

# DODGE MARY MAPES

HANS BRINKER; OR, THE  
SILVER SKATES

Mary Dodge

**Hans Brinker; Or, The Silver Skates**

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# Mary Mapes Dodge

## Hans Brinker; Or, The Silver Skates

### I

#### HANS AND GRETTEL

On a bright December morning long ago, two thinly clad children were kneeling upon the bank of a frozen canal in Holland.

The sun had not yet appeared, but the gray sky was parted near the horizon, and its edges shone crimson with the coming day. Most of the good Hollanders were enjoying a placid morning nap; even Mynheer von Stoppelnoze, that worthy old Dutchman, was still slumbering "in beautiful repose."

Now and then some peasant woman, poising a well filled basket upon her head, came skimming over the glassy surface of the canal; or a lusty boy, skating to his day's work in the town, cast a good-natured grimace toward the shivering pair as he flew along.

Meanwhile, with many a vigorous puff and pull, the brother and sister, for such they were, seemed to be fastening something upon their feet – not skates, certainly, but clumsy pieces of wood narrowed and smoothed at their lower edge, and pierced with holes, through which were threaded strings of rawhide.

These queer looking affairs had been made by the boy Hans. His mother was a poor peasant-woman, too poor to even think of such a thing as buying skates for her little ones. Rough as these were, they had afforded the children many a happy hour upon the ice; and now as with cold, red fingers our young Hollanders tugged at the strings – their solemn faces bending closely over their knees – no vision of impossible iron runners came to dull the satisfaction glowing within.

In a moment the boy arose, and with a pompous swing of the arms, and a careless "come on, Gretel," glided easily across the canal.

"Ah, Hans," called his sister plaintively, "this foot is not well yet. The strings hurt me on last Market day; and now I cannot bear them tied in the same place."

"Tie them higher up, then," answered Hans, as without looking at her he performed a wonderful cat's-cradle step on the ice.

"How can I? The string is too short."

Giving vent to a good-natured Dutch whistle, the English of which was that girls were troublesome creatures, he steered toward her.

"You are foolish to wear such shoes, Gretel, when you have a stout leather pair. Your klompen<sup>1</sup> would be better than these."

"Why, Hans! Do you forget? The father threw my beautiful new shoes in the fire. Before I knew what he had done they were all curled up in the midst of the burning peat. I can skate with these, but not with my wooden ones. – Be careful now – "

Hans had taken a string from his pocket. Humming a tune as he knelt beside her, he proceeded to fasten Gretel's skate with all the force of his strong young arm.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, in real pain.

With an impatient jerk Hans unwound the string. He would have cast it upon the ground in true big-brother style, had he not just then spied a tear trickling down his sister's cheek.

"I'll fix it – never fear," he said, with sudden tenderness, "but we must be quick; the mother will need us soon."

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<sup>1</sup> Wooden Shoes.

Then he glanced inquiringly about him, first at the ground, next at some bare willow branches above his head, and finally at the sky now gorgeous with streaks of blue, crimson and gold.

Finding nothing in any of these localities to meet his need, his eye suddenly brightened as, with the air of a fellow who knew what he was about, he took off his cap and removing the tattered lining, adjusted it in a smooth pad over the top of Gretel's worn-out shoe.

"Now," he cried triumphantly, at the same time arranging the strings as briskly as his benumbed fingers would allow, "can you bear some pulling?"

Gretel drew up her lips as if to say "hurt away," but made no further response.

In another moment they were laughing together, as hand in hand they flew along the canal, never thinking whether the ice would bear or not, for in Holland, ice is generally an all-Winter affair. It settles itself upon the water in a determined kind of way, and so far from growing thin and uncertain every time the sun is a little severe upon it, it gathers its forces day by day and flashes defiance to every beam.

Presently, squeak! squeak! sounded something beneath Hans' feet. Next his strokes grew shorter, ending oftentimes with a jerk, and finally, he lay sprawling upon the ice, kicking against the air with many a fantastic flourish.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Gretel, "that was a fine tumble!" But a tender heart was beating under her coarse blue jacket and, even as she laughed, she came, with a graceful sweep, close to her prostrate brother.

"Are you hurt, Hans? oh, you are laughing! catch me now" – and she darted away shivering no longer, but with cheeks all aglow, and eyes sparkling with fun.

Hans sprang to his feet and started in brisk pursuit, but it was no easy thing to catch Gretel. Before she had traveled very far, her skates, too, began to squeak.

Believing that discretion was the better part of valor she turned suddenly and skated into her pursuer's arms.

"Ha! ha! I've caught you!" cried Hans.

"Ha! ha! I caught *you*," she retorted, struggling to free herself.

Just then a clear, quick voice was heard calling "Hans! Gretel!"

"It's the mother," said Hans, looking solemn in an instant.

By this time the canal was gilded with sunlight. The pure morning air was very delightful, and skaters were gradually increasing in numbers. It was hard to obey the summons. But Gretel and Hans were good children; without a thought of yielding to the temptation to linger, they pulled off their skates, leaving half the knots still tied. Hans, with his great square shoulders, and bushy yellow hair, towered high above his blue-eyed little sister as they trudged homeward. He was fifteen years old and Gretel was only twelve. He was a solid, hearty-looking boy, with honest eyes and a brow that seemed to bear a sign "goodness within" just as the little Dutch zomerhuis<sup>2</sup> wears a motto over its portal. Gretel was lithe and quick; her eyes had a dancing light in them, and while you looked at her cheek the color paled and deepened just as it does upon a bed of pink and white blossoms when the wind is blowing.

As soon as the children turned from the canal they could see their parents' cottage. Their mother's tall form, arrayed in jacket and petticoat and close-fitting cap, stood, like a picture, in the crooked frame of the doorway. Had the cottage been a mile away, it would still have seemed near. In that flat country every object stands out plainly in the distance; the chickens show as distinctly as the windmills. Indeed, were it not for the dykes and the high banks of the canals, one could stand almost anywhere in middle Holland without seeing a mound or a ridge between the eye and the "jumping-off place."

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<sup>2</sup> Summer-house.

None had better cause to know the nature of these same dykes than Dame Brinker and the panting youngsters now running at her call. But before stating why, let me ask you to take a rocking-chair trip with me to that far country where you may see, perhaps for the first time, some curious things that Hans and Gretel saw every day.

## II HOLLAND

Holland is one of the queerest countries under the sun. It should be called Odd-land or Contrary-land, for in nearly everything it is different from other parts of the world. In the first place, a large portion of the country is lower than the level of the sea. Great dykes or bulwarks have been erected at a heavy cost of money and labor, to keep the ocean where it belongs. On certain parts of the coast it sometimes leans with all its weight against the land, and it is as much as the poor country can do to stand the pressure. Sometimes the dykes give way, or spring a leak, and the most disastrous results ensue. They are high and wide, and the tops of some of them are covered with buildings and trees. They have even fine public roads upon them, from which horses may look down upon wayside cottages. Often the keels of floating ships are higher than the roofs of the dwellings. The stork clattering to her young on the house-peak may feel that her nest is lifted far out of danger, but the croaking frog in neighboring bulrushes is nearer the stars than she. Water-bugs dart backward and forward above the heads of the chimney swallows; and willow trees seem drooping with shame, because they cannot reach as high as the reeds near by.

Ditches, canals, ponds, rivers and lakes are everywhere to be seen. High, but not dry, they shine in the sunlight, catching nearly all the bustle and the business, quite scorning the tame fields stretching damply beside them. One is tempted to ask, "Which is Holland – the shores or the water?" The very verdure that should be confined to the land has made a mistake and settled upon the fish-ponds. In fact the entire country is a kind of saturated sponge or, as the English poet, Butler, called it,

"A land that rides at anchor, and is moor'd,  
In which they do not live, but go aboard."

Persons are born, live and die, and even have their gardens on canal-boats. Farmhouses, with roofs like great slouched hats pulled over their eyes, stand on wooden legs with a tucked-up sort of air, as if to say "we intend to keep dry if we can." Even the horses wear a wide stool on each hoof to lift them out of the mire. In short, the landscape everywhere suggests a paradise for ducks. It is a glorious country in summer for barefooted girls and boys. Such wadings! such mimic ship sailing! Such rowing, fishing and swimming! Only think of a chain of puddles where one can launch chip boats all day long, and never make a return trip! But enough. A full recital would set all young America rushing in a body toward the Zuider Zee.

Dutch cities seem at first sight to be a bewildering jungle of houses, bridges, churches and ships, sprouting into masts, steeples and trees. In some cities vessels are hitched like horses to their owners' door-posts and receive their freight from the upper windows. Mothers scream to Lodewyk and Kassy not to swing on the garden gate for fear they may be drowned! Water-roads are more frequent there than common-roads and rail-ways; water-fences in the form of lazy green ditches, enclose pleasure-ground, polder and garden.

Sometimes fine green hedges are seen; but wooden fences such as we have in America are rarely met with in Holland. As for stone fences, a Dutchman would lift his hands with astonishment at the very idea. There is no stone there, excepting those great masses of rock, that have been brought from other lands to strengthen and protect the coast. All the small stones or pebbles, if there ever were any, seem to be imprisoned in pavements or quite melted away. Boys with strong, quick arms may grow from pinafores to full beards without ever finding one to start the water-rings or set the rabbits flying. The water-roads are nothing less than canals intersecting the country in every direction. These are of all sizes, from the great North Holland Ship Canal, which is the wonder of the world, to those

which a boy can leap. Water-omnibuses, called *trekschuiten*,<sup>{1}</sup> constantly ply up and down these roads for the conveyance of passengers; and water drays, called *pakschuyten*,<sup>3</sup> are used for carrying fuel, and merchandise. Instead of green country lanes, green canals stretch from field to barn and from barn to garden; and the farms or *polders*, as they are termed, are merely great lakes pumped dry. Some of the busiest streets are water, while many of the country roads are paved with brick. The city boats with their rounded sterns, gilded prows and gaily painted sides, are unlike any others under the sun; and a Dutch wagon with its funny little crooked pole, is a perfect mystery of mysteries.

"One thing is clear," cries Master Brightside, "the inhabitants need never be thirsty." But no, Odd-land is true to itself still. Notwithstanding the sea pushing to get in, and the lakes struggling to get out, and the overflowing canals, rivers and ditches, in many districts there is no water fit to swallow; our poor Hollanders must go dry, or drink wine and beer, or send far into the inland to Utrecht, and other favored localities, for that precious fluid older than Adam yet young as the morning dew. Sometimes, indeed, the inhabitants can swallow a shower when they are provided with any means of catching it; but generally they are like the Albatross-haunted sailors in Coleridge's famous poem of "The Ancient Mariner" – they see

"Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink!"

Great flapping windmills all over the country make it look as if flocks of huge sea-birds were just settling upon it. Everywhere one sees the funniest trees, bobbed into fantastical shapes, with their trunks painted a dazzling white, yellow or red. Horses are often yoked three abreast. Men, women and children go clattering about in wooden shoes with loose heels; peasant girls who cannot get beaux for love, hire them for money to escort them to the Kermis;<sup>4</sup> and husbands and wives lovingly *harness* themselves side by side on the bank of the canal and drag their *pakschuyts* to market.

Another peculiar feature of Holland is the *dune* or sand-hill. These are numerous along certain portions of the coast. Before they were sown with coarse reed-grass and other plants, to hold them down, they used to send great storms of sand over the inland. So, to add to the oddities, farmers sometimes dig down under the surface to find their soil, and on windy days *dry* showers (of sand) often fall upon fields that have grown wet under a week of sunshine.

In short, almost the only familiar thing we Yankees can meet with in Holland is a harvest-song which is quite popular there, though no linguist could translate it. Even then we must shut our eyes and listen only to the tune which I leave you to guess.

"Yanker didee dudel down  
Didee dudel lawnter;  
Yankee viver, voover, vown,  
Botermelk und Tawnter!"

On the other hand, many of the oddities of Holland serve only to prove the thrift and perseverance of the people. There is not a richer, or more carefully tilled garden-spot in the whole world than this leaky, springy little country. There is not a braver, more heroic race than its quiet, passive-looking inhabitants. Few nations have equaled it in important discoveries and inventions;

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<sup>3</sup> Canal-boats. Some of the first named are over thirty feet long. They look like green houses lodged on barges, and are drawn by horses walking along the bank of the canal. The *trekschuiten* are divided into two compartments, first and second class, and when not too crowded the passengers make themselves quite at home in them; the men smoke, the women knit or sew, while children play upon the small outer deck. Many of the canal-boats have white, yellow, or chocolate-colored sails. This last color is caused by a preparation of tan which is put on to preserve them.

