

## Chapter 3

### The Pupil of John de Witt

Whilst the clamour of the crowd in the square of Buytenhof, which grew more and more menacing against the two brothers, determined John de Witt to hasten the departure of his brother Cornelius, a deputation of burghers had gone to the Town-hall to demand the withdrawal of Tilly's horse.

It was not far from the Buytenhof to Hoogstraet (High Street); and a stranger, who since the beginning of this scene had watched all its incidents with intense interest, was seen to wend his way with, or rather in the wake of, the others towards the Town-hall, to hear as soon as possible the current news of the hour.

This stranger was a very young man, of scarcely twenty-two or three, with nothing about him that bespoke any great energy. He evidently had his good reasons for not making himself known, as he hid his face in a handkerchief of fine Frisian linen, with which he incessantly wiped his brow or his burning lips.

With an eye keen as that of a bird of prey, -- with a long aquiline nose, a finely cut mouth, which he generally kept open, or rather which was gaping like the edges of a wound, -- this man would have presented to Lavater, if Lavater had lived at that time, a subject for physiognomical observations which at the first blush would not have been very favourable to the person in question.

"What difference is there between the figure of the conqueror and that of the pirate?" said the ancients. The difference only between the eagle and the vulture, -- serenity or restlessness.

And indeed the sallow physiognomy, the thin and sickly body, and the prowling ways of the stranger, were the very type of a suspecting master, or

an unquiet thief; and a police officer would certainly have decided in favour of the latter supposition, on account of the great care which the mysterious person evidently took to hide himself.

He was plainly dressed, and apparently unarmed; his arm was lean but wiry, and his hands dry, but of an aristocratic whiteness and delicacy, and he leaned on the shoulder of an officer, who, with his hand on his sword, had watched the scenes in the Buytenhof with eager curiosity, very natural in a military man, until his companion drew him away with him.

On arriving at the square of the Hoogstraet, the man with the sallow face pushed the other behind an open shutter, from which corner he himself began to survey the balcony of the Town-hall.

At the savage yells of the mob, the window of the Town-hall opened, and a man came forth to address the people.

"Who is that on the balcony?" asked the young man, glancing at the orator.

"It is the Deputy Bowelt," replied the officer.

"What sort of a man is he? Do you know anything of him?"

"An honest man; at least I believe so, Monseigneur."

Hearing this character given of Bowelt, the young man showed signs of such a strange disappointment and evident dissatisfaction that the officer could not but remark it, and therefore added, --

"At least people say so, Monseigneur. I cannot say anything about it myself, as I have no personal acquaintance with Mynheer Bowelt."

"An honest man," repeated he who was addressed as Monseigneur; "do you mean to say that he is an honest man (brave homme), or a brave one (homme brave)?"

"Ah, Monseigneur must excuse me; I would not presume to draw such a fine distinction in the case of a man whom, I assure your Highness once more, I know only by sight."

"If this Bowelt is an honest man," his Highness continued, "he will give to the demand of these furibund petitioners a very queer reception."

The nervous quiver of his hand, which moved on the shoulder of his companion as the fingers of a player on the keys of a harpsichord, betrayed his burning impatience, so ill concealed at certain times, and particularly at that moment, under the icy and sombre expression of his face.

The chief of the deputation of the burghers was then heard addressing an interpellation to Mynheer Bowelt, whom he requested to let them know where the other deputies, his colleagues, were.

"Gentlemen," Bowelt repeated for the second time, "I assure you that in this moment I am here alone with Mynheer d'Asperen, and I cannot take any resolution on my own responsibility."

"The order! we want the order!" cried several thousand voices.

Mynheer Bowelt wished to speak, but his words were not heard, and he was only seen moving his arms in all sorts of gestures, which plainly showed that he felt his position to be desperate. When, at last, he saw that he could not make himself heard, he turned round towards the open window, and called Mynheer d'Asperen.

The latter gentleman now made his appearance on the balcony, where he was saluted with shouts even more energetic than those with which, ten minutes before, his colleague had been received.

This did not prevent him from undertaking the difficult task of haranguing the mob; but the mob preferred forcing the guard of the States -- which, however, offered no resistance to the sovereign people -- to listening to the speech of Mynheer d'Asperen.

"Now, then," the young man coolly remarked, whilst the crowd was rushing into the principal gate of the Town-hall, "it seems the question will be discussed indoors, Captain. Come along, and let us hear the debate."

"Oh, Monseigneur! Monseigneur! take care!"

"Of what?"

"Among these deputies there are many who have had dealings with you, and it would be sufficient, that one of them should recognize your Highness."

