

Chapter 33

Conclusion

Van Baerle, led by four guards, who pushed their way through the crowd, sidled up to the black tulip, towards which his gaze was attracted with increasing interest the nearer he approached to it.

He saw it at last, that unique flower, which he was to see once and no more. He saw it at the distance of six paces, and was delighted with its perfection and gracefulness; he saw it surrounded by young and beautiful girls, who formed, as it were, a guard of honour for this queen of excellence and purity. And yet, the more he ascertained with his own eyes the perfection of the flower, the more wretched and miserable he felt. He looked all around for some one to whom he might address only one question, but his eyes everywhere met strange faces, and the attention of all was directed towards the chair of state, on which the Stadtholder had seated himself.

William rose, casting a tranquil glance over the enthusiastic crowd, and his keen eyes rested by turns on the three extremities of a triangle formed opposite to him by three persons of very different interests and feelings.

At one of the angles, Boxtel, trembling with impatience, and quite absorbed in watching the Prince, the guilders, the black tulip, and the crowd.

At the other, Cornelius, panting for breath, silent, and his attention, his eyes, his life, his heart, his love, quite concentrated on the black tulip.

And thirdly, standing on a raised step among the maidens of Haarlem, a beautiful Frisian girl, dressed in fine scarlet woollen cloth, embroidered with silver, and covered with a lace veil, which fell in rich folds from her head-dress of gold brocade; in one word, Rosa, who, faint and with swimming eyes, was leaning on the arm of one of the officers of William.

The Prince then slowly unfolded the parchment, and said, with a calm clear voice, which, although low, made itself perfectly heard amidst the respectful silence, which all at once arrested the breath of fifty thousand spectators. --

"You know what has brought us here?"

"A prize of one hundred thousand guilders has been promised to whosoever should grow the black tulip.

"The black tulip has been grown; here it is before your eyes, coming up to all the conditions required by the programme of the Horticultural Society of Haarlem.

"The history of its production, and the name of its grower, will be inscribed in the book of honour of the city.

"Let the person approach to whom the black tulip belongs."

In pronouncing these words, the Prince, to judge of the effect they produced, surveyed with his eagle eye the three extremities of the triangle.

He saw Boxtel rushing forward. He saw Cornelius make an involuntary movement; and lastly he saw the officer who was taking care of Rosa lead, or rather push her forward towards him.

At the sight of Rosa, a double cry arose on the right and left of the Prince.

Boxtel, thunderstruck, and Cornelius, in joyful amazement, both exclaimed,
--

"Rosa! Rosa!"

"This tulip is yours, is it not, my child?" said the Prince.

"Yes, Monseigneur," stammered Rosa, whose striking beauty excited a general murmur of applause.

"Oh!" muttered Cornelius, "she has then belied me, when she said this flower was stolen from her. Oh! that's why she left Loewestein. Alas! am I then forgotten, betrayed by her whom I thought my best friend on earth?"

"Oh!" sighed Boxtel, "I am lost."

"This tulip," continued the Prince, "will therefore bear the name of its producer, and figure in the catalogue under the title, *Tulipa nigra Rosa Barlaensis*, because of the name Van Baerle, which will henceforth be the name of this damsel."

And at the same time William took Rosa's hand, and placed it in that of a young man, who rushed forth, pale and beyond himself with joy, to the foot of the throne saluting alternately the Prince and his bride; and who with a grateful look to heaven, returned his thanks to the Giver of all this happiness.

At the same moment there fell at the feet of the President van Systems another man, struck down by a very different emotion.

Boxtel, crushed by the failure of his hopes, lay senseless on the ground.

When they raised him, and examined his pulse and his heart, he was quite dead.

This incident did not much disturb the festival, as neither the Prince nor the President seemed to mind it much.

Cornelius started back in dismay, when in the thief, in the pretended Jacob, he recognised his neighbour, Isaac Boxtel, whom, in the innocence of his heart, he had not for one instant suspected of such a wicked action.

Then, to the sound of trumpets, the procession marched back without any change in its order, except that Boxtel was now dead, and that Cornelius and Rosa were walking triumphantly side by side and hand in hand.

