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Stories by English Authors: Germany

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THE BIRD ON ITS JOURNEY, By Beatrice Harraden

It was about four in the afternoon when a young girl came into the salon of the little hotel at C – in Switzerland, and drew her chair up to the fire.

"You are soaked through," said an elderly lady, who was herself trying to get roasted. "You ought to lose no time in changing your clothes."

"I have not anything to change," said the young girl, laughing. "Oh, I shall soon be dry!"

"Have you lost all your luggage?" asked the lady, sympathetically.

"No," said the young girl; "I had none to lose." And she smiled a little mischievously, as though she knew by instinct that her companion's sympathy would at once degenerate into suspicion!

"I don't mean to say that I have not a knapsack," she added,

considerately. “I have walked a long distance – in fact, from Z – .”

“And where did you leave your companions?” asked the lady, with a touch of forgiveness in her voice.

“I am without companions, just as I am without luggage,” laughed the girl.

And then she opened the piano, and struck a few notes. There was something caressing in the way in which she touched the keys; whoever she was, she knew how to make sweet music; sad music, too, full of that undefinable longing, like the holding out of one’s arms to one’s friends in the hopeless distance.

The lady bending over the fire looked up at the little girl, and forgot that she had brought neither friends nor luggage with her. She hesitated for one moment, and then she took the childish face between her hands and kissed it.

“Thank you, dear, for your music,” she said, gently.

“The piano is terribly out of tune,” said the little girl, suddenly; and she ran out of the room, and came back carrying her knapsack.

“What are you going to do?” asked her companion.

“I am going to tune the piano,” the little girl said; and she took a tuning-hammer out of her knapsack, and began her work in real earnest. She evidently knew what she was about, and pegged away at the notes as though her whole life depended upon the result.

The lady by the fire was lost in amazement. Who could she be? Without luggage and without friends, and with a tuning-hammer!

Meanwhile one of the gentlemen had strolled into the salon; but hearing the sound of tuning, and being in secret possession of nerves, he fled, saying, "The tuner, by Jove!"

A few minutes afterward Miss Blake, whose nerves were no secret possession, hastened into the salon, and, in her usual imperious fashion, demanded instant silence.

"I have just done," said the little girl. "The piano was so terribly out of tune, I could not resist the temptation."

Miss Blake, who never listened to what any one said, took it for granted that the little girl was the tuner for whom M. le Proprietaire had promised to send; and having bestowed on her a condescending nod, passed out into the garden, where she told some of the visitors that the piano had been tuned at last, and that the tuner was a young woman of rather eccentric appearance.

"Really, it is quite abominable how women thrust themselves into every profession," she remarked, in her masculine voice. "It is so unfeminine, so unseemly."

There was nothing of the feminine about Miss Blake; her horse-cloth dress, her waistcoat and high collar, and her billycock hat were of the masculine genus; even her nerves could not be called feminine, since we learn from two or three doctors (taken off their guard) that nerves are neither feminine nor masculine, but common.

"I should like to see this tuner," said one of the tennis-players, leaning against a tree.

"Here she comes," said Miss Blake, as the little girl was seen

sauntering into the garden.

The men put up their eye-glasses, and saw a little lady with a childish face and soft brown hair, of strictly feminine appearance and bearing. The goat came toward her and began nibbling at her frock. She seemed to understand the manner of goats, and played with him to his heart's content. One of the tennis players, Oswald Everard by name, strolled down to the bank where she was having her frolic.

"Good-afternoon," he said, raising his cap. "I hope the goat is not worrying you. Poor little fellow! this is his last day of play. He is to be killed to-morrow for *table d'hote*."

"What a shame!" she said. "Fancy to be killed, and then grumbled at!"

"That is precisely what we do here," he said, laughing. "We grumble at everything we eat. And I own to being one of the grumpiest; though the lady in the horse-cloth dress yonder follows close upon my heels."

"She was the lady who was annoyed at me because I tuned the piano," the little girl said. "Still, it had to be done. It was plainly my duty. I seemed to have come for that purpose."

"It has been confoundedly annoying having it out of tune," he said. "I've had to give up singing altogether. But what a strange profession you have chosen! Very unusual, isn't it?"

"Why, surely not," she answered, amused. "It seems to me that every other woman has taken to it. The wonder to me is that any one ever scores a success. Nowadays, however, no one could

amass a huge fortune out of it."

"No one, indeed!" replied Oswald Everard, laughing. "What on earth made you take to it?"

"It took to me," she said simply. "It wrapped me round with enthusiasm. I could think of nothing else. I vowed that I would rise to the top of my profession. I worked day and night. But it means incessant toil for years if one wants to make any headway."

"Good gracious! I thought it was merely a matter of a few months," he said, smiling at the little girl.

"A few months!" she repeated, scornfully. "You are speaking the language of an amateur. No; one has to work faithfully year after year; to grasp the possibilities, and pass on to greater possibilities. You imagine what it must feel like to touch the notes, and know that you are keeping the listeners spellbound; that you are taking them into a fairy-land of sound, where petty personality is lost in vague longing and regret."

