

**TULIP BROTHERS**

A full-length play

by Jason Half

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TULIP BROTHERS

**Cast:** (4M, 2F)

PIETER, 28 at present

NILS, Pieter's brother, 30

CASPAR, Pieter's brother, 26

SOPHIE, Pieter's mother, 50s

KRISTINE, Caspar's girlfriend, early 20s

JONGE, a florist, 30s

SCHEELS, a landlord, 40s

ONDERDONK, a bleacher, 40s

Jonge, Scheels and Onderdonk are played by the same actor

**Setting:**

The DeGroot house and other locations, 1637 Holland and earlier

TULIP BROTHERS

**ACT ONE**

The DeGroot house, center stage. Table and three chairs, then kitchen and cupboards/counter at USR side, window back center. Front door left.

DSR, the end of a pub bar, bar stools behind. Set of stairs near the bar leads to a door and landing above.

As lights on the bar rise, 28-year old PIETER sits on a stool, drinking from a stein of beer. He looks at an imagined bartender.

PIETER

I've been here the space of two beers, and already I'm provided a night's worth of entertainment. You know why I'm amused? Kees, is it? I am amused by you, Kees. I find you comical. Let me tell you why. You've not collected the coin from anyone until after they've downed their drink--'fact, you still haven't pulled a stuiver from me. There's a half-bottle of gin at the end of the counter within anyone's reach, and you turned your back on two dock workers who are itching for a fight. I've watched you, time and again, trust in the good faith of your fellow man. And that generous nature will only make your till short and your life a misery.

My name's Pieter. Jordan Cormer asked me to come 'round and look in. I said I would, since I've nowhere else to be.

Are you married? Family man? I see that ring on your finger. All the more reason to learn the rules fast.

Pieter wiggles his fingers, showing no ring.

PIETER

Me? Never married. Not the marrying type. Not the family type. I do just fine on me own. Always have. 'Fact, my family is gathered at the house right now, bit of a party going on. Of which I'm not invited. And I guarantee that if my name is brought up, it's to curse me. Do I care? Nay.

Pieter drinks.

PIETER

Truth is, love only makes you vulnerable, makes you weak.  
(Noticing expression)  
You don't believe me? All right then, a friendly wager.

I stake everything in my pockets that by night's end, you'll see it as I do: you'll see that love does nothing but destroy.

Pieter takes out four coins from his pocket.

PIETER

Four guilder. Enough coin to buy 30 beers. More than you'll make all shift. And I'll throw in something else, for what it's worth.

Pieter takes from another pocket a flower bulb about the size of a shallot. He puts it on the bar with the coins.

PIETER

Witte Croonen, that is. White Crown. I've no use for it, never had. So hear me out, and if you still think love is worth the pain it brings, then take the lot. But be honest. And if I win, my friend... tonight you pay my bill. What do you say?

A beat, then Pieter covers the coins with his hand to keep them there.

PIETER

Ah-AHH! You haven't earned 'em yet. In the meantime, another round.

Pieter takes a new beer, drinks.

Lights up on SOPHIE, a tough woman in her late 50s, who mops the house's wooden floor.

PIETER

Let me start by telling you of a party of a different sort. The return of the favored son.

SOPHIE

Must look nice for Caspar...

PIETER

In that family, she had room for one favorite at a time.

The house door starts to open.

SOPHIE

Casp--?

NILS crosses the threshold. He is 25.

NILS  
No, it's Nils. Hello mother.

Frowning, Sophie goes back to mopping.

PIETER  
I'm thinking of Nils. But this isn't his story, it's mine.

Nils shuts the door, steps to move in to the room. Lights fade on the bar.

SOPHIE  
STOP! What are you wearing on your feet?

NILS  
Shoes?

SOPHIE  
And what day is this?

NILS  
Tuesday.

SOPHIE  
And what happens every Tuesday? And Friday as well?

NILS  
You mop the floor.

SOPHIE  
I work all day to keep this house clean and you and your brother work full-time to dirty it up.

NILS  
(Checking his soles)  
They're clean.

SOPHIE  
Not compared to this floor. Take 'em off.

NILS  
Then my socks'll get wet.

SOPHIE  
Then take them off, you can logic that out, can't you Nils?

Nils takes shoes and socks off, moves to the table.

NILS  
Any news from the docks?

SOPHIE

How d'you expect me to hear news from the docks? My ears don't carry beyond the waters of my mop bucket.

NILS

Thought maybe someone stopped in. Pieter or Kristine.

SOPHIE

Someone stopped in, right enough. Had a spirited exchange with our landlord.

NILS

Mister Scheels? He was here?

SOPHIE

I had just started on the floor. I wouldn't let him get past the doorstep. It's not his house yet.

NILS

What did he want?

SOPHIE

What do you think? Handed me this.

Sophie takes a folded paper from an apron pocket, gives it to Nils.

NILS

But you explained. About father's passing, and everyone working to make ends meet.

SOPHIE

What good does that do? That kind feels nowt beyond the weight of coin in hand.

NILS

(Reading)

Two months behind... If the full amount of 36 guilder is not paid by Friday, we'll be evicted by the court.

SOPHIE

I know its contents. That Scheels was achin' to read it to me.

NILS

36 guilder. How much do we have now?

SOPHIE

It's that Pieter! Your brother has no sense of family!

NILS

Mother, how much?

SOPHIE

Not even half that! Barely 15 guilder, Nils! Your father would never allow this.

NILS

I won't allow it.

SOPHIE

What good are you? It's Caspar's coming home that'll make it right. He'll be bringing back six months' wages at sea, that's 75, 80 guilder maybe.

NILS

Caspar, yes. But that 15 guilder already saved up, that's from me. I wish it was double.

SOPHIE

Keep wishin'. Without our Caspar we'd all be out on the street. I'd have to go to my sister's in Osdorp, if she'd even take me in...

NILS

Don't talk about it.

SOPHIE

But you! And him! You'd have to find rooms, stay here in Haarlem and keep at your work.

NILS

We won't be splitting up. We're staying right here in this house as a family.

SOPHIE

Thanks to Caspar.

The front door starts to open.

NILS

Right on cue.

KRISTINE, 20, enters. Sophie sees her and continues to mop.

KRISTINE

Hi Nils! Just came from the harbor. The *Gelderland's* in dock.

NILS

Caspar hasn't made it back yet.

KRISTINE

Didn't expect him to be here, actually.

SOPHIE

Kristine, your shoes.

KRISTINE

What about them?

SOPHIE

Take them off. I'm cleaning house.

KRISTINE

I'm not staying long.

SOPHIE

You might as well leave. Caspar's not returned.

KRISTINE

I can stop by, can't I? I don't need Caspar to exist, I do well on my own. Maybe I wanted to stop in, see you and Nils. Well, see Nils, any rate.

SOPHIE

So you're staying?

KRISTINE

That's right.

SOPHIE

Then you're taking off your shoes.

A moment of standoff, and Nils pulls out a chair for Kristine.

NILS

Here, sit down.

Kristine sits.

NILS

(To Sophie)

See? No harm done to the floor. Mother, would you see if there's bread and cheese? I could do with a bite.

SOPHIE

There's nowt.

NILS

Nothing at all?

SOPHIE

In case you've not noticed, our table's been spare since your father passed eight months ago.

KRISTINE

Did he take the food with him?

NILS

Kristine...



SOPHIE

He took his pay with him, foolish girl! Nils makes nowt at the bleacher's--

NILS

That's not true!

SOPHIE

--And Pieter gambles all of his away. Been months since we could afford a joint of mutton like a proper family.

NILS

We'll have it again. I've got plans at the bleaching mill.

SOPHIE

Plans...

KRISTINE

You're lucky, you have a proper family. Of sorts.

Sophie moves to the kitchen to mop, and Nils follows her.

NILS

Mother, listen. I've been talking with Mr. Onderdonk. At the bleachers.

SOPHIE

What good is that?

NILS

I know he's considering me for his partner. I'll learn the business, manage the accounts, all of it. I've been working as hard as I can to gain some notice. His son's not able to run it, he's a bit touched in the head. But if he takes me on as partner, then one day I'm going to own the works.

SOPHIE

"One day." No help to us now.

KRISTINE

Still, it's smart of Nils to look ahead. Wonder when Caspar will be in?

SOPHIE

He's got nowt to offer you.

KRISTINE

Oh no? Then what about you, Nils?

NILS

Kristine... I mean, the bleaching mill.

KRISTINE

What's wrong with the Dutch? The world offers up its dazzling colors and here we work to bleed 'em away. Goodbye, Nils.

NILS

You're leaving already?

KRISTINE

I won't be waiting about for him. He's travelled this far, he can cover a few more feet to find me.

(Calling to kitchen)

Goodbye, Mother DeGroot!

Sophie BANGS something in reply.

Kristine exits.

SOPHIE

I don't want her around here, Nils.

NILS

There's barely a print on the floor.

SOPHIE

Sniffing after Caspar. He's much too good for her.

NILS

They seem a good fit. They've been running together for years.

SOPHIE

She's trash, Nils. The whole family's degenerate. The father's always drunk, her sister whoring herself out--

NILS

Mother, stop.

SOPHIE

She won't join this family. Caspar shows ambition.

NILS

And me. I've got my sights set even higher than Caspar.

SOPHIE

But you're still looking up from the ground, same as the rest of us.

The door opens and Pieter enters. He is dressed in dusty stonemason's clothes and dirty boots. He carries a cloth bag of tools. He is younger here than in the bar scene, about 23 years old.

SOPHIE

Not a step further! I just mopped that floor!

Pieter doesn't acknowledge. He drops the bag of tools on the table, the bag kicking up white masonry dust. He moves to the hearth and rummages.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Pieter! You filthy thing. What do you think you're doing?

Pieter returns with the heel of a crusty bread loaf and a bottle of wine. He sits at the table and starts to eat. Sophie surveys the dirty floor, furious.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Look what you've done! What's the matter with you?

PIETER

What?

SOPHIE

I just mopped that floor!

PIETER

And you can mop it again.

NILS

Pieter...

Sophie SLAPS Pieter's face, hard. They stare at each other.

PIETER

No more of that. Get about your work.

Sophie tosses Pieter the eviction paper. Pieter looks at it.

SOPHIE

Because of you. Two months behind, ready to be tossed out. Because you've a greater affinity for drinking and cards than you do for your own family. You owe us.

PIETER

I owe you nowt.

NILS

We all need to do our share, Pieter.

SOPHIE

No money from you, I've a mind to kick you out.

PIETER

Go ahead. I'd welcome the freedom.

NILS

Come on now, we work together, as a family.

SOPHIE

Some family, one making half-wages and the other salting it away soon as he gets it.

Sophie grabs her bucket, moves to the door. Pieter drinks from the bottle.

SOPHIE

Nothing but extra work. More water, another trip to the pump.

PIETER

That's right, make the place nice for the next tenant.

SOPHIE

Because of you!

Sophie exits with the bucket.

NILS

Why do you push her like that?

PIETER

Aw, leave it alone.

NILS

She just wants the house nice for Caspar.

PIETER

Is that today? The family favorite returns?

NILS

His ship's in the dock.

PIETER

Explains why Kristine's been haunting the place. Saw her coming from here.

NILS

Mother was quite rude to her.

PIETER

The old woman doesn't like the prospect of anyone coming between her and the favored son's purse.

NILS

That's not fair.

PIETER

Fairer than she deserves. You want her to give over some of that love she keeps for Caspar, come around twice a year with a pouch of coins. Our problem, we're not worth enough for the bother.

Nils takes the bottle of wine from Pieter, returns it to the kitchen.

NILS

Enough of that, you'll never make it back to the quarry for work.

PIETER

You're right enough there.

NILS

What's meant by that?

PIETER

I have hereby terminated employment with Donnelin and Sons Stonemasonry. Effective immediately.

NILS

What?! Why?

PIETER

Disagreed with one of the Junior Donnelins on a point of technique.

NILS

You can't do that! That's father's position you took over!

PIETER

So?

NILS

You're throwing that out due to a fight with one of the sons?

PIETER

And good riddance.

NILS

Six guilder a week that job brought in for us! How're we going to pay rent with you out of work?

PIETER

Caspar and his coin are bound for home, remember?