<sup>4</sup> Fair.

none has excelled it in commerce, navigation, learning and science, – or set as noble examples in the promotion of education, and public charities; and none in proportion to its extent has expended more money and labor upon public works.

Holland has its shining annals of noble and illustrious men and women; its grand, historic records of patience, resistance and victory; its religious freedom, its enlightened enterprise, its art, its music and its literature. It has truly been called, "the battle-field of Europe," as truly may we consider it the Asylum of the world, for the oppressed of every nation have there found shelter and encouragement. If we Americans, who after all, are homeopathic preparations of Holland stock, can laugh at the Dutch, and call them human beavers, and hint that their country may float off any day at high tide, we can also feel proud, and say they have proved themselves heroes, and that their country will *not* float off while there is a Dutchman left to grapple it.

There are said to be at least ninety-nine hundred large windmills in Holland, with sails ranging from eighty to one hundred and twenty feet long. They are employed in sawing timber, beating hemp, grinding, and many other kinds of work; but their principal use is for pumping water from the lowlands into the canals, and for guarding against the inland freshets that so often deluge the country. Their yearly cost is said to be nearly ten millions of dollars. The large ones are of great power. Their huge, circular tower, rising sometimes from the midst of factory buildings, is surmounted with a smaller one tapering into a cap-like roof. This upper tower is encircled at its base with a balcony, high above which juts the axis turned by its four prodigious, ladder-backed sails.

Many of the windmills are primitive affairs, seeming sadly in need of Yankee "improvements"; but some of the new ones are admirable. They are so constructed that, by some ingenious contrivance, they present their fans, or wings, to the wind in precisely the right direction to work with the requisite power. In other words, the miller may take a nap and feel quite sure that his mill will study the wind, and make the most of it, until he awakens. Should there be but a slight current of air, every sail will spread itself to catch the faintest breath; but if a heavy "blow" should come, they will shrink at its touch, like great mimosa leaves, and only give it half a chance to move them.

One of the old prisons of Amsterdam, called the Rasphouse, because the thieves and vagrants who were confined there were employed in rasping log-wood, had a cell for the punishment of lazy prisoners. In one corner of this cell was a pump and, in another, an opening through which a steady stream of water was admitted. The prisoner could take his choice, either to stand still and be drowned, or to work for dear life at the pump and keep the flood down until his jailer chose to relieve him. Now it seems to me that, throughout Holland, Nature has introduced this little diversion on a grand scale. The Dutch have always been forced to pump for their very existence and probably must continue to do so to the end of time.

Every year millions of dollars are spent in repairing dykes, and regulating water levels. If these important duties were neglected the country would be uninhabitable. Already dreadful consequences, as I have said, have followed the bursting of these dykes. Hundreds of villages and towns have from time to time been buried beneath the rush of waters, and nearly a million of persons have been destroyed. One of the most fearful inundations ever known occurred in the autumn of the year 1570. Twenty-eight terrible floods had before that time overwhelmed portions of Holland, but this was the most terrible of all. The unhappy country had long been suffering under Spanish tyranny; now, it seemed, the crowning point was given to its troubles. When we read Motley's history of the Rise of the Dutch Republic we learn to revere the brave people who have endured, suffered and dared so much.

Mr. Motley in his thrilling account of the great inundation tells us how a long continued and violent gale had been sweeping the Atlantic waters into the North Sea, piling them against the coasts of the Dutch provinces; how the dykes, tasked beyond their strength, burst in all directions; how even the Hand-bos, a bulwark formed of oaken piles, braced with iron, moored with heavy anchors and secured by gravel and granite, was snapped to pieces like packthread; how fishing boats and bulky vessels floating up into the country became entangled among the trees, or beat in the roofs and walls

of dwellings, and how at last all Friesland was converted into an angry sea. "Multitudes of men, women, children, of horses, oxen, sheep, and every domestic animal, were struggling in the waves in every direction. Every boat and every article which could serve as a boat, were eagerly seized upon. Every house was inundated, even the graveyards gave up their dead. The living infant in his cradle, and the long-buried corpse in his coffin, floated side by side. The ancient flood seemed about to be renewed. Everywhere, upon the tops of trees, upon the steeples of churches, human beings were clustered, praying to God for mercy, and to their fellowmen for assistance. As the storm at last was subsiding, boats began to ply in every direction, saving those who were struggling in the water, picking fugitives from roofs and tree tops, and collecting the bodies of those already drowned." No less than one hundred thousand human beings had perished in a few hours. Thousands upon thousands of dumb creatures lay dead upon the waters; and the damage done to property of every description was beyond calculation.

Robles, the Spanish Governor, was foremost in noble efforts to save life and lessen the horrors of the catastrophe. He had formerly been hated by the Dutch because of his Spanish or Portuguese blood, but by his goodness and activity in their hour of disaster, he won all hearts to gratitude. He soon introduced an improved method of constructing the dykes, and passed a law that they should in future be kept up by the owners of the soil. There were fewer heavy floods from this time, though within less than three hundred years six fearful inundations swept over the land.

In the Spring there is always great danger of inland freshets, especially in times of thaw, because the rivers, choked with blocks of ice, overflow before they can discharge their rapidly rising waters into the ocean. Added to this, the sea chafing and pressing against the dykes, it is no wonder that Holland is often in a state of alarm. The greatest care is taken to prevent accidents. Engineers and workmen are stationed all along in threatened places and a close watch is kept up night and day. When a general signal of danger is given, the inhabitants all rush to the rescue, eager to combine against their common foe. As, everywhere else, straw is supposed to be of all things the most helpless in the water, of course in Holland it must be rendered the mainstay against a rushing tide. Huge straw mats are pressed against the embankments, fortified with clay and heavy stone, and once adjusted, the ocean dashes against them in vain.

Raff Brinker, the father of Gretel and Hans, had for years been employed upon the dykes. It was at the time of a threatened inundation, when in the midst of a terrible storm, in darkness and sleet, the men were laboring at a weak spot near the Veermyk sluice, that he fell from the scaffolding, and was taken home insensible. From that hour he never worked again; though he lived on, mind and memory were gone.

Gretel could not remember him otherwise than as the strange, silent man, whose eyes followed her vacantly whichever way she turned; but Hans had recollections of a hearty, cheerful-voiced father who was never tired of bearing him upon his shoulder, and whose careless song still seemed echoing near when he lay awake at night and listened.

### III

## THE SILVER SKATES

Dame Brinker earned a scanty support for her family by raising vegetables, spinning and knitting. Once she had worked on board the barges plying up and down the canal, and had occasionally been harnessed with other women to the towing rope of a pakschuyt plying between Broek and Amsterdam. But when Hans had grown strong and large, he had insisted upon doing all such drudgery in her place. Besides, her husband had become so very helpless of late, that he required her constant care. Although not having as much intelligence as a little child, he was yet strong of arm and very hearty, and Dame Brinker had sometimes great trouble in controlling him.

"Ah! children, he was so good and steady," she would sometimes say, "and as wise as a lawyer. Even the Burgomaster would stop to ask him a question, and now alack! he don't know his wife and little ones. You remember the father, Hans, when he was himself – a great brave man – don't you?"

"Yes, indeed, mother, he knew everything, and could do anything under the sun – and how he would sing! why, you used to laugh and say it was enough to set the windmills dancing."

"So I did. Bless me! how the boy remembers! Gretel, child, take that knitting needle from your father, quick; he'll get it in his eyes may be; and put the shoe on him. His poor feet are like ice half the time, but I can't keep 'em covered all I can do – " and then half wailing, half humming, Dame Brinker would sit down, and fill the low cottage with the whirr of her spinning wheel.

Nearly all the outdoor work, as well as the household labor, was performed by Hans and Gretel. At certain seasons of the year the children went out day after day to gather peat, which they would stow away in square, brick-like pieces, for fuel. At other times, when home-work permitted, Hans rode the towing-horses on the canals, earning a few stivers<sup>5</sup> a day; and Gretel tended geese for the neighboring farmers.

Hans was clever at carving in wood, and both he and Gretel were good gardeners. Gretel could sing and sew and run on great, high, home-made stilts better than any girl for miles around. She could learn a ballad in five minutes, and find, in its season, any weed or flower you could name; but she dreaded books, and often the very sight of the figuring-board in the old schoolhouse would set her eyes swimming. Hans, on the contrary, was slow and steady. The harder the task, whether in study or daily labor, the better he liked it. Boys who sneered at him out of school, on account of his patched clothes and scant leather breeches, were forced to yield him the post of honor in nearly every class. It was not long before he was the only youngster in the school who had not stood at least *once* in the corner of horrors, where hung a dreaded whip, and over it this motto:

"Leer, leer! jou luigaart, of dit endje touw zal je le ren!"<sup>6</sup>

It was only in winter that Gretel and Hans could be spared to attend school; and for the past month they had been kept at home because their mother needed their services. Raff Brinker required constant attention, and there was black bread to be made, and the house to be kept clean, and stockings and other things to be knitted and sold in the market-place.

While they were busily assisting their mother on this cold December morning, a merry troop of girls and boys came skimming down the canal. There were fine skaters among them, and as the bright medley of costumes flitted by, it looked from a distance as though the ice had suddenly thawed, and some gay tulip-bed were floating along on the current.

There was the rich burgomaster's daughter Hilda van Gleck, with her costly furs and loose-fitting velvet sack; and, near by, a pretty peasant girl, Annie Bouman, jauntily attired in a coarse

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<sup>5</sup> A stiver is worth about two cents of our money.

<sup>6</sup> (Learn! learn! you idler, or this rope's end shall teach you.)

scarlet jacket and a blue skirt just short enough to display the gray homespun hose to advantage. Then there was the proud Rychie Korbes, whose father, Mynheer van Korbes, was one of the leading men of Amsterdam; and, flocking closely around her, Carl Schummel, Peter and Ludwig<sup>7</sup> van Holp, Jacob Poot, and a very small boy rejoicing in the tremendous name of Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck. There were nearly twenty other boys and girls in the party, and one and all seemed full of excitement and frolic.

Up and down the canal, within the space of a half mile they skated, exerting their racing powers to the utmost. Often the swiftest among them was seen to dodge from under the very nose of some pompous law-giver or doctor, who with folded arms was skating leisurely toward the town; or a chain of girls would suddenly break at the approach of a fat old burgomaster who, with gold-headed cane poised in air, was puffing his way to Amsterdam. Equipped in skates wonderful to behold, from their superb strappings, and dazzling runners curving over the instep and topped with gilt balls, he would open his fat eyes a little if one of the maidens chanced to drop him a courtesy, but would not dare to bow in return for fear of losing his balance.

Not only pleasure-seekers and stately men of note were upon the canal. There were work-people, with weary eyes, hastening to their shops and factories; market-women with loads upon their heads; peddlers bending with their packs; barge-men with shaggy hair and bleared faces, jostling roughly on their way; kind-eyed clergymen speeding perhaps to the bedsides of the dying; and, after a while, groups of children, with satchels slung over their shoulders, whizzing past, toward the distant school. One and all wore skates excepting, indeed, a muffled-up farmer whose queer cart bumped along on the margin of the canal.

Before long our merry boys and girls were almost lost in the confusion of bright colors, the ceaseless motion, and the gleaming of skates flashing back the sunlight. We might have known no more of them had not the whole party suddenly come to a standstill and, grouping themselves out of the way of the passers-by, all talked at once to a pretty little maiden, whom they had drawn from the tide of people flowing toward the town.

"Oh Katrinka!" they cried, in a breath, "have you heard of it? The race – We want you to join!"

"What race?" asked Katrinka, laughing – "Don't all talk at once, please, I can't understand."

Every one panted and looked at Rychie Korbes, who was their acknowledged spokeswoman.

"Why," said Rychie, "we are to have a grand skating match on the twentieth, on Meurouw<sup>8</sup> van Gleck's birthday. It's all Hilda's work. They are going to give a splendid prize to the best skater."

"Yes," chimed in half a dozen voices, "a beautiful pair of silver skates – perfectly magnificent! with, oh! such straps and silver bells and buckles!"

"Who said they had bells?" put in the small voice of the boy with the big name.

