

The Last of Her Line

Diane Reeve

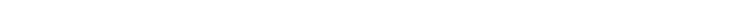
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Prologue

The curator adjusted the head torch then began warming the short, thin-bladed knife over the spirit burner which was placed diagonally across the table from her. Satisfied that the sliver of steel was warm enough to do its job yet not so hot as to cause melting, she carefully worked it between the embossed disk of dark red wax and the paper beneath it. The seal had also been applied on top of a silk cord from which it took some careful working of the blade to remove but finally it came away intact to be laid aside with a frisson of relief that no damage had been done during its removal. Her mission was to reveal the contents of the artifact with a view to re-assembling the parts into the exact form in which the whole had been created over a century earlier. This was no easy task since the packet, which was about the size of modern paperback, had been thoroughly secured so as to evidence even the slightest attempt at tampering.

A second seal was slowly and painstakingly removed, allowing the length of silk cord which had parcelled up the packet to be gently eased off. The cord, still dutifully trying to hold its shape, was placed to the left of the table. Soon all of the five seals that had been applied to the the enveloping sheet of paper were removed and set down beside the cord. The time had come to open the outer wrapper and take the first glimpse of what lay beneath.

The packet had spent the day in a sealed box with the vapours of a seven parts alcohol to one part water mixture. This should have worked on the white glue, which owed its adhesive properties to the protein colloid processed from the bones of animals and fish, degrading it so as to allow the top triangle of fine wove paper to be lifted easily. It was not to be, however, and the edges of the flap needed delicate dabbing with a small sponge held by tweezers and dampened with some of the alcohol and water mix that had been warmed a little. Perhaps

impatience got the better of the curator as she took up the slender knife once more for her first attempt at working the knife beneath the flap because the blade snagged, almost tearing the paper.

The select group of museum friends who had been invited to attend this special event and who had been unconsciously leaning ever further forward as the curator did her work now drew in their breath as one. Each now became suddenly self-conscious, their rapt attention broken, and they began exchanging meaningful looks. For all that they tried to keen aura of a discrete distance and a reverend hush, their presence had now intruded and broken the curator's concentration. She leaned back in her chair, removed the irksome head torch and massaged her forehead. Accustomed to the intense torchlight, the candlelit room now seemed dim. Perhaps this was just as well as it helped to maintain a professional distance from the audience.

The meticulous preparations for tonight's event had begun some hours earlier. A blanket was spread over the polished wood of the dinning room table then covered with a clean, white, cotton cloth. A single, leather-covered, straight-backed chair was placed behind the table with its back to the huge dining room window. Everything that could conceivably be needed was arranged on the cloth so as to all be within easy reach from the chair. Next, the ornate double doors into the grand salon were slid open so that the two dozen or so invited guests could be accommodated between the two rooms without having to crowd round the table.

It was now midsummer dark outside but inside a romantic tallow glow belied the long process of lighting all the candles of the many candelabra in the hall, reception room, grand salon and dining room. The heavy, blue velvet curtains at the windows facing onto the road which passes between the front of the house and the park beyond were drawn. The huge shutters at windows to the rear of the house were closed, excluding their view of the old, formal garden with its ancient copper beech and the waters of the Hollandse IJssel beyond. Finally, the curator had gone to the vapour box and carefully removed the treasured packet, borne it through the house and laid on the table with great reverence.

Late on the previous day a sober-suited lawyer had brought the packet from the safe at the museum's trustees premises in Rotterdam. The trustees had been most reluctant to agree to the packet's removal from their purview but the curator had stood her ground until they relented. The museum was the house where the artifact had been produced and was where it's contents should be revealed. It had come home, so to speak, to be properly cared for rather than pawed at by soulless money-men. The trustees had not capitulated totally, imposing the condition that their lawyer remain present throughout proceedings, even keeping an uninterrupted vigil beside the vapour box.

The curator gathered her wandering thoughts, replaced the head torch and returned her attention to the packet. The guests quietened down at the resumption of activity as at the package. This time the curator made greater allowance being for the liquid being applied to soak into the old-fashioned glue. Timing was of the essence as letting the fine wove paper become wet to the point of soggy would also court disaster. But, at last, the flap permitted itself to be prised open.

Now the moment had arrived for the packet to be opened and the cache of documents that it had concealed since 1922 released into the light. It would have brought a touch of magic to the proceedings had it been possible to withdraw the papers one by one with a flourish as a conjurer might pull playing cards from a top hat. However, the thoroughness of their author's preparation thwarted this performance with an encircling girdle of fine, pink, silk ribbon intended to maintain the neatness of her precious bundle. This occasioned a further delay as time was needed for the careful removal of the intact bundle from its outer clothing, followed by the teasing apart of another knot and the laying aside of paper and ribbon.

One hundred years of close confinement had trained the documents to stay in their allotted places despite the removal their restraints. The curator could not resist giving in to the impulse to theatricality as she made a play of clothing her hands in a pair of fine, white cotton gloves, slowly smoothing each finger into its sheath. Only when the protective gloves were situated to her complete satisfaction was the top paper separated from the rest of the pile in preparation for reading its con-

tents out to the assembled audience. She faltered now, being a child of the age of digital type the curator was unaccustomed to reading this sort of handwritten material. It added to the challenge that the text was in the shaky hand of an octogenarian given to idiosyncratic abbreviations and using an antiquated form of the Dutch language. So, it was a halting but contemporary rendition of the letter which was read out loud for the benefit of those present:

To the people of Haastrecht, My last will and testament, which was signed and witnessed this day, bequeaths my house and sufficient of my estates to support its upkeep in trust for you, the people of Haastrecht, on condition that nothing in the house is changed. When you read this letter then one hundred years will have passed since my death and the execution of my will must have secured the physical legacy of the Bisdome van Vliet family. So, I will now address another aspect of the Bisdome van Vliet legacy that I am anxious should be preserved.

It is said that a person is not truly lost to the living whilst they are still remembered and spoken of. I believe this to be true. Since I am the last Bisdome van Vliet it falls to me to pass on the human legacy of my family through means other than the blood line, by which I mean my biography as seen through the clear lens of time. The notes, letters and diary pages enclosed in this packet have been carefully selected by me in order to reveal something of the true characters and private lives of the individuals involved. By waiting for a century to pass I can be sure that none of those mentioned will neither feel any hurt nor be tempted to arrogance by what is contained herein. It is my wish that someone will take up their pen to reveal my story.

I have witnessed many changes during my long life and wish to acknowledge that, a century after my

passing, much will again be altered from the world I know. The last document in this packet is a codicil to my original will, which I am assured will be legally binding. In it I have made provision for a response to these changes.

—Weduwe Bisdorn van Vliet, 21e december 1922

Anxious to discover what was meant by this unexpected final word from the writer, the curator tried to separate the bottom paper from those above it but, frustratingly, it refused to budge. So, slowly and painstakingly, beginning at the top of the pile, the documents were separated one by one then laid out in strict order across the table so that the gathering might at least look upon them. The final two documents proved to be stuck together by the seal affixed to the bottom one. The assembled pile must have been placed on top of the will codicil before the wax of its seal had completely set. Once more, the warmed knife was patiently applied to achieve the separation of the two documents. Then, just as the knife was about to be applied to the removal of the seal from the will codicil there was a distraction in the form of a bustle of motion and a stage cough nearby. Looking up, the curator came face to stony face with the Bisdorn van Vliet trust's lawyer.

“I think that we should observe the same legal procedure as is usual for the reading of a will. It is my view, also, that the appropriate experts in the relevant speciality of the law should be consulted in order to make a determination as to whether this additional document is, indeed, valid and binding. We need to be sure of our position before we announce Weduwe Bisdorn van Vliet's final wish to the public.”

The curator knew that the lawyer was right despite her frustration at the anti-climax of having so nearly exposed this last, unanticipated mystery. With reluctance, the sealed document was yielded up to the lawyer's outstretched, ungloved hand with a request that he set about making the necessary arrangements as soon as possible. For the time being, all that remained was to supervise the museum's guests as they filed past the table to view the materials laid out upon it and made their way out of the building.

After what seemed like an eternity, the curator was alone in the house. A decade had passed since her appointment as curator of the museum during which time she felt that a relationship had developed between Paulina, as she called the widow, and herself. The curator lived in a small but modern flat in what had previously been part of the house used only by servants. Her working days were spent in the dusty splendour of the main part of the house which had, indeed, been left in a century long time warp. She had also got into the habit of wandering the rooms when the museum was closed, sometimes coming to rest in a chair and exercising her imagination in order to empathise with Paulina. It would only be right that she should be the one to write the widow's biography since she felt such a strong connection with her already. This surely gave her the right to be the first to see what was contained in the documents Paulina had provided as a window onto her life. Resuming her seat at the dinning table, the curator replaced her white, cotton gloves and gently picked up the first piece of paper ...

Juni 1869

The door before her opened and Paulina stepped out of the shadow of the house into the warm, summer sunshine.

The early days of June had been exceptionally cold with flurries of snow by day and ice-cold nights as winter had reached through spring to try its grip on another season. But now the persistent sun swept winter into oblivion to give Gouda a glorious Sunday morning. Like many other families from the houses lining the sides of the haven, they had decided to take advantage of the uplifting weather and walk the short distance to Sint Janskerk for morning worship. The trees which shaded the quays were in their best green for the day. Children from the schutje moored alongside ran in and out of the tree trunks, klompen rattling rhythms on the cobbles. Paulina's nieces and nephews longed to join these other children in their games but the two governesses kept them all under tight control lest they become distracted and lag behind.

This family party heading for church was not quite complete. Little Cornelis Catharinus was only eighteen months old so had remained in his nursery. His mother, Aegidia, who was due to deliver her eighth child in just a few weeks, had also stayed at home, feeling herself to be too large in her pregnancy to venture out and about. She remained indoors trying to rest on her *chaise longue* but actually feeling too uncomfortable to settle properly. So it was that Paulina, her half-sister - the maiden aunt - walked beside the head of the household and accepted the greetings of other church-goers in Aegidia's place.

Paulina had been an impressionable fifteen year old when Aegidia married childhood sweetheart, Theodorus Pieter Viruly. Having recently been given Aernout Drost's *Hermingard of the Oaken Mounds* to read she was awash with the idea of romance between men and women, especially if the men were heroic. Hearing her parents talk

about Theo's courageous business decisions and staunch political stands, it had seemed to her that he was made of the very stuff of heroism. Then there was all the excitement of Aggie's wedding preparations, the house being filled with swatches of fabric, dress designs, recipes and table dressing catalogues. The look of adoration in Aggie's eyes when she ran to Theo upon his arrival at the house and the aura of mystery and delight that came over everyone when the honeymoon was alluded to served to intensify the attraction which the febrile girl-woman felt for her soon-to-be brother-in-law.

Although Theo was now almost fifty years of age, Paulina still experienced some of the same excitement that she had felt for her romantic hero of all those years ago. Although somewhat changed in nature, she found that his allure had in some way grown over the years as he had risen to become both wealthy and powerful. Under his management the family laundry business had transformed itself into a highly lucrative soap and candle works in newly built premises. On the domestic front, he had taken an old canal-side merchant's dwelling and had it rebuilt as the grand house known simply as 'De Haven'. He had filled his new house with a suitable wife and their burgeoning family of healthy children whilst finding the time to rise in the world of politics.

As the family group made their way along Oosthaven quayside, they were encouraged towards the church by the tolling of its four great bells. From time to time they were obliged to step aside for those worshippers who had ordered out their carriages, the east side of the haven being on the direct route to the great church. Each time Paulina took to the narrow footpath in the shadow of the houses, Theo unwittingly brushed against her arm and she began to feel a flush of excitement in anticipation of his next touch. She tried to feel ashamed of herself but the light was too bewitching, the sun too warming and the sound of the church bells too enchanting for her to be able to punish herself for taking an extra morsel of pleasure at this physical contact.

Reaching Dubbele Buurt they had the best view of the Sint Janstoren as it rose high into the blue sky, being visible from as far away as Waddinxveen. Accident and design had resulted in a layered confederation with a square base of three distinct stone storeys: the original

fourteenth century construction being successively topped by additions in 1590 and 1605. In the mid-seventeenth century, a hexagonal lantern had grown up from the stone stump with an openwork section housing a 36-bell carillon. Finally, a narrow waist flared again into a small onion-dome from which the weather-veined lightening rod seems reach all the way to God in his heaven.

Paulina had the sensation of gently falling backwards as a her gaze followed the Sint Janstoren spire right to its tip. She almost reached out to Theo to steady herself but that head-swimming moment soon passed as her gaze responded to the more earthly need to watch where she was treading on the uneven and dung strewn road.

As they reached the narrowness and bustle of Achter de Kerk a tall man in naval uniform stood aside to allow the family party to keep together as they went inside to take their places among the congregation. Paulina noticed that Theo nodded to him in thanks and, perhaps, recognition but no words were exchanged. Then she was caught up in the business of settling the family into their pews, taking her place near the end of the row so that she might be of some help to the governesses in managing the children, each woman now having charge of two young ones.

As it turned out, Paulina was settled between the two eldest children: Catharina Johanna, aged eleven-and-a-half, and Maria Elisabeth, soon-to-be ten. Both girls were generally well-behaved in church, having reached such a stage in their understanding of the world as to appreciate the need for mannered behaviour during holy worship. Both also enjoyed the chance to show off their fine voices, the fruits of the labours of their singing master. Usually their already refined talents and well-developed lady-like qualities made Paulina feel quite the dull, country aunt, but she was not herself that day and seemed to rise above such self-consciousness.