"I confess I had not thought of it in that way," he said, humbly. "I have only regarded it as a necessary every-day evil; and to be quite honest with you, I fail to see now how it can inspire enthusiasm. I wish I could see," he added, looking up at the engaging little figure before him.

"Never mind," she said, laughing at his distress; "I forgive you. And, after all, you are not the only person who looks upon it as a necessary evil. My poor old guardian abominated it. He made many sacrifices to come and listen to me. He knew I liked to see his kind old face, and that the presence of a real friend inspired

me with confidence."

"I should not have thought it was nervous work," he said.

"Try it and see," she answered. "But surely you spoke of singing. Are you not nervous when you sing?"

"Sometimes," he replied, rather stiffly. "But that is slightly different." (He was very proud of his singing, and made a great fuss about it.) "Your profession, as I remarked before, is an unavoidable nuisance. When I think what I have suffered from the gentlemen of your profession, I only wonder that I have any brains left. But I am uncourteous."

"No, no," she said; "let me hear about your sufferings."

"Whenever I have specially wanted to be quiet," he said – and then he glanced at her childish little face, and he hesitated. "It seems so rude of me," he added. He was the soul of courtesy, although he was an amateur tenor singer.

"Please tell me," the little girl said, in her winning way.

"Well," he said, gathering himself together, "it is the one subject on which I can be eloquent. Ever since I can remember, I have been worried and tortured by those rascals. I have tried in every way to escape from them, but there is no hope for me. Yes; I believe that all the tuners in the universe are in league against me, and have marked me out for their special prey."

"*All the what*?" asked the little girl, with a jerk in her voice.

"All the tuners, of course," he replied, rather snappishly. "I know that we cannot do without them; but good heavens! they have no tact, no consideration, no mercy. Whenever I've

wanted to write or read quietly, that fatal knock has come at the door, and I've known by instinct that all chance of peace was over. Whenever I've been giving a luncheon party, the tuner has arrived, with his abominable black bag, and his abominable card which has to be signed at once. On one occasion I was just proposing to a girl in her father's library when the tuner struck up in the drawing-room. I left off suddenly, and fled from the house. But there is no escape from these fiends; I believe they are swarming about in the air like so many bacteria. And how, in the name of goodness, you should deliberately choose to be one of them, and should be so enthusiastic over your work, puzzles me beyond all words. Don't say that you carry a black bag, and present cards which have to be filled up at the most inconvenient time; don't – "

He stopped suddenly, for the little girl was convulsed with laughter. She laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks, and then she dried her eyes and laughed again.

"Excuse me," she said; "I can't help myself; it's so funny."

"It may be funny to you," he said, laughing in spite of himself; "but it is not funny to me."

"Of course it isn't," she replied, making a desperate effort to be serious. "Well, tell me something more about these tuners."

"Not another word," he said, gallantly. "I am ashamed of myself as it is. Come to the end of the garden, and let me show you the view down into the valley."

She had conquered her fit of merriment, but her face wore a

settled look of mischief, and she was evidently the possessor of some secret joke. She seemed in capital health and spirits, and had so much to say that was bright and interesting that Oswald Everard found himself becoming reconciled to the whole race of tuners. He was amazed to learn that she had walked all the way from Z – , and quite alone, too.

"Oh, I don't think anything of that," she said; "I had a splendid time, and I caught four rare butterflies. I would not have missed those for anything. As for the going about by myself, that is a second nature. Besides, I do not belong to any one. That has its advantages, and I suppose its disadvantages; but at present I have only discovered the advantages. The disadvantages will discover themselves!"

"I believe you are what the novels call an advanced young woman," he said. "Perhaps you give lectures on woman's suffrage, or something of that sort?"

"I have very often mounted the platform," she answered. "In fact, I am never so happy as when addressing an immense audience. A most unfeminine thing to do, isn't it? What would the lady yonder in the horse-cloth dress and billycock hat say? Don't you think you ought to go and help her drive away the goat? She looks so frightened. She interests me deeply. I wonder whether she has written an essay on the feminine in woman. I should like to read it; it would do me so much good."

"You are at least a true woman," he said, laughing, "for I see you can be spiteful. The tuning has not driven that away."

"Ah, I had forgotten about the tuning," she answered, brightly; "but now you remind me, I have been seized with a great idea."

"Won't you tell it to me?" he asked.

"No," she answered; "I keep my great ideas for myself, and work them out in secret. And this one is particularly amusing. What fun I shall have!"

"But why keep the fun to yourself?" he said. "We all want to be amused here; we all want to be stirred up; a little fun would be a charity."