"I say so, Master Voost," replied Rychie.

"So they have," – "No, I'm sure they haven't," – "*Oh*, how can you say so?" – "It's an arrow" – "And Mynheer van Korbes told *my* mother they had bells," – came from sundry of the excited group; but Mynheer Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck essayed to settle the matter with a decisive —

"Well, you don't any of you know a single thing about it; they haven't a sign of a bell on them, they —"

"Oh! oh!" and the chorus of conflicting opinion broke forth again.

"The girls' pair are to have bells," interposed Hilda, quietly, "but there is to be another pair for the boys with an arrow engraved upon the sides."

"*There!* I told you so!" cried nearly all the youngsters in a breath.

Katrinka looked at them with bewildered eyes.

"Who is to try?" she asked.

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<sup>7</sup> Ludwig, Gretel, and Carl were named after German friends. The Dutch form would be Lodewyk, Grietje and Karel.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. or Madame (pronounced Meffrow).

"All of us," answered Rychie. "It will be such fun! And you must, too, Katrinka. But it's school time now, we will talk it all over at noon. Oh! you will join of course."

Katrinka, without replying, made a graceful pirouette, and laughing out a coquettish – "Don't you hear the last bell? Catch me!" – darted off toward the schoolhouse, standing half a mile away, on the canal.

All started, pell-mell, at this challenge, but they tried in vain to catch the bright-eyed, laughing creature who, with golden hair streaming in the sunlight, cast back many a sparkling glance of triumph as she floated onward.

Beautiful Katrinka! Flushed with youth and health, all life and mirth and motion, what wonder thine image, ever floating in advance, sped through one boy's dreams that night! What wonder that it seemed his darkest hour when, years afterward, thy presence floated away from him forever.

## IV HANS AND GRETTEL FIND A FRIEND

At noon our young friends poured forth from the schoolhouse intent upon having an hour's practicing upon the canal.

They had skated but a few moments when Carl Schummel said mockingly to Hilda:

"There's a pretty pair just coming upon the ice! The little rag-pickers! Their skates must have been a present from the king direct."

"They are patient creatures," said Hilda, gently. "It must have been hard to learn to skate upon such queer affairs. They are very poor peasants, you see. The boy has probably made the skates himself."

Carl was somewhat abashed.

"Patient they may be, but as for skating, they start off pretty well only to finish with a jerk. They could move well to your new *staccato* piece I think."

Hilda laughed pleasantly and left him. After joining a small detachment of the racers, and sailing past every one of them, she halted beside Gretel who, with eager eyes, had been watching the sport.

"What is your name, little girl?"

"Gretel, my lady," answered the child, somewhat awed by Hilda's rank, though they were nearly of the same age, "and my brother is called Hans."

"Hans is a stout fellow," said Hilda, cheerily, "and seems to have a warm stove somewhere within him, but *you* look cold. You should wear more clothing, little one."

Gretel, who had nothing else to wear, tried to laugh as she answered:

"I am not so very little. I am past twelve years old."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. You see I am nearly fourteen, and so large of my age that other girls seem small to me, but that is nothing. Perhaps you will shoot up far above me yet; not unless you dress more warmly, though – shivering girls never grow."

Hans flushed as he saw tears rising in Gretel's eyes.

"My sister has not complained of the cold; but this is bitter weather they say – " and he looked sadly upon Gretel.

"It is nothing," said Gretel. "I am often warm – too warm when I am skating. You are good, *jufvrouw*,<sup>9</sup> to think of it."

"No, no," answered Hilda, quite angry at herself. "I am careless, cruel; but I meant no harm. I wanted to ask you – I mean – if – " and here Hilda, coming to the point of her errand, faltered before the poorly clad but noble-looking children she wished to serve.

"What is it, young lady?" exclaimed Hans eagerly. "If there is any service I can do? any – "

"Oh! no, no," laughed Hilda, shaking off her embarrassment, "I only wished to speak to you about the grand race. Why do you not join it? You both can skate well, and the ranks are free. Any one may enter for the prize."

Gretel looked wistfully at Hans, who tugging at his cap, answered respectfully.

"Ah, *jufvrouw*, even if we could enter, we could skate only a few strokes with the rest. Our skates are hard wood you see," (holding up the sole of his foot), "but they soon become damp, and then they stick and trip us."

Gretel's eyes twinkled with fun as she thought of Hans' mishap in the morning, but she blushed as she faltered out timidly:

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<sup>9</sup> Miss – Young lady (pronounced yuffrow). In studied or polite address it would be *jongvrouwe* (pronounced youngfrow).

"Oh no, we can't join; but may we be there, my lady, on the great day to look on?"

"Certainly," answered Hilda, looking kindly into the two earnest faces, and wishing from her heart that she had not spent so much of her monthly allowance for lace and finery. She had but eight kwartjes<sup>10</sup> left, and they would buy but one pair of skates, at the furthest.

Looking down with a sigh at the two pairs of feet so very different in size, she asked:

"Which of you is the better skater?"

"Gretel," replied Hans, promptly.

"Hans," answered Gretel, in the same breath.

Hilda smiled.

"I cannot buy you each a pair of skates, or even one good pair; but here are eight kwartjes. Decide between you which stands the best chance of winning the race, and buy the skates accordingly. I wish I had enough to buy better ones – good-bye!" and, with a nod and a smile, Hilda, after handing the money to the electrified Hans, glided swiftly away to rejoin her companions.

"Jufvrouw! jufvrouw von Gleck!" called Hans in a loud tone, stumbling after her as well as he could, for one of his skate-strings was untied.

Hilda turned, and with one hand raised to shield her eyes from the sun, seemed to him to be floating through the air, nearer and nearer.

"We cannot take this money," panted Hans, "though we know your goodness in giving it."

"Why not indeed?" asked Hilda flushing.

"Because," replied Hans, bowing like a clown, but looking with the eye of a prince at the queenly girl, "we have not earned it."

Hilda was quick-witted. She had noticed a pretty wooden chain upon Gretel's neck.

"Carve me a chain, Hans, like the one your sister wears."

"That I will, lady, with all my heart; we have white wood in the house, fine as ivory; you shall have one to-morrow," and Hans hastily tried to return the money.

"No, no," said Hilda decidedly. "That sum will be but a poor price for the chain," and off she darted, out-stripping the fleetest among the skaters.

Hans sent a long, bewildered gaze after her; it was useless he felt to make any further resistance.

"It is right," he muttered, half to himself, half to his faithful shadow, Gretel, "I must work hard every minute, and sit up half the night if the mother will let me burn a candle; but the chain shall be finished. We may keep the money, Gretel."

"What a good little lady!" cried Gretel clapping her hands with delight, "oh! Hans, was it for nothing the stork settled on our roof last summer? Do you remember how the mother said it would bring us luck and how she cried when Janzoon Kolp shot him? And she said it would bring him trouble. But the luck has come to us at last! Now, Hans, if mother sends us to town to-morrow you can buy the skates in the market-place."

Hans shook his head. "The young lady would have given us the money to buy skates, but if I *earn* it, Gretel, it shall be spent for wool. You must have a warm jacket."

"Oh!" cried Gretel, in real dismay, "not buy the skates! Why, I am not often cold! Mother says the blood runs up and down in poor children's veins humming 'I must keep 'em warm! I must keep 'em warm.'"

"Oh, Hans," she continued with something like a sob, "don't say you won't buy the skates, it makes me feel just like crying – besides, I want to be cold – I mean I'm real, awful warm – so now!"

Hans looked up hurriedly. He had a true Dutch horror of tears, or emotion of any kind, and, most of all, he dreaded to see his sister's blue eyes overflowing.

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<sup>10</sup> A kwartje is a small silver coin worth one quarter of a guilder, or 10 cents in American currency.

"Now mind," cried Gretel, seeing her advantage, "I'll feel awful if you give up the skates. *I* don't want them. I'm not such a stingy as that; but I want *you* to have them, and then when I get bigger they'll do for me – oh-h – count the pieces, Hans. Did ever you see so many!"

Hans turned the money thoughtfully in his palm. Never in all his life had he longed so intensely for a pair of skates, for he had known of the race and had, boy-like, fairly ached for a chance to test his powers with the other children. He felt confident that with a good pair of steel runners, he could readily distance most of the boys on the canal. Then, too, Gretel's argument was so plausible. On the other hand, he knew that she, with her strong but lithe little frame, needed but a week's practice on good runners, to make her a better skater than Rychie Korbes or even Katrinka Flack. As soon as this last thought flashed upon him his resolve was made. If Gretel would not have the jacket, she should have the skates.

"No, Gretel," he answered at last, "I can wait. Some day I may have money enough saved to buy a fine pair. You shall have these."

Gretel's eyes sparkled; but in another instant she insisted, rather faintly:

"The young lady gave the money to *you*, Hans. I'd be real bad to take it."

Hans shook his head, resolutely, as he trudged on, causing his sister to half skip and half walk in her effort to keep beside him; by this time they had taken off their wooden "rockers," and were hastening home to tell their mother the good news.

"Oh! *I* know!" cried Gretel, in a sprightly tone. "You can do this. You can get a pair a little too small for you, and too big for me, and we can take turns and use them. Won't that be fine?" and Gretel clapped her hands again.

Poor Hans! This was a strong temptation, but he pushed it away from him, brave-hearted fellow that he was.

"Nonsense, Gretel. You could never get on with a big pair. You stumbled about with these, like a blind chicken, before I curved off the ends. No, you must have a pair to fit exactly, and you must practice every chance you can get, until the Twentieth comes. My little Gretel shall win the silver skates."

Gretel could not help laughing with delight at the very idea.

"Hans! Gretel!" called out a familiar voice.

"Coming, mother!" and they hastened toward the cottage, Hans still shaking the pieces of silver in his hand.

On the following day, there was not a prouder nor a happier boy in all Holland than Hans Brinker, as he watched his sister, with many a dexterous sweep, flying in and out among the skaters who at sundown thronged the canal. A warm jacket had been given her by the kind-hearted Hilda, and the burst-out shoes had been cobbled into decency by Dame Brinker. As the little creature darted backward and forward, flushed with enjoyment, and quite unconscious of the many wondering glances bent upon her, she felt that the shining runners beneath her feet had suddenly turned earth into Fairyland, while "Hans, dear, good Hans!" echoed itself over and over again in her grateful heart.

"By den donder!" exclaimed Peter van Holp to Carl Schummel, "but that little one in the red jacket and patched petticoat skates well. Gunst! she has toes on her heels, and eyes in the back of her head! See her. It will be a joke if she gets in the race and beats Katrinka Flack, after all."

"Hush! not so loud!" returned Carl, rather sneeringly. "That little lady in rags is the special pet of Hilda van Gleck. Those shining skates are her gift, if I make no mistake."

"So! so!" exclaimed Peter, with a radiant smile, for Hilda was his best friend. "She has been at her good work there, too!" And Mynheer van Holp, after cutting a double 8 on the ice, to say nothing of a huge P, then a jump, and an H, glided onward until he found himself beside Hilda.

Hand in hand, they skated together, laughingly at first, then staidly talking in a low tone.

Strange to say, Peter van Holp soon arrived at a sudden conviction that his little sister needed a wooden chain just like Hilda's.

Two days afterward, on St. Nicholas' Eve, Hans, having burned three candle-ends, and cut his thumb into the bargain, stood in the market-place at Amsterdam, buying another pair of skates.

## V SHADOWS IN THE HOME

Good Dame Brinker! As soon as the scanty dinner had been cleared away that noon, she had arrayed herself in her holiday attire, in honor of Saint Nicholas. "It will brighten the children," she thought to herself, and she was not mistaken. This festival dress had been worn very seldom during the past ten years; before that time it had done good service, and had flourished at many a dance and Kermis, when she was known, far and wide, as the pretty Meitje Klenck. The children had sometimes been granted rare glimpses of it as it lay in state in the old oaken chest. Faded and threadbare as it was, it was gorgeous in their eyes, with its white linen tucker, now gathered to her plump throat, and vanishing beneath the trim bodice of blue homespun, and its reddish brown skirt bordered with black. The knitted woolen mitts, and the dainty cap showing her hair, which generally was hidden, made her seem almost like a princess to Gretel, while master Hans grew staid and well-behaved as he gazed.

Soon the little maid, while braiding her own golden tresses, fairly danced around her mother in an ecstasy of admiration.

