

**JOHANN
WOLFGANG
GOETHE**

EGMONT

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Egmont

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Egmont

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In 1775, when Goethe was twenty-six, and before he went to Weimar, he began to write "Egmont" After working on it at intervals for twelve years, he finished it at Rome in 1787.

The scene of the drama is laid in the Low Countries at the beginning of the revolt against Spain. In the fifteenth century Philip of Burgundy had usurped dominion over several of the provinces of the Netherlands, and through him they had passed into the power of his descendant, the Emperor Charles V. This powerful ruler abolished the constitutional rights of the provinces, and introduced the Inquisition in order to stamp out Protestantism. Prominent among his officers was the Fleming, Lamoral, Count Egmont, upon whom he lavished honors and opportunities of service – opportunities so well improved that, by his victories over the French at Saint-Quentin (1557) and Gravelines (1558) Egmont made a reputation as one of the most brilliant generals in Europe, and became the idol of his countrymen. When in 1559 a new Regent of the Netherlands was to be created, the people hoped that Philip II, who had succeeded Charles, would choose Egmont; but instead he appointed his half-sister Margaret, Duchess of Parma. Under the new Regent the persecution of the Protestants was rigorously pressed, and in 1565 Egmont, though a Catholic, was sent to Madrid to plead for clemency. He was received by the King with every appearance of cordiality, but shortly after his return home the Duke of Alva was sent to the Netherlands with instructions to put down with an iron hand all resistance to his master's will. How terribly he carried out his orders has been told by Prescott and Motley. Egmont was an early victim, but his martyrdom, with that of Count Horn, and later the assassination of William of Orange, roused the Netherlands to a resistance that ended only with the complete throwing off of the Spanish yoke.

Such in outline is the background chosen by Goethe for his tragedy. With many changes in detail, the dramatist has still preserved a picture of a historical situation of absorbing interest, and has painted a group of admirable portraits. The drama has long been a favorite on the stage, where it enjoys the advantage of Beethoven's musical setting.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Margaret of Parma, (Daughter of Charles V., and Regent of the Netherlands)
Count Egmont, (Prince of Gaure)
The Duke of Alva
William of Orange
Ferdinand, (his natural Son)
Machiavel, in the service of the Regent
Richard, (Egmont's Private Secretary)
Silva, Gomez, (in the service of Alva)
Clara, (the Beloved of Egmont)
Her Mother
Brackenburg, (a Citizen's Son), and Vansen, (a Clerk)
Soest, (a Shopkeeper), Jetter, (a Tailor), A Carpenter, A Soapboiler
(Citizens of Brussels)

Buyck, (a Hollander), a Soldier under Egmont
Ruysum, (a Frieslander), an invalid Soldier, and deaf
People, Attendants, Guards, &c.
The Scene is laid in Brussels.

ACT I

SCENE I. – Soldiers and Citizens (with cross-bows)

Jetter (steps forward, and bends his cross-bow). Soest, Buyck, Ruysum

Soest. Come, shoot away, and have done with it! You won't beat me! Three black rings, you never made such a shot in all your life. And so I'm master for this year.

Jetter. Master and king to boot; who envies you? You'll have to pay double reckoning; 'tis only fair you should pay for your dexterity.

Buyck. Jetter, I'll buy your shot, share the prize, and treat the company. I have already been here so long, and am a debtor for so many civilities. If I miss, then it shall be as if you had shot.

Soest. I ought to have a voice, for in fact I am the loser. No matter! Come, Buyck, shoot away.

Buyck (shoots). Now, corporal, look out! – One! Two! Three! Four!

Soest. Four rings! So be it!

All. Hurrah! Long live the King! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Buyck. Thanks, sirs, master even were too much! Thanks for the honour.

Jetter. You have no one to thank but yourself. Ruysum. Let me tell you —

Soest. How now, grey-beard?

Ruysum. Let me tell you! – He shoots like his master, he shoots like Egmont.

Buyck. Compared with him I am only a bungler. He aims with the rifle as no one else does. Not only when he's lucky or in the vein; no! he levels, and the bull's-eye is pierced. I have learned from him. He were indeed a blockhead, who could serve under him and learn nothing! – But, sirs, let us not forget! A king maintains his followers; and so, wine here, at the king's charge!

Jetter. We have agreed among ourselves that each —

Buyck. I am a foreigner, and a king, and care not a jot for your laws and customs.