NILS

(Waving the notice)

That'll take care of this month! What'll we do the next?

PIETER

I'll find something else.

NILS

There's nothing else to find.

PIETER

Then I'll make my own job.

NILS

Just tell me what happened. At the masons.

PIETER

Nowt to tell. Donnelin has four sons, and one of 'em's got it in for me. None of my work ever meets his approval. "Edging's a little rough here, Pieter." "Troughs could do with a bit more flushing there, Pieter."

NILS

He's a perfectionist.

PIETER

He's a full bastard, 's what he is. Walking around and judging. Nothing wrong with my work. So I tell him such, he just gives me a look.

NILS

So what happened?

PIETER

I spent the last three days on a Calvinist church commission, lettering the Doctrines of Grace onto a big square of granite for the center of a frieze. And he comes around and starts in again. And I've done had it with him, so I line the chisel against the stone and slam the hammer into it, one great strike.

NILS

What a stupid thing to do.

PIETER

Felt very good at the time.

NILS

While you were smashing up your work and throwing away your career, did you ever once think of your family?

PIETER

Never once.

NILS

With your selfish act of destruction you put us all in a bad way.

PIETER

I'll get another job.

NILS

Not as a mason! The story's probably all around town. No one'll take you.

PIETER

Don't want to be a mason. There's other jobs to suit me.

NILS

You took that job over from father.

PIETER

Don't know how he stood it, day in and day out. Taking that from them. And in the end, look where it got him.

NILS

Don't expect me to carry you while you're out of work.

PIETER

On bleacher's wages? Wouldn't think of it.

NILS

We look out for one another. You're my brother. I'd do anything to help you...

PIETER

I'm not asking for your help. Never will.

NILS

And you shed your career just because you don't like the work.

PIETER

I hate the work! I hate the cramps in my hands, I hate the cuts on my fingers. I hate the prospect of dying in that damn rock pit. Just like our father. Yes, I left. I say it's not irresponsible if you have to leave, if staying will kill you.

NILS

You have an obligation to your family!

PIETER

Family can choke the life from you as sure as the quarry.

The brothers stare at each other.

Sophie enters, carrying water in the bucket.

NILS

Time to explain to her then. Mother, Pieter has something to say to you.

PIETER

Shut up. I've got nowt to say to her.

SOPHIE

And there's nowt I want to hear from either of you.

Sophie starts mopping again.

NILS

It's important.

PIETER

No t'isn't. You'll dampen the mood considerably and then I'll hit you.

Through this, the door opens slowly and CASPAR eavesdrops, timing his entrance.

SOPHIE

Clean up that bread. Don't push the crumbs to the floor, you ape! Clean it up. Nils, get the broom. Pieter, tools off the table. Sweep that to the side! Bring your bag to the hallway!

CASPAR

Hoist the mainsail! Tighten the gib! Batten the hatches! I tell you, mother, you could outorder Captain Rudolf himself.

SOPHIE

Caspar!

NILS

Welcome back!

Sophie and Nils move to embrace Caspar, who carries a kit bag. Caspar is 21, full of confidence and good-natured charm.

CASPAR

It's great to be back in Haarlem. Dutch trading is always sweetest when it's carried out among the Dutch.

SOPHIE

Can I get you something to eat, love?

Sophie enters the hearth, opens cupboards.

CASPAR

Yeah, I wouldn't mind a bit of whatever you can scare up.

Spotting the mop, he freezes in his tracks.



CASPAR (CONT'D)

Uh-oh. I'm making tracks and you've just mopped.

SOPHIE

Don't be silly, come in, make yourself at home.

CASPAR

I will at that.

Caspar moves to Pieter, extends his hand.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Pieter.

PIETER

(Shaking hands cordially)

Welcome back, Caspar.

Sophie enters with a board of a new half-loaf of bread, some cheese, and a mug of drink.

SOPHIE

Sit! Sit! Good heavens, why are you still on your feet?

Sophie wrangles Caspar to the center chair at the table, and the rest of the family clusters around him.

CASPAR

This looks great mum, thanks.

PIETER

Where was that hiding? I didn't see that!

SOPHIE

Just a little something for Caspar. Go on lad, eat.

CASPAR

Let me get something off of me first. Don't want to sit on that all the while.

Caspar takes from off his belt a filled, heavy cloth coin purse and sets it on the table. For the moment, this item commands everyone's attention but Caspar's, who portions out the bread and cheese to himself and the family, handing each their lot.

NILS

And where did six months of voyages take you, Caspar?

CASPAR

(As he eats)

North sailing up the Zuider Zee, past Friesland and into the Baltic. Copper and furs from Helsinki and on the return tour, timber and pitch from Oslo. Messy stuff, pitch.

SOPHIE

(Still glancing at the purse)

It was a rewarding voyage then? Worth the time and effort?

CASPAR

Always, mum. I'm in love with the changing vista, watching that pink dawn break over a dark blue sea.

SOPHIE

But you got money for your trouble too then?

PIETER

That's right, don't get too poetic with this one. She needs to see the color of your coin.

CASPAR

And on the way back we stopped at Danzig.

SOPHIE

What's at Danzig?

CASPAR

There I was able to fill my purse and bring some of the world back with me. Bring it back for father.

NILS

For father?

SOPHIE

Fill your purse. With guilder?

CASPAR

More valuable than that.

NILS

Gold.

CASPAR

Something more precious.

PIETER

(To audience)

Always the storyteller, playing his audience.

CASPAR

They cost me some coin, but they're worth it. You'll see.

SOPHIE

How much coin?

NILS

What did you bring back, Caspar?

CASPAR

Listen. I'm ashore at Danzig where I meet a Turk who runs a market stall. He says his grandfather used to work as a gardener for the emperor at the palace of Topkapi. He's reluctant to say more, so I draw him out with the promise of a drink. And soon he's telling me this story. You see, the palace gardeners had a kind of double duty. They tended the landscapes, but they were also the emperor's guardsmen. Now this man's grandfather had a troubling job duty: when required, he helped his foreman in the execution of women. Any kind of crime, from adultery to theft of food, and the poor girl would be strangled. If she was a virgin, it was this man's job to sew her into a sack to be thrown alive into the Bosphorus.

SOPHIE

My Lord.

CASPAR

Now this man--the Turk kept calling him Babasi--loved his job as gardener, tending to fragile lines of life growing from the soil. But the other part of his job--well, he hated that. And one night when his foreman was off the grounds, young Babasi was brought into a room, and there he found a heavy sack, and a needle and thread...and a 16-year old girl. Now under these circumstances, he had never seen a girl so quiet or calm or beautiful. He couldn't speak. But he opened the sack, and she stepped in and sank down inside. And he started to sew. And finally he said, "What is your name?" "Irina," replied the girl. Stitches. "What is your crime?" "Stealing." More stitches. "And what did you steal?" "I picked a tulip from the gardens." His hand trembled. He stood there for a long time. Then he finished his job and carried the sack out of the room and placed it on a sled to await its trip to the river. Time passed, and the girl waited. And then the sled moved, and after a while it stopped. Then she heard something else: the sound of the stitches coming out. The sack opened, and she blinked in the first light of dawn. Babasi was there with a horse. He said they would have to be quick in finding a new land--the Ottomans are not a forgiving people. And Babasi had one more surprise for Irina--that's the Turk's grandmother, you know. He brought out a cloth and unwrapped it. Inside were twelve of these.

Caspar opens the purse and takes out three flower bulbs.

SOPHIE

Caspar, are those...?

CASPAR

Tulip bulbs. The ex-gardener told the girl, "They come with us. You must learn to see these are flowers of beauty and not of destruction."

PIETER

And which is it for us, then? How much did you pay for this lot?

SOPHIE

Yes, how much is left?

Caspar empties a couple coins from the purse onto the table.

CASPAR

Well, there's some money left.

(Counting)

Five, six, seven guilder.

SOPHIE

Seven?! You should have been paid seventy-five, eighty guilder for six months' work!

CASPAR

I was.

SOPHIE

Well where is it?

CASPAR

With my money I bought a part of the world.

Sophie, Nils react; Pieter lets out a short, cynical bark of laughter.

NILS

We need money right now.

SOPHIE

Eighty guilder and he has seven left!

NILS

I'm not making enough to cover the house, Pieter just lost his masonry work.

SOPHIE

What? You lost your income?

PIETER

That's right, felt like the job was chippin' away at me.

SOPHIE

Go ahead, joke. If your father were here--

PIETER

But he's not. The quarry already caught up with him.

SOPHIE

You unfeeling--

PIETER

That's right I am that. Feeling only makes you weak. You won't find me bringing home flower bulbs out of sentiment.

NILS

Caspar, why did you buy these bulbs? With dad gone, you know how much we need the money.

CASPAR

But I bought these for dad, Nils. He never left Haarlem, never went beyond the neighborhood.

SOPHIE

Why should he? Everything he needed was here.

CASPAR

But he used to love hearing stories of my travels. Those last few months, when he couldn't escape the cough, I'd sit with him and describe the sights I had come across. He loved hearing my stories. And I promised to bring something of the world back to him.

NILS

Caspar, he died before you left!

CASPAR

Doesn't matter. I made a promise. And when I heard the Turk's story, I knew what to get him.

SOPHIE

So you brought back these? Holland's awash in tulips, silly child!

CASPAR

But these are different. The Turk took care to tell me all about them. The original flowers had been passed down to him from his father, who got it from his father. Look, mum.

(Points at a bulb)

This one's The Matchless Pearl.

NILS

How do you know which is which?

CASPAR

We've spent the last three weeks in intimate company. They're like family to me. She's the smallest of the three, see, then this lopsided one, that's The Instiller of Passion.

SOPHIE

It looks it.

CASPAR

But this is my favorite. This beauty is The Rose of the Dawn.

SOPHIE

Oh my heart. I can't believe you spent your earnings on these! Where's your sense of family?

CASPAR

That's why I acted thus. I can plant the bulbs at his graveside and father finally gets his view of the gardens of Turkey.

SOPHIE

How could you be so foolish?!

NILS

Let's think this through. Caspar brought back seven guilder. I've 15 more saved up for the month. That makes 22. With 36 guilder owed, we need to find 14 guilder more by Friday.

PIETER

Economics, economics.

SOPHIE

(Turning to Pieter)

You! If you've got any money in your pockets, you best turn it over right now.

NILS

Pieter, please.

Pieter reaches into his pocket, takes out four coins.

PIETER (CONT'D)

Three guilder, six stuiver. That's the lot.

SOPHIE

Gambling your pay away--

PIETER

No longer any pay to gamble.

SOPHIE

You owe us.

PIETER

I owe nowt to no one. I'll give three guilder to Caspar for spinning an amusing tale. He can do as he chooses with 'em. Here, Casp.

Pieter gives three coins to Caspar.

SOPHIE

Caspar.

CASPAR

Here, mum.

Caspar hands the coins to Sophie.

PIETER

The six stuiver I'm holding for myself for use down at the White Doublet.

SOPHIE

To gamble it away...

PIETER

If that's my want.

CASPAR

You're going to the Doublet? Will you stand me a beer, Pieter?

PIETER

As long as the money holds out.

CASPAR

We can get a couple rounds for that. Come on, I'll race you there.

Caspar moves to the door, Pieter following.

SOPHIE

Caspar! I haven't seen you in months. I want you back at a reasonable hour.

CASPAR

Okay, mum.

PIETER

When do you want me back, then?

SOPHIE

You? Out of work and full of spite? You don't need to return at all.

NILS

Mother.

PIETER

No, Nils. It suits me fine.

Caspar and Pieter exit through the door. Sophie moves to the kitchen, where she squirrels away the coin in a cup in the cupboard.

SOPHIE

It's neck and neck between the DeGroots and the wolf at the door....

Lights fade on Nils and Sophie at the house as the brothers walk to the bar, Pieter narrating.

PIETER

(To audience)

Between his cavalier purchase of flower bulbs and his immediate handing over of my coin to the old woman, I admit I was a little piqued with him.

Lights up on the bar, Caspar joins Kristine and they begin giggling and drinking, well in their cups. Pieter joins them, still narrating.

