

**The Seventh Bulb:
A Middle Grade Historical Fiction Novel**

by

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Abstract

In this work of historical fiction, a twelve-year-old girl called Emmetje journeys from the streets of Constantinople to the decks of a smuggling boat and on to the back streets and canals of 17th century Amsterdam. In her pocket she carries the bulb of a unique blue tulip, and in her hand is a strange treasure map that uncovers the heart of a nation's strange obsession.

Emmetje's mother had drawn tulips. Hovering beside the elegant petals she drew butterflies, and on their wings she drew her map. Compelled by curiosity and an adventurous spirit, Emme sets out to discover where her mother's map might lead. Her journey is shared by her three-legged tabby cat and a cabin boy called Sander. Emmetje's journey inevitably becomes one of self-discovery where fathers, mothers and horticulture all play their part. The blue tulip bulb is the silent hero, but the not so silent metaphor for Emmetje's identity. Precious, protected, rich with potential and waiting to bloom.

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Dedication

For Emma,
just for being her.

Prologue

An Agreement

Emmetje broke through the downstairs window in the dead of night and crept through the dark, unwelcome stairwells. She found Dr Tulp's library and, after a few minutes searching, she found the leather binding with the drawings tucked inside.

In the dancing shaft of moonlight that played across the desk, she looked at the drawings. Seven of them. Botanical sketches of tulips. Rare and beautiful tulips. She remembered them: her mother's drawings. She relaxed into their familiarity.

And then she saw the butterflies.

Dancing above each stem, small and seemingly innocuous, was a butterfly. She could not believe she had never noticed them before. They were not hidden in the background, but they were still background.

She stared hard at one of the butterflies, its wings elegantly detailed. And sure enough, just as Heer Harmenszoon had said, she began to see the letters emerge. Tiny letters well hidden in the swirl of the wing pattern.

What did it say? She had no idea, but she knew what it was. It was a map. Heer Harmenszoon had told her that much. But to what?

“To treasure, of course,” he had said. “All maps lead to treasure. But as to what kind, that depends very much on the map.”

As she stared at the butterfly wing, she was even more intrigued. But this was not a safe place to decipher it. She packed the drawings away and made her way back down through this strange-smelling house.

When she reached the downstairs window, Dr Tulp was standing in front of it.

Emme turned around only to see the door that she'd just entered from being closed and blocked off by a rather imposing butler in a nightcap and gown. He was as large as the doctor was small. There was no getting past.

“What are you doing here, *meisje*?” the doctor said, taking the drawings out of Emme's clutched fingers. “And what are you doing with my things?”

There was very little Emme wanted to say, but she tried. “They are actually mine. They were given to you by accident and I need them back,” she said.

The doctor shook his head. The butler stepped in closer behind her. “No, *meisje*. I ask you again, what are you doing with my things?”

Emme stared stubbornly at him. “They are mine,” she repeated. “Heer Harmenszoon gave them to you by accident. They belong to me.”

“Correction,” the doctor said. “They used to belong to you, but now they belong to *me*.”

This girl looked desperate. The doctor thumbed through the drawings in his hands. Seemingly worthless sketches, he thought. But an opportunity, perhaps.

“If you want the drawings,” he said, “then bring me the real thing.”

“The real thing?”

“Bring me tulip bulbs. Wild bulbs,” he said. “Do we have an agreement?”

“How will I get them?”

“I do not care how,” he said.

“How many?”

Dr Tulp gave a leering smile. “Seven drawings. Seven bulbs.”

Emme looked hard at her treasure maps, itching to just snatch them and run, but she knew better. “Agreed,” she said, and walked out into the night.

Chapter 1

The Bulbs

Driepoot eyed the bulbs with distaste as he began to paw one across the table. The tilt of the ship helped the bulb's momentum as it tumbled towards the edge.

"Don't do that!" said Emmetje. She picked the bulb up quickly and held it above his head. "Not this one, Driepoot. This one is the most precious of all."

Driepoot seemed not to care and began to lick his front paw as if the offending bulb had somehow dirtied it. Emmetje smiled at him, a small smile, which only turned up one corner of her mouth but reached her eyes, as it always did when she looked at her scruffy traveling companion—a three-legged tabby cat with very long whiskers.

Emmetje placed the bulb in her pocket, which nestled secretly beneath her waistband, and turned to look through the cabin window. The sun was finally disappearing beneath the horizon. She felt that the sun had been taunting her, deliberately lingering, because it knew how much she longed for the night.

For the night would bring the Dutch coast. And the morning would bring Amsterdam, her aunt's apple pie, her warm kitchen and her lap: one of the most comfortable places for a twelve-year-old girl to rest her head, second only to Dreipoot's fat tummy.

As delighted as she was to be returning to Holland, Emmetje would hate to leave the ship. *The Wanderer* was home, just as much as Amsterdam. It had been so for as long as she could remember, although she often wondered what its bedraggled crew of smugglers saw in her that they let her come along whenever she wished. There were never any other children.

She had asked Daaf and Aart and the others many times and they provided a vast repertoire of answers.

"The sea spat you out one day. What could we do but catch you?"

"We found you in a sack of potatoes we brought back from the Americas."

"The stork brought you with the sunrise."

"You were born on board. We're cursed if we throw you off."

Emme's curiosity for the true answer remained but she soon became satisfied with these diverse responses. They made her laugh and feel accepted and safe. And so it was that the truth remained untold to Emme. The truth, that her father was the ship's captain, was untold for reasons long ago decided. And while some of those reasons were now obsolete, the truth had been so long concealed it was now hard to tell.

So Emmetje came and went on the ship, happy and unaware.

Emmetje now turned back to the table and looked proudly at the other bulbs she had taken, resting snugly in the small wooden box. There were six. Not many in

comparison to the thousands that were traded and smuggled every day. Not many in comparison to the dozens hidden even now beneath the reams of cloth and hemp and crates of spices in the hold below.

Emmetje had stolen each one of the six, choosing with great care. She knew that Dr Tulp wanted only the best. They were all perfect. But the seventh one, the one resting comfortably in her pocket, she was not going to surrender. She would have to be clever to get him to give her the drawings with only six. Very clever. The embarrassment of being caught was still with her. It had put her in his power because now he knew how much she wanted those drawings.

“Bring me wild bulbs,” he had commanded. And she had shivered then because she knew she couldn’t steal them from Bollenstreek or Haarlem. Nor could she steal them from the breeders’ or merchants’ nurseries. None of those had been wild varieties for a long time. The wild bulbs meant going up, up, up, into the Turkish mountains. Or at least to Constantinople.

She had bounded on board *The Wanderer*, full of excitement and trepidation. The furthest *The Wanderer* usually took her was around the North coast of Europe, smuggling small loads of wine from France, swathes of cotton from England and grain from Poland. The most adventure Emmetje had ever had on board had been when they once encountered a small Spanish galleon and the two ships had exchanged gun volleys. When Emmetje spoke of the incident it became a lavish and fantastical story of a grand Armada sunk and defeated by her small Dutch *fluyt*. Sometimes she added a couple of dragons for effect. It was, after all, much more exciting than the fact that she had spent the whole

time under the covers of her bunk, terrified by the pounding of the guns and the smoke that burned her eyes.

Constantinople had scared her. It was another world. A place she did not understand. If air ever had a colour, it did in Constantinople. Orange and deep and overpowering, almost as if they had taken spices and dissolved them in the air. And the noises almost seemed to have a flavour, filling Emmetje's nose and mouth and ears with their rich and biting sounds.

While she was in Turkey, Emmetje was as a mouse, trying so hard to go unseen in the busy streets. But Emmetje had not been too scared to get what she had come for, jumping over a high wall in the dead of night and, into the Vizier's garden. The tulips of Turkey's breeders were different, prized for the points on their petals rather than on the anomalous breaks in their colours. But they were what she had been looking for. They were the wild bulbs she sought.

Dr Tulp wanted wild bulbs to create new breeds, new and different from the ones grown in Vienna, in Leiden, or in Amsterdam. The six in the box were just what he wanted. The seventh one he didn't have to know about. In the garden of the Vizier, sectioned separately from every other plant in his garden, was a small bed of half dug bulbs. Emmetje could not read the script on the label but there was no mistaking the small picture beside it. A small tulip with slightly pointed petals.

But Dr Tulp didn't have to know about that. He didn't have to know that Emmetje had found a bulb that any breeder or trader would kill for: a blue one.

“Emme!” Aart’s voice came from the gangway, bringing Emmetje’s attention back to the present. She tucked the box of bulbs into her bag before going to open the door.

“We’re nearing the cove. Captain says you can signal us in if you want to,” Aart said.

“Can I really?” asked Emmetje. “All the way this time?”

“Yes, yes,” said Aart, his voice shaking with laughter. He was amused at Emme’s enthusiasm for the codes and signals that were so ordinary to him. Emmetje beamed and hurried past him.

Emmetje burst out on the deck of the *fluyt* and breathed deeply. She could smell the salt from the sea and she could taste it too when she stuck out her tongue. Daaf took one look at her and stuck his tongue out too.

When Emmetje saw Daaf on the deck she grinned and rushed over to take the lantern from him. It was lit but covered with a heavy sacking cloth so that the light was not seen too soon.

“Remember what to do?” Captain Daaf said as she took up position on the port side and gazed out at the land trying to find the familiar cove. It was a small cove and *The Wanderer*, though not a large ship, had to steer carefully through the narrow, safe corridor to shore.

“Two long from us, two short from them. Wait a count of ten then three long from them and three short from us,” Emmetje recited.

“You’ve done this before?” Daaf joked as he moved to stand beside her. They both peered into the darkness trying to make out shapes that might or might not be Hans.

“Now?” Emmetje whispered.

“Why now?” Daaf replied, again testing his protégé. He rumbled his fingers through her cropped curly hair.

“Because we are far enough into the cove that any passing ship will not see the signal but not so far in that we cannot sail away if it’s a trap.”

She shook her head to dislodge his hand, not because she didn’t like the gesture but because she did. And she didn’t want him to know. She had to pretend to be tough sometimes.

She took a deep breath and removed the sacking from the lamp.

“Two long from us...” she said under her breath as she raised the lamp above the side of the ship and signaled the beacon for the shore. She lowered the lamp and squinted hard at the shore, waiting for the response.

None came.

“Did I do it wrong?” she asked after a minute or two had passed. She looked up at Daaf as he stared at the still dark land.

“Not possible, Emme,” he said in a calm voice.

Still no answering signal.

“Maybe he lost his lantern,” said one of the men.

“Most probably he’s asleep,” suggested another. A third possibility, that of a trap, remained unspoken.

“Do it again, Emme,” said Aart.

Emmetje was ready to do so but Daaf’s calm call to “wait” stilled her hand. He had caught a glimpse of something in the trees.

A lantern flame burst to life, was blocked and then repeated. It seemed Hans was there after all.

Emmetje, a relieved lantern bearer, finished her signal response with diligent care and watched as it was answered. She handed the lantern back to Daaf and turned to go down and collect her things. Daaf's voice stopped her.

"We'll make a smuggler of you yet, Emme," he said.

"I thought I already was," she replied.

"A thief and a smuggler are very different things," said Daaf.

"I'm not a thief," Emmetje said, frowning.

"What about the tulip bulbs from the Vizier's garden?"

Emme patted her pocket. "He will not miss them," she said.

Daaf smiled.

"Well," continued Emme, "he will not know who to look for if he does miss them."

"What will you do with them? Sell them? Grow them? Eat them perhaps?"

"Eat them! How could you?" Emme gasped.

"I would swear to them being very tasty for a starving man. Yes, I think you could eat them."

"But why would you? If you sell just one, a right one that is, like the Semper, then that could buy you a thousand dinners." She paused and he smiled. "Have you? Eaten one, that is," she asked.

"I did not say so," he said. "But answer my question: what will you do with them?"

Emmetje thought of telling him about Mama's drawings—that she would trade them—but she stopped herself. Daaf would think her silly. Or he would try to stop her. But she did not want that. She wanted to get them back herself. She *had* to get them back herself. "It's for my treasure," was all she said.

Daaf shrugged, realizing that she was having fun with her secrets and had no intention of surrendering them just yet. "I see," he said. "For all the riches in the world?"

"No," she said.

"Well, before you are too grand for the likes of us, are you going to help us offload the *fluyt*? Or are you too impatient to get back to your *Tante* and Herr Harmenszoon?"

"I'll help, I'll help," she said, excited again. "I want to ask Hans what took him so long to answer my signal."

Hans had dropped his flint box, and so was unable to light the lantern. He was quite red faced and embarrassed about it, so Emme only teased him a little bit, and went on unloading the cargo.

When the rest of the boxes had made their way onto the small boats, Emme checked her own bag, where the bulbs and Driepoot were nestling inside.

Suddenly, she had an idea.

"Daaf?" she asked, as she snuggled up to the stern of his small boat.

"Yes?" he said.

"You know the bulbs you had in the *fluyt*? Are they special ones? Wild ones?"

"Not particularly. They are ones that the Turkish breeders make just for the Dutch market. More of the ones you see everyday. Nothing like yours, I am sure. "

“I wondered if I might have one.”

He looked at her for a moment. “Yes, you may have one.”

“Thank you.” She looked up at the stars blazing down from the moonless sky, and waited for him to ask her why.

“I shall not ask.”

“Why not?”

“Because I am sure you will tell me if you need too.”

“Yes,” she said.

“So I’ll take you to where the river widens. You can go on the river taxi from there,” Daaf said to the back of her head.

Emme nodded.

“And you’ll take care,” Daaf said. It wasn’t a question.

Emmetje turned to look at him. “Yes,” she said.

At that moment Drie stirred from inside her satchel, and poked his head out.

Daaf smiled—a half smile. “Yes, Drie,” he said, “I know I can rely on you to watch her for me.” It was said in a light tone, but it was not a joke. The three-legged ball of fluff was a strange talisman for his daughter, but a talisman nonetheless. If Drie took dislike to someone there was usually good reason. A well placed hiss and Emme would steer clear.

Chapter 2

Amsterdam

“Flat and wet,” said a rather loud voice on the river taxi. “Flat and wet. It is a miserable little country, isn’t it?” Luckily this loud voice was speaking English so the majority of passengers were happy to misunderstand or ignore him. He was large and seemed to suck up all the air around him. He was dressed like an Englishman, probably a sailor from one of the ships sent over to help patrol and to fight the Spanish. Since there was currently a truce holding, many of the soldiers found themselves rather bored. Many of the Dutch found them rather noisy.

Emmetje was usually good at ignoring tourists but this time her attention was drawn by the loud voice and then kept by the soft voice that answered him.

“I think it is more than that, Captain. *Veel mooier dan Engeland,*” said the tall boy with the soft voice sitting beside him. The accent had been heavily English but the words were very distinctly Dutch. Not many English troubled themselves to learn Dutch.

Yes, this is much better than England, thought Emme in agreement while staring at this freckled-nosed boy with the soft voice. He had a sketch pad on his knee, and a couple of canvases rolled up under his arm. An artist's apprentice perhaps?

She shrugged and turned back to the view of her city. Her Amsterdam.

She got off at the Dam, the main square, with Driepoot hopping along beside her. The English voices got off too.

"Oh look," the loud voiced sailor said. "That girl has a three-legged cat. Look at it go."

The freckled boy went deep red with embarrassment. "I'm sorry about my Captain," he said in his soft, heavily accented Dutch, looking more at Driepoot than at Emmetje.

Emmetje made her half smile and said in her own heavily accented English, "That is fine. *He* does not mind. He still has one leg more than any of us."

She smiled again, wider this time, and walked away across the square.

Had she looked back at this point, she would have seen the Englishmen's eyes fixed on her, one pair nonplussed and the other laughing.

But she did not look back. Her destination was already in the forefront of her mind. She could already see Dr Tulp's dark study. There first, she told herself. There first, get it over with.

It was mid morning as she and Driepoot made their way through the streets. She was good at walking unseen. Past the stalls of the cheese mongers and herring merchants and bakers and children selling nuts from baskets. Past the children playing marbles and bowling hoops.

Driepoot was less inclined to walk unseen. He broke away from Emme's fast moving legs and crossed to the fishmonger's stall. The opportunity for herring should never go to waste and the merchant's wife had a soft spot for this three-legged feline. Pawing at marbles was also something to do as often as possible. The months on the ship had certainly lacked such entertainment.

Only when Emme saw three boys blowing bubbles did she slow down, watching with delight as the soapy film filled with air and lifted away from the wooden ring. She stood for several moments, resisting the urge to join in. But she could not play today. She began to walk away, and Driepoot, after swiping at some low floating bubbles, fell into step with her once again.

They rounded the corner and the austere house of Dr Tulp looked back at them. Emme came down to the kitchen door and knocked. Noises from within seemed to promise entrance but the knock was either ignored or not heard. She tried again.

A sullen woman opened it a few moments later.

"Oh, you've come back, have you?" she said in a tone less than welcoming but held the door open for Emme to pass through anyway. "No, that thing is not coming in here," the woman said when she saw Driepoot.

Emmetje picked him up and rested him gently in her arms. "He'll stay with me. He won't cause trouble," she said in what she hoped was a confident voice.

The sullen face opened her mouth to object but seemed to think it wasn't worth the energy. She turned and spoke to the other person in the kitchen, a young boy who Emme had not seen before, who stood timidly behind the table, chopping vegetables for a stew already on the boil in the fireplace.

“Take her to the *Dokter, blaag*. He is in the library. And watch that cat,” she snapped. The boy seemed not to object to the command nor the fact that she had called him brat but simply put down the knife and moved towards the stairs.