Jetter. Why, you are worse than the Spaniard, who has not yet ventured to meddle with them.

Ruysum. What does he say?

Soest (loud to Ruysum). He wants to treat us; he will not hear of our clubbing together, the king paying only a double share.

Ruysum. Let him! under protest, however! 'Tis his master's fashion, too, to be munificent, and to let the money flow in a good cause. (Wine is brought.)

All. Here's to his Majesty! Hurrah!

Jetter (to Buyck). That means your Majesty, of course, Buyck. My hearty thanks, if it be so.

Soest. Assuredly! A Netherlander does not find it easy to drink the health of his Spanish majesty from his heart.

Ruysum. Who?

Soest (aloud). Philip the Second, King of Spain.

Ruysum. Our most gracious king and master! Long life to him.

Soest. Did you not like his father, Charles the Fifth, better?

Ruysum. God bless him! He was a king indeed! His hand reached over the whole earth, and he was all in all. Yet, when he met you, he'd greet you just as one neighbour greets another, – and if you were frightened, he knew so well how to put you at your ease – ay, you understand me – he walked out, rode out, just as it came into his head, with very few followers. We all wept when he resigned the government here to his son. You understand me – he is another sort of man, he's more majestic.

Jetter. When he was here, he never appeared in public, except in pomp and royal state. He speaks little, they say.

Soest. He is no king for us Netherlanders. Our princes must be joyous and free like ourselves, must live and let live. We will neither be despised nor oppressed, good-natured fools though we be.

Jetter. The king, methinks, were a gracious sovereign enough, if he had only better counsellors.

Soest. No, no! He has no affection for us Netherlanders; he has no heart for the people; he loves us not; how then can we love him? Why is everybody so fond of Count Egmont? Why are we all so devoted to him? Why, because one can read in his face that he loves us; because joyousness, open-heartedness, and good-nature, speak in his eyes; because he possesses nothing that he does not share with him who needs it, ay, and with him who needs it not. Long live Count Egmont! Buyck, it is for you to give the first toast; give us your master's health.

Buyck. With all my heart; here's to Count Egmont! Hurrah!

Ruysum Conqueror of St. Quintin.

Buyck. The hero of Gravelines.

All. Hurrah!

Ruysum. St. Quintin was my last battle. I was hardly able to crawl along, and could with difficulty carry my heavy rifle. I managed, notwithstanding, to singe the skin of the French once more, and, as a parting gift, received a grazing shot in my right leg.

Buyck. Gravelines! Ha, my friends, we had sharp work of it there! The victory was all our own. Did not those French dogs carry fire and desolation into the very heart of Flanders? We gave it them, however! The old hard-listed veterans held out bravely for a while, but we pushed on, fired away, and laid about us, till they made wry faces, and their lines gave way. Then Egmont's horse was shot under him; and for a long time we fought pell-mell, man to man, horse to horse, troop to troop, on the broad, flat, sea-sand. Suddenly, as if from heaven, down came the cannon shot from the mouth of the river, bang, bang, right into the midst of the French. These were English, who, under Admiral Malin, happened to be sailing past from Dunkirk. They did not help us much, 'tis true; they could only approach with their smallest vessels, and that not near enough; – besides, their shot fell sometimes among our troops. It did some good, however! It broke the French lines, and raised our courage. Away it went. Helter-skelter! topsy-turvy! all struck dead, or forced into the water; the fellows were drowned the moment they tasted the water, while we Hollanders dashed in after them. Being amphibious, we were as much in our element as frogs, and hacked away at the enemy, and shot them down as if they had been ducks. The few who struggled through, were struck dead in their flight by the peasant women, armed with hoes and pitchforks. His Gallic majesty was compelled at once to hold out his paw and make peace. And that peace you owe to us, to the great Egmont.

All. Hurrah, for the great Egmont! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Jetter. Had they but appointed him Regent, instead of Margaret of Parma!

Soest. Not so! Truth is truth! I'll not hear Margaret abused. Now it is my turn. Long live our gracious lady!

All. Long life to her!

Soest. Truly, there are excellent women in that family. Long live the Regent!

