has risen. She curtsies. She is frightened of everything and everybody*]. Quite well, thank you, Burgomaster.

BURGOMASTER [*he pats her on the cheek*]. That's right, that's right. [*He looks round.*] And your master, my dear old friend Nicholas Snyders—he is not here ?

CHRISTINA. He is upstairs. I will tell him.

BURGOMASTER. Ah, thank you, thank you. Just passing and thought I'd look in and shake him by the hand.

CHRISTINA. He will be so pleased, I am sure. [*She runs up the stairs and disappears.*]

BURGOMASTER [*as he makes himself comfortable in Old Nick's chair by the fire*]. No hurry, no hurry. Just passing and . . . [*He peeps round the edge of the chair, sees that no one is about, and darts across to the desk, pokes about among the papers, turns a page of the ledger that Christina has left open. There comes*

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*a knock. He skips back to his chair. The knock is repeated.]* Come in, come in.

*Klaas enters. He is the chief barber of Zandam. He is a thin, foxy little man, always very deferential and apologetic to everybody for his existence. He is astonished at seeing the Burgomaster.*

BURGOMASTER. Ah, Klaas, it's you, is it? What are you doing here? [*Suddenly he sits up, assumes the magistrate.*] Not been gambling again? I've heard. Not come here to borrow money?

KLAAS [*hurt*]. Oh, Burgomaster, how could you think it? Oh dear, no. No, I just looked in— [*obviously making it up*—just to see if old Snyders wanted a dog. Such a dear little—

BURGOMASTER [*cuts him short*]. Yes. I should be sorry for the dog.

KLAAS. Yes. And seeing *you* here, Burgomaster, I thought for the moment— [*Chuckles.*]

BURGOMASTER. What do you mean?

KLAAS. Well, that perhaps *you*, Burgomaster, had come here to—to— [*Chuckling and wriggling.*]

BURGOMASTER. To borrow money? [*Laughs boisterously.*] That's good. Burgomaster Haas, the ship-owner, the mill-owner, come to beg money from Nicholas Snyders.

*Nicholas Snyders appears in the gallery. He leans over the rail and listens; charmed, complimented by what he hears of himself, hugging himself and laughing inwardly.*

BURGOMASTER. From Nicholas Snyders! The old-clothes man, the rag-and-bottle merchant! [*Laughs boisterously again.*]

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KLAAS. [*Chuckles in answer.*]

BURGOMASTER [*suddenly severe*]. Don't chuckle. How dare you keep on chuckling? You seem to forget that you are the barber, and that I am the Burgomaster of Zandam.

KLAAS. I was only thinking how delighted he would be if such a fine fish came into his net—how he'd fleece you and skin you and bleed you white, and suck the marrow from your bones.

BURGOMASTER [*getting uncomfortable*]. The old miser. You keep your eyes and ears open. He'll overreach himself one day. Then we'll have the law on him.

KLAAS. Did I ever tell you what he did when his poor old uncle Hendriks died and left him all his money? Called at the house the day before the funeral—said he wanted to kiss the corpse good-bye, and the nurse let him in. Found out afterwards that he had sneaked the poor old chap's false teeth. Sold them to his own grandfather for fifteen guilders.

NICHOLAS [*from the gallery*]. Ten, only ten. I forgave him the other five as a present on his eightieth birthday. [*He comes down the stairs.*]

BURGOMASTER [*advancing to meet him with outstretched hands*]. My dear Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. [*A handshake is not enough for him. He kisses the Burgomaster on the cheek.*]

BURGOMASTER. Our little friend Klaas, he can't resist telling a funny story.

NICHOLAS [*kisses Klaas also*]. God bless him. He shall have another one to tell you, next time.

KLAAS [*crestfallen and nervous*]. I will look in again.

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NICHOLAS [*shepherding him to the door*]. Yes, don't leave it too long. Come and tell *me* some funny stories. Oh, I love a funny story. Good-bye. Give my love to all at home. [*Klaas goes out. Nicholas closes the door and returns.*] Nice little man. Always such a fund of anecdote. Do you know what he told me about you the other day? Oh, such a funny story. Sit down, sit down. [*He seats himself at the desk. The Burgomaster sits the other side.*] He told me—oh, you will laugh—he told me you'd been using the public funds for speculating on your own account, and that if the price went down before you could sell out—oh, what a talk there'd be! Oh, such a fuss!

BURGOMASTER [*he half rises*]. How dare he! How dare he, the miserable little back-biting, scandal-mongering——

NICHOLAS. Have the law on him. Show him up for a wicked story-teller. Let them examine your private ledger. The one with the lock and key.

BURGOMASTER [*breaks down*]. My dear Nicholas. My dear old friend Nicholas. You won't see me disgraced—Zandam disgraced.

NICHOLAS. [*He starts. That seems to have hit him.*]

BURGOMASTER. Think of it. Dear old Zandam!

NICHOLAS. My native town.

BURGOMASTER. You will help me. A moment's thoughtlessness. You will not see me ruined, Zandam a byword—for a mere trifle of ten thousand guilders. You will save me.

NICHOLAS. But how can I? "Old Nicholas, the rag-and-bottle merchant, the old-clothes man." [*He leers across the desk.*]



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BURGOMASTER [*his manner changes. Old Nicholas has overheard everything. May as well be dignified, anyhow*]. I'll pay for that. I'd forgotten that gallery. Charge it in the interest.

NICHOLAS. And then I should be—let me see: what is the silly phrase?—ah yes, “compounding a felony.” You see, if you only hadn't told me, it would all have been so simple. Burgomaster Haas comes to his dear old friend Nicholas Snyders for a loan and his dear old friend Nicholas Snyders is naturally overjoyed to be of assistance. But to “compound a felony,” to cover up a crime——

BURGOMASTER. What's your price?

NICHOLAS. Ten per cent.

BURGOMASTER [*evidently relieved. He had expected a much higher rate*]. That's all right.

NICHOLAS. For myself.

BURGOMASTER. What d'you mean: “for yourself”?

NICHOLAS. Well, you see, there's my conscience. That will want squaring. “Aiding and abetting a betrayal of the public trust.” Oh! oh! my poor conscience! Do you know what it is asking—for itself alone? Ninety per cent. Oh, it's wicked, you know—it's wicked!

BURGOMASTER [*after a struggle*]. Let it have it. With your ten that will make just a hundred.

NICHOLAS. A hundred per cent. [*Throws up his hands in despair.*] You burgomasters! You don't care how much you spend.

BURGOMASTER [*he has risen*]. When can I have the money?

NICHOLAS [*he has also risen. He rings a hand-bell*

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*that stands on the desk, glances at the clock*]. It's too late to-day.

BURGOMASTER. I'll come round early in the morning.

NICHOLAS [*he takes him to the door*]. Any time. Always a pleasure to see Burgomaster Haas. Good-bye—for the present. [*The Burgomaster goes out.*] Ta-ta. [*He waves his hand, closes the door; then breaks into a dance, pirouetting and snapping his fingers. But is suddenly pulled up by his lumbago.*] Oh!—oh, my back! [*Christina has come down the stairs in answer to the bell. Has seated herself at the desk.*] Oh, my poor back! Has it ever occurred to you, Christina, how grateful you ought to be for all the youth and health that you have enjoyed here ever since I took you in?

CHRISTINA [*she does not get up, but makes a sort of half curtsy while still seated*]. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS [*he sits at the desk*]. Why, but for me you might have had to go to the poor-house. Might have caught a chill there and had rheumatism all over you.

CHRISTINA [*curtsying*]. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. What's the matter? What do you keep on doing that for? [*Mimics.*]

CHRISTINA. I was curtsying, sir.

NICHOLAS. Oh, curtsying. I thought you were sitting on something that hurt you. I shouldn't do it any more. You'll wear out your frock. Expect me to buy you a new one. You girls, you never consider expense. Have you mended my coat?

CHRISTINA [*forgetting, she is about to curtsy again*]

NICHOLAS [*stops her*]. Ah!

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CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. And darned all my stockings ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Fed the chickens ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Haven't *overfed* them ?

CHRISTINA. No, sir.

NICHOLAS. Nothing so bad for chickens as over-feeding. And not only chickens. [*All through this, he is busy writing.*] I have noticed of late, Christina, that *you* have been feeding rather carelessly.

CHRISTINA. No, sir—yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Think of your figure. You have got a nice little figure. Don't go and spoil it.

CHRISTINA. No, sir.

NICHOLAS. Have you finished the ledger and copied out all those lists I gave you ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. And hoed the potatoes ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Cleaned out the pigsty ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Ah ! Well, now we'll get to work. [*He hands her the draft he has been writing.*] Make a nice fair-copy of that, ready for Burgomaster Haas to-morrow morning. He's coming early.

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir. [*Reading it.*] I beg pardon, sir. You have got "a hundred per cent." Isn't that a mistake ?

NICHOLAS. Yes. Yes, it is a mistake, Christina. The Herr Burgomaster's mistake. Errors in this world, Christina, always bring their just retribution.

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We must all remember that. Ten per cent. for the loan and ninety per cent. for the little mistake. What's the matter? What are you crying about?

CHRISTINA [*crying*]. I can't help it. I feel so sorry for the poor Burgomaster.

NICHOLAS. Well, don't make a blot. Be a good girl and you shall get up early on Sunday morning and get all your work done and go to church and pray for him. Pray that Heaven may help him to pay the interest punctually and so avoid being sold up. [*A knock.*] Come in, come in.

*The door opens. There enters Stoop, a poor artist. He is gaunt and haggard. He carries a picture under his arm. He closes the door and comes forward with a pretence of being at his ease. He bows to Christina, who nervously returns the salutation, and then to Nicholas, who remains seated.*

STOOP. I have the honour of addressing Nicholas Snyders, the art dealer?

NICHOLAS. "Don't throw it away. Take your rubbish to Nicholas Snyders, and see what he will give you." My sign. Just outside the door.

STOOP. [*Responds with a feeble laugh.*]

NICHOLAS. And I have the honour——?

STOOP. Frans Stoop, a poor painter of pictures.

NICHOLAS. A poor painter of pictures. Ah, well! Better than being a painter of poor pictures, anyhow. Isn't it?

STOOP. [*Again responds with a forced laugh.*]

NICHOLAS. Until one comes to sell them. And then the better the picture the less one gets for it. Oh, it's a silly world. It prefers bad art. Is that the

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little gem? [*He indicates the picture which Stoop still carries under his arm.*]

STOOP [*he hands Nicholas the picture*]. I am hoping you will think it so. It's the best thing I have ever done.

NICHOLAS [*examining*]. Ah! What is it: Vesuvius?

STOOP [*he looks across*]. Pardon, Herr Snyders: my daughter. [*He changes the position of the picture.*] You had it the wrong way up.

NICHOLAS. Ah, yes. I see now. Oh, it's a nice face. Oh, pretty. Do you know what I should do if I were a rich man? I should buy it for myself and hang it over the chimney. [*He shows it to Christina.*] Quite clever, isn't it? So much feeling about it.

STOOP [*his hopes are rising*]. I meant never to sell it. She was our youngest. It was all we had to remember her by. But necessity—— [*He makes a gesture.*]

NICHOLAS. Ah, yes. Trouble. Extraordinary the amount of trouble in this world. Everyone that comes here: all of them in trouble. And I can do so little to help them. So little. This picture of yours. Work of genius. And all I can offer you for it is twenty guilders.

STOOP. [*Out of his astonishment and indignation he is about to speak.*]

NICHOLAS [*stops him*]. Don't say it. I am ashamed of it myself. You are quite right not to accept it. Take it away. Take it away. [*He pushes it across.*]

STOOP [*he takes it up. He is about to go. Then turns*]. You couldn't—— Forgive my importunity.

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But my wife, she is ill. She is—we all are—[*with a wave of the hand, trying to make light of it*]—a little hungry. You couldn't, Herr Nicholas, make it—fifty guilders?

NICHOLAS. If only it was the usual, conventional sort of picture. Something the public would understand.

STOOP [*half to himself, indignantly*]. Twenty guilders!

NICHOLAS. Think what it would buy. A nice beefsteak with onions. Bread and butter and beer. One gets quite a lot for twenty guilders. [*He leans a little forward.*] Some nice chicken broth for your wife. [*He waits.*]

STOOP. [*Without speaking, without looking at Nicholas, he pushes the picture back across the desk.*]

NICHOLAS [*from his cash-box he counts out the money, lays it on the desk*]. So sorry. I do wish I could make it more.

STOOP. [*He puts the money in his pocket. He bows to Nicholas and Christina and turns.*]

NICHOLAS. Hope your wife will get better. Don't forget the chicken broth.

STOOP [*he is near the door. He turns*]. I thank you, Nicholas Snyders. I shall not forget. [*He goes out.*]

NICHOLAS [*he watches till the door is closed. Then seizes the picture. He gloats over it. Shows it to Christina*]. Look at it. Look at it. Did you ever see anything finer? It's another Rembrandt. I will sell it for a thousand guilders. Look at those lights and shadows and the painting of that—

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Don't do that. What d'you mean by it : sobbing your heart out all over the place, whenever I'm feeling a bit cheerful ? It spoils all my fun.

CHRISTINA. I am so miserable. I feel so sorry for all the poor people that come here. Oh, please let me go away and get another place.

NICHOLAS. And what about the money you owe me ? Ain't I paying off all your father's old debts, clearing his memory and charging you only twelve per cent. ? Don't I feed you and clothe you ? Didn't you have two helpings of meat only yesterday, you greedy, ungrateful little minx ? Haven't I just bought you a new frock ? New so far as you are concerned, anyhow. Do you know that I could put you into prison for debt ? [*He assumes a kinder tone.*] You work hard and don't waste so much time in bed and always be merry and bright, and perhaps when I die I may leave you something in my will. One never knows.

CHRISTINA. [*Is trying to dry her eyes.*]

NICHOLAS. Now have you finished that—— [*A knock.*] Come in, come in.

*The door opens. Vrow Molenaar enters.*

NICHOLAS [*aside to Christina*]. It's Vrow Molenaar. Don't let her see you've been crying. Will put it about that I'm not kind to you.

*Vrow Molenaar is an ironer and clear-starcher. She closes the door with a bang and comes forward. She is quite at her ease. Kicks off her sabots and lays her umbrella on the desk.*

MOLENAAR. Good afternoon. [*She also nods to Christina.*]

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NICHOLAS. Oh, good afternoon. You don't mind my taking your wet umbrella off my desk, do you? [*He is about to put it behind him.*]

MOLENAAR. I'll have it on *this* side of the desk, if you don't mind. Where I shan't forget it.

NICHOLAS [*handing it her*]. Yes, I should be careful of it. [*Glances at it.*] Family heirloom, I presume?

MOLENAAR. Yes. And it's going to *remain* in the family. I want four florins out of you, my lad.

NICHOLAS. Oh, you do, do you? What for?

MOLENAAR. [*She tucks up her skirt and begins to all appearance to undress herself.*]

NICHOLAS. I say, you can't do that here.

MOLENAAR [*looking up*]. Can't do what?

NICHOLAS. Undress yourself. This isn't a bath.

MOLENAAR. Go on, you silly old gargoyle. Can't I tuck up my skirts before a man old enough to be my great-grandfather? [*Takes off a petticoat and throws it on the desk.*] That's what I want four florins out of you for. For a lace petticoat that you'll sell for ten and cheap at the price. Shouldn't let you have it if I wasn't stone-broke for the price of a Schnaps and hadn't taken it myself for a bad debt. Washed and ironed for that woman for two years—two mortal years. Talked as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. And then does a bunk, owing me fifty florins. And me a poor lone widow, as you know. [*She has worked herself up into a hurricane of indignation.*] Don't mess it about. Put it on the child. Then you will be able to see what it's like. Why, that bottom flounce alone——

NICHOLAS [*he crumples it up and throws it at her*]



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*head*]. Take it away. Take yourself with it. I have got all the petticoats I want for the rest of my life. Every old woman in Zandam brings me her petticoat once a year. I'm smothered in petticoats. Take it home and clean the windows with it. [*Jumping up.*] Don't you hit me with that shoe or I'll have the law on you. Don't you dare——

MOLENAAR [*she has picked up one of her sabots. In another moment she would have hit him over the head with it. She pauses.*] I wouldn't soil it.