She turned back to Emme. “Follow him,” was all she said.

Emme did. Up the dark stairs, through the dark hall. Driepoot began to wriggle in her arms but Emme held on to him. “Not now, Drie,” she said under her breath.

The boy walked in front of her but kept glancing back over his shoulder. Emme tried to meet his eyes but his gaze stayed low, almost as if he was checking that she was not leaving muddy footprints on the floor. Drie meowed quietly, an angry meow.

Upon reaching the large oak door of the library, he stopped. He took a deep breath and knocked twice.

There came a grunt from within, which was unintelligible to Emme, but might have been ‘come in’ because the boy opened the heavy door.

The room was unchanged from the last time that Emme had been there. Rows of dense, leather-bound books filled the walls from floor to ceiling. The smell was peculiar—a musty stale smell and then, mixed in with that, the smell of onions. Not the warm cooked smell of onions like the one in the kitchen but a raw putrid one, almost as if there was a rotting sack of them hidden amongst the shelves. The last time she was here she looked for such a sack, but realized that the smell didn’t belong to the room. It belonged to Dr Tulp.

Dr Tulp was seated behind an enormous desk at the centre of the room, surrounded by a pile of parchment and open books. The little light there was came from the window behind him and so his face was in shadow.

He was a small man with small eyes. His skin was pale, almost grey in colour, the exact opposite of the flowers he had named himself after. He had thin lips and a long nose that hooked downwards, almost as if it was trying hard to meet his chin. His chin however seemed unwilling to oblige, an almost imperceptible bump between mouth and throat.

This mouth now opened, though the eyes never lifted from the desk. "What?" it said impatiently.

"Um...um..." muttered the boy, as he realized he had no idea who Emme was or what she wanted. "Um...it's a girl with a cat, *Dokter*."

It was clear that this was not the kind of information that Dr Tulp wanted. "Well, what the blazes do they want with me, *blaag*?" he snapped.

"Um...um..." began the boy again.

"Um...it's me," Emme interrupted. "I've brought you a delivery from Constantinople."

Both pairs of eyes were now turned on her, the boy with some degree of gratitude and the doctor's with much interest and excitement.

"Ah, yes. Yes. Come in, *meisje*. And you, *blaag*, can close the door on your way out. We are not to be disturbed." He gestured to an armchair opposite him at the desk but his small eyes never wavered from her. The boy closed the door.

Emme perched in the armchair, which was far too big for her, and put Driepoot down beside her.

Drie sat, unhappy.

She reached into her bag and carefully brought out the small wooden box containing the seven bulbs and placed it on her lap.

Emme took a deep breath. "Now," she said, "I have here seven types of new bulbs. Rare bulbs. From the Vizier's own gardens. I shall give them all to you and, as we agreed, I get the drawings."

Emme had meant to be less blunt but the combination of his smell and his close scrutiny made her desire to be gone overwhelming. Dr Tulp continued to stare at her, his claw-like fingers resting together beneath his sinking chin.

"Well, *meisje*, as I remember the terms of our agreement, you would bring me some of the rarest bulbs and I would consider their worth before we determined what you were entitled to. You sit there with your box and you tell me what it contains but until they grow I will not know for sure whether they are of any value to me. I am not a common gardener to be content with the ordinary."

"These are rare," Emme said, incensed. "I know a right one when I see one. I challenge you to find these anywhere else in the Republic. Even in Constantinople these are rare. I know a right one!"

Her indignation came out of two places. First it came from the truth, the fact that six of these bulbs were exactly perfect, and she disliked the distrust. Second it came from a lie, and the nervous knowledge that one of these bulbs was probably very ordinary. She hoped he would not notice. Perhaps the other six would distract him enough.

She had thought again to give him the seventh, as she had intended in the first place. But she could not surrender it to him. He did not deserve it, she decided.

“I am sure you do—know a right one, as you call it,” Dr Tulp said in a mocking tone. “And if these are right ones, as you say—some of the rarest and most valuable bulbs—then these will be of enormous value. And yet, here you sit, willing to give them to me in exchange for a few unspectacular drawings. It does not seem reasonable.”

He paused, not really because he was expecting a reply but because he wanted to watch the expression settling on the face of his audience. Dr Tulp thought to see confusion or fear. To his disappointment he could read nothing at all. Emme’s mouth was fixed in a determined line.

“You understand my hesitation, I hope,” he continued. “Perhaps as a show of faith, you could tell me of what worth these drawings are to you. Now you may think to fool me, to tell me they are of no value to you, but you have already tried to steal them from me—do not think I have forgotten that. What do you want with these pencil scratchings? Why do you want representations of beauty when you could have the real thing?”

Emme sat very still in her chair. Even Driepoot lay motionless beside her, his warm, fat body providing reassurance.

Emme’s voice, when she finally replied, was small but got louder with each word. “*Dokter*, I admit I am confused. I went all the way to Constantinople and returned. Not a game, *Dokter*, to journey so far or for so long. Had I wanted to trick you, I could easily have taken them from one of the merchants in Haarlem.”

“So it is not a game. But still the question: why so much for so little?” he persisted.

Play the fool, Emme thought to herself. Another deep breath and calm. “But *Heer Dokter*, it was you who set the price. I asked what I would have to give you for the drawings and this is what you said you wanted. I know flowers. I don’t know money. I brought you these bulbs because you asked. I think the drawings are beautiful and can last for a long time. The flowers just bloom and then they are gone. The drawings I can keep.”

Dr Tulp hesitated, unsure whether to believe whether the *meisje* was that foolish. He could not fathom seeing tulips, perfect embodiments of true and natural beauty, as anything but the most precious objects.

“I am not sure I believe you, *meisje*,” he continued. “Knowing right ones as you do, you could offer these to the Haarlem merchants or even sell them yourself and make some real money. Then you could commission artists to draw you all the tulips you want.”

The doctor paused, expecting a response but Emme’s mouth stayed closed.

“Do not misunderstand me,” the doctor continued. “I am happy, very happy, that you undertook such an adventure and are willing to give me something so valuable in return for something so simple. But...”

“Then just be happy,” Emme snapped. “You have what you want. It should not matter why I want the drawings.” Her breaths were short. Her temper was threatening to jump out of the tight control she was holding it under.

“I studied them,” he continued, as if she had not spoken. But the unpleasant way his mouth lifted up in one corner made her sure that he had heard her. “The drawings,

that is. After I had taken them back from you.” She knew he was trying to bait her. She took a deep breath but still said nothing.

“They are good, but not spectacular. The artist I do not know. Not famous so as to warrant such demand.”

He stared at her. She stared back. Please don’t notice the butterflies, she thought to herself, but said nothing.

Emme thought about bluffing. Getting up, telling him she had reconsidered and would keep the bulbs for herself. But surely he would know. She had risked so much already. “Bring me wild bulbs,” he had said.

And now things seemed to have come full circle. That night had sent her on a wild adventure that had brought her back to this stale smelling study.

She realized she would have to tell him something. Part of the truth perhaps? She hesitated to do that, not because it would stop him giving the bulbs, but because it made her feel vulnerable. But she realized she was already vulnerable. She had already shown her weakness and desire. The truth might make him a little less suspicious.

“They are my mother’s drawings,” Emme said finally. “She drew them. I gave them to you by accident.”

The Doctor nodded, seemingly satisfied. “Let me see the bulbs,” he said at last.

“Let me see the drawings,” Emme insisted in reply.

Dr Tulp rose and crossed to the shelves. He pulled out a thin leather bound volume and gingerly carried it back to the desk. He placed it on the corner nearest Emme and undid the leather ties. Emme recognized the binding immediately. She resisted the urge to reach out and snatch it off the table.

Emme took off the lid of her small wooden box to reveal her treasure stash of bulbs to the small doctor. She heard his breath still as he looked at the contents. Her breath did the same but merely to avoid the unpleasant smell that grew more rancid with his proximity.

Two of the bulbs in the box were distinct, their shade and shape easily separating them from the others. For the others, the Latin names reading off them on delicate white labels was enough to assure him that this was a set he had definitely not seen before. The false bulb was hiding itself beautifully. Dr Tulp's eyes never strayed from the box's contents as his long fingers opened the leather bound stash.

Emme finally saw the weathered sheets. The image on the top of the pile was an Admiral, she was sure, its flamed petals declaring its fierce worth. An Admiral because Holland was a Republic now and no ode was due to kings or queens. Across the channel the English seemed to name all their roses after princesses or kings' mistresses. In Holland, the soldiers were the royalty.

The flamed patterns on the petals were almost hypnotising. Thus Emme was startled when the Doctor spoke. "Have you any more, *meisje*? These will not suddenly appear in Haarlem tomorrow because you commandeered a whole ship. I am the only one you have shown these to?"

"No, just you," said Emme truthfully. Because she knew that value was directly proportioned to rarity. If these remained the only ones, she had indeed given the doctor a treasure-trove. She had thought about stealing more, a second of each to join the seventh bulb now hidden away. But she had been timid. One is never missed. Two and suddenly

the small selection looks ransacked. And then there is trouble. One had been her rule for as long as she could remember.

And though it is impossible, it seemed to Emme that the seventh bulb in her pouch at her waist very clearly “felt” at that moment, exerting a strange pressure on her abdomen. It’s probably just Drie stretching, she thought to herself. But Drie was still.

“You have a deal, *meisje*. Take your drawings,” said the doctor in a smug tone.

With an incredible sense of will, Emme refrained from doing a celebratory reel, snatching up the drawings and running for home. With painful slowness, it seemed to her, she tied the leather strings of the binding together and placed them in her bag. She rose and picked up the watchful Driepoot and walked towards the door.

She had opened the door and was stepping through when his voice stilled her. “I might have need of you again, *meisje*, so do not hide yourself too well.” Emme just nodded, and hated herself for doing so. But acquiescence here was the fastest way out and home. She would worry about avoiding *Heer Dokter* later.

As soon as the door was closed behind her, a great weight lifted. She felt overjoyed. She hugged Drie tight as she stepped briskly through the dark hall. Get out of this house, get out, said a voice in the back of her mind. Indeed, she could feel overjoyed outside, away from the onions and the stale air.

She came down through the kitchen, past the sullen woman still busy chopping and calling the poor boy brat. “Goodbye, and thank you,” Emme called out in her most innocent voice as she crossed to the door and opened it.

And she was outside, walking down the alley and onto the main *straat*. Driepoot leapt from her arms, preferring a dance in the melee of legs to the stillness of Emme's arms.

"Home, Drie. Home," she said, mostly to herself. And she walked in that direction with one hand resting across the top of her bag and one placed over the seventh bulb.

Chapter 3

Margriet Linder

Herr Harmenszoon had a house in Amsterdam. It was a narrow house, like most of the houses were. With narrow stairs that wound cheerfully around into narrow corridors.

Herr Harmenszoon was an artist, so the narrow corridors opened out into small rooms with canvases, palettes, pigments and brushes, charcoal and pencils. Almost every day the artist would paint. Almost every day, the silent hands of his housekeeper would tidy, just to make sure the canvases did not fall down and bury the busy artist.

His housekeeper's name was Margriet Linder.

Even though he was a busy artist, he was not always a well-paid one. It worked well therefore that Margriet did not ask for money. All she asked was for room to sleep, and food to eat and that her niece Emmetje could live with them too.

It was therefore into Margriet's arms that Emme flung herself when she walked through the door. It was one of the tightest hugs Emme had ever been given. It was only

then, in the warmth of *Tante*'s arms, that Emme let herself cry. The tears made clean smears down her cheeks, cutting through some of the layers of dirt that had masked her face for so long.

Margriet instinctually knew these were not tears to ask about yet. They should be allowed to come. Questions only belonged when Emme was bathed and fed.

So it was that Emme found herself in a small bathing tub near the fire in the kitchen. She was scrubbed and rubbed, splashed and soaped, from head to toe and she relished in it. She began to prattle and ramble, partly to stop her teeth from chattering but mostly because now she was with *Tante*, all the things about Constantinople that had seemed scary were now just small episodes in her great adventure. She showed off all her new scars, which she took great pride in.

"This one, *Tante*, I got when I bumped into a man in the Grand Bazaar," she said, showing Margriet an almost imperceptible scratch on her left knee. Only eyes that cared could have seen it and so to Margriet it was huge.

"And this one I got when I slipped climbing over a garden wall," Emme continued. "That one bled a lot, *Tante*, but Daaf said it didn't need stitches. I saw him, when Aart had to give him stitches in his arm when the rigging splintered in the storm. They wouldn't let me stay, but I watched through the keyhole. He didn't cry," Emme said with a note of awe in her voice. "I would have tried not to cry too."

"Of course you would, *lieveling*," said Margriet.

"And I didn't cry during the storm. I didn't cry at all. Nor did Drie." Drie looked up from his chair by the fire, but quickly decided that sleep was a priority and his head sank back down again.

“Oh, to be sure I know, *lieveling*. Or else there would be far less dirt on your face,” said Margriet in a laughing voice.

“I had to dirty it, *Tante*, so that the people would not recognize me,” said Emme defensively. That was a half-truth. Generally, when she snuck around at night and through the Constantinople streets, the layers of mud were an important part of her disguise. However, on the ship where all the sailors knew her, it was just more fun not to wash it off, but she wouldn’t tell Margriet that.

Margriet smiled in her broad way, filling her round pink cheeks. Her cheeks were always pink, in just the way that her hands were always warm and smelt like warm honey. She had shoulders meant for crying on and her voice was just the right kind of voice for telling stories.

And she had been the one telling the stories since Emme’s mother had died. Emme had been nine, and she still remembered things. Her voice, the way that her hair fell across her face when she sketched things in the garden. The way she would stroke Emme’s hair when she put her to bed.

Emme thought often of her mother, but she did not miss her. It was not through callousness or disregard. Emme had a practicality about her that made her think that missing someone just made you feel sad. There were many around that cared for her—Drie, Margriet, Daaf, Aart, Heer Harmenszoon even—and they allowed her not to miss Mama. They allowed her to be brave and wild and determined. Emme had decided that her mother would not be proud of her if she just sat around sad.

It had been that thought that propelled her to Constantinople, had made her brave high garden walls and a turgid onion-smelling man.

And that is what she told Margriet when Margriet began asking questions.

“Now *lieveling*, are you going to tell me what this was all about?” Margriet asked as she dried Emme’s shivering form before the fire.

Emme took a deep breath. She looked over at her pouch that now rested on top of the leather binding. She nodded.

“I’ve got them back, *Tante*.”

“What?”

“The drawings. Mama’s drawings. I got them back from *Heer Dokter*.”

“Goodness,” said Margriet. “But where were they? I thought Heer Harmenszoon had them upstairs.”

“Well, yes he did, but he gave them away. By accident. He owed a debt to Dr Tulp, and of course he did not really have the money, so he gave him some of his paintings. Only Mama’s were mixed in with them and he gave them to the doctor.

“How did he do that? I am sure they were separate from his work.”

“I do not know, *Tante*. Is he in now? We can ask him. I want to tell him that I got them back.”

“Oh, no, he is away,” said Margriet.

“Away?” said Emme. “Where?”

“I’m not certain. You know he often goes away. To paint.”

“Yes, but now I have so much to ask him!” she said. “Well, I shall have to be clever, and work them out for myself.”

“Work them out?”

“The drawings. They’re a map, *Tante*.”

“A map?”

“Yes. I had always thought they were just drawings, and I thought they were beautiful. But just that. Then Heer Harmenszoon called me up to his studio. He told me he had accidentally given away my mother’s drawings. But then in the next breath he apologized again, saying that he had always meant to give them to me, so that I might follow...in the Path of the Butterflies. Yes, that was the phrase he used.”

Margriet looked thoughtful, but said nothing.

“Did Mama never tell you anything about this path?”

“I don’t know,” said Margriet. Her tone was brisk, which surprised Emme because Margriet’s tone was never brisk. “I know that she and Heer Harmenszoon and... and others, would sometimes meet and... I don’t know, Emme.”

Emme had moved over to the leather bindings and took out a couple of the drawings.

“Look at them, *Tante*. The butterflies. Look at their wings,” said Emme.

Margriet stared. The lines on the wing at first just seemed like an asymmetrical pattern, but as she stared harder the asymmetry became tiny and intricately drawn letters. She could make out a T from amongst them.

“I never knew,” she said. “What does it say?”

“I don’t know yet, *Tante*. I have to look very hard. They are a map so they must show me the way to somewhere.”

“Yes they must,” said Margriet. She paused, took a deep breath, and continued. “I do understand now why you were so determined to go with Daaf to Constantinople. I did

not realize, when you said you had to find something of Mama's, I did not think this is what you meant."

"What else could I mean, *Tante*?"

"I don't know," she said. Another deep breath. "So now you are going to follow this path?"

"I have done so much to get these drawings, *Tante*. I have to find out what they mean."

"But what if they are nothing. Just drawings your Mama drew. She did not tell me about them, Emme. That might be because they are secret. Or it might be because they are just drawings."

"With writing on butterfly wings?" said Emme.

"A puzzle or a game then," said Margriet.

"If it is only a puzzle then there can be no harm in it," said Emme. Margriet's brow was furrowed so Emme went on, trying to smooth that wrinkle away. "I promise I shall not do anything too silly, *Tante*. Heer Harmenszoon introduced me to an art seller in town. His name was Geert. Perhaps he will know something about them."

Margriet nodded. "And I suppose it is useless to ask you to wait until Heer Harmenszoon returns?"

Emme smiled. "*Och Tante!* You must despair of me really. I hope you don't worry for me too much."