"Very well, since you wish it, you shall be stirred up," she answered; "but you must give me time to work out my great idea. I do not hurry about things, not even about my professional duties; for I have a strong feeling that it is vulgar to be always amassing riches! As I have neither a husband nor a brother to support, I have chosen less wealth, and more leisure to enjoy all the loveliness of life! So you see I take my time about everything. And to-morrow I shall catch butterflies at my leisure, and lie among the dear old pines, and work at my great idea."

"I shall catch butterflies," said her companion; "and I too shall lie among the dear old pines."

"Just as you please," she said; and at that moment the *table d'hote* bell rang.

The little girl hastened to the bureau, and spoke rapidly in German to the cashier.

"*Ach, Fraulein*!" he said. "You are not really serious?"

"Yes, I am," she said. "I don't want them to know my name.

It will only worry me. Say I am the young lady who tuned the piano."

She had scarcely given these directions and mounted to her room when Oswald Everard, who was much interested in his mysterious companion, came to the bureau, and asked for the name of the little lady.

"*Es ist das Fraulein welches das Piano gestimmt hat*," answered the man, returning with unusual quickness to his account-book.

No one spoke to the little girl at *table d'hote*, but for all that she enjoyed her dinner, and gave her serious attention to all the courses. Being thus solidly occupied, she had not much leisure to bestow on the conversation of the other guests. Nor was it specially original; it treated of the short-comings of the chef, the tastelessness of the soup, the toughness of the beef, and all the many failings which go to complete a mountain hotel dinner. But suddenly, so it seemed to the little girl, this time-honoured talk passed into another phase; she heard the word "music" mentioned, and she became at once interested to learn what these people had to say on a subject which was dearer to her than any other.

"For my own part," said a stern-looking old man, "I have no words to describe what a gracious comfort music has been to me all my life. It is the noblest language which man may understand and speak. And I sometimes think that those who know it, or know something of it, are able at rare moments to find an answer to life's perplexing problems."

The little girl looked up from her plate. Robert Browning's words rose to her lips, but she did not give them utterance:

> God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
> The rest may reason, and welcome; 'tis we musicians know.

"I have lived through a long life," said another elderly man, "and have therefore had my share of trouble; but the grief of being obliged to give up music was the grief which held me longest, or which perhaps has never left me. I still crave for the gracious pleasure of touching once more the strings of the violoncello, and hearing the dear, tender voice singing and throbbing, and answering even to such poor skill as mine. I still yearn to take my part in concerted music, and be one of those privileged to play Beethoven's string-quartettes. But that will have to be in another incarnation, I think."

He glanced at his shrunken arm, and then, as though ashamed of this allusion to his own personal infirmity, he added hastily:

"But when the first pang of such a pain is over, there remains the comfort of being a listener. At first one does not think it is a comfort; but as time goes on there is no resisting its magic influence. And Lowell said rightly that 'one of God's great charities is music.'"

"I did not know you were musical, Mr. Keith," said an English lady. "You have never before spoken of music."

"Perhaps not, madam," he answered. "One does not often

speak of what one cares for most of all. But when I am in London I rarely miss hearing our best players."

At this point others joined in, and the various merits of eminent pianists were warmly discussed.

"What a wonderful name that little English lady has made for herself!" said the major, who was considered an authority on all subjects. "I would go anywhere to hear Miss Thyra Flowerdew. We all ought to be very proud of her. She has taken even the German musical world by storm, and they say her recitals at Paris have been brilliantly successful. I myself have heard her at New York, Leipsic, London, Berlin, and even Chicago."

The little girl stirred uneasily in her chair.

"I don't think Miss Flowerdew has ever been to Chicago," she said.

There was a dead silence. The admirer of Miss Thyra Flowerdew looked much annoyed, and twiddled his watch-chain. He had meant to say "Philadelphia," but he did not think it necessary to own to his mistake.

"What impertinence!" said one of the ladies to Miss Blake. "What can she know about it? Is she not the young person who tuned the piano?"

"Perhaps she tunes Miss Thyra Flowerdew's piano!" suggested Miss Blake, in a loud whisper.

"You are right, madam," said the little girl, quietly. "I have often tuned Miss Flowerdew's piano."

There was another embarrassing silence; and then a lovely old

lady, whom every one reverenced, came to the rescue.

"I think her playing is simply superb," she said. "Nothing that I ever hear satisfies me so entirely. She has all the tenderness of an angel's touch."

"Listening to her," said the major, who had now recovered from his annoyance at being interrupted, "one becomes unconscious of her presence, for she *is the music itself*. And that is rare. It is but seldom nowadays that we are allowed to forget the personality of the player. And yet her personality is an unusual one; having once seen her, it would not be easy to forget her. I should recognise her anywhere."

As he spoke, he glanced at the little tuner, and could not help admiring her dignified composure under circumstances which might have been distressing to any one; and when she rose with the others he followed her, and said stiffly:

"I regret that I was the indirect cause of putting you in an awkward position."

"It is really of no consequence," she said, brightly. "If you think I was impertinent, I ask your forgiveness. I did not mean to be officious. The words were spoken before I was aware of them."

