

## Chapter 25

### The President van Systens

Rosa, on leaving Cornelius, had fixed on her plan, which was no other than to restore to Cornelius the stolen tulip, or never to see him again.

She had seen the despair of the prisoner, and she knew that it was derived from a double source, and that it was incurable.

On the one hand, separation became inevitable, -- Gryphus having at the same time surprised the secret of their love and of their secret meetings.

On the other hand, all the hopes on the fulfilment of which Cornelius van Baerle had rested his ambition for the last seven years were now crushed.

Rosa was one of those women who are dejected by trifles, but who in great emergencies are supplied by the misfortune itself with the energy for combating or with the resources for remedying it.

She went to her room, and cast a last glance about her to see whether she had not been mistaken, and whether the tulip was not stowed away in some corner where it had escaped her notice. But she sought in vain, the tulip was still missing; the tulip was indeed stolen.

Rosa made up a little parcel of things indispensable for a journey; took her three hundred guilders, -- that is to say, all her fortune, -- fetched the third bulb from among her lace, where she had laid it up, and carefully hid it in her bosom; after which she locked her door twice to disguise her flight as long as possible, and, leaving the prison by the same door which an hour before had let out Boxel, she went to a stable-keeper to hire a carriage.

The man had only a two-wheel chaise, and this was the vehicle which Boxtel had hired since last evening, and in which he was now driving along the road to Delft; for the road from Loewestein to Haarlem, owing to the many canals, rivers, and rivulets intersecting the country, is exceedingly circuitous.

Not being able to procure a vehicle, Rosa was obliged to take a horse, with which the stable-keeper readily intrusted her, knowing her to be the daughter of the jailer of the fortress.

Rosa hoped to overtake her messenger, a kind-hearted and honest lad, whom she would take with her, and who might at the same time serve her as a guide and a protector.

And in fact she had not proceeded more than a league before she saw him hastening along one of the side paths of a very pretty road by the river. Setting her horse off at a canter, she soon came up with him.

The honest lad was not aware of the important character of his message; nevertheless, he used as much speed as if he had known it; and in less than an hour he had already gone a league and a half.

Rosa took from him the note, which had now become useless, and explained to him what she wanted him to do for her. The boatman placed himself entirely at her disposal, promising to keep pace with the horse if Rosa would allow him to take hold of either the croup or the bridle of her horse. The two travellers had been on their way for five hours, and made more than eight leagues, and yet Gryphus had not the least suspicion of his daughter having left the fortress.

The jailer, who was of a very spiteful and cruel disposition, chuckled within himself at the idea of having struck such terror into his daughter's heart.

But whilst he was congratulating himself on having such a nice story to tell to his boon companion, Jacob, that worthy was on his road to Delft; and, thanks to the swiftness of the horse, had already the start of Rosa and her companion by four leagues.

And whilst the affectionate father was rejoicing at the thought of his daughter weeping in her room, Rosa was making the best of her way towards Haarlem.

Thus the prisoner alone was where Gryphus thought him to be.

Rosa was so little with her father since she took care of the tulip, that at his dinner hour, that is to say, at twelve o'clock, he was reminded for the first time by his appetite that his daughter was fretting rather too long.

He sent one of the under-turnkeys to call her; and, when the man came back to tell him that he had called and sought her in vain, he resolved to go and call her himself.

He first went to her room, but, loud as he knocked, Rosa answered not.

The locksmith of the fortress was sent for; he opened the door, but Gryphus no more found Rosa than she had found the tulip.

At that very moment she entered Rotterdam.

Gryphus therefore had just as little chance of finding her in the kitchen as in her room, and just as little in the garden as in the kitchen.

The reader may imagine the anger of the jailer when, after having made inquiries about the neighbourhood, he heard that his daughter had hired a

horse, and, like an adventuress, set out on a journey without saying where she was going.

Gryphus again went up in his fury to Van Baerle, abused him, threatened him, knocked all the miserable furniture of his cell about, and promised him all sorts of misery, even starvation and flogging.

Cornelius, without even hearing what his jailer said, allowed himself to be ill-treated, abused, and threatened, remaining all the while sullen, immovable, dead to every emotion and fear.

After having sought for Rosa in every direction, Gryphus looked out for Jacob, and, as he could not find him either, he began to suspect from that moment that Jacob had run away with her.

The damsel, meanwhile, after having stopped for two hours at Rotterdam, had started again on her journey. On that evening she slept at Delft, and on the following morning she reached Haarlem, four hours after Boxtel had arrived there.

Rosa, first of all, caused herself to be led before Mynheer van Systems, the President of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem.

She found that worthy gentleman in a situation which, to do justice to our story, we must not pass over in our description.

The President was drawing up a report to the committee of the society.

This report was written on large-sized paper, in the finest handwriting of the President.