"Oh, mother, mother, mother, how pretty you are! Look, Hans! isn't it just like a picture?"

"Just like a picture," assented Hans, cheerfully, "*just* like a picture – only I don't like those stocking things on the hands."

"Not like the mitts, brother Hans! why, they're very important – see – they cover up all the red. Oh, mother, how white your arm is where the mitt leaves off, whiter than mine, oh, ever so much whiter. I declare, mother, the bodice is tight for you. You're growing! You're surely growing!"

Dame Brinker laughed.

"This was made long ago, lovey, when I wasn't much thicker about the waist than a churn-dasher. And how do you like the cap?" turning her head from side to side.

"Oh, *ever* so much, mother. It's b-e-a-u-tiful! see! The father is looking!"

Was the father looking? Alas, only with a dull stare. His vrouw turned toward him with a start, something like a blush rising to her cheeks, a questioning sparkle in her eye. – The bright look died away in an instant.

"No, no," she sighed, "he sees nothing. Come, Hans" (and the smile crept faintly back again), "don't stand gaping at me all day, and the new skates waiting for you at Amsterdam."

"Ah, mother," he answered, "you need many things. Why should I buy skates?"

"Nonsense, child. The money was given to you on purpose, or the work was – it's all the same thing – Go while the sun is high."

"Yes, and hurry back, Hans!" laughed Gretel; "we'll race on the canal to-night, if the mother lets us."

At the very threshold he turned to say – "Your spinning wheel wants a new treadle, mother."

"You can make it, Hans."

"So I can. That will take no money. But you need feathers, and wool and meal, and – "

"There, there! That will do. Your silver cannot buy everything. Ah! Hans, if our stolen money would but come back on this bright Saint Nicholas' Eve, how glad we would be! Only last night I prayed to the good Saint – "

"Mother!" interrupted Hans in dismay.

"Why not, Hans! Shame on you to reproach me for that! I'm as true a protestant, in sooth, as any fine lady that walks into church, but it's no wrong to turn sometimes to the good Saint Nicholas. Tut! It's a likely story if one can't do that, without one's children flaring up at it – and he the boys' and girls' own saint – Hoot! mayhap the colt is a steadier horse than the mare?"

Hans knew his mother too well to offer a word in opposition, when her voice quickened and sharpened as it did now (it was often sharp and quick when she spoke of the missing money) so he said, gently:

"And what did you ask of good Saint Nicholas, mother?"

"Why, to never give the thieves a wink of sleep till they brought it back, to be sure, if he's power to do such things, or else to brighten our wits that we might find it ourselves. Not a sight have I had of it since the day before the dear father was hurt – as you well know, Hans."

"That I do, mother," he answered sadly, "though you have almost pulled down the cottage in searching."

"Aye; but it was of no use," moaned the dame, "*hidere* make best finders."

Hans started. "Do you think the father could tell aught?" he asked mysteriously.

"Aye, indeed," said Dame Brinker, nodding her head, "I think so, but that is no sign. I never hold the same belief in the matter two days. Mayhap the father paid it off for the great silver watch we have been guarding since that day. But, no – I'll never believe it."

"The watch was not worth a quarter of the money, mother."

"No, indeed; and your father was a shrewd man up to the last moment. He was too steady and thrifty for silly doings."

"Where *did* the watch come from, I wonder," muttered Hans, half to himself.

Dame Brinker shook her head, and looked sadly toward her husband, who sat staring blankly at the floor. Gretel stood near him, knitting.

"That we shall never know, Hans. I have shown it to the father many a time, but he does not know it from a potato. When he came in that dreadful night to supper he handed the watch to me and told me to take good care of it until he asked for it again. Just as he opened his lips to say more, Broom Klatterboost came flying in with word that the dyke was in danger. Ah! the waters were terrible that holy Pinxter-week! My man, alack, caught up his tools and ran out. That was the last I ever saw of him in his right mind. He was brought in again by midnight, nearly dead, with his poor head all bruised and cut. The fever passed off in time but never the dullness —*that* grew worse every day. We shall never know."

Hans had heard all this before. More than once he had seen his mother, in hours of sore need, take the watch from its hiding-place, half-resolved to sell it, but she had always conquered the temptation.

"No, Hans," she would say, "we must be nearer starving than this before we turn faithless to the father!"

A memory of some such scene crossed her son's mind now; for, after giving a heavy sigh, and filliping a crumb of wax at Gretel across the table, he said:

"Aye, mother, you have done bravely to keep it – many a one would have tossed it off for gold long ago."

"And more shame for them!" exclaimed the dame, indignantly. "*I* would not do it. Besides, the gentry are so hard on us poor folks that if they saw such a thing in our hands, even if we told all, they might suspect the father of –"

Hans flushed angrily.

"They would not *dare* to say such a thing, mother! If they did – I'd –"

He clenched his fist, and seemed to think that the rest of his sentence was too terrible to utter in her presence.

Dame Brinker smiled proudly through her tears at this interruption.

"Ah, Hans, thou'rt a true, brave lad. We will never part company with the watch. In his dying hour the dear father might wake and ask for it."

"Might *wake*, mother!" echoed Hans, "wake – and know us?"

"Aye, child," almost whispered his mother, "such things have been."

By this time Hans had nearly forgotten his proposed errand to Amsterdam. His mother had seldom spoken so familiarly with him. He felt himself now to be not only her son, but her friend, her adviser.

"You are right, mother. We must never give up the watch. For the father's sake, we will guard it always. The money, though, may come to light when we least expect it."

"Never!" cried Dame Brinker, taking the last stitch from her needle with a jerk, and laying the unfinished knitting heavily upon her lap. "There is no chance! One thousand guilders! and all gone in a day! One thousand guilders – Oh! what ever *did* become of them? If they went in an evil way, the thief would have confessed by this on his dying bed – he would not dare to die with such guilt on his soul!"

"He may not be dead yet," said Hans, soothingly; "any day we may hear of him."

"Ah, child," she said in a changed tone, "what thief would ever have come *here*? It was always neat and clean, thank God! but not fine; for the father and I saved and saved that we might have something laid by. 'Little and often soon fills the pouch.' We found it so, in truth; besides, the father had a goodly sum, already, for service done to the Heernoct lands, at the time of the great inundation. Every week we had a guilder left over, sometimes more; for the father worked extra hours, and could get high pay for his labor. Every Saturday night we put something by, except the time when you had the fever, Hans, and when Gretel came. At last the pouch grew so full that I mended an old stocking and commenced again. Now that I look back, it seems that the money was up to the heel in a few sunny weeks. There was great pay in those days if a man was quick at engineer work. The stocking went on filling with copper and silver – aye, and gold. You may well open your eyes, Gretel. I used to laugh and tell the father it was not for poverty I wore my old gown; – and the stocking went on filling – so full that sometimes when I woke at night, I'd get up, soft and quiet, and go feel it in the moonlight. Then, on my knees, I would thank our Lord that my little ones could in time get good learning, and that the father might rest from labor in his old age. Sometimes, at supper, the father and I would talk about a new chimney and a good winter-room for the cow; but my man forsooth had finer plans even than that. 'A big sail,' says he, 'catches the wind – we can do what we will soon,' and then we would sing together as I washed my dishes. Ah, 'a smooth sea makes an easy rudder,' – not a thing vexed me from morning till night. Every week the father would take out the stocking, and drop in the money and laugh and kiss me as we tied it up together. – Up with you, Hans! there you sit gaping, and the day a-wasting!" added Dame Brinker tartly, blushing to find that she had been speaking too freely to her boy; "it's high time you were on your way."

Hans had seated himself and was looking earnestly into her face. He arose, and, in almost a whisper, asked:

"Have you ever *tried*, mother?"

She understood him.

"Yes, child, often. But the father only laughs, or he stares at me so strange I am glad to ask no more. When you and Gretel had the fever last Winter, and our bread was nearly gone, and I could earn nothing, for fear you would die while my face was turned, oh! I tried then! I smoothed his hair, and whispered to him soft as a kitten, about the money – where it was – who had it? Alack! he would pick at my sleeve, and whisper gibberish till my blood ran cold. At last, while Gretel lay whiter than snow, and you were raving on the bed, I screamed to him – it seemed as if he *must* hear me – 'Raff, where is our money? Do you know aught of the money, Raff? – the money in the pouch and the stocking, in the big chest?' – but I might as well have talked to a stone – I might as –"

The mother's voice sounded so strangely, and her eye was so bright, that Hans, with a new anxiety, laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Come, mother," he said, "let us try to forget this money. I am big and strong – Gretel, too, is very quick and willing. Soon all will be prosperous with us again. Why, mother, Gretel and I would rather see thee bright and happy, than to have all the silver in the world – wouldn't we, Gretel?"

"The mother knows it," said Gretel, sobbing.

## VI SUNBEAMS

Dame Brinker was startled at her children's emotion, glad, too, for it proved how loving and true they were.

Beautiful ladies, in princely homes, often smile suddenly and sweetly, gladdening the very air around them; but I doubt if their smile be more welcome in God's sight than that which sprang forth to cheer the roughly clad boy and girl in the humble cottage. Dame Brinker felt that she had been selfish. Blushing and brightening, she hastily wiped her eyes, and looked upon them as only a mother can.

"Hoity! Toity! pretty talk we're having, and Saint Nicholas' Eve almost here! What wonder the yarn pricks my fingers! Come, Gretel, take this cent,<sup>11</sup> and while Hans is trading for the skates you can buy a waffle in the market-place."

"Let me stay home with you, mother," said Gretel, looking up with eyes that sparkled through their tears. "Hans will buy me the cake."

"As you will, child, and Hans – wait a moment. Three turns of the needle will finish this toe, and then you may have as good a pair of hose as ever were knitted (owning the yarn is a grain too sharp,) to sell to the hosier on the Heireen Gracht.<sup>12</sup> That will give us three quarter-guilders if you make good trade; and as it's right hungry weather, you may buy four waffles. We'll keep the Feast of Saint Nicholas after all."

Gretel clapped her hands. "That will be fine! Annie Bouman told me what grand times they will have in the big houses to-night. But we will be merry too. Hans will have beautiful new skates, – and then there'll be the waffles! Oh-h! Don't break them, brother Hans. Wrap them well, and button them under your jacket very carefully."

"Certainly," replied Hans quite gruff with pleasure and importance.

"Oh! mother!" cried Gretel in high glee, "soon you will be busied with the father, and now you are only knitting. Do tell us all about Saint Nicholas!"

Dame Brinker laughed to see Hans hang up his hat and prepare to listen. "Nonsense, children," she said, "I have told it to you often."

"Tell us again! oh, *do* tell us again!" cried Gretel, throwing herself upon the wonderful wooden bench that her brother had made on the mother's last birthday. Hans, not wishing to appear childish, and yet quite willing to hear the story, stood carelessly swinging his skates against the fireplace.

"Well, children, you shall hear it, but we must never waste the daylight again in this way. Pick up your ball, Gretel, and let your sock grow as I talk. Opening your ears needn't shut your fingers. Saint Nicholas, you must know, is a wonderful saint. He keeps his eye open for the good of sailors, but he cares most of all for boys and girls. Well, once upon a time, when he was living on the earth, a merchant of Asia sent his three sons to a great city, called Athens, to get learning."

"Is Athens in Holland, mother?" asked Gretel.

"I don't know, child. Probably it is."

"Oh, no, mother," said Hans, respectfully. "I had that in my geography lessons long ago. Athens is in Greece."

"Well," resumed the mother, "what matter? Greece may belong to the King, for aught we know. Anyhow, this rich merchant sent his sons to Athens. While they were on their way, they stopped one night at a shabby inn, meaning to take up their journey in the morning. Well, they had very fine clothes, – velvet and silk, it may be, such as rich folks' children, all over the world, think nothing of

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<sup>11</sup> The Dutch cent is worth less than half of an American cent.

<sup>12</sup> A street in Amsterdam.

wearing – and their belts, likewise, were full of money. What did the wicked landlord do, but contrive a plan to kill the children, and take their money and all their beautiful clothes himself. So that night, when all the world was asleep he got up and killed the three young gentlemen."

Gretel clasped her hands and shuddered, but Hans tried to look as if killing and murder were every-day matters to him.

"That was not the worst of it," continued Dame Brinker, knitting slowly, and trying to keep count of her stitches as she talked, "that was not near the worst of it. The dreadful landlord went and cut up the young gentlemen's bodies into little pieces, and threw them into a great tub of brine, intending to sell them for pickled pork!"