She passed into the salon, where she found a quiet corner for herself, and read some of the newspapers. No one took the slightest notice of her; not a word was spoken to her; but when she relieved the company of her presence her impertinence was commented on.

"I am sorry that she heard what I said," remarked Miss Blake; "but she did not seem to mind. These young women who go out into the world lose the edge of their sensitiveness and femininity. I have always observed that."

"How much they are spared then!" answered some one.

Meanwhile the little girl slept soundly. She had merry dreams, and finally woke up laughing. She hurried over her breakfast, and then stood ready to go for a butterfly hunt. She looked thoroughly happy, and evidently had found, and was holding tightly, the key to life's enjoyment.

Oswald Everard was waiting on the balcony, and he reminded her that he intended to go with her.

"Come along then," she answered; "we must not lose a moment."

They caught butterflies; they picked flowers; they ran; they lingered by the wayside; they sang; they climbed, and he marvelled at her easy speed. Nothing seemed to tire her, and everything seemed to delight her – the flowers, the birds, the clouds, the grasses, and the fragrance of the pine woods.

"Is it not good to live?" she cried. "Is it not splendid to take in the scented air? Draw in as many long breaths as you can. Isn't it good? Don't you feel now as though you were ready to move mountains? I do. What a dear old nurse Nature is! How she pets us, and gives us the best of her treasures!"

Her happiness invaded Oswald Everard's soul, and he felt like a school-boy once more, rejoicing in a fine day and his liberty,

with nothing to spoil the freshness of the air, and nothing to threaten the freedom of the moment.

"Is it not good to live?" he cried. "Yes, indeed it is, if we know how to enjoy."

They had come upon some haymakers, and the little girl hastened up to help them, laughing and talking to the women, and helping them to pile up the hay on the shoulders of a broad-backed man, who then conveyed his burden to a pear-shaped stack. Oswald Everard watched his companion for a moment, and then, quite forgetting his dignity as an amateur tenor singer, he too lent his aid, and did not leave off until his companion sank exhausted on the ground.

"Oh," she laughed, "what delightful work for a very short time! Come along; let us go into that brown chatlet yonder and ask for some milk. I am simply parched with thirst. Thank you, but I prefer to carry my own flowers."

"What an independent little lady you are!" he said.

"It is quite necessary in our profession, I can assure you," she said, with a tone of mischief in her voice. "That reminds me that my profession is evidently not looked upon with any favour by the visitors at the hotel. I am heartbroken to think that I have not won the esteem of that lady in the billycock hat. What will she say to you for coming out with me? And what will she say of me for allowing you to come? I wonder whether she will say, 'How unfeminine!' I wish I could hear her!"

"I don't suppose you care," he said. "You seem to be a wild

little bird."

"I don't care what a person of that description says," replied his companion.

"What on earth made you contradict the major at dinner last night?" he asked. "I was not at the table, but some one told me of the incident; and I felt very sorry about it. What could you know of Miss Thyra Flowerdew?"

"Well, considering that she is in my profession, of course I know something about her," said the little girl.

"Confound it all!" he said, rather rudely. "Surely there is some difference between the bellows-blower and the organist."

"Absolutely none," she answered; "merely a variation of the original theme!"

As she spoke she knocked at the door of the chalet, and asked the old dame to give them some milk. They sat in the *Stube*, and the little girl looked about, and admired the spinning-wheel and the quaint chairs and the queer old jugs and the pictures on the walls.

"Ah, but you shall see the other room," the old peasant woman said; and she led them into a small apartment which was evidently intended for a study. It bore evidences of unusual taste and care, and one could see that some loving hand had been trying to make it a real sanctum of refinement. There was even a small piano. A carved book-rack was fastened to the wall.

The old dame did not speak at first; she gave her guests time to recover from the astonishment which she felt they must be

experiencing; then she pointed proudly to the piano.

"I bought that for my daughters," she said, with a strange mixture of sadness and triumph. "I wanted to keep them at home with me, and I saved and saved, and got enough money to buy the piano. They had always wanted to have one, and I thought they would then stay with me. They liked music and books, and I knew they would be glad to have a room of their own where they might read and play and study; and so I gave them this corner."

"Well, mother," asked the little girl, "and where are they this afternoon?"

"Ah," she answered sadly, "they did not care to stay; but it was natural enough, and I was foolish to grieve. Besides, they come to see me."

"And then they play to you?" asked the little girl, gently.

"They say the piano is out of tune," the old dame said. "I don't know. Perhaps you can tell."

The little girl sat down to the piano, and struck a few chords.

"Yes," she said; "it is badly out of tune. Give me the tuning-hammer. I am sorry," she added, smiling at Oswald Everard, "but I cannot neglect my duty. Don't wait for me."

"I will wait for you," he said, sullenly; and he went into the balcony and smoked his pipe, and tried to possess his soul in patience.