PIETER

But the thing about Caspar is, as angry as you want to be for whatever he's done, you can't stay mad for long. It's not even strategy on his part. It's just his nature. It's like staying sore at the wind.

CASPAR

(To Kristine)

...So ol' Pieter stands there waiting while Donnelin Junior inspects that stone tablet up and down and every which way...!

PIETER

I'm particularly fond of this gift he has of listening to you tell a story, then turning around and telling it back to you in a grander style than you delivered it in the first place.

Pieter sits beside them, pulls up a stein and joins the mood.

CASPAR

...And after much study the lad pulls his fat face away and says, "Lettering's a little shallow right here, Pieter!"



We don't want shoddy craftsmanship." Now I know my brother and at this point he's weighing his options--

PIETER  
(Enjoying the tale)

I am.

CASPAR  
And he briefly entertains the notion of a generous fist right to Donnelin Junior's head, but he's reluctant to spend his next two birthdays in prison. Besides, it's not his style, not quite. So instead he makes nice: "Tell me, Donnelin," he says as he lines up his chisel, "Is this by chance where you feel the lettering lacks the depth?" "Aye, that's just it." "Well, let's see if we can't correct that," and Pieter gives that chisel a blow with his hammer that'd make Thor fill with envy. And that Calvinist tract breaks into fifteen pieces, with a substantial chunk concerning the Perseverance of the Saints falling on our Donnelin's foot!

PIETER  
(To the audience)  
That part never happened but it's a brilliant touch.

CASPAR  
So our Pieter's out on his ear and out of a job, but he did so in considerable style, and that's what counts. To Pieter!

KRISTINE  
Caspar, let's drink to us.

CASPAR  
To us as well then. Tastes just as good.

PIETER  
(To audience)  
She's here too, though let it be noted that she was the one who came to him.

KRISTINE  
Caspar, how was your time at sea?

CASPAR  
Incredible. Everything you could imagine is out there to find, fabrics and figurines and spices and silk.

PIETER  
And grifters with flowers for the gullible.

CASPAR  
Kristine, I have to tell you what I found in Danzig...

KRISTINE

Of course, Caspar. And I want to speak with you as well. In private, if you please, Pieter.

PIETER

If I please? Toddle off, let you drink those beers I paid for in peace, you mean?

KRISTINE

I see a card game started in the alley. Let that draw you.

CASPAR

Kristine...

PIETER

Nay, she's right. There's more to learn over a game of money than one played for love. Better odds as well.

Pieter moves SL and watches a card game in progress. Kristine and Caspar stay at the bar.

CASPAR

When I was at Danzig, I met up with this Turk...

KRISTINE

I'm so glad you're back, Caspar. I've been lonely.

CASPAR

Lonely? With your father and your sister?

KRISTINE

Hannah's moved out. We tried to take care of Father, we really did, but when he drinks, it's best not to share his company.

CASPAR

But you're still with him?

KRISTINE

I've nowhere else to go.

CASPAR

Hannah won't take you?

KRISTINE

Where she lives... Where she works, there's--no room for extra guests.

CASPAR

Your sister?

KRISTINE

She makes money, Caspar. Enough for herself. To be away from him.

CASPAR

But still--

KRISTINE

She's not like you. She can't just sail away from her lot in life, easy as you.

(A pause.)

You've gone quiet. What're you thinking about?

CASPAR

You.

KRISTINE

How funny. And here I am, thinking about us.

CASPAR

You know, I have a little more time before I sail again...

They look at each other. Kristine kisses Caspar on impulse. He smiles, and they exit hand in hand.

Pieter moves back to the bar, narrating as he goes.

PIETER

Make no mistake. That's not love, that's lust, and it's as reliable a pastime as playing cards.

(Motioning to the door above)

And just as lucrative. And I get to reclaim the bar stool for a bit. But the thing about staying in one spot? People manage to find you, even when you don't want to be found.

Nils enters the bar, crosses to Pieter.

NILS

Pieter.

PIETER

(A little drunk)

I'm just getting comfortable.

NILS

You need to come home. This is important.

PIETER

It's all relative, relative. I think this is important. This drink is important.

NILS

Pieter...

PIETER

It's by way of celebrating. The Donnelins came through with the last of my pay. Took a little persuading, mind you...

NILS

You have your pay? Brother, listen--

PIETER

T'wasn't what I'd done that made 'em open their purse really. It was more what I offered to do.

NILS

Will you please come back with me?

PIETER

Why? Found my absence unbearable? Couldn't function without Pieter the Rock acting as cornerstone?

NILS

(Physically trying to move  
Pieter)

We don't have much time.

PIETER

You're the oldest, Nils. Why aren't you the rock?

NILS

I-- I have plans. But now we really need you.

PIETER

Need me? No one needs me.

NILS

Just follow me. Put the drink down. Please. Do this for me.

PIETER

All right, Nils.

Pieter follows Nils, who moves quickly ahead. Pieter walks at a leisurely gait.

PIETER (CONT'D)

(Narrating)

So I follow him back. He's ahead of me all the while, not much chance of conversation 'less I choose to run. And all the while I'm thinking, why would anyone need me?

NILS

(Calling behind)

Come on!

Nils opens the front door, enters.

PIETER

And just as I arrived, I had my answer. This was the third day.

NILS

(Calling into house)

Mother!

Pieter picks up the eviction notice from the table and waves it.

PIETER

This was Friday.

Pieter sets down the notice as a yell comes from the back of the house.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

STOP! Don't you dare touch that!

From the rear of the house enters MR. SCHEELS, the landlord, dressed in business attire. He carries a wood box with clothes, linens, and a few candle holders and miscellany packed haphazardly on top.

NILS

Mr. Scheels--

SCHEELS

I told this woman she needs to begin packing, and she has refused.

SOPHIE

You've no right, you bandit!

SCHEELS

So I started the packing for her.

SOPHIE

Hands off my own property!

Sophie grabs the box and heads back into the house.

SCHEELS

(To Sophie)

I have two officers of the court arriving within minutes. They'll handle you far rougher than I!



NILS

Right, I know...

SCHEELS

For the last five months you have been late in paying.

NILS

But we paid!

SCHEELS

No more of this. I will only accept full payment.

Sophie enters, addresses Pieter for the first time.

SOPHIE

Here! What're you here for? Come to gloat?

PIETER

That's right. Wanted to see how many crates were needed to box up your life.

SOPHIE

Enjoy what you've done to me! Sleep content. Be well satisfied.

NILS

Mother, stop!

SOPHIE

Look at him, Nils! He's put us here, gambling the rent money away--

PIETER

My earnings!

SOPHIE

--And he has the nerve to show up with drink on his breath and a smile on his face.

PIETER

One often brings on the other.

NILS

Listen: Pieter is here because he--

PIETER

(Interrupting)

She already knows why I'm here, she said as much. I came here to gloat, to scoff, to enjoy the destruction I caused this family.

SCHEELS

I'm waiting for 36 guilder.

PIETER

Wait a mite more. See what happens.

NILS

Pieter got paid today. Rest of the money from his quarry work.

SOPHIE

Is that true?

PIETER

True enough.

SOPHIE

Do you have the rest of the money then?

SCHEELS

Eleven guilder.

SOPHIE

Eleven guilder. Do you have it?

PIETER

Funny story. Nils comes rushing into the Doublet, just about pulls me off the stool. He hears I've been paid, and from then on I'm pulled straight to this door. So it's Nils brought me here.

SOPHIE

Eleven guilder, Pieter! You owe us that.

PIETER

He's in such a right hurry, he didn't give me an opening to explain.

NILS

Explain what?

PIETER

I collected my pay in the morning, Nils. It's been with me through the day. And of course there was some drink to buy.

SOPHIE

How much is left?

PIETER

And the card game started earlier than usual, due to some visiting Swedes. They're not supposed to be good at cards, the Swedes.

NILS

No.



PIETER

That lot must have been the exception. So between the beer and the cards...

SOPHIE

How much?

Pieter reaches in his pocket and tosses a single coin onto the table.

SCHEELS

Three stuiver. Unacceptable.

Scheels takes an empty box near the wall and exits to the rear of the house.

SOPHIE

God damn you...

NILS

I'm sorry, mother.

SOPHIE

(To Pieter)

Get out.

PIETER

Answer me this. Do you love me?

SOPHIE

(Unbelieving)

What?

PIETER

Do you love me? Do you love your son?

SOPHIE

What do you want?

PIETER

The truth.

SOPHIE

"The truth." The truth is, I want you out of my house and out of my life. Is that truth enough for you?

PIETER

You surprise me. I think you just gave an honest answer.

Still locking eyes with Sophie, Pieter reaches into his same pocket and takes out seven more coins. He places them on the table. Sophie and Nils look.

NILS

Fourteen guilder. You saved the house.

PIETER

It's worth it to know where I stand.

Pieter exits, closes the front door.  
Sophie puts Pieter's coins together  
with the savings, calls out as she goes  
to the back.

SOPHIE

(Calling to Scheels)

Here! Put that away! Come get your money and get out of my  
house!

Sophie exits. Lights fade on Nils at  
the table, looking at the coins.

Pieter walks down to the bar. Kristine  
sits there, pretending not to notice  
him. Pieter narrates.

PIETER

Are you coming round to my way of thinking? If not, there's  
still plenty of time.

(To Kristine)

Hello, Kristine. Surprised to see you here.

KRISTINE

Don't be. Caspar's out back.

PIETER

Ah. You two have been inseparable since you've allowed that  
sailor to dock.

KRISTINE

I enjoy my time with him. And he with me.

PIETER

You'll grow out of it soon enough.

KRISTINE

You know, we have differing viewpoints, me and you.

PIETER

I'd be worried otherwise.

KRISTINE

You think the worst of everyone, always.

PIETER

It's a reliable outlook.

KRISTINE

I think it's sad. Would it hurt you so much to be happy for us?

PIETER

"Happy" for you? You can't generate that yourself?

KRISTINE

We already do. And I'm sorry you're so miserable.

PIETER

Don't be sorry for me, ever. I'm fine on me own.

KRISTINE

Caspar and I are engaged.

PIETER

He's proposed to you then?

KRISTINE

Well. There's been a lot of talk.

PIETER

Talk. Our Caspar's good at that. He'll be in no hurry then.

KRISTINE

He's not like you. He's good.

PIETER

Good? You still hold to a child's outlook, you know that? No one is ever good, merely human. While we sit here considering how saintly our Caspar is, money's given up to the sod with the best hand of cards in the alley outside.

KRISTINE

Be quiet.

PIETER

And right above us, in the rooms upstairs men leave a few guilder lighter with a sheepish look on their face while the tired ladies stay behind, straighten the bedding and get ready to answer the next muffled knock.

KRISTINE

(Turning away; dismissing)

You're drunk...

PIETER

And where is he? Out in the alley with the men or upstairs in good company?

KRISTINE

Stop it. I'm done talking to you.

PIETER

You've no idea what life is. Just wait till you take in your share of the stone dust, until you can't breathe, then come talk to me.

Caspar enters from the opposite side, crosses to the bar.

CASPAR

That's done then. What're you two sharing a moment on?

KRISTINE

Where did you go just now?

CASPAR

Needed to step out, love. Three beers requires a certain amount of self-maintenance.

PIETER

Was there a game going?

CASPAR

I should say so. Half the crew from my ship, near as I could tell. Need to do something with their wages.

PIETER

Human nature.

CASPAR

That it is.

(To Kristine)

How are you holding up, my dear?

KRISTINE

Caspar...

CASPAR

(Taking a drink)

Ah, brilliant. What is it?

KRISTINE

I wanted to have you alone for a bit. When are we gonna be alone?

CASPAR

I just got a refill, Kristine.

KRISTINE

But we should talk. Pieter, would you leave us be?

CASPAR

Wait, no need...

KRISTINE

Yes there is.

PIETER

'Salright, Casp. I've learned where to go when she has that look in her eyes.

Pieter takes his stein and moves to the opposite side, where he looks out at the card game in the alley.

CASPAR

All right then. In a manner of speaking, we're alone. With which we'll have to make do until we can employ another manner of speaking. So to speak.

KRISTINE

Caspar.

CASPAR

Kristine.

KRISTINE

Why haven't you proposed to me yet?

CASPAR

We're jumping to this now?