NICHOLAS [*snarling*]. Ah-r-r-r!

MOLENAAR [*she brings the shoe down on the desk*]. Sit down.

NICHOLAS. [*He sits, but maintains an attitude of defence.*]

MOLENAAR [*sits*]. And give me four florins—for that petticoat. [*She hands it back to him.*] Look at it. You're not a fool. Look at the lace.

NICHOLAS. I don't want it.

MOLENAAR. I'm not asking you to wear it. I'm asking you to buy it for four and sell it for ten.

NICHOLAS. Why don't you sell it yourself for ten?

MOLENAAR. I happen to want the money to-night—for a purpose.

NICHOLAS [*who has been looking at it*]. I'll give you two for it.

MOLENAAR. [*There is a moment's danger of assault. She controls herself.*]

NICHOLAS. Just the price of a bottle of Schnaps. Take it or leave it.

MOLENAAR [*rises*]. You skinflint. You dried-up

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old mummy. D'you know what I'd like to do with that dirty little soul of yours ?

NICHOLAS. Never you mind my soul. There's your money. [*Pushes it across the desk.*]

MOLENAAR [*pockets it*]. Take it out and disinfect it, if I could find a pair of tongs long enough. And *then* it wouldn't be worth putting back.

NICHOLAS. Yes. Don't forget to shut the door.

MOLENAAR. There will be *one* mourner at your funeral : the Devil. *He* will lose a good and faithful servant when you die. And that can't be much further off. [*Goes out and slams the door.*]

NICHOLAS. Ah-r-r-r ! If that woman comes again—remember, Christina, I'm not at home. Throw her out and slam the door in her face. Nasty, spiteful— After having it all her own way, too. Did you hear what she said—about my soul ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir. [*She is trying to hide the fact that she has enjoyed the conversation.*]

NICHOLAS [*looking at her sharply*]. Ye-es. Feeling a bit more cheerful now, aren't you ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. Yes. Thought you were. Well, don't stand gaping there. Haven't you got anything to do ?

CHRISTINA. Yes, sir. I beg pardon, sir. Oughtn't I to run across to the market ? We've got no butter.

NICHOLAS. Ah-r-r-r ! Always thinking of your stomach. [*He gives her some money, counting it out carefully.*] Don't you be gone more than five minutes.

CHRISTINA. No, sir. [*She puts on a cloak hanging near the door, and goes out.*]

NICHOLAS [*mimicking*]. No, sir—yes, sir ; yes, sir—

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no, sir. It's like keeping a rabbit. [*He takes up the petticoat. Is rolling it up into a ball.*] Nasty, disagreeable old cat. Like to disinfect it, would she : my dirty little soul—— [*A knock.*] That's what she called it : "A dirty little soul." [*The knock is repeated.*] Come in.

*The door opens. A child enters and closes it behind her. She comes forward.*

NICHOLAS [*still preoccupied*]. And before witnesses. Wonder if I could have the law on her. Might get damages out of her.

THE CHILD [*from the other side of the desk*]. Is your name Nicholas Snyders ?

NICHOLAS [*he is putting the petticoat away in a cupboard*]. Yes, that's my name. I am Nicholas Snyders, the——

THE CHILD. I am so glad.

NICHOLAS. [*It strikes him as a novel observation. He turns.*]

THE CHILD. I am Gytha. [*She stretches out a small hand across the desk.*]

NICHOLAS [*he looks at it, expecting to see something in it held out for sale. It contains nothing. He is puzzled for a moment. Then understands*]. Ah ! And how d'you do ? [*Shakes hands.*]

THE CHILD. Quite well, thank you.

NICHOLAS. Ah, that's——

THE CHILD. I was so afraid you might be dead. [*He stares at her.*] Won't you sit down ?

*Nicholas sits. The child takes the client's chair opposite to him.*

NICHOLAS. Why should I be dead ?

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THE CHILD. Mother thought you might be. Because, you see, you are very old.

NICHOLAS. Oh! Your mother said that, did she? Well, you go back and tell your mother——

THE CHILD. She's dead.

NICHOLAS. Oh! H'm! Well, she can't crow, anyhow.—And what else did your mother say about me, in case I happened to be still alive?

THE CHILD. She said you were a good man.

NICHOLAS [*he leans forward with his hand to his ear*]. I beg pardon, dear. I didn't——

THE CHILD [*raises her voice*]. She said you were a good man.

NICHOLAS. D'you know, I thought it sounded like it. Wasn't quite sure.

THE CHILD. And if ever I was in "dire necessity" and needed the money "absolutely," I was to bring you this. [*She unclasps a necklace that was hidden beneath her cloak and hands it to him.*] She said you would buy it.

NICHOLAS [*he turns it over in his hand. Holds it up to the fading light*]. Where did your mother get it from?

THE CHILD. It was given to her when she was young. And very beautiful.

NICHOLAS. You haven't ever brought it to me before, have you?

THE CHILD. No.

NICHOLAS. H'm! [*He is puzzled.*] How much do you want for it?

THE CHILD. She said you would give me what it was worth.

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NICHOLAS. She didn't mention any figure ?

THE CHILD. No.

NICHOLAS. H'm ! Well, as you seem to be a good little girl and as your poor mother is dead, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you ten guilders for it. Ten whole, bright guilders.

THE CHILD [*her face has fallen*]. Is that all it's worth ? Are you sure ?

NICHOLAS. Quite sure.

THE CHILD. I thought that jewels were worth a lot of money.

NICHOLAS. Jewels ! Yes, dear ; so they are. Oh, heaps of money. But these aren't jewels, dear. No. They're merely bits of coloured glass. These things are made by the thousand and sold to the poor benighted heathen in exchange for coconuts and great, big elephants' tusks. Oh, such big tusks. [*He indicates with his hands.*] It's lucky you came to old Nicholas Snyders. Why, anybody else would have given you only five. [*He is counting out the money.*] Have you got a purse ?

THE CHILD [*she shakes her head. She takes up the necklace*]. Ten guilders isn't any use to me. I needed so much more money than that.

NICHOLAS. You can't expect me to give you more than it's worth, can you ?

THE CHILD. No, of course not. I didn't mean that. But you understand, don't you ? I am so disappointed.

NICHOLAS. Shall we say—twelve guilders ?

THE CHILD [*shakes her head*]. I shouldn't like to take more than it was worth. . And even twelve

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guilders would not be enough. [*She rises.*] I'm so sorry. You won't think me rude, will you? [*She refastens the necklace, leaving her cloak open.*]

NICHOLAS [*he has risen*]. That's all right, dear. Think it over and come again to-morrow. It shan't make any difference. Ten whole bright guilders whenever you like to come for them.

THE CHILD. Thank you.

NICHOLAS [*he goes with her to the door*]. You won't take it to anyone else, will you?

THE CHILD. No, I won't take it to anyone else.

NICHOLAS. Remember what your mother said: Good old Nicholas Snyders. He'll buy it and give you what it's worth. Better button your cloak. [*He helps her to button it.*] Might be thieves about.

THE CHILD. Good-bye. [*She puts out her hand.*] Thank you for not being angry with me.

NICHOLAS. Good-bye. [*Shakes hands.*]

*The child goes out.*

NICHOLAS [*with the door in his hand, looking after her*]. Shall be if you don't come again. Ten whole bright guilders. Good-bye. [*Waves his hand. Closes the door. Stands thinking. Shakes his head. Goes to the fire.*] Wonder where I've seen it before. [*Shakes his head.*] Silly. Silly of me. Ought to have made it fifty; she'd have taken fifty. Suppose she doesn't come to-morrow. Suppose she never comes again. [*Shakes his head.*] What a chance I shall have missed. What a chance. [*He spreads out his hands to the fire.*] She'll never come again. [*Shakes his head.*] Silly of me. Silly.

*The door opens. Dame Toelast puts in her head.*

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*She is a wicked old woman. Almost as old and wicked as Nicholas himself. She is thin and much wrinkled.*

DAME TOELAST [*at door*]. Peep-bo !

NICHOLAS [*he turns*]. Ah !

DAME TOELAST. [*She breaks into a thin cackle intended for a laugh, closes the door and runs across to him.*]

NICHOLAS [*catches her by the hands*]. And how is my little lump of gold ?

DAME TOELAST. How is my precious bit of parchment ? [*They both laugh, or, rather, cackle. She springs up. Nicholas catches her in his arms and kisses her.*] Take care. You'll spoil my wig. [*She rearranges it. Not quite as it should be.*] Libertine ! [*She gives him a playful push. It upsets him. Fortunately his chair is just behind him. He falls into it.*]

NICHOLAS. Oh, my back !

DAME TOELAST. Ah ! didums. Did its poor back give way ? [*She springs on to his knee.*] It wants its little Tootums to take care of it, doesn't it ? When shall it be ?

NICHOLAS. [*He looks at her ; then turns his face away.*]

DAME TOELAST. When shall we be married ? You do love me, don't you ?

NICHOLAS. Don't wriggle. You're scratching my leg.

DAME TOELAST. Oh, never mind your skinny old leg. [*Coaxing*] Say you love me. Say it.

NICHOLAS. How much are you worth ?

DAME TOELAST [*coyly*]. Ah ! that's telling.

NICHOLAS. Shan't say I love you till you tell me how much you are worth. Don't wriggle.

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DAME TOELAST. Well then, say it. Would you love me if I was worth a hundred thousand guilders?

NICHOLAS. Yes. If you had another face and were fifty years younger.

DAME TOELAST. Sauce-box! If I were worth two hundred thousand?

NICHOLAS. Perhaps. If you weren't so healthy and not likely to live long.

DAME TOELAST. Flirt! And if I were worth three hundred thousand guilders?

NICHOLAS. Yes. If you could show them to me.

DAME TOELAST. I can prove it. I can prove it. [*Cackles.*] You do love me now? [*Nicholas throws his arms round her. They rock to and fro in the chair, laughing—or rather cackling.*] And you'll marry me?

NICHOLAS. On Michaelmas Day. And I'll tell you how we'll spend our honeymoon. We'll go round together collecting our rents.

DAME TOELAST [*she flings her arms round him. Breaks into her laugh again.*] You funny old villain. You humorous old devil. I do love you. Why, together we'll be able to buy up half Zandam.

NICHOLAS. And raise all their rents.

DAME TOELAST. We'll buy all the mills and double the prices.

NICHOLAS. We'll buy all the ships and treble the freights.

DAME TOELAST. We'll—— [*She gives a start and springs to the ground.*]

NICHOLAS. What's the matter?

DAME TOELAST. Talking of ships reminds me. Have you heard the news?



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NICHOLAS. What news ?

DAME TOELAST. Jan has returned.

NICHOLAS. Does Christina know ?

DAME TOELAST. Does Christina know ! Why did you let her go out ? All the market is talking about nothing else. It's the quickest voyage the *Van Dyke* has ever made, and the most successful. And old man Geert is so pleased, he has promised Jan that after one more voyage he will make the ship over to him. So that Jan will be his own master. He is coming to take Christina away from you and marry her. You will miss her, won't you ?

NICHOLAS [*he has risen*]. Terribly. Don't know how I'll get on without her. Now that she's got into all my ways. Oh, I *shall* miss her [*He suddenly changes his tone. His face becomes one wicked grin*—when she's gone.

DAME TOELAST. You think she's so fond of you, she won't want to leave you. [*Cackles.*]

NICHOLAS. Perhaps Jan won't want to take her away, if I ask him not to.

DAME TOELAST. How are you going to do it ? How are you going to trick them and spoil their little dream ? Tell Tootums. [*She claps her hands and sways up and down—like some impatient child.*]

NICHOLAS. Perhaps old man Geert may not be able to give ships away for nothing. Perhaps the *Van Dyke* is not all his own to do what he likes with. Perhaps Jan may not care to see his old father sold up and his poor old mother turned into the street without a roof over her head. He was always a good son. Perhaps he won't *insist* on taking Christina away

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DAME TOELAST [*it rouses her to an ecstasy of delight*].  
Oh, you are—you are—— [*She can find no word to express her admiration.*] Oh, wouldn't I like to be here and just watch his face! You'll tell me all about it afterwards? You'll tell Tootums?

NICHOLAS. Yes. Bring your ear-trumpet with you, and then I shan't have to shout it. When is he coming?

DAME TOELAST. He's on his way now. He may knock at the door any moment. Mustn't find us here together, must he? Think of my reputation.

NICHOLAS [*he is feeling quite merry*]. And what about mine?

DAME TOELAST. [*She cackles.*]

NICHOLAS [*with a playful slap*]. Temptress! [*He has gone to the door with her.*]

DAME TOELAST. Kiss me.

NICHOLAS. [*He kisses her.*]

DAME TOELAST [*she flings her arms round him*].  
Oh, I do love you! Oh! what a cunning old brain it's got, and oh! what a wicked old soul! Au revoir. [*She goes out.*]

NICHOLAS [*closes the door after her. Goes back to his desk.*] If anyone says another word this afternoon about my soul—— [*Stops and thinks it out.*] There is some joke on. I wonder what's the answer: "If I had your soul." No. "D'you know what I would like——" [*A knock. He breaks off: "It is Jan." His hands go up, his knees go down. His whole face shapes itself into one big impish grin of anticipated joy. He hastily seats himself in his chair.*] Come in. Come in, Jan. [*To get some papers, he turns round*

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*and searches in the safe behind him. He goes on talking with his back to the room.]* So pleased. So glad to see you. Am just looking for something to show you. Sit down. Ah! here it is. Something that will——  
[*He turns with the paper in his hand.*] Who are you?

*The twilight has deepened. The old Mill is filled with shadows. When Nicholas cried out "Come in," the door opened. Through the jar one saw the light beyond, a glimpse of Old Zandam and the Zuyder Zee. And then the door closed and latched itself. But one saw none enter. Out of the shadows he seemed to appear and seat himself in the chair opposite to Nicholas: a strange, freakish figure, oddly clad with a curious peaked cap upon his head. His eyes are wondrously bright. What little light is left in the old Mill seems to be gathered into them. It almost seems as if the light came from them, falling on Nicholas's face. All the rest is in shadow.*

THE PEDLAR. A pedlar.

NICHOLAS. Not wanting anything. Shut the door and mind the step.

THE PEDLAR. Are you sure, Nicholas Snyders? Are you sure there is nothing you want? [*He leans across.*] Wouldn't you like a new soul?

NICHOLAS [*that's done it*]. Out you go. Here! Fido! Fido! Good dog. Here! [*He makes to rise. The Pedlar's whimsical face is watching him with a smile. The piercing eyes are fixed on him. A fear that he does not as yet acknowledge to himself is creeping into him. He sinks back into his chair.*]

THE PEDLAR. Think it over, Nicholas Snyders. For forty years you have drunk the joy of being mean

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and cruel. Are you not tired of the taste? Wouldn't you like a change? To be loved instead of hated, to hear yourself blessed instead of cursed? Mightn't it be good fun, Nicholas Snyders, just by way of a change?

NICHOLAS. Yes. It—it's very kind of you. I—I'll think it over. I'm rather busy just now.

THE PEDLAR. Think quickly, Nicholas Snyders. You haven't much time to lose. A fair, fresh, clean young soul in exchange for yours. Doesn't it sound a good bargain?