She had been to services in Sint Janskerk many times before and admired its beauty, as it were, from a mental distance. Today the feeling of standing back from the scene had left her and she became totally absorbed in the magical transformation wrought by the sunlight

pouring into the vast space of the interior with its high wooden vaults and its white walls pierced by lofty glass windows. The great swags of gilded organ pipes seemed to shimmer with reflected light. Of all the wonderful windows it was the one depicting The Sacrifice of the Prophet Elijah that drew Paulina's attention that day. To be precise, she became totally absorbed in the image of Margaretha van Parma at the bottom of the window.

In the sixteenth century Margaretha had been Landvoogdes van de Nederlanden and, as Governess of the Low Countries, had paid for this window to be made as a vanity piece. Paulina must have heard the story of Margaretha's life from one of her tutors but had relegated the details to the back of her mind. On this sunny, summer, Sunday morning this image of a powerful and worldly woman from three centuries ago became an almost tangible presence. From beneath the Governess's crown of gold a youthful woman's face looked out, exuding strength and confidence which flowed like warm wine through Paulina's arteries as she met the eyes in the glass portrait.

Fashionably and opulently dressed in gold cloth, lace and furs, Margaretha still managed to be both pious and upright. By contrast, Paulina had never been very interested in her appearance, rising above the pain of knowing that the people of Haastrecht called her 'the farmer girl' behind her back. She had felt that no alchemy of fashion could transform her sturdy frame, plain looks and unruly hair into such a beautiful creature as Aggie and her friends. The sheer amount of effort it would take to make beauty from such unpromising material had always seemed to Paulina to be a travesty of nature and of what God had given her. Now, though, Margaretha van Parma was giving her permission to make the most of herself free from the burden of aiming for the impossible and without the worry that she was sinfully vain.

The more she looked into Margaretha's luminous eyes the more she grasped a deeper message from this woman. Yes, Paulina could fulfil her destiny as a wealthy and powerful woman without sacrificing the feminine desire for marriage and children. Like Margaretha, she would be strong, proud and have a masculine consciousness of her place in this world yet make a marriage that would produce heirs and

stand the test of time. But, and a chill note of caution came now, this could only happen if each party contracted to a marriage that left them free to follow their individual paths. Margaretha had made an undignified and unhappy marriage at sixteen to a boy two years her junior, to whom she bore twins, but this liaison had metamorphosed over the years into a lasting mutual respect for what each was achieving in their lives. Paulina now knew in her heart and soul that she would henceforth be her true self, which was so much more than the dutiful and dull woman of just moments ago.

So taken up with these revelations was she that Paulina lost awareness of her surroundings until the great organ let out a rich, swelling cord startling her back into the present moment with its signal that the service was about to start. Her whole being resonated with this crescendo in celebration of new beginning and she woke to the moment, rising to her feet with the rest of the congregation to devote herself heart and soul to the first hymn.

The service over, the children set off for home with an enthusiasm which the governesses could not quite curb. Paulina had expected to stay by Theo's side on the return to 'De Haven' but a number of men were clearly intent on engaging him in conversation as he left the church. No doubt they were taking the opportunity to press their interests with the man who was not only their councillor and alderman but was also a senator in the Eerste Kamer of parliament in Den Haag. She waited for the bulk of the congregation to depart before wandering back towards Oosthaven by herself, yet not feeling alone. As she regained the quays she saw that the schuitje that had been moored alongside earlier was now being worked through the gates of the Donkere Sluis. Along with several other churchgoers, she stopped to watch as the little boat negotiated this awkward navigation, enjoying the unhurried nature of the activity and the feel of the day.

From across the lock, a group of children began singing with great gusto the old rhyme to encourage the rowers of the 'little cooking pot' boat:

Schuitje varen, theetje drinken,

*Varen we naar de Overtoom.
Drinken er zoete melk met room.
Zoete melk met brokken,
Kindje mag niet jokken.¹*

Looking over at the impromptu choir, she was surprised to find her eyes meeting those of the naval officer whom the family had briefly encountered on the way into church. They exchanged smiles which encouraged the officer to make his way over the set of lock gates on the IJssel side as soon as they closed and she soon found him standing before her, extending his hand in introduction,

“Lieutenant le Fèvre de Montigny at your service.”

He bowed low over her hand before releasing it but continuing to look directly into her eyes. His own eyes were a liquid brown and she began to feel herself falling as if into a deep pool. He was tall, slim and very attractive. He had combed his thick, black hair back from his forehead and applied just enough Macassar oil so that it shone in the sunlight. His facial whiskers were also dark and dense, spreading down his jaw and across his top lip, yet his chin and neck were shaved bare as was the fashion in Den Haag.

“I think you are a relative of Mr Viruly. You have his stature.”

She was amazed that he, the first person whom she had encountered since Margaretha had awakened her, could appreciate that she was a significant woman.

“I am Paulina Bisdom van Vliet, his wife's half-sister.”

All her life she had insisted on being known as “Paulina” so that she would be distinguished from her grandmother, Paulina Maria Hondorff-Block, after whom she had been named. It came as a surprise to her to find that she had suddenly and without thought reclaimed her proper name, her own name.

¹ Sail your boat, drink your tea, We're sailing to the Overtoom*. Drinking sweet milk with cream. Sweet milk with bread lumps, children, don't tell fibs. *The Overtoom was a canal in the suburbs of Amsterdam that connected important waterways.

“Your father is the burgemeester of Haastrecht?”

She nodded assent.

“Then I have had the honour of making his acquaintance at my brother's house. Gilles was the burgemeester of Berkel and Rodenrijs and has just become burgemeester of Hillegerberg and Bergschenhoek. Both your father and Viruly were his supporters in gaining his improved appointment.”

She was glad to hear that he moved in the same social circles as her family and was not going to prove an embarrassment to be seen talking to. She also liked that he was tall. Looking up to him made her feel feminine since she was herself taller than most men. Anxious now that their conversation should not flag, she enquired,

“Are you in Gouda with your ship?”

“I am between voyages at present and like to stay at the Hotel De Zalm here. So, it is fortuitous that we have met today. I see that you are watching the operation of the lock, do you have an interest in navigation?”

“Since I was a child I watched boats pass our house on the Hollandse IJssel and bring cargo along the Vlist to the Haven in Haastrecht, but I know nothing of the sea or of the marine.”

He easily took up her conversational opening and began to tell of his sea voyages, allowing Paulina to ask questions and show interest at appropriate points so that she did not feel excluded. They had just arrived at Curaçao in the West Indies, where Lieutenant le Fèvre de Montigny's ship was visited by Governor Landsbergen, when she noticed that Theo had detached himself from his followers and was approaching. Since the two men were acquainted, she expected Theo to join them but instead he slowed to a stop a pace or two away, clearly waiting for her to join him. She was somewhat reluctant to part from the handsome lieutenant but also understood that one did not keep Theodorus Pieter Viruly waiting. The lieutenant noticed the social dilemma she faced and quickly resolved it for her by turning and

taking a step towards Theo, thus allowing her to do the same. The lieutenant then greeted Theo enthusiastically,

“Good morning, Mayor Viruly! Let me give you my hand!”

Theo only briefly touched the hand extended to him and grunted a greeting in reply before offering Paulina his arm and steering her in the direction of Oosthaven. So swift was her disengagement from the lieutenant that she felt her farewell was cut so short as to be almost rude. Minded to say something to Theo as she was rather cross with him not only for leaving her alone after church but also for tearing her away from her handsome new friend, she chided him,

“Lieutenant le Fèvre de Montigny was good enough to escort me after church since your politics detained you for so long. I found his company most engaging and understood that you and he were acquainted. I am sorry to be parted from him so briskly and hope that I shall meet him again.”

Theo was silent for some time before replying,

“Yes, I have met le Fèvre de Montigny and so has your father. His brother is in politics and looks to do well. I am sorry if you thought me rather unfriendly just now.”

There the matter rested and they were soon back inside De Haven and into the thick of family life once more.

Sunday dinner was a family meal and rather chaotic so it was well into the afternoon before Aegidia and Paulina were alone. Paulina went to sit with Aggie as she tried to rest since she said that she often got bored by being so inactive and left all by herself. It was not long before Aggie remarked upon the change in Paulina's demeanour, saying that she seemed somehow stronger in herself yet almost girlishly excited at the same time.

Aggie knew her half-sister well having moved to the burgemeester's house following his marriage to her mother. Aggie had been seven

when Paulina was born and the age gap between them had not always been comfortable. They became closer after Aggie's older brother and sister both died in the same year, throwing the two daughters into each other's company when the one was just past childhood at eleven and the other, at eighteen, was almost a woman. Their relationship came into full bloom after Aggie married and the children started to come along. She had felt able to confide things in Paulina which she did not care to share with their mother. In return, Paulina had confided her horror at the string of unappealing young men who had been put before her as potential husbands. They had laughed together at their coarse features, or their foppish dress, or their arrogant manners, or their blatant desire to advance themselves through marriage. Aggie had also wiped away the tears when the ones that Paulina did like had disappeared, never to return to her side.

Now, once she heard that Paulina had been talking to a handsome young naval lieutenant that morning, Aggie pressed her for all the details of the encounter. As Paulina started talking about him she self-consciously realised that she sounded just like a girl in love. Aggie picked up on this immediately, asking,

“Tell me, sister, did you perhaps flirt with him a little?”

Paulina found herself blushing and left with no choice but to confess that perhaps she had – just a little.

“I am so pleased for you that you have found someone who takes your fancy! Now, let us consider how suitable a match he would be for you. What do you know of his family?”

“Well, his brother is a burgemeester and both papa and Theo know him. He is an officer in the marine, too, and looks so handsome in his uniform! He has such interesting things to say about his voyages and the places he has visited. I wonder if he has ever been in a battle? He didn't say.”

“I think that you are getting a little distracted! If he were in the military then I would know exactly who his family is. There were illus-

trious military engineers called le Fèvre de Montigny, so he may be connected with them. In which case, he is of the patriciate and socially on a par with us. We should ask Theo or papa to find out more."

"Oh, but isn't that making rather a lot of fuss after just one, brief meeting?"

"My dear! I have never seen you show such an interest in a man and I am so excited for you that I want to help all I can. He just might be the right one for you and we shouldn't let him get away! It is not as though you are a mere girl and this just an infatuation that will be gone by tomorrow! You will be twenty nine years old in a few days and have a mature woman's sensibilities and not a little experience in dealing with potential suitors. I think that we need to find out more about your handsome stranger."

"But what if he is married or I don't feel the same next time I see him?"

"We must be patient and leave it to the men to find out more. But, in the meantime, perhaps we can make sure that you chance upon a second meeting? You said that he is resident at Hotel De Zalm? Well then, it should be easy! If you find reason to stroll in the Markt for long enough you are sure to encounter him. You might even take coffee at the hotel during the cheese market. How I wish that my condition allowed me to go with you! As it is, my great belly would be enough to put off any man!"

"Poor Aggie, is it really so bad?"

"I must confess that I am finding it exhausting this time. The doctor says that this must be my last pregnancy if I am to fully recover my health after the birth. But I seem to become pregnant so easily that I am not sure how I shall stop! I could go on to have another five or ten children before I am too old to conceive! What a dreadful thought!"

"Our mama must have been about the same age as you when I was born yet there were no more children after me. Poor papa, he so wanted a son to inherit his position and wealth but all he got was me! Which

brings me to the other thing that happened to me today: I have become resolved to do all that I can do in this life and not be hindered by the limitations on what is expected of me because of my sex. I was looking at Margaretha van Parma in the stained glass window I was sitting under in church this morning and she seemed pour her strength into me. So, if le Fèvre de Montigny is to be my husband, he had better know that I shall not bend myself or my destiny to accommodate his - or anyone else's - notion of wifely behaviour!"

"Good gracious, Paulina. You are quite disconcerting me!"

"Well, you might as well know straight away that I now call myself Paulina, with the 'a' that I was Christened with. I assure you that nobody will ever confuse me with old Oma now!"

"I am quite sure that you are right in that! Now, Paulin-with-an-A, I have had quite enough excitement for one day so, please will you read to me for a while? Since I must spend so much of my day in idleness I thought I should exercise my mind in compensation. Whilst you were at church I began reading 'Max Havelaar' to see what all the fuss was about when it was published some years ago. I have to confess that Mr Douwes Dekker's style is most conducive to rest as it fails to excite. Yet, I feel that I must continue with it as the subject matter is important. Theo is concerned with the political debates about our East Indies colonies so it will be good to inform myself about the topic so that I might appear more knowledgeable and interested when he talks of his work in Den Haag."

"Is that the Multatuli book?"

"Yes."

"What a strange *nom de plume*."

"Apparently it is Latin for 'I have borne much' – which seems appropriate for my situation! I fear that the poor man had a bad time of things in Java. It seems such a far-away place and such a different place to Holland that I find it hard to believe that his tales have much to do with us ordinary Dutch people. It has caused quite a stir, though.

Maybe you will be able to put some excitement into it when you read a passage for me?"

Paulina did try to make the tale interesting but Aggie was soon fast asleep and she did not chose to carry on with the book for herself. Unwilling to risk waking Aggie by leaving the room in order to fetch her writing materials, she reached for the novel by Ouida which Aggie had just finished reading and commended to her. Fortunately this was in translation from the original English, a language in which Aggie was competent but that was opaque to Paulina. So, to find *Idalia* in Dutch had been something of a treat, especially since the story was compelling enough to distract her from her passion for keeping her journal.

Immediately captivated by the courageous, clever, independent and muscular Queen's Messenger with the exotic, Scottish name of Sir Fulke Erceldoune, Paulina had been gathered up and swept along with his headlong fall for the beautiful Countess Idalia Vassalis, who had saved his life. Hoping for a romantic, happy ending, it had been distressing to discover that Idalia was actually an enchantress who bewitched men then bent them to her political will before discarding them or, worse, sending them to their deaths. But all was not lost and Paulina became heartened again by the prospect of Idalia's love for Fulke being the saving grace which would reform her, showing her to be a virtuous soul worthy of the hero's devotion after all. The novel was proving to be a much more riveting way of exercising the moral faculties than her usual diet of the sermons and poetry of Utrecht minister Nicolaas Beets, whose latest tome remained buried in her luggage.