Jetter. Prudent is she, and moderate in all she does; if she would only not hold so fast and stiffly with the priests. It is partly her fault, too, that we have the fourteen new mitres in the land. Of what use are they, I should like to know? Why, that foreigners may be shoved into the good benefices, where formerly abbots were chosen out of the chapters! And we're to believe it's for the sake of religion. We know better. Three bishops were enough for us; things went on decently and reputably. Now each must busy himself as if he were needed; and this gives rise every moment to dissensions and ill-will. And the more you agitate the matter, so much the worse it grows. (They drink.)

Soest. But it was the will of the king; she cannot alter it, one way or another.

Jetter. Then we may not even sing the new psalms; but ribald songs, as many as we please. And why? There is heresy in them, they say, and heaven knows what. I have sung some of them, however; they are new, to be sure, but I see no harm in them.

Buyck. Ask their leave, forsooth! In our province, we sing just what we please. That's because Count Egmont is our stadtholder, who does not trouble himself about such matters. In Ghent, Ypres,

and throughout the whole of Flanders, anybody sings them that chooses. (Aloud to Ruysum.) There is nothing more harmless than a spiritual song – Is there, father?

Ruysum. What, indeed! It is a godly work, and truly edifying.

Jetter. They say, however, that they are not of the right sort, not of their sort, and, since it is dangerous, we had better leave them alone. The officers of the Inquisition are always lurking and spying about; many an honest fellow has already fallen into their clutches. They had not gone so far as to meddle with conscience! If they will not allow me to do what I like, they might at least let me think and sing as I please.

Soest. The Inquisition won't do here. We are not made like the Spaniards, to let our consciences be tyrannized over. The nobles must look to it, and clip its wings betimes.

Jetter. It is a great bore. Whenever it comes into their worships' heads to break into my house, and I am sitting there at my work, humming a French psalm, thinking nothing about it, neither good nor bad – singing it just because it is in my throat; – forthwith I'm a heretic, and am clapped into prison. Or if I am passing through the country, and stand near a crowd listening to a new preacher, one of those who have come from Germany; instantly I'm called a rebel, and am in danger of losing my head! Have you ever heard one of these preachers?

Soest. Brave fellows! Not long ago, I heard one of them preach in a field, before thousands and thousands of people. A different sort of dish he gave us from that of our humdrum preachers, who, from the pulpit, choke their hearers with scraps of Latin. He spoke from his heart; told us how we had till now been led by the nose, how we had been kept in darkness, and how we might procure more light; – ay, and he proved it all out of the Bible.

Jetter. There may be something in it. I always said as much, and have often pondered over the matter. It has long been running in my head.

Buyck. All the people run after them.

Soest. No wonder, since they hear both what is good and what is new.

Jetter. And what is it all about? Surely they might let every one preach after his own fashion.

Buyck. Come, sirs! While you are talking, you; forget the wine and the Prince of Orange.

Jetter. We must not forget him. He's a very wall of defence. In thinking of him, one fancies, that if one could only hide behind him, the devil himself could not get at one. Here's to William of Orange! Hurrah!

All. Hurrah! Hurrah!

Soest. Now, grey-beard, let's have your toast.

Ruysum. Here's to old soldiers! To all soldiers! War for ever!

Buyck. Bravo, old fellow. Here's to all soldiers. War for ever!

Jetter. War! War! Do ye know what ye are shouting about? That it should slip glibly from your tongue is natural enough; but what wretched work it is for us, I have not words to tell you. To be stunned the whole year round by the beating of the drum; to hear of nothing except how one troop marched here, and another there; how they came over this height, and halted near that mill; how many were left dead on this field, and how many on that; how they press forward, and how one wins, and another loses, without being able to comprehend what they are fighting about; how a town is taken, how the citizens are put to the sword, and how it fares with the poor women and innocent children. This is a grief and a trouble, and then one thinks every moment, "Here they come! It will be our turn next."

Soest. Therefore every citizen must be practised in the use of arms.

Jetter. Fine talking, indeed, for him who has a wife and children. And yet I would rather hear of soldiers than see them.

Buyck. I might take offence at that.

Jetter. It was not intended for you, countryman. When we got rid of the Spanish garrison, we breathed freely again.

Soest. Faith! They pressed on you heavily enough.

Jetter. Mind your own business.

Soest. They came to sharp quarters with you.

Jetter. Hold your tongue.

Soest. They drove him out of kitchen, cellar, chamber – and bed. (They laugh.)

Jetter. You are a blockhead.

Buyck. Peace, sirs! Must the soldier cry peace? Since you will not hear anything about us, let us have a toast of your own – a citizen's toast.