KRISTINE

You've been jumping away from it since you've been on shore.

CASPAR

And I sail again in less than a week.

KRISTINE

How we've been seeing each other these days, I wouldn't have allowed it if I didn't think it was leading to something.

CASPAR

I know, love. We're in accord.

KRISTINE

I wanted to because it was with you, Caspar. Only you.

CASPAR

Kristine.

KRISTINE

I need to see the color of my future. I want you with me, and whatever else you want to bring my way: silks. Or spices. Or a baby. But I want you.

CASPAR

And I want you. But there's protocol to be followed. You'd move in with us, so I'd need to clear the way with mum...

KRISTINE

It's not complicated, Caspar. Ask yourself if you love me. If so, ask yourself if you want to marry me. If so, then ask it and be done with it. Or I'll ask for you.

CASPAR

You're throwing me off balance. I'm supposed to be the one with a facility for conversation.

KRISTINE

Then start using it. Do you love me?

CASPAR

Yes, I love you.

KRISTINE

Do you want to marry me?

CASPAR

I want nothing less.

KRISTINE

Then what have you to say for yourself?

CASPAR

Kristine VanWick, will you marry me?

KRISTINE

All right then. Cheers.

Kristine clinks his glass, drinks. They look at each other, then grin. They take hands and exit, excited.

The lights fade on the bar.

In half light Pieter moves warily to the house door. Lights up as he enters.

Sophie stands opposite in robe, watching.

PIETER

What do you want?

SOPHIE

Wondered who it was at this hour.

PIETER

You have your answer.

SOPHIE

Well, sit down then. I'll find you something to eat.

PIETER

Don't bother.

SOPHIE

You're not hungry?

PIETER

Actually... I am.

SOPHIE

Then sit down and stop griping.

Sophie goes to the kitchen.

PIETER

Nothing special.

SOPHIE

Nothing special to be had. You make do with that.

Sophie brings a board with a heel of bread and a cup of drink.

PIETER

Can't recall the last time you waited on me.

SOPHIE

Nay, you just gather up everything on your own, like a bear. Is it all right?

PIETER

Yeah. D'you want some?

Pieter tears and passes bread to Sophie. He avoids looking at her.

SOPHIE

You look tired.

PIETER

I suppose I am.

SOPHIE

It's 'cause you're fighting the world. You never let yourself rest.

PIETER

I do all right.

SOPHIE

Aye, that you do.

PIETER

Not like Caspar.

SOPHIE

Caspar's engaged and back at sea. But you're here.

Sophie reaches and briefly touches  
Pieter's hair, not unkindly.

SOPHIE

Three weeks' away from the quarry and you still got stone  
dust in your hair.

PIETER

What you said. I let myself rest. I'm sitting down now.

SOPHIE

For a minute or two. Then you'll be up again, arms swingin'.

PIETER

I take after you. But we don't keep company well, you and me.

SOPHIE

Be quiet now. Eat.

PIETER

It's so hard sometimes. Hard to feel. I don't feel. I don't  
even know...

SOPHIE

You're tired. You need a rest.

PIETER

(Emotionally naked)

Mother. Why am I this way?

SOPHIE

(Firm)

Stop it. This is not to talk about. You're tired.

PIETER

I'm tired.

SOPHIE

You go to sleep. And tomorrow you'll be working alongside  
Nils and everything will be put to right.

PIETER

What? Why Nils?

SOPHIE

He's got you a job at that bleaching mill. You're to start  
tomorrow.



PIETER

What are you on about? I didn't ask him for a job!

SOPHIE

No, you're too proud to. You've been out of work too long, and you're moping because of it. You're going back to work.

PIETER

What I do with my life I decide on my own! You and Nils don't tell me what to do, ever!

SOPHIE

Look at you, self-righteous and swinging!

PIETER

You only show kindness to me because you know I'd soon be handing over the coin!

SOPHIE

Nils is worried for you. You need some good, honest work. Something to shake this outlook of yours.

PIETER

I see fine. You, always needing money.

SOPHIE

Needing to survive. You're to be there at daybreak so Nils can show you your duties. This is important.

PIETER

Where is he? Where is Nils?

SOPHIE

At the mill, earning extra wages. And don't you lose another job!

PIETER

Woman, I never had it in the first place!

Pieter storms out of the house.

SOPHIE

(Calling after him)

Pieter! Ingrate!

Sophie angrily cleans the table.

Pieter's momentum takes him DSL, where Nils, in apron, stirs fabric in a large vat with a wooden paddle. Pieter shoves Nils away from the vat and grabs the paddle from him.

NILS  
Jesus, man! What are you doing?

PIETER  
Do I look like you?

NILS  
What?

PIETER  
DO I LOOK LIKE YOU?!

NILS  
No.

PIETER  
No. You do not speak for me, Nils. You don't find me a job--

NILS  
(Overlapping)  
I'm trying to help you!

PIETER  
(Overlapping)  
--You don't tell the old woman that I'll be working with you, you don't tell her anything about me! She's turned here back on me, same as always.

NILS  
This again. Poor, wounded Pieter.

PIETER  
You think I want to be like you? Stirring other people's linens for the rest of my days, until I get so cramped I can't lay straight?

NILS  
I'm not doing this forever. I've got plans.

PIETER  
Leave me out of them.

NILS  
I've got plans. You're my brother, I wanted to help. Why did I try to bring you on?

PIETER  
Why did you?

NILS  
Because I felt sorry for you! My brother a mess, out of work, drunk, almost living at that tavern.

PIETER

They're truer souls than you and her.

NILS

You've gotten in with the boss of the Doublet, I heard.  
Jordan Cormer. Working for him.

PIETER

Helping out as needed.

NILS

Collecting pub debts. You're better than that, Pieter. Rise  
above it. You don't need that work.

PIETER

I'll work any way I please!

NILS

Then don't expect me to take you on here when I become  
manager.

PIETER

Manager? Manager?! How will that come about? What'll you do,  
Nils, push Onderdonk into one of his bleach vats?

NILS

Just leave! I'm done talking with you.

ONDERDONK (O.S.)

Here! What is this? Nils?

MR. ONDERDONK enters from behind the  
stairs and approaches.

NILS

Oh God, I didn't-- Mr. Onderdonk! I didn't know you were  
here.

ONDERDONK

There's a, uh, crack in one of the um, ur, ah vats.  
Maintenance.

PIETER

Mr. Onderdonk!

NILS

Pieter.

PIETER

Pleasure to meet you, bleacher!

NILS

Mister-- This is Pieter, my brother. He was leaving.

ONDERDONK

No one else should, uh, be back here, um Nils.

NILS

No, I know.

PIETER

So tell me this. When are you bringing my brother on to manage this place?

NILS

Pieter!

ONDERDONK

Um, manage?

PIETER

Um, that's right. Nils has big plans for the place.

NILS

Just leave! I'm sorry, Mister--

ONDERDONK

Are you, um, drunk, young man?

PIETER

It's still a valid question, bleacher. When are you giving Nils a proper position here?

ONDERDONK

You need to, um, uh--

PIETER

No, you need to answer. Nils has been working for you, underpaid and overworked for three years now. He must have talked to you about his plans!

NILS

Pieter! Leave right now!

Nils tries to pull Pieter away but Pieter keeps him at bay with the paddle.

ONDERDONK

Nils, control your um, brother!

PIETER

I'm in control, and I know you, be you a Donnelin or a Scheels or an Onderdonk. You're all the same. Your world operates on profit and nothing but. You don't care a toss for who you're trampling or who you hurt. All you want from anyone is the money that keeps you in business. It's sick.

NILS

(Physically struggling)

Goddammit, Pieter!

PIETER

I'd never work here, and if my brother ever finds his senses, he'll leave with me!

ONDERDONK

THAT'S ENOUGH!

Pieter swings the paddle to the side, readying to strike Onderdonk. Nils, in a fury, grabs the paddle out of Pieter's hands and grips it. Before Pieter can take it back:

ONDERDONK

That's it. Nils, you work here no more! I um never want to see you or this um man again. I'm summoning the uh, police!

Onderdonk retreats back SR. Nils is breathing heavily, fury building up.

Nils YELLS and raises the paddle to hit Pieter. Pieter waits. But he can't go through with it.

Nils drops his arms and breathes, exhausted.

NILS (CONT'D)

What have you done? My God.

PIETER

Best thing for you.

NILS

My plans. Gone. Just go! Get away from me!

PIETER

Don't push me, Nils! I tried to help, make you see!

NILS

Just GO!! Back where you belong, with the drunken, the lost and the damned!

Nils starts to push him, Pieter resists and starts to fight back. Finally Nils pushes him out of the space and towards the bar. Pieter stumbles and continues downstage in front of the bar, pacing to burn off adrenaline.

PIETER

(To the audience)

He pushes me to the *Doublet* right enough, but on my journey through the streets I come across a squinty-eyed fellow named Gerlof Spoor. And it happens this Gerlof Spoor owes my employer thirteen guilder and has been avoiding both him and his establishment as of late. And as I had passed a very frustrating evening and carried some anger over, I set upon this young man with a singular sense of purpose. I leave him with cracked teeth, two black eyes, a broken thumb and a receipt for thirteen guilder paid in full.

Pieter crosses to the bar, sits. Grabs a stein of beer, drinks. His hand trembles holding the stein. He notices, sets it down, grasps his hand with the other.

PIETER

Jordan Cormer likes my performance and I get a promotion of sorts. And if I ever want to claim a family--and I don't--my boss and the group here at The *Doublet* comes closer than any I've had.

Kristine and Caspar enter and stand, side by side, both in formal clothes.

PIETER

And somewhere around this time Caspar comes back to land, and he brings with him a Danish dress that Kristine weds him in.

CASPAR

I do.

KRISTINE

I do.

PIETER

I don't. Because I don't care.

Kristine and Caspar kiss and exit.

PIETER (CONT'D)

And Nils. Out of work and out of favor with the old woman, Nils visits his father's grave. But not out of sentiment, and good for him. Instead, he returns with three pots carrying three tulips.

In the house, Nils crosses and opens the door. MR. JONGE, a florist, enters.

JONGE

Mr. DeGroot?

NILS

Mr. Jonge. Thank you for coming.

JONGE

Frankly, I hope it's worth my time.

PIETER

And after some study Nils invites a flower trader to the house, a rather unattractive specimen.

NILS

I decided to place them in pots because we don't yet have a garden, though we should. Each has a hole at the base for drainage, and I added a little potash and shore sand into the mix....

JONGE

Yes yes. Show me the tulips, please.

Nils picks up a pot with a single upright tulip in it. The flower is a solid milky-white color. Jonge leans in, inspecting it critically.

NILS

The Turk who sold this to me called it The Matchless Pearl.

JONGE

Mmmmm...

NILS

It's a quite healthy specimen. Stem is tall and straight, leaves are uniform.

JONGE

Yes...

NILS

The cup is solid, the petals are full and evenly spaced.

JONGE

Show me something else.

NILS

It's not of interest?

JONGE

It's unicolor.

NILS

Yes, but it's an interesting shade of pearl white.

JONGE

It's a solid color. It's commonplace, even if it is white. No one would give you more than a stuiver for it, if that.

NILS

A stuiver? That won't even buy a loaf of bread.

JONGE

Perhaps not. Then sell a dozen of them. You'll then have money for two loaves. What else?

NILS

Wait. Let me show you The Instiller of Passion.

Nils picks up a second pot, places it on the table. This tulip has a solid deep red bloom. Jonge surveys it skeptically.

JONGE

The Instiller of Passion?

NILS

That's right.

JONGE

Unicolor.

NILS

A nice, deep red.

JONGE

Two stuiver.

NILS

Two stuiver?

JONGE

No one will give you more.

NILS

The parents of these flowers were in the gardens of Topkapi!

JONGE

Then they've really come down in the world. Young man, I sell these types of bulbs by the weight. Dozens are sold at a time. I don't have the patience for two flowers.

NILS

There is another one, it might be of more interest.

JONGE

Can you be quick please?



NILS

It's right here.

Nils takes out the last pot, sets it on the table. The bloom is an unusual waxy yellow and red.

NILS (CONT'D)

The Rose of the Dawn.

Jonge is trying to keep a poker face, but he is clearly interested.

