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## A Craze in the Flower Market

It's the end of September, and I am excitedly looking through the tulip bulb display at the local garden center! I am envisioning my yard 6-7 months from now awash in lavish color.

We definitely need a bed of pink double tulips enmasse for dramatic impact, a grouping of Parrot tulips for the exotic look, and a mixture of early, mid, and late season tulip varieties in every color imaginable!

Whoa, there! I guess I'm getting a bit carried away, but I can't help myself! The beauty and splendor of these little gems has always fascinated me. How these ugly, paper-skinned bulbs turn into the breathtaking, colorful flowers they do is beyond my comprehension!

Did you know that way back in the seventeenth century, people in Holland felt even more strongly about tulips than I do?

The tulip bulb came to Europe in the 1500's from Asia Minor. It soon became a favorite flower in Holland. In fact, the Dutch became so enamored with it that growers hurriedly started multiplying and cross-breeding the flowers to get new colors and shapes. The most popular and most prized tulips were "broken" (striped and blotched due to a virus in the bulb) tulips. These mutants or "freaks" of variegated colors started a speculative frenzy known as Tulipomania. The more a flower was striped or blotched, the more attractive it became to everyone. Flower connoisseurs fought over the bulbs, offering higher and higher prices to become the exclusive owners of these unique varieties.

By 1634, tulips had become such a rage, that the Dutch people were neglecting their everyday affairs to gamble in a "tulip stock market" of sorts. Between 1634 and 1637, tulipomania was a full-blown craze, with many people of all classes investing their money and their livelihoods in tulips.

Broken bulbs brought fabulous prices. Inns became places where bulbs were bought and sold by people young and old, rich and poor. Bulbs often changed hands several times a day, not in actuality, but on paper. (Sounds like stocks and shares on the stock exchange today, doesn't it?)

Records tell us that a certain man without any readily available cash, purchased a single bulb by trading wheat, rye, 4 oxen, 3 pigs, 12 sheep, 2 "hogsheads" of wine, 4 tons of beer, 1,000 pounds of cheese, 2 tons of butter, a silver tankard worth about \$1,000, a bed, and articles of clothing!

It is also noted that some bulbs sold for thousands and thousands of dollars a piece!

Tulipomania caused many people to lose fortunes in the tulip market. With thousands of people ruined monetarily, the Dutch government finally was forced to step in and crack down on tulip speculating. It regulated the bulb trade, and the price of tulip bulbs fell drastically.

So check out the latest and most fashionable tulip bulbs at your neighborhood garden center this fall, and get ready to enjoy a bit of "tulip mania" in your yard next spring!