Jetter. We're all ready for that! Safety and peace!

Soest. Order and freedom!

Buyck. Bravo! That will content us all.

(They ring their glasses together, and joyously repeat the words, but in such a manner that each utters a different sound, and it becomes a kind of chant. The old man listens, and at length joins in.)

All. Safety and peace! Order and freedom!

SCENE II. – Palace of the Regent

Margaret of Parma (in a hunting dress). Courtiers, Pages, Servants

Regent. Put off the hunt, I shall not ride to-day. Bid Machiavel attend me.

[Exeunt all but the Regent.

The thought of these terrible events leaves me no repose! Nothing can amuse, nothing divert my mind. These images, these cares are always before me. The king will now say that these are the natural fruits of my kindness, of my clemency; yet my conscience assures me that I have adopted the wisest, the most prudent course. Ought I sooner to have kindled, and spread abroad these flames with the breath of wrath? My hope was to keep them in, to let them smoulder in their own ashes. Yes, my inward conviction, and my knowledge of the circumstances, justify my conduct in my own eyes; but in what light will it appear to my brother! For, can it be denied that the insolence of these foreign teachers waxes daily more audacious? They have desecrated our sanctuaries, unsettled the dull minds of the people, and conjured up amongst them a spirit of delusion. Impure spirits have mingled among the insurgents, horrible deeds have been perpetrated, which to think of makes one shudder, and of these a circumstantial account must be transmitted instantly to court. Prompt and minute must be my communication, lest rumour outrun my messenger, and the king suspect that some particulars have been purposely withheld. I can see no means, severe or mild, by which to stem the evil. Oh, what are we great ones on the waves of humanity? We think to control them, and are ourselves driven to and fro, hither and thither.

[Enter Machiavel.

Regent. Are the despatches to the king prepared?

Machiavel. In an hour they will be ready for your signature.

Regent. Have you made the report sufficiently circumstantial?

Machiavel. Full and circumstantial, as the king loves to have it. I relate how the rage of the iconoclasts first broke out at St. Omer. How a furious multitude, with staves, hatchets, hammers, ladders, and cords, accompanied by a few armed men, first assailed the chapels, churches, and convents, drove out the worshippers, forced the barred gates, threw everything into confusion, tore down the altars, destroyed the statues of the saints, defaced the pictures, and dashed to atoms, and trampled under foot, whatever came in their way that was consecrated and holy. How the crowd increased as it advanced, and how the inhabitants of Ypres opened their gates at its approach. How, with incredible rapidity, they demolished the cathedral, and burned the library of the bishop. How a vast multitude, possessed by the like frenzy, dispersed themselves through Menin, Comines, Verviers, Lille, nowhere encountered opposition; and how, through almost the whole of Flanders, in a single moment, the monstrous conspiracy declared itself, and was accomplished.

Regent. Alas! Your recital rends my heart anew; and the fear that the evil will wax greater and greater, adds to my grief. Tell me your thoughts, Machiavel!

Machiavel. Pardon me, your Highness, my thoughts will appear to you but as idle fancies; and though you always seem well satisfied with my services, you have seldom felt inclined to follow my advice. How often have you said in jest: "You see too far, Machiavel! You should be an historian; he who acts, must provide for the exigence of the hour." And yet have I not predicted this terrible history? Have I not foreseen it all?

Regent. I too foresee many things, without being able to avert them.

Machiavel. In one word, then: – you will not be able to suppress the new faith. Let it be recognized, separate its votaries from the true believers, give them churches of their own, include them within the pale of social order, subject them to the restraints of law, – do this, and you will at once tranquillize the insurgents. All other measures will prove abortive, and you will depopulate the country.

Regent. Have you forgotten with what aversion the mere suggestion of toleration was rejected by my brother? Know you not, how in every letter he urgently recommends to me the maintenance of the true faith? That he will not hear of tranquility and order being restored at the expense of religion? Even in the provinces, does he not maintain spies, unknown to us, in order to ascertain who inclines to the new doctrines? Has he not, to our astonishment, named to us this or that individual residing in our very neighbourhood, who, without its being known, was obnoxious to the charge of heresy? Does he not enjoin harshness and severity? and am I to be lenient? Am I to recommend for his adoption measures of indulgence and toleration? Should I not thus lose all credit with him, and at once forfeit his confidence?