NICHOLAS [*he keeps his eyes fixed on the Pedlar as on a strange dog one is not quite sure of, while pretending to be at one's ease*]. Oh, excellent. Excellent. [*With a nervous laugh.*] And have you got it with you, this fair, fresh——

THE PEDLAR [*from his pack he produces a silver flask of curious workmanship*]. A little preparation of my own and quite harmless. A trifle bitter to the tongue. But one does not drink it by the goblet. A wine-glassful, such as one would of old Tokay, while the mind of both is fixed on the same thought. [*The voice changes. The bantering tone has gone.*] "May my soul pass into him, may his soul pass into me."

NICHOLAS [*the man must be an escaped lunatic. Best perhaps to humour him*]. I see. So all I've got to do——

THE PEDLAR [*interrupting. He has become quite a serious Pedlar*]. Is to choose your soul. Do not fear, Nicholas Snyders. It is the possession men value least of all they have. And you are rich. Choose your soul and strike your bargain. I will leave it

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with you. [*He touches the silver flask where it lies on the desk between them.*] As for the price—I will come again.

NICHOLAS. D'you know, I'd really rather you didn't. Suppose something happened to it. Suppose——

THE PEDLAR. So much the worse for you, my friend. [*He has risen. Seated, one judged him withered, dwarfish. He stands looking down at Nicholas, a tall, majestic figure. A strange command, authority, is in his look and voice.*] Get rid of your soul, Nicholas Snyders, before it is too late. Don't waste it, old friend. Let me enjoy the sport of seeing it creep into a young man with all his years before him. [*He laughs.*] You shall have his in exchange. [*He moves.*] Choose well. Choose a fair young soul, Nicholas Snyders, and drive your bargain. I will come again.

*He passes into the shadows. One sees again the opening and the closing of the door that makes no sound. But nothing else. Nicholas is alone among the shadows.*

NICHOLAS [*a chill fear is upon him. He blinks his eyes. Peers round about him*]. I must have been dreaming. Must have fallen into a doze and—— [*His eyes alight on the silver flask that flashes as if by some light of its own. His hand creeps out to it; he takes it up. Then with a start lets it fall again.*] What's that? Who's there? Christina! [*He rises.*] Lazy hussy. Why couldn't she have lit the candles before she went? [*He gropes his way across the room. He peers about him. He can see no candles anywhere.*] Where the devil has she put the candles?

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[*A flickering shadow cast by the firelight terrifies him. He gives a cry and starts back.*] Ah, you old fool! What are you afraid of? Just because some half-witted lunatic, some wandering jackanapes—— [*He turns suddenly as if he had heard a footstep. Then breaks into a little low whimper of fear. Stands trembling for a moment. Then with sudden fierceness*] What has she done with the candles? Oh, I'll give her—— Where are the candles? The candles, the candles, the candles . . . [*It rises to a thin scream as he disappears behind the carved oak screen near to the stove: the way to the kitchen.*]

*The door opens. Christina enters. She looks round, advancing a few steps on tiptoe. Sees that the place is empty. Returns to the door and beckons. Jan enters. He is a sailor. A bright, handsome youngster with a ringing laugh and frank, clear voice. Christina, making a sign for quietness, closes the door. They talk in whispers, or rather Christina does, remaining near to the stairs.*

JAN [*looking round*]. Where is he? The Devil hasn't been and carried him away, has he? [*Laughs.*]

CHRISTINA. Hush! He may be hiding.

JAN. Well, let him, the old——

CHRISTINA. [*She puts her hand over his mouth.*]

JAN [*he puts his arms round her and gives her a kiss*]. You haven't got to be afraid of him any more. Just for a day or two while I get things fixed up. And then 'twill all seem a bad dream.

CHRISTINA [*she is clinging to him*]. You won't be hard on him, will you? He did take me in.

JAN. Yes. I won't forget that he took you in.

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And don't you forget that I'm taking you out this evening. How soon can you be ready?

CHRISTINA. Oh, in quarter of an hour. I've only got to change my frock.

JAN. Yes. I know that quarter of an hour. Look here. You meet me in the porch of the old Tollhaus when St. Anselm is chiming seven. And look here—— Where are you?

CHRISTINA [*from under the shadow of the stairs gives a little laugh*].

JAN [*hauls her out. Kisses her*]. That's for slipping away. My fault for not holding you tighter. If you are not there by a quarter to eight, I shall come and fetch you, dressed or——

CHRISTINA. Suppose he won't let me.

JAN. Won't let you! You wait till I've finished talking to him. Never you mind whether he lets you or whether he doesn't. You just open the door at five minutes to seven and walk out. If he dares——

*A glimmer of light comes from behind the oak screen.*

CHRISTINA [*in a terrified voice*]. He's coming. [*She springs away and flies up the stairs.*]

JAN. Three cheers. [*Calling after her*] Don't forget: Tollhaus at seven o'clock.

CHRISTINA [*half-way up she stops and leans over the banisters*]. Oh, Jan——

*Nicholas enters, carrying two great candles, one in each hand. Christina, seeing him, does not finish the sentence. She darts back into the shadows and disappears. Jan comes forward. Meets Nicholas near to the stove.*

NICHOLAS [*he has recovered his form. He is himself*

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again. *With trembling hands, he raises the two candles. Peers up between them into Jan's face.* Ah! So it's Jan. Captain Jan de Voort come to see his old friend Nicholas——

JAN [*he takes the candles from Nicholas*]. Guess my hand is a bit steadier than yours.

NICHOLAS. Thanks. Thanks so much. [*He turns and draws the curtains near to him.*]

JAN. Where will you have them? On the desk?

NICHOLAS. Thanks. [*Crossing, he draws the curtain of the other window near the desk.*] Sorry to have interrupted the little tête-à-tête.

JAN. That's all right. Plenty of time for all that sort of thing. The evening isn't over yet. [*Nicholas has arrived at the other side of the desk. Jan stretches out his hand across the desk.*] How are you?

NICHOLAS [*shakes hands*]. Tolerable. Only tolerable, Jan. [*Sits.*] My back still troubles me. [*Shakes his head.*]

JAN. You ought to marry. Get somebody to rub it for you.

NICHOLAS [*with his cackling laugh*]. Ah, you young men, you young men! Always thinking about love, and marriage.

JAN. Yes. And very good things to think of. [*Sits.*] Now look here. About Christina.

NICHOLAS. Ah, yes. My little handmaid.

JAN. Yes. Well, she isn't going to be your handmaid any longer.

NICHOLAS. Not. Why? Isn't she happy?

JAN [*recovers himself*]. She's going to be. She's going to be my wife.



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NICHOLAS. Your wife ! Oh, that will be nice for her. And you'll be able to provide for her—give her a dear little home ?

JAN [*cutting him short*]. And pay off her debt to you. How much is it ?

NICHOLAS. I'll look it up. Oh, not much ; a mere trifle. How much money have you got, Jan ? [*Jan is about to flare up.*] You mustn't mind my asking. You see, the poor child, she hasn't got a father.

JAN. Umph ! Well, if you must know, I've got a thousand guilders.

NICHOLAS. A thousand guilders ! Oh, I am pleased. Yes ; they told me you had had a prosperous voyage. But it won't go very far, will it, Jan—a thousand guilders ? Not after paying debts and . . . Pity it's only a thousand, Jan.

JAN. It will be enough, till I get more. I shall be my own master after this next voyage. Councillor Geert has promised to hand me over the ship. Let me pay for it a bit at a time.

NICHOLAS. Oh, how kind ! How very kind of him ! And are you sure—quite sure that the ship is entirely his own to do what he likes with ?

JAN [*he begins to see what's coming*]. I suppose so. That's what I understood.

NICHOLAS [*he is throwing off the mask*]. I should make sure, Jan. [*He leans across the desk. His wicked eyes are feasting on Jan's face.*] It would be such a disappointment, wouldn't it, if somebody at the last moment should buy the ship over your head ?

JAN [*the anger is surging up in him. He understands*].

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Let him do it, if he can. Whoever he may be—the dirty swab. I can still earn my living. And hers too.

NICHOLAS [*he leans still nearer*]. And your old father, Jan. You would be willing to see him turned out of the mill where he was born; the mortgage foreclosed on your wedding-day; your mother dragged from her sick-bed? [*His whole face has become one wicked, leering gibe.*] Don't take her away from me, Jan, my little handmaid. You don't know how useful she is to me. And how cheap.

JAN [*the blood is rushing up into his brain*]. You villain! So that's your game, is it? You vile, cunning—— Why, there can't be in all Hell a soul as black as yours. [*The sight of Nick's face becomes too much for him. He springs up.*] You grinning devil, you—— [*His hand reaches for something to fling at the wicked old face that has darted back out of his reach. His hand falls on the Pedlar's flask. In another moment it would be hurtling through the air.*]

NICHOLAS [*with a sudden cry, he has started to his feet and has laid his hand upon Jan's with a strength that causes Jan, in sheer astonishment, to pause and release the flask. Slowly Nicholas draws the flask towards him; stands upright as he has not stood for many a long year.*] Sit down, Jan. Let us talk further. [*There is something in the voice that compels the younger man's obedience.*] The ship shall be yours, Jan, beyond dispute. The mill shall go free. Your father shall hold up his head again; your mother live and die in the old home. You shall marry Christina. On one condition [*he leans across the*

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*desk*]: Sell me your soul, Jan. Such things can't be. Just an old man's fancy. That he would like to live again before he dies; know again what it is to laugh and to feel kind, to love and to be loved. [*Jan does not answer. He is still staring; puzzled, bewildered. Nicholas seizes pen and paper and writes feverishly. He talks while he writes.*] The ship is bought and paid for. It is yours—[*he flashes a look at Jan*—and Christina's. Your father's debt is cancelled. The old mill is all his own. Your mother shall grow well. The fear shall be lifted from her. See. [*He pushes the paper across to Jan.*] I will sign it and it shall be yours. All I ask is that you drink a glass of wine with me, wishing the while that your soul shall pass from you and become the soul of Nicholas Snyders. Your answer?

JAN. What sort of talk is all this? Has your wicked old brain gone crazy?

NICHOLAS. And if it has. It will not make that paper less binding—[*He points a finger to it*—when I have signed it.

JAN [*he draws it to him. Reads it. He looks across at Nicholas, and there is a silence. He pushes it back for Nicholas to sign*]. I shall keep you to it.

NICHOLAS. [*He rises. Out of the great cupboard behind him, which seems to be a receptacle for all things, he takes two antique glasses. He puts them on the desk, and his hand reaches out for the flask. And, as he clutches it, he glances fearfully behind him. He pours out the wine. The hand that holds the flask is trembling. He grips his wrist with his other hand to steady it. And all the while his eyes are peering fearfully into the*

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*shadows. He replaces the stopper of the flask. As if it were some evil thing, he flings it behind him. It falls with a little clinking clash into the bottom of the cupboard, where it will lie amid forgotten rubbish. With getting rid of it, his courage seems to come back to him. He pushes Jan's glass across to him.]*

JAN. [*He has sat watching Nicholas, not knowing whether to be amused at his antics or share, for some reason he cannot tell, the old miser's fear. Now he points to the still unsigned paper lying between them.*]

NICHOLAS. [*He had forgotten it. He takes his pen and, stooping, signs it. He turns it round so that Jan can read the signature. It lies on the desk between them.*]

JAN. [*He rises with his hand upon his glass.*]

NICHOLAS. You will play me fair? You will mean it?

JAN. May my soul—— [*He pauses with the glass raised in his hand. Seems half-inclined to put it down again. A true man does not trifle with his soul, even in jest. But Christina is pulling at his heart-strings. It can only be that the old man is mad. He shakes off his fear with a short laugh. He raises his glass.*] May my soul pass from me and become the soul of Nicholas Snyders.

NICHOLAS. [*He has raised his glass at the same time. His lips move, but the words are unheard.*]

*The two men's eyes are fixed on one another across the desk. They drain their glasses at the same time. And a strange, low laugh is heard, and the tall candles flicker and go out, leaving only the dancing firelight.*

JAN. Who's there? [*There is fear in his voice.*]

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*His glass has fallen from his hand. It lies among the littered papers on the desk.]* Why did you blow out the candles ?

NICHOLAS. It must have been the wind.

JAN. [*He is trembling. With arms stretched out in front of him, he moves to go.*]

NICHOLAS. The paper. The paper I have signed. You are forgetting it. [*He points to it where it still lies on the desk.*]

JAN. [*He turns. He stretches out a trembling hand and clutches it. He turns on Nicholas a puckered, snarling face of triumph. Thrusts the paper into his pocket. A stooping figure with outstretched hands, he gropes his way to the door. Opens it.*]

*A little band of unseen revellers are passing along the quay. One hears their singing and their laughter and the twanging of a mandoline. Jan draws the door to after him. The song of the revellers grows fainter.*

NICHOLAS. [*Slowly, as if in a dream, he sinks into his chair. Slowly, his head falls on to his arms, stretched out upon the desk.*]

*The song of the revellers dies away.*

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*The next morning. The light is struggling through the curtained windows of the Old Mill. Nicholas still sleeps, his head upon his arms. The carillon of St. Anselm is heard chiming the hour.*

NICHOLAS [*stirs. Mutteres to himself. Wakes with a start*]. Come in. [*He yawns. Rubs his eyes. Sits up and stares about him.*] How did I get here? [*He rises.*] Oh! Damn my back! [*He goes to the window behind him, and draws back the curtain. The sunlight streams in. He goes to the window opposite, and draws the curtain of that also. Broad daylight fills the Mill. He is recrossing, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles, when there comes a sound of gentle snoring. He stops, listens, looks round him. The snoring continues. It seems to come from the great chair near the stove. He steals to it and looks.*]

*Christina, dressed in all the hereditary finery that she put on the previous evening for her meeting with Fan, sleeps cuddled up in a corner of the chair. Her legs are tucked up underneath her. One foot, from which the shoe has fallen, peeps from beneath her skirts.*

NICHOLAS. Angel. I'm in Heaven. Now, how the Devil did I get—— [*There comes another snore; rather more important, this one.*] Angels don't snore. [*A louder snore.*] Not as loud as that. [*He takes another look.*] I wonder what it is. I have seen it

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before somewhere. Now, where have I——  
[*Christina stirs, and opens her eyes. He draws back.*]  
Good morning. Are you an Angel? [*Christina closes her eyes again.*] Oh, she's gone to sleep again. I say——

CHRISTINA. [*She opens her eyes again. This time she sees him and gives a terrified cry.*]

NICHOLAS. What's the matter? Anything frightened you? [*He looks round.*]

CHRISTINA. Oh, please, I am so sorry. [*She is struggling into a sitting posture.*]

NICHOLAS [*soothing her*]. No, don't go. It's all right. Don't you get up. I'll go and call—— I can't think of her name for the minute. But it's all right. She lives here, you know. She's upstairs. As a matter of fact, she ought to be down—[*he glances at the clock*]—by now. She must have overslept herself.

CHRISTINA. [*She takes it for sarcasm and begins to cry.*]

NICHOLAS. What's the matter? Don't cry.

CHRISTINA. You are angry with me. I know you are angry with me.

NICHOLAS. Angry! My dear child, why should I be angry? Now you make yourself comfortable and—— Are you cold? [*He feels her hand.*] Oh! [*He stoops and feels her unshod foot.*] Oh! Oh, your poor little tootsies! Oh, they are cold! Now we'll make up the fire and then we'll have some coffee, shall we? Some nice hot—— [*He is putting on the biggest lump of coal he can find.*]

CHRISTINA. Isn't that rather a large lump?

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NICHOLAS. H'm ! Perhaps it is. We'll break it up.  
[*He goes at it with the poker.*]

CHRISTINA. I didn't mean that. I meant—isn't it rather extravagant ? Aren't coals very dear ?