"Yes, that I might be charged with having been the instigator of all this work, indeed, you are right," said the young man, blushing for a moment from regret of having betrayed so much eagerness. "From this place we shall see them return with or without the order for the withdrawal of the dragoons, then we may judge which is greater, Mynheer Bowelt's honesty or his courage."

"But," replied the officer, looking with astonishment at the personage whom he addressed as Monseigneur, "but your Highness surely does not suppose for one instant that the deputies will order Tilly's horse to quit their post?"

"Why not?" the young man quietly retorted.

"Because doing so would simply be signing the death warrant of Cornelius and John de Witt."

"We shall see," his Highness replied, with the most perfect coolness; "God alone knows what is going on within the hearts of men."

The officer looked askance at the impassible figure of his companion, and grew pale: he was an honest man as well as a brave one.

From the spot where they stood, his Highness and his attendant heard the tumult and the heavy tramp of the crowd on the staircase of the Town-hall. The noise thereupon sounded through the windows of the hall, on the balcony of which Mynheers Bowelt and D'Asperen had presented themselves. These two gentlemen had retired into the building, very likely from fear of being forced over the balustrade by the pressure of the crowd.

After this, fluctuating shadows in tumultuous confusion were seen flitting to and fro across the windows: the council hall was filling.

Suddenly the noise subsided, and as suddenly again it rose with redoubled intensity, and at last reached such a pitch that the old building shook to the very roof.

At length, the living stream poured back through the galleries and stairs to the arched gateway, from which it was seen issuing like waters from a spout.

At the head of the first group, man was flying rather than running, his face hideously distorted with satanic glee: this man was the surgeon Tyckelaer.

"We have it! we have it!" he cried, brandishing a paper in the air.

"They have got the order!" muttered the officer in amazement.

"Well, then," his Highness quietly remarked, "now I know what to believe with regard to Mynheer Bowelt's honesty and courage: he has neither the one nor the other."

Then, looking with a steady glance after the crowd which was rushing along before him, he continued, --

"Let us now go to the Buytenhof, Captain; I expect we shall see a very strange sight there."

The officer bowed, and, without making any reply, followed in the steps of his master.

There was an immense crowd in the square and about the neighbourhood of the prison. But the dragoons of Tilly still kept it in check with the same success and with the same firmness.

It was not long before the Count heard the increasing din of the approaching multitude, the first ranks of which rushed on with the rapidity of a cataract.

At the same time he observed the paper, which was waving above the surface of clenched fists and glittering arms.

"Halloa!" he said, rising in his stirrups, and touching his lieutenant with the knob of his sword; "I really believe those rascals have got the order."

"Dastardly ruffians they are," cried the lieutenant.

It was indeed the order, which the burgher guard received with a roar of triumph. They immediately sallied forth, with lowered arms and fierce shouts, to meet Count Tilly's dragoons.

But the Count was not the man to allow them to approach within an inconvenient distance.

"Stop!" he cried, "stop, and keep off from my horse, or I shall give the word of command to advance."

"Here is the order!" a hundred insolent voices answered at once.

He took it in amazement, cast a rapid glance on it, and said quite aloud, --

"Those who have signed this order are the real murderers of Cornelius de Witt. I would rather have my two hands cut off than have written one single letter of this infamous order."

And, pushing back with the hilt of his sword the man who wanted to take it from him, he added, --

"Wait a minute, papers like this are of importance, and are to be kept."

Saying this, he folded up the document, and carefully put it in the pocket of his coat.

Then, turning round towards his troop, he gave the word of command, --

"Tilly's dragoons, wheel to the right!"

After this, he added, in an undertone, yet loud enough for his words to be not altogether lost to those about him, --

"And now, ye butchers, do your work!"

A savage yell, in which all the keen hatred and ferocious triumph rife in the precincts of the prison simultaneously burst forth, and accompanied the departure of the dragoons, as they were quietly filing off.

The Count tarried behind, facing to the last the infuriated populace, which advanced at the same rate as the Count retired.

John de Witt, therefore, had by no means exaggerated the danger, when, assisting his brother in getting up, he hurried his departure. Cornelius, leaning on the arm of the Ex-Grand Pensionary, descended the stairs which led to the courtyard. At the bottom of the staircase he found little Rosa, trembling all over.

"Oh, Mynheer John," she said, "what a misfortune!"

"What is it, my child?" asked De Witt.

"They say that they are gone to the Town-hall to fetch the order for Tilly's horse to withdraw."

"You do not say so!" replied John. "Indeed, my dear child, if the dragoons are off, we shall be in a very sad plight."

"I have some advice to give you," Rosa said, trembling even more violently than before.



"Well, let us hear what you have to say, my child. Why should not God speak by your mouth?"

"Now, then, Mynheer John, if I were in your place, I should not go out through the main street."