Machiavel. I know it. The king commands and puts you in full possession of his intentions. You are to restore tranquillity and peace by measures which cannot fail still more to embitter men's minds, and which must inevitably kindle the flames of war from one extremity of the country to the other. Consider well what you are doing. The principal merchants are infected – nobles, citizens, soldiers. What avails persisting in our opinion, when everything is changing around us? Oh, that some good genius would suggest to Philip that it better becomes a monarch to govern burghers of two different creeds, than to excite them to mutual destruction.

Regent. Never let me hear such words again. Full well I know that the policy of statesmen rarely maintains truth and fidelity; that it excludes from the heart candour, charity, toleration. In secular affairs, this is, alas! only too true; but shall we trifle with God as we do with each other? Shall we be indifferent to our established faith, for the sake of which so many have sacrificed their lives? Shall we abandon it to these far-fetched, uncertain, and self-contradicting heresies?

Machiavel. Think not the worse of me for what I have uttered.

Regent. I know you and your fidelity. I know too that a man may be both honest and sagacious, and yet miss the best and nearest way to the salvation of his soul. There are others, Machiavel, men whom I esteem, yet whom I needs must blame.

Machiavel. To whom do you refer?

Regent. I must confess that Egmont caused me to-day deep and heart-felt annoyance.

Machiavel. How so?

Regent. By his accustomed demeanour, his usual indifference and levity. I received the fatal tidings as I was leaving church, attended by him and several others. I did not restrain my anguish, I broke forth into lamentations, loud and deep, and turning to him, exclaimed, "See what is going on in your province! Do you suffer it, Count, you, in whom the king confided so implicitly?"

Machiavel. And what was his reply?

Regent. As if it were a mere trifle, an affair of no moment, he answered: "Were the Netherlanders but satisfied as to their constitution! The rest would soon follow."

Machiavel. There was, perhaps, more truth than discretion or piety in his words. How can we hope to acquire and to maintain the confidence of the Netherlander, when he sees that we are more interested in appropriating his possessions, than in promoting his welfare, temporal or spiritual? Does the number of souls saved by the new bishops exceed that of the fat benefices they have swallowed? And are they not for the most part foreigners? As yet, the office of stadtholder has been held by Netherlanders; but do not the Spaniards betray their great and irresistible desire to possess themselves of these places? Will not people prefer being governed by their own countrymen, and according to their ancient customs, rather than by foreigners, who, from their first entrance into the land, endeavour to enrich themselves at the general expense, who measure everything by a foreign standard, and who exercise their authority without cordiality or sympathy?

Regent. You take part with our opponents?

Machiavel. Assuredly not in my heart. Would that with my understanding I could be wholly on our side!

Regent. If such your disposition, it were better I should resign the regency to them; for both Egmont and Orange entertained great hopes of occupying this position. Then they were adversaries, now they are leagued against me, and have become friends – inseparable friends.

Machiavel. A dangerous pair.

Regent. To speak candidly, I fear Orange. – I fear for Egmont. – Orange meditates some dangerous scheme, his thoughts are far-reaching, he is reserved, appears to accede to everything, never contradicts, and while maintaining the show of reverence, with clear foresight accomplishes his own designs.

Machiavel. Egmont, on the contrary, advances with a bold step, as if the world were all his own.

Regent. He bears his head as proudly as if the hand of majesty were not suspended over him.

Machiavel. The eyes of all the people are fixed upon him, and he is the idol of their hearts.

Regent. He has never assumed the least disguise, and carries himself as if no one had a right to call him to account. He still bears the name of Egmont. Count Egmont is the title by which he loves to hear himself addressed, as though he would fain be reminded that his ancestors were masters of Guelderland. Why does he not assume his proper title, – Prince of Gaure? What object has he in view? Would he again revive extinguished claims?

Machiavel. I hold him for a faithful servant of the king.

Regent. Were he so inclined, what important service could he not render to the government? Whereas, now, without benefiting himself, he has caused us unspeakable vexation. His banquets and entertainment have done more to unite the nobles and to knit them together than the most dangerous secret associations. With his toasts, his guests have drunk in a permanent intoxication, a giddy frenzy, that never subsides. How often have his facetious jests stirred up the minds of the populace? and what an excitement was produced among the mob by the new liveries, and the extravagant devices of his followers!

Machiavel. I am convinced he had no design.