NICHOLAS. They'll only be dearer to-morrow. Better burn them now, before they go up. [*He puts on more. A blaze springs up.*] That's better. Now you sit there and get your little tootsies warm, and I'll go and call——. Funny thing, I can't recollect that girl's name. She lives here. I know she lives here. Dismal sort of a girl. Always makes me think of a rabbit.

CHRISTINA. You don't mean Christina ?

NICHOLAS. That's the name. Christina. Funny thing I couldn't remember—— [*He turns.*] How did you know ?

CHRISTINA [*fun overcomes her fear. She laughs*]. I am Christina.

NICHOLAS [*he is still staring at her*]. I—I beg your pardon.

CHRISTINA. I am Christina.

NICHOLAS. [*He is still staring at her.*]

CHRISTINA. Oh well, go and look, if you don't believe me. You won't find her upstairs.

NICHOLAS. But, my dear child ! Christina—she's a good girl enough—clean and all that sort of thing. But—— D'you know what I thought when I first saw you asleep there ? I thought that something must have happened to me. You know ; that I'd been run over, or something of that sort ; and that I was in Heaven. [*Christina begins to laugh.*] What are you laughing at ?



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CHRISTINA. I'm so sorry. I can't help it. The idea of you in Heaven.

NICHOLAS [*he joins in the laugh*]. Yes. I couldn't quite understand it myself. But still, there you were. It couldn't have been the other place. That's how I argued.—Are you sure you are Christina?

CHRISTINA. Quite sure. But I'm not sure who you are. [*Shakes her head.*]

*There is some excuse for her. Nicholas may have been, say, a little under sixty, with forty years of evil thinking to pucker his face into wicked lines; to make his eyes look small and mean and cruel; to wither him and age him. Christina sees a kindly old gentleman with a childish expression making him curiously young for his years. His voice has changed. The ways and mannerisms are still there. But they are the eccentricities of a genial old oddity with a sense of humour; an old fellow who does not seem quite to have grown up—with still the heart of a boy, in spite of the grey hair and the whimsical, wrinkled face.*

NICHOLAS. You know, it's a funny thing. But my memory this morning—— I suppose you haven't any idea who I am?

CHRISTINA. Well, you *were* Nicholas Snyders.

NICHOLAS. Nicholas Snyders. Yes. Of——But wasn't that a long, long time ago?

CHRISTINA. It was yesterday.

NICHOLAS. Yesterday. I seem to have lived a long time since yesterday. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] Oh well, it's no good worrying about yesterdays. I'd better go and make the coffee, hadn't I?

CHRISTINA [*her eyes open still wider*]. It—it would

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be rather nice. [*He is going.*] Do you know where everything is?

NICHOLAS. I'll find them. [*He disappears behind the screen.*]

CHRISTINA [*she sits staring in front of her*]. I wonder. I have prayed for him—quite a lot. [*From behind the screen there comes a smash.*] Have you broken anything?

NICHOLAS [*from behind the screen*]. Couldn't help it. It slipped out of my hand.

CHRISTINA. What was it?

NICHOLAS. Oh, nothing of importance. Where's the milk?

CHRISTINA. In a copper jug just under the window.

NICHOLAS. Ah yes, I see. [*There comes a sound as if he had upset tin trays and saucepans.*]

CHRISTINA. Hadn't I better come and help you?

NICHOLAS. No, it's all right. Don't fuss me. You are making me nervous. [*One hears him pottering about. Suddenly his head appears over the woodwork. He must be standing on a box of some kind.*] I say. [*Christina looks round. Then sees him.*] If you are really Christina, what were you doing, asleep in that chair?

CHRISTINA. I suppose I must have dropped off.

NICHOLAS. Never mind how you dropped off. How did you get into it? Why aren't you in bed?

CHRISTINA. Oh, I didn't want to make a noise. And disturb people.

NICHOLAS. Have you been there all night?

CHRISTINA [*beginning to get short with him*]. Yes—most of it. It was a little late when I got back.

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NICHOLAS. What time ?

CHRISTINA. Oh, I don't know. About eleven, I suppose. Isn't that coffee ready ?

NICHOLAS [*he glances behind him*]. It's just beginning to sing. I say. You didn't happen to notice what time *I* came in, did you ?

CHRISTINA. No. I—— [*Suddenly sits up.*] Where were you last night ? [*There comes the sound of splintering wood. The box has evidently given way. Nicholas's head disappears.*] What's that ?

NICHOLAS. Macaroni, I think.

CHRISTINA. H'm ! Shall be glad when you come out.

NICHOLAS. Shan't be long. [*One hears the rattle of cups and saucers. Suddenly his head appears again over the screen at a different place.*] I say !

CHRISTINA. I say, do be careful. What are you standing on now ?

NICHOLAS. It's all right. Firm as a rock. Got a picture of a cow on it. I say——

CHRISTINA. Get off. It's the eggs. I shall come in, in a minute. [*His head disappears.*]

NICHOLAS. Such a fuss about a few eggs. I say.

CHRISTINA. What is it now ?

NICHOLAS. If you are really Christina, why have I never seen you in those clothes ?

CHRISTINA. Because I've never put them on. Hurry up.

NICHOLAS. Coming. [*He appears carrying a laden tray.*] Where will you have it ?

CHRISTINA. Here.

NICHOLAS [*he looks round helplessly*]. There's nothing to put it on.

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CHRISTINA. Well, get something. [*She gives a little laugh.*]

NICHOLAS. All very well to say—— [*He spots a small, littered table near the desk, clears it by the simple process of tilting everything on to the floor, puts the tray on it, and brings it to her.*]

CHRISTINA. And who is going to pick up all those things?

NICHOLAS. That's all right. I'll see to them. How's the coffee?

CHRISTINA [*she lifts the lid and scents it*]. Not bad. [*Nicholas sits the other side of the table. She pours out the coffee.*] What *did* happen to you last night? [*Nicholas shakes his head. He is thinking.*] I came downstairs. It was a little after seven. It was all dark. You must have blown out the candles and gone out. Where did you go?

NICHOLAS. I had a dream.

CHRISTINA. [*She nods to herself, and a little smile of triumph plays about her lips: it was her prayers that did it.*]

NICHOLAS. It was quite a wonderful dream. The most wonderful dream I have ever dreamt in all my life. I wish I could remember it.

CHRISTINA. And you don't remember where you went—where you dreamt it?

NICHOLAS [*shakes his head*]. It was a strange dream—if it was a dream.

CHRISTINA [*she nods again to herself*]. You won't go back. You will never be wicked old Nicholas Snyders any more. For my sake?

NICHOLAS. Wicked? Was I wicked?

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CHRISTINA. We won't worry about it any more. From to-day you shall be dear, good, kind old Nicholas Snyders, instead. [*She laughs.*]

NICHOLAS. Yes. It's a bit long, isn't it? How about "dear Nicky" for short?

CHRISTINA. I'll see—how you behave yourself. Take care; that's all the butter we've got.

NICHOLAS. All the——

CHRISTINA. Till I get some more.

NICHOLAS. Yes; get enough for two, next time.

CHRISTINA. I will.

NICHOLAS [*to himself*]. Stingy, I call it.

CHRISTINA. What did you and Jan talk about last night?

NICHOLAS. Jan?

CHRISTINA. Oh, can't you remember anything? Jan van de Voort. He came here last night to talk to you on business. You didn't give him any good advice, did you?

NICHOLAS. Good advice?

CHRISTINA. About not spending his money—being careful.

NICHOLAS [*staring at her*]. Why should I tell him not to spend his money? What's money for? [*They are making their breakfast while talking.*] Why? What did he do?

CHRISTINA. Didn't do anything. Said everything was too expensive. We just walked about and listened to the band outside the Voorhout where they were dancing.

NICHOLAS. Dancing outside the Voorhout?

CHRISTINA. No. Dancing inside, of course. *We* were outside.

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NICHOLAS. I see.

CHRISTINA. Then we took a stroll as far as the lighthouse, looked at the new breakwater, and came home.

NICHOLAS. Do you often go out with him? Have many of these little jollifications?

CHRISTINA. Oh, do try and remember *something*. I haven't seen him for six months. He has only just come back. I wonder if he could have caught anything abroad.

NICHOLAS. Why worry about him at all?

CHRISTINA. Don't be silly. You must worry about the man you are going to marry.

NICHOLAS. Why marry him?

CHRISTINA [*she tosses her head*]. I won't if he is going to be horrid and think me a burden.

NICHOLAS. Seems to me to have a nasty, miserly disposition. That's what he's got: a nasty, miserly disposition. A girl of your goodness and beauty, why—— Don't you throw yourself away.

CHRISTINA [*she tosses her little head again*]. I shan't. Unless I see a change in him. I don't mind so much now—not now you are nice. [*She puts her hand on his.*] Because if the worst came to the worst, I could go on living with you, couldn't I?

NICHOLAS. Always dear Nicky to fall back upon. Always remember that. Always—— Isn't that somebody trying to get in?

CHRISTINA. I thought I heard something—some time ago.

NICHOLAS. Yes. It's somebody trying to open the door. [*He goes to the door. Unbolts and opens it.*]

*Fan pitches into the room. He must have been stand-*

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*ing with his nose glued to the door. He seems as if in a dream. He seems shrunken, his clothes too big for him. His voice has a mean, rasping tone. He walks with a familiar step, as if the place belonged to him. He passes Nicholas and Christina without a word, goes to the desk, and seats himself in Nicholas's chair.*

NICHOLAS [*he has closed the door and come down*]. Does he live here?

CHRISTINA. No. Of course not. He has no business here.

NICHOLAS [*to Jan*]. I beg your pardon. Sorry to——

JAN [*fumbling among the papers, he has picked up the document prepared for the Burgomaster*]. A hundred per cent. Ten thousand guilders to Burgomaster Haas at a hundred per cent. [*He rubs his hands and chuckles.*]

CHRISTINA [*she has crossed. She takes the paper from him*]. Please go away. Go away at once, or I shall be very angry with you.

NICHOLAS. You have come to the wrong house. You don't live here.

JAN [*staring bewildered*]. Not live here?

NICHOLAS. No. And you are not going to. Do you think he knows where he does live?

CHRISTINA. Of course he knows where he lives. Go home at once.

JAN. [*Without seeming to know what he is doing, he rises.*]

NICHOLAS. That's all right. A little mistake that might—— [*He takes Jan's arm.*] Where's his hat? Didn't he have a hat?

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CHRISTINA. I don't know. [*Highly indignant, she takes up the tray, disappears behind the screen.*]

NICHOLAS [*he spots Fan's hat on the floor where it had fallen when he pitched into the room*]. Ah, yes. I thought he had a hat. [*He picks it up, puts it on Fan's head.*] Now you take my advice. You go home and go straight to bed. Nothing like sleeping it off. Get your mother to give you a basin of gruel with a nutmeg in it. Don't forget the nutmeg. Mind the step. [*Fan stumbles out. Nicholas closes the door after him, and returns to the desk.*]

*Christina re-enters.*

NICHOLAS. He'll be all right by the evening. A little thing that might happen to any of us. Just met a few boon companions, I expect, and—— [*He is arranging things on the desk.*]

CHRISTINA [*she is on her knees fussing with the fire. Her back is towards him*]. Hasn't got over it, even by the next morning. Doesn't know where he lives or who he is even. It must have been a perfect orgy. [*She brings the poker down viciously.*]

NICHOLAS. Yes. They don't think, you know. They get together. And one glass leads to another. And then before—— [*He has moved some papers. Beneath them is the glass Fan dropped there last night. He takes it up. A little wine is left in the bowl. The papers round about are stained. His eyes go searching. On the floor lies his own glass. He has no recollection of the cause. It looks as if he, too, had been indulging in an "orgy"; neither is he quite sure where he lives or who he is.*]



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CHRISTINA [*she brings the little table across*]. I shall tell him what I think of him when he's——

NICHOLAS [*he has hurriedly hidden the glass*]. I'll see to all this, dear. Don't you worry. I'll tidy up here. [*He takes the table from her, and gets between her and the desk.*] You go and do your hair.

CHRISTINA. What's the matter with my hair?

NICHOLAS. Oh, it's awful. Looks as if you had been sleeping in it.

CHRISTINA. You might have told me.

NICHOLAS. Well, I'm telling you now. It's a perfect sight. Getting worse every minute. [*He is picking up the things he overturned and replacing them on the table.*]

CHRISTINA. Oh, it can't be as bad as all that.

NICHOLAS. Well, you go and look at it. I'll see to all this. [*He watches her to the stairs. He stoops to pick up the other glass from the floor.*]

CHRISTINA [*from the gallery*]. Nicky, dear. [*Nicholas looks up.*] Don't forget to feed the chickens. [*She disappears.*]

NICHOLAS. No. I won't forget the chickens. You go and—— [*He makes sure that she has gone this time, then picks up the glass. He looks at the pair of them side by side. He then tries to remember. Failing, he puts them back into the cupboard, with one eye all the time on the staircase. There comes a knock. It is repeated.*] Come in.

*The door opens. Jan slips in. He looks round carefully. Nicholas is still thinking, staring in front of him. Jan closes the door noiselessly. Creeps down.*

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NICHOLAS [*looks up and sees him*]. Now look here,

JAN. Are you sure I don't live here ?

NICHOLAS. Dead sure. You get that out of your head. What makes you think you live here ?

JAN. I don't know. It seems—[*he looks round*]—homely.

NICHOLAS. You know, you have been drinking. [*He throws a cautious glance towards the staircase.*] It wasn't here, was it—with me ?

JAN [*shakes his head*]. I don't remember drinking.

NICHOLAS. Somebody must have been here drinking with me. Unless I drank out of two glasses. And then I must have fallen asleep and dreamt.

JAN. I had a dream.

NICHOLAS. What was yours ?

JAN. I don't know. It was a beastly dream.

NICHOLAS. You know, you can't stand it. No ; you are looking like a boiled owl. And you are behaving like a boiled owl. As for myself—except for my memory, which I suppose will come back some time—I never felt better in my life. If it wasn't for my back—[*A knock.*] Now you go and sleep it off.

JAN. I don't seem to know where to go to.

NICHOLAS. Well, you can't stop here, you know. Christina will be down in a minute. Then you will get into trouble again. Find somebody that knows you. Ask them to take you home. Don't forget your hat. [*It is on the table. He pushes it towards Jan. In doing so he sends some papers on to the floor.*] Damn ! [*He stoops to pick them up. Jan seizes the*

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*opportunity to take his hat and slip across to the great chair in front of the fire, where he sits hidden. The knock is repeated.]* Come in.

*The door opens. Burgomaster de Haas enters and closes it behind him. He comes down. Nicholas has gathered up his papers.*

BURGOMASTER. Good morning.

NICHOLAS. Good morning. [*He stares at him.*]

BURGOMASTER. Have I come too early?

NICHOLAS. No. Oh no.

BURGOMASTER. You seem to me to be not quite awake.

NICHOLAS. Oh yes, I'm awake. At least, I think so. But my head—this morning. [*He taps it.*] It must be the east wind, I fancy.

BURGOMASTER [*drily*]. Yes. Very trying.

NICHOLAS. Yes. Always seems to get into my ——— Do you mind telling me what you *have* come for?

BURGOMASTER. You want me to go over it again, from the beginning?

NICHOLAS. Well, it would save time. You are sure you don't mind?

BURGOMASTER. [*They sit one each side of the desk.*] I came to you yesterday afternoon, Nicholas Snyders, to ask you to lend me ten thousand guilders.

NICHOLAS. Ten thousand guilders.

BURGOMASTER. Ten thousand guilders. You promised to do so.

NICHOLAS. H'm! I seem to have plenty of money. [*To himself.*] I'll have some butter for breakfast to-morrow.