JONGE

This is...better.

NILS

It's a broken bulb. As you know. From the variety Bizarden. The petals are yellow with flares of red running up the sides. And once a bulb is broken--once it starts producing multi-colored blooms--it will continue to do so for the life of the plant. And you're right. The unicolor bulbs--you know, the breeder bulbs--they're not worth much. But the broken bulbs...that's a different story.

JONGE

Yes, it's a nice plant. I'll give you a guilder for it.

NILS

A guilder? Not a stuiver but a guilder? Worth that much?

JONGE

That's right. That's a fair offer. Five loaves of bread for one tulib bulb.

NILS

It's a Bizarden.

(No reply from Jonge.)

I'm asking you. It's a Bizarden.

JONGE

Yes it is.

NILS

I classified it correctly.

JONGE

Yes you did.

NILS

If I know that much, I know enough to know it's worth more than a guilder.

JONGE

Perhaps, but all right. Three guilder.

NILS

I've also been at the traders, been watching the exchange prices of tulips. They seem to be on the rise.

JONGE

Four guilder.

NILS

I believe I'll wait out the season and harvest the bulb then, see where prices for Bizardens sit.

JONGE

I will offer you eight guilder firm for that tulip now and you won't have to wait out the season.

NILS

Market price for a Bizarden of this size is ten guilder.

JONGE

All right then, ten. No higher.

NILS

Thank you Mr. Jonge, but no. I will wait out the season. It is quite likely that by then it may be worth fifteen. Good day.

JONGE

You take me away from my shop and then you don't even offer your bulbs for sale!

NILS

But they are: The Matchless Pearl is yours for one stuiver and The Instiller of Passion for two. The Bizarden is not for sale.

JONGE

Insolence.

NILS

Education.

Jonge exits out the door. Nils sits at the table with the red and yellow tulip, takes out a book. Pieter narrates from the bar.

Sophie enters from the kitchen, goes to Nils and paces.

PIETER

And Nils' business practices met with opposition from all sides.

SOPHIE

You're killing me, Nils!

NILS

No!

SOPHIE

Caspar's at sea, Kristine does nothing, you won't look for work--

NILS

(Pointing to the book)

I tell you, this is my work.

SOPHIE

And you won't sell that potted plant even though we need the money. It's sitting there worth fifteen guilder--

NILS

The market today quoted twenty.

SOPHIE

Twenty!? Twenty guilder and you still won't sell?! I hate looking at it now. I walk past it, I clean around it and it knows. It knows its protected status around here. It's mocking me, Nils!

NILS

Mother, listen. Next month, September, that's the harvest month for tulips.

SOPHIE

Next month? How do we make it through this month if we don't sell the ruddy thing?

NILS

In September the flower dies and sloughs off and the bulb can be dug up again for sale.

SOPHIE

But we can sell it now! Give it to 'em like that, pot and all. Maybe charge a stuiver extra for the pot even.

At the bar, Pieter takes out a note and studies it. While Nils and Sophie continue to talk, Pieter moves around to the front door.

NILS

If we sell now, we hand over the plant and never see it again. But: if we wait until we can harvest the bulb, we get to see its condition.

SOPHIE

So what?

NILS

Tulips can be grown from seeds, mother, but they can also be grown from offsets, smaller bulbs that grow off of the original. They can be separated and grown individually. Since they're clones of the mother bulb, they'll produce the same flower. If this has an offset, I'll have two bulbs for sale instead of one. Twice the money.

SOPHIE

Is that going to happen?

NILS

It might. Actually, I don't know.

SOPHIE

Nils, Nils...

NILS

What?

SOPHIE

Another month with the rent not met. That Scheels will be back again, ready to toss us out. Where are we going to get the money?

NILS

I'm working on that. Trust me.

SOPHIE

(Dismissively)

Trust you...

The door opens and Pieter enters.  
Awkward assessments.

PIETER

(To Nils)

A note at the Doublet said you had to see me?

NILS

Yes, good.

SOPHIE

Well, look who's back after losing two jobs in one family. Looking to try your luck with Caspar as well?

NILS

Mother...

PIETER

I'm not talking with her here.

SOPHIE

This is my house! Least it will be until we're tossed out of it end of this month.

PIETER

Your house and Nils and I were the ones who paid the rent time and again.

SOPHIE

Well that proud tradition's come to an end, hasn't it?

NILS

ENOUGH! Both of you, stop. Let's all sit down. Pieter, I'd like mother to hear this. It's something that could benefit us all.

PIETER

Count me out.

Sophie sits.

SOPHIE

All right, Nils. I'm ready.

NILS

But mother, be silent, yes? A silent witness. Pieter, please sit.

Pieter stays standing. Pause.

NILS (CONT'D)

So how are you?

PIETER

Why am I here?

NILS

Well, I'm not happy with where we've wound up. You've taken yourself away and we parted in anger and--

PIETER

I've taken my money away, you mean. You're broke.

NILS

No. Pieter. I'll start again. When I was let go at the mill--

PIETER

Ah, we're onto that.

NILS

(Irritated.)

Just wait! Listen.

(Starting over.)

Yes Pieter, I was angry with you. But after a while it went away, and do you know why? Because it was too exhausting for me to carry around. And when my anger left, I started to see it differently, as something to be grateful for.

Sophie SCOFFS.

NILS (CONT'D)

Next month I'm going into business. As a flower seller.

SOPHIE

I told you my views!

PIETER

What kind of job is that?

SOPHIE

Exactly. It's not a job. It's a hobby.

NILS

Mother, please. You haven't looked into it, you wouldn't know. But Pieter, there's money to be made. Tulip prices rise every month, and if you buy, cultivate and sell--

PIETER

Wait a minute. Flowers.

SOPHIE

That's what I said!

NILS

They're a commodity, like wine or wheat or copper. And if you buy and sell at the right times, you can make a lot of money.

SOPHIE

Not you! You won't even sell the one you've got!

NILS

Mother, you're not-- Would you please leave Pieter and me? I'm asking you.

SOPHIE

Well... I'll do so, but I'll be listening to this plan of yours from over here.

Sophie moves to the kitchen.

Nils takes out a bulb, holds it up to Pieter.

NILS (CONT'D)

I want you to have this. It's a gift. A White Crown.

PIETER

You give me this thinking I'll catch your fever from it? I want nowt to do with it.

NILS

Then take it as an investment. It's worth three guilder at the market today. In a few months' time it might be worth six.

PIETER

You're a fool to get into it. Money chasing itself.

NILS

No. The market keeps rising--

PIETER

You're selling things that you can't count on. There's frosts and blight and weather, and they might grow and they might not, and they might be the right color and they might not.

NILS

Nothing is reliable.

PIETER

Yes. You can rely on one thing. People. What they do, how they act, what they want. You just need to be cynical enough about it and nothing will take you off guard.

NILS

That's a poor point of view.

PIETER

You're going to get crushed.

NILS

I'm going to make our fortune.

PIETER

Peddling flowers. The real players will take you for all you have.

NILS

They will?

PIETER

Yes they will.

NILS

Then I need to have someone watching out for that. I want you to be my business partner.

PIETER

What?

NILS

Leave the pub and the people there. Come into business with me.

PIETER

You're daft. It'll never work. We'd kill each other.

NILS

At least we'd be a family again. With father gone and Caspar away, it doesn't seem right without you.

PIETER

I'm fine on my own.

NILS

Really?

PIETER

Go back to your flowers. And keep your white crown.

Nils moves the red/yellow tulip between them.

NILS

Look at this and see beauty or see money, but recognize its value! This one's bulb will be worth 30 guilder next month. If it's produced an offset, it will be worth double that. I've spent my weeks studying the market and the practice of gardening, I'm ready to bring more beauty in this world.

PIETER

To traffic in it.

NILS

So to speak. We can work together. Take the white crown. It's worth something.

PIETER

I'll take it, it's something to remind me that we're different, you and me. That I'll never need to be you, believing there's a right way to live and a noble way to get by. I'll remember how different we are. But this flower chasing? It's not for me. None of this is for me.

Pieter pockets the bulb, gets up, starts to the door.

NILS

Wait. Give me a loan then. A cold-hearted business transaction. And if I can't pay, you can treat me like Gerlof Spoor.



PIETER

What do you mean, a loan?

NILS

To see us through this month. So we can pay the rent. Then in September I guarantee I'll have enough to pay you back. With interest.

Pieter laughs harshly.

NILS

(Irritated)

What's so funny?

PIETER

So that's why I've been summoned here! Real human motive, it's never beauty or love or kindness. It's always greed and lust and avarice! You call me here and start by saying how much you need me back in the family--

NILS

I do!

PIETER

--But when you strip away that false affection, what remains is an outstretched hand begging for guilder.

NILS

That is not true! I want you back as a brother!

PIETER

I don't hear from you for weeks, then you call me when you need some coin...

NILS

You cost me my job! Go to hell! I'm sorry to pull you away from the Doublet and your drink.

PIETER

I'm used to it. You and her, always asking for what's in my pockets.

SOPHIE

(Entering)

You owe us that!

PIETER

I owe you nothing. I'm nothing to you, remember?

NILS

Just go away, Pieter.

SOPHIE

You owe Nils for putting him out of work.

PIETER

It was a costly lesson: don't speak for others. You want to know what's in my pockets? Here.

Pieter reaches into his pocket, takes out a dozen coins. A quick count and he puts them on the table, amused.

PIETER

22 guilder.

Sophie moves to pick them up but Pieter's hand SLAMS over them.

PIETER (CONT'D)

No. Not you. Back to the kitchen. I make this deal with brother Nils only. Go on then.

SOPHIE

(To Nils)

That's rightfully ours!

PIETER

Back with you! Or I take my money and go.

NILS

Mother, just leave us.

SOPHIE

All right, Nils. You know what you're doing.

Sophie moves back to the kitchen.

PIETER

What am I worth to you? I'm offering up my 22 guilder on my terms. You take these coins, and I've bought my freedom from this family. Understand me, Nils? I'm serious. Take the coins, they're yours. You can keep the rest of the family intact as long as you're willing to cut me out. And I am willing to go. To you, to her: with this I've paid my debt in full. What do you say? Is it a deal?

NILS

It will help us to survive.

PIETER

Is it a deal?

NILS

If those are your terms.

PIETER

Best bargain ever struck.

Pieter exits. Sophie moves to Nils, takes the coins from him, returns to the kitchen to hide them.

Pieter walks to the bar, sits.

PIETER

(To audience)

And that paid the landlord in August. And in September Caspar returned from sea.

Pieter drinks.

Nils is at the table, fiddling with a dirt-filled tulip pot. Kristine sits beside him, waiting. Sophie is tidying the kitchen.

PIETER

And she was around too, of course. One of the family.

KRISTINE

(To Nils)

Will you please do this for me?

NILS

There's no reason for it. Caspar's doing well on his own.

KRISTINE

But I'm not.

SOPHIE

Shouldn't have married a sailor, Kristine.

NILS

I see the gifts he brings back, pretty robes and scarves.

KRISTINE

I want him, Nils. He's always gone. But if you took him into the flower trade, where he can work in town...

NILS

It's early days. I might not have room for a partner.

KRISTINE

But he's your brother. It doesn't matter what he earns as long as he's here with me.

NILS

All right, I'll ask him. I'll see what I can do.

KRISTINE

You will? Thank you, Nils!

Pieter remains turned away from the scene behind him. He becomes more drunk.

PIETER

All hail the Happy Wanderer's return!  
(To the bartender)  
Hey, Kees. Another beer. Keep it coming.

The trio greet Caspar. Pieter takes a long drink of a new beer.

KRISTINE

(Kissing Caspar)  
I missed you so much!

CASPAR

I missed you.

PIETER

(About the beer)  
Bitter. Is this the usual?

NILS

Caspar, welcome home. We should talk.

KRISTINE

Yes, you boys talk. I'll be at the Doublet waiting for you.

CASPAR

I'll find you. I always do.

Kristine exits through the door and moves DSL. She stands facing out, thinking things through.

Caspar and Nils sit at the table. Nils talks in pantomime.

PIETER

And where was I? Oh. So Nils dusts off the family partner speech and tries to sell Caspar on the flowers.