Margriet smiled too. "*Lieveling*, even if you were to sit at home with me all the days, and never get up to any mischief at all, I should worry for you. Your mother was my sister and she would not allow me to stop worrying for you, *lieveling*. So I shall

worry about men and mischief and *Heer Dokters* until my head falls into nonsense and potatoes sprout from my ears.”

As Margriet said this, she wrapped Emme in her arms and ruffled her hand through the cropped curls. Emme did not stop her aunt the way she had stopped Daaf.

Emme snuggled closer. “I shall not worry then at all. Otherwise there shall be far too much worrying going on for my sake.” Emme said the words, and hoped to mean them. Her eyes strayed to her pouch where the seventh bulb was still nestled, silent and safe. She was not sure what to do with it. Perhaps one of the merchants might have heard about blue tulips. Perhaps they were being bartered and traded all over Haarlem and her small bulb would be one of many.

Perhaps she could find someone to talk with about it in the morning.

For now she would sleep. She would rest and drown out the words playing none too quietly at the back of her mind. “I might have need of you again,” his grating voice had said. Yes, she was worried about how big a part *Heer Dokter* still had to play in her adventures.

Chapter 4

The Experts

The pancakes were just what Emme needed. They filled her tummy in all the right ways, especially after all the months of dry, salted or stale offerings on board the *fluyt*. Margriet knew the right way to make a day begin.

Driepoot seemed to agree as he finished lapping up his cream and followed a light-footed, clean-faced Emmetje out the kitchen door.

“Bring back some herring for Drie’s supper or I shan’t be responsible for how he complains,” Margriet called after them. She had a smile on her face but it faded as Emme turned the corner, out of sight. She sighed as she closed the door.

Emme took delight in her city as she walked through, in a way she had not allowed herself to do the day before. The cobbles beneath her feet played themselves out as an intricate maze that she had to find her way through. She imagined hedges that blocked routes straight ahead, and saw the milling crowd as a host of different monsters and

dragons. She allowed Drie to play a sphinx at one point, imagining him conjuring a riddle from his whiskers.

The stalls in the *markt* became castle walls and parapets. The wares became ammunition thrown down from the tower to deter the conquering army. By the time Emme was halfway down the *straat*, other children had joined in so there truly was an army bombarding through.

“Emme! You are back!” said one boy.

“Where have you been at?” said another.

“Oh, how short you’ve cut your hair. Was it very hot where you were?” the enquiries persisted.

“Or were you ill and they cut it all off? That happened to my cousin.”

The questions followed so fast on each other’s heels that no response seemed necessary, or indeed had opportunity to be heard. The game also took priority for most, so often the asker had to run away to chase a dragon rather than wait for a response.

“I must stop the Great Green Dragon before it burns down Haarlem!” shouted one, running off to pry a woman in a green shawl away from a flower stall.

“Beware that maze turn to the right. There is an oubliette waiting to be fallen into.” The fact that it was merely a crack in the cobbles was noticed by none as they all deftly avoided the obstacle.

Emme broke from the game to see the street she needed to turn down. With promises of returning later, she turned away from the happy crowd. Driepoot followed, a half dead mouse dangling in his mouth.

She looked down the row of shops, the signs and colours indicating mostly valuers and brokers. Brokers were dishonest but often knowledgeable about many different goods, especially tulips. It was said by some, she knew, that it was the more secretive brokers, and not the traders, that set the price and value of the tulips.

She chose the closest shop and went in through the frayed wooden door.

At the sound of her entrance, a short man with graying hair came in from a back room. He emitted a large growl from his lips, as if he had been doing very important things and resented the interruption.

“Good morning. I’m sorry to bother you but I am looking for a tulip valuer,” said Emme.

“Show me the bulb,” growled the man.

“Oh, no, I don’t have the bulb,” she lied. “But I can tell you about it...”

A louder growl now. “Hrumph. I do not value thin air, *meisje*. No bulb, no value.”

Part of Emme thought that this line was a good one to exit on. She was certainly not going to show the bulb to this man. But she was mischevious by nature. She would take up a little more of his time, simply because it was the last thing he wanted.

“Oh that is a shame,” she said innocently. “My mistress, she is on her death bed and is clutching it so tight, she would not let me take it. But she begged me to come and find out how much it would be worth, for she claims it is more than her whole fortune, all her four houses and her paintings and her mantle clocks and so on.”

The man looked confused. Emme couldn’t tell if that confusion was based in disbelief or stupidity.

She decided to continue anyway. "Her husband does not believe her, so to prove him wrong she is offering 1000 florins to the valuer that proves its worth."

"Och, well I think I can guess," he said.

"No, well she says it is a tulip no one has seen before. Her delusions must be very bad, as she says it is... blue."

"Blue? There's no such thing."

"Crazy, is it not? Well, I've already taken too much of your valuable time. I'll come back if I get the bulb from my mistress."

"Yes, please do."

She turned to leave.

"Oh!" she said and turned back. "What is your name, just so I have it for my mistress?"

"My name is Hendrik. Hendrik Gulzig." He began to spell it out for her and she made a grand show of writing it down.

"Hendirt Gulpig?" she said in a deliberate way.

"No, no, Hendrik Gulzig," he corrected. She wrote it down again, and then thanked him with a great deal more ceremony than his information warranted but she was enjoying the charade.

Emme and Drie made their way back to the main *straat*.

"Well, he was not very helpful, was he Drie? But we made it fun all the same, didn't we?" she said as she snapped a twig from a low hanging branch of a tree planted along the canal.

Driepoot played with the end of the twig that Emme dangled down for him.

“I agree,” continued Emme, as if Drie had responded. “It was very naughty of us to tease him. But we will try harder to be good next time, will we not?”

Emme paused as she crossed the *Kaisergraacht* and tossed the twig into the slow moving water below. She watched as her twig emerged on the other side of the bridge. She walked on. She crossed the *plein* quickly, en route to Geert’s shop.

Geert van Hulp’s art shop was in a tired looking building in the bustling Jewish Quarter. His shop was cluttered from wall to wall, with canvases and paintbrushes, with pallets and animal bladders filled with pigment. There seemed to be no particular order to the grand assortment of things. Indeed, Geert put very little emphasis on order, believing—like most of the artists that patronized his shop—that all these things were merely tools to a greater purpose, and therefore spending time organising them would be a waste of time that could have been spent perfecting true art.

The delightful chaos of the shop had the effect of making it seem very busy. Any more than two customers squeezed in against the leaning shelves and canvases, and the shop would seem close to bursting.

It was so when Emme entered, Driepoot at her heels, and saw Geert at his counter and a customer in front of him.

“Good morning, *juffrouw*,” said Geert in a cheerful voice. “I’ll be with you shortly.” He listened as the customer explained, in a soft voice, what he wanted, and then went through a curtained entrance at the back of the shop.

Emme remembered this shop from when she had come with Heer Harmenszoon, and Geert had seemed jovial and knowledgeable. Heer Harmenszoon seemed to respect him, and perhaps he confided in him too.

She now stood near the door and looked at some paintbrushes on the shelf beside her. She was distracted enough not to notice as Drie found a loose piece of canvas and began to toss it around the floor. He masterfully evaded all the obstacles around him until—with one particularly acrobatic leap—he found the legs of the customer.

The customer looked down his freckled nose to see what manner of creature had chosen to attack his shins.

“Whoa there, little thing,” he said as he saw the tabby blur jumping round his legs. “What you got there, huh?” he said, leaning down and taking hold of the canvas scrap to wave for his furry attacker.

As he played, he looked hard at the rather plump tabby cat and noted, with a jarring sense of familiarity, that it had only three legs.

His head jerked up and his eyes scanned the room. His eyes found Emme; or the back of her head. Curly, cropped hair that he immediately recognized.

“Um... hello... again,” he said in soft voice and his faltering Dutch.

Emme turned. Her eyes met his. The English boy from the water taxi. But the sense of recognition in her expression was not mimicked in his.

Emme’s face was not what he was expecting. It was clean and scrubbed, with the mud and dirt from yesterday long gone.

“You’re, um... I mean, um... yesterday you were, um...” he tried to say.

She saw his confusion. One side of her mouth curled up.

“I’m Emmetje. And this is Driepoot.”

The boy opened his mouth to reply but Geert came back in from behind the curtain, carrying a small oil painting.

“This is the one he wanted, no?” said Geert, holding up the canvas for inspection.

“Um... yes, thank you very much,” said the boy, still flustered. He reached down to his belt and untied his money pouch. He counted out the florins on the counter for Geert.

“Many thanks. The captain has made a very good choice,” said Geert before turning his attention to Emme. “Yes, *juffrouw*, how may I help you?”

Emme smiled but did not respond until the boy had picked up the painting and was turning to leave. His eyes often glanced at Emme, and his mouth kept opening for conversations he couldn't quite bring himself to start. In the end, he proffered a polite smile and headed out through the door.

Emme watched him leave then turned to Geert.

“I should like to talk to you for a few moments, if that is good,” said Emme.

“About what, *juffrouw*?”

“About some drawings I would like appraised, not for value so much as information.”

“What sort of drawings?”

“Botanical sketches.”

Geert nodded. “Of tulips.” It was a statement of fact, rather than a question. Most botanical sketches of any value were of tulips.

“Yes,” said Emme.

“Do you have them with you?”

Emme hesitated. “Well, um, it is for my employer I ask,” she lied. “Heer Harmenszoon.”

Geert grinned. "Are they more of his own drawings, or are they some that he has found?"

"Not his own," she said.

"Certain? Because he tried to sell his own before."

"What is wrong with his?" said Emme.

"Nothing," said Geert. "Except that no one is interested in purchasing them. I tried to tell him that."

"No, not his own," Emme said again. "These were given to him. He is not interested in selling them. But he was confused because these seemed different."

"Different how?"

"Well, he said something about insects on them."

"Insects?" said Geert. Emme was trying to read his face, seeing if the hint would pique his interest.

"Yes, some flying insects near the blooms. He wondered if this was peculiar."

"Well, without looking at them, *juffrow*, it is hard to say. A number of the botanical sketches have small birds in the distance. I have even seen one with a ladybird climbing the stem. But the majority will not focus too much on the background, especially if the drawing is one of the bizzares. Are they bizzares?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, that is more unique. Is there more than one insect on the flowers? Are they swarming around it?"

"No, nothing like that. I am not certain, but I think he said there was a butterfly and it was flying."

“A butterfly?”

“Yes.”

“I have never seen a butterfly. Most interesting,” said Geert. “And you have no idea as to the artist?”

Emme shook her head.

“Well, I’m afraid I must see them to ascertain any value or significance. But they sound most intriguing.”

The drawings were in their leather binding in her satchel. Her satchel was round her neck. Yet she did not extract it. “I may be able to get one later today,” said Emme.

A man walked into the shop.

“Good morning, *de heer*. I’ll be with you in one moment,” said Geert. He turned to Emme. “Well, *juffrouw*, I can book some time for you later. If you do have it, you can come back near the end of the day. I close at five.”

Emme nodded and walked out of the shop.

Much to her surprise, Drie was not at her heels. She looked back through the shop door but did not see him. She scanned the *straat*, her head turning left and right. She tried not to panic. Drie was always somewhere close.

“Looking for someone?” she heard a voice behind her. The soft voiced boy was standing beside her, Drie cradled in his arms.

Emme was shocked, relieved and jealous all at the same time. Drie never usually let anyone else pick him up. Not even Margriet.

“Thank you,” was all she could muster as she took Drie and put him on ground.

“My name is Sander,” he said as if there had been no interruption at all from their last conversation.

Emme smiled, looking at the wonderful explosion of cat hair now left all over his clothes. Mischievous Drie.

“It is good to meet you, Sander,” Emme said with a laugh in her voice. She was surprised at that laugh. It seemed to start with relief and ended with a strange comfort. This freckled boy, now peppered with cat hair, seemed comfortable. Yes, that was a good word for him.

His name seemed comfortable too. But Sander was a Dutch name. She looked at the boy with the strange Dutch accent and then realized he had probably translated it for her, from the English.

“Driepoot and I are off to get some herring. Hungry?” she said

Sander nodded and followed girl and cat down the *straat*.

Chapter 5

Sander, the Sceptic

Sander was the cabin boy of the Captain from the river taxi. He was tall and a little skinny, with knobbly knees. His voice was soft and unobtrusive, as if it had just broken and he was ashamed and unused to its new pitch.

He was amusing company, too. He had never eaten salted herring whilst walking along the canal, and his initial surprise had Emme laughing. Driepoot had been happy too, pouncing on the piece that Sander had spit out.

“I can’t believe you are a sailor and have never eaten salted herring! What do they feed you on English ships?” she said.

“Oh, things even less edible, if that is possible,” he said as he worked at chewing his second mouthful and not spitting it out. “Salt meats, dried peas. Cheese and bread sometimes. Oh—and lots of beer. Double beer, I think you call it.”

Emme scrunched up her face in disapproval. “I do not like the taste of double beer, or even single beer, the one with less alcohol. I think they taste like bitter oats.”

“I suppose,” he agreed, “but after one or two you stop noticing the flavour. And then it makes one feel happy. It makes me want to sing songs at the top of my lungs.”

Emme still looked unconvinced. “The only way I like it is the way my *Tante* makes it for breakfast—with nutmeg and sugar. Then it’s not so bad.”

Sander shrugged and looked at his last piece of salt herring and then leaned down to offer it to Driepoot. “What does Driepoot mean?” he asked. *Drie* is three, I know but *poot* I’m not sure.”

“Tripod,” said Emme in English.

“Tripod,” he repeated as Drie made quick work of the herring.

There was a comfortable silence.

“So,” said Emme, “have you seen much action? At sea, I mean. Any battles with Spanish ships.”

“No, it has been quite quiet with the truce. But then again I have only been here six months, and most of that has been on land. In fact most of the time I am a shopper rather than sailor. The captain is developing a taste for art. Like this morning, when he sees a piece he likes and then sends me off to pay for it.”

“You like art too though, yes?” said Emme. “I saw your sketch pad with you on the river taxi.”

Sander’s demeanor changed, and he became suddenly shy. “I like art. Liking it and being good are different things. And here in Holland it seems presumptuous to call

oneself an artist when all one does is sketch trees and statues, and maybe a flower or two.”

“Tulips?” said Emme.

“Sometimes,” said Sander. He seemed unimpressed.

“What about buying tulips? Does your captain do that?”

“The Captain does. Sometimes. Grown ones, for decoration. He doesn’t speculate or invest in tulip bulb futures or anything.”

Emme looked surprised. Almost everyone had some kind of tulip share, she had thought.

“He likes the cheaper ones too. None of the Bizarres—you know, the broken petal ones. Just the ones with block colour.”

“And you?”

“Me? No, I don’t buy tulips.”

“Why not? They are very good value.”

“How so?” said Sander, his voice losing a degree of its softness. “They are overpriced and then, because people are so precious about the bulbs, they often never grow the flowers. It seems to me that is like buying an expensive bed you will never sleep in and keeping it in a locked room so no one can look at how beautiful it is.”

Emme was shocked. How could anyone not see the value of the tulip? At first she was unable to respond but, as they passed some tulips stalls and saw the wonderful colours, she found her voice.

“I do not see tulips are any different than gold or silver,” said Emme. “Or hemp or cotton or cinnamon. They are all valuable...”

“Yes, but with tulips it is a value based only on aesthetics. Nothing else,” Sander interrupted. “I mean they are pretty to look at, but they don’t do anything. They are not useful.”

Emme hesitated for a moment, uncertain of herself, which did not happen very often. Perhaps because no one argued with her very much. The realization that this was an argument made her a little excited, and she found her way again.

“So many things are just *pretty*. What are gold and silver, if not metals that are valuable because they are shiny?”

Sander hesitated. He had to agree with her there, that valuing gold and silver did seem a bit arbitrary, but he wasn’t about to argue that they had no value.

Emme took his silence for just such a concession. But while being a fun notch to have made, Emme realized that this did not help him see why tulips were so wonderful.

“Do you know what makes the Bizarres? The flamed ones? Do you know what makes the colour break like that?” Emme said, barely able to keep the excitement out of her voice.

“No,” he said.

“Neither do I. Neither does anyone. Not the biggest buyer nor the Haarlem merchants, not professional breeders nor the housekeepers trying to grow them in their kitchen gardens. You see, it is completely unpredictable, like nature playing a game of chance,” said Emme with awe. “You could buy one hundred bulbs and I could buy just one, and mine is just as likely to flame as any one of your hundred.”

Sander was compelled to nod, though he was not sure if it was in deference to her argument or to the conviction with which she spoke.

“Do you not see the value,” she continued, “in something made perfectly by nature?”

“Perhaps,” he said, “but can’t man make perfect things too, as well as nature? Improve on nature? Take gold ore and turn it into coins and jewellery?”

“No, of course not,” she chided. “Art! Art is a good example. That canvas you have there.”

Sander looked at his Captain’s selected painting. A ship, sails billowing, on a rough sea with dark skies behind. He looked a little harder and he began to see her point. It was a picture of something natural and manmade. It showed man in nature’s control, the sea ready to tip the ship at any moment.

“It’s a manmade interpretation of nature?” he said.

She smiled. “Yes. A successful one. I mean, it is beautiful, is it not? I think succeeding is important too.”

He watched her as she walked ahead. “Where do you learn things like that?” he said, his voice echoing her smile.

“My mother,” she said. “She used to love drawing from nature. Tulips. Dandelions. Sometimes butterflies.”

“Oh,” said Sander. He caught the past tense and hesitated, wondering whether to ask what happened.

She answered the unasked question. “She died three years ago.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Don’t be. I don’t want you to be sorry for me. Neither would she.”