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BURGOMASTER. You have plenty of money, Nicholas Snyders. You can afford yourself butter for breakfast. You could have afforded to help an old friend in trouble without pushing him further down.

NICHOLAS [*he is staring at the Burgomaster*]. An old——

BURGOMASTER. We were boys together, you and I, Nicholas Snyders.

NICHOLAS. What is your name ?

BURGOMASTER [*a faint smile comes to him*]. It must have been a stiff east wind, Nicky. Paul Constantyn de Haas is my name. We were "Nick" and "Con" in those days.

NICHOLAS. I remember. Why, we went courting together, you and I. It must be forty years ago.

BURGOMASTER. Very nearly.

NICHOLAS [*he has risen. He stretches out a hand across the desk*]. How are you ? [*The Burgomaster has also risen. They grasp hands.*] I say, you have put on a bit, old chap, since then. [*He indicates with his finger the lower portion of the Burgomaster's chest, and laughs again.*]

BURGOMASTER. I expect I have spread my butter a bit thicker than you have, Nick. [*They sit.*]

NICHOLAS. Funny thing ! I can't remember yesterday, while things that must have happened forty years ago—— Do you remember Styntje—Styntje Venne ? And that black-eyed imp of a cousin of hers ? And how we took them to the dance on your grandmother's cow, because old man Venne had hidden their sabots ? And the old cow hooked it and we had to carry them home ourselves. [*They laugh.*]

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BURGOMASTER. Do you remember little Gytha and the day you tried to get her out of the window and got stuck in it yourself and old Mother Beerstraater caught you? [*They laugh again.*]

NICHOLAS. Do you remember when you——

*Christina has come down. The Burgomaster, who is the first to see her, gives a warning cough. The reminiscences suddenly cease.*

BURGOMASTER. Well, now. About this matter of business.

NICHOLAS. Ah, yes.

BURGOMASTER [*the paper that Christina had taken away from Jan lies on the desk. He sees it, drags it to him*]. Ah, I see you have it all ready. [*He reads it.*] Ten thousand guilders—interest at rate per annum of one hundred per cent.

*Jan's head comes slowly round the corner of the chair. The face is grinning.*

CHRISTINA. I think we agreed—[*she lays her hand on Nicholas's shoulder*—that was a “little mistake.” Didn't we? It should be—ten per cent.

*Jan's face shows signs of alarm.*

BURGOMASTER. I agreed to a hundred. Nobody shall ever say that Burgomaster Haas tried to talk himself out of a bargain. If called upon, I'm ready to sign. [*He is looking straight at Nicholas. He is expecting Nicholas to make the first move.*]

NICHOLAS. You always did fancy yourself. [*He pushes the paper across to him.*] Sign.

CHRISTINA. No. [*She goes to snatch at the paper.*] *Nicholas stretches out a hand and stops her. His eyes are still fixed on the Burgomaster. The Burgo-*

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*master dips his quill, flashes Nicholas a look, and signs. Jan's face grins with triumph.*

NICHOLAS [*to Christina*]. Now alter that hundred per cent. to five, and I'll initial it.

JAN [*he springs up*]. But he has signed. He has signed. He has signed to pay a hundred.

CHRISTINA [*she is seated, making the alterations*]. I told you to go home. [*To Nicholas*] Why didn't you tell me he was there?

NICHOLAS. Didn't know he *was* there. What's the matter with him? What's he dancing about like that for?

JAN. I can't help it. I hate to see money being given away. It breaks my heart.

CHRISTINA. [*She has made the alterations. She puts the paper in front of Nicholas for him to initial.*]

JAN. Don't let him. Don't let him do it.

NICHOLAS [*to Jan*]. If I have any more trouble with you, I'll give him the money.

JAN. [*He stands petrified with horror at the thought.*]

NICHOLAS [*still severely*]. A hundred per cent. You greedy, grasping young bloodsucker. How dare you talk to me about a hundred per cent. in my own house? [*To Christina*] This is my own house, isn't it?

CHRISTINA. Of course. [*She has written on another piece of paper, which she now puts in front of Nicholas.*] The order on your bankers for the ten thousand guilders. [*He signs it.*]

NICHOLAS [*to Jan*]. I am ashamed of you.

*Jan, snarling, muttering to himself, creeps back to the chair. The Burgomaster, not understanding, has sat staring from one to the other. Christina hands the order*

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*—the cheque as it would be called to-day—to the Burgomaster.*

CHRISTINA [*pointing to Jan*]. It's the remains of the fever, you know. [*She taps her head.*] It's affected his head.

BURGOMASTER [*he has risen*]. Ah, poor fellow! He looks a bit poorly. [*He pockets the paper.*] Thanks, my dear. [*He stretches out a hand to Nicholas with a smile.*] Good-bye, Nick. [*Nicholas has also risen. They shake hands across the desk.*] Thanks.

NICHOLAS. Good-bye, Con.

*The Burgomaster goes out.*

JAN [*muttering to himself*]. Ninety-five per cent. thrown away. Ah-r-r-r!—And a fire half-way up the chimney. It's burning money. [*He takes the tongs, lifts off a lump of coal, puts it back into the coal-box.*] That's what it is: burning money. [*Goes on muttering to himself.*]

*Nicholas and Christina are standing by the desk. They watch him. They speak in low tones.*

NICHOLAS. What he wants is food. He has let his stomach get empty and all the blood has gone to his head. What he wants is a good breakfast.

CHRISTINA. H'm! Well, let him go somewhere else and get it.

NICHOLAS. Good idea. Gets rid of him at the same time. [*He crosses, taps Jan on the shoulder.*]

NICHOLAS. Have you had any breakfast?

JAN. I don't know.

NICHOLAS. Well, you make sure of it, see. You go—

CHRISTINA [*crossing to fire, where she replaces the*

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coal *Jan had taken off and stirs it up*]. He can go to the "Twee Steden." It's only just across the quay.

NICHOLAS. Yes. You go to the "Twee Steden." Have you got any money?

JAN [*emphatically*]. No.

NICHOLAS. No. I thought you wouldn't. Well, look here. Here's a florin. [*Jan goes to snatch it.*] Now, wait a minute, wait a minute. Where's your hat? You ought to have it tied round your neck. [*He picks it up from the floor and puts it on Jan's head. He goes towards the door, holding out the florin as a bait. Jan follows it instinctively.*] You go to the "Twee Steden"—come along—and tell them to give you a good breakfast. Tell them to give you a grilled herring with red pepper. And don't forget the pepper. [*They have reached the door.*] Now don't lose it. Where's your pocket? [*He holds out the florin. Jan snatches it.*] Don't snatch. And don't come back here. [*Jan goes out.*] Try and lose yourself somewhere. [*He closes the door and returns.*] He'll be all right by the evening. [*Christina is crying. He puts an arm round her.*] Don't you cry.

CHRISTINA. I can't help it.

NICHOLAS. Poor little girl! [*He wipes her eyes.*]

CHRISTINA. I feel as if I could never love him any more. You won't ever send me away, will you? [*Her head is on his shoulder.*]

NICHOLAS. You shall stop here as long as ever you like.

CHRISTINA. And you'll always be good to me?

NICHOLAS. I can never be as good to you as you deserve.



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CHRISTINA [*looking up at him*]. No. But you'll try, won't you ?

NICHOLAS. All I know. [*He strokes her hair.*] You shall be my—— [*He was going to say "My little girl." A new thought comes to him.*] I'm rather an old sort of chap, ain't I ?

CHRISTINA. Well, you're not—you're not young.

NICHOLAS. No, I was afraid I wasn't young. I suppose I never shall be, now.

CHRISTINA [*she laughs*]. You will always be dear, kind old Nicky, and I shall always—— [*A knock. She springs away.*] Come in. [*She goes to her place at the head of the desk.*]

*The door opens. Pieter Bles enters, carrying something big, covered with a sailor's jacket. He closes the door and comes down. He is a stoutish sailor-man, first mate on Jan's ship, the "Van Dyke." He is called "Captain" by courtesy. He stands his burden on the floor.*

CHRISTINA [*she looks at Nicholas, who remains near the fire. For his benefit she emphasises the name*]. Good morning, Captain Bles.

BLES. Good morning, my dear. [*Before she knows it is going to happen, he puts his arm round her neck and gives her a spanking kiss.*] Why, you're looking prettier and saucier than ever.

CHRISTINA. If you do that again, I'll tell all your wives.

BLES. Not all of them, my dear. [*He laughs.*] Why, I couldn't tell you where to find the most of them myself. Scattered family, ours. [*He holds out a hand to Nicholas.*] Well, and how's the biggest old rogue in Zandam ?

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NICHOLAS. I beg pardon ?

BLES. I am asking you—how you are.

NICHOLAS. Oh ! [*Shakes hands.*] Of course. How stupid of me ! Oh, nothing to grumble at.

BLES. I am going to make you happy. I am going to give you the opportunity of cheating a poor sailor-man. [*He uncovers his burden. It is a grey parrot in a cage.*] There's a bird for you. Look at his eye. Why, he has taken a fancy to you already.

NICHOLAS. Yes. I like his face. A bit nosy.

BLES. Nosy ! Why, that's where the brain comes in. You could teach that bird to say anything, except swear-words. And they come natural to him.

CHRISTINA. He is sweet. I would love a parrot.

NICHOLAS. How much do you want for him ?

BLES. Fifteen guilders for the bird, and nothing for the cage.

NICHOLAS. Fifteen guilders for a grey parrot ! What's the matter with him ?

BLES [*beginning the fight which he anticipated*]. There's nothing the matter with him, except that he will talk. And his price is fifteen guilders.

NICHOLAS. You don't know the value of parrots.

BLES. Oh, I don't, don't I ? I know enough not to let you have him for a cent less than twelve guilders. Why, the cage cost me four, you miserable, mean-fisted——

NICHOLAS. If there's nothing wrong with him, you could take him into Amsterdam and sell him for thirty. I'll give you twenty-five.

*Bles clutches at the chair near to him. It falls him.*

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*He sinks on to the floor, lies there on his back with his eyes closed.*

NICHOLAS [*bending over him*]. Oh, poor fellow !  
He's dead.

CHRISTINA. No, he isn't. Pat his hands. [*She runs behind the screen—to the kitchen.*]

NICHOLAS [*kneeling and patting his hands*]. Whatever could have been the cause of it ?

CHRISTINA [*returning with water and a handkerchief, she kneels and bathes his brow*]. Pat hard.

NICHOLAS. Yes, but I'm getting most of the patting. Wait a minute. I'll get a brick.

CHRISTINA. No. It's all right. He's coming-to. Lift his head up. [*They raise him to a sitting posture.*]

BLES [*he stares round him vacantly*]. Where am I ?

NICHOLAS. It's all right. You are with friends.

BLES. Where's the bird ?

NICHOLAS. He's here. I've bought him off you.

BLES. How much ?

NICHOLAS. Twenty-five guilders.

BLES [*he struggles to his feet*]. Sorry. It's my heart, you know. Anything sudden.

NICHOLAS. Yes. You must be more careful. [*They are near the desk.*]

CHRISTINA [*she takes the money from the cash-drawer, and gives it to Bles*]. There's your money, Captain Bles. Twenty-five guilders, cage included.

BLES. Thank you, my—— [*Puts out an arm towards her waist. He evidently intends to kiss her again.*]

CHRISTINA [*she slips out of his reach*]. No receipt necessary.

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BLES. Well, don't say I didn't offer it to you. [*He holds out a hand to Nicholas.*] So long, Nick. Damme, now I come to look at you, if you ain't twenty years younger. I believe it's that little baggage. 'Pon my word, I believe she'd reform me if I gave her half a chance. [*He puts on his jacket.*]

CHRISTINA [*laughs*]. You had a good voyage, I hear.

BLES. Most prosperous voyage the "Van Dyke" has ever made.

CHRISTINA. Did anything happen to Captain Jan? Didn't fall ill or get a sunstroke—anything of that sort—did he?

BLES [*shrugs his shoulders*]. Never mentioned it to anybody if he did. No. The only complaint I've got to make against the Captain is that he was just a bit stingy with the grog. [*He turns to Nicholas, who has been talking to the parrot.*] If he shows any sign of fretting—after me, you sing to him. He loves being sung to.

NICHOLAS. Yes. Yes, he seems a good listener. [*They go to the door together.*]

BLES. There are some I have known that won't let you get in a word.

NICHOLAS. Ah, that's being greedy. I like to have my share. [*At door*] I should take something for that heart of yours, you know.

BLES [*he jingles the money in his pocket*]. Yes. Perhaps I will. So long. [*Goes out.*]

CHRISTINA. Did you hear what he said about Jan and the grog?

NICHOLAS. Oh, I shouldn't worry about that. I

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should be sorry to be on a ship where the sailormen thought the Captain *wasn't* stingy with the grog. Now come along. We have got to teach him to talk. [*The cage is on the floor about the centre of the room. They sit down on the floor, one each side of it.*] Wait a minute. I think he is going to say something. No, he's waiting for you to begin.

CHRISTINA. I don't know what to talk to him about.

NICHOLAS. Oh, don't be shy. Tell him that you love him. That ought to start him off.

CHRISTINA [*she laughs again.*] I love you.

NICHOLAS. That's done it. No. Oh, he's blushing. [*They both laugh.*] I believe you've shocked him. I wonder——

*Dame Toelast has entered. She is standing behind them. She has been looking down on them with a face that nearly expresses all she feels.*

DAME TOELAST. Good morning.

NICHOLAS [*he rises*]. What is it? Do I know it?

CHRISTINA [*nods. She speaks for them both to hear*]. Good morning, Dame Toelast. [*Dame Toelast replies with a snort. Christina takes the cage and jug of water, and goes behind the screen—into the kitchen.*]

DAME TOELAST. So you've persuaded her not to leave you.

NICHOLAS. Leave me? Why should she leave me?

DAME TOELAST [*she snorts*]. No, there doesn't seem to be much reason for it, does there? I suppose you remember you're engaged to be married to me.

NICHOLAS. I beg pardon!

DAME TOELAST. Oh! So you are deaf, too, are you? So there will be a pair of us. I asked you if you re-

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remembered that you are engaged to be married to me.  
[*She almost screams it.*]

NICHOLAS. Don't be silly. Where's your keeper?

DAME TOELAST. Where's yours? Can't you remember even yesterday? Didn't you promise to marry me on Michaelmas Day?

*Christina re-enters.*

NICHOLAS [*he turns to her*]. This poor soul is under the impression that I am going to marry her. What's the best thing to do in these cases, without being unkind?

DAME TOELAST [*has put up her ear-trumpet to listen*].

CHRISTINA. Well, I'm afraid that it's true.

NICHOLAS. What's true?

CHRISTINA. That you are betrothed to her.

DAME TOELAST. It's your little Tootums. Your little lump of gold. Don't you know me?

NICHOLAS [*to Christina*]. You mean that I have promised to marry—that?

CHRISTINA. It's the general idea.

NICHOLAS. But why? What did I do it for? Was it a bet?

DAME TOELAST. You don't know? You want me to tell you why you did it? Because I am the richest woman in Zandam. Because I am worth three hundred thousand guilders and can prove it. And you are a cunning, avaricious, mean, deceitful, greedy, cheating, thieving, ugly-faced old miser who would sell his soul for money. But you are not going to get out of it. I have made up my mind to be married and I will be married. You are the only thing I can get and you have promised to do it. I have letters to

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prove it. You shall see them. Don't you pretend that you have forgotten them. I am going to fetch them. All Zandam shall——

*Jan has entered. He is standing by the door. Dame Toelast, backing to the door, walks into him.*

JAN [*it seems a case of love at first sight. He apologises most politely*]. So sorry.

DAME TOELAST [*it seems to be a case of mutual admiration. She, too, is suddenly all graciousness*]. My fault.