When she had faithfully done her work she played a few simple melodies, such as she knew the old woman would love and understand; and she turned away when she saw that the listener's

eyes were moist.

"Play once again," the old woman whispered. "I am dreaming of beautiful things."

So the little tuner touched the keys again with all the tenderness of an angel.

"Tell your daughters," she said, as she rose to say good-bye, "that the piano is now in good tune. Then they will play to you the next time they come."

"I shall always remember you, mademoiselle," the old woman said; and, almost unconsciously, she took the childish face and kissed it.

Oswald Everard was waiting in the hay-field for his companion; and when she apologised to him for this little professional intermezzo, as she called it, he recovered from his sulkiness and readjusted his nerves, which the noise of the tuning had somewhat disturbed.

"It was very good of you to tune the old dame's piano," he said, looking at her with renewed interest.

"Some one had to do it, of course," she answered, brightly, "and I am glad the chance fell to me. What a comfort it is to think that the next time those daughters come to see her they will play to her and make her very happy! Poor old dear!"

"You puzzle me greatly," he said. "I cannot for the life of me think what made you choose your calling. You must have many gifts; any one who talks with you must see that at once. And you play quite nicely, too."

"I am sorry that my profession sticks in your throat," she answered. "Do be thankful that I am nothing worse than a tuner. For I might be something worse – a snob, for instance."

And, so speaking, she dashed after a butterfly, and left him to recover from her words. He was conscious of having deserved a reproof; and when at last he overtook her he said as much, and asked for her kind indulgence.

"I forgive you," she said, laughing. "You and I are not looking at things from the same point of view; but we have had a splendid morning together, and I have enjoyed every minute of it. And to-morrow I go on my way."

"And to-morrow you go," he repeated. "Can it not be the day after to-morrow?"

"I am a bird of passage," she said, shaking her head. "You must not seek to detain me. I have taken my rest, and off I go to other climes."

They had arrived at the hotel, and Oswald Everard saw no more of his companion until the evening, when she came down rather late for *table d'hote*. She hurried over her dinner and went into the salon. She closed the door, and sat down to the piano, and lingered there without touching the keys; once or twice she raised her hands, and then she let them rest on the notes, and, half unconsciously, they began to move and make sweet music; and then they drifted into Schumann's "Abendlied," and then the little girl played some of his "Kinderscenen," and some of his "Fantasie Stucke," and some of his songs.

Her touch and feeling were exquisite, and her phrasing betrayed the true musician. The strains of music reached the dining-room, and, one by one, the guests came creeping in, moved by the music and anxious to see the musician.

The little girl did not look up; she was in a Schumann mood that evening, and only the players of Schumann know what enthralling possession he takes of their very spirit. All the passion and pathos and wildness and longing had found an inspired interpreter; and those who listened to her were held by the magic which was her own secret, and which had won for her such honour as comes only to the few. She understood Schumann's music, and was at her best with him.

Had she, perhaps, chosen to play his music this evening because she wished to be at her best? Or was she merely being impelled by an overwhelming force within her? Perhaps it was something of both.

Was she wishing to humiliate these people who had received her so coldly? This little girl was only human; perhaps there was something of that feeling too. Who can tell? But she played as she had never played in London, or Paris, or Berlin, or New York, or Philadelphia.

At last she arrived at the "Carnaval," and those who heard her declared afterward that they had never listened to a more magnificent rendering. The tenderness was so restrained; the vigour was so refined. When the last notes of that spirited "Marche des Davidsbundler contre les Philistins" had died away,

she glanced at Oswald Everard, who was standing near her almost dazed.

"And now my favourite piece of all," she said; and she at once began the "Second Novelette," the finest of the eight, but seldom played in public.

What can one say of the wild rush of the leading theme, and the pathetic longing of the intermezzo?

> .. The murmuring dying notes,
> That fall as soft as snow on the sea;

and

> The passionate strain that, deeply going,
> Refines the bosom it trembles through.

What can one say of those vague aspirations and finest thoughts which possess the very dullest among us when such music as that which the little girl had chosen catches us and keeps us, if only for a passing moment, but that moment of the rarest worth and loveliness in our unlovely lives?

What can one say of the highest music except that, like death, it is the great leveller: it gathers us all to its tender keeping – and we rest.

The little girl ceased playing. There was not a sound to be heard; the magic was still holding her listeners. When at last they had freed themselves with a sigh, they pressed forward to greet

her.

"There is only one person who can play like that," cried the major, with sudden inspiration – "she is Miss Thyra Flowerdew."

The little girl smiled.

"That is my name," she said, simply; and she slipped out of the room.

The next morning, at an early hour, the bird of passage took her flight onward, but she was not destined to go off unobserved. Oswald Everard saw the little figure swinging along the road, and she overtook her.

"You little wild bird!" he said. "And so this was your great idea – to have your fun out of us all, and then play to us and make us feel I don't know how, and then to go."

