

## Chapter 27

### The Third Bulb

Boxtel's return was scarcely announced, when he entered in person the drawing-room of Mynheer van Systens, followed by two men, who carried in a box their precious burden and deposited it on a table.

The Prince, on being informed, left the cabinet, passed into the drawing-room, admired the flower, and silently resumed his seat in the dark corner, where he had himself placed his chair.

Rosa, trembling, pale and terrified, expected to be invited in her turn to see the tulip.

She now heard the voice of Boxtel.

"It is he!" she exclaimed.

The Prince made her a sign to go and look through the open door into the drawing-room.

"It is my tulip," cried Rosa, "I recognise it. Oh, my poor Cornelius!"

And saying this she burst into tears.

The Prince rose from his seat, went to the door, where he stood for some time with the full light falling upon his figure.

As Rosa's eyes now rested upon him, she felt more than ever convinced that this was not the first time she had seen the stranger.

"Master Boxtel," said the Prince, "come in here, if you please."

Boxtel eagerly approached, and, finding himself face to face with William of Orange, started back.

"His Highness!" he called out.

"His Highness!" Rosa repeated in dismay.

Hearing this exclamation on his left, Boxtel turned round, and perceived Rosa.

At this sight the whole frame of the thief shook as if under the influence of a galvanic shock.

"Ah!" muttered the Prince to himself, "he is confused."

But Boxtel, making a violent effort to control his feelings, was already himself again.

"Master Boxtel," said William, "you seem to have discovered the secret of growing the black tulip?"

"Yes, your Highness," answered Boxtel, in a voice which still betrayed some confusion.

It is true his agitation might have been attributable to the emotion which the man must have felt on suddenly recognising the Prince.

"But," continued the Stadtholder, "here is a young damsel who also pretends to have found it."

Boxtel, with a disdainful smile, shrugged his shoulders.

William watched all his movements with evident interest and curiosity.

"Then you don't know this young girl?" said the Prince.

"No, your Highness!"

"And you, child, do you know Master Boxtel?"

"No, I don't know Master Boxtel, but I know Master Jacob."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that at Loewestein the man who here calls himself Isaac Boxtel went by the name of Master Jacob."

"What do you say to that, Master Boxtel?"

"I say that this damsel lies, your Highness."

"You deny, therefore, having ever been at Loewestein?"

Boxtel hesitated; the fixed and searching glance of the proud eye of the Prince prevented him from lying.

"I cannot deny having been at Loewestein, your Highness, but I deny having stolen the tulip."

"You have stolen it, and that from my room," cried Rosa, with indignation.

"I deny it."

"Now listen to me. Do you deny having followed me into the garden, on the day when I prepared the border where I was to plant it? Do you deny having followed me into the garden when I pretended to plant it? Do you deny that, on that evening, you rushed after my departure to the spot where you hoped to find the bulb? Do you deny having dug in the ground with your hands -- but, thank God! in vain, as it was a stratagem to discover your intentions. Say, do you deny all this?"

Boxtel did not deem it fit to answer these several charges, but, turning to the Prince, continued, --

"I have now for twenty years grown tulips at Dort. I have even acquired some reputation in this art; one of my hybrids is entered in the catalogue under the name of an illustrious personage. I have dedicated it to the King of Portugal. The truth in the matter is as I shall now tell your Highness. This damsel knew that I had produced the black tulip, and, in concert with a lover of hers in the fortress of Loewestein, she formed the plan of ruining me by appropriating to herself the prize of a hundred thousand guilders, which, with the help of your Highness's justice, I hope to gain."

"Yah!" cried Rosa, beyond herself with anger.

"Silence!" said the Prince.

Then, turning to Boxtel, he said, --

"And who is that prisoner to whom you allude as the lover of this young woman?"

Rosa nearly swooned, for Cornelius was designated as a dangerous prisoner, and recommended by the Prince to the especial surveillance of the jailer.

Nothing could have been more agreeable to Boxtel than this question.