JAN. Not at all. Allow me. [*He opens the door for her.*]

DAME TOELAST [*she smiles sweetly*]. Thank you. [*They bow to one another. There is a feeling behind it. Dame Toelast goes out.*]

NICHOLAS [*recovering himself*]. H'm! Lively old party. We shan't be dull.

JAN [*he has been looking about him*]. Did I leave my hat here?

NICHOLAS. No, you didn't. I told you——

CHRISTINA [*to Nicholas*]. Have you fed the chickens?

NICHOLAS. Chickens? Oh, my head! I'd forgotten all about them. Poor little things! Shan't be a minute. It was on his head when he went out. [*He disappears behind the screen.*]

CHRISTINA. No. Your hat doesn't seem to be here. Are you sure your head's all right?

JAN. What's the matter with my head?

CHRISTINA. I was wondering [*She goes up to him.*] You're not very nice to me, Jan. You're not as nice to me as dear old Nicky.

JAN. Old fool.

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CHRISTINA [*perhaps it will make him jealous.*] He has bought me a parrot. Just because I said I'd like one. Gave twenty-five guilders for it.

JAN. Twenty-five guilders. Why didn't you tell me you wanted a parrot?

CHRISTINA [*eagerly*]. Would you have bought me one?

JAN. I could have sold him one. Do you think he would buy you another—at the same price? They would be company for one another, a pair.

CHRISTINA [*she turns away*]. There was a time when you were not always thinking of how to make money.

JAN. Better than always thinking of how to spend it.

CHRISTINA. I thought sailors were so generous.

JAN. That's why people sponge upon them. Not going to be a sailor any longer.

CHRISTINA. You are going to give up being a sailor?

JAN. Doesn't pay. Shall settle down. Start a little business. That's the thing that pays. [*He rubs his hands.*] A little business.

CHRISTINA [*she comes to him*]. You're pretending. You're doing it to tease me.

JAN. Why should my starting a business tease you?

CHRISTINA. Because I don't like business. I like sailormen. [*She puts her arms round him.*] Be a nice dear sailor and love me like you used to. What shall we do this evening? [*Jan shuffles. Looks the other way. Slowly she releases him. Stares at him.*] You do love me—don't you?



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JAN. You see, love's so expensive. What between dances and shows—refreshments every few hours—and presents—parrots. Why, your hand's never out of your pocket. And everything going up—getting dearer every day.

CHRISTINA. I hate you. I hate you. I——

*Nicholas re-enters.*

*Christina, bursting into tears, runs up the stairs.*

NICHOLAS. Oh, they were hungry. I thought they'd never—— What's she running away for?

JAN. I don't know. To change her frock, I should hope. Extravagant young minx, flouncing about in all her best clothes in the early morning. Spoiling them. Did you notice that ink-stain on her sleeve?

NICHOLAS [*an idea suddenly occurs to him*]. Yes. Yes, I'm afraid she's inclined to be extravagant.

JAN. Extravagant. Wicked waste I call it. Burning coals, as if they cost nothing. And then must have parrots, if you please, at twenty-five guilders. You don't want to buy another, do you?

NICHOLAS. No. Not to-day.

JAN. Could sell you one for twenty.

NICHOLAS. We'll see about it.—No. I'm afraid she's hardly the wife for a poor man.

JAN. A girl who encourages an old—[*he corrects himself in time*—who encourages her employer to throw away ninety-five per cent. interest. Must be something wrong about her. [*Shakes his head.*]

NICHOLAS [*he looks round*]. Have you seen her eat? I mean lately. Oh! Oh, such an appetite! Would eat you out of house and home.

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JAN [*remembering*]. She was clamouring for food all yesterday evening.

NICHOLAS [*looks round again. Draws nearer*]. Dame Toelast. That's the wife for you.

JAN. Toelast?

NICHOLAS. The old girl that bumped into you at the door.

JAN. I seemed to know her.

NICHOLAS. There's the wife for a careful young man. That dress she's wearing now: one of the first things I remember as a boy. Been turned, you know.

JAN. Yes. I like 'em saving.

NICHOLAS. And so healthy. So wiry. No doctor's bills. Why, you could leave her out all night and nothing would happen. I'm going to tell you something else about her. Now get ready. Hold yourself in. She's the richest old woman in Zandam.

JAN. [*his eyes are like saucers*]. Do you know, I somehow felt she'd got money.

NICHOLAS [*he digs him in the ribs*]. You young dog, you.

JAN. How much do you think she's worth?

NICHOLAS. I don't think. I know: three hundred thousand guilders. [*Jan almost collapses.*] Hold up.

JAN. Do you think there'd be any chance for me?

NICHOLAS. "Chance!" There's no "chance" about it. Didn't you notice the way she looked at you?

JAN. She did give me a smile.

NICHOLAS. A smile! She'd have had you then and

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there if you had asked her. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. She's threatened—I mean, she's promised to be back here in a few minutes. Now, you make yourself comfortable in the back-yard. And when she comes I'll let you know. [*He is leading him towards the kitchen.*] You won't catch cold without your hat, will you?

JAN. I don't think so.

NICHOLAS. Well, be careful of yourself. [*They go behind the screen.*] And don't get shilly-shallying. She isn't a chicken. She hasn't much time to lose.

*They have disappeared and there is a moment's silence. And then from the distance comes faintly the sound of the carillon. The clock of old St. Anselm chimes the hour.*

*And then a little knock. It is repeated.*

*And then the door is pushed gently open and the Child enters.*

CHILD [*she looks round the empty room*]. Nicholas Snyders. Are you here?

*There is no answer. She closes the door behind her. She comes down to the desk. Seats herself in the client's chair. Folds her hands and waits.*

*Nicholas re-enters from behind the screen. He is looking pleased with himself and rubbing his hands. He makes to go to the fire.*

*The child, having heard his footstep, turns. They see each other.*

THE CHILD [*she rises.*] Good morning, Nicholas Snyders.

NICHOLAS [*he does not know her.*] Good morning, my dear.

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THE CHILD [*she holds out her hand and they shake*]. I am so sorry I mistrusted you yesterday. You see, I was so taken aback.

NICHOLAS [*he hasn't the faintest recollection of yesterday*]. Ah, yes.

THE CHILD. I have been thinking it all out, and I find that if I am very careful, I can just make the ten guilders do—for part of what I wanted. So if you please, will you let me have them. [*She has unfastened the necklace. She puts it into his hand. Nicholas looks at the necklace. He looks at the Child. Evidently his memory needs helping.*] You said, you know, yesterday afternoon that if I brought it back, you would buy it from me—for ten guilders.

NICHOLAS. Ten guilders—for this ?

THE CHILD. You said so.

NICHOLAS [*he looks again at the necklace*]. Ten guilders ! Why, if I gave you ten guilders for this, I should never sleep o' nights.

THE CHILD [*there is terror coming into her eyes*]. But you said you would.

NICHOLAS. My dear child, it's worth two hundred.

THE CHILD. Two—hundred !

NICHOLAS. Why, these are amethysts.

THE CHILD [*she flings her arms round his neck*]. I knew you were joking. At least, I ought to have known it. Because Mother said I was to trust you. You just did it to try me. And if I had accepted, you would have laughed at me and given me two hundred. I am so ashamed of myself. You are sure it's worth two hundred ?

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NICHOLAS. Quite sure. [*He is looking closely at the necklace.*] Where did you get it from ?

THE CHILD. Why, I told you. It was given to my mother—years and years ago. When she was young.

NICHOLAS [*he is staring at her as if he saw a ghost*]. What is your name ?

THE CHILD [*she gives a sigh*]. Oh, you have got a shocking memory. Gytha. I told you.

NICHOLAS. Your mother's name was Gytha, too, wasn't it ?

THE CHILD [*nods*]. She's dead, you know.

NICHOLAS. Yes. You are wonderfully like her. [*Very slowly, with his eyes fixed on her, he puts his arms round her, draws her to him, and kisses her. He goes round to the other side of the desk. Seats himself in his own chair. The Child sits. He is counting out the money.*] What are you going to do with it ?

THE CHILD. It is for Dame Beerstraater. I live with her, you know. She is very ill.

NICHOLAS. I am sorry.

THE CHILD. You see, there are so many things you want when you are ill. I can't tell you what a load it is off my mind, your giving me all this money.

NICHOLAS. She must be very old, Dame Beerstraater.

THE CHILD. I think she must be older even than you.

NICHOLAS. Well, she used to be.

THE CHILD. I feel very anxious about her, sometimes.

NICHOLAS. And if anything should—happen to her. What would you do, then ?

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THE CHILD. Yes ; I have been thinking about that, though I try not to. Because, you see, in my case it is so awkward, my being so young. I should not be of any use to anyone.

NICHOLAS [*he has crossed over to her*]. Where's your purse ?

THE CHILD [*she rises. She hands him her purse. It is a very little purse*]. Will it all go in ?

NICHOLAS. Well, it is a bit of a squeeze. [*He gets it in. They laugh. He gives it her.*] You won't lose it ?

THE CHILD. Oh, no. I am very careful.

NICHOLAS. And if—anything—should happen—and you don't know what else to do—you needn't knock—just push that door open, and come in. Will you ?

THE CHILD. Oh ! May I ?

NICHOLAS. You promise ?

THE CHILD. Yes. [*She puts her arms round him again.*] You are so—good.

NICHOLAS [*he holds her to him for a minute. Then puts her down.*] Good-bye. You understand ? [*They are near the door.*]

THE CHILD [*she answers with a grave nod*]. Good-bye. [*They are at the door.*] Dear Nicholas Snyders. [*Goes out.*]

*Nicholas closes the door. He comes back to the fire. He had put the necklace into an inner pocket of his coat. He takes it out. He looks at it. He is still looking at it, when he hears the click of the latch. He hastily puts it back in his pocket and buttons his coat. He peeps round the corner of the great stove.*

*Dame Toelast enters.*

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*Nicholas creeps round the other side of the stove and goes out behind the screen.*

*Dame Toelast has a bundle of letters in one hand and her ear-trumpet in the other. She closes the door noisily.*

DAME TOELAST [*she peers round. Calls loudly*].  
Nicholas Snyders. [*She puts up her ear-trumpet, but there is no answer. She comes down further. Turns round and shouts towards the staircase.*] Nicholas Snyders. [*Again she listens.*] I am here, Nicholas Snyders. I shan't go till you come. [*She goes to the fire. Seats herself in the big chair.*] Coward! [*She sits bolt upright, her letters in one hand, her ear-trumpet in the other.*]

*Jan has entered from behind the screen. He comes down the other side of the stove. He peeps round the corner. She sees him.*

JAN. Is it anything I can do?

DAME TOELAST [*she looks across at him. A little grin begins upon her lips. Then she hardens again*]. Where is Nicholas Snyders?

JAN. He isn't here.

DAME TOELAST. Yes. I can see that for myself.

JAN [*he comes across*]. He isn't worthy of you.

DAME TOELAST. Yes. And I know that, too.

JAN. He's too old for you. Why, with your hundred thousand guilders——

DAME TOELAST. Eh? What? [*She raises her ear-trumpet.*]

JAN. With your two hundred thousand guilders——

DAME TOELAST [*she cackles*]. Ah-r-r-r! You haven't got it right yet. Three hundred thousand guilders. I can prove it.

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JAN. I could love a rich wife.

DAME TOELAST. Yes. And spend all her money on some young girl.

JAN. I hate young girls. So extravagant. I love money.

*Dame Toelast looks at him. She slips the packet of letters into her pocket. She breaks into a cackle. He answers her with a little chuckling laugh. He seats himself on the arm of the chair.*

JAN. I could help you. To make it more. I feel I could.

DAME TOELAST. And you would be—kind to me?

JAN. I love you. [*He bends down, kisses her. He sits in the chair. Takes her on his knee. Christina appears in the gallery.*] When shall it be?

DAME TOELAST. What's wrong with Michaelmas Day? Or is that too soon?

JAN. Couldn't make it to-morrow, could you? [*Dame Toelast breaks into a cackle. Clasped in each other's arms, they rock to and fro laughing—or rather cackling.*]

*Christina has descended the stairs. She is standing watching them. Dame Toelast, seeing her, jumps to her feet. Jan rises.*

*Nicholas re-enters. They do not see him.*

DAME TOELAST. Captain Van de Voort and I are going to be married—on Michaelmas Day—[*she slips her arm through Jan's*—aren't we, dear?

JAN. Won't you make it sooner?

DAME TOELAST [*cackles*]. I have a fancy for Michaelmas Day. [*To Christina*]. Won't you congratulate us?



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CHRISTINA. I am so glad. You are just suited to one another, I'm sure. I hope you'll be as happy as you deserve to be. I hope—— [*Nicholas has drawn nearer. She turns and sees him. She bursts into tears and throws herself into his arms.*]. You will never send me away, will you ?

NICHOLAS. Never ! Never !

CHRISTINA [*through her sobs*]. You do—love me—don't you ?

NICHOLAS. Yes. I love you.

CHRISTINA. Then why don't you ask me to marry you ?

NICHOLAS. You mean it ? Will you ?

CHRISTINA [*still through her sobs—but they are feebler*]. Ye-es.

NICHOLAS [*he flashes a look of triumph at Jan. Then to Christina, as he closes her in his arms*]. We'll be married on Michaelmas Day.

*At the same moment a strange low laugh comes from behind. The two men hear it ; but only the two men. It brings a start of half terror, half wonder into their faces. Vaguely, it seems to them as if somewhere, long ago, they had heard that laugh before. But when and where and why they have forgotten. They dare not look at one another, they dare not look behind them. Did they do so, they would see faintly the figure of the Pedlar, wrapped in the shadows of the great tiled stove. One did not see him enter. One saw but the door open. His freakish face is grinning. His arms are stretched forth blessing both couples. Then he fades into the shadows. And softly the door closes.*

CURTAIN

### ACT III

*A short time has elapsed. It is Michaelmas Eve. There is but little change in the Mill. It is perhaps a little brighter-looking, more cared-for. The great desk is less littered. A fire is burning. It is late afternoon. Christina is seated in her old place at the head of the desk. Her elbows are resting on the desk. Her face is covered with her hands. There comes a knock. She does not hear it. The door opens. Captain Bles enters and closes the door behind him.*

BLES. Anybody in? [*He sees Christina and pauses. She does not move. He stands looking at her a moment. His weather-beaten, kindly face is sad. He shakes his head. Gently he puts his great, hairy paw upon her head.*]

CHRISTINA [*she starts and looks up. There are tears in her eyes.*] Oh! It's you, Captain Bles.

BLES. You didn't hear my fairy footsteps.

CHRISTINA. [*She answers with a little laugh.*]

BLES. Where's old—— [*Checks himself.*] Where's Nicholas?

CHRISTINA [*she is trying to wipe her eyes without Bles seeing. He pretends not to notice.*] Oh, he won't be long. He has gone for a walk.

BLES. Wonders will never cease. Why, he never

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used to go outside the door without the children shouting after him : “ Wicked old Nicholas Snyders, the Miser of Zandam.” Met him only the day before yesterday with a crowd of them swarming round him like squirrels, feeling in his pockets for sweets. Might have knocked me down with a marling-spike.

CHRISTINA [*she laughs again*]. Will you wait ?

BLES. Well, I must. Have got to fix things up with him—for the wedding, to-morrow. What does a Best Man *have* to do ?

CHRISTINA. Oh, not much. Just see that he’s got the ring and doesn’t marry the wrong girl and—  
[*She had begun a little laugh. She stops suddenly and bites her lip. Bles is looking at her oddly. There is an awkward silence. She breaks it by pointing to a small metal case, evidently of Chinese origin, that Bles has in his hand.*] What’s that ? [*She raises a reproofing finger.*] You have been spending your money on a wedding present. And I told you not to.