Despite Aggie's urging her to frequent the environs of Hotel De Zalm in the hope of another encounter with the handsome naval officer, several days elapsed before Paulina again set foot outside 'De Haven'. She was to accompany Theo once more but this time they were not headed for church but for the new railway station. It was another glorious summer day as they left the house and were handed into the Viruly's smart, new Victoria carriage with it's liveried driver. Paulina

had a keen eye for horse flesh and was appreciative of the fine pair of bay mares which were harnessed and waiting patiently, their coats gleaming in the sunlight.

The carriage hood was down so that they were open to the sights, sounds and feel of day. They had no sooner set off along Oosthaven heading for the Markt when the Sint Janskerk carillon began chiming out the Meideun tune to signal the hour for ten o'clock. Paulina let herself relax back into her seat so as to fully enjoy the music, the sun's warmth and the sights as they made their progress past the stepped gables and slender spires of the stadhuis in the centre of the market square before taking the Hoogstradt, crossing the Turfsingel and Katensingel canal bridges to reach Stationsplein.

It had to be admitted that there was rather more excitement for their outing today than there had been last Sunday for this was a day of celebration for Theo. The people of Gouda had not taken easily to the notion of rail transport when their business had done so well out of the shipping that passed through Holland's busiest river junction. It had been unfortunate that the first train line was laid to the north of the city centre, being unable to breach the walls and canals so as to arrive at a more convenient location. Indeed, the townsmen had refused to contribute to the building of a proper station leaving train travellers to make do with a rather basic wooden construction beside the single track which linked Rotterdam and Utrecht.

Characteristically undaunted, Theo had worked hard on behalf of the Nederlandsche Rijnspoorweg-Maatschappij, of which he was a shareholder and board member, and today his efforts would come to fruition. He had exercised his political skills to have the town boundary re-drawn so that the station now lay within Gouda's compass. His business acumen was instrumental in the development of a second track which, passing through Harmelen and Breukelen, would soon enable travel between Rotterdam and Amsterdam. A third line to Den Haag would follow making it possible to travel easily between Holland's three great maritime cities: Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Den Haag. Competition from the Hollandsche IJzeren Spoorweg-Maatschappij's direct line between Rotterdam and Amsterdam

via Den Haag had been successfully beaten off, largely because Theo had advocated investment in modern engineering techniques to deal with the problems of laying track across waterlogged land.

The Rhijnspoorweg line continued beyond Gouda to Utrecht and Arnhem then went on to Oberhausen across the border, thus opening up not only the whole of the central and eastern Netherlands but also Germany. Theo had grasped the possibility that at least some of the anticipated numbers of people on board all these trains might be encouraged to break their journey in Gouda and contribute to the town's trade. To this end he had persuasively argued that a station which made the right impression on the travel hardened and weary was crucial to local enterprise. Today was to see the first stage Theo's grand vision for his home town realised when passengers from Rotterdam and Utrecht would be able to alight at Gouda's distinctive new station building which offered all the facilities a traveller might require. A group of specially invited guests were to arrive on the next train from Rotterdam and join with the local dignitaries for a formal opening ceremony followed by inaugural festivities in the station's restaurant.

Having arrived at the station in good time for the train from Rotterdam, Theo left Paulina to stroll around the building and platform whilst he went to check that all was in order. He had wanted to be early so that he could round up the chosen members of the welcoming party and ensure that everyone was in the right place at the right time, and doing the right thing. Anxious that Gouda and its station should gain the approval of the august company soon to arrive, he had worked hard to ensure that the building was ready, the staff well-trained and provided with new uniforms, and the restaurant able to lay on a sumptuous mid-day meal.

Paulina had caught some of his mood and paced restlessly and aimlessly around. First she wandered through the ticket hall with its window already manned in preparation for the first customers and the porters with their trolleys waiting to assist with luggage. Then she investigated the waiting rooms, declining the attentions of the maid who was eager to seat her in the women's room. Paulina was unable to sit or stand still, however, and soon passed out onto the platform.

Everywhere was lavishly decked in bunting or garlanded with fresh flowers whose scent barely masked the lingering odour of fresh paint. Paulina found herself gazing hopefully in the direction from which the Rotterdam train would arrive, although she knew it was not yet due for some time.

The excitement of the occasion was especially heightened for Paulina as her beloved papa was one of the honoured guests due to arrive by train as he returned from a week attending to his shipping business in Rotterdam. It had been decided that, following the station opening, she and papa would continue on home to Haastrecht together in the comfort of Theo's new carriage. On its return journey to Gouda the carriage would bring mama, Paulina and Aggie's mother, who wanted to be on hand in plenty of time for the arrival of the new baby. Paulina was looking forward to swapping news with her father, the urgency for which seemed to be further fuelled by their at daily exchange of letters. She had also begun to hanker for home and, if truth were told, was keen to exercise her spirit and mind in the management of the family house and estates. As was usual for daughters of the patriciate, her education had all been in preparation for the conduct her own affairs upon her marriage. So far, she had been afforded little opportunity to test herself in this respect, having been cast as assistant to her mother. Paulina had always deferred to her mama's way of doing things but now her new-found confidence and strength of will made her determined to take charge and be autonomous. She found the prospect of being in control during mama's absence quite exhilarating.

The tasks ahead of her were busily running through her head as Paulina turned to retrace her steps to the entrance hall. Suddenly he was there! Not in his uniform this time, but her heart recognised him before she was fully conscious of it and let out an involuntary cry then hastily put her hands to her face as if to push the noise back inside of her. At the muffled sound he turned from supervising the porter who was stacking his luggage and quickly covered the distance between them.

“Is there something the matter?”

He asked and before she had time to think about what she would say Paulina had replied,

“Oh, no, not at all! I had so hoped to see you again but now it seems that you are going away, perhaps on a long sea voyage!”

She was aware that this was a rather bold and forthright utterance, although it was truthful. But Johan Jacob le Fèvre de Montigny was not a man to be thrown by forwardness in a woman, finding the whole *etiquette* of courtship rather tedious. He happily replied in kind whilst hoping to be able to put a name to her vaguely recalled face.

“Do not concern yourself, my dear, I am merely paying a visit to my brother in Hillegersberg. I shall not be far away and, in any case, will return to De Zalm in a week or so's time. Are you taking the train yourself?”

“No, I am here in my step-sister's place beside Theo Viruly at the opening ceremony; and to meet my father who is arriving with the official party from Rotterdam. We are to go home to Haastrecht later today but I am sure that I shall be back in Gouda once my latest niece or nephew arrives.”

At last, Johan placed the woman. She was the only daughter of the burgemeester of Haastrecht and she seemed to be setting her cap at him. He was intrigued!

“My brother is among the burgemeesters from Rotterdam who have been invited today. Perhaps you would like to be introduced to him?”

“Oh, yes, that would be delightful! You can meet my father, too! This has really turned out to be a most fortunate encounter!”

Johan had a vague sense that he was not quite in control of the way things were going as the young woman seemed to be slightly more enthusiastic than his polite offer of an introduction warranted. Since he couldn't quite put his finger on what, if anything, was wrong with it, he went along with her enthusiasm and nodded his agreement.

A sudden commotion of people arriving on the platform from inside the station building put paid to any further dialogue. Theo was marshalling the reception committee into place whilst the station master took up a position at the platform's edge, extracting his shiny new timepiece from the pocket of his smart uniform coat and consulting it. It would not do for his first train to be late! A distant whistle reassured him that all was well as Theo stepped up beside him in readiness to greet the distinguished city men.

The driver skilfully halted his train so that the door of the first class carriage containing his most notable passengers came to rest exactly beside the two waiting men. The carriage door was opened with some ceremony by the station master and the men inside began to alight. Theo shook the hand of each before they passed on to mingle with the local mayors and patriarchs behind him. Paulina was only looking for one face, that of her father, Marcellus. As soon as she saw him she was hardly able to stop herself from running to him. He had seen her, too, and extricated himself from the round of greetings as soon as was polite so that they were soon embracing affectionately.

Meanwhile, Johan had located his brother and worked his way into the crowd to place himself at Gillis's right elbow. The brothers did not exchange greetings and seemed not to acknowledge each other, yet they moved through the cluster of guests as one. Johan lost no time in shaking hands and swapping names with many prominent men who assumed that he, too, was important. He was charming and personable, seeming to be in the acquaintance of the burgemeester of the rapidly developing Hellegesburg district of Rotterdam. Gillis le Fèvre de Montigny had recently been appointed to this promising position after serving for several years in a smaller, less notable district where he had nevertheless made the right impression. Brother Johan eased himself into the social benefit afforded by his association with Gillis and merged with the invited guests.

Paulina and Marcellus worked their way through the crowd to be near Theo as he delivered his formal speech, declared the station open and, after others had made their speeches, led the assembled party into the restaurant where they were seated for the meal. Paulina found that her

appetite was unusually slight and that her eyes constantly sought out Johan, who seemed to have been made room for at the end of a table, near the door. His brother sat next to him and appeared to be animatedly monopolising his attention. Occasionally they would look in her direction and she would quickly look away but just sometimes her eyes met Johan's only and they held each other's gaze unabashed. Mostly, however, she was able to take him in as he devoted his attention to his food and his brother. He was every bit as handsome as she remembered and stirred her passion no less now that he was out of his uniform and in a smart tailcoat and suit.

For her own part, she was glad that she had put on her favourite carriage dress with its flatteringly cut jacket in a darker blue to the full-skirted, lightweight dress beneath. It was quite a new costume and, she had been assured by the dressmaker, fashionable. As was the Mantilla which she had been persuaded would complete the look. But Paulina found that her boisterous hair defeated all attempts to attach the flimsy Spanish creation which, in any case, made her feel uncomfortably tall as its comb added a good hand's breadth to her height. She had tossed the Mantilla into a drawer at home and was now relieved not to have the worry of it.

The meal over, people began to leave the table and pass out of the restaurant. The train for Rotterdam was due at any moment so leave-takings began. Theo and Marcellus passed among the Rotterdam guests, shaking hands and saying a few well-chosen words to each of them. Paulina tried to keep up with them and do as they did but was finding it difficult to connect socially with any of the men. She might have felt aggrieved by their overlooking her but was distracted from the whole enterprise when she noticed that Johan and his brother were heading through the throng in her direction. She then focussed her own efforts on managing matters so that Marcellus was at hand when the brothers arrived before her.

Before Paulina could concern herself with including her father in the introductions she found that Gillis le Fèvre de Montigny had taken this social manoeuvre upon himself, deftly separating the four of them into a discrete group away from the mass of people. Gillis drew up-

on a slight previous acquaintance with Marcellus and the latter's current mood of fellowship to all around in order to engage his attention. Once he had ensured that all four were known to each other and a cordial atmosphere prevailed, he swiftly moved on to issue an invitation to dine at his new house in Hillegesburg. Marcellus explained that the family were waiting upon a new arrival so his wife would not be travelling far in the near future. Most extraordinarily, Marcellus then heard himself issue an invitation for the le Fèvre de Montignys to take lunchewon at Haastrecht the following week. The invitation was readily accepted, a date and time agreed and hasty farewells made as the Rotterdam train was now standing at the platform with Johan's luggage being loaded aboard.

Once released from his civic duties, Theo had prevailed upon Marcellus and Paulina to come into the house and take refreshment with Aggie whilst Paulina's luggage was being stowed on the carriage. Once the sisters were together it was inevitable that an account of Johan's presence at the station opening should burst from Paulina. Marcellus, being a good natured man and exceedingly fond of his daughter, joined in with their excitement, proclaiming,

“I do believe that you are a little enamoured of this gentleman!”

To the surprise of all present Paulina announced,

“Yes, father. He is the man I am going to marry!”

Everyone had been somewhat taken aback by Paulina's announcement but the tone of determination in her voice brooked of no contrary comments. Such a brief acquaintance seemed hardly the basis for a life-long commitment and would usually have been dismissed as a passing fancy. However, in the circumstances there was an element of relief as it was proving difficult to find a suitable husband for her. Many tactful introductions had been made over the years since she came of age but she had shown no interest in forming any sort of attachment either romantically or pragmatically.

It had not been easy to entice eligible bachelors in Paulina's direction, either. She was somewhat out of the ordinary in her physical appearance, being both tall and sturdy, as well as lacking in any dress sense or gracefulness. She was educated to manage her inheritance but not accomplished in literature, music or art and spoke no foreign languages. Although she spent hours each day at her writing desk, the result was perhaps best described as mental outpourings.

Paulina's enthusiasm for this man at least got over the first hurdle on the course towards marriage. However, two major stumbling blocks remained. Was this relative stranger a suitable person to be the husband of the only daughter of a wealthy and powerful patrician. Paulina stood to inherit a great deal of property in her own right but could only retain her father's power if she had a husband to act on her behalf. Even assuming his credentials passed scrutiny, there was the small matter of whether Johan Jacob le Fèvre de Montigny was actually interested in marrying Paulina.

Because of these concerns, Marcellus made a point of having a private talk with Theo before leaving for Haastrecht. The two men pooled what little they knew of Paulina's potential suitor, starting with their shared assumption that he came from a family with an illustrious military past. That said, they next agreed that the brothers Gillis and Johan appeared to have been born in obscurity but to be men of means; where, they wondered, had this money come from? Theo was also privy to the rumours circulating at parliament in Den Haag concerning the dubious morals of the King's eldest son, Hendrik the Navigator. Johan's name had been mentioned as one of the set who joined in the Prince's notorious bouts of drinking and womanising. Neither man was keen to ally their innocent Paulina to a man of dissolute habits.