Partly on instruction and partly from relief, Sander changed the subject. Something she could be excited about. Or angry. "So, she taught you all about aesthetics and all about Dutch history with the tulip and why it was so important. So perhaps you can explain to me, who is certainly bewildered by it all, how this strange Dutch obsession with flowers began?"

Emme looked at him. "Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, because it confuses me. How can a group of people become so obsessed with flowers? Yes I understand your point, about nature, but if that is the case, why flowers. Why not water? Or cows. Or cow dung even."

Emme slapped him lightly across the arm. "Oh really. Well, yes I can see how you might think to worship cow dung. No doubt you will now tell me how useful it is."

"Well, it is. Very. But even I might stop short of worship," he said. "So, tell me how this new Republic became so single-minded about bulbs."

"Well, I guess it is because of a man called Clusius. He had got tulips from Persia, and began to grow them in his garden. He wanted to use them to make medicines."

"Useful," said Sander.

"Yes," said Emme. "But I don't think it worked."

"Just pretty then," said Sander.

"But wanted. All the tulips in the land were inside one garden in Leiden," said Emme. The story was pouring out like a litany, and she could hear Margriet's voice in her head, saying the same words to her as a bedtime story, as if this was the family's history or a fairytale, rather than the strange biography of a flower. Margriet said it with love, and delight, just as her sister, Emme's mother, used to do.

“It took a long time for tulips to get out of Clusius’ garden,” Emme continued. “He kept them privately for years, refusing to sell or trade them. This created a strange curiosity around them. But then one moonlit night someone scaled the wall of his garden and dug up a whole patch of the flowers. Some say it was just a common thief but others are sure it was greedy merchants, taking them across canals and bridges into their gardens and nurseries. The only thing people know for sure is that the next spring the bulbs were everywhere.

“Their story might have ended there. They might only have been beautiful flowers, except in a few more gardens. Until, one day, one tulip broke its petals. It should have been a red one but instead there emerged white petals with flaming red stripes.”

Sander watched Emme’s expression as she told this tale, and it made a strange sort of sense. It didn’t seem to be about greed anymore. There seemed a real reverence; as if she believed the tulip bulbs were truly magical.

“And this is the Semper one? This ‘Semper Augustus’ that everyone talks about...”

“Is considered the most rare and valuable of all,” continued Emme. She moved her hand over her pouch where the seventh bulb still nestled silently.

“And is it true what they were saying? That they sold a bulb for over 4000 florins?”

Emme nodded. “And a horse and carriage.” She saw Sander’s eyes go wide in disbelief. She liked that he didn’t hide what he was feeling. “It is said that a man once offered a load of wheat, rye, oxen, swine, sheep, wine, beer, butter, a thousand pounds of cheese and a bed all for a single ‘Viceroy’ bulb.”

Sander’s mouth dropped open now to match the openness of his eyes. “Is that really true?”

Emme laughed. "I don't know. I wasn't here. I just heard that. But it could be. After all, a Viceroy is easily worth 3000 florins and you could certainly buy most of those things for 3000 florins!"

"But doesn't that strike you as too expensive? I mean, wouldn't you rather have the oxen and the swine?"

"Me? No. A tulip bulb is easier to carry," said Emme as she turned to cross the canal.

Sander couldn't help the smile that came to his lips as he watched her walk across the bridge.

But Sander's were not the only eyes watching Emme. From the other side of the bridge, a boy's gaze was fixed on the satchel she was carrying. The boy watched from an alley as Emme and the satchel got closer and closer.

Paces later, the boy pounced, his hands making a determined grab for the satchel. Then he ran and began to take the satchel away with him. But the satchel's strap was still wrapped round Emme's neck and so his tugging brought her crashing down onto the cobbled ground.

The boy pulled at the satchel but Emme would not let it go. Sander rushed forward, but unsure whether to help Emme hold on to the bag or to just push the boy away.

He tried both. He pushed at the boy, but he was bigger than Sander's tall thin body could move. So Sander took hold of the strap and pulled. As he was pulling in a separate direction from both Emme and the boy, it did very little to help anyone.

Suddenly the boy let go of the satchel and turned away and ran. The sudden release made Sander fall back and land hard on his backside.

Emme and Sander lay and sat at the side of *Prinsengraacht*.

“Are you all right?” asked Sander when he had caught his breath.

Emme nodded but said nothing. Her eyes were trying to follow the retreating figure of the thief. He looked strangely familiar. She had not seen his face at all, so intent had been her focus on holding onto the satchel and the contents inside. But now, as she followed his head through the crowd, she could not shake the feeling that she knew him.

“Well that was bold,” said Sander. “In the middle of the day and the middle of the city?”

Emme sat up. She looked into her bag and saw the leather binding. Intact. Not bent. Still there. No, it didn’t happen like that in the middle of the day unless you had something particular that someone wanted.

“What do you have in there, anyway? A stash of bulbs no doubt. Or cow dung?” said Sander.

Emme’s eyes turned on him. “No,” she said.

The intense look in her eyes surprised Sander as he stood up and offered his hands to help Emme to her feet.

She accepted the gesture.

“Where’s Driepoot?” Sander asked as she stood.

Emme looked around. “He’s somewhere close. Don’t worry,” she said. She gave a small sigh of thanks that Drie had not been in her satchel.

Emme turned her eyes back to Sander. “Thank you for your help,” she said.

He smiled. “You’re welcome. Though I do hope that whatever is in that bag of yours is worth the bruises on my bum. These cobbles are not too comfortable.”

Emme could not help laughing. “Yes, I think it is,” she said. “Yes, yes. I know it is,” she corrected.

Sander looked hard at Emme. He did not know how to ask her. Ask her to tell him what was in the bag. He decided to start simply. “So, where to now?”

“You don’t have to go back to the Captain?” said Emme.

“Well, I suppose he will want his painting at some point, but it is hardly urgent. He is busy all day today anyway,” said Sander.

Emme hesitated.

“So I am available,” continued Sander, “to sit on any number of cobbled bridges with you.”

One half of Emme’s mouth turned upwards. “Well,” she said, “I guess we should start by catching up with Drie.”

“And keep talking about tulips?” said Sander.

“Yes. And butterflies.”

Chapter 6

The Path of the Butterflies

And so it was that Emme told this funny English boy about her mother's drawings. About the intricate words in the wings. He asked all the right questions and was silent in all the right places.

And so, as late morning ebbed over into late afternoon, they sat on the quiet banks of the *Prinsengraacht* canal, and considered the seven wonderful illustrations.

She took a strange sense of pride in Sander's sense of reverence and intrigue.

"In spite of your lack of respect for tulips in general, you seem quite impressed," she said.

"Look at the detail," he said. "The detail of the line work." He seemed not to breathe as his eyes scanned the sheets in front of him.

Emme understood. There was something hypnotic about them.

The only one not interested in the seven drawings was Driepoot who was happily engaged in disturbing the cobwebs in the corners of the bench where they perched.

Sander suddenly held up one of the drawings.

“Of the seven,” he said, “this one seems somehow different. The other six are very similar in style and execution. This one is just different.”

Emme nodded and was silently elated. She had accidentally found her expert.

“Also,” he continued, “all of others are unsigned, but this one seems to be initialed: R. H. L.”

“Does that mean anything to you?” said Emme.

“No, you?”

“No. Heer Harmenszoon told me that my mother had drawn them, and they aren’t her initials.”

“All of them?”

“He did not say *all* but he did call them my mother’s drawings,” she said. “Do you think that means that the seventh one is separate? That it doesn’t belong.”

“No,” Sander said. “They are clearly a set, despite the differences of the last one.”

“Because of the butterflies?” said Emme.

“Not all of them have butterflies,” said Sander. Emme looked at him and then back at the drawings. All seven seemed to have butterflies.

“Yes they do,” said Emme.

“No, do you see these three here? Those are moths, not butterflies.”

Emme looked at him in astonishment.

“I used to catch them and draw them in my garden back home,” said Sander by way of explanation. “They are plainer, usually brown in colour. Whereas butterflies...” he trailed off, allowing the drawings to speak for themselves.

“Do you think that matters?” Emme asked.

“I’m not sure,” he said.

Emme examined the pages. “Yes,” she said suddenly. “Yes it does. The moths don’t have any writing on their wings, whereas all the butterflies do.”

But she wasn’t sure what that meant. If it meant anything at all. She decided that it was something she would worry about later. The wings that did have messages on them were probably more important.

“Let’s worry about the butterflies first. Each of the wings has letters on them. Do you have a notion of what they are saying? Perhaps we need to put them in order for them to make sense,” said Emme.

Sander squinted his eyes and lowered his head to the drawings. He muttered under his breath and tapped the nearest page with his finger, almost as if he was trying to count out a rhythm.

He slowly sat up and shook his head. “I really don’t know what I’m looking for,” he said.

Emme turned back to the drawings. “Maybe they are anagrams of some kind. The letters are all scrambled up and we just have to put them back in the right order. You look at those and I’ll do these,” she said, distributing the drawings randomly.

They were silent as they set about their task, both considering every aspect of the illustration before them.

“There’s a number on this wing!” said Sander. “A number one. Maybe that means this is the first.”

“Maybe,” said Emme. “But that just confuses things, because none of my wings have numbers on.”

“Neither do the rest of mine,” said Sander. “And if we are talking about confusion, one of mine has a small square in it, as well as all the letters.”

Emme shrugged. “Just keep looking,” she said.

Emme’s eyes grew tired of staring at the tiny letters on the intricate wings. Her eye drifted down the page. Down past the raging red striped petals, past the slender stem and the spanning green leaves and then down to the roots. Stringy random looking roots.

That all of a sudden did not seem so random. As she looked harder at the wiry pattern of the roots, one seemed to bend in a very unnatural way, almost in the shape of a...a...

“Three!” Emme said, making Sander jump. “On the roots. Three. It’s the number three. Look at the roots, look at the roots.” Emme turned her eyes to her other sheets. A seven. A four. All in the roots. This had to be right.

And very soon they had one through to seven in order. Emme could not help smiling. Even though they did not know what the wings said, she felt that there was more direction.

They turned their attention to what they knew was the first in the series.

“It is this one that has the square,” said Sander. “Also an N, an I, two Es, an L and a D.”

“And the second drawing is the one with the number one on its wing,” said Emme, shaking her head. “But first one first. If it is an anagram, then what do those letters spell out? Exclude the square.”

Sander shook his head. “I am afraid that my Dutch spelling is not very good. I would probably be better with the square.”

Sander hoped he might see the corner of Emme’s mouth rise, but her concentration was with the letters.

“Leiden!” she said suddenly.

“Leiden,” he repeated.

She nodded. She knew it sounded right. It was where the first tulips had been in Holland, the place of Clusius’ garden. But she was suddenly very worried. She did not want to go all the way to Leiden. She had only just returned to Amsterdam. What if each drawing required them to go to a different city in the Republic?

“Leidensplein,” said Sander.

Emme looked at him.

“Because of the square. In English, a square means the shape as well as a *plein* or place,” he said. She continued to look at him. He smiled. “I said I’d be better with the square.”

Leidensplein was one of the main squares in Amsterdam and was only a few streets away from where they were. Emme wanted to jump up and go immediately. But without any of the other clues worked out, she realized that was not going to get her very far.

They set to work again, this time on the second and third drawings.

“Bridge,” said Emme suddenly, looking at the second drawing. “This spells bridge.”

“Yes,” said Sander. “But what does the number one have to do with a bridge?”

“I’m not sure. And the third one still doesn’t make any sense. An L, an N, an R, an A, and a U. I can’t think of anything spelled with those letters,” said Emme.

At this point Driepoot, who had now destroyed all the cobwebs, was scratching impatiently at Emme’s leg.

“I agree,” said Sander. “Let’s just go.”

“But we only have the first clue,” said Emme.

“Exactly,” said Sander. “We have the first clue. We can work out others as we go. We might even need something from the locations to help the next clues make sense.”

Emme hesitated.

“Come on,” said Sander. “Or it will be dark and then you’ll have to wait till tomorrow.”

They collected their things and walked towards Leidensplein, the first stage on The Path of the Butterflies.

Chapter 7

Stone Tulips

Leidensplein was bustling. Unlike many other squares in the city that belonged to the day, Leidensplein seemed only to wake up as the sun came down. It bordered on the *Princengracht* canal that ringed the city like a moat round a castle. The Leidensplein sat like a gatehouse on the canal's banks, but rather than guards, it had seamen. Sailors, and merchants filled the alehouses, and poured onto the streets, and there were captains en route to and from their ships.

"I'm not sure about this, Emme," said Sander as he looked around.

"Not sure about what?" asked Emme.

"I think I may have been a little keen," he said. He looked at her and her straight face. "You are just waiting to tell me that you were right, that I was too impatient. Go on."

Emme kept her face straight. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Sander looked again at the milling crowd around them and waited for her to tell him all the things he had suddenly realized: that they didn't have the slightest idea what they were looking for. Looking at the crowds and the size of the square was not encouraging. Even if they knew what they were looking for, it would be hard to spot.

Driepoot hopped out into the throng of legs. Emme followed without hesitation. "I think it will be in the middle," she said. "And as to what it is," she continued, asking his unasked question, "I think we will know when we see it."

"And this uncertainty doesn't discourage you?" said Sander.

She shook her head.

They reached the middle of the square. A lamp post stood there, its flame flickering insistently at them.

Emme walked around it, her fingers outstretched to feel its texture, hoping to encounter some secret nook or notch. She stopped as Sander began to laugh and stared at him.

"I'm sorry. I am. Very sorry. This is good," he said, trying to pick up on his earlier enthusiasm. "Maybe it's something hidden next to the flame?"

"No, the lamplighters would see it."

"Well, I'm hoping someone can see it," said Sander.

Emme didn't answer.

"Why are you so sure it's in the centre?" asked Sander.

Emme shrugged. "I'm not. It just seemed like a good place to start."

"So I guess we'll just start working our way outwards, and try not to hit too many drunk seamen along the way," said Sander.

“Yes,” said Emme. “Do you recognize anyone? From your ship, I mean?”

Sander looked round. “No, I don’t think so. Why?”

“Just wondering.”

Sander began to move away, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground, as if one of the textured cobbles beneath his feet would reveal something. Truth be told, he was wishing for a beacon signal or an enormous X mark. Then he might feel less silly about being so keen to run out and look for this clue. He was liking their odds less and less as he bumped into more and more people. Sander knew this was inevitable if one was going to keep one’s head down but this did not change his predicament.

Why, he wondered. And he did not mean this quest. He did not mean why had he insisted they come out and look before they knew what they were looking for, though that question clearly did apply. He was wondering why he was so compelled to stay with this strange girl. It was true his usual life on board ship lacked any real excitement, but it was more than that.

He looked up to see Emme still scouring different lamp posts with the same diligent care. Her concentration made her eyebrows turn down and she was biting her lip. Why? he thought again. Why has she let me come?

The answer, had he asked her the question, she would not have given him. Because she would not admit it to him yet. She would not admit that she had trusted this tall, soft-spoken boy from the moment that Drie had let Sander hold him.

Their cobble and lamp post search continued for a short while until the futility of it became too much, even to pretend to ignore.

“Maybe we should come back when it’s light,” said Emme.

“And empty.”

“Yes. Just after dawn would probably be best.”

“Yes,” said Sander. “So what next?”

“Nothing, until morning. We might look more at the drawings but otherwise I can’t think of anything.”

Sander looked around. “So perhaps some double beer then?”

Emme scrunched up her nose in distaste and Sander laughed.

“Oh come on! Don’t be such a grumpy thing.”

“Grumpy?” she repeated in English.

“Yes, grumpy. As opposed to grumpy. My grandmother said it all the time.”

“My *Tante* calls me sour milk puss sometimes.”

Sander laughed again.

“Well, come on sour milk puss, let’s have beer,” he said as he walked her towards one of the larger taverns. They got to the door and she stopped. “I’ll wait here,”

“No, come on, Emme,” he said but she was quite resolute. “Why not?”

He waited for some explanation. Nothing about her made him think she would be scared of a tavern, or even the men inside one. But she was still.

He was about to ask again but her hand flew up in a gesture for silence. That hand then fell and pointed to the bottom of the doorframe.

His eyes followed her hand and he suddenly saw what she saw. Not there unless you were looking, carved into the bottom of the doorframe, was a strange symbol. One might have mistaken it for some small insignia of a royal crown or something, but to eyes

that knew that their path involved tulips or butterflies, there was no mistaking it: the three-pointed tulip petal and the butterfly hovering above .

Emme looked up at the name of the tavern: It was called Leidensplein Tavern.

Emme frowned and then pulled Sander inside.

The atmosphere was not as bustling as the scene outside. It might be because it was still a little early, or it might have been that this, for all the self-importance of its name, was not the most popular establishment in the Square.

Emme sat at a table in the corner as Sander went to ask about beer and perhaps some dinner. He had very suddenly realized that he hadn't had anything since that salt herring, which he decided could not really be thought of as a food.

He ordered stew and beer and decided, as he placed the florins on the table, that if Drie was hungry he would have to do with leftovers of that.

At the thought of Drie he turned to Emme. Much to his surprise, the cat sat in the middle of her table. He certainly had not come in with them and he wondered if this cat was part homing-pigeon, because he seemed able to find Emme wherever she was.

Emme was trying to look at one of the drawings from behind the lump of cat and fur.

She was suddenly distracted by some voices across the tavern. Not that she knew the voices. She had just overheard a peculiar phrase.

“A blue one?”

Her ears pricked up.

“Yes, a blue one. Gulzig was in here earlier, talking about some mad dying woman who thinks she is seeing blue tulips in her death bed, or something.”

