

## Chapter 16

### Master and Pupil

The worthy Master Gryphus, as the reader may have seen, was far from sharing the kindly feeling of his daughter for the godson of Cornelius de Witt.

There being only five prisoners at Loewestein, the post of turnkey was not a very onerous one, but rather a sort of sinecure, given after a long period of service.

But the worthy jailer, in his zeal, had magnified with all the power of his imagination the importance of his office. To him Cornelius had swelled to the gigantic proportions of a criminal of the first order. He looked upon him, therefore, as the most dangerous of all his prisoners. He watched all his steps, and always spoke to him with an angry countenance; punishing him for what he called his dreadful rebellion against such a clement prince as the Stadtholder.

Three times a day he entered Van Baerle's cell, expecting to find him trespassing; but Cornelius had ceased to correspond, since his correspondent was at hand. It is even probable that, if Cornelius had obtained his full liberty, with permission to go wherever he liked, the prison, with Rosa and his bulbs, would have appeared to him preferable to any other habitation in the world without Rosa and his bulbs.

Rosa, in fact, had promised to come and see him every evening, and from the first evening she had kept her word.

On the following evening she went up as before, with the same mysteriousness and the same precaution. Only she had this time resolved within herself not to approach too near the grating. In order, however, to engage Van Baerle in a conversation from the very first which would

seriously occupy his attention, she tendered to him through the grating the three bulbs, which were still wrapped up in the same paper.

But to the great astonishment of Rosa, Van Baerle pushed back her white hand with the tips of his fingers.

The young man had been considering about the matter.

"Listen to me," he said. "I think we should risk too much by embarking our whole fortune in one ship. Only think, my dear Rosa, that the question is to carry out an enterprise which until now has been considered impossible, namely, that of making the great black tulip flower. Let us, therefore, take every possible precaution, so that in case of a failure we may not have anything to reproach ourselves with. I will now tell you the way I have traced out for us."

Rosa was all attention to what he would say, much more on account of the importance which the unfortunate tulip-fancier attached to it, than that she felt interested in the matter herself.

"I will explain to you, Rosa," he said. "I dare say you have in this fortress a small garden, or some courtyard, or, if not that, at least some terrace."

"We have a very fine garden," said Rosa, "it runs along the edge of the Waal, and is full of fine old trees."

"Could you bring me some soil from the garden, that I may judge?"

"I will do so to-morrow."

"Take some from a sunny spot, and some from a shady, so that I may judge of its properties in a dry and in a moist state."

"Be assured I shall."

"After having chosen the soil, and, if it be necessary, modified it, we will divide our three bulbs; you will take one and plant it, on the day that I will tell you, in the soil chosen by me. It is sure to flower, if you tend it according to my directions."

"I will not lose sight of it for a minute."

"You will give me another, which I will try to grow here in my cell, and which will help me to beguile those long weary hours when I cannot see you. I confess to you I have very little hope for the latter one, and I look beforehand on this unfortunate bulb as sacrificed to my selfishness. However, the sun sometimes visits me. I will, besides, try to convert everything into an artificial help, even the heat and the ashes of my pipe, and lastly, we, or rather you, will keep in reserve the third sucker as our last resource, in case our first two experiments should prove a failure. In this manner, my dear Rosa, it is impossible that we should not succeed in gaining the hundred thousand guilders for your marriage portion; and how dearly shall we enjoy that supreme happiness of seeing our work brought to a successful issue!"

"I know it all now," said Rosa. "I will bring you the soil to-morrow, and you will choose it for your bulb and for mine. As to that in which yours is to grow, I shall have several journeys to convey it to you, as I cannot bring much at a time."

"There is no hurry for it, dear Rosa; our tulips need not be put into the ground for a month at least. So you see we have plenty of time before us. Only I hope that, in planting your bulb, you will strictly follow all my instructions."

"I promise you I will."

"And when you have once planted it, you will communicate to me all the circumstances which may interest our nursling; such as change of weather, footprints on the walks, or footprints in the borders. You will listen at night whether our garden is not resorted to by cats. A couple of those untoward animals laid waste two of my borders at Dort."

"I will listen."

"On moonlight nights have you ever looked at your garden, my dear child?"

"The window of my sleeping-room overlooks it."

"Well, on moonlight nights you will observe whether any rats come out from the holes in the wall. The rats are most mischievous by their gnawing everything; and I have heard unfortunate tulip-growers complain most bitterly of Noah for having put a couple of rats in the ark."

"I will observe, and if there are cats or rats ---- "

"You will apprise me of it, -- that's right. And, moreover," Van Baerle, having become mistrustful in his captivity, continued, "there is an animal much more to be feared than even the cat or the rat."

"What animal?"

"Man. You comprehend, my dear Rosa, a man may steal a guilder, and risk the prison for such a trifle, and, consequently, it is much more likely that some one might steal a hundred thousand guilders."

