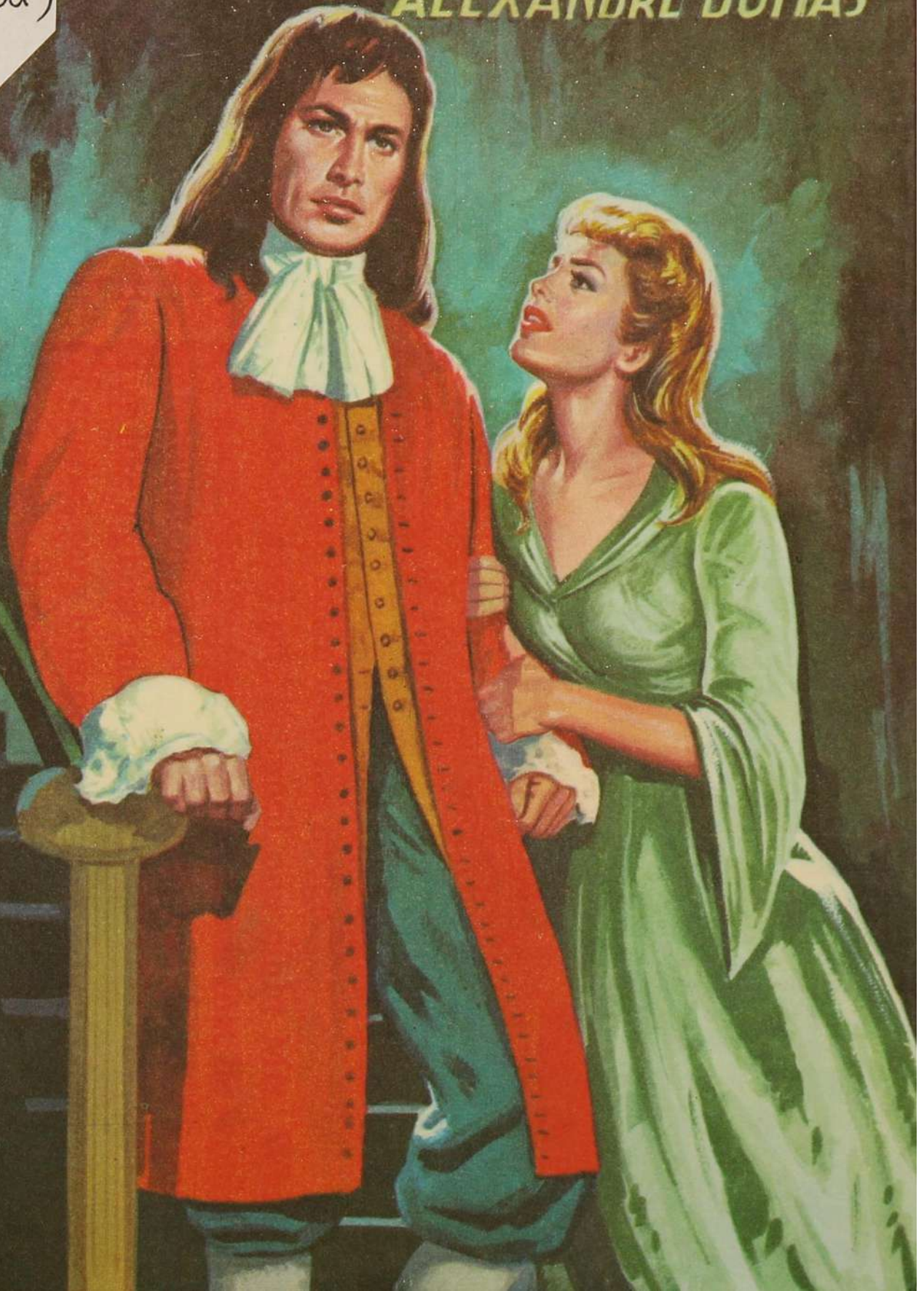


THE
BLACK TULIP

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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THE BLACK TULIP

by
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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CHAPTER I

