

Chapter 18

Rosa's Lover

Rosa had scarcely pronounced these consolatory words when a voice was heard from the staircase asking Gryphus how matters were going on.

"Do you hear, father?" said Rosa.

"What?"

"Master Jacob calls you, he is uneasy."

"There was such a noise," said Gryphus; "wouldn't you have thought he would murder me, this doctor? They are always very troublesome fellows, these scholars."

Then, pointing with his finger towards the staircase, he said to Rosa: "Just lead the way, Miss."

After this he locked the door and called out: "I shall be with you directly, friend Jacob."

Poor Cornelius, thus left alone with his bitter grief, muttered to himself, --

"Ah, you old hangman! it is me you have trodden under foot; you have murdered me; I shall not survive it."

And certainly the unfortunate prisoner would have fallen ill but for the counterpoise which Providence had granted to his grief, and which was called Rosa.

In the evening she came back. Her first words announced to Cornelius that henceforth her father would make no objection to his cultivating flowers.

"And how do you know that?" the prisoner asked, with a doleful look.

"I know it because he has said so."

"To deceive me, perhaps."

"No, he repents."

"Ah yes! but too late."

"This repentance is not of himself."

"And who put it into him?"

"If you only knew how his friend scolded him!"

"Ah, Master Jacob; he does not leave you, then, that Master Jacob?"

"At any rate, he leaves us as little as he can help."

Saying this, she smiled in such a way that the little cloud of jealousy which had darkened the brow of Cornelius speedily vanished.

"How was it?" asked the prisoner.

"Well, being asked by his friend, my father told at supper the whole story of the tulip, or rather of the bulb, and of his own fine exploit of crushing it."

Cornelius heaved a sigh, which might have been called a groan.

"Had you only seen Master Jacob at that moment!" continued Rosa. "I really thought he would set fire to the castle; his eyes were like two flaming torches, his hair stood on end, and he clinched his fist for a moment; I thought he would have strangled my father."

"'You have done that,' he cried, 'you have crushed the bulb?'"

"'Indeed I have.'"

"'It is infamous,' said Master Jacob, 'it is odious! You have committed a great crime!'"

"My father was quite dumbfounded.

"'Are you mad, too?'" he asked his friend."

"Oh, what a worthy man is this Master Jacob!" muttered Cornelius, -- "an honest soul, an excellent heart that he is."

"The truth is, that it is impossible to treat a man more rudely than he did my father; he was really quite in despair, repeating over and over again, --

"Crushed, crushed the bulb! my God, my God! crushed!"

"Then, turning toward me, he asked, 'But it was not the only one that he had?'"

"Did he ask that?" inquired Cornelius, with some anxiety.

"You think it was not the only one?" said my father. 'Very well, we shall search for the others.'

"You will search for the others?" cried Jacob, taking my father by the collar; but he immediately loosed him. Then, turning towards me, he continued, asking 'And what did that poor young man say?'

"I did not know what to answer, as you had so strictly enjoined me never to allow any one to guess the interest which you are taking in the bulb. Fortunately, my father saved me from the difficulty by chiming in, --

"What did he say? Didn't he fume and fret?"

"I interrupted him, saying, 'Was it not natural that he should be furious, you were so unjust and brutal, father?'

"Well, now, are you mad?' cried my father; 'what immense misfortune is it to crush a tulip bulb? You may buy a hundred of them in the market of Gorcum.'

"Perhaps some less precious one than that was!" I quite incautiously replied."

"And what did Jacob say or do at these words?" asked Cornelius.

"At these words, if I must say it, his eyes seemed to flash like lightning."

"But," said Cornelius, "that was not all; I am sure he said something in his turn."

"So, then, my pretty Rosa,' he said, with a voice as sweet a honey, -- 'so you think that bulb to have been a precious one?'

"I saw that I had made a blunder.

"What do I know?' I said, negligently; 'do I understand anything of tulips? I only know -- as unfortunately it is our lot to live with prisoners -- that for them any pastime is of value. This poor Mynheer van Baerle amused himself with this bulb. Well, I think it very cruel to take from him the only thing that he could have amused himself with.'

"But, first of all,' said my father, 'we ought to know how he has contrived to procure this bulb.'

"I turned my eyes away to avoid my father's look; but I met those of Jacob.

"It was as if he had tried to read my thoughts at the bottom of my heart.

"Some little show of anger sometimes saves an answer. I shrugged my shoulders, turned my back, and advanced towards the door.

"But I was kept by something which I heard, although it was uttered in a very low voice only.