"Oh!" cried Gretel, horror-stricken, though she had often heard the story before. Hans still continued unmoved, and seemed to think that pickling was the best that could be done under the circumstances.

"Yes, he pickled them, and one might think that would have been the last of the young gentlemen. But no. That night Saint Nicholas had a wonderful vision, and in it he saw the landlord cutting up the merchant's children. There was no need of his hurrying, you know, for he was a saint; but in the morning he went to the inn and charged the landlord with the murder. Then the wicked landlord confessed it from beginning to end, and fell down on his knees, begging forgiveness. He felt so sorry for what he had done that he asked the saint to bring the young masters to life."

"And did the saint do it?" asked Gretel, delighted, well knowing what the answer would be.

"Of course he did. The pickled pieces flew together in an instant, and out jumped the young gentlemen from the brine-tub. They cast themselves at the feet of Saint Nicholas and he gave them his blessing, and – oh! mercy on us, Hans, it will be dark before you get back if you don't start this minute!"

By this time Dame Brinker was almost out of breath and quite out of commas. She could not remember when she had seen the children idle away an hour of daylight in this manner, and the thought of such luxury quite appalled her. By way of compensation she now flew about the room in extreme haste. Tossing a block of peat upon the fire, blowing invisible dust from the table, and handing the finished hose to Hans, all in an instant —

"Come, Hans," she said, as her boy lingered by the door, "what keeps thee?"

Hans kissed his mother's plump cheek, rosy and fresh yet, in spite of all her troubles.

"My mother is the best in the world, and I would be right glad to have a pair of skates, but" – and, as he buttoned his jacket, he looked, in a troubled way, toward a strange figure crouching by the hearth-stone – "If my money would bring a meester<sup>13</sup> from Amsterdam to see the father, something might yet be done."

"A meester would not come, Hans, for twice that money, and it would do no good if he did. Ah! how many guilders I once spent for that; but the dear, good father would not waken. It is God's will. Go, Hans, and buy the skates."

Hans started with a heavy heart, but since the heart was young, and in a boy's bosom, it set him whistling in less than five minutes. His mother had said "thee" to him, and that was quite enough to make even a dark day sunny. Hollanders do not address each other, in affectionate intercourse, as the French and Germans do. But Dame Brinker had embroidered for a Heidelberg family in her girlhood, and she had carried its "thee" and "thou" into her rude home, to be used in moments of extreme love and tenderness.

Therefore, "what keeps thee, Hans?" sang an echo song beneath the boy's whistling, and made him feel that his errand was blest.

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<sup>13</sup> Doctor (dokter in Dutch) called meester by the lower class.

## VII HANS HAS HIS WAY

Broek, with its quiet, spotless streets, its frozen rivulets, its yellow brick pavements, and bright wooden houses, was near by. It was a village where neatness and show were in full blossom; but the inhabitants seemed to be either asleep or dead.

Not a footprint marred the sanded paths, where pebbles and sea-shells lay in fanciful designs. Every window-shutter was closed as tightly as though air and sunshine were poison; and the massive front doors were never opened except on the occasion of a wedding, christening, or a funeral.

Serene clouds of tobacco-smoke were floating through hidden apartments, and children, who otherwise might have awakened the place, were studying in out-of-the-way corners, or skating upon the neighboring canal. A few peacocks and wolves stood in the gardens, but they had never enjoyed the luxury of flesh and blood. They were cut out in growing box, and seemed guarding the grounds with a sort of green ferocity. Certain lively automata, ducks, women and sportsmen, were stowed away in summer-houses, waiting for the spring-time, when they could be wound up, and rival their owners in animation; and the shining, tiled roofs, mosaic courtyards and polished house-trimmings flashed up a silent homage to the sky, where never a speck of dust could dwell.

Hans glanced toward the village, as he shook his silver *kwartjes*, and wondered whether it were really true, as he had often heard, that some of the people of Broek were so rich that they used kitchen utensils of solid gold.

He had seen *Mevrouw van Stoop's* sweet-cheeses in market, and he knew that the lofty dame earned many a bright, silver guilder in selling them. But did she set the cream to rise in golden pans? Did she use a golden skimmer? When her cows were in winter quarters, were their tails really tied up with ribbons?

These thoughts ran through his mind as he turned his face toward Amsterdam, not five miles away, on the other side of the frozen Y.<sup>14</sup> The ice upon the canal was perfect; but his wooden runners, so soon to be cast aside, squeaked a dismal farewell, as he scraped and skimmed along.

When crossing the Y, whom should he see skating toward him but the great Dr. Boekman, the most famous physician and surgeon in Holland. Hans had never met him before, but he had seen his engraved likeness in many of the shop-windows of Amsterdam. It was a face that one could never forget. Thin and lank, though a born Dutchman, with stern, blue eyes, and queer, compressed lips, that seemed to say "no smiling permitted," he certainly was not a very jolly or sociable looking personage, nor one that a well-trained boy would care to accost unbidden.

But Hans *was* bidden, and that, too, by a voice he seldom disregarded – his own conscience.

"Here comes the greatest doctor in the world," whispered the voice. "God has sent him; you have no right to buy skates when you might, with the same money, purchase such aid for your father!"

The wooden runners gave an exultant squeak. Hundreds of beautiful skates were gleaming and vanishing in the air above him. He felt the money tingle in his fingers. The old doctor looked fearfully grim and forbidding. Hans' heart was in his throat, but he found voice enough to cry out, just as he was passing:

"Mynheer Boekman!"

The great man halted, and sticking out his thin under lip, looked scowlingly about him.

Hans was in for it now.

"Mynheer," he panted, drawing close to the fierce-looking doctor, "I knew you could be none other than the famous Boekman. I have to ask a great favor – "

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<sup>14</sup> Pronounced Eye, an arm of the *Zuider Zee*.

"Humph!" muttered the doctor, preparing to skate past the intruder, – "Get out of the way – I've no money – never give to beggars."

"I am no beggar, Mynheer," retorted Hans proudly, at the same time producing his mite of silver with a grand air. "I wish to consult with you about my father. He is a living man, but sits like one dead. He cannot think. His words mean nothing – but he is not sick. He fell on the dykes."

"Hey? what?" cried the doctor beginning to listen.

Hans told the whole story in an incoherent way, dashing off a tear once or twice as he talked, and finally ending with an earnest,

"Oh, do see him, Mynheer. His body is well – it is only his mind – I know this money is not enough; but take it, Mynheer, I will earn more – I know I will – Oh! I will toil for you all my life, if you will but cure my father!"

What was the matter with the old doctor? A brightness like sunlight beamed from his face. His eyes were kind and moist; the hand that had lately clutched his cane, as if preparing to strike, was laid gently upon Hans' shoulder.

"Put up your money, boy, I do not want it – we will see your father. It is a hopeless case, I fear. How long did you say?"

"Ten years, Mynheer," sobbed Hans, radiant with sudden hope.

"Ah! a bad case; but I shall see him. Let me think. To-day I start for Leyden, to return in a week, then you may expect me. Where is it?"

"A mile south of Broek, Mynheer, near the canal. It is only a poor, broken-down hut. Any of the children thereabout can point it out to your honor," added Hans, with a heavy sigh; "they are all half afraid of the place; they call it the idiot's cottage."

"That will do," said the doctor, hurrying on, with a bright backward nod at Hans, "I shall be there. A hopeless case," he muttered to himself, "but the boy pleases me. His eye is like my poor Laurens. Confound it, shall I never forget that young scoundrel!" and, scowling more darkly than ever, the doctor pursued his silent way.

Again Hans was skating toward Amsterdam on the squeaking wooden runners; again his fingers tingled against the money in his pocket; again the boyish whistle rose unconsciously to his lips.

"Shall I hurry home," he was thinking, "to tell the good news, or shall I get the waffles and the new skates first? Whew! I think I'll go on!"

And so Hans bought the skates.

## VIII

### INTRODUCING JACOB POOT AND HIS COUSIN

Hans and Gretel had a fine frolic early on that Saint Nicholas' Eve. There was a bright moon; and their mother, though she believed herself to be without any hope of her husband's improvement, had been made so happy at the prospect of the meester's visit, that she had yielded to the children's entreaties for an hour's skating before bedtime.

Hans was delighted with his new skates, and in his eagerness to show Gretel how perfectly they "worked" did many things upon the ice, that caused the little maid to clasp her hands in solemn admiration. They were not alone, though they seemed quite unheeded by the various groups assembled upon the canal.

The two Van Holps, and Carl Schummel were there, testing their fleetness to the utmost. Out of four trials Peter van Holp had beaten three times. Consequently Carl, never very amiable, was in anything but a good humor. He had relieved himself by taunting young Schimmelpenninck who, being smaller than the others, kept meekly near them, without feeling exactly like one of the party; but now a new thought seized Carl, or rather he seized the new thought and made an onset upon his friends.

"I say, boys, let's put a stop to those young rag-pickers from the idiot's cottage joining the race. Hilda must be crazy to think of it. Katrinka Flack and Rychie Korbes are furious at the very idea of racing with the girl; and for my part, I don't blame them. As for the boy, if we've a spark of manhood in us we will scorn the very idea of – "

"Certainly we will!" interposed Peter van Holp, purposely mistaking Carl's meaning, "who doubts it? No fellow with a spark of manhood in him would refuse to let in two good skaters just because they were poor!"

Carl wheeled about savagely:

"Not so fast, master! and I'd thank you not to put words in other people's mouths. You'd best not try it again."

"Ha! ha!" laughed little Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck, delighted at the prospect of a fight, and sure that, if it should come to blows, his favorite Peter could beat a dozen excitable fellows like Carl.

Something in Peter's eye made Carl glad to turn to a weaker offender. He wheeled furiously upon Voost.

"What are you shrieking about, you little weasel! You skinny herring you, you little monkey with a long name for a tail!"

Half a dozen bystanders and by-skaters set up an applauding shout at this brave witticism; and Carl, feeling that he had fairly vanquished his foes, was restored to partial good humor. He, however, prudently resolved to defer plotting against Hans and Gretel until some time when Peter should not be present.

Just then, his friend, Jacob Poot, was seen approaching. They could not distinguish his features at first; but as he was the stoutest boy in the neighborhood there could be no mistaking his form.

"Hola! here comes Fatty!" exclaimed Carl, "and there's some one with him, a slender fellow, a stranger."

"Ha! ha! that's like good bacon," cried Ludwig; "a streak of lean and a streak of fat."

"That's Jacob's English cousin," put in Master Voost, delighted at being able to give the information, "that's his English cousin, and, oh! he's got such a funny little name, – Ben Dobbs. He's going to stay with him until after the grand race."

All this time the boys had been spinning, turning, "rolling" and doing other feats upon their skates, in a quiet way, as they talked; but now they stood still, bracing themselves against the frosty air as Jacob Poot and his friend drew near.

"This is my cousin, boys," said Jacob, rather out of breath – "Benjamin Dobbs. He's a John Bull and he's going to be in the race."

All crowded, boy-fashion, about the newcomers. Benjamin soon made up his mind that the Hollanders, notwithstanding their queer gibberish, were a fine set of fellows.

If the truth must be told, Jacob had announced his cousin as "Penchamin Dopps," and called him a "Shon Pull," but as I translate every word of the conversation of our young friends, it is no more than fair to mend their little attempts at English. Master Dobbs felt at first decidedly awkward among his cousin's friends. Though most of them had studied English and French, they were shy about attempting to speak either, and he made very funny blunders when he tried to converse in Dutch. He had learned that *vrouw* means wife, and *ja*, yes; and *spoorweg*, railway; *kanaals*, canals; *stoomboot*, steamboat; *ophaalbruggen*, drawbridges; *buiten platen*, country seats; *mynheer*, "mister;" *tweegevegt*, duel or *two-fights*; *koper*, copper; *zadel*, saddle; but he could not make a sentence out of these, nor use the long list of phrases he had learned in his "Dutch dialogues." The topics of the latter were fine, but were never alluded to by the boys. Like the poor fellow who had learned in Ollendorf to ask in faultless German "have you seen my grandmother's red cow?" and when he reached Germany discovered that he had no occasion to inquire after that interesting animal, Ben found that his book-Dutch did not avail him as much as he had hoped. He acquired a hearty contempt for Jan van Gorp, a Hollander who wrote a book in Latin to prove that Adam and Eve spoke Dutch; and he smiled a knowing smile when his uncle Poot assured him that Dutch "had great likeness mit Zinglish but it vash much petter languish, much petter."