Regent. Be that as it may, it is bad enough. As I said before, he injures us without benefiting himself. He treats as a jest matters of serious import; and, not to appear negligent and remiss, we are forced to treat seriously what he intended as a jest. Thus one urges on the other; and what we are endeavouring to avert is actually brought to pass. He is more dangerous than the acknowledged head of a conspiracy; and I am much mistaken if it is not all remembered against him at court. I cannot deny that scarcely a day passes in which he does not wound me – deeply wound me.

Machiavel. He appears to me to act on all occasions, according to the dictates of his conscience.

Regent. His conscience has a convenient mirror. His demeanour is often offensive. He carries himself as if he felt he were the master here, and were withheld by courtesy alone from making us feel his supremacy; as if he would not exactly drive us out of the country; there'll be no need for that.

Machiavel. I entreat you, put not too harsh a construction upon his frank and joyous temper, which treats lightly matters of serious moment. You but injure yourself and him.

Regent. I interpret nothing. I speak only of inevitable consequences, and I know him. His patent of nobility and the Golden Fleece upon his breast strengthen his confidence, his audacity. Both can protect him against any sudden outbreak of royal displeasure. Consider the matter closely, and he is alone responsible for the whole mischief that has broken out in Flanders. From the first, he connived at the proceedings of the foreign teachers, avoided stringent measures, and perhaps rejoiced in secret that they gave us so much to do. Let me alone; on this occasion, I will give utterance to that which weighs upon my heart; I will not shoot my arrow in vain. I know where he is vulnerable. For he is vulnerable.

Machiavel. Have you summoned the council? Will Orange attend?

Regent. I have sent for him to Antwerp. I will lay upon their shoulders the burden of responsibility; they shall either strenuously co-operate with me in quelling the evil, or at once declare themselves rebels. Let the letters be completed without delay, and bring them for my signature. Then hasten to despatch the trusty Vasca to Madrid, he is faithful and indefatigable; let him use all diligence, that he may not be anticipated by common report, that my brother, may receive the intelligence first through him. I will myself speak with him ere he departs.

Machiavel. Your orders shall be promptly and punctually obeyed.

SCENE III. – Citizen's House

Clara, her Mother, Brackenburg

Clara. Will you not hold the yarn for me, Brackenburg?

Brackenburg. I entreat you, excuse me, Clara.

Clara. What ails you? Why refuse me this trifling service?

Brackenburg. When I hold the yarn, I stand as it were spell-bound before you, and cannot escape your eyes.

Clara. Nonsense! Come and hold!

Mother (knitting in her arm-chair). Give us a song! You used to be merry once, and I had always something to laugh at.

Brackenburg. Once!

Clara. Well, let us sing.

Brackenburg. As you please.

Clara. Merrily, then, and sing away! 'Tis a soldier's song, my favourite.

(She winds yarn, and sings with Brackenburg.)

The drum is resounding,
And shrill the fife plays;
My love, for the battle,
His brave troop arrays;
He lifts his lance high,
And the people he sways.
My blood it is boiling!
My heart throbs pit-pat!
Oh, had I a jacket,
With hose and with hat!
How boldly I'd follow,
And march through the gate;
Through all the wide province
I'd follow him straight.
The foe yield, we capture

Or shoot them! Ah, me!
What heart-thrilling rapture
A soldier to be!

(During the song, Brackenburg has frequently looked at Clara; at length his voice falters, his eyes fill with tears, he lets the skein fall, and goes to the window. Clara finishes the song alone, her Mother motions to her, half displeased, she rises, advances a few steps towards him, turns back, as if irresolute, and again sits down.)

Mother. What is going on in the street, Brackenburg? I hear soldiers marching.

Brackenburg. It is the Regent's body-guard.

Clara. At this hour? What can it mean? (She rises and joins Brackenburg at the window.) That is not the daily guard; it is more numerous! almost all the troops! Oh, Brackenburg, go! Learn what it means. It must be something unusual. Go, good Brackenburg, do me this favour.

Brackenburg. I am going! I will return immediately. (He offers his hand to Clara, and she gives him hers.)

[Exit Brackenburg.]

Mother. Thou sendest him away so soon!

Clara. I am curious; and, besides – do not be angry, Mother – his presence pains me. I never know how I ought to behave towards him. I have done him a wrong, and it goes to my very heart to see how deeply he feels it. Well, it can't be helped now!

Mother. He is such a true-hearted fellow!

