

The Tulip Killer

---Devankur Kashyap

Imagine the world's most beautiful garden--- it will have all sorts of flowers, right? Rose, Jasmine, Hibiscus, and what not! Otherwise, how will the colours of the rainbow be represented? Well, that's not what Dr. Darpan believed. Why collect different species, when you can have the same type of flower showing all the colours? Easier to maintain, easier to study, and most importantly, easier to care for and flourish.

So what was this versatile organ of flourishing? His answer--- Tulips.

Yes, tulips of every shade that the scientist had created himself. Doing his PhD on tulips itself, he had made it his life's dream to learn everything about these marvels of nature. All this was evident from the number of Tulips he possessed in, as he humbly called it, his "garden". Don't think he was limited to these plants though, he had earned the respect of scientists across the globe for the recent creation of his eco-friendly communication device--- a transmitter in a special radioactive frequency, that did not match the usual phones' and thus, could work at unbelievable speeds.

It was during one of the fun days that he decided to go out for an evening walk in his garden. Sitting for hours on his study table, and just looking out the window was not doing him any good.

Rows and rows of tulips---every shade, you name it. Dr. Darpan had "programmed" them so that they developed an additional system that allowed him to set the colour of the flower as accurately as possible.

That was when he noticed some of his tulips withering, earlier than expected.

"Strange", he thought. But ignored the concern considering it to be some random event.

But over the next few weeks, this withering began to increase. You could soon see blotches of brown in the middle of the spectrum even from the study table itself. And the doctor was unable to find any animal responsible--Eating had clearly different signs than withering. You would need something poisonous to do that.

Wait, poisonous? Poison? Venom?

"Of course", Darpan realized with shock, "It must be those slithering beasts roaming in my garden." With its scaly body, it angered him even thinking about how the snakes might have polluted his paradise using each fang to inject poison into the lives of the flowers! There was one little mystery left unsolved though—their objective. "It doesn't matter", he countered, "those beasts are not 'human'! They wouldn't appreciate art! They just choose to destroy without any reason."

What happened next? Well, take a guess.

As careful and kind he was towards those tulips; it was the complete opposite towards the snakes. As he listened to peaceful music (as he regularly did in his special phone), the guys he hired did not show any mercy towards the snakes in the field. Most of the reptiles were killed. Some were taken away "for

preservation" as they seemed rare specimens. Darpan knew the workers were talking about the snakeskin, not the life of the animal, but he did not care--- the devils could die for torturing his hard toil.

During the next few days, he was worried a little about the fate of his garden—he even stopped listening to his daily music. To his utmost happiness, the brown blotches in his garden began to refill with new colours again. Music continued again. The problem was solved.

Or was it?

There began a sharper decline in his tulip population—this time not only withering but also with signs of being torn and eaten. But he had already solved the problem, hadn't he?

As he sat on his table looking at the garden with helplessness, there appeared a black rope out of the fields, settling near one of his plants. "This wretched beast has dared to live, and is again killing the tulips", thought Darpan and immediately carried a spade outside to finish the last one of the snakes off. Appearing carefully behind the snake, he was about to strike the fatal blow when he noticed what the "wretched beast" was doing--- it was eating a rat!