On their arriving at the Hotel de Ville, the Prince, pointing with his finger to the purse with the hundred thousand guilders, said to Cornelius, --

"It is difficult to say by whom this money is gained, by you or by Rosa; for if you have found the black tulip, she has nursed it and brought it into flower. It would therefore be unjust to consider it as her dowry; it is the gift of the town of Haarlem to the tulip."

Cornelius wondered what the Prince was driving at. The latter continued, --

"I give to Rosa the sum of a hundred thousand guilders, which she has fairly earned, and which she can offer to you. They are the reward of her love, her courage, and her honesty. As to you, Sir -- thanks to Rosa again, who has furnished the proofs of your innocence ---- "

And, saying these words, the Prince handed to Cornelius that fly-leaf of the Bible on which was written the letter of Cornelius de Witt, and in which the third bulb had been wrapped, --

"As to you, it has come to light that you were imprisoned for a crime which you had not committed. This means, that you are not only free, but that your property will be restored to you; as the property of an innocent man cannot be confiscated. Cornelius van Baerle, you are the godson of Cornelius de Witt and the friend of his brother John. Remain worthy of the name you have received from one of them, and of the friendship you have enjoyed with the other. The two De Witts, wrongly judged and wrongly punished in a moment of popular error, were two great citizens, of whom Holland is now proud."

The Prince, after these last words, which contrary to his custom, he pronounced with a voice full of emotion, gave his hands to the lovers to kiss, whilst they were kneeling before him.

Then heaving a sigh, he said, --

"Alas! you are very happy, who, dreaming only of what perhaps is the true glory of Holland, and forms especially her true happiness, do not attempt to acquire for her anything beyond new colours of tulips."

And, casting a glance towards that point of the compass where France lay, as if he saw new clouds gathering there, he entered his carriage and drove off.

Cornelius started on the same day for Dort with Rosa, who sent her lover's old housekeeper as a messenger to her father, to apprise him of all that had taken place.

Those who, thanks to our description, have learned the character of old Gryphus, will comprehend that it was hard for him to become reconciled to his son-in-law. He had not yet forgotten the blows which he had received in that famous encounter. To judge from the weals which he counted, their

number, he said, amounted to forty-one; but at last, in order, as he declared, not to be less generous than his Highness the Stadtholder, he consented to make his peace.

Appointed to watch over the tulips, the old man made the rudest keeper of flowers in the whole of the Seven Provinces.

It was indeed a sight to see him watching the obnoxious moths and butterflies, killing slugs, and driving away the hungry bees.

As he had heard Boxtel's story, and was furious at having been the dupe of the pretended Jacob, he destroyed the sycamore behind which the envious Isaac had spied into the garden; for the plot of ground belonging to him had been bought by Cornelius, and taken into his own garden.

Rosa, growing not only in beauty, but in wisdom also, after two years of her married life, could read and write so well that she was able to undertake by herself the education of two beautiful children which she had borne in 1674 and 1675, both in May, the month of flowers.

As a matter of course, one was a boy, the other a girl, the former being called Cornelius, the other Rosa.

Van Baerle remained faithfully attached to Rosa and to his tulips. The whole of his life was devoted to the happiness of his wife and the culture of flowers, in the latter of which occupations he was so successful that a great number of his varieties found a place in the catalogue of Holland.

The two principal ornaments of his drawing-room were those two leaves from the Bible of Cornelius de Witt, in large golden frames; one of them containing the letter in which his godfather enjoined him to burn the correspondence of the Marquis de Louvois, and the other his own will, in which he bequeathed to Rosa his bulbs under condition that she should marry a young man of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years, who loved her

and whom she loved, a condition which was scrupulously fulfilled, although, or rather because, Cornelius did not die.

And to ward off any envious attempts of another Isaac Boxtel, he wrote over his door the lines which Grotius had, on the day of his flight, scratched on the walls of his prison: --

"Sometimes one has suffered so much that he has the right never to be able to say, 'I am too happy.'"