"You said the company wanted stirring up," she answered, "and I rather fancy I have stirred them up."

"And what do you suppose you have done for me?" he asked.

"I hope I have proved to you that the bellows-blower and the organist are sometimes identical," she answered.

But he shook his head.

"Little wild bird," he said, "you have given me a great idea, and I will tell you what it is: *to tame you*. So good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye," she said. "But wild birds are not so easily tamed."

Then she waved her hand over her head, and went on her way singing.

KOOSJE: A STUDY OF DUTCH LIFE, by John Strange Winter

Her name was Koosje van Kampen, and she lived in Utrecht, that most quaint of quaint cities, the Venice of the North.

All her life had been passed under the shadow of the grand old Dom Kerk; she had played bo-peep behind the columns and arcades of the ruined, moss-grown cloisters; had slipped up and fallen down the steps leading to the *grachts*; had once or twice, in this very early life, been fished out of those same slimy, stagnant waters; had wandered under the great lindens in the Baan, and gazed curiously up at the stork's nest in the tree by the Veterinary School; had pattered about the hollow-sounding streets in her noisy wooden *klompen*; had danced and laughed, had quarrelled and wept, and fought and made friends again, to the tune of the silver chimes high up in the Dom – chimes that were sometimes old *Nederlandsche* hymns, sometimes Mendelssohn's melodies and tender "Lieder ohne Worte."

But that was ever so long ago, and now she had left her romping childhood behind her, and had become a maid-servant – a very dignified and aristocratic maid-servant indeed – with no less a sum than eight pounds ten a year in wages.

She lived in the house of a professor, who dwelt on the Munster Kerkhoff, one of the most aristocratic parts of that

wonderfully aristocratic city; and once or twice every week you might have seen her, if you had been there to see, busily engaged in washing the red tile and blue slate pathway in front of the professor's house. You would have seen that she was very pleasant to look at, this Koosje, very comely and clean, whether she happened to be very busy, or whether it had been Sunday, and, with her very best gown on, she was out for a promenade in the Baan, after duly going to service as regularly as the Sabbath dawned in the grand old Gothic choir of the cathedral.

During the week she wore always the same costume as does every other servant in the country: a skirt of black stuff, short enough to show a pair of very neat-set and well-turned ankles, clad in cloth shoes and knitted stockings that showed no wrinkles; over the skirt a bodice and a kirtle of lilac, made with a neatly gathered frilling about her round brown throat; above the frilling five or six rows of unpolished garnet beads fastened by a massive clasp of gold filigree, and on her head a spotless white cap tied with a neat bow under her chin – as neat, let me tell you, as an Englishman's tie at a party.

But it was on Sunday that Koosje shone forth in all the glory of a black gown and her jewellery – with great ear-rings to match the clasp of her necklace, and a heavy chain and cross to match that again, and one or two rings; while on her head she wore an immense cap, much too big to put a bonnet over, though for walking she was most particular to have gloves.

Then, indeed, she was a young person to be treated with

respect, and with respect she was undoubtedly treated. As she passed along the quaint, resounding streets, many a head was turned to look after her; but Koosje went on her way like the staid maiden she was, duly impressed with the fact that she was principal servant of Professor van Dijck, the most celebrated authority on the study of osteology in Europe. So Koosje never heeded the looks, turned her head neither to the right nor to the left, but went sedately on her business or pleasure, whichever it happened to be.

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

But there is one bribe no woman can resist – the bribe that is offered by love. As Professor van Dijck had expected and feared, that bribe ere long was held out to Koosje, and Koosje was too weak to resist it. Not that he wished her to do so. If the girl had a chance of settling well and happily for life, he would be the last to dream of throwing any obstacle in her way. He had come to be an old man himself; he lived all alone, save for his servants, in a great, rambling house, whose huge apartments were all set out with horrible anatomical preparations and grisly skeletons; and, though the stately passages were paved with white marble, and led into rooms which would easily have accommodated crowds

of guests, he went into no society save that of savants as old and fossil-like as himself; in other words, he was an old bachelor who lived entirely for his profession and the study of the great masters by the interpretation of a genuine old Stradivari. Yet the old professor had a memory; he recalled the time when he had been young who now was old – the time when his heart was a good deal more tender, his blood a great deal warmer, and his fancy very much more easily stirred than nowadays. There was a dead-and-gone romance which had broken his heart, sentimentally speaking – a romance long since crumbled into dust, which had sent him for comfort into the study of osteology and the music of the Stradivari; yet the memory thereof made him considerably more lenient to Koosje's weakness than Koosje herself had ever expected to find him.

Not that she had intended to tell him at first; she was only three and twenty, and, though Jan van der Welde was as fine a fellow as could be seen in Utrecht, and had good wages and something put by, Koosje was by no means inclined to rush headlong into matrimony with undue hurry. It was more pleasant to live in the professor's good house, to have delightful walks arm in arm with Jan under the trees in the Baan or round the Singels, parting under the stars with many a lingering word and promise to meet again. It was during one of those very partings that the professor suddenly became aware, as he walked placidly home, of the change that had come into Koosje's life.