"This prisoner," he said, "is a man whose name in itself will prove to your Highness what trust you may place in his probity. He is a prisoner of state, who was once condemned to death."

"And his name?"

Rosa hid her face in her hands with a movement of despair.

"His name is Cornelius van Baerle," said Boxtel, "and he is godson of that villain Cornelius de Witt."

The Prince gave a start, his generally quiet eye flashed, and a death-like paleness spread over his impassible features.

He went up to Rosa, and with his finger, gave her a sign to remove her hands from her face.

Rosa obeyed, as if under mesmeric influence, without having seen the sign.

"It was, then to follow this man that you came to me at Leyden to solicit for the transfer of your father?"

Rosa hung down her head, and, nearly choking, said, --

"Yes, your Highness."

"Go on," said the Prince to Boxtel.

"I have nothing more to say," Isaac continued. "Your Highness knows all. But there is one thing which I did not intend to say, because I did not wish to make this girl blush for her ingratitude. I came to Loewestein because I had business there. On this occasion I made the acquaintance of old Gryphus, and, falling in love with his daughter, made an offer of marriage to her; and, not being rich, I committed the imprudence of mentioning to them my prospect of gaining a hundred thousand guilders, in proof of which I showed to them the black tulip. Her lover having himself made a show at Dort of cultivating tulips to hide his political intrigues, they now plotted together for my ruin. On the eve of the day when the flower was expected to open, the tulip was taken away by this young woman. She carried it to her room, from which I had the good luck to recover it at the very moment when she had the impudence to despatch a messenger to announce to the members of the Horticultural Society that she had produced the grand black tulip. But she did not stop there. There is no doubt that, during the few hours which she kept the flower in her room, she showed it to some persons whom she may now call as witnesses. But, fortunately, your Highness has now been warned against this impostor and her witnesses."

"Oh, my God, my God! what infamous falsehoods!" said Rosa, bursting into tears, and throwing herself at the feet of the Stadtholder, who, although thinking her guilty, felt pity for her dreadful agony.

"You have done very wrong, my child," he said, "and your lover shall be punished for having thus badly advised you. For you are so young, and have such an honest look, that I am inclined to believe the mischief to have been his doing, and not yours."

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" cried Rosa, "Cornelius is not guilty."

William started.

"Not guilty of having advised you? that's what you want to say, is it not?"

"What I wish to say, your Highness, is that Cornelius is as little guilty of the second crime imputed to him as he was of the first."

"Of the first? And do you know what was his first crime? Do you know of what he was accused and convicted? Of having, as an accomplice of Cornelius de Witt, concealed the correspondence of the Grand Pensionary and the Marquis de Louvois."

"Well, sir, he was ignorant of this correspondence being deposited with him; completely ignorant. I am as certain as of my life, that, if it were not so, he would have told me; for how could that pure mind have harboured a secret without revealing it to me? No, no, your Highness, I repeat it, and even at the risk of incurring your displeasure, Cornelius is no more guilty of the first crime than of the second; and of the second no more than of the first. Oh, would to Heaven that you knew my Cornelius; Monseigneur!"

"He is a De Witt!" cried Boxtel. "His Highness knows only too much of him, having once granted him his life."

"Silence!" said the Prince; "all these affairs of state, as I have already said, are completely out of the province of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem."

Then, knitting his brow, he added, --

"As to the tulip, make yourself easy, Master Boxtel, you shall have justice done to you."

Boxtel bowed with a heart full of joy, and received the congratulations of the President.

"You, my child," William of Orange continued, "you were going to commit a crime. I will not punish you; but the real evil-doer shall pay the penalty for both. A man of his name may be a conspirator, and even a traitor, but he ought not to be a thief."

"A thief!" cried Rosa. "Cornelius a thief? Pray, your Highness, do not say such a word, it would kill him, if he knew it. If theft there has been, I swear to you, Sir, no one else but this man has committed it."