BLES. Wrong, my lass. Hadn’t any to spend. Spent it all. This is something I came across in going over my chest. [*He holds it up.*] From China. It’s considered a great luxury in China—so they tell me.

CHRISTINA. What is it ?

BLES. Tea.

CHRISTINA [*never having heard the word before*].  
Tea ?

BLES. [*He pours some into his hand. Shows it to her.*]

CHRISTINA. What curious-looking stuff ! What do you do with it ?

BLES. Ah, there you’ve got me. I’ve tried chewing

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it and I've tried smoking it. Can't say myself that I like it. But then, maybe, you know, I'm on the wrong tack.

CHRISTINA. What do they do with it in China ?

BLES. I don't know. What do you think yourself ?

CHRISTINA [*she fingers it*]. Have you tried cooking it ?

BLES. Sailor man I knew did. Said he preferred it raw.

CHRISTINA. It's a pretty case.

BLES. What I said to myself was : If anybody can squeeze anything out of it, it ought to be old—— [*He checks himself.*] Well, there it is, my dear. [*He puts it on the desk.*] Put it away with the others. And next time I come back perhaps I'll be able to tell you what to do with it. She's taking China on her next voyage, the *Van Dyke*.

CHRISTINA [*the mention of the ship has brought a look of longing into her eyes*]. It must be wonderful to see the world. When does she sail ?

BLES. Just left the Captain going over her, giving his finishing orders.

CHRISTINA. Captain—— [*she hesitates a moment*]—— Van de Voort ? [*Bles answers with a nod.*] He isn't going to sail with her, is he ?

BLES [*shakes his head*]. No. He's trying to sell her. Says he hates the sea—— [*to himself*] the money-grubbing lubber. [*Aloud.*] We shall weigh anchor the moment he's found a new owner. [*He looks at her. Suddenly makes up his mind to speak out.*] Can't you put some sense into him ? As fine a sailorman as ever trod a quarter-deck. And she the smartest little craft in all the Zuyder Zee. Have you tried ?

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CHRISTINA. I never see him. I can't go running after him, calling out "Jan, Jan, Jan." [*Without knowing it, her voice had become a cry, as if she were stretching out her arms to him and calling him. The tears come into her eyes. She makes no attempt to hide them.*]

BLES. Will you do something—to oblige me ?

CHRISTINA. If I can.

BLES. He wants me to take charge of her. I have told him I'd rather not. First Mate has been my job for twenty years. And it suits me—I want my Captain back again. Sound and sane and kind like he used to be. [*He comes nearer. Sinks his voice.*] If I can ship him in here on some excuse or other will you talk to him ?

CHRISTINA. What can I say to him ?

BLES. What can you say to him ! If I was the prettiest, trimmest, sweetest girl in Zandam, which unfortunately I am not, do you think I'd be asking an old seadog, smelling all over of tar, what I was to "say" to a young sailorman ?

CHRISTINA. [*Through her tears she cannot help laughing.*]

BLES. The Devil's just luring him on by dangling more gold pieces before his eyes than he thought there were in all the world. And you do nothing to save him. [*He is leaning over her with his hand on the desk.*]

CHRISTINA [*she puts her hand on his and looks up at him*]. How can I ? Even if he would listen. It would be so cruel to dear old Nicholas. He loves me, and I have promised.

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BLES. If he loves you, he will be thinking more of your happiness than of his own.

CHRISTINA [*still hesitating*]. He is so good and kind.

BLES. So was the Captain, before the Devil got hold of him. Won't you make just one last effort to save him?

CHRISTINA. You think I ought to?

BLES. It's your duty. He's waiting in his cabin for old Toelast. I'll tell him——

*Vrouw Molenaar comes down the stairs. She has Christina's wedding-dress over her arm. It has just arrived. Vrouw Molenaar is somewhat changed in appearance since we saw her in the First Act. She is sprucely dressed and in much better temper. She is a good-looking, buxom woman of middle age. She has come down without their hearing her. She halts a few paces behind them and takes a couple of sniffs at the air. Bles, hearing, turns round.*

MOLENAAR [*nods*]. Yes. I thought it was you.

BLES. You're right, my dear. It is. And how is the Widow Molenaar? [*He puts an arm round her and kisses her.*]

MOLENAAR [*she is looking for somewhere to put the dress*]. I'll tell you in a minute. How dare you——

BLES. Didn't you want it?

MOLENAAR. Want it! When I *do* want it, I'll——

BLES. My mistake. I'll take it back. [*He kisses her again. She is hampered by the dress. It saves him.*] Ta-ta. [*He goes out with a laugh.*]

*Christina has risen. She puts the tea on a shelf.*

MOLENAAR. Humph! Not a bad sort. Wonder

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if it's true what they say of him : that he has a wife in every port.

CHRISTINA [*with a smile*]. Well, he hasn't one in Zandam.

MOLENAAR [*musling on possibilities*]. No. That's true. [*She has been smoothing and patting the dress. She holds it up.*] What do you think of it? Your wedding-dress for to-morrow. It's just arrived from Amsterdam. [*She spreads it over a chair.*] I gave him the bill. He never even looked at it. Just put it in his pocket with a smile. [*She makes a gesture.*] Shows you what love will do.

CHRISTINA [*she is looking at the dress*]. It's very beautiful.

MOLENAAR. Wonder what old Mother Toelast will wear. Something out of Noah's sale, I expect, when he gave up the ark. [*Christina laughs.*] Would you like to try it on?

CHRISTINA. A little later, may I?

MOLENAAR. I suppose we ought to. Make sure it's all right. [*She crosses to the fire. Stirs it, puts some coal on.*] You're not superstitious, are you?

CHRISTINA [*she is standing near the desk*]. No. Not very. Why?

MOLENAAR. Oh, I don't know. There is an old saying that if—— [*A knock.*] Come in.

*Jan enters and closes the door.*

JAN [*he looks round*]. Bles told me that Dame Toelast was here.

MOLENAAR [*she looks from one to the other. Christina has seated herself at the desk and drawn a book—a ledger—towards her*]. She'll be back in a minute.

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Said you were to wait for her. [*She takes up the dress. To Christina as she passes her*]. Don't be long; it may want altering. [*She goes up the stairs.*]

JAN [*he is warming his hands at the fire*]. I am not in the way, am I?

CHRISTINA. No. [*She has taken a pen.*] You won't mind my going on with my work?

JAN [*he watches her a moment*]. Wish I hadn't wasted so much time at sea. I'm so bad at business.

CHRISTINA. You must get Dame Toelast to teach you.

JAN. Yes. She's very good. She's so patient.

CHRISTINA [*she looks across at him where he is standing stooping over the fire. Her voice is a cry of pain*]. Jan! Jan! What have you come to?

JAN. What have I come to?

CHRISTINA. Can't you remember—what you were? Gallant and frank and generous, with the sunlight in your eyes. Can't you remember how you hated old Nicholas for his meanness, how you despised him for his love of money? And what have you become yourself? A young miser, more hateful than an old one. Selling yourself for so much gold. Dreaming of spending all your life adding up your riches. [*She has risen.*] Jan! Jan! Where are you? My young, kind, laughing Jan—what have you done with him? What have you done with him?

JAN [*he stares at her. He stretches out his arms. His voice has changed. A new look has come into his face*]. Yes—it was long ago—I loved the sea——

CHRISTINA [*she has come to him*]. Jan! He is coming back. I can see him in your eyes.



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JAN [*he is speaking as in a dream. He is standing upright, still with his arms outstretched.*] And Christina. Christina—— [*Suddenly he stops.*]

*The great door of the Mill opens. It stands ajar.*

CHRISTINA. Jan ! I am here.

*Behind them, with arms folded, dimly seen among the shadows of the great tiled stove, stands the Pedlar.*

JAN [*his face changes. The evil and the cunning come back into it. His voice takes on again its old mean, rasping tone. His arms drop to his side*]. Three hundred thousand guilders. I could double it. I feel I could.

CHRISTINA. Jan ! Jan ! [*It is a cry of despair.*]

JAN [*he does not see her. He does not hear her. His face is grinning. He is crouching again over the fire*]. Three hundred thousand guilders. Three hundred thousand guilders. [*He chuckles.*]

CHRISTINA. [*She stares at him a moment. Then covers her eyes with her hands, hiding out the sight of him. She turns. Slowly she goes up the stairs.*]

*The figure of the Pedlar dies into the shadows. The door closes.*

JAN. Three hundred thousand guilders. And she's so clever. She will help me.

*The door opens softly. Dame Toelast enters. Dame Toelast is in her wedding-dress. It is ancient. But there are still about it interesting remains. Jan still wears his sailor's clothes.*

JAN [*he looks up and sees her*]. Ah ! My little lump of gold.

DAME TOELAST [*she closes the door and runs down.*]

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*They embrace*]. It will be all your own to-morrow. Why didn't you wait for me on the ship ?

JAN. Bles told me——

DAME TOELAST [*interrupting*]. Ah-r ! He would make a muddle of it. Is anybody about ?

JAN. There *was* somebody here. [*He looks about, wondering what has become of them.*]

DAME TOELAST. H'm ! May as well let them see us, now that we are here. Show that there's no ill-feeling. One never knows what——

MOLENAAR [*is coming down the stairs. She is returning for something belonging to Christina's dress that she let fall upon the floor and had not noticed*].

DAME TOELAST. Ah ! It's Vrow Molenaar. Keeping house for the dear children. Pays better than ironing and clear-starching, doesn't it ?

MOLENAAR [*she picks up the piece of the dress*]. Would, if everybody's washing-bill was anything like——

DAME TOELAST [*interrupting*]. What do you think of it ? My wedding-dress—for to-morrow. [*She spins round to show it off. She gives Jan a playful dig with her trumpet.*] It's the frock I wore to my first dance.

MOLENAAR. Ah ! They built things to last in those days.

DAME TOELAST [*when she wants to hear, she puts up her ear-trumpet. When she doesn't, she puts it down*]. Forty-eight years. Why, you must have been a mere child at the time.

MOLENAAR [*furious*]. A child ! Me ! Forty-eight years ago ! I was not born for twenty years.

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DAME TOELAST [*pretending to have caught only the end of it*]. Twenty. You were twenty.

MOLENAAR. Use your trumpet, can't you? I said I was——

DAME TOELAST [*pretending not to hear*]. You don't look it. [*To Jan*] She doesn't look a day over fifty-five, does she? [*She cackles. Vrow Molenaar tries to speak, but Dame Toelast sweeps on.*] And Jan thought that as we were passing, that perhaps dear little Christina might like to see me in it. Didn't you, dear?

MOLENAAR [*shouting*]. I am sure she will. She likes a good laugh. It will amuse her.

DAME TOELAST [*her trumpet down*]. Eh? What? I didn't quite——

MOLENAAR. I said she—— [*Feeling the hopelessness of it.*] Ah! You deaf old cockatoo. You ought to be in a museum. [*She goes up the stairs.*]

DAME TOELAST [*she cackles, rubbing her hands, delighted with her triumph over Vrow Molenaar. A knock. She pulls herself up*]. Come in.

*Klaas enters. He is wearing the same quaint costume that he wore in the First Act.*

DAME TOELAST. Ah! It's Barber Klaas. Come to borrow money. To gamble with. [*Cackles.*] Haven't you?

KLAAS [*chuckling and apologetic as usual*]. Not much use coming here for it nowadays. Can't get old Nick even to talk about business.

DAME TOELAST. Will have to find somebody else, eh? [*She looks round—to Jan*]. Sit down. [*She points to Nicholas's chair at the desk.*]

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JAN. Suppose he comes back ?

DAME TOELAST. It's only a joke. [*Jan sits.*] And I'll be Christina. If all goes well, we'll buy the Mill off him. [*She sits in Christina's place.*] I have always fancied myself in this seat. And Klaas shall be the client. [*She beckons to him.*] How much do you want ?

KLAAS [*comes forward, chuckling*]. Only a trifle, Nicholas Snyders—I beg pardon, Captain Van de Voort. Only a couple of thousand guilders.

JAN. Two thousand guilders ! Where am I to get it from ?

DAME TOELAST. We might be able to raise it. You see, it's for a friend. [*Cackles.*]

KLAAS [*he joins her. Then changes his note*]. You wouldn't like to be serious and really lend it to me, would you ? [*He looks from one to the other.*] I could pay it you back in a week.

JAN. Yes. They all say that.

KLAAS. I have worked out a system. It's a certainty. I could drop into the Casino at Amsterdam and break the bank, if I had two thousand guilders.

JAN. What will you give me for it ?

KLAAS [*thinks a moment*]. A hundred guilders. Just for a week.

JAN. A hundred guilders ! And you'll make ten thousand. [*Leans across.*] I'll take half your winnings. You can keep the losings.

DAME TOELAST [*cackles delightedly*]. Good ! Good !

JAN. Five thousand guilders. To say nothing of the fun.

KLAAS [*beginning to yield*]. You will do it ?

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JAN. And as you are bound to win, you won't mind handing me over that bale of hair I brought you back in the *Van Dyke* by way of security. And then I'll only charge you ten per cent.

*Nicholas enters. He stands, listening. He wears a hat and has a staff in his hand.*

KLAAS [*indignant*]. Half my winnings. And ten per cent. in addition. On a pledge worth double the money!

JAN. You will pay it all back in a week. And have five thousand guilders in your pocket to go on with. [*He sees that Klaas will give in.*] Take it or leave it.

KLAAS. Ah-r-r! Why, you are worse than old Nick himself. You——

JAN [*he sees Nicholas, and makes a sign to the others*]. We were just having a little joke. [*He goes to rise.*]

NICHOLAS [*he motions him back*]. You are welcome to it, Jan. I have taken a dislike to that chair.

DAME TOELAST. Perhaps you would like to get rid of the Mill altogether.

JAN. Of course at a reasonable price.

NICHOLAS. I'll see what Christina says. [*To Jan*] We might make an exchange. I might buy back your ship.

KLAAS. Captain Nicholas Snyders!

NICHOLAS [*he laughs*]. I like the smell of the sea.

JAN. It's a fine ship. Very expensively built. Christina would love it.

NICHOLAS. We will see what she says.—Ah!

*Christina, followed by Vrow Molenaar, comes down the stairs. Nicholas goes to meet her. Jan and Dame Toelast rise and come forward.*

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MOLENAAR. Dame Toelast thought Christina might like to see her in her wedding-dress. So I thought that perhaps Dame Toelast might like to see Christina in hers.

CHRISTINA [*she has let Vrow Molenaar do what she would with her. She is like a child who has been dragged from a sick-bed. She appears to give a glance at Dame Toelast's dress*]. It is very becoming.

DAME TOELAST [*throwing an eye over Christina's dress*]. H'm ! Not bad. Pity she's looking so pale.

MOLENAAR [*she turns to Jan*]. And what does Captain Van de Voort think of it ? Do you like it ?

JAN [*he throws an eye over it*]. H'm ! Must have cost a lot of money. Glad I haven't got to pay for it. [*Chuckles.*]

CHRISTINA [*she looks at him. A little tired smile comes to her lips. She turns away.*]

KLAAS. Quite a pretty picture, isn't it : "The two brides." [*Christina and Dame Toelast are standing side by side.*]

DAME TOELAST. Yes. We must be careful we don't get mixed up. It would be so vexing if I got married to rich old Nick and you had to put up with poor Jan. Wouldn't it ?

CHRISTINA [*she speaks wearily, as she moves away*]. Yes. I should be sorry for that to happen. [*She joins Nicholas.*]

NICHOLAS. We have just been wondering what you would say to an idea : that Captain Van de Voort should take over the Mill, and that you and I should sail the seas in the *Van Dyke*.

JAN [*he sees a profitable deal*]. You have often said

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how you would like to go a voyage—how fond you were of the sea.