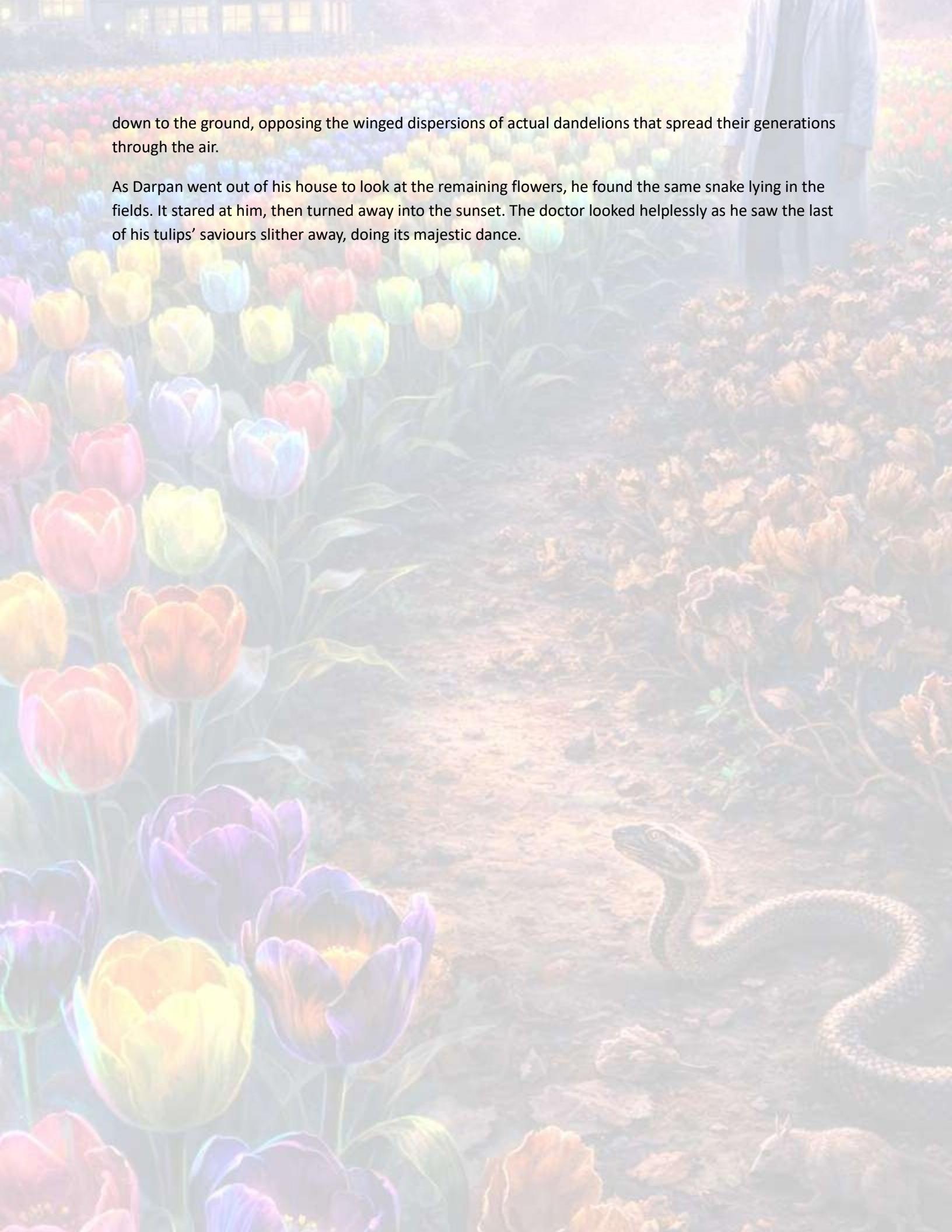
Rats and mouses, as his studies had already informed him, were one of the worst enemies of tulips. But he did not connect this problem to the tulips' declination as he never saw one in his house. As the snake gulped down the rat, Darpan actually started to see it as a saviour of his life's creations. The snake looked at the doctor holding the spade and then slithered away. Only then did he start to notice how graceful its movements were!

He realized he had killed down the only animal that was keeping the rats' population under control and hence, protect the tulips. Snakes were, after all, not "human", right? They would not attack at something that does not benefit them in any way.

But what about the first time? Darpan was pretty sure the snakes were protecting his garden then. Then why wither? What had happened during that time that had not happened during a healthy tulip population? After a long time, he could only narrow it down to the use of his special phone to browse through his song collections all the time. But that could not be the reason, he had himself proved that microwave frequency to be harmless to humans, and other scientists had proven it for other animals and plants too.

Wait, his plants were not normal plants! He remembered engineering the special system that could allow him to code the tulip colour according to his wish. He fumbled through numerous research papers, hoping to find one which could reassure him from the worst---he could not find a single one.

Finally, he knew he had no choice but to undertake the experiment himself. Collecting a few of the remaining healthy flowers from his garden, he started to subject it to average radiation of his phone, hoping against hope it would not cause any damage. But as the next day arrived, he could not recognize the freshly brought tulips in their charred form, as if each quantum of radiation had taken a bit of their souls slowly. 'Dandelion' playing in his phone seemed like the parting song as the last of the petals fell

A dense field of tulips in various colors like red, yellow, and purple. In the background, a large building is visible through a haze. A snake is slithering across the ground towards the right.

down to the ground, opposing the winged dispersions of actual dandelions that spread their generations through the air.

As Darpan went out of his house to look at the remaining flowers, he found the same snake lying in the fields. It stared at him, then turned away into the sunset. The doctor looked helplessly as he saw the last of his tulips' saviours slither away, doing its majestic dance.