A GRATEFUL PEOPLE

ON THE 20th of August, 1672, the city of the Hague, always so lively, so neat, and so trim, that one might believe every day to be Sunday; with its shady park, with its tall trees, spreading over its Gothic houses; with its canals like large mirrors, in which its steeples and its almost Eastern cupolas are reflected; the city of the Hague, the capital of the seven United Provinces, was swelling in all its arteries with a black and red stream of hurried, panting, and restless citizens, who, with their knives in their girdles, muskets on their shoulders, or sticks in their hands, were pushing on to the Buitenhof, a terrible prison, the grated windows of which are still shown, where, on the charge of attempted murder, preferred against him by the surgeon Tyckelaer, Cornelius De Witte, the brother of the Grand Pensionary of Holland, was confined.

If the history of that time, and especially that of the year in the middle of which our narrative commences, were not indissolubly connected with the two names just mentioned, the few explanatory pages which we are about to add might appear quite supererogatory; but we will, from the very first, apprise the reader—our old friend, to whom we are wont, on the first page to promise amusement, and with whom we always try to keep our word as well as is in our power—that this explanation is as indispensable to the right understanding of our story, as to that of the great event itself on which it is based.

Cornelius De Witte, warden of the dykes, ex-burgomaster of Dort, his native town, and member of the Assembly of the States of Holland, was forty-nine years of age, when the Dutch people, tired of the republic such as John De Witte, the Grand Pensionary of Holland, understood it, at once conceived a most violent affection for the Stadtholderate, which had been abolished for ever in Holland by the "Perpetual Edict" forced by John De Witte upon the United Provinces.

As it rarely happens that public opinion, in its whimsical flights, does not identify a principle with a man, thus the people saw

in the personification of the republic in the two stern figures of the brothers De Witte, those Romans of Holland, spurning to pander to the fancies of the mob, and wedding themselves with unbending fidelity to liberty without licentiousness, and prosperity without the waste of superfluity; on the other hand, the Stadtholderate recalled to the popular mind the grave thoughtful image of the young Prince William of Orange.

The brothers of De Witte humoured Louis XIV, whose moral influence was felt by the whole of Europe, and the pressure of whose material power Holland had been made to feel in that marvellous campaign on the Rhine which, in the space of three months, had laid the power of the United Provinces prostrate.

Louis XIV had long been the enemy of the Dutch, who insulted or ridiculed him to their heart's content, although it must be said that they generally used French refuges for the mouthpiece of their spite. Their national pride held him up as the Mithridates of the republic. The brothers De Witte, therefore, had to strive against a double difficulty—against the force of national antipathy, and, besides, against that feeling of weariness which is natural to all vanquished people, when they hope that a new chief will be able to save them from ruin and shame.

This new chief, quite ready to appear on the political stage, and to measure himself against Louis XIV, however gigantic the fortunes of the Grand Monarch loomed in the future, was William, Prince of Orange, son of William II, and grandson, by his mother, Mary Stuart, of Charles I of England. We have mentioned him before as the person by whom the people expected to see the office of Stadtholder restored.

This young man was, in 1672, twenty-two years of age. John De Witte, who was his tutor, had brought him up with the view of making him a good citizen. Loving his country better than he did his disciple, the master had, by the "Perpetual Edict," extinguished the hope which the young prince might have entertained of one day becoming Stadtholder. But God laughs at the presumption of man, who wants to raise and prostrate the powers on earth without consulting the King above; and the fickleness and caprice of the Dutch, combined with the terror inspired by Louis XIV, in repealing the "Perpetual Edict" and re-establishing the office of Stadtholder in favour of William of Orange, for whom the hand of Providence had traced out ulterior destinies on the hidden map of the future.

The Grand Pensionary bowed before the will of his fellow citizens; Cornelius De Witte, however, was more obstinate, and notwithstanding all the threats of death from the Orangist rabble, who

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