CASPAR

But Nils, you're the one who studies and reads and learns the market. That's not me, I'm not cut out for it.

NILS

You're married now. Kristine misses you.

CASPAR

And I miss her. But I get to see her each time I'm back, which makes the reunion all the better.

NILS

There are other jobs here, in town.

CASPAR

And they pay nothing like the trade ships.

NILS

That's true. You do make good money at sea. Caspar, what about this? I could use your investment to build my stock. We'll have a true partnership. Promise to give me your money, and I promise to double it for you. While you're away I'll be here making our fortunes.

CASPAR

I'd be investing and I can still sail. Nils, could we figure out how to get some of the money I make to Kristine, something to live on while I'm away?

NILS

A simple percentage, set aside once a week. There'd be nothing easier.

CASPAR

Excellent, Nils. I'm in!

They shake hands, then hug.

PIETER

Love does nothing but wound and weaken. And little enough to go around...

CASPAR

Where's Pieter?

NILS

Wait a moment. Let me show you something. This is your Rose of the Dawn.

CASPAR

Nils, that's father's plant.

NILS

It's okay, I've let him keep the other two. They're back at the grave, reminding him of your travels. But this one is ours. Caspar, it's our future.

Nils lifts a bumpy bulb out of the pot.

CASPAR

What are those?

NILS

Offsets. Two of them. We now have three Bizarden bulbs to bring to market. They're worth a total of 90 guilder.

CASPAR

Lord! That's more than six months' sailing pay.

NILS

Your investment paid off.

PIETER

Have I won my wager yet?

CASPAR

That's brilliant, Nils! Imagine what we can do, the two of us.

They smile at each other.

PIETER

Leave them to their party, leave them to their love. Nils. I need none of it. Tonight. Tonight I'll let it go. For this one night, I'll believe the best of everyone. Even myself.

Kristine looks across and makes eye contact with Pieter. They stare at each other. Pieter is spellbound for a moment.

Then he breaks, turning away and lowering his gaze. Kristine holds her intense stare on Pieter as the lights fade. She does not look away.

**END OF ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**

Pieter is at the bar, another beer in hand.

PIETER

It was the next year the craze took hold. You're lucky to start your barkeeping now, Kees. You never had to contend with them every afternoon. They overran the place and turned this respectable public house into a seething den of... commerce.

Nils and Jonge enter, each carrying a hand-held slate in wood frame and chalk. As Pieter speaks, he moves DS of the bar.

PIETER

Buyers and sellers, sellers and buyers, each of them thinking they're shrewder than the other, that this deal will make, or at least add to, their fortune.

Nils and Jonge sit on the bar seats. They do not acknowledge Pieter.

NILS

Mr. Jonge.

JONGE

Mr. DeGroot.

PIETER

And what did they call these makeshift trading floors? Colleges. As if anyone learned owt from their actions.

NILS

Your family is well, I trust?

JONGE

Quite well, thank you. Yours?

NILS

The same.

JONGE

Very good.

PIETER

And while these colleges were in session every bleedin' afternoon, I learned to stay well away from the pubs.

Pieter exits.

NILS

What do you have for me today?

JONGE

Something I think you'll find interesting. Two dozen pink vodderij, one dozen red vodderij.

NILS

Unicolor rags, Mr. Jonge, whatever the size or amount.

JONGE

I haven't finished.

NILS

Then continue.

JONGE

Three violetten, delicate pale lilac crown on a pure white base. Each bulb a guaranteed five hundred azen in weight.

NILS

Three violetten and three dozen rags, Mr. Jonge. Is that the lot?

JONGE

Not quite, sir. I have one more, a single Paragon Schilder, authenticated by a student of Clusius and signed to that effect three months ago.

Nils is clearly interested, though he tries to remain poker-faced.

NILS

A Paragon Schilder, with authentication. What size?

JONGE

Six hundred fifteen azen. And that, Mr. DeGroot, is the lot. I take it you're interested?

NILS

I'm willing to consider the lot. Shall we start?

After a little deliberation, Jonge and Nils each write a figure on their slates. They present to each other.

JONGE

Fourteen guilder? You insult me, sir.

NILS

With that inflated digit, I may claim the same.

JONGE

82 is a much fairer price for the lot.



NILS

I grant you that the Paragon is a fine flower...

JONGE

Superbly fine, sir. Don't forget the classifications. The King of the Pink-and-Whites, it has been called.

NILS

And even royalty can be overpriced.

JONGE

But you forget: I offer this king with his court intact. Three lilac violetten.

NILS

I haven't forgotten. I still say fourteen guilder.

JONGE

And I still hold at 82.

NILS

I'm willing to make a counter-offer.

JONGE

And I'm willing to consider it.

Nils and Jonge erase their first number, consider and write a second number. They show their slates.

NILS

Twenty-one!

JONGE

Seventy-nine!

Back to the slates. Nils and Jonge write and offer, write and offer.

Sophie sits at the table, counting coins from her cup.

SOPHIE

Sixteen, seventeen eighteen guilder. Rent made and it's only the twentieth of the month. He's a good boy, is Nils.

Nils and Jonge show their slates.

NILS

(Same time)  
Fifty-eight!

JONGE

(Same time)  
Fifty-eight!

They're both a bit surprised at the agreement.

JONGE

It appears we've reached an agreement, Mr. DeGroot.

NILS

I'm ready to examine the receipt.

JONGE

Very good.

The two shake hands and Jonge gathers some contract papers. He gives one to Nils, who starts to read.

Sophie has put the coins back in the cup, stuck a cloth on top as disguise, and replaced it back in the kitchen cupboard.

Kristine enters from back of the house.

KRISTINE

Have you seen Caspar?

SOPHIE

I have not.

KRISTINE

I see him scarcely more on land than when he's away.

SOPHIE

You need a job, Kristine. Or a baby. Show some independence. Stop sitting in that room of yours sulking.

KRISTINE

It's quite clear I'm in the way anywhere else in this house. But I'm living with Caspar now!

SOPHIE

Hard to forget.

KRISTINE

I'm part of this family too.

SOPHIE

If that's your outlook, you can help set the table.

Sophie hands plates and utensils to Kristine.

Nils and Jonge sign papers.

JONGE

Your purchase receipt with description of the flowers, the bulbs available at harvest season. Which leaves...

NILS

Fifteen percent paid on the agreed price.  
(Counting out coins)  
Here you are. Eight guilder, fourteen stuiver.

JONGE

Thank you. And your signature on the promissory note for the remaining amount. Also due at harvest season.

NILS

(Signs and reads)  
Forty-nine guilder, six stuiver. The amount I pay come September, even if the bulbs are worth more.

JONGE

The amount you must pay, sir, even if the bulbs are worth less.

Jonge puts a coin down, hands beers to Nils and himself.

JONGE

But here, a toast. May the year prove prosperous for us all!

NILS

I can drink to that.

Jonge drinks, while Nils takes a token sip and puts his stein down. Nils gathers his papers and stands.

JONGE

Here! You've not had more than a sip!

NILS

Enough to be politic but not enough to be impaired. I've three more meetings with florists after you, sir. You gain in life through clear thinking and controlling your hand. Good day.

Nils exits, and Jonge remains at the bar.

Sophie and Kristine have laid out the start of dinner: two bread loaves, some cheese and fruit, grapes and mugs.

SOPHIE

You've one too many places set, Kristine.

KRISTINE

What? Oh, I must have had Pieter in mind.

SOPHIE

He can find his dinner elsewhere. Take the place away. Go on.

Kristine gathers up plate and settings,  
brings it back to the kitchen.

KRISTINE

You know, I'd like to try my hand in the kitchen. Make Caspar something nice.

SOPHIE

He likes his mother's cooking, as it should be.

KRISTINE

You see more of him when he's back than I do.

SOPHIE

Nothing wrong with that. Here he comes!

Caspar enters the house. Jonge exits  
the bar.

CASPAR

Hello all.

KRISTINE

There you are! Where've you been?

Kristine kisses him.

CASPAR

Down to the docks, watching them load the Gelderland.

KRISTINE

You're shipping out again?

CASPAR

Not for two days. I'll bring you back something great. Last trip to Denmark I talked with a merchant trading in blue parrots. Talked with the parrots too.

KRISTINE

I don't want a parrot.

CASPAR

(Sniffing the air)

Oooh, mum! Is that roast mutton?

SOPHIE

You were always fond of mutton, you and Nils both. A mother remembers such things.

KRISTINE

I want to talk to you. Now.

SOPHIE  
We'll be eating soon.

KRISTINE  
This is important.

SOPHIE  
As is this meal.

KRISTINE  
(To Sophie)  
Just give us some privacy, would you?

SOPHIE  
I like that! You're in my house.

CASPAR  
Mum, leave us for a bit, yeah? Won't take long.

SOPHIE  
Nils will be back and then we're starting on the meal. Too much time spent talking things out anyway.

Sophie exits into the back. Caspar keeps nibbling on bread and grapes.

CASPAR  
Now what's so urgent?

KRISTINE  
Caspar, do you remember those days we were first married?

CASPAR  
Not that long ago.

KRISTINE  
No, but long enough to change. It was good then, you and me, joining to find our path together.

CASPAR  
Nothing's changed. If anything, we're on a better path. I'm providing for you comfortably.

KRISTINE  
Please stop eating! This isn't about money.

CASPAR  
About what then?

KRISTINE  
Us. You know, I stay in this house and I wait for you to return. Weeks. Months.

CASPAR

This house is a better one than you came from, let's be honest. You're best rid of your father, you said that yourself.

KRISTINE

But when we married, we talked about our own place, just you and me, with room enough for a child. It's a vision I embraced and loved as much as you.

CASPAR

First off--

KRISTINE

I miss you so much when you're away. I just sit here, waiting.

CASPAR

First off: it's foolish to spend money on separate lodgings when I'm away so much.

KRISTINE

Then don't go away. Stay here.

CASPAR

My sailing keeps us well off, you know that. Just look around our room for proof, all those gifts of bright linens and dresses and jewelry I bring to you.

KRISTINE

I don't want them, Caspar, they just remind me of what's missing!

CASPAR

They're the best I can find, beautiful things, full of color.

KRISTINE

I stay here and wait for you, it's like I'm sewn into that sack, listening to other people moving. Difference is, you've tossed in enough trinkets that you think I'll be occupied.

CASPAR

Now stop this. I'm providing for you, for mum, for this family. You best not complain; just ask your sister's who provides for her.

KRISTINE

Caspar, please stop sailing. Stay with me.

CASPAR

You're fine here. Your new family's right here.

KRISTINE

You're all I've got, and you've gone far away.

CASPAR

Then you best enjoy me while I'm here.

KRISTINE

All right, then be here with me. Fully here. Like our courting days. Let's go back to our room. Push aside the trinkets and keep each other occupied.

CASPAR

What, now? Kristine, we're about to eat.

KRISTINE

Let me push your appetite elsewhere.

CASPAR

No, stop it. Mother's around.

KRISTINE

She's always around. But it can be just us, in our own space.

CASPAR

(Irritated)

Kristine, would you leave it?

KRISTINE

Then later, Caspar. Promise me.

CASPAR

We'll see.

Nils enters.

KRISTINE

Caspar.

NILS

Ah good, Caspar, I've a favor to ask.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Is that Nils?

NILS

(Calling)

I'm here, Mother.

KRISTINE

Caspar, please. Make time for me.

CASPAR

Everyone wants a favor.

NILS

This could benefit us all. Caspar, when do you sail next?

CASPAR

Two days time, to Denmark.

KRISTINE

(To herself)

Denmark. Gone for eight months.

NILS

Excellent. From now on, I want you to return with notes about the flower prices and varieties offered at the ports. I'll show you what to look for. Then bring that information back to me.

CASPAR

It will help with your business then?

NILS

Absolutely. Paying attention to demands is crucial.

KRISTINE

Caspar...

CASPAR

More money to be made, more security all around. You can count on me, Nils.

Kristine starts to exit.

CASPAR

Kristine, where're you off to?

KRISTINE

I don't know. I don't want to be here.

CASPAR

We're about to eat. Come have some wine.

KRISTINE

No. Goodbye.

Kristine exits. Caspar stands, planning to follow her.