However, the fun of skating glides over all barriers of speech. Through this, Ben soon felt that he knew the boys well; and when Jacob (with a sprinkling of French and English for Ben's benefit) told of a grand project they had planned, his cousin could now and then put in a "ja," or a nod, in quite a familiar way.

The project *was* a grand one, and there was to be a fine opportunity for carrying it out; for, besides the allotted holiday of the Festival of Saint Nicholas, four extra days were to be allowed for a general cleaning of the schoolhouse.

Jacob and Ben had obtained permission to go on a long skating journey – no less a one than from Broek to the Hague, the capital of Holland, a distance of nearly fifty miles!<sup>15</sup>

"And now, boys," added Jacob, when he had told the plan, "who will go with us?"

"I will! I will!" cried the boys eagerly.

"And so will I!" ventured little Voostenwalbert.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jacob, holding his fat sides, and shaking his puffy cheeks, "*you* go? Such a little fellow as you? Why, youngster, you haven't left off your pads yet!"

Now in Holland very young children wear a thin, padded cushion around their heads, surmounted with a framework of whalebone and ribbon, to protect them in case of a fall; and it is the dividing line between babyhood and childhood when they leave it off. Voost had arrived at this dignity several years before; consequently Jacob's insult was rather too great for endurance.

"Look out what you say!" he squeaked. "Lucky for you when you can leave off *your* pads – you're padded all over!"

"Ha! ha!" roared all the boys except Master Dobbs, who could not understand. "Ha! ha!" – and the good-natured Jacob laughed more than any.

"It ish my fat – yaw – he say I bees pad mit fat!" he explained to Ben.

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout this narrative distances are given according to our standard, the English statute mile of 5280 ft. The Dutch mile is more than four times as long as ours.

So a vote was passed unanimously in favor of allowing the now popular Voost to join the party, if his parents would consent.

"Good-night!" sang out the happy youngster, skating homeward with all his might.

"Good-night!"

"We can stop at Haarlem, Jacob, and show your cousin the big organ," said Peter van Holp, eagerly, "and at Leyden, too, where there's no end to the sights; and spend a day and night at the Hague, for my married sister, who lives there, will be delighted to see us; and the next morning we can start for home."

"All right!" responded Jacob, who was not much of a talker.

Ludwig had been regarding his brother with enthusiastic admiration.

"Hurrah for you, Pete! It takes you to make plans! Mother'll be as full of it as we are when we tell her we can take her love direct to sister Van Gend. My! but it's cold," he added, "cold enough to take a fellow's head off his shoulders. We'd better go home."

"What if it is cold, old Tender-skin?" cried Carl, who was busily practicing a step which he called the "double edge." "Great skating we should have by this time, if it was as warm as it was last December. Don't you know if it wasn't an extra cold winter, and an early one into the bargain, we couldn't go?"

"I know it's an extra cold night anyhow," said Ludwig. "Whew! I'm going home!"

Peter van Holp took out a bulgy gold watch, and holding it toward the moonlight as well as his benumbed fingers would permit, called out:

"Hollo! it's nearly eight o'clock! Saint Nicholas is about by this time, and I, for one, want to see the little ones stare. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" cried one and all, – and off they started, shouting, singing, and laughing as they flew along.

Where were Gretel and Hans?

Ah! how suddenly joy sometimes comes to an end!

They had skated about an hour, keeping aloof from the others – quite contented with each other, and Gretel had exclaimed, "Ah, Hans, how beautiful! how fine! to think that we both have skates! I tell you the stork brought us good luck!" – when they heard something!

It was a scream – a very faint scream! No one else upon the canal observed it, but Hans knew its meaning too well. Gretel saw him turn white in the moonlight as he hastily tore off his skates.

"The father!" he cried, "he has frightened our mother!" and Gretel ran after him toward the house as rapidly as she could.

## IX

# THE FESTIVAL OF SAINT NICHOLAS

We all know how, before the Christmas tree began to flourish in the home-life of our country, a certain "right jolly old elf," with "eight tiny reindeer," used to drive his sleigh-load of toys up to our housetops, and then bound down the chimney to fill the stockings so hopefully hung by the fireplace. His friends called him Santa Claus, and those who were most intimate ventured to say "Old Nick." It was said that he originally came from Holland. Doubtless he did; but, if so, he certainly like many other foreigners changed his ways very much after landing upon our shores. In Holland, Saint Nicholas is a veritable saint, and often appears in full costume, with his embroidered robes, glittering with gems and gold, his mitre, his crozier and his jeweled gloves. *Here* Santa Claus comes rollicking along, on the twenty-fifth of December, our holy Christmas morn. But in Holland, Saint Nicholas visits earth on the fifth, a time especially appropriated to him. Early on the morning of the sixth, he distributes his candies, toys and treasures, then vanishes for a year.

Christmas day is devoted by the Hollanders to church rites and pleasant family visiting. It is on Saint Nicholas' Eve that their young people become half wild with joy and expectation. To some of them it is a sorry time, for the saint is very candid, and if any of them have been bad during the past year, he is quite sure to tell them so. Sometimes he carries a birch rod under his arm and advises the parents to give them scoldings in place of confections, and floggings instead of toys.

It was well that the boys hastened to their abodes on that bright winter evening, for in less than an hour afterward, the saint made his appearance in half the homes of Holland. He visited the king's palace and in the selfsame moment appeared in Annie Bouman's comfortable home. Probably one of our silver half dollars would have purchased all that his saintship left at the peasant Bouman's; but a half-dollar's worth will sometimes do for the poor what hundreds of dollars may fail to do for the rich; it makes them happy and grateful, fills them with new peace and love.

Hilda van Gleck's little brothers and sisters were in a high state of excitement that night. They had been admitted into the grand parlor; they were dressed in their best, and had been given two cakes apiece at supper. Hilda was as joyous as any. Why not? Saint Nicholas would never cross a girl of fourteen from his list, just because she was tall and looked almost like a woman. On the contrary, he would probably exert himself to do honor to such an august looking damsel. Who could tell? So she sported and laughed and danced as gaily as the youngest, and was the soul of all their merry games. Father, mother and grandmother looked on approvingly; so did grandfather, before he spread his large red handkerchief over his face, leaving only the top of his skullcap visible. This kerchief was his ensign of sleep.

Earlier in the evening all had joined in the fun. In the general hilarity, there had seemed to be a difference only in bulk between grandfather and the baby. Indeed a shade of solemn expectation now and then flitting across the faces of the younger members, had made them seem rather more thoughtful than their elders.

Now the spirit of fun reigned supreme. The very flames danced and capered in the polished grate. A pair of prim candles that had been staring at the Astral lamp began to wink at other candles far away in the mirrors. There was a long bell-rope suspended from the ceiling in the corner, made of glass beads netted over a cord nearly as thick as your wrist. It generally hung in the shadow and made no sign; but to-night it twinkled from end to end. Its handle of crimson glass sent reckless dashes of red at the papered wall turning its dainty blue stripes into purple. Passers-by halted to catch the merry laughter floating, through curtain and sash, into the street, then skipped on their way with a startled consciousness that the village was wide awake. At last matters grew so uproarious that the grandsire's red kerchief came down from his face with a jerk. What decent old gentleman could

sleep in such a racket! Mynheer Van Gleck regarded his children with astonishment. The baby even showed symptoms of hysterics. It was high time to attend to business. Madame suggested that if they wished to see the good Saint Nicholas, they should sing the same loving invitation that had brought him the year before.

The baby stared and thrust his fist into his mouth as Mynheer put him down upon the floor. Soon he sat erect, and looked with a sweet scowl at the company. With his lace and embroideries, and his crown of blue ribbon and whalebone (for he was not quite past the tumbling age) he looked like the king of the babies.

The other children, each holding a pretty willow basket, formed at once in a ring, and moved slowly around the little fellow, lifting their eyes, meanwhile, for the saint to whom they were about to address themselves was yet in mysterious quarters.

Madame commenced playing softly upon the piano; soon the voices rose – gentle youthful voices – rendered all the sweeter for their tremor:

"Welcome, friend! Saint Nicholas, welcome!  
Bring no rod for us, to-night!  
While our voices bid thee, welcome,  
Every heart with joy is light!

Tell us every fault and failing,  
We will bear thy keenest railing,  
So we sing – so we sing —  
Thou shalt tell us everything!

Welcome, friend! Saint Nicholas, welcome!  
Welcome to this merry band!  
Happy children greet thee, welcome!  
Thou art glad'ning all the land!

Fill each empty hand and basket,  
'Tis thy little ones who ask it,  
So we sing – so we sing —  
Thou wilt bring us everything!"

During the chorus, sundry glances, half in eagerness, half in dread, had been cast toward the polished folding doors. Now a loud knocking was heard. The circle was broken in an instant. Some of the little ones, with a strange mixture of fear and delight, pressed against their mother's knee. Grandfather bent forward, with his chin resting upon his hand; grandmother lifted her spectacles; Mynheer van Gleck, seated by the fireplace, slowly drew his meerschaum from his mouth, while Hilda and the other children settled themselves beside him in an expectant group.

The knocking was heard again.

"Come in," said Madame, softly.

The door slowly opened, and Saint Nicholas, in full array, stood before them. You could have heard a pin drop!

Soon he spoke. What a mysterious majesty in his voice! what kindness in his tones!

"Karel van Gleck, I am pleased to greet thee, and thy honored vrouw Kathrine, and thy son and his good vrouw Annie!

"Children, I greet ye all! Hendrick, Hilda, Broom, Katy, Huygens, and Lucretia! And thy cousins, Wolfert, Diedrich, Mayken, Voost, and Katrina! Good children ye have been, in the main,

since I last accosted ye. Diedrich was rude at the Haarlem fair last Fall, but he has tried to atone for it since. Mayken has failed of late in her lessons, and too many sweets and trifles have gone to her lips, and too few stivers to her charity-box. Diedrich, I trust, will be a polite, manly boy for the future, and Mayken will endeavor to shine as a student. Let her remember, too, that economy and thrift are needed in the foundation of a worthy and generous life. Little Katy has been cruel to the cat more than once. Saint Nicholas can hear the cat cry when its tail is pulled. I will forgive her if she will remember from this hour that the smallest dumb creatures have feeling and must not be abused."

As Katy burst into a frightened cry, the saint graciously remained silent until she was soothed.

"Master Broom," he resumed, "I warn thee that boys who are in the habit of putting snuff upon the foot-stove of the school mistress may one day be discovered and receive a flogging – "

[Master Broom colored and stared in great astonishment.]

"But thou art such an excellent scholar, I shall make thee no further reproof.

"Thou, Hendrick, didst distinguish thyself in the archery match last Spring, and hit the Doel<sup>16</sup>, though the bird was swung before it to unsteady thine eye. I give thee credit for excelling in manly sport and exercise – though I must not unduly countenance thy boat-racing since it leaves thee too little time for thy proper studies.

"Lucretia and Hilda shall have a blessed sleep to-night. The consciousness of kindness to the poor, devotion in their souls, and cheerful, hearty obedience to household rule will render them happy.

"With one and all I avow myself well content. Goodness, industry, benevolence and thrift have prevailed in your midst. Therefore, my blessing upon you – and may the New Year find all treading the paths of obedience, wisdom and love. To-morrow you shall find more substantial proofs that I have been in your midst. Farewell!"

With these words came a great shower of sugar-plums, upon a linen sheet spread out in front of the doors. A general scramble followed. The children fairly tumbled over each other in their eagerness to fill their baskets. Madame cautiously held the baby down in their midst, till the chubby little fists were filled. Then the bravest of the youngsters sprang up and burst open the closed doors – in vain they peered into the mysterious apartment – Saint Nicholas was nowhere to be seen.

Soon there was a general rush to another room, where stood a table, covered with the finest and whitest of linen damask. Each child, in a flutter of excitement, laid a shoe upon it. The door was then carefully locked, and its key hidden in the mother's bedroom. Next followed good-night kisses, a grand family-procession to the upper floor, merry farewells at bedroom doors – and silence, at last, reigned in the Van Gleck mansion.

Early the next morning, the door was solemnly unlocked and opened in the presence of the assembled household, when lo! a sight appeared proving Saint Nicholas to be a saint of his word!

