

## Chapter 21

### The Second Bulb

The night was a happy one, and the whole of the next day happier still.

During the last few days, the prison had been heavy, dark, and lowering, as it were, with all its weight on the unfortunate captive. Its walls were black, its air chilling, the iron bars seemed to exclude every ray of light.

But when Cornelius awoke next morning, a beam of the morning sun was playing about those iron bars; pigeons were hovering about with outspread wings, whilst others were lovingly cooing on the roof or near the still closed window.

Cornelius ran to that window and opened it; it seemed to him as if new life, and joy, and liberty itself were entering with this sunbeam into his cell, which, so dreary of late, was now cheered and irradiated by the light of love.

When Gryphus, therefore, came to see his prisoner in the morning, he no longer found him morose and lying in bed, but standing at the window, and singing a little ditty.

"Halloa!" exclaimed the jailer.

"How are you this morning?" asked Cornelius.

Gryphus looked at him with a scowl.

"And how is the dog, and Master Jacob, and our pretty Rosa?"

Gryphus ground his teeth, saying. --

"Here is your breakfast."

"Thank you, friend Cerberus," said the prisoner; "you are just in time; I am very hungry."

"Oh! you are hungry, are you?" said Gryphus.

"And why not?" asked Van Baerle.

"The conspiracy seems to thrive," remarked Gryphus.

"What conspiracy?"

"Very well, I know what I know, Master Scholar; just be quiet, we shall be on our guard."

"Be on your guard, friend Gryphus; be on your guard as long as you please; my conspiracy, as well as my person, is entirely at your service."

"We'll see that at noon."

Saying this, Gryphus went out.

"At noon?" repeated Cornelius; "what does that mean? Well, let us wait until the clock strikes twelve, and we shall see."

It was very easy for Cornelius to wait for twelve at midday, as he was already waiting for nine at night.

It struck twelve, and there were heard on the staircase not only the steps of Gryphus, but also those of three or four soldiers, who were coming up with him.

The door opened. Gryphus entered, led his men in, and shut the door after them.

"There, now search!"

They searched not only the pockets of Cornelius, but even his person; yet they found nothing.

They then searched the sheets, the mattress, and the straw mattress of his bed; and again they found nothing.

Now, Cornelius rejoiced that he had not taken the third sucker under his own care. Gryphus would have been sure to ferret it out in the search, and would then have treated it as he did the first.

And certainly never did prisoner look with greater complacency at a search made in his cell than Cornelius.

Gryphus retired with the pencil and the two or three leaves of white paper which Rosa had given to Van Baerle, this was the only trophy brought back from the expedition.

At six Gryphus came back again, but alone; Cornelius tried to propitiate him, but Gryphus growled, showed a large tooth like a tusk, which he had in the corner of his mouth, and went out backwards, like a man who is afraid of being attacked from behind.

Cornelius burst out laughing, to which Gryphus answered through the grating, --

"Let him laugh that wins."

The winner that day was Cornelius; Rosa came at nine.

She was without a lantern. She needed no longer a light, as she could now read. Moreover, the light might betray her, as Jacob was dogging her steps more than ever. And lastly, the light would have shown her blushes.

Of what did the young people speak that evening? Of those matters of which lovers speak at the house doors in France, or from a balcony into the street in Spain, or down from a terrace into a garden in the East.

They spoke of those things which give wings to the hours; they spoke of everything except the black tulip.

At last, when the clock struck ten, they parted as usual.

Cornelius was happy, as thoroughly happy as a tulip-fancier would be to whom one has not spoken of his tulip.

He found Rosa pretty, good, graceful, and charming.

But why did Rosa object to the tulip being spoken of?

This was indeed a great defect in Rosa.

Cornelius confessed to himself, sighing, that woman was not perfect.

Part of the night he thought of this imperfection; that is to say, so long as he was awake he thought of Rosa.

After having fallen asleep, he dreamed of her.

But the Rosa of his dreams was by far more perfect than the Rosa of real life. Not only did the Rosa of his dreams speak of the tulip, but also brought to him a black one in a china vase.

Cornelius then awoke, trembling with joy, and muttering, --

"Rosa, Rosa, I love you."

And as it was already day, he thought it right not to fall asleep again, and he continued following up the line of thought in which his mind was engaged when he awoke.

Ah! if Rosa had only conversed about the tulip, Cornelius would have preferred her to Queen Semiramis, to Queen Cleopatra, to Queen Elizabeth, to Queen Anne of Austria; that is to say, to the greatest or most beautiful queens whom the world has seen.

But Rosa had forbidden it under pain of not returning; Rosa had forbidden the least mention of the tulip for three days. That meant seventy-two hours

given to the lover to be sure; but it was seventy-two hours stolen from the horticulturist.

There was one consolation: of the seventy-two hours during which Rosa would not allow the tulip to be mentioned, thirty-six had passed already; and the remaining thirty-six would pass quickly enough: eighteen with waiting for the evening's interview, and eighteen with rejoicing in its remembrance.

Rosa came at the same hour, and Cornelius submitted most heroically to the pangs which the compulsory silence concerning the tulip gave him.

His fair visitor, however, was well aware that, to command on the one point, people must yield on another; she therefore no longer drew back her hands from the grating, and even allowed Cornelius tenderly to kiss her beautiful golden tresses.

Poor girl! she had no idea that these playful little lovers' tricks were much more dangerous than speaking of the tulip was; but she became aware of the fact as she returned with a beating heart, with glowing cheeks, dry lips, and moist eyes.

And on the following evening, after the first exchange of salutations, she retired a step, looking at him with a glance, the expression of which would have rejoiced his heart could he but have seen it.

"Well," she said, "she is up."