"Jacob said to my father, --

"It would not be so difficult to ascertain that.'

"How so?'

"You need only search his person: and if he has the other bulbs, we shall find them, as there usually are three suckers!"

"Three suckers!" cried Cornelius. "Did you say that I have three?"

"The word certainly struck me just as much as it does you. I turned round. They were both of them so deeply engaged in their conversation that they did not observe my movement.

"But,' said my father, 'perhaps he has not got his bulbs about him?'

"Then take him down, under some pretext or other and I will search his cell in the meanwhile."

"Halloa, halloa!" said Cornelius. "But this Mr. Jacob of yours is a villain, it seems."

"I am afraid he is."

"Tell me, Rosa," continued Cornelius, with a pensive air.

"What?"

"Did you not tell me that on the day when you prepared your borders this man followed you?"

"So he did."

"That he glided like a shadow behind the elder trees?"

"Certainly."

"That not one of your movements escaped him?"

"Not one, indeed."

"Rosa," said Cornelius, growing quite pale.

"Well?"

"It was not you he was after."

"Who else, then?"

"It is not you that he was in love with!"

"But with whom else?"

"He was after my bulb, and is in love with my tulip!"

"You don't say so! And yet it is very possible," said Rosa.

"Will you make sure of it?"

"In what manner?"

"Oh, it would be very easy!"

"Tell me."

"Go to-morrow into the garden; manage matters so that Jacob may know, as he did the first time, that you are going there, and that he may follow you. Feign to put the bulb into the ground; leave the garden, but look through the keyhole of the door and watch him."

"Well, and what then?"

"What then? We shall do as he does."

"Oh!" said Rosa, with a sigh, "you are very fond of your bulbs."

"To tell the truth," said the prisoner, sighing likewise, "since your father crushed that unfortunate bulb, I feel as if part of my own self had been paralyzed."

"Now just hear me," said Rosa; "will you try something else?"

"What?"

"Will you accept the proposition of my father?"

"Which proposition?"

"Did not he offer to you tulip bulbs by hundreds?"

"Indeed he did."

"Accept two or three, and, along with them, you may grow the third sucker."

"Yes, that would do very well," said Cornelius, knitting his brow; "if your father were alone, but there is that Master Jacob, who watches all our ways."

"Well, that is true; but only think! you are depriving yourself, as I can easily see, of a very great pleasure."

She pronounced these words with a smile, which was not altogether without a tinge of irony.

Cornelius reflected for a moment; he evidently was struggling against some vehement desire.

"No!" he cried at last, with the stoicism of a Roman of old, "it would be a weakness, it would be a folly, it would be a meanness! If I thus give up the

only and last resource which we possess to the uncertain chances of the bad passions of anger and envy, I should never deserve to be forgiven. No, Rosa, no; to-morrow we shall come to a conclusion as to the spot to be chosen for your tulip; you will plant it according to my instructions; and as to the third sucker," -- Cornelius here heaved a deep sigh, -- "watch over it as a miser over his first or last piece of gold; as the mother over her child; as the wounded over the last drop of blood in his veins; watch over it, Rosa! Some voice within me tells me that it will be our saving, that it will be a source of good to us."

"Be easy, Mynheer Cornelius," said Rosa, with a sweet mixture of melancholy and gravity, "be easy; your wishes are commands to me."

"And even," continued Van Baerle, warming more and more with his subject, "if you should perceive that your steps are watched, and that your speech has excited the suspicion of your father and of that detestable Master Jacob, -- well, Rosa, don't hesitate for one moment to sacrifice me, who am only still living through you, -- me, who have no one in the world but you; sacrifice me, -- don't come to see me any more."

Rosa felt her heart sink within her, and her eyes were filling with tears.

"Alas!" she said.

"What is it?" asked Cornelius.

"I see one thing."

"What do you see?"

"I see," said she, bursting out in sobs, "I see that you love your tulips with such love as to have no more room in your heart left for other affections."

Saying this, she fled.

Cornelius, after this, passed one of the worst nights he ever had in his life.

Rosa was vexed with him, and with good reason. Perhaps she would never return to see the prisoner, and then he would have no more news, either of Rosa or of his tulips.

We have to confess, to the disgrace of our hero and of floriculture, that of his two affections he felt most strongly inclined to regret the loss of Rosa; and when, at about three in the morning, he fell asleep overcome with fatigue, and harassed with remorse, the grand black tulip yielded precedence in his dreams to the sweet blue eyes of the fair maid of Friesland.