“Are there blue ones?”

“No, of course not, or the merchants would have sold one by now. Blue is a very hard colour. How many flowers do you know that are blue?”

“Hydrangeas,” chirped up a new voice.

“Forget-me-nots,” said another.

“Well, of course there are some, but not many. And never a blue tulip.”

“Breeders these days, maybe they can do anything.”

“Load of nonsense.”

Sander came over to Emme with a beer in his hand. “We’ll share it,” he said, “since from your face I gather a whole one would not be to your liking. There is stew coming if you’re hungry.” He may as well have been addressing Drie directly for all the response he got from Emme.

He sat down beside her. “I realize how foreign I am when I come in here. There are some men at the bar arguing about flowers. In England, that could never...” He trailed off. She clearly was not listening to him.

“Sshhhh!” she said gently.

“What?”

“I’m listening to the men talking about flowers.”

“Oh, of course. Have they moved on from forget-me-nots?”

“They are talking about the rumour of a new breed. A blue tulip.”

“A blue one?”

“Yes.”

“And you are interested from the historical perspective or the aesthetic perspective?”

“Neither,” she said. She looked at him for the first time since he had sat down. On a whim, she leaned forward and whispered into his ear. “I’m interested because I started the rumour.”

“You?” he said. “But why?”

Emme smiled her half smile. “Maybe I was bored.”

“Bored,” he repeated.

“Maybe,” she said. “But enough now. Here look at this one.”

He looked at the drawing over her shoulder. “Which one is this?” he whispered.

“The second one,” she said. “Its clue is Bridge and then a number 1. I am wondering if it might be a tavern too.”

“But why? Do you think they might all be taverns or something?”

“I’m not sure, but it seems to be worth considering,” she said. “Thought I can’t think of any taverns called Bridge One or anything like that.”

“Neither can I,” said Sander, lifting the beer to his lips before Drie could sniff anymore at the foam. Driepoot’s wet pink nose seemed to wiggle in protest as Sander drank. “What’s the third clue? Maybe that will tell us?” he said as he swallowed.

Emme shifted the pages and brought out the third clue. “An L, an N, an R, an A, and a U. I am still not sure what that spells.”

Sander looked hard at the letters, letting them blur before his eyes—it seemed pointless, trying to spell Dutch words. He had enough problems with English ones. ‘LNRAU’ could have been Dutch for all he knew. He found himself looking at English

words—urn, run, ran—over and over and he was ready to give up when his stew was plopped in front of him.

“Have some,” he offered Emme, and was not surprised when it was Drie rather than Emme who answered with a short ‘miaow’. It was the first time he had heard Drie speak, he realized. He was sure it was this that softened him as he gave the first piece up to Drie’s waiting mouth.

Emme eventually responded too, as the smell of the pie was too tempting.

Through mouthfuls she continued to utter Dutch possibilities to solve the anagram and so Sander returned to his own English word game—RA, UN, LUNRA—no, none of them were words. Wait. LUNRA wasn’t. But change the A and the R.

“LUNAR!” he said.

“What?”

“LUNAR,” he repeated. “It’s a Latin word, meaning moon.”

Emme looked at the third clue again.

“I know it probably isn’t a Latin word, but that just happens to fit with those letters,” said Sander.

“I am not sure. It feels right but it is English. What about the second one, BRUG—is there an English word that fits those letters?”

Sander thought. “I can only see the word GRUB which is slang we use on board for dirt or food, so I am inclined to think that the Dutch bridge is a much better guess. I’d stick with that.”

So where did that leave them. Leiden, bridge, lunar.

“Hey, that’s funny,” said Sander.

“What?”

“Well, no, I’m sure it’s nothing really, but those were all words in your story.”

Emme looked at him in a way that commanded explanation.

“I’m sure it’s nothing, but the story you were telling me earlier, about the merchants stealing tulips out of Clusius’ garden one moonlit night. They crossed bridges back to their nurseries.”

Emme continued to stare at him and he was beginning to find it very unsettling.

“Forget it. Just coincidence,” he tried to reassure her.

“Hmmm. I’m not so sure. It is a well-known story. And moonlight and bridges are always a part of it, even though I always thought of them as just embellishments people put in to liven up the story.”

Without realizing, she began to finish the stew. Sander smiled as he finished the beer. His stomach rumbles told him that he should mind, but his “hey, slow down there,” was not really meant to stop her.

“I’m sorry,” she said through a full mouth.

“It’s fine,” he smiled. “As far as food is concerned, I’m sure there’s always more to be had.”

Drie seemed less impressed with Sander’s egalitarian attitude as he began to lick the bowl.

Then Emme gasped.

She stood up, gathered her things and darted towards the door. Sander gulped back some beer before jumping up, and he followed her out, Drie at his heels.

Emme rushed across the square towards the *Princengracht* and the bridge that crossed over it.

She looked at the base stones of the bridge, looking for that little symbol she hoped would be repeated.

Sander didn't ask but began to search as she did. They had crossed the bridge and were about to give up when Emme saw the stairs off the bridge to the canal side. She leaped down and then edged carefully along the narrow canal.

Her effort was not in vain because there, in front of her eyes, carved under the curve of the bridge and hidden from unsearching eyes, was the butterfly hovering above the petals.

"How did you know?" asked Sander.

"It was you. The story. I realized that this is called the Leiden bridge because it is part of the road to Leiden. Certainly this is the first bridge into Amsterdam that they would cross, those merchants, with Clusius' bulbs in their arms."

Chapter 8

Confusion

Emme and Sander sat by the bridge and contemplated the remaining drawings, but in the dim light of the lamps it was very difficult to decipher which way might be next.

“But whichever way, I think it will take us out of the city, probably over the bridge to Leiden,” said Emme. The excitement of the finds so far propelled them forward, but common sense and exhaustion held them back.

“I say some sleep and we pick up the trail fresh in the morning,” said Sander. Emme looked at Drie as he chased a moth along the cobblestones and nodded. Home to Margriet. A warm fire.

“Dawn, here?” Emme asked.

Sander nodded. Emme got up and began to walk away, the promise of meeting in the morning hanging in the air.

Emme didn't want to admit it, but part of her didn't want to go too far from Amsterdam right now. She had only just got back, and goodness knows where this new path would take them.

The question of what she was doing loomed large in her mind. Should she go chasing stone tulips across the United Provinces? Why couldn't she do as Margriet asked and wait for Heer Harmenszoon?

Because that was not who she was. And she was beginning to get the feeling that Harmenszoon would not just give her answers. He would expect her to find the path for herself. A path to tulips?

She put her hand over her pouch. The bulb was still there of course, in its warm hiding place. She could sell this, to a Haarlem merchant, or Hendrig Gulpig, and be as rich as an admiral. Then she could go back to playing with her friends and forget about silly drawings and...

She shook herself angrily. "I like adventure," she said aloud. "We like to wander, don't we, Drie? Another place to see and more things to do. Margriet will always be waiting for us with sweet buttermilk and herring.

"Yes, on to Leiden we shall go, Drie," she decided, and picked up her pace. Drie ran ahead chasing a rat along the cobbles.

As Emme neared the main *straat* of the Jewish quarter, she saw light spilling out from beneath a few doors. Many merchants lived above their shops so it was not unusual to see light this late. One door she recognized as Geert van Hulp's. She had not gone back at five. She had not needed to. She and Sander were doing well. There was probably nothing Geert could tell her about the drawings.

She was about pass the door, but tripped up on Drie. She caught herself before falling and looked down at him, the now dead rat dangling in his mouth. Drie obviously decided it was a lovely gift and set it at Emme's feet.

"I don't want it, Drie," she said, catching her breath. "And don't bring it with you. Put it down, Drie."

As she shooed Drie away, he hissed. She was shocked. He never hissed at her. But then she realized he was not hissing at her. There was noise coming from behind Geert's door. The door began to open. A figure stood in the doorway. From instinct, she jumped into the shadow behind the door. She knelt down, trying to be small.

"Yes, yes, that was the girl," said Geert van Hulp.

"And she had botanical drawings?"

Emme's ears pricked up. She recognized the second voice. Quiet, nervous, but not at all gentle.

"No, but she talked about botanical drawings. With insects. She was very interested about the insects. That's all I know, so please go. It is late."

"She said she would be back?"

"Yes, but she hasn't been. Now really, please, go."

"*Heer Docter* thanks you," said the boy as he stepped out and began to walk down the street. Turning back once, his face caught the light coming from the still open door. His face was narrow and his mouth had a sneer fixed to it. Emme had to cover her mouth to stop from gasping.

The boy from Dr Tulp's kitchen!

Emme sat against the wall. She tried to concentrate on breathing because she couldn't focus on her thoughts, which were turning round and round like a spinning top. Before she had been trying to seem small, but now she felt small.

The boy and Dr Tulp. Looking for her. *Heer Dokter* after the drawings? But why? Had he found out that only six of the bulbs were really valuable? So fast? Would that matter to him? Of course it would. He was a very petty man.

"Yes, Drie," she thought as he rubbed up against her still folded knees. "I must think about my breathing."

She stood up slowly and began to walk away, away from the back alley and onto the main *straat*. Her steps were quick because she did not want to linger. Her usually familiar world felt like a pillaged kingdom.

She reached Margriet's door in no time at all and stepped inside. Margriet had fallen asleep in the small wooden chair near the door, her candle burning low. Emme touched her shoulder gently.

"I am home, *Tante*," Emme said. "You should have gone up to bed."

"Are you well? Are you safe?" said Margriet.

"I am well," she said, not sure of the answer to the second question.

Margriet got to her feet. "To bed, *lievling*," she said as she pushed Emmetje up the narrow staircase.

"Do you know if Daaf is in Amsterdam, *Tante*?" Emme said.

"I don't know. You know better than I do, *lievling*," Margriet replied. "What did he say when he dropped you off?"

"That he had to unload. So he may still be nearby."

“He may. Are you going away again, Emme?” she asked, the worry not disguised in her voice.

“I am not certain. I may have to,” said Emme with a small sigh. “Would it bother you awfully, *Tante*?”

Margriet smiled down at her. “I thank you for asking, *lievling*,” she said. “And you are very funny. Like your mother, *lievling*, you will always do what you want. Stubborn. Stubborn like honey on your fingers. I shall worry, but if you are with Daaf I will know you are safe.”

Emme was quiet.

She let Margriet lead her up to the tiny nook she called her bed, let Margriet set down the candle and get the water basin, all without saying a word. She let Margriet rub away the dirt of the day, from her nose and tired eyes. And her hands.

“Such small hands,” said Margriet. “You grow every day, but I think your hands will always stay small and clever.”

Still Emme said nothing. She let Margriet tuck her in to bed, and let Margriet kiss her now clean forehead, and stroke Drie as he curled up neatly by Emme’s head. As Margriet began to get to her feet, Emme spoke.

“Do you think Mama would be proud of me?” Emme said.

“How can you even ask! Prouder than a star when it shines its brightest.”

“Yes, though I don’t think she would let me wander like you do.”

“Maybe. Maybe she would want to come with you.”

“Would she?”

“Do not think your wandering spirit was plucked from the dust in the sky. It was born to you like those curls.”

“And a love of tulips?”

“That, too. Though for your Mama it was not just tulips. Anything that flowered. Even dandelions. She would fill the kitchen with bouquets of dandelions. And decorate the window boxes with daisies. Weeds mixed in with tulips. And she did not love tulips because everyone else liked them. She liked them for themselves. For their pointed petals. For the strange green of their stems,” said Margriet.

“And because of Clusius?”

“Yes, because it was such a marvellous story. One man’s garden becomes a country’s obsession. And because she felt they deserved the attention. The tulips, that is. “They try to stand so straight,” she would say, “unwilling to bow their heads. I think they deserve respect.” I would laugh at her. I still do. But now I think we are laughing together.”

“What happened to Mama’s garden? What happened to all her tulips?”

“Many things. Perhaps it was sad too and forgot to grow. Squirrels ate many of the bulbs. Some were taken. And the dandelions conquered everything that was left.”

Emme was silent again, and her eyes drifted towards the small chair in the corner where her pouch now rested. Margriet began to walk away.

“*Tante*,” Emme said suddenly, “if you had a bulb, a right one, a proper right one, like the *Semper*, what would you do with it?”

Margriet did not hesitate. “I would sell it—and make sure you had all the things that you deserve. And buy soft plush pillows for Drie. And I would buy you a big bed with

four posts that was far too big. And I would keep the rest of the money tucked carefully away, perhaps built in to your new bed, so that we would always be...comfortable.”

Emme nodded. “Daaf said he would eat it.”

“Perhaps he would. Squirrels eat them. They probably taste quite good.”

Emme laughed. “He said that too. Me, I am not sure. Perhaps I would sell it.”

“Well, let me know when you have a Semper and I shall try and convince you,” Margriet said as she opened the door. Just before she closed it behind her, she stopped. “You know what your mama would do, don’t you?”

“Plant it,” said Emme. “Plant it and watch it grow.”

Margriet nodded and closed the door.

Chapter 9

Bravery

Sander was waiting for Emme at the foot of the bridge. The dawn was already broken and the sun was beginning to play peek out between splatterings of cloud, but this part of town was rather still.

Emme had thought about staying in bed, about not coming to meet Sander, and waiting till the *blaag* was not looking for her anymore. But she'd reminded herself that she was a brave sort of person, and she'd best act that way. And she had Drie, who would hiss at *blaag*.

She watched Sander as she walked up to him. He had a strange assemblage of bags at his feet and over his shoulders. The weight of the bags looked substantial, and he grimaced; though that could have been the early hour. He did not look in the least covert. He looked rather like a grumpy donkey.

"What are you carrying?" Emme said as she reached him, a laugh finding her voice.

“Provisions. Food, clothing. Some things that we might need.”

He spoke with conviction, as if there was no other way to go on a journey, but he then noticed that Emme was carrying only her cloth satchel, and Drie seemed to be taking up most of that. A cold nose and two soft ears were the only visible part of the sleeping cat.

“Is that all you’re bringing?” he asked.

“What else do I need?” she said. Looking again at his bags, she continued, “I shall not tease you. We may need your things.”

He re-juggled the bags proudly.

“Come on,” she said and began to walk down to the canal below.

Sander was a bit confused. “We aren’t going over the bridge to Leiden?” he asked, as he followed Emme.

“Tis what will be expected,” she said.

“Yes.” And Sander followed.

Emme stopped at the stone tulip carved lightly into the underside of the bridge. She put her finger out and felt gingerly along the points of the tulip petals. They felt dull and weathered. In the daylight she saw the dirt and grime that had collected over the image.

“I think it has been here for a long time,” she said. “The edges are not sharp and it looks neglected. Or well hidden.” Emme opened her satchel and pulled out the leather binding. She managed this without disturbing the lethargic feline. Or rather, the lethargic feline chose not to be disturbed. She opened the leather and looked at the top drawing.

“I had a look at them this morning before I came, and I think I’ve worked out the next one. The letters on the wings seems to spell out *water* and *leagues*. Which means

we do not have to go over the bridge to Leiden. I think we have to follow the canal for a certain number of leagues, though I am not sure how many, as there is no number.

“What number is in the roots?” asked Sander.

“Four. But I think that relates to what number clue this is, rather than the distance.”

“Maybe they are the same thing. Fourth clue. Four leagues.”

“Perhaps.” Emme hesitated. “Maybe we’re wrong. Maybe we are not supposed to follow the canal.”

“I think we must be right,” said Sander. “It seems the only way to go. And anyway, do we have anything to lose?”

“Well, you do,” said Emme. “If we go wandering down the canal for four leagues, you might drop your bags in the water. Though that could be fine. Maybe one of the barges will trawl them out. *They* might find them useful.”

“Well done not teasing me. All of five minutes that lasted.” He sighed.

Emme smiled her half smile, and began to walk. “Oh, by the way,” she said a few moments later. “We are probably being followed.”

“Followed?” Sander said.

“Yes, followed. By the boy who tried to take my bag yesterday.”

“Oh,” he said. He cleared his throat. “And, um, are we planning to do anything about that? Lose him perhaps?”

“Yes. We can try and lose him. But we should also have a plan for if we do not.”

“And what is that?”

“We must make sure we are being followed on our own terms, rather than on theirs.”

“Theirs?”

“Theirs.”

At this point she turned and scrambled up stone cut steps into the bank of the canal. She heard rather than checked that Sander was following, his bags making soft thumps. They turned into the nearest alley and veered into the city.

“Um, that wasn’t four leagues,” he said, his breath fast from maneuvering his burden up the steps.

“No,” she said. “Our terms.”

“Oh,” he said. Then, after a glance around, “I recognize this... we are going back to the art shop?”

“Yes and no,” Emme said. Within sight of the back of his shop, she knelt down and pulled the sleeping Drie out of her satchel. He was uncomplaining as she put him on the ground. She dug around in her satchel and pulled out her pencil and a scrap of rough paper and began to write: Master taken drawings to Haarlem for sale. Many thanks for your help.

Sander was going to ask, but thought better of it.

Emme folded up the paper and walked up to the shop and tucked the note under the narrow crack at the foot of the wooden door.

Emme then returned to Sander and gestured for him to follow, back the way they had come. When they got to the canal, they walked along the main path, not furtively along the lower bank.

At the first river taxi stop, Emme paused. As a boat drew up to the pier, she looked hard at it. "Let's take it," she said, with sudden decision, and leapt on, Drie and Sander following in some disorder behind her.

It was early and the boat was almost empty. Sander caught up with Emme and sat down beside her. She answered the unasked questions. "There are times to be seen, and times not to be seen."