However, Koosje told him blushingly that she did not wish to

leave him just at present; so he did not trouble himself about the matter. He was a wise man, this old authority on osteology, and quoted oftentimes, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

So the courtship sped smoothly on, seeming for once to contradict the truth of the old saying, "The course of true love never did run smooth." The course of their love did, of a truth, run marvellously smooth indeed. Koosje, if a trifle coy, was pleasant and sweet; Jan as fine a fellow as ever waited round a corner on a cold winter night. So brightly the happy days slipped by, when suddenly a change was effected in the professor's household which made, as a matter of course, somewhat of a change in Koosje's life. It came about in this wise.

Koosje had been on an errand for the professor, – one that had kept her out of doors some time, – and it happened that the night was bitterly cold; the cold, indeed, was fearful. The air had that damp rawness so noticeable in Dutch climate, a thick mist overhung the city, and a drizzling rain came down with a steady persistence such as quickly soaked through the stoutest and thickest garments. The streets were well-nigh empty. The great thoroughfare, the Oude Gracht, was almost deserted, and as Koosje hurried along the Meinerbroederstraat – for she had a second commission there – she drew her great shawl more tightly round her, muttering crossly, "What weather! yesterday so warm, to-day so cold. 'Tis enough to give one the fever."

She delivered her message, and ran on through Oude Kerkhoff as fast as her feet could carry her, when, just as she turned the

corner into the Domplein, a fierce gust of wind, accompanied by a blinding shower of rain, assailed her; her foot caught against something soft and heavy, and she fell.

"Bless us!" she ejaculated, blankly. "What fool has left a bundle out on the path on such a night? Pitch dark, with half the lamps out, and rain and mist enough to blind one."

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

Koosje tried to lift her; but the dead-weight was beyond her, young and strong as she was. Then the rain and the wind came on again in fiercer gusts than before; the woman's moans grew louder and louder, and what to do Koosje knew not.

She struggled on for the few steps that lay between her and the professor's house, and then she rang a peal which resounded through the echoing passages, bringing Dortje, the other maid, running out; after the manner of her class, imagining all sorts of terrible catastrophes had happened. She uttered a cry of relief when she perceived it was only Koosje, who, without vouchsafing any explanation, dashed past her and ran straight into the professor's room.

"O professor!" she gasped out; but, between her efforts to remove the woman, her struggle with the elements, and her race down the passage, her breath was utterly gone.

The professor looked up from his book and his tea-tray in surprise. For a moment he thought that Koosje, his domestic treasure, had altogether taken leave of her senses; for she was streaming with water, covered with mud, and head and cap were in a state of disorder, such as neither he nor any one else had ever seen them in since the last time she had been fished out of the Nieuwe Gracht.

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

"There's a woman outside – dying," she panted, "I fell over her."

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

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

It was, as he had said a minute before, a terrible night. He could hear the wind beating about the house and rattling about the casements and moaning down the chimneys; and to think any poor soul should be out on such a night, *dying*! Heaven preserve others who might be belated or houseless in any part of the world!

He fell into a fit of abstraction, – a habit not uncommon with learned men, – wondering why life should be so different

with different people; why he should be in that warm, handsome room, with its soft rich hangings and carpet, with its beautiful furniture of carved wood, its pictures, and the rare china scattered here and there among the grim array of skeletons which were his delight. He wondered why he should take his tea out of costly and valuable Oriental china, sugar and cream out of antique silver, while other poor souls had no tea at all, and nothing to take it out of even if they had. He wondered why he should have a lamp under his teapot that was a very marvel of art transparencies; why he should have every luxury, and this poor creature should be dying in the street amid the wind and the rain. It was all very unequal.

It was very odd, the professor argued, leaning his back against the tall, warm stove; it was very odd indeed. He began to feel that, grand as the study of osteology undoubtedly is, he ought not to permit it to become so engrossing as to blind him to the study of the greater philosophies of life. His reverie was, however, broken by the abrupt reentrance of Koosje, who this time was a trifle less breathless than she had been before.

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

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

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

The professor hesitated; he hated attending in cases of illness,

though he was a properly qualified doctor and in an emergency would lay his prejudice aside.

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

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

He followed his housekeeper down the chilly, marble-flagged passage into the kitchen, where he never went for months together – a cosey enough, pleasant place, with a deep valance hanging from the mantel-shelf, with many great copper pans, bright and shining as new gold, and furniture all scrubbed to the whiteness of snow.

In an arm-chair before the opened stove sat the rescued girl – a slight, golden-haired thing, with wistful blue eyes and a frightened air. Every moment she caught her breath in a half-hysterical sob, while violent shivers shook her from head to foot.

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

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

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

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

slender hands in piteous supplication.