Doubts clouded the enthusiasm of father and brother-in-law for Paulina's choice of husband and they saw it as their duty to find out more before matters progressed too far. Not only did they wish to spare Paulina the pain of future disillusionment, but they were also eager to avoid any scandal which association with the wrong sort of man might bring down upon their heads. It was agreed that Theo would quickly pay a visit to Den Haag where he knew of a clever and discrete man

whom he would engage to investigate and report back directly on the young lieutenant.

Juli 1869

The man waiting patiently at the edge of the room was quite unremarkable. He could neither be described as tall nor short, thick-set nor thin, dark nor fair and he wore clothes that were neither rough nor elegant. His features were unremarkable, his stance relaxed and confident without being in any way challenging. Like a moth on a wall at dusk, you would not notice him until, that is, he moved. Then his talent for mimicry displayed itself in far more complex and dynamic ways than were available to any insect. His movements and gestures could mirror those of the people around him, as could his voice, accent and expressions. Upon first meeting him almost anyone would feel the sort of rapport that presages a lifelong friendship, yet you could pass him in the street unrecognised within an hour of taking him into your heart – and confidence.

His plain clothing concealed a muscular and agile body that was well able to deal with trouble of a physical kind, as well as a short-bladed knife and small pistol which he could apply with skill should the necessity arise. Fortunately, no such circumstance had arisen in the conduct of this particular case, yet, despite its apparently straightforward and safe nature, this matter had caused him some perturbation. Viruly was not his only client and there were more powerful interests with far fatter purses which had to be taken into account when presenting his report.

As was usual in these circumstances, the man would give his findings verbally. He had previously ordered his thoughts on paper then, blessed with a photographic memory, destroyed any trace of written material before presenting himself before his client. The man's stoic wait was eventually rewarded when the door to the room opened and closed as Viruly entered his Den Haag office. Even so, it wasn't until Viruly had settled himself behind the desk that he became aware of the

man's presence, feeling rather discomfited at being caught unawares. The man gave Viruly an arch look and continued to wait in silence until Viruly got up and crossed the room in order that an envelope of bank notes could be transferred from Viruly's inside coat pocket to that of the man.

Viruly seated himself behind the desk once more and gestured to the man that he should take the visitor's seat opposite him but the man indicated that he preferred to stand. He moved forward into the spotlight of sunshine let in by the window as a signal that he was ready to begin his narrative. So far, not a word had been uttered by either party and Viruly was unwilling to be the one to break the oddly monastic atmosphere so, instead of speaking, he elected to open the palm of his right hand and extend it in front of him as an invitation to the other to start what was clearly set up to be an uninterrupted soliloquy. The account which followed was delivered without embellishment or dramatic interpretation, the man reading the words from the inside of his expressionless eyes. Its listener was left to interpret what he heard for himself and form what judgement he may of the individual it concerned.

“The subject, Johan Jacob le Fèvre de Montigny, is the second living son of Johan Jacob le Fèvre de Montigny, after whom he was named, and Petronella Henrietta Kleijn. His father was called to the ministry of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk as a young man and all his family practice that religion.”

“He has one surviving older brother, Gillis Johannes le Fèvre de Montigny, named after his grandfather. This brother was born in 1837 in the village of Kwadijk in the Zeevang community of North Holland, his father being the pastor resident there. A second child, Bartolomeus, born in 1938, did not survive infancy. The family were quite short of funds at this time.”

“In 1839 the family moved to Nieuwe Tonge in the community of Middleharnis on the island of Goeree-Overflakkee in South Holland. Here Johan Jacob junior was born in 1840 and another child, Henri Pieter, arrived some years later.”

“Johan Jacob senior was predikant of the parish of Nieuwe Tonge for the remainder of his lifetime, his fortunes improving such that he was registered as a landowner at his death in 1849. It is said that his new parish was granted as the result of the application of both power and money on the part of his parents. Nieuwe Tonge was certainly an improvement on Kwadijk in both location, being close to his family, and in possessing an environment more favourable for both physical and financial health. However, his choice of profession is rather at odds with the occupations of the rest of his well-respected patrician family.”

“The subject's grandfather, Gillis Johannes senior, married Lena van der Sluys in 1807 at Zwartewaal, near Brielle on the island of Voorne-Putten in South Holland. They had two daughters and two sons who survived into adulthood. The daughters, who are the eldest children, married well. Maria Johanna wed Arij Jacobusz Hogendijk, a shipowner and merchant, and lives in Vlardingem. The Hogendijks are a clan of shipbuilders and builders in the area of Krimpen aan den IJssel. Jacoba Elena wed Johannes Oudorp Kotebrant who was appointed mayor of Kralingen near Rotterdam in 1867. The Oudorp family also has connections in the East Indies. A fourth and youngest child, Jacob known as Jacques, requires money for his care and always lives with a family member. He was in the home of Lena van der Sluys until her death in 1859, some 38 years after her husband, at Oudendijk. Jaques now lives with the Kralingen branch of the family but it has not been possible to discover what ails him.”

“The subject's grandfather, Gillis Johannes le Fèvre de Montigny was born at Den Bosch in North Brabant in 1765 and died at Maasluis in South Holland in 1821. In 1776 he became a Kornet in the Regiment Oranje-Gelderland. By 1782 he had risen to the rank of Kolonel in the Korps Ingenieurs which became Korps der Genie in 1806 then the Koninklijk Korps der Artillerie en Genie in 1807. He is noted and respected for his work in map-making and, less so, for the design of defensive structures. In 1806 he was appointed examiner of surveys to the land register. The Koninklijk Korps der Artillerie en Genie closed in 1810 after French came to power but Kolonel le Fèvre de Montigny was one of the few to retain his rank in the French army.”

“Thus from 1810 – 1811 the Kolonel was *chef de bataillon* 1e Klasse. He was designated premier administrator to Hollandse cadaster which surveyed and mapped the Netherlands in order to create the land register which was to form the basis of new tax laws on property. He held this post until 1817 and is best known for the quality of his work and for taking a principled stand over standardization and detail in his surveys. This was deemed both costly and irrelevant by those in charge of the project but le Fèvre de Montigny stood fast and overcame this opposition to oversee the production of the first set of detailed and accurate maps of our country.”

“The subject's grandfather had followed in the military footsteps of his own father, Johan Nicolaas le Fèvre de Montigny, who joined the Korps Ingenieurs as a Kornet 1776 and rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Kolonel in 1795. Johan Nicolaas became Directeur of Nederrijn- en IJssellinie defensive works, for which he produced the first accurate maps of Overijssel and Zeeland.”

“To return to more recent events. The subject and two brothers were still minors in the care of their mother, Petronella Henrietta Kleijn, when their grandmother, Lena van der Sluys, died in 1857. At this point the three pastor's sons inherited a significant amount of money, being their father's share of the estate. The subject's grandmother owned a great deal of land around Brielle which was sold by her heirs and the proceeds apportioned between them. The subject's mother did not benefit from this inheritance and died some years later at the age of fifty three. I could find no trace of the younger brother after that event.”

“At the time that he benefited from his inheritance the older brother, Gillis Johannes, was employed as a candidate notary in Den Haag. After his grandmother's death he moved to Brielle then, in 1864, gave up the law and went to live in Berkel near Rotterdam, having been appointed burgemeester of Berkel and Rodenrijs at the end of the previous year. Gillis Johannes has recently been appointed burgemeester of Hillegersberg and Bergschenhoek, which neighbours his previous constituency yet is more favourably located for development as a substantial centre of business and an elegant residential area. It would

seem that the subject's brother has used his new-found wealth and his ancestor's influential name in order to progress a career in politics. In 1866 he married Maria Woutherina van Haaften in Den Haag. To date, he has one son, an infant given the family names of Johan Jacob. He has just built a substantial villa in Hillegersberg where the subject is also currently residing."

"As to the subject's biography, he attended a private elementary school in Hilversum then, aged 14, commenced training as a sea-going officer in the navy. The reasons for his taking this course of action rather than following the family preference for the military are not known. The Naval Training School in Den Helder did not exist at that time so our subject's training was arranged as a private matter between the family and appropriate sea captains. Perhaps the influence of his family background set him on the course of becoming a navigation officer."

The man smiled wryly to himself behind his stony face as he examined his client for any sign that his little pun had been appreciated. He often played such a small trick at this point in his monologues in order to discover whether his audience had been, and still was, attending to all that he laid before them. It was frequently the case, especially in matrimonial affairs, that the client was listening for a particular piece of information and not taking in the whole picture. However, this employer evidenced himself to be a model of diligence by the merest lightening of his expression at the man's slight whimsy. Thus, coming to the meat of the matter, the man continued,

"The subject's first voyage of any length was as a Kornet on the Frigate *Admiral van Wassenaar* from 1855 to 1856. During another two-year voyage from 1857 to 1859, also on a Frigate, he was promoted to Adelborst. Then he served on the transport ship *De Heldin* which sailed from Hellevoetsluis to the West Indies, being promoted to Lieutenant ter Zee der 2e Klasse in 1859. In connection with his voyages, he has purchased many charts and maps, including of Java, the Batta countries and Sumatra in the East Indies, as well as inheriting many maps from his forbears."

“At the age of twenty two he left the navy and began to live variously in hotels in Den Haag, Amsterdam and Gouda as well as with his brother near Rotterdam. He has made substantial investments using the firm of Jonas & Krugeman in Amsterdam, including a particularly successful venture in the Koninklijke Stoomboot Maatschappij. He is a member of Den Haag Freemason's lodge and The Amsterdam branch of the public welfare organisation Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen. He has never married and no scandal attaches to his name.”

The man stopped speaking and looked directly at Viruly. An interval elapsed during which Viruly tried to formulate his thoughts for the response which was clearly expected. In the end he simply said,

“If I understand you correctly, Lieutenant le Fèvre de Montigny comes from a lesser branch of a notable patrician family. He is of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk protestant religion, possessed of some wealth and a member of suitably worthy organisations. He has never married and has no independent household.”

The man nodded his confirmation. Viruly continued,

“Does he have any particular friends?”

The man knew that not even the smallest grain of the truth must dust his answer,

“The subject has an easy social manner which has engaged many acquaintances but he has formed no particular friendships. His relationship with his brother has endured and indicates that he has the potential to form deep and lasting attachments.”

This answer had only skimmed the surface of Viruly's most serious concern so he felt that he must press further,

“You say that no scandal attaches to his name but you do not offer any more detailed assessment of his character. I should be interested to hear your opinion of him as a man.”

The man had prepared his answer, having expected such a line of enquiry. He knew that he needed to tread carefully in what he said but that say something he must if the fact of his manipulating his information were not to be suspected. To reveal too much would, however, put him in jeopardy of losing valuable clients and perhaps even put him in the way of a more physical sort of danger.

“The subject is a sailor and a bachelor who has been in the habit of going where he pleases and suiting himself. Many of his connections are people who share his charitable, business and religious interests and others are naval colleagues. He is accepted into polite society wherever he goes.”

“I should perhaps mention that there has lately been an alteration in his usual behaviours which might be interpreted as indicating that he has come to a time in his life where he is ready to settle down and take a wife, should he find someone suitable. For instance, I have heard that he has very recently made enquiries as to the purchase of a house presently under construction in a fashionable part of The Hague.”

The man left his answer there, knowing that he had avoided the moral quagmire before him yet safely achieved the crux of the matter that occupied the client before him. He had subtly alluded to the suitability and availability of the subject for marriage to the Bisdom van Vliet daughter, which was all that Viruly had really wanted to know and what one of his other interests had wished him to convey.

The man made a slight bow and was gone with hardly a disturbance to the air in the room. Viruly immediately took up a sheet of writing paper, pen and ink and wrote a short message to Marcellus using the form of words which they had agreed upon as a confirmation that Paulina's choice of husband was considered a suitable one. Sealing the letter, Viruly rang for a boy to take it to the post. Marcellus would have the news he was waiting for by the end of that afternoon.

As soon as the message left his hand Viruly began to feel less certain of it's content. Now that the man had gone taking his stage presence with him, and Viruly had dropped his own guard of rationality and

returned to being Theo, the concerned brother-in-law, some sense of unease crept over him. He tried to focus on what was bothering him but all he was left with were vague suspicions too insubstantial to bear close scrutiny. Was the father a noble man who followed his religious convictions at the cost of wealth and power, or was he in some way the black sheep of the family? Is there some inherited family weakness behind the shadowy figures of the uncle known as Jacques and the younger brother, Henri Pieter? For all he knew, the latter might have had a dashing military career and been killed in action.

Then there was the man himself. Theo had to admit that he just didn't like Johan and that this coloured his enthusiasm for the match with Paulina. Quite why his instincts told him to keep his distance from the dashing, young Lieutenant he couldn't fathom. Perhaps it was just his own fondness for the girl that made it hard for him to see any man as good enough for her. Then again, his political and business dealings had been a great education in the ways of men and he was well aware that the investigator had presented a well-manicured account for political reasons. Gillis had some of this skill, too, but Johan seemed to lack this political acumen, although he clearly had a head for business which Theo was able to appreciate. There was something else that motivated the young man in his social dealings, something that Theo felt was beyond his range of understanding. Something that was probably best left to the women in the family to fathom.