"Prove it," Boxtel coolly remarked.

"I shall prove it. With God's help I shall."

Then, turning towards Boxtel, she asked, --

"The tulip is yours?"

"It is."

"How many bulbs were there of it?"



Boxtel hesitated for a moment, but after a short consideration he came to the conclusion that she would not ask this question if there were none besides the two bulbs of which he had known already. He therefore answered, --

"Three."

"What has become of these bulbs?"

"Oh! what has become of them? Well, one has failed; the second has produced the black tulip."

"And the third?"

"The third!"

"The third, -- where is it?"

"I have it at home," said Boxtel, quite confused.

"At home? Where? At Loewestein, or at Dort?"

"At Dort," said Boxtel.

"You lie!" cried Rosa. "Monseigneur," she continued, whilst turning round to the Prince, "I will tell you the true story of these three bulbs. The first was crushed by my father in the prisoner's cell, and this man is quite aware of it, for he himself wanted to get hold of it, and, being balked in his hope, he very nearly fell out with my father, who had been the cause of his

disappointment. The second bulb, planted by me, has produced the black tulip, and the third and last" -- saying this, she drew it from her bosom -- "here it is, in the very same paper in which it was wrapped up together with the two others. When about to be led to the scaffold, Cornelius van Baerle gave me all the three. Take it, Monseigneur, take it."

And Rosa, unfolding the paper, offered the bulb to the Prince, who took it from her hands and examined it.

"But, Monseigneur, this young woman may have stolen the bulb, as she did the tulip," Boxtel said, with a faltering voice, and evidently alarmed at the attention with which the Prince examined the bulb; and even more at the movements of Rosa, who was reading some lines written on the paper which remained in her hands.

Her eyes suddenly lighted up; she read, with breathless anxiety, the mysterious paper over and over again; and at last, uttering a cry, held it out to the Prince and said, "Read, Monseigneur, for Heaven's sake, read!"

William handed the third bulb to Van Systems, took the paper, and read.

No sooner had he looked at it than he began to stagger; his hand trembled, and very nearly let the paper fall to the ground; and the expression of pain and compassion in his features was really frightful to see.

It was that fly-leaf, taken from the Bible, which Cornelius de Witt had sent to Dort by Craeke, the servant of his brother John, to request Van Baerle to burn the correspondence of the Grand Pensionary with the Marquis de Louvois.

This request, as the reader may remember, was couched in the following terms: --

"My Dear Godson, --

"Burn the parcel which I have intrusted to you. Burn it without looking at it, and without opening it, so that its contents may for ever remain unknown to yourself. Secrets of this description are death to those with whom they are deposited. Burn it, and you will have saved John and Cornelius de Witt.

"Farewell, and love me.

Cornelius de Witt.

"August 20, 1672."

This slip of paper offered the proofs both of Van Baerle's innocence and of his claim to the property of the tulip.

Rosa and the Stadtholder exchanged one look only.

That of Rosa was meant to express, "Here, you see yourself."

That of the Stadtholder signified, "Be quiet, and wait."

The Prince wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, and slowly folded up the paper, whilst his thoughts were wandering in that labyrinth without a goal and without a guide, which is called remorse and shame for the past.

Soon, however, raising his head with an effort, he said, in his usual voice, --

"Go, Mr. Boxtel; justice shall be done, I promise you."

Then, turning to the President, he added, --

"You, my dear Mynheer van Systems, take charge of this young woman and of the tulip. Good-bye."

All bowed, and the Prince left, among the deafening cheers of the crowd outside.

Boxtel returned to his inn, rather puzzled and uneasy, tormented by misgivings about that paper which William had received from the hand of Rosa, and which his Highness had read, folded up, and so carefully put in his pocket. What was the meaning of all this?

Rosa went up to the tulip, tenderly kissed its leaves and, with a heart full of happiness and confidence in the ways of God, broke out in the words, --

"Thou knowest best for what end Thou madest my good Cornelius teach me to read."