

The Fourth Man (18)
A Story from the Time of the Afscheiding
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Chapter 18
Dark Clouds

Rev. Buddingh had come to Hilversum to preach for the Secessionist congregation there. He was taken to the town in the night because the Secessionists knew that his presence, if known, would bring upon them the wrath of the municipal authorities. Manus Rebel, an old, cynical retired soldier, had helped them get into the village. Although they had met some unexpected obstacles, they had succeeded in bringing Rev. Buddingh to his destination, the home of Gijsbert Haan, where he would stay for the weekend. They thought they had succeeded in keeping his coming a secret, but they were mistaken.

Constable Van Huizen had promised himself a quiet night on duty. A few hours earlier he and his colleague, De Nooij, had emptied up the taverns with the usual hubbub. Yes, they had done this together..., but De Nooij had done the lion's share of the work and he had held back.

After completing this chore, Van Huizen had sauntered through the back alleys and lanes, here and there checking a door or with some idle chatter lifting a drunk to his feet—the usual work on Saturday night and early Sunday morning. But now he stood pondering the unusual event that he had just witnessed: a number of men, who obviously did not want to be seen, had entered the farmhouse of Gijsbert Haan in the hollow of the night. Haan was seemingly an honest citizen, but nevertheless he belonged to “the Cocksian brood,”¹ as De Nooij called it.

Van Huizen's curiosity won out over his hesitancy. After all he was justified in going to investigate.

The constable crossed the Groest and remained standing for a while at the gate of the farm. Then he carefully stepped over the small area where clothes were bleached to the closed shutters. He drew one slowly and carefully open and stared inside. He witnessed the hearty reception that Reverend Buddingh received. Astonished, he wanted to open the shutter a bit more, but then somewhere a dog began to growl. The next moment Van Huizen was outside the gate. Still a bit uneasy he walked from there over to the Groest, while his brain slowly worked. What a strange man had stood there, with short trousers and a three-cornered hat on his head!

Suddenly he stood still and tore his cap from his head greatly agitated. Obviously, that was one of those Secession ministers, who secretly wanted to preach here tomorrow! But, Van Huizen thought, that fellow will be bitterly disappointed.

Van Huizen did not have any particular grudge against the Secessionists. As a Roman Catholic he felt very little involvement in their affairs. But he had discovered something special...

When he reached the Kerkstraat his mind was made up. He would immediately report his discovery to the mayor.

For a moment he considered walking to his home in the Doelen to get his tall dress hat, but he thought better of it. His wife Johanna would probably scare awake, and moreover he would make much more of an impression if he had come directly from the field of battle.

Swiftly he ran down the Kerkstraat. At the Zeedijk² a drunk lay on the road, but the constable gave it no thought.³ He simply stepped over him. He was hunting nobler game.

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At the corner of the Schoutenstraat stood the peaceful and important home of Mayor Barend Andriesen. For twenty years he had filled this office, initially as a sheriff and after 1825, as mayor. He was Van Huizen's immediate superior and the constable did feel his courage fail a bit when he stood in front of the closed gate.

But finally he carried on and made the heavy knocker boom on the thick front door. With a hollow echo the sound carried through the nightly silence of the house. Soon an upper window grated open and the head of the mayor himself, adorned with a fancy nightcap, appeared in the window. "Who is there?" he scolded, not entirely awakened.

The sergeant immediately sprang to attention. "Constable Van Huizen reports, your honor! I have a discovery to report which is of greatest importance!"

"Really?" the mayor responded without enthusiasm. "Well, then, wait a moment." The window closed with a slight sigh.

After a "moment" of ten minutes he opened the door, fully dressed, and let his subordinate into a side room. Perfectly at ease he began to stuff his long pipe, while Van Huizen nervously twisted his cap. A large crucifix that hung above the chimney reminded him that the mayor was of the same faith as his.

"Well now, Van Huizen," he finally began, puffing out a cloud of smoke, "tell me your tale."

The sergeant gave a broad account of his discovery. The mayor listened to him in silence and after hearing the story, sat painfully still for a few minutes.

Finally the mayor cleared his throat. "Why do you come to tell me this in the darkest part of the night?"

"We can take that fellow while he is in his bed, your honor!"

"The two of us?" responded the mayor with slight mockery. "And on the basis of what? Because he lodges there? Use your head, Van Huizen. Tomorrow I will give De Nooij orders to keep an eye on that house."

But Van Huizen would not be sent on his way so easily. "But, your honor, that type of person stirs up unrest and riot."

"Therefore we must awaken no sleeping dogs. Let those Protestants settle that matter among themselves." The mayor stood up and carefully tapped his pipe empty in an ashtray.

Now Van Huizen made his final effort, a vicious one. "It is my modest determination, your honor, also to inform Mr. Perk about this."

The mayor felt rising in him the inclination to throw the ashtray at Van Huizen's head. "Mr. Perk" was the fiery town clerk; one that hated all that belonged to the Secession. According to some he was the actual head of the municipality.

"Fine," the mayor spoke sharply after a few moments, "If you are determined to carry the matter to an extreme, let us go together to Mr. Perk." He hung his pipe on the rack and put on his hat.

"You mean right now?" asked Van Huizen, quite upset.

“Yes, that is what I mean,” stated the mayor, not without satisfaction. “Didn’t you want to haul someone out of bed?”

Soon both men were walking down the Kerkstraat. From the direction of the courthouse on the Kerkbrink rang a suspiciously happy song. It was the members of the civic guard, for whom it was quitting time. They were appointed to assist the policemen in their night duty. That “assistance” usually consisted of spending their hours drinking and playing cards in the guard room.

“Good peace keepers,” joked Van Huizen, “You can hear them coming a long way off. If we constables did not use our eyes and ears so well...”

“Yes, we get a lot of pleasure from your alertness,” answered the boss sarcastically.

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Albertus Perk, the town clerk, was not a little disturbed when he was called out of bed. But his mood changed like a leaf on a tree when Van Huizen had finished his tale.

“My compliment on your attentiveness, Van Huizen,” he said to the beaming constable. Then he turned with a determined movement to the mayor.

“Your honor, I have advised you so often to deal with that rabble with a strong hand. Now you see what is happening. If tomorrow we do not take strong action our noble town will soon become the breeding nest for all sorts of fanaticism and dispute. What would the governor of the king think of that?”

Mayor Andriesen decided to resign himself to the inevitable. He pushed his hat back a bit and cleared his throat.

“Well then, I summon you both to the court tomorrow morning at nine o’clock. I expect constable De Nooij at the same time. Maybe our friend Van Huizen will transfer the order to him.”

“Our friend” stood at attention and saluted. “At your service, your honor.”

Shortly after, the mayor and the constable each went their way, the first nervous, the second tense.

It was June 12, 1836. The golden glow of the rising sun announced a glorious Sunday morning. But above the small Secession congregation dark clouds gathered threateningly.

Endnotes

¹ This was a nickname for the Secessionists. It comes from the name of their leader, Hendrick De Cock, who had begun the Secession in his church in Ulrum in the northern part of the Netherlands.

² Literally “the sea dike,” apparently a reference to the dike which directly held back the North Sea.

³ This chapter’s description of drinking in Dutch villages is no exaggeration. Such frequenting of taverns and open drunkenness were usual.

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