Every shoe was filled to overflowing, and beside each stood many a colored pile. The table was heavy with its load of presents – candies, toys, trinkets, books and other articles. Every one had gifts, from grandfather down to the baby.

Little Katy clapped her hands with glee, and vowed, inwardly, that the cat should never know another moment's grief.

Hendrick capered about the room, flourishing a superb bow and arrows over his head. Hilda laughed with delight as she opened a crimson box and drew forth its glittering contents. The rest chuckled and said "Oh!" and "Ah!" over their treasures, very much as we did here in America on last Christmas day.

With her glittering necklace in her hands, and a pile of books in her arms, Hilda stole toward her parents and held up her beaming face for a kiss. There was such an earnest, tender look in her bright eyes that her mother breathed a blessing as she leaned over her.

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<sup>16</sup> Bull's-Eye.

"I am delighted with this book, thank you, father," she said, touching the top one with her chin. "I shall read it all day long."

"Aye, sweetheart," said Mynheer, "you cannot do better. There is no one like Father Cats. If my daughter learns his 'Moral Emblems' by heart, the mother and I may keep silent. The work you have there is the Emblems – his best work. You will find it enriched with rare engravings from Van de Venne."

[Considering that the back of the book was turned away, Mynheer certainly showed a surprising familiarity with an unopened volume, presented by Saint Nicholas. It was strange, too, that the saint should have found certain things made by the elder children, and had actually placed them upon the table, labeled with parents' and grandparents' names. But all were too much absorbed in happiness to notice slight inconsistencies. Hilda saw, on her father's face, the rapt expression he always wore when he spoke of Jacob Cats, so she put her armful of books upon the table and resigned herself to listen.]

"Old Father Cats, my child, was a great poet, not a writer of plays like the Englishman, Shakespeare, who lived in his time. I have read them in the German and very good they are – very, very good – but not like Father Cats. Cats sees no daggers in the air; he has no white women falling in love with dusky Moors; no young fools sighing to be a lady's glove; no crazy princes mistaking respectable old gentlemen for rats. No, no. He writes only sense. It is great wisdom in little bundles, a bundle for every day of your life. You can guide a state with Cats' poems, and you can put a little baby to sleep with his pretty songs. He was one of the greatest men of Holland. When I take you to the Hague I will show you the Kloosterkerk where he lies buried. *There* was a man for you to study, my sons! he was good through and through. What did he say?

"Oh, Lord, let me obtain this from Thee  
To live with patience, and to die with pleasure!"<sup>17</sup>

"Did patience mean folding his hands? No, he was a lawyer, statesman, ambassador, farmer, philosopher, historian, and poet. He was keeper of the Great Seal of Holland! He was a – Bah! there is too much noise here, I cannot talk" – and Mynheer, looking with astonishment into the bowl of his meerschaum – for it had "gone out" – nodded to his vrouw and left the apartment in great haste.

The fact is, his discourse had been accompanied throughout with a subdued chorus of barking dogs, squeaking cats and bleating lambs, to say nothing of a noisy ivory cricket, that the baby was whirling with infinite delight. At the last, little Huygens taking advantage of the increasing loudness of Mynheer's tones, had ventured a blast on his new trumpet, and Wolfert had hastily attempted an accompaniment on the drum. This had brought matters to a crisis, and well for the little creatures that it had. The saint had left no ticket for them to attend a lecture on Jacob Cats. It was not an appointed part of the ceremonies. Therefore when the youngsters saw that the mother looked neither frightened nor offended, they gathered new courage. The grand chorus rose triumphant, and frolic and joy reigned supreme.

Good Saint Nicholas! For the sake of the young Hollanders, I, for one, am willing to acknowledge him, and defend his reality against all unbelievers.

Carl Schummel was quite busy during that day, assuring little children, confidentially, that not Saint Nicholas, but their own fathers and mothers had produced the oracle and loaded the tables. But we know better than that.

And yet if this were a saint, why did he not visit the Brinker cottage that night? Why was that one home, so dark and sorrowful, passed by?

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<sup>17</sup> O Heere! laat my dat van uwen hand verwerven, Te leven met gedult, en met vermaak te sterven.

## X

### WHAT THE BOYS SAW AND DID IN AMSTERDAM

"Are we all here?" cried Peter, in high glee, as the party assembled upon the canal early the next morning, equipped for their skating journey. "Let me see. As Jacob has made me captain, I must call the roll. Carl Schummel – You here?"

"Ya!"

"Jacob Poot!"

"Ya!"

"Benjamin Dobbs!"

"Ya-a!"

"Lambert van Mounen!"

"Ya!"

"[That's lucky! Couldn't get on without *you*, as you're the only one who can speak English.]

Ludwig van Holp!"

"Ya!"

"Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck!"

No answer.

"Ah! the little rogue has been kept at home. Now, boys, it's just eight o'clock – glorious weather, and the Y is as firm as a rock – we'll be at Amsterdam in thirty minutes. One, Two, Three, start!"

True enough, in less than half an hour they had crossed a dyke of solid masonry, and were in the very heart of the great metropolis of the Netherlands – a walled city of ninety-five islands and nearly two hundred bridges. Although Ben had been there twice since his arrival in Holland, he saw much to excite wonder; but his Dutch comrades, having lived near by all their lives, considered it the most matter-of-course place in the world. Everything interested Ben; the tall houses with their forked chimneys and gable ends facing the street; the merchants' warerooms, perched high up under the roofs of their dwellings, with long, arm-like cranes hoisting and lowering goods past the household windows; the grand public buildings erected upon wooden piles driven deep into the marshy ground; the narrow streets; the canals everywhere crossing the city; the bridges; the locks; the various costumes, and, strangest of all, shops and dwellings crouching close to the fronts of the churches, sending their long, disproportionate chimneys far upward along the sacred walls.

If he looked up, he saw tall, leaning houses, seeming to pierce the sky with their shining roofs; if he looked down, there was the queer street, without crossing or curb – nothing to separate the cobblestone pavement from the foot-path of brick – and if he rested his eyes half-way, he saw complicated little mirrors [*spionnen*] fastened upon the outside of nearly every window, so arranged that the inmates of the houses could observe all that was going on in the street, or inspect whoever might be knocking at the door, without being seen themselves.

Sometimes a dog-cart, heaped with wooden ware, passed him; then a donkey bearing a pair of panniers filled with crockery or glass; then a sled driven over the bare cobblestones (the runners kept greased with a dripping oil rag so that it might run easily); and then, perhaps, a showy, but clumsy family-carriage, drawn by the brownest of Flanders horses, swinging the whitest of snowy tails.

The city was in full festival array. Every shop was gorgeous in honor of Saint Nicholas. Captain Peter was forced, more than once, to order his men away from the tempting show-windows, where everything that is, has been, or can be thought of in the way of toys was displayed. Holland is famous for this branch of manufacture. Every possible thing is copied in miniature for the benefit of the little ones; the intricate mechanical toys that a Dutch youngster tumbles about in stolid unconcern would create a stir in our Patent Office. Ben laughed outright at some of the mimic fishing boats.

They were so heavy and stumpy, so like the queer craft that he had seen about Rotterdam. The tiny trekschuiten, however, only a foot or two long, and fitted out, complete, made his heart ache – he so longed to buy one at once for his little brother in England. He had no money to spare, for with true Dutch prudence, the party had agreed to take with them merely the sum required for each boy's expenses, and to consign the purse to Peter for safekeeping. Consequently Master Ben concluded to devote all his energies to sightseeing, and to think as seldom as possible of little Robby.

He made a hasty call at the Marine school and envied the sailor students their full-rigged brig and their sleeping-berths swung over their trunks or lockers; he peeped into the Jews' Quarter of the city, where the rich diamond cutters and squalid old-clothes men dwell, and wisely resolved to keep away from it; he also enjoyed hasty glimpses of the four principal avenues of Amsterdam – the Prinsen gracht, Keizers gracht, Heeren gracht and Singel. These are semicircular in form, and the first three average more than two miles in length. A canal runs through the centre of each, with a well-paved road on either side, lined with stately buildings. Rows of naked elms, bordering the canal, cast a network of shadows over its frozen surface; and everything was so clean and bright that Ben told Lambert it seemed to him like petrified neatness.

Fortunately the weather was cold enough to put a stop to the usual street-flooding, and window-washing, or our young excursionists might have been drenched more than once. Sweeping, mopping and scrubbing form a passion with Dutch housewives, and to soil their spotless mansions is considered scarcely less than a crime. Everywhere a hearty contempt is felt for those who neglect to rub the soles of their shoes to a polish before crossing the door-sill; and, in certain places, visitors are expected to remove their heavy shoes before entering.

Sir William Temple, in his Memoirs of "What passed in Christendom from 1672 to 1679," tells a story of a pompous magistrate going to visit a lady of Amsterdam. A stout Holland lass opened the door, and told him in a breath that the lady was at home and that his shoes were not very clean. Without another word, she took the astonished man up by both arms, threw him across her back, carried him through two rooms, set him down at the bottom of the stairs, seized a pair of slippers that stood there and put them upon his feet. Then, and not until then, she spoke, telling him that her mistress was on the floor above, and that he might go up.

While Ben was skating, with his friends, upon the crowded canals of the city, he found it difficult to believe that the sleepy Dutchmen he saw around him, smoking their pipes so leisurely, and looking as though their hats might be knocked off their heads without their making any resistance, were capable of those outbreaks that had taken place in Holland – that they were really fellow-countrymen of the brave, devoted heroes of whom he had read in Dutch history.

As his party skimmed lightly along he told Van Mounen of a burial-riot which in 1696 had occurred in that very city, where the women and children turned out, as well as the men, and formed mock funeral processions through the town, to show the burgomasters that certain new regulations, with regard to burying the dead, would not be acceded to – how at last they grew so unmanageable, and threatened so much damage to the city that the burgomasters were glad to recall the offensive law.

"There's the corner," said Jacob, pointing to some large buildings, "where, about fifteen years ago, the great corn-houses sank down in the mud. They were strong affairs, and set up on good piles, but they had over seventy thousand hundred-weight of corn in them; and that was too much."

It was a long story for Jacob to tell and he stopped to rest.

"How do you know there were seventy thousand hundred-weight in them?" asked Carl sharply – "you were in your swaddling clothes then."

"My father knows all about it," was Jacob's suggestive reply. Rousing himself with an effort, he continued – "Ben likes pictures. Show him some."

"All right," said the captain.

"If we had time, Benjamin," said Lambert van Mounen in English, "I should like to take you to the City Hall or *Stadhuis*. There are building-piles for you! It is built on nearly fourteen thousand

of them, driven seventy feet into the ground. But what I wish you to see there is the big picture of Van Speyk blowing up his ship – great picture."

"Van *who*?" asked Ben.

"Van Speyk. Don't you remember? He was in the height of an engagement with the Belgians, and when he found that they had the better of him and would capture his ship, he blew it up, and himself too, rather than yield to the enemy."

"Wasn't that Van Tromp?"

"Oh, no. Van Tromp was another brave fellow. They've a monument to him down at Delft Haven – the place where the Pilgrims took ship for America."

"Well, what about Van Tromp? He was a great Dutch Admiral; wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was in more than thirty sea-fights. He beat the Spanish fleet and an English one, and then fastened a broom to his masthead to show that he had swept the English from the sea. Takes the Dutch to beat, my boy!"

"Hold up!" cried Ben, "broom or no broom, the English conquered him at last. I remember all about it now. He was killed somewhere on the Dutch coast, in an engagement in which the British fleet was victorious. Too bad," he added maliciously, "wasn't it?"

"Ahem! where are we?" exclaimed Lambert changing the subject. "Hollo! the others are way ahead of us – all but Jacob. Whew! how fat he is! He'll break down before we're half-way."

Ben of course enjoyed skating beside Lambert, who though a staunch Hollander, had been educated near London, and could speak English as fluently as Dutch; but he was not sorry when Captain van Holp called out:

"Skates off! There's the Museum!"

It was open, and there was no charge on that day for admission. In they went, shuffling, as boys will, when they have a chance, just to hear the sound of their shoes on the polished floor.

This Museum is in fact a picture gallery where some of the finest works of the Dutch masters are to be seen, beside nearly two hundred portfolios of rare engravings.