Rosa was announced simply as Rosa Gryphus; but as her name, well as it might sound, was unknown to the President, she was refused admittance.

Rosa, however, was by no means abashed, having vowed in her heart, in pursuing her cause, not to allow herself to be put down either by refusal, or abuse, or even brutality.

"Announce to the President," she said to the servant, "that I want to speak to him about the black tulip."

These words seemed to be an "Open Sesame," for she soon found herself in the office of the President, Van Systens, who gallantly rose from his chair to meet her.

He was a spare little man, resembling the stem of a flower, his head forming its chalice, and his two limp arms representing the double leaf of the tulip; the resemblance was rendered complete by his waddling gait which made him even more like that flower when it bends under a breeze.

"Well, miss," he said, "you are coming, I am told, about the affair of the black tulip."

To the President of the Horticultural Society the *Tulipa nigra* was a first-rate power, which, in its character as queen of the tulips, might send ambassadors.

"Yes, sir," answered Rosa; "I come at least to speak of it."

"Is it doing well, then?" asked Van Systens, with a smile of tender veneration.

"Alas! sir, I don't know," said Rosa.

"How is that? could any misfortune have happened to it?"

"A very great one, sir; yet not to it, but to me."

"What?"

"It has been stolen from me."

"Stolen! the black tulip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know the thief?"

"I have my suspicions, but I must not yet accuse any one."

"But the matter may very easily be ascertained."

"How is that?"

"As it has been stolen from you, the thief cannot be far off."

"Why not?"

"Because I have seen the black tulip only two hours ago."

"You have seen the black tulip!" cried Rosa, rushing up to Mynheer van Systems.

"As I see you, miss."

"But where?"

"Well, with your master, of course."

"With my master?"

"Yes, are you not in the service of Master Isaac Boxtel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"But for whom do you take me, sir?"

"And for whom do you take me?"

"I hope, sir, I take you for what you are, -- that is to say, for the honorable Mynheer van Systems, Burgomaster of Haarlem, and President of the Horticultural Society."

"And what is it you told me just now?"

"I told you, sir, that my tulip has been stolen."

"Then your tulip is that of Mynheer Boxtel. Well, my child, you express yourself very badly. The tulip has been stolen, not from you, but from Mynheer Boxtel."

"I repeat to you, sir, that I do not know who this Mynheer Boxtel is, and that I have now heard his name pronounced for the first time."

"You do not know who Mynheer Boxtel is, and you also had a black tulip?"

"But is there any other besides mine?" asked Rosa, trembling.

"Yes, -- that of Mynheer Boxtel."

"How is it?"

"Black, of course."

"Without speck?"

"Without a single speck, or even point."

"And you have this tulip, -- you have it deposited here?"

"No, but it will be, as it has to be exhibited before the committee previous to the prize being awarded."

"Oh, sir!" cried Rosa, "this Boxtel -- this Isaac Boxtel -- who calls himself the owner of the black tulip ---- "



"And who is its owner?"

"Is he not a very thin man?"

"Bald?"

"Yes."

"With sunken eyes?"

"I think he has."

"Restless, stooping, and bowlegged?"

"In truth, you draw Master Boxtel's portrait feature by feature."

"And the tulip, sir? Is it not in a pot of white and blue earthenware, with yellowish flowers in a basket on three sides?"

"Oh, as to that I am not quite sure; I looked more at the flower than at the pot."

"Oh, sir! that's my tulip, which has been stolen from me. I came here to reclaim it before you and from you."

"Oh! oh!" said Van Systens, looking at Rosa. "What! you are here to claim the tulip of Master Boxtel? Well, I must say, you are cool enough."

"Honoured sir," a little put out by this apostrophe, "I do not say that I am coming to claim the tulip of Master Boxtel, but to reclaim my own."

"Yours?"

"Yes, the one which I have myself planted and nursed."

"Well, then, go and find out Master Boxtel, at the White Swan Inn, and you can then settle matters with him; as for me, considering that the cause seems to me as difficult to judge as that which was brought before King Solomon, and that I do not pretend to be as wise as he was, I shall content myself with making my report, establishing the existence of the black tulip, and ordering the hundred thousand guilders to be paid to its grower. Good-bye, my child."

"Oh, sir, sir!" said Rosa, imploringly.

"Only, my child," continued Van Systems, "as you are young and pretty, and as there may be still some good in you, I'll give you some good advice. Be prudent in this matter, for we have a court of justice and a prison here at Haarlem, and, moreover, we are exceedingly ticklish as far as the honour of our tulips is concerned. Go, my child, go, remember, Master Isaac Boxtel at the White Swan Inn."

And Mynheer van Systems, taking up his fine pen, resumed his report, which had been interrupted by Rosa's visit.