"She is up! Who? What?" asked Cornelius, who did not venture on a belief that Rosa would, of her own accord, have abridged the term of his probation.

"She? Well, my daughter, the tulip," said Rosa.

"What!" cried Cornelius, "you give me permission, then?"

"I do," said Rosa, with the tone of an affectionate mother who grants a pleasure to her child.

"Ah, Rosa!" said Cornelius, putting his lips to the grating with the hope of touching a cheek, a hand, a forehead, -- anything, in short.

He touched something much better, -- two warm and half open lips.

Rosa uttered a slight scream.

Cornelius understood that he must make haste to continue the conversation. He guessed that this unexpected kiss had frightened Rosa.

"Is it growing up straight?"

"Straight as a rocket," said Rosa.

"How high?"

"At least two inches."

"Oh, Rosa, take good care of it, and we shall soon see it grow quickly."

"Can I take more care of it?" said she. "Indeed, I think of nothing else but the tulip."

"Of nothing else, Rosa? Why, now I shall grow jealous in my turn."

"Oh, you know that to think of the tulip is to think of you; I never lose sight of it. I see it from my bed, on awaking it is the first object that meets my eyes, and on falling asleep the last on which they rest. During the day I sit and work by its side, for I have never left my chamber since I put it there."

"You are right Rosa, it is your dowry, you know."

"Yes, and with it I may marry a young man of twenty-six or twenty-eight years, whom I shall be in love with."

"Don't talk in that way, you naughty girl."

That evening Cornelius was one of the happiest of men. Rosa allowed him to press her hand in his, and to keep it as long as he would, besides which he might talk of his tulip as much as he liked.

From that hour every day marked some progress in the growth of the tulip and in the affection of the two young people.

At one time it was that the leaves had expanded, and at another that the flower itself had formed.

Great was the joy of Cornelius at this news, and his questions succeeded one another with a rapidity which gave proof of their importance.

"Formed!" exclaimed Cornelius, "is it really formed?"



"It is," repeated Rosa.

Cornelius trembled with joy, so much so that he was obliged to hold by the grating.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

Then, turning again to Rosa, he continued his questions.

"Is the oval regular? the cylinder full? and are the points very green?"

"The oval is almost one inch long, and tapers like a needle, the cylinder swells at the sides, and the points are ready to open."

Two days after Rosa announced that they were open.

"Open, Rosa!" cried Cornelius. "Is the involucre open? but then one may see and already distinguish ---- "

Here the prisoner paused, anxiously taking breath.

"Yes," answered Rosa, "one may already distinguish a thread of different colour, as thin as a hair."

"And its colour?" asked Cornelius, trembling.

"Oh," answered Rosa, "it is very dark!"

"Brown?"

"Darker than that."

"Darker, my good Rosa, darker? Thank you. Dark as ---- "

"Dark as the ink with which I wrote to you."

Cornelius uttered a cry of mad joy.

Then, suddenly stopping and clasping his hands, he said, --

"Oh, there is not an angel in heaven that may be compared to you, Rosa!"

"Indeed!" said Rosa, smiling at his enthusiasm.

"Rosa, you have worked with such ardour, -- you have done so much for me! Rosa, my tulip is about to flower, and it will flower black! Rosa, Rosa, you are the most perfect being on earth!"

"After the tulip, though."

"Ah! be quiet, you malicious little creature, be quiet! For shame! Do not spoil my pleasure. But tell me, Rosa, -- as the tulip is so far advanced, it will flower in two or three days, at the latest?"

"To-morrow, or the day after."

"Ah! and I shall not see it," cried Cornelius, starting back, "I shall not kiss it, as a wonderful work of the Almighty, as I kiss your hand and your cheek, Rosa, when by chance they are near the grating."

Rosa drew near, not by accident, but intentionally, and Cornelius kissed her tenderly.

"Faith, I shall cull it, if you wish it."

"Oh, no, no, Rosa! when it is open, place it carefully in the shade, and immediately send a message to Haarlem, to the President of the Horticultural Society, that the grand black tulip is in flower. I know well it is far to Haarlem, but with money you will find a messenger. Have you any money, Rosa?"

Rosa smiled.

"Oh, yes!" she said.

"Enough?" said Cornelius.

"I have three hundred guilders."

"Oh, if you have three hundred guilders, you must not send a messenger, Rosa, but you must go to Haarlem yourself."

"But what in the meantime is to become of the flower?"

"Oh, the flower! you must take it with you. You understand that you must not separate from it for an instant."

"But whilst I am not separating from it, I am separating from you, Mynheer Cornelius."

"Ah! that's true, my sweet Rosa. Oh, my God! how wicked men are! What have I done to offend them, and why have they deprived me of my liberty? You are right, Rosa, I cannot live without you. Well, you will send some one to Haarlem, -- that's settled; really, the matter is wonderful enough for the President to put himself to some trouble. He will come himself to Loewestein to see the tulip."

Then, suddenly checking himself, he said, with a faltering voice, --

"Rosa, Rosa, if after all it should not flower black!"

"Oh, surely, surely, you will know to-morrow, or the day after."

"And to wait until evening to know it, Rosa! I shall die with impatience. Could we not agree about a signal?"

"I shall do better than that."

"What will you do?"

"If it opens at night, I shall come and tell you myself. If it is day, I shall pass your door, and slip you a note either under the door, or through the grating, during the time between my father's first and second inspection."

"Yes, Rosa, let it be so. One word of yours, announcing this news to me, will be a double happiness."

"There, ten o'clock strikes," said Rosa, "I must now leave you."

"Yes, yes," said Cornelius, "go, Rosa, go!"

Rosa withdrew, almost melancholy, for Cornelius had all but sent her away.

It is true that he did so in order that she might watch over his black tulip.