Ben noticed, at once, that some of the pictures were hung on panels fastened to the wall with hinges. These could be swung forward like a window-shutter, thus enabling the subject to be seen in the best light. The plan served them well in viewing a small group by Gerard Douw, called the "Evening School," enabling them to observe its exquisite finish and the wonderful way in which the picture seemed to be lit through its own windows. Peter pointed out the beauties of another picture by Douw, called "The Hermit," and he also told them some interesting anecdotes of the artist, who was born at Leyden in 1613.

"Three days painting a broom handle!" echoed Carl in astonishment, while the captain was giving some instances of Douw's extreme slowness of execution.

"Yes, sir; three days. And it is said that he spent five in finishing one hand in a lady's portrait. You see how very bright and minute everything is in this picture. His unfinished works were kept carefully covered, and his painting materials were put away in airtight boxes as soon as he had finished using them for the day. According to all accounts, the studio itself must have been as close as a band-box. The artist always entered it on tiptoe, besides sitting still, before he commenced work, until the slight dust caused by his entrance had settled. I have read somewhere that his paintings are improved by being viewed through a magnifying glass. He strained his eyes so badly with this extra finishing, that he was forced to wear spectacles before he was thirty. At forty he could scarcely see to paint, and he couldn't find a pair of glasses anywhere that would help his sight. At last, a poor old German woman asked him to try hers. They suited him exactly, and enabled him to go on painting as well as ever."

"Humph!" exclaimed Ludwig, indignantly, "that was high! What did *she* do without them, I wonder?"

"Oh," said Peter, laughing, "likely she had another pair. At any rate she insisted upon his taking them. He was so grateful that he painted a picture of the spectacles for her, case and all, and she sold it to a burgomaster for a yearly allowance that made her comfortable for the rest of her days."

"Boys!" called Lambert, in a loud whisper, "come look at this Bear Hunt."

It was a fine painting by Paul Potter, a Dutch artist of the seventeenth century, who produced excellent works before he was sixteen years old. The boys admired it because the subject pleased them. They passed carelessly by the masterpieces of Rembrandt and Van der Helst, and went into raptures over an ugly picture by Van der Venne, representing a sea-fight between the Dutch and English. They also stood spellbound before a painting of two little urchins, one of whom was taking soup and the other eating an egg. The principal merit in this work was that the young egg-eater had kindly slobbered his face with the yolk for their entertainment.

An excellent representation of the "Feast of Saint Nicholas" next had the honor of attracting them.

"Look, Van Mounen," said Ben to Lambert, "could anything be better than this youngster's face? He looks as if he *knows* he deserves a whipping but hopes Saint Nicholas may not have found him out. That's the kind of painting *I* like; something that tells a story."

"Come, boys!" cried the captain, "ten o'clock, time we were off!"

They hastened to the canal.

"Skates on! Are you ready? One, two – hollo! where's Poot?"

Sure enough where *was* Poot?

A square opening had just been cut in the ice not ten yards off. Peter observed it, and without a word skated rapidly toward it.

All the others followed, of course.

Peter looked in. They all looked in; then stared anxiously at each other.

"Poot!" screamed Peter, peering into the hole again. All was still. The black water gave no sign; it was already glazing on top.

Van Mounen turned mysteriously to Ben.

"*Didn't he have a fit once?*"

"My goodness! yes!" answered Ben, in a great fright.

"Then, depend upon it, he's been taken with one in the Museum!"

The boys caught his meaning. Every skate was off in a twinkling. Peter had the presence of mind to scoop up a cap-full of water from the hole, and off they scampered to the rescue.

Alas! They did indeed find poor Jacob in a fit – but it was a fit of sleepiness. There he lay in a recess of the gallery, snoring like a trooper! The chorus of laughter that followed this discovery brought an angry official to the spot.

"What now! None of this racket! Here, you beer-barrel, wake up!" and Master Jacob received a very unceremonious shaking.

As soon as Peter saw that Jacob's condition was not serious, he hastened to the street to empty his unfortunate cap. While he was stuffing his handkerchief to prevent the already frozen crown from touching his head, the rest of the boys came down, dragging the bewildered and indignant Jacob in their midst.

The order to start was again given. Master Poot was wide awake at last. The ice was a little rough and broken just there, but every boy was in high spirits.

"Shall we go on by the canal or the river?" asked Peter.

"Oh, the river, by all means," said Carl. "It will be such fun; they say it is perfect skating all the way, but it's much farther."

Jacob Poot instantly became interested.

"*I* vote for the canal!" he cried.

"Well, the canal it shall be," responded the captain, "if all are agreed."

"Agreed!" they echoed, in rather a disappointed tone – and Captain Peter led the way.  
"All right – come on – we can reach Haarlem in an hour!"

## XI

### BIG MANIAS AND LITTLE ODDITIES

While skating along at full speed, they heard the cars from Amsterdam coming close behind them.

"Hollo!" cried Ludwig, glancing toward the rail-track – "who can't beat a locomotive? Let's give it a race!"

The whistle screamed at the very idea – so did the boys – and at it they went.

For an instant the boys were ahead, hurraing with all their might – only for an instant, but even *that* was something.

This excitement over, they began to travel more leisurely, and indulge in conversation and frolic. Sometimes they stopped to exchange a word with the guards who were stationed at certain distances along the canal. These men, in Winter, attend to keeping the surface free from obstruction and garbage. After a snow-storm they are expected to sweep the feathery covering away before it hardens into a marble pretty to look at but very unwelcome to skaters. Now and then the boys so far forgot their dignity as to clamber among the ice-bound canal-boats crowded together in a widened harbor off the canal, but the watchful guards would soon spy them out and order them down with a growl.

Nothing could be straighter than the canal upon which our party were skating, and nothing straighter than the long rows of willow trees that stood, bare and wispy, along the bank. On the opposite side, lifted high above the surrounding country, lay the carriage road on top of the great dyke built to keep the Haarlem Lake within bounds; stretching out far in the distance until it became lost in a point, was the glassy canal with its many skaters, its brown-winged ice-boats, its push-chairs and its queer little sleds, light as cork, flying over the ice by means of iron-pronged sticks in the hands of the riders. Ben was in ecstasy with the scene.

Ludwig van Holp had been thinking how strange it was that the English boy should know so much of Holland. According to Lambert's account he knew more about it than the Dutch did. This did not quite please our young Hollander. Suddenly he thought of something that he believed would make the "Shon Pull" open his eyes; he drew near Lambert with a triumphant:

"Tell him about the tulips!"

Ben caught the word "*tulpen*."

"Oh! yes," said he eagerly, in English, "the Tulip Mania – are you speaking of that? I have often heard it mentioned, but know very little about it. It reached its height in Amsterdam, didn't it?"

Ludwig moaned; the words were hard to understand, but there was no mistaking the enlightened expression on Ben's face; Lambert, happily, was quite unconscious of his young countryman's distress as he replied:

"Yes, here and in Haarlem, principally; but the excitement ran high all over Holland, and in England too for that matter."

"Hardly in England,<sup>18</sup> I think," said Ben, "but I am not sure, as I was not there at the time."

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<sup>18</sup> Although the Tulip Mania did not prevail in England as in Holland, the flower soon became an object of speculation and brought very large prices. In 1636, Tulips were publicly sold on the Exchange of London. Even as late as 1800, a common price was fifteen guineas for one bulb. Ben did not know that in his own day a single Tulip plant, called the "Fanny Kemble" had been sold in London for more than 70 guineas. Mr. Mackay in his "Memoirs of Popular Delusions" tells a funny story of an English botanist who happened to see a tulip bulb lying in the conservatory of a wealthy Dutchman. Ignorant of its value, he took out his penknife and, cutting the bulb in two, became very much interested in his investigations. Suddenly the owner appeared, and pouncing furiously upon him, asked him if he knew what he was doing. "Peeling a most extraordinary onion," replied the philosopher. "Hundert tousant tuyvel!" shouted the Dutchman, "it's an Admiral Vander Eyk!" "Thank you," replied the traveler, immediately writing the name in his note book; "pray are these very common in your country?" "Death and the tuyvel!" screamed the Dutchman, "come before the Syndic and you shall

"Ha! ha! that's true, unless you are over two hundred years old. Well, I tell you, sir, there was never anything like it before nor since. Why, persons were so crazy after tulip bulbs in those days, that they paid their weight in gold for them."

"What, the weight of a man?" cried Ben, showing such astonishment in his eyes, that Ludwig fairly capered.

"No, no, the weight of a *bulb*. The first tulip was sent here from Constantinople about the year 1560. It was so much admired that the rich people of Amsterdam sent to Turkey for more. From that time they grew to be the rage, and it lasted for years. Single roots brought from one to four thousand florins; and one bulb, the *Semper Augustus*, brought fifty-five hundred."

"That's more than four hundred guineas of our money," interposed Ben.

"Yes, and I know I'm right, for I read it in a translation from Beckman, only day before yesterday. Well, sir, it was great. Every one speculated in Tulips, even the barge-men and rag-women, and chimney-sweeps. The richest merchants were not ashamed to share the excitement. People bought bulbs and sold them again at a tremendous profit without ever seeing them. It grew into a kind of gambling. Some became rich by it in a few days, and some lost everything they had. Land, houses, cattle and even clothing went for Tulips when people had no ready money. Ladies sold their jewels and finery to enable them to join in the fun. Nothing else was thought of. At last the States-general interfered. People began to see what geese they were making of themselves, and down went the price of Tulips. Old tulip debts couldn't be collected. Creditors went to law, and the law turned its back upon them; debts made in gambling were not binding, it said. Then, there was a time! Thousands of rich speculators reduced to beggary in an hour. As old Beckman says, 'the bubble was burst at last.'"

"Yes, and a big bubble it was," said Ben, who had listened with great interest. "By the way, did you know that the name Tulip came from a Turkish word, signifying turban?"

"I had forgotten that," answered Lambert, "but it's a capital idea. Just fancy a party of Turks in full head-gear, squatted upon a lawn – perfect tulip bed! Ha! ha! capital idea!"

["There," groaned Ludwig to himself, "he's been telling Lambert something wonderful about Tulips – I knew it!"]

"The fact is," continued Lambert, "you can conjure up quite a human picture out of a tulip bed in bloom, especially when it is nodding and bobbing in the wind. Did you ever notice it?"

"Not I. It strikes me, Van Mounen, that you Hollanders are prodigiously fond of the flower to this day."

"Certainly. You can't have a garden without them, prettiest flower that grows, *I* think. My uncle has a magnificent bed of the finest varieties at his summer-house on the other side of Amsterdam."

"I thought your uncle lived in the city?"

"So he does; but his summer-house, or pavilion, is a few miles off. He has another one built out over the river. We passed near it when we entered the city. Everybody in Amsterdam has a pavilion somewhere, if he can."

"Do they ever live there?" asked Ben.

"Bless you, no! They are small affairs, suitable only to spend a few hours in on Summer afternoons. There are some beautiful ones on the southern end of the Haarlem Lake – now that they've commenced to drain it into polders, it will spoil *that* fun. By the way, we've passed some red-roofed ones since we left home. You noticed them I suppose with their little bridges, and ponds and gardens, and their mottoes over the door-way."

Ben nodded.

"They make but little show, now," continued Lambert, "but in warm weather they are delightful. After the willows sprout, uncle goes to his summer-house every afternoon. He dozes and smokes;

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see!" In spite of his struggles the poor investigator, followed by an indignant mob, was taken through the streets to a magistrate. Soon he learned to his dismay that he had destroyed a bulb worth 4,000 florins (\$1,600). He was lodged in prison until securities could be procured for the payment of the sum.

aunt knits, with her feet perched upon a foot-stove, never mind how hot the day; my cousin Rika and the other girls fish in the lake from the windows, or chat with their friends rowing by; and the youngsters tumble about, or hang upon the little bridges over the ditch. Then they have coffee and cakes; besides a great bunch of water-lilies on the table – it's very fine, I can tell you; only (between ourselves) though I was born here, I shall never fancy the odor of stagnant water that hangs about most of the summer-houses. Nearly every one you see is built over a ditch. Probably I feel it more, from having lived so long in England."

"Perhaps I shall notice it, too," said Ben, "if a thaw comes. This early winter has covered up the fragrant waters for my benefit – much obliged to it. Holland without this glorious skating wouldn't be the same thing to me at all."

"How very different you are from the Poots!" exclaimed Lambert, who had been listening in a sort of brown study, "and yet you are cousins – I cannot understand it."

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