Pieter quietly returns, takes his seat at the bar again.

CASPAR

Kristine!

NILS

Let her go. You can make amends after.

Sophie brings out a tray of roast mutton, sets it on the table.



SOPHIE  
Here we are!

CASPAR  
Oh mum!

NILS  
Mother, that looks fantastic!

SOPHIE  
We should eat now. Where's that Kristine?

CASPAR  
She left.

SOPHIE  
Oh. We won't need this plate then.

Sophie collects a table setting and carries it off to the kitchen. Nils and Caspar start putting food on their plates. Sophie returns and sits between the two men, content.

SOPHIE  
Pass the bread, Nils. Here we are. A nice family meal at last.

PIETER  
Affection is a dangerous thing. As it pulls together one set, it just as cleanly casts off another. More beer, Kees. If you're paying my account tonight, I best take advantage of the arrangement. Cheers.

After dinner, Nils helps Sophie clear the table. Caspar is gone.

SOPHIE  
Your father'd help me clean up after a meal. That was before we had the lot of you. He soon stopped that custom.

Sophie pulls a covered stein from a lower shelf.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)  
Here, why's this so heavy?

NILS  
(Noticing)  
No, mother, stop! It's mine.

Sophie looks into the stein. Beat.

SOPHIE

Nils. What's this?

NILS

You've taught me well, mother. I've watched you squirrel away the rent money in this wedding cup of yours.

Nils takes Sophie's bank cup from the shelf. Sophie takes it away from him.

SOPHIE

Here! That's an heirloom!

NILS

Every time I sell some of my stocks, I take ten percent of each transaction and add it to my own savings. I've been doing that for a year now. And from this I pay the rent, and I pay Caspar who pays Kristine...

SOPHIE

How much is in here?

NILS

Right around 200 guilder.

SOPHIE

200! That's more than I've known in my life.

NILS

I told you all along, I have plans. The market won't last forever, but this provides our future no matter what turn it takes. I'm the one making steps to hold this family together. I wanted this to be a surprise.

SOPHIE

200 guilder is a welcome surprise no matter when it's sprung.

NILS

Yes, it's money, but with it I'm going to buy you this house. Mr. Scheels will sell it to me for 500 guilder in coin.

SOPHIE

You'd buy this house? We've always rented. To think there were times we couldn't even pay that.

NILS

I'm not Pieter and I'm not Caspar. I'm here and I'm looking out for you.

SOPHIE

I know, Nils. Our own house. No more worries about rent for the rest of my life. Just be quick with the purchase so I know how much you love me.

PIETER

(To audience/bartender)

And the weeks go by and Caspar comes and goes and Nils buys and sells and the old woman pushes and waits.

Kristine enters the bar, stands on the opposite side.

PIETER (CONT'D)

Meanwhile I'm making myself useful, collecting debts and overseeing some business. And human weakness being what it is, I manage to keep busy. Then one day, without warning, she shows up.

Kristine crosses to the bar, sits.

KRISTINE

(To bartender)

A beer.

She takes a beer. Silence.

KRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hello Pieter.

PIETER

Kristine.

KRISTINE

How are you holding up?

PIETER

With the generous help of this bar rail, thanks for asking. Is Caspar sailing the high seas?

KRISTINE

Yes.

PIETER

When's he due back?

KRISTINE

Next month sometime.

PIETER

Oh? What date?

KRISTINE

I don't know.

PIETER

That's negligent. Thought you'd want to keep track, mark the days till your husband's return.

KRISTINE

There was a time I counted the days. Now I know I need to keep busier than that.

PIETER

Can't rely on others. Best to go it alone.

KRISTINE

And how about you? I hear you're working for Jordan Cormer.

PIETER

There's truth to that.

KRISTINE

And that he runs the card games out back and the women upstairs, among other things.

PIETER

Now that's pure speculation.

KRISTINE

And because those businesses are doing well, you're doing well.

PIETER

I can't complain. So why isn't Caspar attending to you?

KRISTINE

I was talking about your business.

PIETER

Right now I'm asking about yours. Why are you at the bar, unaccompanied?

KRISTINE

Because I expected you to be here.

PIETER

So what do you want?

KRISTINE

To change my outlook, see beyond the walls of my brightly colored sack.

PIETER

And where do I enter into this?

KRISTINE

I want to talk. Can I not talk? I've no one else to go to.

PIETER

Please yourself. But you didn't seek me out to talk. Caspar's the talker.

KRISTINE

Caspar's far away.

PIETER

That's right. So you've got another reason for seeking me out.

KRISTINE

You know so much about people and their motives, go ahead. Tell me why I'm here.

PIETER

You're lonely, understandably so. And you're mad at Caspar. And your husband's away, but his estranged brother's in town...

KRISTINE

(Amused)

Go ahead, keep flattering yourself.

PIETER

Tell me if I'm off the mark.

KRISTINE

You're off the mark. But not by as much as you think.

PIETER

I think I'm spot-on. I think you're looking to get with me.

KRISTINE

And you're looking to get with me?

PIETER

Stands to reason. We're all base creatures.

KRISTINE

Good. Then you'll see the logic of my request.

PIETER

And what's that?

KRISTINE

I want a room upstairs.

PIETER

For us?

KRISTINE

For me. Only. With an arrangement no better or worse than the other women have.

PIETER

You want to set yourself up here? You're daft.

KRISTINE

I'm not. I've done a lot of sober thinking tonight.

PIETER

To arrive here? You don't know what you want. Isn't Caspar bringing back enough to satisfy you?

KRISTINE

He thinks he is, but he's not.

PIETER

Just how much coin--?

KRISTINE

No. This isn't about that.

PIETER

Isn't it? That's why this trade exists, steady transactions for all.

KRISTINE

Then why stop me? You stand to benefit; you do so from the others upstairs.

PIETER

Not you. Not this way.

KRISTINE

I want a room. And I'm confirming your outlook, that life is best lived solitary. Whoring, you can't get more solitary than that, in a way.

PIETER

You're unfit. You're soft, delicate.

KRISTINE

You don't believe that.

PIETER

You're not cut out for the trade.

KRISTINE

I may be better suited for the trade than for marriage.

PIETER

Go back home, Kristine.

KRISTINE

Whose home? Where do I fit in? If you don't help me, I'll go to my sister's house, where the women make do with bruises and bed fleas. But I come to you because I know you'll look out for me. And you'll let me make my own way.

PIETER

I can't do anything.

KRISTINE

An hour ago I was standing at the trading dock, staring into the black water, hearing more than seeing. Caspar always talked about needing to see new vistas. I found myself wondering what we saw when we were offered no vista at all.

PIETER

You're self-pitying, and it's unattractive.

KRISTINE

I could take another course tonight and look a damn sight worse.

PIETER

I won't do it. You're with Caspar.

KRISTINE

You bought your independence from all of them, your brother included, and now I want to do the same. A moment ago you were gauging your chances with me, so you best not stand on your morals. They're a slippery lot.

PIETER

It's a mistake! Leave, Goddammit.

KRISTINE

I'm either forging my own way in life starting now or I'm giving it up. I'm asking for your help. What's your offer?

A pause. Kristine waits him out.

PIETER

Go up the stairs, knock, talk to Sondra. Give her my name.

Kristine finishes her beer, rises. Pieter gets a coin from his pocket, but Kristine takes another from her purse and slaps it on the bar.

KRISTINE

No. From here out I pay my own way.

Kristine moves to the stairs, ascends them, goes through the door. Pieter stays at the bar, thinking.

Jonge takes a seat beside Pieter at the bar, organizes his papers.

PIETER

(to audience)

Demand keeps the prices on the rise, and more and more flower sellers descend on the Doublet, like an infestation of aphids.

Pieter downs his drink and exits as Jonge enters. Through this, Jonge faces out, addressing an imagined Nils.

Sophie goes to the kitchen, opens the cupboard. She takes down her cup, looks in. Shock.

SOPHIE

Nils!

Nils enters, moves to Sophie.

JONGE

I don't know where you heard such a rumor.

SOPHIE

Nils!!

NILS

Mother, listen.

JONGE

But the rumor is nevertheless correct.

SOPHIE

Empty! How--?

NILS

I want to explain.

JONGE

It happens I do have a Viceroy. A recent acquisition.

SOPHIE

All our money, gone.

NILS

No, not gone. Invested.

JONGE

A beautiful specimen. The King of the Violetten.

SOPHIE

Where is it then?

NILS

I met Jonge the florist, and it was business as usual. Until:



Nils shows Sophie a color drawing of a purple and white tulip.

JONGE

Superbly fine, 920 azen, quite capable of providing an offset.

SOPHIE

Oh Nils, no!

NILS

You don't understand. You don't see it.

JONGE

The patron provided an illustration from his tulip book.

NILS

Mother, this is our house. A beautiful Viceroy.

JONGE

The King of the Violetten.

NILS

And with this king I knew I could get our castle. Because what this seller doesn't know that I know is that a banker from Rotterdam has just arrived in town specifically looking for Viceroy bulbs, and his fever is so strong he's willing to pay far above market value for his quarry.

JONGE

It's priced well above your means.

SOPHIE

No Nils. It's such a risk!

NILS

Yes, it's a risk, but a calculated one. I won't have this chance again, mother.

JONGE

You're not able to afford it.

NILS

He told me I couldn't have it, and that angered me even more. I knew my worth, not him. Not anyone. So I proved him wrong.

SOPHIE

All our money, Nils?

JONGE

Congratulations, sir. That's 250 guilder owed me today...

NILS

As an investment.

JONGE

With the remaining amount due at harvest.

NILS

One that will pay double in three days' time.

JONGE

Remember: 1,415 guilder comes due in September. A pleasure doing business.

Jonge exits.

SOPHIE

That was for the rent! Now we have nothing!

NILS

No. I've already made an appointment with the banker to start the sale. At least 500 guilder collected by Friday.

SOPHIE

Do it quick, Nils. You're stoppin' my heart.

NILS

(Holding up tulip picture)

I promise you: in three days time, we will own this house.

SOPHIE

Until then, keep that paper out of my sight.

Sophie exits to the back of the house.

Nils picks up his bidding slate and clips the Viceroy picture to its back.

PIETER

(To audience)

And then one day too soon, life decides to right itself again.

Nils takes his slate and chalk and crosses DSL, opposite the bar side, where he sits and faces out. He barter with an imagined rival. Clipped to the back of his slate is the Viceroy picture, which is visible each time he turns the slate over to write again.

Through Pieter's narration, Nils writes a series of figures, always descending, starting at 6420 g. And, at next flip, 6395, then 6300, 6100, 6020, 5500, 4000, 2600, et cetera, jumping rapidly down to 100, then 32, then 15.

Nils' writing gets more urgent and is nearly illegible at the end.

PIETER

(To audience)

Enough of those pushing paper started to realize that others might not pay the crazy amounts that they just paid for the promise of bulbs in someone else's ground. A few investors got skittish, then a few more, then a lot more. And that's also human nature: in the end, coin in hand beats a promise on paper every time.

Nils is dazed at what just happened. The clipped picture of the Viceroy comes loose and flutters to the ground. He does not notice. Nils exits.

PIETER

(To audience)

Of course, there's some good news to be had. The trading stopped, so the drinking houses gave way once more to those of us truly in need of 'em. But even here--especially here--certain trades were as steady as ever.

Kristine enters the bar, proceeds to the stairs. She wears a simple dress and overcoat and no sign of jewelry or clothing from Caspar. Before she ascends:

PIETER

(To Kristine)

Everything all right? The arrangements up there.

KRISTINE

I'm not wanting.

PIETER

Were you out? Bakery?

KRISTINE

Coat's on, carrying some fresh bread, stands to reason.

(Pause)

Do you think--would there be room for my sister here?

PIETER

For Hannah? I'd have to see her, I don't know what shape she's in. No promises.

KRISTINE

I've got my room done up in nothing but whites. The rug, the bedding, tapestry. Sondra says it's impractical, but I don't mind being responsible for the upkeep.

And I like choosing when I'm alone and when I'm in company. I think I like the time alone best of all.

PIETER

I can understand that.

KRISTINE

I appreciate someone caring.

PIETER

Not me.

KRISTINE

All right, Pieter.