"I see," said Sander, but not really seeing. He looked hard at Emme, and saw in her face a keen determination and a great sense of confidence. She might have been pretending, but he certainly could not tell if she was.

"The people...um, person... following us. Are they, or he, after the drawings?" As soon as it was out of his mouth, he decided it was a silly question. He decided to keep talking. "I mean, why do you think they want them?"

Emme drew a breath. She was glad he had rephrased his question, as she could answer it without quite lying. She was not entirely sure that the *blaag* was after the drawings. He probably was. Just the same, she felt at the bulb in her pouch, and couldn't help wondering. But that was nonsense. Nobody knew she had it, did they? There were beginning to be murmurs about a blue tulip, but as she had started them, there was not necessarily a real threat or search. Surely nobody knew.

Should she tell Sander? There were becoming less and less reasons not to. She did trust him, and he was following her about the city in a way she didn't quite mind. He had probably guessed something.

But now wasn't the time. So she decided to accept the question as it was, and answer it as it was.

“Perhaps because of what we will find. Maybe there is a treasure,” she said.

“Well, yes, but who, um, how?” he said.

“Sander, stop. You only have ‘what’ and ‘when’ left,” she said lightly.

“Sorry. I don’t have to ask, if you don’t want. I will come with you anyway, though, if that is fine by you. Because this is more adventure than I think I have ever had.”

Emme saw the earnestness in his face and decided not to tease him anymore. Well, not right then anyway.

“Do you remember what I told you before, about *Heer Dokter*, and how I got the drawings back from him?” she asked.

Sander nodded.

“I’m not sure why, but I think he is trying to get them back from me. The boy, who tried to steal them from me on the *straat* yesterday, he was a boy I saw in *Heer Dokter*’s house.

“Then, last night, after I had left you, I saw this boy again. I was walking home past Geert’s shop door, the boy ran out into the alley. I overheard Geert telling him I had been in there asking about botanical drawings.”

Sander gasped, much as Emme had done the night before.

Emme hung her head for the first time, and Sander decided that the gesture did not suit her.

“So that is why, in the note just now, you wrote Haarlem,” said Sander.

Emme nodded. “I realize I should not have been so quick to tell him about them. He does not know much but I should not have been talking about them to strangers. But I did not think that this path was going to prove such a real journey. A first I thought it just

a game. They are just my mother's drawings after all. She might have put a puzzle in just because it could be fun. But I see now that it is more than that, and I should not have told him anything."

"You couldn't know he would tell the doctor," said Sander quickly.

Emme shrugged. "But I've learned better now."

Sander cleared his throat. He was going to tell her that she could trust him. He would not tell anyone. Indeed, all he told his captain this morning was that he was running some errands for the quartermaster, and would be away for a couple of days. Given that some of his land duties often involved purchasing provisions in bulk, it could easily involve long trips out of the city to the food storehouses. A plausible lie.

"It has been about four leagues, I think. We'll get off here," said Emme. She stood up before he said anything, and made towards the bow, picking up Drie as she went. Drie had been perched on his back legs with his front paws resting on the edge of the water taxi, looking out onto the water of the canal below. He protested with a quiet meow as Emme picked him up.

The water taxi was beginning to dock. "Come on, Sander," she said as she began to disembark. He came, with his bags clunking around him.

They moved off the pier, but paused by a lamp post. As Sander reorganized his possessions, Emme looked around them. The city was beginning to wake, the usual and familiar bustle and rhythm was audible now. And comforting. There was the smell of something rich in the air, and she was reminded that she had not eaten yet.

She reached into her bag and began to pull out the leather binding.

“No one got off with us when the river taxi docked,” Sander said, “and I shall keep an eye out if you like. No one seems particularly interested in us yet, but do you want to go somewhere not in the open to look for the next clue?”

The rumble in her stomach gave her the answer. “Yes,” she said, replacing the leather binding in her satchel. “Let’s have breakfast. Herring perhaps?”

“Ha, no,” said Sander. “There looks to be much more appetizing fare over there. Bread, cheese and perhaps some buttermilk?”

Emme’s stomach growled in agreement, and she began to walk across the *straat*. She stopped suddenly.

“What?” asked Sander.

“We cannot buy the food.”

“Why not?”

“It would prevent your provisions being useful. Surely this was why you brought food.”

“I have decided,” said Sander, “to ignore you at this moment.” He began to walk away from her.

“Oh, but Sander...”

“No. Ignoring you,” he said, still walking.

“But...”

He stopped and turned. “The food isn’t meant for now. It’s for later, when we might be far away from food. But when you’re starving in some underground cave somewhere, don’t expect any of my salt beef to keep you.”

“Oh, Sander. You didn’t tell me it was salt beef. I’m so sorry I teased you,” she said in her sweetest, most innocent voice.

“Hrumph,” he said and walked into the shop for his breakfast.

Emme followed him and they found a table in the corner. He went to the counter and after a few minutes came to the table with two large mugs of buttermilk and a plate of bread and cheese.

She reached for one of the mugs.

“No, I am sorry, *juffrouw*. These are mine. Did *juffrouw* want anything for herself?”

“Well, yes. *Juffrouw* would have loved some salt beef, but that sadly does not seem to be available at the moment, because the holder is grumpy. So she will make do with this buttermilk and bread and cheese.”

Emme took the mug and took a big gulp before Sander could say anything else.

Sander did not say anything else for a while, burying his pride in his appetite.

After she had eaten her fill, Emme pulled the leather binding out again, and began to examine the fifth drawing.

“Well?” Sander asked her after a while.

“I’m not sure. This one has a moth on it, so there is no writing in the wings. But there is a five in the roots, so I know this is the next clue.”

“And there is no writing at all? What about on the flower itself, or on the stem?”

“No, nothing that I can see.”

“But it makes no sense. It has to tell us something.”

“Well, you have a look then,” she said as she passed the illustration to him. She watched while he carefully traced the pattern of the leaves and the petals for any hint of code.

She sighed and sipped at the buttermilk. She then began to look at the next two drawings in the sequence, but found herself equally nonplussed. On these there were only moths too. Moths with brown and black wings. No butterflies with swirls of colour. No letters.

She looked harder, remembering that she had not seen the letters in the butterfly wings to begin with. She tilted her head, and allowed her eyes to go fuzzy in her concentration.

Just as she was about to throw the whole folder down in frustration, she caught something in the brown and black swirl of one of the moth’s wings.

Something. Not a letter, but definitely something.

Without lifting her eyes from the wing, she reached out her hand to touch Sander’s wrist. He jumped, clearly lost in concentration himself, but his eyes came up to look at her.

“In the wings.”

“But it’s not.”

“Yes, in the wings. Sander, there’s an arrow.”

“An arrow?” he said. He looked down at his own again and, as she had done, stared hard at the swirl of black and brown on the tiny wing. Sure enough, almost as his eyes began to lose focus, he saw an arrow.

“I see it,” he said. “It’s pointing right.”

“Right. Right to what?”

“Just right. Off the page.”

“Nothing else there?”

“No, just the feelers on the moth’s head,” he said. Then, with a start, “Yes, wait, the feelers! They are curled in a circle. It could be a letter o.

“*Oost*,” said Emme softly.

“Yes, *Oost*. East. Of course. The arrow points towards the East.”

“And mine points South,” said Emme. “So the moths are compasses.”

Sander took a deep breath, almost as if he had forgotten to do that in his studious concentration. He took a sip of buttermilk. “Well done, Emme.”

Emme looked up and smiled. “Well done to you too.”

“So we go East,” he said. “But from where, and how far?”

“Hmmm. I am not sure.”

“Well, last time it was paired with the number in the roots. Maybe we go East for five leagues.”

“Well, that would take us towards Leiden, which would seem to be the right way,” she said. “But, we cannot be sure that the distance of four leagues was correct last time. We have not found the next carving yet.”

“Yes, and surely that symbol will be our starting point.”

Emme nodded her agreement. “Are you finished with your buttermilk?”

He nodded, but if he had not been, he would have had a fight on his hands. Drie’s head was almost completely immersed in Sander’s mug, his tongue making quick work of the remnants.

Emme laughed. "We thank you for breakfast, Sander. Do we not, Drie?" In response, Drie's head went deeper in the mug, even though it hadn't seemed possible.

"You must forgive him. He does not usually get such fine fare. My *Tante* won't let him have too much buttermilk at home. Usually he has to make do with mice and stolen scraps."

"Stolen?"

"Yes," she said. "Does that shock you?"

"A little."

"He is quite unscrupulous. He will steal scraps from the fishmonger before you can blink, and then purr wildly at the fishmonger's wife, who promptly gives him more."

"The heart of a true criminal, I see."

"He only takes what will not be missed," she said, and then thought of the bulb in her pouch. "Only from people who can afford to miss it."

"But how can one tell if they can afford it?"

"That is one thing Amsterdam does not hide very well. Those who have and those who do not. You can always tell."

"No," said Sander, surprising her.

"No?"

"No," he repeated. "You, for example, I cannot tell what you have. Maybe, the day I first saw you, with your face so dirty I could almost think you were a boy. Maybe then I might have thought that you had no money. But I know you a little now. You have a home. And I guess from the way you talk about your *Tante*, that it is comfortable and you are not without things. You get buttermilk for breakfast."

Unusually, she did not have anything to say.

“I am sorry,” Sander said. “I did not mean to judge.” Then, with deliberate change of subject, “So, where to, do you think?”

Emme thought about not answering, but decided against. That is what a girl in a sulk would do. She was in a bit of a sulk, even though she thought sulking was silly. Nothing Sander had said was wrong, really. It was a little bit right, and she decided that it was unfair to sulk at people who are a little bit right.

Emme made a decision.

“Sander,” she said in a sudden whisper. “I took seven bulbs out of the Vizier’s garden in Constantinople.”

Sander was silent.

“Seven from among thousands. *He* will not miss them,” Emme continued.

“No, he won’t,” said Sander.

Drie now seemed done with the buttermilk and jumped off the table, his face wet and cream-coloured.

Emme used his exit off the table to trigger her own and began to collect the drawings together and put them away.

Sander did the same. “So, where to?” he repeated.

“Sander, I kept one.”

Sander stopped collecting his things and looked at her. It was on the tip of his tongue to say “Just one?” but he stopped himself. She’d kept one. She knew so much about tulips. If she chose to keep one it must be a very special one. One that there might be rumours about.

“Oh,” was all he said.

“Sander, I...”

“No, it is all right,” he said. “I don’t think you taking the bulbs is bad. In fact, I think you are brave. You are one of the bravest people I know. I was just arguing with you when you said you could tell who has and who has not. I was just telling you how I could not read you at first glance.”

She looked at him. “You do not mind I took it? You are not calling me a thief?”

He kept his voice low. “I make it a rule never to mind people who have a blue tulip.”

“How did you...?” she began.

“I am a fool perhaps, but I listen to rumours in taverns.”

“A wise decision,” she said, her half smile firmly in place.

“So, where to?” said Sander for the third time.

“Back to the canal now,” Emme said, standing up.

“Back to the canal?”

“Yes,” she said. “I think we got off just shy of four leagues. So we will go back to the canal, and walk on a bit, until we find our carving. What do you think?”

“I think that is a grand plan. Lead the way.”

They were lucky, or skilled perhaps. They quickly found their mark and on the bridge next to it was a signpost. LEIDEN was written in bold letters and the distance 20 MILES was written beside it.

“Twenty miles,” said Sander. “That’s about five leagues, I think.”

Emme nodded. "Five or six," she said. She looked ahead at the canal and saw that the one they followed ended just a little further ahead, and met another running east to west. They could still follow the canal, rather than going by road or walking. And it would keep them closer to the path, which seemed to be staying to the canal like a lifeline.

"River taxi?" asked Sander.

"No," said Emme. "They don't go as far as Leiden. We shall have to get on the Leiden barge. I think one of their docks is over there, on the other side of the canal."

They did just that.

They sat down towards the stern, and watched the other passengers as they boarded. Emme was looking for *blaag*, but she could not see him. Perhaps they had lost him.

Sander seemed to read her mind. "I think we are all right," he said quietly to her.

"I think so too," she said, "but I want to be sure."

"Even if they asked after us at all the stops along the canal, surely not that many people would remember us?"

She agreed. Neither of them looked particularly strange, and she was good at being invisible when she wanted to be. Yes, not many people would remember them.

Suddenly there was a warm brush against her shins. Drie, reminding her that he was still there, and had not had any attention for a while perhaps. She lifted Drie into her lap, where he immediately began to bathe himself, first his long, luscious tail, and then the ragged but furry stump of his missing leg.

Oh.

Her dear Drie. Even if no one remembered her or Sander, they always noticed three legged Drie. He liked being noticed.

She interrupted his bath and tucked him into her satchel. Surprisingly he did not complain and stretched out as best he could on the leather binding.

It will be fine, she told herself. *Blaag* would probably not think to ask about them. He did not seem that clever.

Blaag was a good name for him. She did not like to agree with *Heer Dokter* on anything, but on this she thought he was right.

The canal boat started to pull away from the dock.

She calmed a little, because there was no *blaag* on the boat. She closed her eyes and began to doze, her head tilting to rest gently on Sander's shoulder. One more bundle for him to juggle, but this one was no burden.

Chapter 10

The Seventh Drawing

They arrived in Leiden when the sun was just past its apex. The distant views were now of sea and sky, not farmland. The water shimmered gleefully in their gazes, and its warm salty tang was rich on the air and in their nostrils.

Emme looked at the buildings flanking the Old Rhine canal as they floated past, and up at the mound where the circular watch tower at *De Burcht* looked out into the sea. Leiden, like Amsterdam, was a city rich with secrets and history. It was the heart of South Holland, just as Amsterdam was for North Holland. Bulbs came through here certainly, but it was Egyptian cotton and fabric that was thrust in their faces as they got out at the main square.

Their luck was holding, and they found the next carving mere steps away from where they disembarked, hidden again in the lee of one of the Old Rhine's most unobtrusive bridges.

They had already deciphered the arrow on the sixth clue, its black tip pointing them in a southerly direction.

“But how far. Six leagues this time?” asked Sander. “Wouldn’t that be strange now that it has brought us directly to Leiden?”

“I’m not certain,” said Emme. Once again the leather binding came out of the satchel, and she stared closely at the moth. After a few moments, she passed the paper over to Sander.

“Is it my imagination,” she asked, “or is that a number one in the moth’s feeler?”

“Well, it is a very straight feeler. Deliberately straight. It could be a number one,” said Sander. “Going one league will not hurt, and if it is not one we can keep going.”

Emme nodded. “I hope it is only one league, or soon we will get to Haarlem, which is where I told Geert I was going.”

“Let’s see if there is a canal that follows our path, or whether we have to go over land,” said Emme.

To Emme’s delight, there was a canal that cut their path southwards. She always felt more at ease on the water. They went down to the nearest dock. Moored up was a *woonboot*, and on deck a rotund woman with lazy eyes was moving baskets into the cabin.

“Excuse me *mevrouw*, we are trying to go south a little way on this canal. Do you know of a craft that may take us?”

The woman stopped what she was doing and looked them up and down, as if assessing their credibility.

“This takes you out to sea,” she said. Her tone was matter of fact, as if she was commenting on the view, rather than making judgment on their declared direction.

“Yes, we know,” said Emme, “but we do not journey that far, only a league or so, to the next town. We would walk but my friend carries much.”

The woman nodded, and put down her basket. “If you help me load up, I’ll take you.”

“Many thanks,” Emme said, and she and Sander clambered onto the *woonboot*.

The baskets were not too heavy or numerous, and they cast off a few minutes later. The woman planted herself at the tiller, and Sander took point at the bow with the barge pole, gently nudging the craft away from the banks of the canal.

They set off, none of them aware of someone watching them from the far bank.

Emme sat on the roof of the cabin, with Drie stretched out beside her, taking full advantage of the mid afternoon sun. Emme’s stomach grumbled a bit, but she would not ask Sander for any of his salt beef.

To distract herself she took out the drawings and studied the seventh. Geert had been right. This one was different. Still of a tulip and its now familiar butterfly companion, but the lines seemed slightly different, and the rendering of colour of a different brilliance.

She considered the letters at the bottom. The artist’s initials. R.H.L. Why were the other six not signed? What was so special about this seventh and final one? R.H.L. It was familiar somehow, like it was the part of the background in some memory somewhere.

She looked closely at the swirling pattern of letters on the butterfly's wing. This one was very intricate, and the letters seemed to trip into each other. She made out eight letters. Three seemed distinctly separated from the others: a T, a P and a U. And then the other five: R, E, D, N and O.

“TUP?” she murmured to herself. Wasn't a Dutch word. Just as she was about to ask Sander if it was an English word, she saw it. Not TUP, but PUT. That was Dutch.

“PUT, Sander,” she said aloud. “PUT!”

“PUT?” he repeated. “Oh, PUT as in a well?”

Emme nodded.

A well. But what were they to do at this well? She looked at the remaining five letters and played with their syllables in her head. RED? She knew that was a colour in English. In Dutch it meant save. Save the Well? But what about the N and the O?

“This town here?” The *woonboot* owner interrupted her thoughts.

Emme looked up at the small cluster of houses.

“Yes please,” Emme said. “Do you know this town?”

“Katwijk,” the woman said, and then she called out to Sander to push hard on the far bank.

A few minutes later they stood on the bank of the canal and looked up at the town of Katwijk.

“Have you heard of this place?” Sander said.

Emme gave a half nod. “I have heard of it but can tell you nothing about it. It is old, I think.”

“Well, a look at the buildings and I can tell you that too,” said Sander.