NICHOLAS. Would you like it ?

CHRISTINA. Would you ?

NICHOLAS. I should love it—if you would.

CHRISTINA. We could start almost at once, couldn't we ?

NICHOLAS. It shall be our honeymoon.

JAN [*thinking to help on the deal*]. There's a dear little cabin. Don't you remember the last time you were there : how we planned it all out ?

CHRISTINA [*she looks at him. It is the last turn of the screw. Suddenly she bursts into tears*]. No. No, I hate the sea. [*Crying, she runs away up the stairs.*]

MOLENAAR. She has been poorly all day. She is a little overwrought. [*She follows up the stairs.*]

KLASS. I will look in again. I had forgotten that to-morrow was Michaelmas Day. [*Nicholas does not seem to hear. He is troubled. Klaas goes to the door.*]

DAME TOELAST [*in a whisper to Jan*]. Go after him. Don't let it slip.

*Jan nods and follows Klaas. Klaas has gone out. Jan follows him and closes the door.*

DAME TOELAST. It's joy at the thought of her coming marriage. It takes some people that way.

NICHOLAS. H'm. Does Jan cry often at the thought of his coming marriage with you ?

DAME TOELAST [*she draws nearer*]. Jan doesn't still love someone else. Jan does not dream of laughing eyes and youthful kisses, and wake to look upon grey hairs and wrinkled faces. Look in the glass, Nicholas

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Snyders, if you want to know—why she cries. [*She goes out.*]

NICHOLAS. [*stands thinking. Slowly, he goes to the desk. He sits in his old seat. From a drawer he takes a small Venetian hand-mirror. Holding it in his hand, he looks at himself; slowly he puts the mirror back in the drawer. Sits staring in front of him. A knock.*] Come in.

*Bles enters. He closes the door and comes down.*

BLES. Just met old Toelast. She seemed cheerful.

NICHOLAS. Yes. She's a spritely old party.

BLES. Everything all right?—about to-morrow?

NICHOLAS. Ah, yes. You're to be my Best Man.

BLES. That *was* the idea.

NICHOLAS [*he looks at him. There is a moment's pause*]. You're not in a hurry, are you?

BLES. No.

NICHOLAS [*he rises. He crosses in front of Bles to the fire. From a shelf over the stove he takes a jar of tobacco. Bles has followed. He hands it him.*] Try that.

BLES. H'm! Smells good.

*Nicholas answers with a little laugh. They seat themselves, one each side of the fire. Bles fills and lights his pipe. Puts aside the jar on a small table that is near. Nicholas watches in silence till the pipe is well lit.*

NICHOLAS. What do you mean by "That *was* the idea"?

BLES. Been thinking it out. Not sure that I want to be there.

NICHOLAS. Why not? Tired of weddings? [*With a smile.*]



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BLES. I've been mixed up in a few. Some of them that turned out well, and others—that didn't.

NICHOLAS [*again he smiles, covering his trouble under an attempt to treat the matter lightly*]. And which do you think mine is going to be?

BLES [*he looks across at Nicholas*]. Well, I shouldn't have said it, if you hadn't asked me. But as you have asked me—— I think you're making a mistake.

NICHOLAS [*still trying to pretend that it is only a joking talk*]. You think I have left it—too late?

BLES. Never too late to marry. That's always been my argument. [*With another look.*] Provided you get the right wife.

NICHOLAS. Well, what's wrong with Christina?

BLES [*he takes a few puffs in silence*]. I remember—it wasn't so long ago, either—marrying a young girl in the Bermudas. A nice, sweet little slip of a girl she was. Thought I'd done the best day's work for myself in all my life. [*Returns to his pipe.*]

NICHOLAS. H'm! Not one of your successes?

BLES [*shakes his head*]. Never again. Boys for girls; and for—[*he checks himself*—for middle-aged chaps like you and me, middle-aged wives. That's my experience.

NICHOLAS. The outside of a man isn't everything.

BLES. It's the part that catches the eye.

NICHOLAS. What about the real man within? I am not old. I am young. Ask the children. They don't find me old. They *know*. Something crept into me that drove my youth away. It has come back to me. I am young. I can hope and I can dream. I can love. I am not old. I am young.

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BLES. You have changed, Nick. I admit it. Inside—if one could only see you—dare say you're twenty-five at its best. But look at the thing from your own point of view. If Dame Toelast had changed—*inside*. *Inside* was as young and beautiful as they make 'em. *Outside* remaining as heretofore. Would you fancy her? [*He resumes his pipe.*] Boys for girls, and——

NICHOLAS [*he springs up*]. What's the good of sitting there repeating "boys for girls" like some croaking old poll-parrot? She hasn't got a boy. Do you call Jan a boy? Would you have her marry him, even if he was willing to give up old Dame Toelast and her money? The heartless, withered-up old miser that he has become!

BLES. That's true.

NICHOLAS. Ah-r!

BLES. Seems to me as if you and the Captain had both got yourselves bewitched. Here were you, till merely the matter of a little while ago, about the meanest, cunningest, low-down old rogue in Zandam. I don't say it unkindly. But as between old friends you must admit yourself—— Do you remember how you swindled the widow Quaas out of her three pigs? How you tricked——

NICHOLAS [*he is pacing to and fro*]. Yes. Never mind all that. I have put that all right.

BLES. That's the strangest part of it. And then as for the Captain. Why, I've known the Captain, man and boy, ever since he was a whipper-snapper before the mast. A kinder, franker, more open-handed—— Seems to me as if you two had swopped natures—as

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if Jan had got hold of your miserly old soul in exchange for—— [*He catches sight of Nicholas's face.*] What's the matter? What are you staring at?

NICHOLAS [*a sudden, strange look has come into his face. The words have released the memory of that night. He sees the Pedlar's grinning face framed in the gathering shadows. Speaking as in a dream, he repeats the Pedlar's words.*] "Wouldn't you like a new soul, Nicholas Snyders, in exchange for your own?"

BLES [*he has risen. There is an unknown fear in the air*]. Saints preserve us. What are you talking about?

NICHOLAS. That night of Jan's return. There came—a Pedlar. He offered me a soul. [*His eyes are staring into the shadows. His voice is that of a haunted man.*] I bought—Jan's soul.

BLES. Bought——?

NICHOLAS [*he points with a trembling finger*]. We sat there. One each side of the desk. I poured the wine into the two glasses. "May my soul pass from me and become the soul of Nicholas Snyders." He sold me his soul.

BLES [*he is thinking*]. The "wine"? What wine?

NICHOLAS. The wine that the Pedlar gave me. In the flask that scorched and burnt.

BLES. Was there any of that "wine" left?

NICHOLAS. There may have been. [*He is still staring in front of him.*]

BLES. What did you do with it?

NICHOLAS. [*Flashes a swift glance at him. Thought is coming back to him. He understands what the other*

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*man will urge upon him. Why should he? Be again the old miser he has grown to hate?]*

BLES. The flask, that—*[he pauses a moment. Makes the sign of the Cross upon his breast]*—the Pedlar gave you.

NICHOLAS. I—I am not sure. I may have thrown it away.

BLES. *[Looks at him with searching eyes.]*

NICHOLAS *[his tone suddenly changes]*. Why should I look for it? I paid him his price. It was a fair bargain.

BLES. And Christina?

*A pause.*

NICHOLAS. And if I do find it. And it's empty?

BLES. Then the Devil wins. *[He looks at Nicholas.]* Are you sure it wasn't all a dream?

NICHOLAS *[an ugly look is coming into his face. He gives a curious little laugh]*. Perhaps. Perhaps it was—a dream.

BLES *[something he sees in Nicholas's grinning face terrifies him. He gives a slight shiver. He whispers the words to himself]*. Guess I'll get out of this. *[He goes on tiptoe to the door. Turns and looks back at Nicholas, who is still standing where he left him. He goes out.]*

*Nicholas looks round. He steals to the cupboard into which he now remembers having flung the flask. With backward glances he searches. Draws it forth. It glows and flashes in his hand. Holding it to his ear, he shakes it. Yes; there is wine left. He pours just a drop into the palm of his trembling hand and looks at it. He crosses to the fire. The temptation has come to*

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*him to spill the wine into the fire and watch it hiss and bubble. The sound of a footstep on the stairs stops him. Christina comes towards him. Nicholas slips the flask into his pocket. Christina wears her old dress. She comes to him smiling. She puts her hands in his.*

CHRISTINA. I am sorry I was foolish just now. You see, I am your little handmaid again. And I will try not to be tiresome any more. [*She puts her arms round him.*] Because you are so good and kind. Would you really like to be a sailor? [*She laughs.*]

NICHOLAS. Would you—like to be a sailor's wife?

CHRISTINA [*she gulps down something before answering*]. Yes. I didn't mean I hated the sea. I was just feeling naughty. It has always been my dream.

NICHOLAS [*he is stroking her hair*]. Wasn't there a younger Captain—in that dream?

CHRISTINA [*she starts away*]. What do you mean?

NICHOLAS. Do you still love him?

CHRISTINA. You have no right to ask me. It is cruel of you.

NICHOLAS [*he puts his hands on her shoulders and forces her to look at him*]. Tell me.

CHRISTINA. I can't help it. I have tried not to. I am ashamed of myself for doing it. [*She hides her face in her hands.*]

NICHOLAS. Suppose it had all been—a joke? [*She looks up.*] A jest that I had persuaded Jan to help me play? [*She draws away from him, staring at him.*] Yes; a foolish jest. I am sorry. You could forgive him?

CHRISTINA [*recoiling from him in loathing*]. You mean——

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NICHOLAS [*he silences her with a gesture*]. I will put it right.

*Christina, staring at him, moves away. She goes up the stairs. Nicholas goes to his desk. He takes his pen and writes. Jan enters. Nicholas looks up; goes on writing.*

JAN [*he closes the door and comes down. He sits in the client's chair*]. I thought perhaps I'd find you alone. Christina doesn't really hate the sea. She loves it, I know. I am not interrupting you—am I?

NICHOLAS. No. I am listening.

JAN. I have just been over the ship. Everything's in order. She could sail to-morrow.

NICHOLAS [*he has finished writing. He looks across at Jan with a little smile*]. Do you remember the last time we talked together across this desk? The night of your return. It was about the ship that we talked, then. [*He leans across.*] We struck a bargain, you and I. You sitting there, and I here. We drank a glass of wine together. [*From his pocket he takes the Pedlar's flask. Lays it on the desk between them.*] Do you remember?

JAN. [*Stares at the glowing flask. Suddenly the memory comes back to him also. He clutches at his chair. Stares across at Nicholas.*]

NICHOLAS [*he takes the flask*]. There is still enough left. We will drink again.

JAN [*he does not speak for a while. Then the Miser comes back into his face*]. Why should we? What was wrong with the bargain? You took your price. And I have mine.

NICHOLAS. And Christina? She loves you.

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JAN. What is that to me? Why should I give up three hundred thousand guilders? Become again a silly sailorman—[*with a laugh*—burdened with a penniless wife? I hate the sea.

NICHOLAS. Christina is not penniless. She is the richest bride in Zandam. [*He pushes the paper he has been writing across to Jan.*] There is the deed. Read it.

JAN. [*He reads it and his face changes.*]

NICHOLAS [*still with that faint smile about his lips*]. You will drink with me—again?

JAN. Yes. At that price. [*He touches the paper and chuckles.*]

*Nicholas rises. He turns his back for a moment, reaching for the two glasses from the cupboard. Jan seizes the opportunity and reaches out his hand for the paper. He folds it. Leering, puts it into his pocket. Nicholas fills the two glasses. Lays down the flask. It no longer glows. It is dead. He pushes Jan's glass across the desk. Takes his own in his hand. Jan rises.*

NICHOLAS. You remember? May my soul—

*Nicholas has raised his glass. He stops and the glass trembles in his hand while the momentary struggle is seen upon his face. Then, conquering, he raises his glass. His lips move, but the rest of the words are not heard. Jan's lips move. The words are not heard. They drink. Jan's glass falls to the floor with a crash. He covers his eyes with his hand. Nicholas drops into his chair with a strange cry. His glass falls from his hand on to the floor beside him. The Mill has grown dark. Christina's voice is heard from the gallery.*

CHRISTINA. Jan! Jan!

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JAN. Who calls ?

CHRISTINA [*she comes down the stairs. There is fear in her voice*]. It is I, Christina—I will light the candles.

*She goes to the fire. From the shelf above she takes the two tall candles ; lights them from the fire. She brings them across. Suddenly as their light falls upon old Nick's face, she gives a cry and would have dropped them : a wicked old Miser is sitting in Nick's chair. Jan takes the candles from her ; puts them upon the desk. He turns. He takes Christina in his arms. He kisses her, holding her tightly to him. She is about to speak. He stops her with a gesture.*

JAN. Not now. One day I will tell you. [*He gives one backward glance at the desk where sits old Nick.*] Let us go. [*He takes her by the hand.*]

*They go softly to the door. They open it ; steal out, drawing the door to behind them. Nicholas has neither moved nor spoken. Slowly, like a man coming back to life, he raises his head. He stretches out his hands, examining them. From its drawer he takes the small mirror, forces himself to look into it. Seeing his face, he gives a sobbing cry, and the mirror falls. He buries his face in his hands. The door is gently pushed open, a little way. The Child enters. She has a bundle and a big umbrella. She looks across. Old Nick seems to be asleep. She puts the bundle and the umbrella carefully away somewhere near the door. She softly closes the door. She comes down. She lays her hand on him. He starts and looks up.*

THE CHILD. You said I could come.

NICHOLAS [*he stares at her in silence for a moment.*]



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*He shakes his head*]. Too late. Too late. I am Wicked Old Nick, the Miser of Zandam, that the children run from and call after in the street. [*His voice is rising.*] Too late. Too late. I am Old Nick, the Miser. I should bully you and over-work you and half starve you. [*She doesn't seem in the least impressed. He springs to his feet and, seizing his ledger, he runs at her to drive her away with it.*] Run from me. Run from me. Like all the children do. I'm Wicked Old Nick, the Miser, that everybody hates. I —

THE CHILD [*she laughs. Puts her arms round him and kisses him*]. You dear, funny old man.

NICHOLAS [*his voice has become half a cry, half a scream*]. I'm not. I'm not funny. I'm a mean, cruel, wicked old man. That nobody can ever love. I am Wicked Old Nick, the Miser, that the Devil will come for one day. He said he would come again. He will open the door and—— Ah-r! [*It is a shriek of terror that rings through the Mill. The great door of the Mill is slowly opening.*] The door. The door. He is coming for me. He is coming in.

THE CHILD. [*She looks. The door is still moving. She darts towards it.*]

NICHOLAS. Come back. Come back. It's too late. He's coming. He's coming for me. He's —— [*He is crouching in the shadow of the stove to hide himself.*]

*But the Child does not heed him. She has run to the door. She stands in the opening, holding it in her hand. Nicholas, crouching, watches her. The Child closes the door and returns.*

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NICHOLAS [*he comes a little forward—in a frightened whisper*]. Who was it?

THE CHILD [*she laughs*]. Only an old Pedlar. And when he saw me, he made a wicked face at me, and ran away.

NICHOLAS. You won't let him come back. You'll help me. You won't ever leave me?

THE CHILD [*she laughs and puts her arms about him*]. Why, of course not. I love you.

*He catches her up in his arms with a cry of great joy. The wicked old Miser has gone out of him. Faintly, from the distance, comes the sound of a carillon. The great clock of St. Anselm is chiming the hour.*

CURTAIN





*An Autobiography by  
Jerome K. Jerome*

MY LIFE AND TIMES

*The Plays of  
Jerome K. Jerome*

THE CELEBRITY

FANNY AND THE  
SERVANT PROBLEM

THE SOUL OF  
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