Once back at Haastrecht, preparations for the luncheon consumed a great deal of Paulina's emotional energies. Everything seemed to conspire against her, however, and she was often in an agony of anxiety that things would not be as she desired or, unthinkable, the invitation would have to be postponed or even cancelled. Firstly, her mama had to be persuaded to leave Aggie's side and return to Haastrecht for the occasion. It was not so much that Maria Elizabeth could not tear herself away from De Haven for even one day, although that was the impression that she gave. It was, if truth be told, a rather less noble sentiment that motivated her – she had moved heaven and earth to find a suitable husband for her youngest daughter only to be thwarted by this wilful child. Now, the girl had gone and found a man all by

herself, putting her mother's nose well and truly out of joint. Since Paulina had made it clear that she was taking over all her mother's duties in her absence and brooked no interference, she could have the responsibility of organising her own luncheon party for all her mother cared about it.

Paulina was delighted to have control of the event but suffered greatly until her mother relented and agreed to attend. Then she was on tenterhooks waiting for a formal response to their written invitations to Johan and Gillis and his wife which was delayed somewhat because the baby, Johan Jacob junior, was suffering from some childhood ailment and his mother could not bear to be parted from him. At last, the news came that all was well so the luncheon could go ahead as arranged. Now Paulina could get on with the tasks of planning and organising with which she was in her element.

Wanting to make a good impression, she decided on a formal meal in the 'new' part of the house, that is to say the part built by her great great grandfather when he came to Haastrecht in 1694. Usually more informal meals were taken in the original 'family house' adjoining it, parts of which dated back to the 16th century. Although the family house was more cosy and intimate, Paulina wanted her future husband to experience the style in which she expected to spend her married life.

Her first task was to decide with the butler on the table setting. There was no doubt in her mind but that the Meissen porcelain dinner service should be used for she adored it's delicate pink floral pattern with a simple gold band around the rim. She had a fondness for porcelain in general, fashionably aspiring to a great collection of it one day. To accompany the dinner service she chose the solid silver Sheffield cutlery, of course. To dress the table she ordered vases of flowers and the bringing out the new silver and crystal glass garnishments which she, Aggie and Theo had bought for her parents on the occasion of their silver wedding anniversary a few years previously. Silver pedestals supported crystal fruit platters, compote dishes and *bonbonnières*, their edges dripping with crystal tear-drops which would shimmer in the candlelight from the best silver candelabra. The tiered centre piece would set off the whole ensemble to perfection and leave her guests in

no doubt but that they were sitting at the table of a well-to-do family. Her next project was to decide on the food and wines that would garce her magnificent table setting.

She hated relying on the staff for advice but soon realized that she had to do so. Paulina made a list of her favourite dishes and created an opulent but ungainly menu which made cook throw her hands up in despair when it reached the kitchen. Cook was not a woman to be beaten, however, so she took up her pencil and re-worked Paulina's offering to her own satisfaction. Dishes which clashed were separated and those involving unseasonable or unobtainable ingredients, as well as those which were time-consuming or likely to overtax even her skills, were amended or replaced. This revised menu was then taken to the young mistress for final approval, the changes being tactfully explained. Luckily, Paulina was delighted with the result and had no trouble accepting that she had a lot to learn about what went into the creation of a successful menu.

When it came to choosing the wines to accompany the meal Paulina knew from the start that she was out of her depth. She understood that the wines served at a dinner were usually judged by the men at least as keenly as the table was by the women. The trouble was that she wouldn't know a good wine from a bottle of vinegar as she drank but little. In fact, she quite disapproved of alcohol but had so far kept this to herself. She had seen enough of the effects of drunkenness amongst the poor of the village to last a lifetime but was not yet able to disentangle the circumstances of poverty and the availability of cheap gin from the ease of plenty and the pleasures of fine wines. The only alcohol she allowed to pass her lips was the sweet, red vermouth she had been introduced to in Italy a few years previously. She realized that this version of a wine was an eccentric taste of hers and not something that she could expect her guests to drink throughout the meal.

The French had left behind their habit of wine drinking when they retreated back within their own borders in 1815 but the notion of keeping a private supply at home had not taken hold with the Dutch. Unlike the hot and dry lands of wine-producing France, the wet soil of the Netherlands was not conducive to the undermining of buildings with

cellars which the temperate climate, in any case, rendered unnecessary. Paulina summoned her father's favourite wine merchant to discuss placing an order. They went through the menu together, the merchant suggesting wines to compliment each dish. When the cost of the order was reckoned up Paulina was horrified and the whole process had to be gone through again but with an eye to economy this time. Somehow she just couldn't bring herself to pay the prices of some of the best wines, no matter how much she wished to impress her guests.

All these preparations did not distract her from her duties to the family estates. She enjoyed keeping detailed and accurate accounts of all the incomings and outgoings, keeping a tight grip on all the monies brought to the house by a constant stream of tenants as well as carefully monitoring the household expenses. There was also the business of sending written instructions to the various tradesmen who were required to make repairs and alterations to all the properties. Aside from such routine matters, Paulina concerned herself with the physical and moral welfare of the sick and poor of the district who either came to the door or were commended to her by the predikant. Once word got round that the young (and, so it was assumed, inexperienced) woman of the family was in sole charge, there was an increase in the number of petitioners but Paulina was determined that she should not be hoodwinked into giving charity to the undeserving so turned a deaf ear to some of the more outrageous tales of woe.

It was exhausting work which left little time for socializing with her good friends Helena and Cornelia Droost and Mientje Blankken, although they only lived a step or two away. Letter writing of a personal nature was confined to uncharacteristically brief communications with her mother, step-sister and a married friend who now lived in Aachen. Her father was out of the house most of the time, occupied with his business concerns and his civic duties which often involved long hours of travel on top of the difficult situations he had to deal with and the important decisions he needed to take. In fact, Paulina's most constant companion during this period was her journal in which she wrote avidly at every available moment, dashing off line after line in her large and flowing hand using a pencil for speed rather than the more complex demands of pen and ink. She was always to judge

that the hhat thoughts which she committed to paper during these few weeks in July were the most revealing and significant of all her writings.

The day of the luncheon seemed to come round very quickly so that, before she knew it, Paulina was being helped into her best day dress by her maid. Her mother and father had both returned to Haastrecht during the morning and were now also dressing ready to receive guests. The household staff were quietly and calmly going about thier tasks. All was well and even the sun was shining for Paulna's luncheon party.

Marcellus was in his office attending to the post which had ccumulated during his brief absence and Paulina and her mother were going over the accounts together when their guests arrived by cab from Gouda station. By the time Johan, Gillis and Mary had descended from the vehicle the Bisdome van Vliet family had made thier way to the vestibule to greet them. The sight of Johan almost took Paulina's breath away, which came as something of a relief as it would have been rather socially awkward had her feelings towards him suddenly changed.

The luncheon passed well with both Mary and her mother complimenting the tastefully laid table whilst all the men were appreciative of the choice of wines. Everyone enjoyed the plentiful food whose many courses kept them at the table until well into the afternoon. As to conversation, the men had much to talk about since, despite all being liberal in their political persuasion, they had somewhat differing views on a number of issues which needed debating. Meanwhile, the women talked about children and household matters which, having neither, rather left Paulina on the outside. Her attention tended to drift towards Johan who deftly included her in his audience when he came onto the topic of his passion for the new steamships which, he predicted, would replace the use of wind power entirely within the next decade. His knowledge of the sea and enthusiasm for the new industry of building ships using metal rather than wood and engines rather than sail captivated her with his manliness.

Once the party had eaten their fill, Paulina suggested that they took tea or coffee outside in the landscaped grounds across the lane to the front

of the house. Whilst the ladies made their way to the table and chairs which had already been set up in the shade of a large Copper Beech tree, the men retired to Marcellus's office where he offered them cognac and a choice of cigars from the three factories in Haastrecht. Gillis discretely left his brother alone with Marcellus once the comparison of cigars and cognacs had been discussed for a polite length of time. He made his way slowly through the house and out into the gardens where he found the ladies taking their tea cold against the heat of the afternoon, a habit from the East Indies which had now become fashionable back in Holland.

The private conversation between Marcellus and Johan did not take long. As Marcellus had expected, Johan formally requested his permission to pay court to Paulina using the words so carefully coached by brother Gillis. Marcellus asked Johan what his prospects were, as if he didn't already know, and made out to be modestly reassured by hearing of his considerable income from investments, his possible earnings from future sea voyages and the building of a fashionable house in Den Haag which would make a suitable family home, in due course. Marcellus made a show of giving his blessing with the caveat that Paulina herself should be agreeable to Johan's attentions, again he was privately sure that she was more than willing.

Once reunited and everyone had drunk their fill of the various beverages, Marcellus proposed a stroll in the gardens. This provided him with an opportunity to let his guests see in the flesh, as it were, the stylish landscaping that they had already admired as the setting for the 1757 family portrait of great grandfather Theodorus, with his wife and ten children. Marcellus privately held this forebear of his to be his role model. Theodorus was the first to be appointed burgemeester of Haastrecht at the beginning of the 18th century, a role which had been handed down through the Bisdome van Vliet men in an uninterrupted line ever since. Successful in business, Theodorus had been wealthy enough to be able to buy up lands around Haastrecht, which included the castle Sloot van Vliet which enabled him to engrandise the family name from the simple Bisdome of his father, Adriaan. On the home front, Theodorus had built a new wing onto the house and commissioned the Royal Gardener to lay out the grounds. Then, to

top it all, he had fathered twelve children almost all of whom had survived to adulthood without the losses in infancy and childhood which were usual.

Marcellus had inherited the family interests at the tender age of nineteen and at a time when the Golden Age of Dutch prosperity from overeseas trade was long gone. It had been as much as he could do to hold onto his inheritance let alone lay out money on house, garden or land. He had married Maria when he was thirty three and under some pressure for his mother to provide heirs. His fancy was taken by the widow Ledeboer who also lived on the Hoogstraat , and who brought lands adjoining his, as well as her three surviving children, to their union. As time was to tell, Maria's age (she three years older than him) was to lead to disappointment. They only had one child, Paulina, and this shortly after their marriage in 1839. Now he once more found himself cajoled by his mother, now aged eighty three, into finding a husband for Paulina before her child-bearing years had dwindled much further. A male heir was what was needed, especially now that Marcellus could feel the economic tide in Holland turning to the flood making a second Golden Age seemed possible. Today, he felt his hopes rise.

Whilst Marcellus conducted his guided tour of the lake, the statues of Hercules and Neptune and all the specimen trees, Paulina and Johan hung back under the pretext of inspecting in the Copper Beeches which Adriaan had planted to mark the birth of his first two sons, Jacob in 1696 and Theodorus in 1698. The pair pursues their interest in Copper Beeches by returning to the small, formal garden behind the house where Adriaan had planted his own tree upon first arrival in Haastrecht in 1694. They wandered down to the water's edge where the River Ijssel bounded the edge of the property. Here, in this public private place, Johan took the opportunity to speak his well-rehearsed lines.

"I do hope that I shall not be presuming too much upon such a short acquaintance as ours if i say that I am already at ease in your company. Would it be too much to hope that you might one day feel comfortable with me?"

Paulina could hardly keep herself from jumping into the middle of his declaration with fulsome affirmations that she reciprocated any positive feelings he might have for her. However, she, too, had been carefully prepared against the possibility of just this situation occurring. So, instead she relied in as steady a manner as she could manage,

"I, too, have felt that there is a naturalness to our meetings."

Taking his cue, Johan responded,

"Then might I hope that we might meet together more often and get to know each other further?"

"I should like that very much."

"Then it will be my pleasure to call upon you as often as you will permit me to. In the meantime, I think that it is your birthday soon and wish to offer you a gift"

With this, Johan produced a small package from his inside coat pocket and handed it to Paulina.

"It is just a small token of my esteem which I hope will remind you of me when we are apart."

Paulina unwrapped the present to find a tiny replica of a ship's cannon made out of solid silver. Before she could master her feelings she felt a flush of disappointment at such an unfeminine choice of gift. Hardly had this almost reflex response had time to enter her awareness than it was replaced in a more stable delight at his thoughtfulness. It also thrilled to have a tangible token of her womanhood, a symbol of her passage from unwanted spinster to a woman being paid court to by the man she loves. After a heartbeat's delay, Paulina smiled up at Johan and offered him her thanks - and her hand which he raised to his lips and tenderly kissed, holding her gaze with his liquid brown eyes.

With that, it was done. Paulina Maria Bisdom van Vliet was about to be courted by Johan Jacob le Fevre de Montigny. It was hard to think of anything else to say now, so the couple just looked into each other's

eyes for a second or two before turning back to the house where they quietly slid back into the company of their families.

The last day of June was Paulina's twenty-ninth birthday which made for a constant stream of callers to the house. Villagers and tenants came bearing the best of their produce that they could manage as a token of their respect: fish, meat, eggs, bread, vegetables, fruit, cheese, flowers and small pieces of various needlecrafts. Paulina stationed herself on a chair behind the streetside window nearest to the main door so that she could give a word of acknowledgement to each departing donor. More affluent well-wishers were the cause of frequent deliveries by tradesmen and by post of more substantial gifts as well as some of the newly fashionable cards. Soon every available space on top of side-boards, buffets and small tables was filled, despite the perishables having been conveyed to the pantry immediately.

Among the few callers actually admitted to the house were Paulina's friends. First came Helena and Cornelia Droost who lived in the house next door. The daughters of a wealthy Schoonhoven silver dealer, there was twenty four years difference in the sisters' ages with Helena being fourteen years older than Paulina and Cornelia ten years younger. Next to arrive was Mientje Blanken, now nearing her fortieth year, who lived with her uncle, an important figure in the village and friend of Paulina's father. Last, and in a flurry as usual, was Aaltje van Zijl who was just in her twenties and the daughter of another local family of substance. Aaltje's father was building the hofje, a courtyard of almshouses, at the poor eastside of Hoogstraat. which was a project heartily endorsed by Paulina's own father.