"No one ever enters the garden but myself."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Rosa. All the joy of my life has still to come from you."

And as the lips of Van Baerle approached the grating with the same ardor as the day before, and as, moreover, the hour for retiring had struck, Rosa drew back her head, and stretched out her hand.

In this pretty little hand, of which the coquettish damsel was particularly proud, was the bulb.

Cornelius kissed most tenderly the tips of her fingers. Did he do so because the hand kept one of the bulbs of the great black tulip, or because this hand was Rosa's? We shall leave this point to the decision of wiser heads than ours.

Rosa withdrew with the other two suckers, pressing them to her heart.

Did she press them to her heart because they were the bulbs of the great black tulip, or because she had them from Cornelius?

This point, we believe, might be more readily decided than the other.

However that may have been, from that moment life became sweet, and again full of interest to the prisoner.

Rosa, as we have seen, had returned to him one of the suckers.

Every evening she brought to him, handful by handful, a quantity of soil from that part of the garden which he had found to be the best, and which, indeed, was excellent.

A large jug, which Cornelius had skilfully broken, did service as a flower-pot. He half filled it, and mixed the earth of the garden with a small portion of dried river mud, a mixture which formed an excellent soil.

Then, at the beginning of April, he planted his first sucker in that jug.

Not a day passed on which Rosa did not come to have her chat with Cornelius.

The tulips, concerning whose cultivation Rosa was taught all the mysteries of the art, formed the principal topic of the conversation; but, interesting as the subject was, people cannot always talk about tulips.

They therefore began to chat also about other things, and the tulip-fancier found out to his great astonishment what a vast range of subjects a conversation may comprise.

Only Rosa had made it a habit to keep her pretty face invariably six inches distant from the grating, having perhaps become distrustful of herself.

There was one thing especially which gave Cornelius almost as much anxiety as his bulbs -- a subject to which he always returned -- the dependence of Rosa on her father.

Indeed, Van Baerle's happiness depended on the whim of this man. He might one day find Loewestein dull, or the air of the place unhealthy, or the gin bad, and leave the fortress, and take his daughter with him, when Cornelius and Rosa would again be separated.

"Of what use would the carrier pigeons then be?" said Cornelius to Rosa, "as you, my dear girl, would not be able to read what I should write to you, nor to write to me your thoughts in return."

"Well," answered Rosa, who in her heart was as much afraid of a separation as Cornelius himself, "we have one hour every evening, let us make good use of it."

"I don't think we make such a bad use of it as it is."

"Let us employ it even better," said Rosa, smiling. "Teach me to read and write. I shall make the best of your lessons, believe me; and, in this way, we shall never be separated any more, except by our own will."

"Oh, then, we have an eternity before us," said Cornelius.

Rosa smiled, and quietly shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you remain for ever in prison?" she said, "and after having granted you your life, will not his Highness also grant you your liberty? And will you not then recover your fortune, and be a rich man, and then, when you are driving in your own coach, riding your own horse, will you still look at poor Rosa, the daughter of a jailer, scarcely better than a hangman?"

Cornelius tried to contradict her, and certainly he would have done so with all his heart, and with all the sincerity of a soul full of love.

She, however, smilingly interrupted him, saying, "How is your tulip going on?"

To speak to Cornelius of his tulip was an expedient resorted to by her to make him forget everything, even Rosa herself.

"Very well, indeed," he said, "the coat is growing black, the sprouting has commenced, the veins of the bulb are swelling, in eight days hence, and perhaps sooner, we may distinguish the first buds of the leaves protruding. And yours Rosa?"

"Oh, I have done things on a large scale, and according to your directions."

"Now, let me hear, Rosa, what you have done," said Cornelius, with as tender an anxiety as he had lately shown to herself.

"Well," she said, smiling, for in her own heart she could not help studying this double love of the prisoner for herself and for the black tulip, "I have done things on a large scale; I have prepared a bed as you described it to me, on a clear spot, far from trees and walls, in a soil slightly mixed with sand, rather moist than dry without a fragment of stone or pebble."

"Well done, Rosa, well done."

"I am now only waiting for your further orders to put in the bulb, you know that I must be behindhand with you, as I have in my favour all the chances of good air, of the sun, and abundance of moisture."

"All true, all true," exclaimed Cornelius, clapping his hands with joy, "you are a good pupil, Rosa, and you are sure to gain your hundred thousand guilders."

"Don't forget," said Rosa, smiling, "that your pupil, as you call me, has still other things to learn besides the cultivation of tulips."

"Yes, yes, and I am as anxious as you are, Rosa, that you should learn to read."



"When shall we begin?"

"At once."

"No, to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because to-day our hour is expired, and I must leave you."

"Already? But what shall we read?"

"Oh," said Rosa, "I have a book, -- a book which I hope will bring us luck."

"To-morrow, then."

"Yes, to-morrow."

On the following evening Rosa returned with the Bible of Cornelius de Witt.