

Chapter 30

Wherein the Reader begins to guess the Kind of Execution that was awaiting Van Baerle

The carriage rolled on during the whole day; it passed on the right of Dort, went through Rotterdam, and reached Delft. At five o'clock in the evening, at least twenty leagues had been travelled.

Cornelius addressed some questions to the officer, who was at the same time his guard and his companion; but, cautious as were his inquiries, he had the disappointment of receiving no answer.

Cornelius regretted that he had no longer by his side the chatty soldier, who would talk without being questioned.

That obliging person would undoubtedly have given him as pleasant details and exact explanations concerning this third strange part of his adventures as he had done concerning the first two.

The travellers passed the night in the carriage. On the following morning at dawn Cornelius found himself beyond Leyden, having the North Sea on his left, and the Zuyder Zee on his right.

Three hours after, he entered Haarlem.

Cornelius was not aware of what had passed at Haarlem, and we shall leave him in ignorance of it until the course of events enlightens him.

But the reader has a right to know all about it even before our hero, and therefore we shall not make him wait.

We have seen that Rosa and the tulip, like two orphan sisters, had been left by Prince William of Orange at the house of the President van Systemen.

Rosa did not hear again from the Stadtholder until the evening of that day on which she had seen him face to face.

Toward evening, an officer called at Van Systemen's house. He came from his Highness, with a request for Rosa to appear at the Town Hall.

There, in the large Council Room into which she was ushered, she found the Prince writing.

He was alone, with a large Frisian greyhound at his feet, which looked at him with a steady glance, as if the faithful animal were wishing to do what no man could do, -- read the thoughts of his master in his face.

William continued his writing for a moment; then, raising his eyes, and seeing Rosa standing near the door, he said, without laying down his pen, --

"Come here, my child."

Rosa advanced a few steps towards the table.

"Sit down," he said.

Rosa obeyed, for the Prince was fixing his eyes upon her, but he had scarcely turned them again to his paper when she bashfully retired to the door.

The Prince finished his letter.

During this time, the greyhound went up to Rosa, surveyed her and began to caress her.

"Ah, ah!" said William to his dog, "it's easy to see that she is a countrywoman of yours, and that you recognise her."

Then, turning towards Rosa, and fixing on her his scrutinising, and at the same time impenetrable glance, he said, --

"Now, my child."

The Prince was scarcely twenty-three, and Rosa eighteen or twenty. He might therefore perhaps better have said, My sister.

"My child," he said, with that strangely commanding accent which chilled all those who approached him, "we are alone; let us speak together."

Rosa began to tremble, and yet there was nothing but kindness in the expression of the Prince's face.

"Monseigneur," she stammered.

"You have a father at Loewestein?"

"Yes, your Highness."

"You do not love him?"

"I do not; at least, not as a daughter ought to do, Monseigneur."

"It is not right not to love one's father, but it is right not to tell a falsehood."

Rosa cast her eyes to the ground.

"What is the reason of your not loving your father?"

"He is wicked."

"In what way does he show his wickedness?"

"He ill-treats the prisoners."

"All of them?"

"All."

"But don't you bear him a grudge for ill-treating some one in particular?"

"My father ill-treats in particular Mynheer van Baerle, who ---- "

"Who is your lover?"

Rosa started back a step.

"Whom I love, Monseigneur," she answered proudly.

"Since when?" asked the Prince.

"Since the day when I first saw him."

"And when was that?"

"The day after that on which the Grand Pensionary John and his brother Cornelius met with such an awful death."

The Prince compressed his lips, and knit his brow and his eyelids dropped so as to hide his eyes for an instant. After a momentary silence, he resumed the conversation.

"But to what can it lead to love a man who is doomed to live and die in prison?"

"It will lead, if he lives and dies in prison, to my aiding him in life and in death."

"And would you accept the lot of being the wife of a prisoner?"

"As the wife of Mynheer van Baerle, I should, under any circumstances, be the proudest and happiest woman in the world; but ---- "

"But what?"

"I dare not say, Monseigneur."

"There is something like hope in your tone; what do you hope?"

She raised her moist and beautiful eyes, and looked at William with a glance full of meaning, which was calculated to stir up in the recesses of his heart the clemency which was slumbering there.

"Ah, I understand you," he said.

Rosa, with a smile, clasped her hands.

"You hope in me?" said the Prince.

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Umph!"

The Prince sealed the letter which he had just written, and summoned one of his officers, to whom he said, --

"Captain van Deken, carry this despatch to Loewestein; you will read the orders which I give to the Governor, and execute them as far as they regard you."

The officer bowed, and a few minutes afterwards the gallop of a horse was heard resounding in the vaulted archway.

"My child," continued the Prince, "the feast of the tulip will be on Sunday next, that is to say, the day after to-morrow. Make yourself smart with these five hundred guilders, as I wish that day to be a great day for you."

"How does your Highness wish me to be dressed?" faltered Rosa.

"Take the costume of a Frisian bride." said William; "it will suit you very well indeed."