On being shown into the kleine salon each woman kissed Paulina three times on alternating cheeks then tendered birthday good wishes. Everyone had brought a gift so Paulina was engaged with paper and ribbon for some minutes as she revealed writing materials and the latest novel, a pair of white lace gloves and a silver-backed hand mirror, which Aaltje assured her had come from Paris. Tea and delicate little cakes were served and the women fell into comfortable conversation. With these lifelong women friends gathered around her, it was not

long before Paulina found that she could no longer keep her important news to herself;

"There have been developments in my acquaintance with Lieutenant le Fevre de Montigny. I am now officially being courted by this gentleman!"

There was an immediate clamour of excitement and congratulations followed by a great press of questions about when, where and how this happy circumstance had come about as well as demands for every kind of detail about the man himself. Paulina gleefully launched into an unnecessarily fulsome account of events and an impassioned description of Johan Jacob.

The two older women had long abandoned any hope of marriage for themselves and it was with bitter-sweet feelings that they outwardly enthused about Paulina's suitor, having privately considered her to be destined to join them in spinsterhood. Cornelia and Aaltje, on the other hand, were young and bright with romantic expectations for themselves which added a vicarious interest to their enquiries.

What started out for Paulina as the recounting of her story as if it were a fairy-tale romance slowly changed in the telling. Her narrative transformed from a description of a girl's cherished dream into a mature woman's account of a real man and an actual possibility - no, probability - that she would marry him. The atmosphere in the room seemed to gradually become more calm, perhaps in response to Paulina's increasingly down-to-earth tone. The older women exchanged glances as both privately wondered if Paulina might be having second thoughts. But before they had time to formulate discrete but probing enquiries, there was a knock at the door and a maid came in bearing another gift.

This present was a rather large package with a long letter in Aggie's hand accompanying it. Paulina laid the letter to one side to read at her leisure once her guests had departed. She requested the maid to clear the table of their now abandoned tea things and, once this had been done, laid the parcel on it in order to remove the cord and paper wrap-

pings. What was revealed was a bolt of the finest silk satin fabric in a stunning magenta. The other women crowded round the table to feel the luxuriousness of the material and admire its rare colour. As Paulina unrolled the first length of the silk the better for it to be appreciated, a small square of paper fell out onto the floor. The maid, who was lingering by the buffet too curious to leave the room, swiftly retrieved the note from the floor and handed it to Paulina. The contents were a brief, intensely private and personal communication which Paulina took in at a glance before hastily secreting it beneath the discarded wrapping paper. The note read:

"Dearest Paulina. This is for your bride dress. From your loving sister, Aegidia."

A flush spread up Paulina's neck onto her cheeks and she remained quiet and thoughtful as her friends compiled a list of all the features which a gown in this most fashionable of colours should have. They began to debate hoops as against horsehair petticoats, fringes as against ruffles, wide sleeves as against narrow cuffs and whether a lace collar or ribbons would be a flattering at the neck-line. In order to give herself time to recover her composure, and to dispatch the maid from the room, Paulina sent for the latest editions of *Le Petit Courrier des Dames* which Aggie so that the women could pursue the complicated draperies of the fashionable gowns illustrated therein.

Vroeg August 1869

Johan was enjoying himself hugely. If he had been the sort of man to reflect on life then it would have come as a surprise to him that he was so pleurably engrossed in his courtship of Paulina Maria. But he was not that sort of man so spared not a second on such thoughts. Instead, he gave himself up to the feeling of exhilaration that was the nearest he had ever got on land to those times at sea when the ship was creaming along on a running sea, sails full and it was his hands on the wheel.

To begin with he had been a reluctant suitor, already set in his bachelor ways at the age of twenty eight. Feeling himself firmly steered by both families onto his present course his independent spirit threatened to rebel, to fight against their control, with the inevitable result that the whole enterprise would have foundered. Disaster was averted, however, when the warm winds of flattery swelled his ego and he came round to his present and surprisingly comfortable heading. The realisation that he was deemed worthy to have his name associated with that of Marcellus Bisdorn van Vliet, a man whose social stature and good name in business were recognised the length of all the Great Rivers, puffed up his pride by virtue of association.

Yet there was more to this change of tack in his courtship of Paulina Maria than could be accounted for by mere flattery. Something in her response to his attentions spoke directly to a need deep within him, although he could not have said what this was. He had simply been going through social motions of courtship until a means of extricating himself presented itself, but Paulina Maria had been so receptive, so open and so guileless in her reception of him that he had been quite won over by her. Her obvious delight at everything he said and did drew him to her in anticipation of an unbounded and uncritical love such as he had not experienced since he was a boy at his mother's knee.

That first feeling of being loved so completely had ended abruptly upon the birth of his sickly younger brother who survived to distract their mother with the burden of his care. The untimely death of his father left her an impoverished widow struggling to bring up three sons in a manner which befitted their station in life. She had precious little emotional energy left for her needy second child who was dispatched to school in Hilversum and then into the Marine as soon as possible. Only now was that unacknowledged abandoned child within the adult Johan awakened to bask in the glow of the generous outpouring of adoration lavished upon him by Paulina Maria.

There had been a lot of women passing through his life since Johan entered the Marine as a youth but the pleasures of their company had rarely left any lasting impression on him. If he had ever been drawn back to any of them it could largely be accounted for by the ease of their virtue. Indeed, one of the more pleasant aspects of his residence at the Hotel De Zalm was the sweet and available maid-of-all-work who was willing to help him unmake his bed in return for the small change he left for her on the dresser. But nothing had ever recaptured for him that feeling of being loved and wanted without qualification or demands that he had lost so early in his life. Until now, that is, and with this most unlikely of women who held no more physical attraction for him that which was solely due to her sex.

Again, if he had been a man to ponder such things, Johan would have been amazed at himself for the longing he felt for Paulina Maria's company. Such was the soothing quality of his time spent with her that, had he been able to name the emotion felt upon parting from her, he would have called it grief. Paulina Maria never left him to suffer the agony of loss for long, however, as she sent him a continuous stream of long letters to which he eagerly responded. He often enclosed a new photograph of himself in his uniform as he knew this would please her and draw forth favourable comments in her next correspondence.

Thus it was with a glad heart that he viewed the prospect of spending several days in her company at the Bisdom van Vliet house in Haastrecht. He had arrived on the first Thursday in August to find that Marcellus was away from home and not expected back until dinner

time the next day. Maria Elizabeth was, as usual, much taken up with the affairs of the family's local properties and village interests. Paulina Maria normally helped her mother with these tasks but had been released from most of her duties in order to entertain their guest. The only call on her time was the management of the household during Johan's visit, which she said it was her pleasure to perform.

The weather was good on that first afternoon so he spent several happy hours with Paulina Maria on his arm as they wandered through the *overtuin* across the lane from the house. They admired the new planting which had been done, held imaginary conversations with the impressive statues of Hercules and Neptune beside the lake, fancied themselves explorers discovering the grotto on its island, then paused to look at their reflections in the water and admire the view over the farms to the windmills along the Vlist. Turning back towards the house, they peeped in at the indoor plants being propagated in orangery but found it much too hot and steamy inside to linger there for long.

They cooled down by taking cordials with Oma under the shade of the old copper beech tree in the formal garden behind the house. The old lady, now in her eighty-fourth year, had developed a tremor and Johan watched tenderly as Paulina Maria helped the old lady to drink from her cup without spills. Despite this physical sign of her advanced age, Oma seemed keen to show an interest in him and soon got him telling stories about his naval exploits. When the couple rose to leave Oma took advantage the social *largesse* granted to those of advanced years when delivering her parting shot to the couple,

"Now don't leave it too long, will you? We need children to keep the family going!"

As he lay alone in the old-fashioned cupboard bed in his room in the *familiehuis*, old Oma's words came back into Johan's head. Up to this point he had only been dimly aware of the connection between courtship and marriage, having taken more notice of scandalous relationships than the more conventional ones. His courtship of Paulina

Maria seemed to be a thing in and of itself its destination lost on the hazy horizon of the future. Suddenly the mists cleared and he saw with crystal clarity that everyone expected him to marry her and father her children.

Gilles had laid out clearly for him the expected progression from first meetings to formal application to pay court followed by the courtship itself leading up to the making of an offer of marriage. The actual goal of being married had, however, remained vague. Johan understood that a wedding marked the transition from the groom being an unattached bachelor to being a husband bound to one woman for life. Perhaps Gilles had rashly assumed that his brother comprehended the state of matrimony as well as he did himself, especially as Johan was a frequent visitor to Gilles and Maria's home where he could directly observe the well-regulated conduct of married life taking place. It might have appeared that no further elaboration of the duties and obligations involved in being a husband and father was required.

Thus it was that without a trace of hesitation or doubt Johan decided that, yes, he could live permanently with the way Paulina Maria made him feel! More than that, he could no longer contemplate life without her, the very thought of which now made him rather panic-stricken. Having reached the conclusion that he wanted her for his wife, Johan's certainty about her feelings for him suddenly began to slowly ebb away allowing the reefs of his insecurity to emerge. He drew comfort from the agony of uncertainty by snuggling down into a nest of soft mattress, feather pillows and voluminous covers. He resolved to ask for her hand as soon as an opportunity arose, before she had time to cool towards him. Yes, that is what he must do!

Having resolved on taking this course, Johan's thoughts moved on to the topic of children. The connection between sex and unwanted pregnancy, not to mention certain unmentionable diseases, had long been familiar to him. The link between marriage, sex and the inevitability, and even desirability, of procreation was something new for him to contemplate. Now he began to toss around the notion of sex for insemination rather than simply for pleasure and relief. He began to try to imagine what it would be like having conjugal relations with Paulina

Maria. It was difficult for him to think of her in that way but Oma had made it clear for him that he was to stand stallion for the Bisdom van Vliet blood line. He exercised his highly developed libidinous faculties to conjure up a vision of what lay beneath the chaste layers of Paulina Maria's clothing. He anticipated the feel of her naked breasts under his hands, finding them just as he liked breasts to be, large yet firm. His member, already tingling pleasurably, now stiffened as his imaginings shifted to the warm, moist cleft between her legs which promised to welcome him inside. Now thoroughly aroused but with no opportunity for casual female company, he had no other recourse than to seek the seaman's release.

Waking sometime later he climbed down from his bed, put on his dressing gown and slippers then went in search of the night servant to ask for brandy and a cigar to be brought to him. Thus provided for he settled into an arm chair set before the open window and shutters. Johan tried again to focus his thoughts on marriage and paternity as the night air cooled his feverish imagination. He might have reflected upon the suffering he witnessed as his parents buried yet another small coffin in the Oude Tonge churchyard. Or recalled the distress of his brother, Gilles, who could only wait impotently as Maria screamed for a whole night and most of the following day to bring his namesake into the world. Or he might have brought to mind the young life of his vibrant cousin, Elisabeth, cut short in childbirth. As it was he reflected on none of these sad events, nor did his lips form a smile at the recollection of the joy children could also bring.

What actually came to his mind was the comforting thought of how little the arrival of young Johan Jacob had altered Gillis's daily life. He was still able to go about his affairs and travel from home without hindrance. His prospective father-in-law was also a re-assuring case in point, being hardly ever at home, or so it seemed. Johan would have been loathe to curtail his activities for the sake of any child he might father, finding it difficult to rest in any one place for long. His resolve to marry Paulina Maria would have wavered had he felt his freedom of movement might be in any way curtailed. Johan was thus able to re-assure himself that he was not about to give up his liberty in any real sense but, rather, was about to gain a secure emotional future

and a ready supply of sex whilst placing himself in an advantageous social position into the bargain. Becoming fuddled with alcohol and tiredness, he burrowed back into the surprisingly comfortable old bed and was soon snoring fit to raise the roof.

The following day dawned fine and warm, offering Johan the prospect of again spending much of it out of doors, as was his preference. He missed being on board ship, if not the discipline of life at sea. The day was especially full of promise as he was to have Paulina Maria to himself for several hours before they would be obliged to join her parents and Oma for a family meal. Paulina Maria had appeared at breakfast wearing a light gown with a rather lower neckline than was usual for her. The flimsy dress in combination with the sheer, almost transparent, fabric of the modesty scarf which covered the gap from *decolletage* to neck was enticingly suggestive of the ample bosom beneath, a choice of attire which he regrettably attributed entirely to the hot weather and not at all to a desire to raise any passion in him.

Once their coffee and bread had been taken, Paulina Maria announced that she wanted him to accompany her to the stables in order to inspect the new carriage horse that had been her birthday gift from her parents. She suggested that afterwards they might have the horse harnessed to the *sjees* and take a drive along the dyke-top to the village of Willige Langerak on the banks of the River Lek. It soon became clear to him that horses and horse-drawn transport was a keen interest of hers, but unfortunately one that he did not share.

Perhaps conditioned by his father's ill-humoured old nag, Johan had grown up distrustful of horses, finding them alarmingly large, powerful and unpredictable. The movement of their gangling legs made his feet ache at the very thought of them getting caught between iron-shod hoof and hard earth. Their strong jaws and massive teeth threatened to wreak havoc with his flesh as their long necks seemed able to rotate their huge heads in every conceivable direction, offering little hope of escape. He fancied that their bulging eyes followed his every move with nothing but evil intent in them, especially when the whites showed. Altogether, he regarded the horse as a beast of wilful malev-

olence which he could not believe capable of human subjugation and was thankful that they had no place at sea.

With Paulina Maria's firm grip on his arm, Johan found himself propelled towards the stables at a pace which brooked no hesitation. Fortunately for the course of their courtship, his equine anxieties soon evaporated with the moral heat created by the motion of Paulina Maria's breasts which were thrust upwards by her corset and barely concealed by the flimsiest of summer fabrics. Not only could he snatch surreptitious glimpses of her magnificent *decolletage* but he could also relish the sensation of an occasional brush of clothed breast against his upper arm, not to mention the insinuation of a sturdy thigh against his as she strode along beside him despite the thickness of her horse-hair petticoats. All in all he found himself rendered incapable of uttering anything coherent, let alone negative, on the subject of horses, being so distracted that he could barely follow the thread of her bright chatter. In his not trivial experience of women he had learnt that they were all too aware of the physical signals they were sending through these slight contacts and glimpses of barely concealed flesh. To his delight, Johan took Paulina Maria to be flirting with him sexually!