A pause, then:

PIETER

Bring Hannah. I'll see what I can do.

Kristine nods and climbs the stairs. Jonge enters the bar and also moves to the stairs behind Pieter. Pieter holds an arm out and stops him.

PIETER

Hold it, florist.

Kristine notices on the landing and calls down.

KRISTINE

He's okay. Send him up in a minute.

Pieter nods, parks Jonge beside him. Kristine exits into her upstairs room.

PIETER

Give the lady a chance to prepare.

(Pause)

I know you. You're one of those florists.

JONGE

You offer it like an epithet.

PIETER

Don't care much for flowers.

JONGE

And I know you. Bill collector for Jordan Corner.

PIETER

Among other talents.

JONGE

I could use your services.

PIETER

Is that so? I've heard florists don't have much income to offer, given what happened today.

JONGE

It depends on the florist's portfolio, namely whether he is in debt to another. I'm in the happy position that others are indebted to me. I spent the day reviewing my stock, and this is the list of people who owe me money.

PIETER

(To bartender/audience)

Considering the quick production of this list, I say he not only knew my reputation as a collector but also as a DeGroot. But if he wanted me to make a show, I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

(To Jonge)

People owe you. Congratulations.

JONGE

I'd like you to consider collecting these debts for me as they come due. I offer ten percent of the amount retrieved. Good money for easy work. These people aren't the trash you normally have to persuade. They're good class, decent types. Like me. I'd think a man like you, steeped in the rough life, would find this job a welcome change.

Jonge moves past Pieter and climbs the stairs. Pieter looks at the list. Jonge knocks, and a moment later Kristine opens the door. He exits inside, and Kristine closes the door.

Pieter puts on a coat, crosses around and enters through the house door. Sophie is in an excited state near the kitchen, calling back.

SOPHIE

I want nothing left in that room, Nils! Nothing!

(To Pieter)

You! Why are you here?

PIETER

Where's Nils?

SOPHIE

What d'you want with him?

PIETER

What happened?

SOPHIE

Ask him! He's the one who did it.

PIETER

I want to talk to Nils.

Nils enters, stares at Pieter.

NILS

Get out.

PIETER

I'm here on business.

NILS

Business. You've come to gloat.

PIETER

Nay. I'm too tired for that.

NILS

Then go and get some sleep. I don't need your charity.

PIETER

Did you hear me offering it?!

NILS

Just leave, dammit, would you?

SOPHIE

Now Nils, let's hear your brother out. Perhaps he can help you in some way.

PIETER

I won't speak in front of you, woman. We're through. You're not sniffing about me for silver.

SOPHIE

Don't use that tone! This is my house.

PIETER

I'm dead serious. If you stay around, then I'm out that door. Who leaves, you or me?

SOPHIE

Nils!

PIETER

You or me?! Go on, what's it worth to you?

Pieter holds the door open. Furious, Sophie grabs her wrap, stomps out grumbling.

SOPHIE

Thrown out of my own house, paid for with my own money...

Sophie exits. Pieter slams the door  
after her.

NILS

You've no right (to do that).

PIETER

(Overlapping)

Rights, rights, rights. Who has the right, Nils? He with the  
family or he with the coin?

NILS

You're nothing but bluster, come here to preach.

PIETER

I come here on business. I've a list. Your name is on that  
paper. Says you owe that florist Jonge fourteen hundred  
guilder.

NILS

And you're here to collect.

PIETER

If it's not me facing you, it'll be someone else.

NILS

Your job finally matches your outlook. In life and career,  
you don't have to feel, you don't have to care.

PIETER

That's right.

NILS

Just wait till the game is played, then get hired by the  
winners to collect from the losers.

PIETER

It's steady work.

NILS

And if I don't have the money, then what? You'll threaten and  
beat me? You'll beat Mother and Caspar as well? I threw their  
money into the gamble. I ruined them as surely as myself.

PIETER

That's not my concern.

NILS

No. That's right. You bought out of this family two years  
ago.

PIETER  
An investment.

NILS  
A withdrawal.

PIETER  
And you accepted my terms.

NILS  
I'd do it again in an instant.

PIETER  
So tell me what happened.

NILS  
Go to hell.

PIETER  
Explain it to me. You're the smart one here, I'm just the wretch who makes his fortune off the unfortunate, but you--

NILS  
You mock me.

PIETER  
No. But you, Nils, you study and you learn and you always keep your wits about you. I know that.

NILS  
This time was different.

PIETER  
You wouldn't have gambled so much without good reason.

NILS  
Good reason? I had the best reason: I was doing it for her. One authenticated Viceroy sold to the right person and I'd have enough in hand to buy this house. Father couldn't do that. Caspar couldn't!

PIETER  
Turns out, nor could you.

NILS  
You don't know, you haven't been around. These last months, my income alone paid the rent time and again, and she loved me.

PIETER  
Nils...



NILS

She loved me. And you and Caspar were gone, but we didn't need you there. She and I, we were a family. But not any more. She's right to do what she did. I ruined everything.

PIETER

What are you saying? What did she do?

NILS

Oh God. I ruined this family, as sure as buying my way out. It's my fault, and I need to atone.

PIETER

What did she do?!

NILS

She's kicked me out. Sending me away. Tomorrow morning I have to leave. And I'm not to come back.

(in anguish)

And I'm the only one who loves her....

PIETER

Goddamn her!

NILS

I don't know if I can go. I'd rather die.

PIETER

No. Listen to me. She kicked you out, then go. Be rid of her. It's your chance to be free.

NILS

You don't understand. You don't feel.

PIETER

I never needed her love, Nils. Nor do you. Come with me. Please.

NILS

Where to, your bar? That's who you've become, not me.

PIETER

I won't leave you here like this.

NILS

No. Not without your payment.

PIETER

Enough of that. You have some weeks before the debt is due.

NILS

The damage is done. He'll push for every stuiver, you know. He hates me.

PIETER

Maybe I can help.

NILS

Why would you help? You've spent your life pulling away from everyone, most of all me.

PIETER

Not most of all, Nils. Let me help you, dammit.

NILS

You're nowt to me but a bill collector.

PIETER

Stop it. Look. I have some money saved up...

NILS

This is my house, not yours.

PIETER

Not nearly the sum, but it's a start.

NILS

Was my house.

PIETER

And I can talk to Jonge about the rest, make arrangements...

NILS

You're just jealous of what I had. With her.

PIETER

I can help you. But you need to let me.

NILS

I won't take your money. I know what I need to do.

PIETER

(Taking out coins)

Look. I've some coin in my pocket. No more than a few guilder, but it's the gesture. Take this coin and I promise you, Nils. I promise I'll see you through this.

NILS

With your blood money and bar wages. Why? What's in it for you, then?

PIETER

Don't ask me that.

NILS

So for the rest of your life you can feel superior to me?

PIETER

(Angry)

Take it! I want to buy my way back in. But just you and me, brother. Just us.

NILS

No.

PIETER

I can help you.

NILS

And I'm not about to help you. I take that and you have proof-

PIETER

Christ, Nils, you stumbled. So have we all.

NILS

Proof that I'm just like you, no better. That I am you. That I've finally hit bottom, that I've run out of love. That I belong to no one.

PIETER

Is that what you think of me?

NILS

Maybe I've stumbled, but I'm not you. Anyone who shows you love and concern you pay back with damage beyond repair. Father gave you his quarry job, I tried to help you time and again, and out of spite you smash back at us with as much force as you can find.

PIETER

That's not who I am.

NILS

It is; I know. And there is no more love in you. I've grown to hate you, Pieter.

PIETER

(Truly feeling)

I don't hate you, Nils.

NILS

You'll never change who you are. So keep your money. I am not you. I think nothing of you.

PIETER

I'm good...

NILS

You're not. You're worthless.

No. PIETER

Just go. NILS  
(Pieter is stunned)  
Get out! Go!

Pieter, shaken, exits through the door and moves down to the bar. Lights fade on Nils and the house.

Pieter sits at the bar, takes a long drink of beer. When he's finished, he is his resolute, drunken self.

PIETER  
You draw a good beer, Kees. I'll pass the word to Jordan Corner, let him know you're a welcome addition. Where was I? I left Nils in his misguided state near midnight, and our Caspar seeks me out here this morning, rouses me out of slumber to give me the latest. And here, my friend, is where I win my bet if I haven't already done so.

Caspar enters the bar, moves to Pieter.

PIETER  
(On seeing Caspar)  
Well, Kees, look at that! Yet another visit from the wanderer. Hello, Caspar, come to deliver more news from the house?

CASPAR  
Pieter, why are you still here?

PIETER  
Sit down. Is the party at the old woman's place still going strong?

CASPAR  
Please come back home. It's not right, you being in the bar.

PIETER  
Of course it's right. This is my home, Casp. I've no reason to go anywhere else.

CASPAR  
Come back with me.

PIETER  
To the party? The party no one wants me attending?

CASPAR  
Stop calling it such. Have some respect.

PIETER

Here, tell Kees what you told me when you came storming in to my basement room this morning. Try for the exact words.

CASPAR

Pieter, stop it.

PIETER

(To Kees)

He comes barging in, says "Pieter, it's your brother Nils! He's hanged himself in the night, right above the kitchen table off of one of the rafters. Oh Pieter, how horrible!"

Caspar, angry, shoves Pieter off his bar stool. Pieter's reflexes bring him immediately to a fighting stance. He surveys Caspar, then relaxes.

PIETER (CONT'D)

You're not a fighter, Casp.

CASPAR

Why don't you feel for anyone?

PIETER

It's easier that way.

CASPAR

I always thought we got along, you and I. What've you got against me then?

PIETER

Nothing. But I've still smashed your life up, same as all the others.

CASPAR

Come pay your respects then. For me. See Nils before he's put in the ground.

PIETER

No chance. I'd just open more wounds. It's my nature. Leave me, Casp.

CASPAR

You're a good person deep down, Pieter.

PIETER

Just go, would you?

CASPAR

Mum was asking for you.

PIETER

Cursing me, you mean.

CASPAR  
No. She's hurting from the loss.

PIETER  
Nils.

CASPAR  
No. You. You were always her favorite, you know that, don't you?

PIETER  
You're daft.

CASPAR  
No. It's plain to see. That's why she fights you so. She loves you the most.

PIETER  
(Resolute)  
Get out of here, Caspar.

KRISTINE  
Caspar?

Kristine appears on the landing outside her room. Caspar looks up. Then he moves around Pieter towards the stairs. Pieter stops him with an arm.

KRISTINE (CONT'D)  
It's all right. I want him to come up.

Pieter lowers his arm, Caspar moves to the stairs. As he reaches the base:

PIETER  
Caspar.

Caspar stops. Pieter speaks facing forward, not looking at Caspar.

PIETER (CONT'D)  
Tomorrow, at the grave, I won't be attending. But I want you to know, in case anyone queries: Nils has a stone waiting for him. Simple granite, I did the lettering. Because I did not want those fat Donnelins to get their hands on it, botching the job. I hate those bastards. For that reason I did it myself. Is that understood?

CASPAR  
Yes.

PIETER  
That's all I'll say about it.

CASPAR  
Okay.

PIETER  
Go on, then.

Caspar climbs the stairs, slowly,  
unsure of his reception.

KRISTINE  
Did you know I was here.

CASPAR  
I heard from-- Yes.

KRISTINE  
And are you ready to talk.

CASPAR  
Yes. No. That is, if you want to talk to me.

KRISTINE  
Come on, Caspar.

At the door, Caspar breaks and buries  
his head against Kristine's shoulder.  
Kristine waits, then guides him into  
the room. The door closes.

PIETER  
You see, Kees? You're always better served when you're not  
weakened by affection. Don't feel, my friend, just build up  
your armor and survive. Look what it's done for me, won me  
coins and bought me drinks, and for that I'm much obliged.

Pieter takes his coins from the bar,  
pockets them, finishes his beer.

PIETER (CONT'D)  
So maybe it's me. I've always been broken. I don't feel. I  
can't feel. But it's served me well, hasn't it? Don't need  
anyone else, not really. I'm glad it's just me, standing  
strong on my own.

Lights fade on Pieter, alone at the  
bar, trying his best to look  
invulnerable.

**END OF PLAY**