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

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

"So! Koosje, she is remarkably well dressed, is she not?" the professor said, glancing at the costly lace head-gear, the heavy gold head-piece, which lay on the table together with the great gold spiral ornaments and filigree pendants – a dazzling head of richness. He looked, too, at the girl's white hands, at the rich, crape-laden gown, at their delicate beauty, and shower of waving golden hair, which, released from the confinement of the cap and head-piece, floated in a rich mass of glittering beauty over the pillows which his servant had placed beneath her head.

The professor was old; the professor was wholly given up to his profession, which he jokingly called his sweetheart; and, though he cut half of his acquaintances in the street through inattention and the shortness of his sight, he had eyes in his head, and upon occasions could use them. He therefore repeated the question.

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

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

"O mynheer, I am all alone in the world," she answered, her blue misty eyes filled with tears. "I had a month ago a dear, good, kind father, but he has died, and I am indeed desolate. I always believed him rich, and to these things," with a gesture that

included her dress and the ornaments on the table, “I have ever been accustomed. Thus I ordered without consideration such clothes as I thought needful. And then I found there was nothing for me – not a hundred guilders to call my own when all was paid.”

“But what brought you to Utrecht?”

“He sent me here, mynheer. In his last illness, only of three days’ duration, he bade me gather all together and come to this city, where I was to ask for a Mevrouw Baake, his cousin.”

“Mevrouw Baake, of the Sigaren Fabrijk,” said Dortje, in an aside, to the others. “I lived servant with her before I came here.”

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

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

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

The professor wheeled round and faced her.

“She had better sleep in the guest room,” he said, thoughtfully, regardless of the cold which struck to his slippered feet from the marble floor. “That is the only room which does not contain specimens that would probably frighten the poor child. I am very

much afraid, Koosje," he concluded, doubtfully, "that she is a lady; and what we are to do with a lady I can't think."

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

"He'll never think of marrying her," mused Koosje, rather blankly. If she had spoken the thoughts to the professor himself, she would have received a very emphatic assurance that, much as the study of osteology and the Stradivari had blinded him to the affairs of this workaday world, he was not yet so thoroughly foolish as to join his fossilised wisdom to the ignorance of a child of sixteen or seventeen.

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

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

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

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

Just at first Truide, poor child, was charmed.

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

It was great fun! For a whole week this young person danced about the rambling old house, playing at being a servant. Then she began to grow a little weary of it all. She had been accustomed, of course, to performing such offices as all Dutch ladies fulfil – the care of china, of linen, the dusting of rooms, and the like; but she had done them as a mistress, not as an underling. And that was not the worst; it was when it came to her pretty feet having to be thrust into klompen, and her having to

take a pail and syringe and mop and clean the windows and the pathway and the front of the house, that the game of maid-servant began to assume a very different aspect. When, after having been as free as air to come and go as she chose, she was only permitted to attend service on Sundays, and to take an hour's promenade with Dortje, who was dull and heavy and stupid, she began to feel positively desperate; and the result of it all was that when Jan van der Welde came, as he was accustomed to do nearly every evening, to see Koosje, Miss Truide, from sheer longing for excitement and change, began to make eyes at him, with what effect I will endeavour to show.

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

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

Now Truide, rendered fairly frantic by her enforced confinement to the house, grew to look upon Jan as her only chance of excitement and distraction; and Jan, poor, thick-headed noodle of six feet high, was thoroughly wretched. What

to do he knew not. A strange, mad, fierce passion for Truide had taken possession of him, and an utter distaste, almost dislike, had come in place of the old love for Koosje. Truide was unlike anything he had ever come in contact with before; she was so fairy-like, so light, so delicate, so dainty. Against Koosje's plumper, maturer charms, she appeared to the infatuated young man like – if he had ever heard of it he would probably have said like a Dresden china image; but since he had not, he compared her in his own foolish heart to an angel. Her feet were so tiny, her hands so soft, her eyes so expressive, her waist so slim, her manner so bewitching! Somehow Koosje was altogether different; he could not endure the touch of her heavy hand, the tones of her less refined voice; he grew impatient at the denser perceptions of her mind. It was very foolish, very short-sighted; for the hands, though heavy, were clever and willing; the voice, though a trifle coarser in accent than Truide's childish tones, would never tell him a lie; the perceptions, though not brilliant, were the perceptions of good, every-day common sense. It really was very foolish, for what charmed him most in Truide was the merest outside polish, a certain ease of manner which doubtless she had caught from the English aristocrats whom she had known in her native place. She had not half the sterling good qualities and steadfastness of Koosje; but Jan was in love, and did not stop to argue the matter as you or I are able to do. Men in love – very wise and great men, too – are often like Jan van der Welde. They lay aside pro tem. the whole amount, be it great or small, of

wisdom they possess. And it must be remembered that Jan van der Welde was neither a wise nor a great man.

Well, in the end there came what the French call *un denouement*, – what we in forcible modern English would call a *smash*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.