Clara. I cannot help it, I must treat him kindly. Often without a thought, I return the gentle, loving pressure of his hand. I reproach myself that I am deceiving him, that I am nourishing in his heart a vain hope. I am in a sad plight! God knows, I do not willingly deceive him. I do not wish him to hope, yet I cannot let him despair!

Mother. That is not as it should be.

Clara. I liked him once, and in my soul I like him still I could have married him; yet I believe I was never really in love with him.

Mother. Thou wouldst always have been happy with him.

Clara. I should have been provided for, and have led a quiet life.

Mother. And through thy fault it has all been trifled away.

Clara, I am in a strange position. When I think how it has come to pass, I know it, indeed, and I know it not. But I have only to look upon Egmont, and I understand it all; ay, and stranger things would seem natural then. Oh, what a man he is! All the provinces worship him. And in his arms, should I not be the happiest creature in the world?

Mother. And how will it be in the future?

Clara. I only ask, does he love me? – does he love me? – as if there were any doubt about it.

Mother. One has nothing but anxiety of heart with one's children. Always care and sorrow, whatever may be the end of it! It cannot come to good! Thou hast made thyself wretched! Thou hast made thy Mother wretched too.

Clara (quietly). Yet thou didst allow it in the beginning.

Mother. Alas! I was too indulgent; I am always too indulgent.

Clara. When Egmont rode by, and I ran to the window, did you chide me then? Did you not come to the window yourself? When he looked up, smiled, nodded, and greeted me, was it displeasing to you? Did you not feel yourself honoured in your daughter?

Mother. Go on with your reproaches.

Clara (with emotion). Then, when he passed more frequently, and we felt sure that it was on my account that he came this way, did you not remark it yourself with secret joy? Did you call me away when I stood behind the window-pane and awaited him?

Mother. Could I imagine that it would go so far?

Clara (with faltering voice, and repressed tears). And then, one evening, when, enveloped in his mantle, he surprised us as we sat at our lamp, who busied herself in receiving him, while I remained, lost in astonishment, as if fastened to my chair?

Mother. Could I imagine that the prudent Clara would so soon be carried away by this unhappy love? I must now endure that my daughter —

Clara (bursting into tears). Mother! How can you? You take pleasure in tormenting me!

Mother (weeping). Ay, weep away! Make me yet more wretched by thy grief. Is it not misery enough that my only daughter is a castaway?

Clara (rising, and speaking coldly). A castaway! The beloved of Egmont a castaway! — What princess would not envy the poor Clara a place in his heart? Oh, Mother, — my own Mother, you were not wont to speak thus! Dear Mother, be kind! — Let the people think, let the neighbours whisper what they like — this chamber, this lowly house is a paradise, since Egmont's love dwelt here.

Mother. One cannot help liking him, that is true. He is always so kind, frank, and open-hearted.

Clara. There is not a drop of false blood in his veins. And then, Mother, he is indeed the great Egmont; yet, when he comes to me, how tender he is, how kind! How he tries to conceal from me his rank, his bravery! How anxious he is about me! so entirely the man, the friend, the lover.

Mother. DO you expect him to-day?

Clara. Have you not seen how often I go to the window? Have you not noticed how I listen to every noise at the door? — Though I know that he will not come before night, yet, from the time when I rise in the morning, I keep expecting him every moment. Were I but a boy, to follow him always, to the court and everywhere! Could I but carry his colours in the field — !

Mother. You were always such a lively, restless creature; even as a little child, now wild, now thoughtful. Will you not dress yourself a little better?

Clara. Perhaps, Mother, if I want something to do. — Yesterday, some of his people went by, singing songs in honour. At least his name was in the songs! The rest I could not understand. My heart leaped up into my throat, — I would fain have called them back if I had not felt ashamed.

Mother. Take care! Thy impetuous nature will ruin all. Thou wilt betray thyself before the people; as, not long ago, at thy cousin's, when thou roundest out the woodcut with the description, and didst exclaim, with a cry: "Count Egmont!" — I grew as red as fire.

Clara. Could I help crying out? It was the battle of Gravelines, and I found in the picture the letter C. and then looked for it in the description below. There it stood, "Count Egmont, with his horse shot under him." I shuddered, and afterwards I could not help laughing at the woodcut figure of Egmont, as tall as the neighbouring tower of Gravelines, and the English ships at the side. — When I remember how I used to conceive of a battle, and what an idea I had, as a girl, of Count Egmont; when I listened to descriptions of him, and of all the other earls and princes; — and think how it is with me now!