Emme began to walk to the nearest bridge and then ducked underneath as was now her custom, in search for her marker.

The familiar butterfly over tulip was not here.

No, it would not be under the bridge here, would it? It would be at the well, wherever that might be.

“We must look for a well,” said Emme as she came back to Sander and they wandered into the centre of the town.

Katwijk had its own pace, it seemed. Gone was the bustle of Amsterdam and Leiden.

“Let’s ask someone,” said Sander, as he ducked into the nearest shop.

It was a cheese shop. The huge wheels of gouda and edam were piled almost roof high, dwarfing Sander as he walked up to the counter. Emme lingered in the doorway, Drie in her arms. While the cheese aroma was tempting him to explore, she held on to him, certain that he would knock something over. Not clumsily, but quite deliberately. And she’d had a long day.

“Excuse me,” Sander called out as he reached the counter.

A small man emerged from the back room. So small he needed a step to stand at the counter. Sander wondered how he lifted all these cheeses. Or reached all the cheese at the top of the piles.

“Ah, good afternoon, *de heer*. How are you? Is it not a beautiful day we are having. A perfect day for eating cheese. No doubt you have something special in mind, and we have many special things, indeed we do. Our Gouda is my particular favourite but

perhaps you are looking for something different? Some Maaslander, or some Leerdammer.”

“Ah, no, well...” said Sander

“Oh, yes of course, the Leyden perhaps. Surely not the Edam. They are a bit too pretentious, I find. I would not stock it, but you see there are so many people who ask for it, and one must try and be a businessman, though it hurts my principles, *de heer*, it really does.”

“Well, yes, um, I mean... um.”

“Perhaps you would like to sample some, *de heer*?”

“No, I...” said Sander.

“A small wedge of Gouda would certainly be my favourite too,” said Emme walking forward. “Let us get some of that.”

“Ah, yes, an excellent choice, *juffrouw*,” said the man, stepping down to get her some Gouda. “Though only a little... Well, no doubt you shall taste it and come back for more. It is most remarkable, indeed it is. The admiral among cheeses.”

“To be sure, it must be a crime to take but a little,” said Emme. “But we are traveling, *de heer*, and unfortunately must limit what we carry.”

“Ah, yes, of course, quite understandable. A journey sized piece it shall be. A perfect provision sized piece. For two to share. Or perhaps one each? Oh, and perhaps one for *de kat*?”

“Oh no, we will all share one, thank you,” she said. “We are also hoping to get some water before we move on. Is there perhaps a well here about that we might use?”

“A well?” the small man said as he passed the cheese across the counter to Sander’s outstretched hand. “There is a well, a Roman one in fact, but I would not draw water from it, *juffrouw*. Some of the boys play far too many games there, and goodness knows how many dead rats and toads lie at the bottom. Nor am I sure whether there is any water in it any more. There is a pump just there in the main square. No doubt that will meet your needs.”

“Yes, that shall be most adequate. Thank you so much,” Emme said. She thought of trying to ask the location of the well, but suddenly Sander spoke.

“A Roman well, you say. Is it of particular architectural interest? I do so admire so many of the old Roman buildings where I come from.”

“Do you, indeed?” the little man asked. “A noble study, certainly. There are many fine specimens around here for certain, as Katwijk was a Roman settlement. The well is not one of the finest, but beyond there are some small ruins. A fortress, I recall.”

“And which way would we go to see that?” said Sander, feeling just a little bit pleased with himself.

“It is but a hundred steps from the west gate. You cannot miss it. The fortress is up the hill a small way,” the small man said, and then began to laugh. A warm, throaty chuckle. “Though, of course when I say hill, it is a small joke. We have mere mounds here, but to us they seem like hills, yes?”

He continued to laugh as Sander paid him the few florins. Emme laughed too. Much to Emme’s surprise and delight, she found she was laughing genuinely. It was a good joke. A Dutch hill was a mountain if it reached any taller than her head.

Emme and Sander left the cheese shop and made their way directly to the West gate. And there, almost directly in front of them, was a well. A narrow cobblestone path led up to it, and circled around it.

An unimpressive well, but as it seemed to herald the near end of their quest, it seemed a very grand well indeed in Emme's eyes.

"So," said Sander, as they reached the moss covered stone structure, "what are we supposed to do at this well?"

"Um," said Emme, "one possibility is that we have to save it."

"Save it?"

"Yes, but I am beginning to doubt that." Emme brought out the seventh drawing again and looked hard at the unsolved five letters. "What do you make of R, E, D, N, O?"

"Red no?" Sander was looking down into the well at this point so his words echoed gently around them.

"*Onder!*" Emme said suddenly.

Sander looked at her, shock in his face. "You must be teasing, Emme!" he said.

"Go under it?"

She nodded. "Can you think of anything else it might be?"

Sander looked down into the well again. "I don't think we want to go down there, Emme."

"Well, do you think we are at the wrong well? Or maybe it is not a well at all. TUP might be a word."

"TUP? That is an English word. For a ram—a male sheep." Sander went a bit red.

"I don't think it means that, Emme. I am sure you are right about the well."

“How should we go under it, then?”

Sander was thoughtful for a moment. Then suddenly, with a flurry of activity, he began to rummage through his bags. The bags he had so diligently carried, that might have otherwise felt neglected, were being somewhat ransacked now.

At the bottom of the third bag Sander searched, his hand came across the object he sought. With a triumphant gesture he held it above his head.

“A rope?”

“Yes,” he said, “and now something slightly heavy that I would not mind losing.” He delved back into his bag and emerged holding a lantern, together with flint box.

“Um, you wouldn’t mind losing that?” Emme asked.

“I might, but I’ll risk it. We can light it and see down the well.”

Emme took the flint box and began to strike up a flame, as Sander knotted one end of the rope to the lantern handle. As Emme lit the lantern, Drie gave a rare meow, and began to paw at the cobbles round the well, making little scratches in the moss.

Emme lifted up the lantern and rested it gently on the inside edge of the well.

“Ready?” she asked Sander.

He nodded, taking the rope firmly in two hands and making it taut.

Emme let go of the lantern. There was a soft clang as the metal of the lantern hit the stone of the wall.

Sander began to lower the rope, and the lantern began to descend. It was not a gentle or quiet action, as the lantern scratched consistently on the stone.

Drie meowed again, vastly unimpressed.

Emme leaned over the top of the well and watched the lantern illuminate the black depths below it.

“See anything?” Sander asked.

“Not yet,” said Emme.

They lowered the lantern for almost a minute, and while Emme could see a slight glow from the lamp, it was nearly impossible to see what, if anything, was being illuminated.

“Sander, I am not sure this is going to work.” As she said this there was a sudden, distant splash. “Water. Stop,” she said, but it was too late. There was a flickering and then a return to blackness.

“It has gone out. Best pull it back up.”

Before he did so, he put his thumb quite firmly on the part of the rope at the top edge of the well.

“Emme, would you mind marking that section of the rope with some moss or something, so we know how deep we went.” Emme wiped her finger along the grimy rim of the well and marked it as best as she could.

Sander began to pull up the rope. When the lantern reached the top again, Emme hauled it out of the well and put it gingerly on the ground.

“While this may prove a fascinating fact in years to come, being able to calculate the depth of the well in Katwijk, I don’t think that has helped us very much,” said Sander, slightly out of breath.

“Oh, no,” said Emme, the corner of her mouth raised in her half smile. “You got to use some of your things.”

As if in protest, Sander sat down on the cobblestones and crossed his legs. He reached into the satchel nearest him and pulled out some of the salt beef. He took a huge bite.

Emme laughed. "I'm sorry."

He took another bite.

"No, I am being sincere. I am very grateful." Even though there was still a laugh in her voice, he knew she was being genuine. He held out a second piece of salt beef to her.

Emme took it and sat down beside him.

They were both still for a number of minutes, contemplating the fact that they seemed to have come all the way to a well miles from home, just to eat salt beef. Drie was the only moving thing as he continued to paw at the cobbles.

"So much for *onder*," said Sander.

"Yes," said Emme as she watched Drie, working hard on a particularly stubborn clump of moss.

Suddenly, Emme caught something out of the corner of her eye. Near Drie's paws, at the base of the well, there was a clump of moss hugging the edges of something.

Something familiar.

She leaned forward and began to scratch away at the surrounding moss.

"Sander, look," she said, and leaned back to let him see the revealed image.

Tulip petals with a hovering butterfly.

Chapter II

And So Under

“In front of us the whole time.”

“It seems so.”

“Of course!” said Sander. “Under! Looking down the well was in, not under!”

“Oh,” said Emme, but then after a pause, “but this is not under either really, is it?

This is more on.”

“I think it is more under than the in we were on before.”

“Yes,” said Emme.

“Ha!” said Sander, with sudden decision. “Maybe that stone lifts out and we can look ‘under’ it.”

He began to feel around the edges of the cobble. The joints were thick with moss, but it seemed, as they continued to scrape the moss away, that the stone was becoming looser and looser. Soon, with a little effort, it lifted free from the confines of its neighbours.

Sander excitedly scraped away at the moss on the underbelly of the stone.

Another carving was revealed.

Emme tilted her head, slightly confused.

“It is a spiral,” she said.

“Yes. What in the whole round world can that mean?”

“If I were being very literal,” Emme said, “I would say that it wants us to walk in a spiral from this point.”

“That would be my very literal understanding, too.”

They were both silent for a beat, then Emme laughed. “Do we have anything else to do?”

Sander laughed too. “And we have come all this way.”

“Certainly.”

They got to their feet and began to gather their things together. Once Sander was loaded up like a pack mule, they began to walk in a widening spiral.

They giggled most of the way round, but kept diligently to the graduating circular arcs they were making. Drie was creating his own spirals by running in circles around their legs.

After what seemed like dizzying hours, though had really only been twenty minutes, their spirals hit an obstacle.

The Roman ruins that the cheese merchant had spoken off. The splattering of stones littered the hillside. Or the mound side. The stones were much larger than Emme had expected, some almost reaching her head.

Some had obviously been moved about, perhaps by children, to create their own fortresses. A group of them had been stood near the steepest part of the mound, almost on top of each other.

“That does not look particularly Roman,” she said, pointing out the strange structure to Sander.

“Hmmm,” he said as he broke his spiral pattern and began to walk towards it.

Emme followed.

As they neared it, they saw that the stones almost made their own cave, with an opening at one side, big enough for them to slip through if they bent down.

Emme was about to suggest they go back to their spirals, when Drie dashed inside the strange fortress.

“He seems to think it is worth exploring,” said Sander as he unloaded some of his bags and bent himself through.

Emme followed.

It was a very tight squeeze for three, and they jostled around.

“No doubt the children made this their fortress castle. Very good for spotting dragons or encroaching armies,” Emme said as she looked through the narrow cracks in the stone.

“Yes,” said Sander, “though they have not much room for reinforcements or battles in here. Must be hard to storm this castle.”

Emme laughed.

“Back to our circles?” Sander asked.

Emme nodded. Sander began to duck out the small entrance, and Emme leaned down to pick up Drie. He struggled out of her grasp and moved away from her, as far away as he could in this narrow confine.

“Drie, come on,” said Emme gently, but he was not interested.

She kneeled down so as to balance herself better when she reached for him. As she leaned forward, weight shifted to her knees and there was a peculiar noise.

A gentle creak.

She leaned back and then forward again. Another creak.

She got off her knees and began to clear away the leaves and bracken and moss where her knees had been.

“Sander,” she called out as the green matting parted and revealed its secret: a trap door.

“Oh, my painted stars,” said Sander, almost under his breath. “Now *that* is under.”

“Yes,” said Emme. “Sander, do you think your lantern still works?”

“Might need to dry the wick a bit, but it should. Good plan,” he said, and set about readying his wet lamp.

A few moments later he handed it through the opening for her and came through, followed inelegantly by his belongings.

She found the handle, a small hole in the wood. She placed her fingers in and gave a sharp tug. After a moment of resistance, it came free with yet another soft creak.

Drie put his nose in the newly discovered opening, and sniffed.

Emme shone the lantern down into the space below.

To her relief it looked dry and unoccupied. There was a ladder leading securely down to the floor.

“I want to see if anyone is there,” she whispered to Sander.

“Let me,” said Sander as he leaned his head into the opening and surveyed its area.

“Looks clear,” he said, bringing his head back up.

“Let us go then.”

Sander went down first. He stopped on the ladder and Emme passed his bags through to him and dropped them on the floor below. Then, he took the lantern and continued down, holding the lantern up for her to find the way.

Emme put Drie in her satchel and went through, taking care to close the trap door behind her.

Once in the cavern below, they looked round. It was an empty space, with a corridor leading away into blackness.

With the lantern held high in front of them, they decided to go where it lead. They walked a good league or so, when suddenly their path split in front of them.

“Which way?” Emme whispered. Not because she was scared to raise her voice, but because whispering seemed like the right thing to do in a dark tunnel underground.

Sander waived the lantern, first at one entrance, then the other. “This way,” he said suddenly.

“How do you...” she began, but she was cut off by his pointing to the symbol at the entrance to the second tunnel. Their usual marker.

This passage went on for some while too.

“Well,” said Sander. “On the bright side, this tunnel has to be going somewhere. So we are bound to end up somewhere, even if we do not know where that somewhere is.”

“True,” she said.

Then, almost as if deliberately there to give credence to Sander’s point, the tunnel took a sharp turn and suddenly widened, into an enormous, and not at all empty, room.

It must have been as wide as the *fluyt*, or wider still, Emme surmised. And it was piled high with crates. Neat, high towers, much like in the cheese shop. But the peculiarity of finding all these crates here, underground in the middle of nowhere, was very disconcerting.

“Wow,” was all Emme could say.

Sander nodded. “Do you think this is it?”

“It must be. We’re out of clues,” she said.

“Well, let’s look in one of these crates then,” Sander said, “since these appear to be the treasure.”

They decided on a shorter stack of crates, and managed to maneuver one crate onto the floor together.

They peeled back the lid with care, and their eyes focused in on the contents.

Bulbs. Hundreds of bulbs. In this crate. And if each and every crate in the room was packed like this...

“Wow,” said Sander.

“I will admit I expected some. They were tulip drawings, after all but I never, expected...”

“Me neither.”

Then suddenly, from somewhere in the cavernous room beyond them, there was a noise. A rustling. Footsteps. Not light footsteps either. Big boots pounding, getting closer.

And then a voice.

“*Welkom*, Emme.”

Her heart broke into a violent rhythm, and she felt Sander jump beside her.

She looked round the dim room.

She knew that voice.

Her heart beat hard and her head whirred. It took her a moment to place the voice. Not because it was unfamiliar, but because it was completely unexpected, and her heart was still pounding.

She looked round again, and then, through the inky dim light, she began to see the shadow of a man walking towards her.

His face was suddenly caught in the lamp, and Emme’s heart leapt.

“Daaf!” she cried out, and ran into his arms.

Chapter 12

Treasures and Secrets

Daaf lifted Emme into the hug, and swung her round, her feet dangling in midair as she held on around his neck.

“I think,” he said, a laugh in his voice, “that you are a little pleased to see me, Emme.”

“Oh, I am,” she said excitedly, “and also very surprised. A dragon I expected more. Or the onion smelling *dokter*, or a gang of boys with rats, but not you.” She looked at him with her head tilted to one side. “What are you doing here, Daaf?”

“I think the more fascinating question is what are you doing here?”

“Well, Sander and I... oh Daaf, this is Sander by the way...”

“So I surmised,” Daaf said as he nodded at Sander. Sander inclined his head in response.

“Well, yes, he and I... no, wait. I asked you first,” Emme said. “That was almost clever of you, Daaf, but very naughty.”

“Yes, I know,” he said, a smile in his eyes. “Come on, we will sit down somewhere comfortable, yes?”

“Yes,” said Emme.

Daaf led Emme and Sander through the maze of crates and towards one of the side walls.

It looked like a dead end, but Sander held up the lantern to see some steep steps leading up along the wall. He shone the lantern up higher, as if to see where the stairs went and saw, to his surprise, a glow. From a recess in the wall above. Another lantern perhaps. His guard went up. Would there be anyone else?

Emme, Sander and Daaf walked up the short steep steps, and arrived in the lit alcove.

“Some visitors for us,” said Daaf as he stood at the entrance way. Sander had been right. There were in fact three lanterns, one in the middle and two in the corners. And there was another man. He was seated on a sheepskin.

At the sight of Emme, the man stood up.

“Aart!” said Emme, and she crossed to hug this man too.

“*Welkom*, Emme,” said Aart. “Daaf said you would be coming and I could scarce believe him. Ah, you have brought a friend...”

Emme turned at that and looked straight at Daaf. “You knew I would be coming? But how? We did not even know we were coming. And you asked me why I was here.”

“The short answer is that Hans saw you in Leiden, getting on the *woonboot*,” said Daaf.

Daaf had stopped talking, almost as if he had explained everything. But Emme’s mind was racing with more and more questions.

As if he could see the madness of thoughts whizzing round her head, Daaf spoke again. “Come sit, Emme. Have some single beer perhaps? Get comfortable and we will explain more.”

Emme and Sander went to one of the sheepskin rugs and sat down, Sander carefully putting down his bags in the corner before he did so. Emme let Drie out of her satchel, and he viewed the sheepskins with delight. He curled up by Emme’s leg on the warm wooly bed.

Aart handed Emme and Sander mugs with ale in and Sander sipped his gratefully.

“I do not understand, Daaf,” Emme said. “How do you know about the drawings? How does Hans? And why was he following me?”