"And why so, as the dragoons of Tilly are still at their post?"

"Yes, but their order, as long as it is not revoked, enjoins them to stop before the prison."

"Undoubtedly."

"Have you got an order for them to accompany you out of the town?"

"We have not?"

"Well, then, in the very moment when you have passed the ranks of the dragoons you will fall into the hands of the people."

"But the burgher guard?"

"Alas! the burgher guard are the most enraged of all."

"What are we to do, then?"

"If I were in your place, Mynheer John," the young girl timidly continued, "I should leave by the postern, which leads into a deserted by-lane, whilst all

the people are waiting in the High Street to see you come out by the principal entrance. From there I should try to reach the gate by which you intend to leave the town."

"But my brother is not able to walk," said John.

"I shall try," Cornelius said, with an expression of most sublime fortitude.

"But have you not got your carriage?" asked the girl.

"The carriage is down near the great entrance."

"Not so," she replied. "I considered your coachman to be a faithful man, and I told him to wait for you at the postern."

The two brothers looked first at each other, and then at Rosa, with a glance full of the most tender gratitude.

"The question is now," said the Grand Pensionary, "whether Gryphus will open this door for us."

"Indeed, he will do no such thing," said Rosa.

"Well, and how then?"

"I have foreseen his refusal, and just now whilst he was talking from the window of the porter's lodge with a dragoon, I took away the key from his bunch."

"And you have got it?"

"Here it is, Mynheer John."

"My child," said Cornelius, "I have nothing to give you in exchange for the service you are rendering us but the Bible which you will find in my room; it is the last gift of an honest man; I hope it will bring you good luck."

"I thank you, Master Cornelius, it shall never leave me," replied Rosa.

And then, with a sigh, she said to herself, "What a pity that I do not know how to read!"

"The shouts and cries are growing louder and louder," said John; "there is not a moment to be lost."

"Come along, gentlemen," said the girl, who now led the two brothers through an inner lobby to the back of the prison. Guided by her, they descended a staircase of about a dozen steps; traversed a small courtyard, which was surrounded by castellated walls; and, the arched door having been opened for them by Rosa, they emerged into a lonely street where their carriage was ready to receive them.

"Quick, quick, my masters! do you hear them?" cried the coachman, in a deadly fright.

Yet, after having made Cornelius get into the carriage first, the Grand Pensionary turned round towards the girl, to whom he said, --

"Good-bye, my child! words could never express our gratitude. God will reward you for having saved the lives of two men."

Rosa took the hand which John de Witt proffered to her, and kissed it with every show of respect.

"Go! for Heaven's sake, go!" she said; "it seems they are going to force the gate."

John de Witt hastily got in, sat himself down by the side of his brother, and, fastening the apron of the carriage, called out to the coachman, --

"To the Tol-Hek!"

The Tol-Hek was the iron gate leading to the harbor of Schevening, in which a small vessel was waiting for the two brothers.

The carriage drove off with the fugitives at the full speed of a pair of spirited Flemish horses. Rosa followed them with her eyes until they turned the corner of the street, upon which, closing the door after her, she went back and threw the key into a cell.

The noise which had made Rosa suppose that the people were forcing the prison door was indeed owing to the mob battering against it after the square had been left by the military.

Solid as the gate was, and although Gryphus, to do him justice, stoutly enough refused to open it, yet evidently it could not resist much longer, and the jailer, growing very pale, put to himself the question whether it would not be better to open the door than to allow it to be forced, when he felt some one gently pulling his coat.

He turned round and saw Rosa.

"Do you hear these madmen?" he said.

"I hear them so well, my father, that in your place ---- "

"You would open the door?"

"No, I should allow it to be forced."

"But they will kill me!"

"Yes, if they see you."

"How shall they not see me?"

"Hide yourself."

"Where?"

"In the secret dungeon."

"But you, my child?"

"I shall get into it with you. We shall lock the door and when they have left the prison, we shall again come forth from our hiding place."

"Zounds, you are right, there!" cried Gryphus; "it's surprising how much sense there is in such a little head!"

Then, as the gate began to give way amidst the triumphant shouts of the mob, she opened a little trap-door, and said, --

"Come along, come along, father."

"But our prisoners?"

"God will watch over them, and I shall watch over you."

Gryphus followed his daughter, and the trap-door closed over his head, just as the broken gate gave admittance to the populace.

The dungeon where Rosa had induced her father to hide himself, and where for the present we must leave the two, offered to them a perfectly safe retreat, being known only to those in power, who used to place there important prisoners of state, to guard against a rescue or a revolt.

The people rushed into the prison, with the cry --

"Death to the traitors! To the gallows with Cornelius de Witt! Death! death!"