[Enter Brackenburg.

Clara. Well, what is going on?

Brackenburg. Nothing certain is known. It is rumoured that an insurrection has lately broken out in Flanders; the Regent is afraid of its spreading here. The castle is strongly garrisoned, the burghers are crowding to the gates, and the streets are thronged with people. I will hasten at once to my old father. (As if about to go.)

Clara. Shall we see you to-morrow? I must change my dress a little. I am expecting my cousin, and I look too untidy. Come, Mother, help me a moment. Take the book, Brackenburg, and bring me such another story.

Mother. Farewell.

Brackenburg (extending his hand). Your hand.

Clara (refusing hers). When you come next.

[Exeunt Mother and DAUGHTER.

Brackenburg (alone). I had resolved to go away again at once; and yet, when she takes me at my word, and lets me leave her, I feel as if I could go mad, – Wretched man! Does the fate of thy fatherland, does the growing disturbance fail to move thee? – Are countryman and Spaniard the same to thee? and carest thou not who rules, and who is in the right? I was a different sort of fellow as a schoolboy! – Then, when an exercise in oratory was given; "Brutus' Speech for Liberty," for instance, Fritz was ever the first, and the rector would say: "If it were only spoken more deliberately, the words not all huddled together." – Then my blood boiled, and longed for action. – Now I drag along, bound by the eyes of a maiden. I cannot leave her! yet she, alas, cannot love me! – ah – no – she – she cannot have entirely rejected me – not entirely – yet half love is no love! – I will endure it no longer! – Can it be true what a friend lately whispered in my ear, that she secretly admits a man into the house by night, when she always sends me away modestly before evening? No, it cannot be true! It is a lie! A base, slanderous lie! Clara is as innocent as I am wretched. – She has rejected me, has thrust me from her heart – and shall I live on thus? I cannot, I will not endure it. Already my native land is convulsed by internal strife, and do I perish abjectly amid the tumult? I will not endure it! When the trumpet sounds, when a shot falls, it thrills through my bone and marrow! But, alas, it does not rouse me! It does not summon me to join the onslaught, to rescue, to dare. – Wretched, degrading position! Better end it at once! Not long ago, I threw myself into the water; I sank – but nature in her agony was too strong for me; I felt that I could swim, and saved myself against my will. Could I but forget the time when she loved me, seemed to love me! – Why has this happiness penetrated my very bone and marrow? Why have these hopes, while disclosing to me a distant paradise, consumed all the enjoyment of life? – And that first, that only kiss! – Here (laying his hand upon the table), here we were alone, – she had always been kind and friendly towards me, – then she seemed to soften, – she looked at me, – my brain reeled, – I felt her lips on mine, – and – and now? – Die, wretch! Why dost thou hesitate? (He draws a phial from his pocket.) Thou healing poison, it shall not have been in vain that I stole thee from my brother's medicine chest! From this anxious fear, this dizziness, this death-agony, thou shalt deliver me at once.

ACT II

SCENE I. – Square in Brussels

Jetter and a Master Carpenter (meeting)

Carpenter. Did I not tell you beforehand? Eight days ago, at the guild, I said there would be serious disturbances?

Jetter. Is it, then, true that they have plundered the churches in Flanders?

Carpenter. They have utterly destroyed both churches and chapels. They have left nothing standing but the four bare walls. The lowest rabble! And this it is that damages our good cause. We ought rather to have laid our claims before the Regent, formally and decidedly, and then have stood by them. If we speak now, if we assemble now, it will be said that we are joining the insurgents.

Jetter. Ay, so every one thinks at first. Why should you thrust your nose into the mess? The neck is closely connected with it.

Carpenter. I am always uneasy when tumults arise among the mob – among people who have nothing to lose. They use as a pretext that to which we also must appeal, and plunge the country in misery.

[Enter Soest.

Soest. Good day, sirs! What news? Is it true that the image-breakers are coming straight in this direction?

Carpenter. Here they shall touch nothing, at any rate.

Soest. A soldier came into my shop just now to buy tobacco; I questioned him about the matter. The Regent, though so brave and prudent a lady, has for once lost her presence of mind. Things must be bad indeed when she thus takes refuge behind her guards. The castle is strongly garrisoned. It is even rumoured that she means to fly from the town.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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