“Slow down, Emme, slow down,” Daaf tried to stem the flow. “You accuse too much too fast. Too curious”

Emme paused, drank from her mug, and then looked up at Daaf. She did not like to appear so flustered and confused in front of him but there were too many questions. And she was also a bit angry, because it looked like he was enjoying himself.

“Let’s start with Hans. He was not following you. We were all in Leiden. We had some contacts to trade with. It just so happened that Hans saw you get on the *woonboot*.”

“Good. We have already had someone try to follow us, and another one just seems exhausting.”

“Who tried to follow you?”

“One of Dr Tulp’s servants.”

“Why would...”

“I had to get Mama’s drawings from him. Herr Harmenszoon gave them to *Heer Dokter* by accident. I don’t think *Heer Dokter* knows anything about the path in the drawings. I think he just wanted to follow me to make sure I had not tricked him. Or just because he saw an opportunity to profit somehow.”

“I think we lost him,” said Sander, speaking for the first time.

“I think so too,” said Emme.

“Good. Now let me try to explain where you have come. Let us start with your first question: why am I here?” said Daaf in a very matter of fact way. “This question I cannot really answer until I first make sure you know where here is. Here is where the drawings led you. Did Heer Harmenszoon tell you anything about them?”

“No. Just that they were a map and Mama drew them, and something about the path of the butterflies. Margriet did not know they were a map.”

“I forgot Margriet did not know.”

“How do *you* know?”

Daaf took a breath. “Because your mother drew them. For me.”

Emme hesitated. His words were shocking yet she did not feel shocked. “Why?” she said, half to Daaf and half to herself. Her mother drew them for Daaf. Why did that make sense?

“Well, because I asked her to. It was not just for me, but for a group of us called *Botervlieg Bewaarders*.”

Now Emme looked shocked.

“*Bewaarders?*” said Sander in an undertone to Emme.

“Keepers,” Emme translated for him. “The Butterfly Keepers.”

“The Keepers,” Daaf confirmed in his lilting English. “It is fine to speak Dutch?”

“Yes, I understand,” replied Sander in Dutch. “It is just some words.”

“Good,” said Daaf. “I did not like that name, but I was interested in doing rather than naming. Rembrandt came up with it I think.”

“Rembrandt the painter?” Sander asked.

“Rembrandt the painter,” said Daaf. “Silly young jackanape. It was he who painted one of the drawings. The last one.”

Emme shook her head. “R.H.L? How does R.H.L stand for Rembrandt? Who is Rembrandt?”

“He is a very talented painter. I have seen some of his work,” said Sander.

“So have you, Emme.”

“Me? No, I...”

“Yes, you have. You have even met him. Rembrandt Harmenszoon of Leiden. Or R.H.L. It is only recently he has started signing his first name.”

“Heer Harmenszoon?” Emme was shocked but realized that this too made a strange sort of sense.

“The man whose house you live in?” said Sander.

Daaf spoke before Emme could reply. "Wait. I shall get there. I should not have said anything. I am confusing things. But, as I say I am not one for words. Let me try to tell you in order or we shall be here far too long."

Emme nodded. "I am sorry, Daaf. I did not mean to be troublesome."

Daaf smiled a half smile that Sander recognized.

"You are part of trouble always, Emme, but in the best ways," Daaf said, and Aart laughed.

Sander looked at Emme, expecting a storm or an outburst, but she smiled.

From Daaf it was one of the best compliments.

"As the value and price of tulip bulbs began to go up and up," Daaf continued, "some concerned individuals in the different provinces of the Republic began to be concerned. Different people. Not all noblemen and merchants. Some farmers, some artists, some mothers and fathers, some humble smugglers. The whole of our nation's health and future on a little flower? Wonderful as it was, it is dangerous.

"So we began, little by little, to store bulbs. To hide bulbs. Because the truth is that there are many valuable tulips, many more than the Haarlem breeders and merchants would like us to know or think."

"So they are all filled with bulbs," Emme asked. Incredulous. Disbelieving.

"But, of course," said Aart. "What else could they be?"

"All bulbs, many of them bizarres," said Daaf. "We keep them here, and at a few other caverns along the butterfly pathway. And, when the merchants get too greedy, want too much for a single bulb, then a few more right ones, as you call them, will appear. As if by magic."

Emme was pensive, her head clicking over with a speed and energy that was a little bit overwhelming. She opened her mouth before her head got too full of words.

“So the rare become less rare, and the flower becomes common.”

“The flower is already common. We just pretend it is not,” said Daaf.

When Emme next spoke, her voice sounded small, which did not suit her. “So,” she said, “if the tulip is really only common, why do you not bring out all the bulbs at once. Everyone will have dozens and everyone will be happy.”

“No, Emme, you are being silly. You know why we do not do that.”

“Yes I know, because you do not want the tulip to be so common as to be worth nothing,” said Emme.

“The tulip stock would crash and people would lose everything,” said Sander.

“Yes,” said Daaf. “Emme, you know me. You know I have no grand plan to take over the provinces. I am a little hurt that you would think it of me.”

“I do not,” said Emme.

Daaf nodded.

“Some of the Keepers have a bigger plan. To slowly make the tulip more and more common. So there is no big explosion and chaos. Only the slow loss of admiration, a gentle relapse on what people are willing to pay, or hoping to sell.”

“Some of the Keepers? It is not your plan?”

“I am not sure it would work. I think that we cannot really predict what people are willing to sell and buy. But I agree that we must keep all of these bulbs here secret.”

“Do you guard this place?”

“Sometimes. Mostly I move the bulbs around. Take a few bulbs and sail the *Wanderer* up the coast to Haarlem. Some merchants are Keepers and they carefully bring them in to the market.”

Emme looked at Daaf. “I am a little angry that you did not tell me. I have been sailing with you my whole life, and you did not tell me.”

It was Daaf’s turn to look at Emme, with a small smile in his eyes. “Well, you have your secrets too, yes? Your treasure hunts? If you had told me your plan, I could have told you about all this. I do not mind telling you. You were a bit young before. There is much adventure in you. From your head to your toes. There is curiosity even in your curls.

“I have shared many of my adventures with you, even if I did not tell you what the adventures were. You could sail before you could walk. *The Wanderer* has been your home. You helped us smuggle and sail the treasure in. You have even unloaded some of it.”

“But I did not know...”

“But was it any less of an adventure? When you were smaller, you did not care what we carried, just that you were part of it. Do you not still feel that way?”

Emme hesitated.

“I was going to tell you soon. There were many things I was going to tell you soon. Things that your mother would have told you were she here.”

“Well, why did not Margriet?”

“Some things Margriet does not know. Like what the drawings show. She knew of the Keepers and what they were, but how and what they did she did not want to know or care.”

“And Mama was one of the Keepers?”

“Yes,” said Daaf. “She loved the tulip more than anyone else I have known, and yet she hated that they were given so much weight and speculation.”

“And the drawings?”

“All treasures must have maps, no?” said Daaf. “We know these caverns and routes because we created them, but there will be more who have to find them.”

“Are you not worried that the wrong people will find this? We did, whether we were supposed to or not,” said Sander.

“But how many people will look the way you look, or see the way you see. There are so many botanical sketches out there that no one looks hard at them. And even if they do, they look at the tulip and not at the butterfly.”

“I would not have noticed the butterfly if Heer Harmenszoon had not told me. Because it is nonsensical. Butterflies don’t like tulips.”

Daaf shrugged. “You will have to ask Heer Harmenszoon. His idea. A layered truth, he said. He used a French word, I think: *metaphor*.”

Though he was interested, Sander found himself yawning with exhaustion in the dim cavern.

“Yes, we have talked long. Please get some rest if you want it. It is safe. We will leave after it is dark, and I think I shall see you back to Amsterdam.”

Sander looked at Emme. “Will you sleep?”

“Not now, but please go on. You have come a long way, and had to carry so much.”

“We needed things,” he said.

“Yes, we did.”

Sander curled up on the sheepskin and allowed himself to relax for the first time that day. Very soon he was fast asleep, emitting soft, inoffensive snores.

Aart too decided he would rest. “Too many crates Daaf makes me carry,” he joked as he closed his eyes.

Emme got up and went to sit beside Daaf. She sat crosslegged on the sheepskin and looked at him.

“Still angry, *lieveling*?” he asked softly. “You did not enjoy your adventure?”

“Not angry,” she said. “Curious, as you say.”

“Good,” he said. He looked over at the sleeping Sander. “Your friend is diligent, no? He seems to care about you much. If I had proved to be a monster, I am sure he would have bitten my head off.”

“Yes,” she said. “He likes wandering too.”

“Adventuring?”

“Yes,” she said, “though he is not always good at it. Too many bags.”

Daaf gave a small chuckle.

“And Drie likes him.”

“Yes,” he said. He knew that this boy had passed the true shibboleth for his daughter’s affection: the whims of her three-legged partner.

Chapter 13

Finders and Fathers

“Daaf?”

“Yes, Emme?”

“Why do you think Heer Harmenszoon wanted me to see the butterflies?”

Daaf hesitated

“Perhaps he decided it was time we shared secrets.”

“Perhaps.”

Emme took a deep breath. “When I found the butterfly path I was excited. I thought I had found my own adventure, and I was going to solve my own puzzle.”

“You have. You made it here without help from anyone.”

“No, I am worried I revealed your secrets to people who should not know. I got advice from a merchant and he talked about it to Dr Tulp. He told Dr Tulp that the

drawings were coded, *Heer Dokter* sent someone to follow me, and they tried to steal the drawings from me. I think I lost them but I am cannot be sure.

“You see I thought it was my own adventure. That I would not be hurting anyone else. But the doctor made it complicated.”

“Dr Tulp?”

“Yes.”

“My first thought is not to worry. From what I know of *Heer Dokter*, he is a collector. An eccentric. He might be interested in having this collection, but not in selling it.”

“But he would take it if he found it.”

“So we will make sure he does not.”

“But...”

“We have kept it secret for years. If he does not have the drawings, and if you lost your followers all will be well. But we will set a watch, and keep it protected, do not fear.”

Emme looked uncertain.

“You have not ruined anything,” Daaf said. “Are you sure you do not need to rest?”

“I still have so many questions.”

“There are always questions. Sometimes they find their own answers.”

Emme was silent for a beat.

“Remember the bulbs I stole from the Vizier’s garden?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I kept one.”

“Only one?”

“Yes, a blue one.”

“Blue?”

“Yes.”

“I did not think there were blue ones.”

“No, nor does anyone else. They will not believe it. One man even suggested that it had been dyed with blueberries.” As Emme said this, she brought her hand to her waist and felt for her pouch. For the first time since she had left *The Wanderer*, she brought the bulb out and held it in the palm of her hands for Daaf to see.

“I do not think it has,” said Daaf. “Been dyed with blueberries, that is.”

“It is still a bulb. I am not sure.”

“So perhaps, unlike so many of these speculators, we should plant it and see.”

“Maybe. Are you sure you do not want to eat it?”

Daaf laughed. “No, I think not. Though there are plenty here if you would like to try.”

“Some other time. When they are truly cheap and common.”

“Yes.”

“Perhaps I will rest a little.”

“Lie here. I will keep watch.”

Emme lay down on the soft wool, her head gently resting against Daaf’s leg. She carefully stowed the bulb back in its pouch. She yawned and closed her eyes.

“Tis strange,” she said, her eyes still closed. “Tis only three days ago that I was with you on *The Wanderer*.”

“Much has happened.”

“Margriet says Mama would be proud.”

“That is certain.”

“Do you miss her, Daaf?”

Daaf hesitated, but then answered from his heart. “Every day.”

“So do I.”

Daaf hesitated again, and this time decided to be brave.

“You know, don’t you Emme?”

“Yes, Papa.”

“How?”

“The sea spat me out one day?—that excuse could not work forever,” she joked.

“I think I have known for a while, though I was not certain. Not until you talked about Mama that way.”

“And you don’t mind?”

“That you are my Papa?” she said. “Why would I mind that? I just mind that Heer Harmenszoon had to send me on a treasure hunt for you to tell me.”

“I was trying to protect you.”

“From what?”

“From all the people who would hurt me by hurting you... it seemed right at the time. I lived a dangerous life.”

“Which you’ve let me be part of.”

“And?”

“No and. Just that. I was thinking the next time we go on *The Wanderer* we might take Sander with us.”

“Well, I don’t know him but...”

“Well, when he wakes up I shall introduce you.”

Sander was only half asleep. His eyes were closed but his lips smiled.

Epilogue
Rembrandt

Emme sat upstairs in Heer Rembrandt Harmenszoon of Leiden's studio. She perched on the back of a wooden chair and watched him sketch out the beginning of a new painting.

"It impresses me. It comforts my pride that one so rarely still as yourself is content to watch me work."

"Oh, I am waiting for Sander, and I shall be wandering with him, so I can be still now."

"I am relieved. I was concerned for a moment."

"Why did you not tell me you had drawn the seventh drawing?"

"Ah, now where would be the fun in that?"

"That sounds like something my father would say."

Rembrandt's hand stopped moving, the charcoal frozen above the page.

“Did he tell you, or did you guess?” he asked her.

“I did not really do either. It suddenly did not make sense for him to be anything else. When I was younger I had thought him my uncle, perhaps. But to hear him talking about my mother, I knew then.”

“And how do you feel. How does he feel?”

“I am fine. I shall always call him Daaf, I think. Perhaps Father just when I am being my most cheeky.”

“An excellent strategy.”

“Yes,” she said, getting to her feet. “I think I shall go and wait for Sander.”

“What mischief beckons?”

“The back garden.”

“Ah, but of course. It grows,” Rembrandt said. “And is it blue?”

“What do you think?” said Emme with her half smile.

His laugh said much.

“And have you seen any butterflies?”

“No,” she said in mock disappointment. “Though now I rather want to. Perhaps just to see if they do like tulips.”

“Do let me know,” he laughed, “but even if they do, that is not why they were the chosen symbol.”

“Yes, your *metaphor*.”

“Indeed, for my own amusement.”

“One of your new servants,” Emme said, walking over to the window. “He is Greek. I just happened to be talking to him about butterflies, and apparently to him they

are souls, and the breath of the world. Is that not good, to think of them as part of the air?"

"Yes, most good."

"Yes, I thought so," she said. "Oh, there is Sander."

She rushed down to meet him and enthusiastically beckoned him on through the house to the back garden.

There the seventh bulb was blooming bright blue.

Author's Note

In the early part of the 17th century, there was a tulip craze in the Netherlands called Tulipomania. It peaked in 1634-7, and there are stories of tulips selling or being exchanged for enormous amounts. Dutch people from all walks of life were involved in the trade. Many made a fortune and many more lost all that they had.

The most valuable tulips were the broken tulips, or Bizarres. In the 1930s their mystery was finally revealed: the breaks in colour were caused by a virus. The virus made the tulips weak, and caused them to wither quickly. Their short life span was a part of what added to their value in the 17th century. Artists were commissioned to draw and paint the broken tulips, as a way of preserving their beauty. For many ordinary people, these drawings were the only way to afford the beautiful flowers.

In the 1630s, the demand for Bizarres was so great that they were often sold months before they were grown. The Dutch government had tried to outlaw this practice, but with little success.

In 1637, many tulipomaniacs realized that the demand could not last and this caused panic. Overnight prices plummeted and the flowers became worthless. In later years, the tulip trade would recover somewhat, but it would never be as lucrative or as widespread again.

The reasons for a country's strange obsession with a flower are still debated among historians (and sociologists and economists). The early 17th century was a volatile time. The Thirty-Years War raged (a Europe-wide conflict between Catholic and Protestant countries). There were outbreaks of bubonic plague. In a romantic way, perhaps people just wanted to believe in something beautiful.

Emme's story is set in the early 1630s, at the height of tulipomania. Her blue tulip is fiction. Tulips are not naturally blue, nor were any known to have been artificially bred at that time. Today, a white tulip and some blue food colouring will create one for you.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon of Leiden is now recognized as one of the greatest Dutch painters of all time. This book finds him at the beginning of his illustrious career. He did paint tulips and he did have a house in Amsterdam. It has never been documented that a girl and a three-legged cat lived there, but perhaps they might tell you otherwise...

Glossary

<i>bewaarders</i>	keeper, guardian
<i>blaag</i>	brat
<i>botervlieg</i>	butterfly
<i>Burcht, De</i>	castle, in this case Leiden Castle, a circular 12 th century fortress in Leiden
<i>dan</i>	than
<i>de</i>	the
<i>dokter</i>	doctor
<i>driepoot</i>	tripod
<i>Engeland</i>	England
<i>fluyt</i>	a relatively long three-masted ship with a boxlike cross section, first built in the Netherlands at the close of the 16 th century.
<i>heer</i>	Mr / Sir, can be prefixed with <i>de</i>
<i>juffrouw</i>	Miss
<i>Kaisergracht</i>	Kaiser's Canal, the name of a canal that rings around the centre of Amsterdam, just inside the ring of the Prince's Canal
<i>kat</i>	cat
<i>lieveling</i>	sweetheart, darling
<i>markt</i>	market
<i>meisje</i>	girl
<i>mevrouw</i>	Madam, lady or Mrs
<i>mooier</i>	better
<i>och</i>	oh
<i>onder</i>	under
<i>Oost</i>	East
<i>plein</i>	square or place, an urban open space with walls or buildings on four sides.
<i>Prinsengraacht</i>	Prince's Canal, the name of a canal that rings round the centre of Amsterdam, just outside the ring of the Kaiser's Canal

<i>put</i>	a well
<i>straat</i>	street
<i>tante</i>	auntie
<i>tulp</i>	tulip
<i>veel</i>	much
<i>welkom</i>	welcome
<i>woonboot</i>	house boat