Once they had arrived at the stables Paulina Maria bade the head ostler lead out her new horse. Emerging from the gloom of her stall, the animal started at the brightness of the external world causing Johan's heart to lurch. The ostler soon calmed the mare with soft words and a gentle hand then began to lead her up and down the yard for the admiration of her visitors. The animal's coat gleamed in the sunshine, emphasising the toned muscles that underlay her supple movements. The delicate way in which she placed her feet and her responsiveness to the lightest touch from the ostler began to entrance Johan. A tattoo beat out from the man's clogs and the beast's iron shoes striking the cobbled ground as the mare was put through her paces: walking, turning, trotting and turning to walk past them again. Johan began to be mesmerised by the sounds, by the oneness of man and mare, and by the sheer beauty and grace of the animal.

Finally the ostler brought the horse to a halt before them making her stand so as to be presented to best advantage for their inspection. Fol-

lowing Paulina Maria's lead, Johan ran his hand along the animal's neck, thrilling to the feel of her firm flesh beneath the warm, velvet of her coat. He was given carrot and apple pieces to hold out on the palm of his hand for the mare to take. The horse's breath was warm on his skin as her soft lips delicately felt for the food before gently lifting it from him with a watchmaker's precision. He found himself fascinated by the fine skin and few long whiskers of her muzzle, by the pulsating and deep nostrils that softly inhaled and exhaled, and by her unfocused brown eyes which suggested nothing so much as a benign character. Unable to resist exploring her face further, he ran his hand over her forehead, ears, and mane before his enchantment was broken by the ostler's discrete cough.

As the mare was led away to be put into harness, Johan turned to Paulina Maria and offered her his arm for the return walk to the house. He found her gazing into his eyes and smiling contentedly. His heart filled with such joy that he could barely stop himself from acting without decorum. He wanted to shout, to laugh loudly and to catch Paulina Maria up by the waist and run with her. Self-control was necessary as their path soon crossed with that of three servants traveling in an open cart with whom greetings and cheery waves were exchanged. Paulina Maria explained that a picnic was being sent on ahead and would be laid out ready for them to take lunch when they got to her father's *jachthuis* in Willige Langerak. What a miracle of organisation she was, thinking of everything and arranging it just so! He must have her as his wife!

Johan's high spirits soon suffered a knock, however. He readied himself to drive out then joined Paulina Maria to wait in the vestibule for their transport to be brought to them, Paulina Maria having changed into a different and more decorous outfit to suit the upcoming activity. A clearly expensive and very ornately decorated *sjees* appeared with a uniformed groom leading the magnificent mare, who was now between the delicate shafts of the carriage. Johan found himself fervently hoping that he would not be required to take the driving seat. He could see that the light, two-seater conveyance had no box for a coachman nor was there a pair of horses to suggest that a postilion might appear

and ride the leader. Johan could barely sit a horse much less drive one so the prospect of being put in charge of such a refined and costly rig as that drawing up before him filled him with horror. Would Paulina Maria consider it unmanly of him were he to decline to take the reins? Could he avoid the shame of discovery if he were to conceal his shortcomings behind an exhibition of bravado in the driving seat? Images of every sort of carriage accident known to him passed before his mind's eye causing his courage to take flight. A paralysis seized him such as he had never known even in the worst of conditions at sea.

It was with a not inconsiderable measure of relief that Johan realised that Paulina Maria was heading determinedly for the left seat in the *sjees*. Hastily mastering himself, Johan helped her up into the carriage then walked round to the right side and climbed in himself. Once they were settled, sitting close together as dictated by the lack of space, Paulina Maria signalled to the man at the horse's head that they were to set off. Soon they were on their way through the village and onto the Vlisterdijk road towards Shoonhoven and it was only then that she explained the rather unconventional seating arrangement as only prudent with a relatively untried horse which had never pulled a *sjees* before or been driven by anyone in the household apart from herself and her father. She wished to spare Johan the responsibility of driving in these circumstances and hoped that he would not be offended. He was not, he assured her, managing to present a graceful acceptance of the imposed circumstances which avoided his having to confess his shortcoming as a suitor.

As they passed slowly and sedately along the Hoogstraat, the men they passed doffed their hats and women dipped little curtsies. Johan was unaware of it but their route out of the village carefully avoided the poorer dwellings to the east of the Grote Haven in favour of passing the best houses and the thriving businesses. Just beyond the village they came in sight of an octagonal windmill which Paulina Maria named for him as Boezemmolen Number Six, which seemed a rather prosaic name for the gracefully curved structure with its reed thatch top coat and almost rakish 'tail' ladder. Looking ahead Johan could make out six or seven more windmills along the River Vlist, although these were of a smaller, simpler design. He remarked that the land

below the dijk seemed still quite waterlogged, even after the recent dry spell, voicing some surprise that none of these drainage mills had their sails turning despite a reasonable breeze having got up. Paulina Maria explained that one of the other duties of the servants in the cart ahead of them had been to instruct the millers to stop the sails until their *sjees* had passed. The Gouda to Schoonhoven Post Coach had also been held back to let them go on ahead of it as well as any vagrants or beggars cleared out of their path.

The way having been prepared for them, the journey passed most pleasantly. Johan had all the mills and farms named for him and anecdotes told about the local characters who inhabited them. It soon became clear to him that Paulina Maria and her mother not only controlled all that he could see with a firm business hand, they also took an interest in the lives of their tenants. Families suffering sickness and hardship received assistance so that none should be destitute through no fault of their own. Although Paulina Maria did not talk about this, he soon deduced for himself how delicate the balance between water, wind and land was. As high tides and heavy rainfall raised water levels in the River Vlist, which ran between the larger rivers of the IJssel and Lek and drew water from both of them, the land would flood. If the wind to turn the mills did not come then it would not be possible to pump the water off the land so it would remain waterlogged. Animals would die, crops would fail and diseases thrive in the stagnant water so that all who drank from it risked illness and even death. Being at the mercy of wind and water was something he could understand and came as a welcome antidote to the earlier social shortcomings he had felt. It was just a pity that the mill arms had their canvasses rolled up as he would have enjoyed hearing the rush of the sails as the wind gave up its power to them and the wood of the mill structures creak and groan in response to the motion.

His equilibrium restored, Johan now took advantage of their close physical proximity and the time on their hands to pay attention to his courtship of Paulina Maria. He began with the usual compliments on appearance: the colour of her carriage dress bringing out the colour of her eyes, the attraction of the fineness of her complexion, the inviting shape and colour of her lips, and so on. He leant close to her so

that he could speak softly into her ear whilst considering how to slip his arm around her waist, a liberty which would allow him to explore the corsetry beneath her dress for its hints about the flesh beneath. She seemed to accept his attentions with some warmth yet she did not respond physically as he had anticipated she might, so he held back from pressing her too far for fear of rejection. He fancied that Paulina Maria was only feigning her concentration on driving out of decorum, regarding himself as fortunate that she had her hands full with the horse's reins and was constrained to be close to him by the confines of the carriage.

Passing what seemed to be the last mill before coming to a village, Johan rallied his interest as Paulina Maria told him about it. His attentiveness was part courtship ploy as well as a half genuine enquiry and turned out to be successful on both counts as the mill's long history was recounted with some enthusiasm. The current Bonrepasmolen, he was told, was the latest to be built on the site of the earliest mill in South Holland, with the collapse of the access bridge and loss of wind dogging the one attempt made to re-locate the mill to the opposite side of the Vlist. Hearing them approaching, Miller Prins came out of the reed-thatched pyramid of a house that he and his family occupied beneath the wooden cap of the mill and proudly held up his baby son, Arie, for the lady and her guest to admire. Paulina Maria caused the *sjees* to be halted briefly, producing a coin from some concealed place in her skirts which she instructed Johan to give to the miller. This achieved, they continued with their journey and, to his joy, Paulina Maria leant conspiratorially towards Johan. This was for nothing more romantic than to quietly explain that she wished to discourage Miller Prins from presenting the child at the house since he was unlikely to resist using the occasion as an excuse to petition her mother and herself for money to enlarge the mill's house to accommodate his growing family. It was the view of her parents that the miller was lucky to have work and a home so should be grateful not greedy. Lacking any grounds to contradict her, Johan joined the whispered conspiracy against the miller as the only way he could see to pursue his courtship.

Their destination was soon in view as the Vlist swung round to pass the village of Willige Langerak to their right. Leaving the dijk, they

turned down beside the church before taking a narrow lane to their left and halting the *sjees* before the door of a long, low house. An elderly man appeared from within, followed by the three Haastrecht servants, all four lining up to welcome them. Johan hastily stepped down from the carriage and hastened to assist Paulina Maria ahead of the waiting staff. Although the *sjees* was extremely well sprung and deeply upholstered he was relieved to be able to straighten his body and stretch his long legs. Paulina Maria introduced the old man as Jan de Gier who acted as caretaker of the *jachthuis* then invited Johan to enter the house with her. Once inside Paulina Maria disappeared into a distant room along with her maid and he was shown to his own room where Jan de Gier's son was on hand to help him to make himself comfortable and clean after the dusty journey.

The refreshment provided with lunch was most welcome and Johan partook of several glasses of an excellent Spätburgunder with which to wash down a hearty serving of cold meats, cheeses and filled breads from the buffet awaiting them. He noticed that Paulina only drank seltzer water but made up for this abstemiousness with a hearty appetite for the food, especially the sweet dishes which were brought in once they had finished with the savouries. By the time they had eaten their fill they had been more than an hour and a half at table, the time being consumed in no small part by the passage of easy conversation between them. Nevertheless Johan was starting to feel restless and was pleased to follow up on a talking point by suggesting a stroll to the nearby church.

On leaving the *jachthuis* they turned right along the lane for the short walk to their destination, glad of the shade of the few trees at the edge of the gardens as the heat of the day reached its mid-afternoon intensity. The low body of the church was painted white with the addition of a short, square, tower at its western end built in grey stone, the whole looking very neat and well-kept. As they approached the portico over the entrance hall the Pastor, having heard them coming, appeared round the corner from the graveyard with the intention of opening the doors for them and assisting them in any further way they might require. However, Paulina Maria deftly dismissed the man say-

ing that she was sufficiently familiar with the interior of the church. Johan was thankful for her tact as he so desperately wanted to have her completely to himself at last with nothing to distract her from his attentions.

In the cool of the interior they made a brief tour of inspection of what little there was to see in this simple place of worship, relaxing some of their social guardedness in response to the calm atmosphere that often characterises old churches and is so soothing to the spirit. Johan chose a bench by the wall and drew Paulina Maria to sit beside him where they were companionably and contentedly silent for a while. Then Johan gently took her hand and lifted it briefly to his lips before asking;

"Would you do me the honour of considering becoming my wife?"

He had not exactly planned to propose in this place and at this time, but it had been on his mind to speak to Paulina Maria as soon as he had the opportunity. He rather fancied that she might wish to take time to consider the matter especially as he was starting to realize that there were differences between them. He worried that she might reject him since it was becoming obvious that their lives took different paths with his being so unlike that of her father that she might not be able to accommodate his ways. Although he badly needed to make certain of her, he was actually somewhat unnerved by her immediate acceptance of his offer of marriage. Had she really thought the matter over? Would she change her mind later and break their engagement on further reflection?

Johan now sought to ease his insecurity by suggesting that their nuptials should take place as soon as possible, a course of action to which Paulina Maria instantly agreed. He and his new fiancée sat together in the old church, talking together in hushed tones as they planned how to make their important announcement and when the wedding should take place. Everything went smoothly as Paulina Maria knew exactly what was needed and soon put her organisational skills to work, relieving him of much of the detailed decision-making, for which he was ill-equipped anyway. By the time they left the church Johan knew

exactly what he was to do and when in making the announcement of their forthcoming marriage to their respective families and friends.

Although the success of his suit brought an immediate feeling of relief and even satisfaction, he still felt a vague sense of unease. It would seem that Paulina Maria had already secured the blessing of her family in anticipation of his proposal yet he wondered why they had not found a better match for her than his unworthy self. Somehow it had all been too easy, leaving him with the suspicion that he had overlooked some flaw in the Bisdome van Vliet's in general or Paulina Maria in particular. Or was it simply that they had not seen through him despite their worldly wisdom? A new anxiety began to form in his mind to replace his earlier fear of rejection. As the couple made the return journey to Haastrecht by *sjees* the notion slowly crystallised in his mind that Paulina Maria's family were about to give him a place among them solely by virtue of their own misguidedness. If they knew him for the undeserving wretch that he really was then he would not be about to occupy the exalted position of Paulina Maria's husband. He had secured entry to their patrician family through marriage but was unworthy of it and now felt the cold fingers of insecurity again reaching for his heart.

As the Bisdome van Vliet family gathered before dinner on Friday 6th August Johan was pleased to announce that he and Paulina Maria were to be married as soon as everything could be put in place. Her family were delighted although the women were at first somewhat perturbed that there was to be no formal period of engagement with all its associated social and sartorial benefits, not to mention the jewelery. Then Marcellus voiced the view that the couple were old enough to know their own minds and any undue delay would serve no useful purpose - a view no doubt bolstered by the brisk and businesslike approach he and Maria had taken towards their own wedding. Soon all concerns were put aside and a toast made to the betrothed pair.

The discussion during the meal concluded with an almost military plan of action having been drawn up. Throughout that evening and the following day messengers came and went and the house bustled with

constant activity and buzzed with hasty consultations. Johan found himself swept along on the tide of activity, collapsing exhausted into his bed that night with no energy left with which to worry about anything. There seemed very little that he could actually contribute apart from his general enthusiasm for all that was going on around him and participation in any necessary formalities. His only personal task was to write to his brother with the good news and an invitation for Gillis and Mary to dine at Haastrecht that Sunday evening. Their hearty congratulations and acceptance of the dinner invitation came by immediate return.

In what seemed like no time at all the official procedures began with a visit to the Raadhuis for the Huwelijksafkondigingen which publicly proclaimed their wedding in writing. There was some urgency in doing this as it was required that their should be two weeks for any objectors to come forward before the actual wedding day itself. The next day they attended Sunday morning service in the Hervormde Kerk for the announcement of their wedding to the congregation. The Pastor was a friend of Marcellus's so had already visited the house and, over refreshments, a relaxed and happy discussion of the detailed wedding arrangements had resulted in Johan and Paulina Maria emerging with a clear idea of what was to happen. Being the Burgermeester, Marcellus himself had organised the civil marriage ceremony in the Raadhuis that would precede the Church wedding, the date set for both ceremonies being August 20th.

Although Johan was familiar with the exterior of the church, whose brick tower topped with a three-tiered white belfry dominated the village skyline, he had never been inside. The family had explained that this was not the original building as this had been destroyed by fire and rebuilt twice since its 13th century foundation. The last reconstruction in the 17th century had left the old choir section outside the walls which resulted in an unusual T-shaped interior. He had been shown the base of the choir walls and the grave stones covering its vaults which were now open to the elements and to public use. Now, as they entered the church, Marcellus and Paulina Maria took him aside in order to show him the Bisdom van Vliet family vault. Beneath the looping script and decorative curlicues carved into the stone covering the

vault lay the remains of Paulina Maria's ancestors. The rather chilling thought that he could well join them was a rather sobering thought.

As he joined the family in their accustomed pew Johan was acutely aware that he was the object of barely concealed scrutiny by the churchgoers gathered in the rows behind them. His presence at the house on Hoogstraat could hardly have gone unremarked in such a small and close-knit community as Haastrecht and the gossip surrounding himself and Paulina Maria must have been rife. So, when the Pastor made the announcement that their marriage was to take place in less than two week's time a breaking wave of whispers and rustling clothing broke across the congregation. Johan felt their eyes upon him as he turned towards Paulina Maria and they exchanged smiles. Once the service was over the Bisdom van Vliet family party were the first to leave the church but nevertheless found themselves waylaid by well-wishers and the just plain curious, causing them to be considerably delayed on their return to the house.

After a hasty lunch everyone but Johan resumed their busy wedding preparations. Lingered at the table with a much-needed glass of wine to hand he struggled with a cross-current of emotions. He had been caught up by the general excitement of the wedding announcement and the press of people outside the church but now found that the celebratory mood this had induced in him seemed to be shared neither by his bride-to-be nor by his hosts who all now adopted a cool, businesslike demeanor. A sense of not being part of the whole process of organising the marriage - his marriage - and of being relegated to the side-lines was at odds with wanting to share his happiness. Soon he took his lifelong recourse from the feeling of being abandoned and went in search of some independent activity in which he could bury himself. Since Marcellus had offered him the use of his library and workroom it was to this secluded place that Johan retreated with a view to reading the newspapers for the day.

At first he just skipped through the news without taking much in as he was not in a settled enough frame of mind to undertake the onerous task of reading about national and provincial politics. Suddenly his eye was taken by a small item that immediately captured his full

attention since it concerned a lady with whom he had some acquaintance. Back in 1861 he had been serving on a ship making passage between Den Haag and Alexandria in the company of three ladies who, much to the irritation of the officers and crew, they had been ordered to convey in the best possible comfort. The youngest, Alexine Tinne, had attained some notoriety as a pioneering photographer and fearless traveller. She was also among the wealthiest women in the Netherlands. Accompanied by her widowed mother, her maternal aunt, their several maids and a vast amount of luggage, accommodating them had caused serious disruption on board. Although only a few years his senior and not unpleasing to look on, Vrouw Tinne did not attract him in the usual way. For one thing, her mode of dress was nothing short of bizarre and for another she had about her a steely determination to go her own way in the world which quite threatened the young officer.

Much had been forgiven her, however, when she began to enlivened dinners in the officers quarters with her vivid accounts of her experiences whilst travelling through Egypt, Palestine and Syria as well as of her time living in Beirut, all of which were regarded as territories too dangerous for a woman to enter. The officers were all enchanted by her description of her planned expedition in search of the source of Nile, a feat attempted by few men let alone by woman, and one which they all secretly wished they could undertake. Once back in Holland he had hastened to acquire the maps and charts which would enable him to see where she was about to venture, spending endless hours trying to work out her possible routes and imagining the hazards and wonders she would encounter along the way. Over the next few years he bought every book and paper published about her expeditions and pieced together a dismaying tale of abandoned hopes as the river proved unnavigable and illness struck. Vrouw Tinne's mother, aunt and two of her maids died during her second attempt to penetrate the heart of Africa and she had been very ill herself. Privately he considered it a tribute his idea of feminine correctness that they had continued to keep up their Dutch standards of toilette and domestic routine in the face of such a hostile environment.

Now he was disturbed to read that Vrouw Tinne had disappeared during her latest expedition, along with two Dutch sailors who were part

of her *entourage*. Her caravan had set out some weeks previously with the intention of crossing the Sahara desert in order to encounter the nomadic Tuareg tribes. She seemed to have made contact with some tribal leaders upon arriving safely at Marzuk but since then nothing had been seen or heard of her. She had failed to make contact with a fellow explorer in the area who had set up a rumour that fleeing survivors from her caravan told of an ambush and many deaths. Vrouwe Tinne's safety was feared for, in short. Johan wanted to see for himself what kind of geographical location she might be in and the physical challenges she was facing. He got up and began to look through the cupboards and bookshelves in the hope of an atlas to help him in his quest.

At the fourth try he opened a cupboard to find the welcome sight of three rows of the familiar tubes of twenty or so rolled-up maps which Marcellus had neatly arranged inside. Johan reverently lifted them out one by one, unrolling each in turn on the top of the large table in the centre of the room, holding down their four corners with convenient small, heavy objects. Thus he took stock of the treasure he had found, carefully rolling each map up and replacing it in the cupboard as he finished with it. There was, of course, nothing on Africa but instead a wealth of material relating to Holland in general and to the Krimpen-erwaard in particular, some of it familiar from his own collection and even some of the work of his grandfather. Several river charts took his interest as either very old or for their obvious use as working documents which had been annotated in the process of taking water management decisions. After some deliberation, he chose one from among them for closer scrutiny.

He reverently laid out what he recognised as a hand-coloured print on paper made from a copper engraving of the original chart as drawn by Melchior Bolstra in the middle of the last century. He knew that it was one of a set of seven sheets which covered the whole of the River Lek, part of a mapping exercise which covered all the rivers of Holland. This particular sheet showed the reach of the river that passed Willige Langerak, a village which now held sentimental interest for him. Only forty or so copies of Bolstra's maps had been produced, their ownership restricted to officials of the Hoogheemraadschap van

Rijnland and the local river and polder boards. None had been allowed into general circulation and many were now lost from sight. Marcellus's forbears had clearly been involved in the making of important decisions about the management of the Lek which were to prove successful in preventing the repeated flooding that had occurred since the Spyk dyke breach in 1740. The map had also been used in their deliberations about work on the bed of the river which would ensure that it remained an efficient navigation route for shipping.

Bolstra had undertaken a meticulous survey of the Lek between 1750 and 1754, following the principles introduced by Cruquius which combined rigorously gathered quantitative data with the usual cartographic drawing. Unlike Cruquius, Bolstra did not keep his data in separate tables but integrated it into the chart itself to produce an accurate representation of the river bed and the other topographical elements of the fluvial environment. Johan knew that, although Bolstra had amassed data concerning the depth of the river and the shape of the river bed, he was yet to develop the system of contour lines. He was also aware that the results of Bolstra's research into river flow were never applied to the chart, although they had been available in manuscript form. Rather less of a shortcoming in Johan's view was the lack of detail included about the land beyond the river and its banks and dykes, a focus on navigation by water which showed the map-maker to be of like minds with himself.

After some moments in silent appreciation of the history of the chart before him, Johan delved into the breast pocket of his coat and removed a square pouch made of soft leather from which he carefully slid his folding brass magnifying glass. He opened the glass out so that it rested on its frame with the lens at just the right height to bring the details of the chart into focus. Now he bent to the happy task of reading the old chart before him, as others might read a sheet of music or a good book. In his blood ran the gift of visualising mere lines on paper as the very thing that they had been made to represent. So, the territory mapped rose in his mind's eye as a three-dimensional landscape, coloured and in motion as nature and man had made it. Not only that but he could move about in this inner world: altering course here and altitude there, compensating for wind and current, avoiding

the precipice and finding the track most economical of effort. Then, at will, his perspective would shift back to the drawing before him and a course to run would appear to him as clearly as if the line to follow had already been drawn upon the paper.

Now he saw, as if he were there, the river gently curving to port before him as it flowed towards the sea, the low water lazy at the turn of a neap tide and depleted by the summer sun. To starboard he perceived the pattern of ditches, walls and triangular bastions that made up the six-pointed defensive star that protected Nieuwpoort against artillery attack. Ahead and to port rose Schoonhoven's larger, eight-pointed *trace italienne* fortifications beyond which the river made a turn to starboard before evaporating at the western edge of the chart. He could see that, as well as protecting against attack by man, these ramparts would save both cities from floods, the harbours and shipyards tucked behind them providing refuge for shipping.

Having looked around him in a general way, Johan now turned his attention to the north bank just before Schoonehoven where the village of Willege Langerak lay tucked behind a shallow dyke. He passed across the shallows at the edge of the river and floated up and over the dyke to the gratifying sight of the church with its tower ahead of him looking almost exactly as it had a century later on. The gentlest of smiles warmed his face at the recollection of the day that he had spoken to Paulina Maria within with such a happy outcome. Turning to look at what was now the *jachthuis* he found instead two ramshackle cottages and was reminded of the Bisdom van Vliet's wealth which had enabled these mean dwellings to be transformed into the well-appointed hunting lodge and stables that he had visited.

Having made his sentimental journey to Willige Langerak he floated over fields and dykes to Schoonhoven itself where he became engrossed in exploring the harbour and waterways that were so much a part of the old city, losing himself in how life was before the steam engine and the river improvements. The weight of a hand on his shoulder roused Johan to the present and to Paulina Maria beside him.

"We thought we had lost you, nobody has seen you for hours! I'm glad that we could provide you with something to occupy you and only sorry to have to disturb you, but it is time to dress for dinner. Your brother and our other guests are expected shortly."

Johan took his watch from his waistcoat pocket and looked in disbelief at the time.

"Thank you for coming to find me, my dear. I shall just replace this chart then go to make myself ready for our celebration dinner."

He took Paulina Maria's hand and raised it to his lips, causing her a slight giggle at the tickle of his moustaches, then turned to roll up Bolstra's chart. Paulina Maria filled with a warm glow as she took in the curve of his strong back bent over the table. Next he went about the business of placing the chart among its fellows in their cupboard. She could barely resist reaching out to touch his beautiful dark hair. Order restored to the maps, he turned towards her and they fell into an unpremeditated mutual embrace, heedless of the possibility of being observed.

Paulina Maria was wearing her new Bride Dress for the first time that evening. As Johan returned to her side, dressed for dinner and ready to receive the congratulations of their guests, he complimented her on it fulsomely, although privately he wondered at her choice of such a bold hue which was a surprisingly fashionable choice for her. Although her complexion could stand up to the colour, the gown itself was so busy with every form of adornment that it quite swamped even Paulina Maria's robust frame and owed its design to no form of fashion that he knew of. He suspected Paulina Maria's own whims had steered its creation and quailed somewhat at the thought that she would be wearing this same garment to all their engagements between now and the end of the honeymoon, and that it would live on in perpetuity in their wedding photographs. He would now have to reconsider wearing his full dress uniform for their big day as Paulina Maria's gown would undoubtedly distract everyone's attention from it.

As the guests for their dinner party began to arrive and assemble in the Grote Salon Johan was introduced to Marcellus' brother, Otto Braet Bisdom van Cattenbroek, and his wife, Adelaide. Paulina Maria's uncle, who was called Braet by everyone, seemed a rather dull old chap compared to the cheery and sociable Marcellus. Despite being Marcellus's younger brother by four years Braet's hair was quite grey. His heavy eyelids drooped as though weary of looking at the world and his mouth came to rest with its corners turned down in lamentation of his lot in life. From the conversation amongst the Bisdom family Johan gathered that Uncle Braet was an Advocate of some importance in the city of Utrecht and had taken the van Cattenbroek name from his lands a few miles upstream along the Hollandse Ijssel near the city of Montfoort. It seemed to Johan that Uncle Braet had got himself out from under the shadow of his prominent sibling by removing himself from South Holland to Utrecht and its Province, altering his name to simply Braet van Cattenbroek and seeking prominence in a different public sphere.

By contrast, Vrouw van Cattenbroek appeared to be much younger being possessed of an open, round face which displayed few signs of a care-worn personality. Her buxom figure and straight brown hair were simply dressed giving an air of motherliness about her. Just as Gillis and Mary had named their first-born Johan Jacob after him so Braet and Adelaide had named their firstborn after Paulina Maria. This youngest Paulina Maria was now in her twenty-first year so it seemed a shame that she had not been invited that evening. He lost count of their other children who were mostly girls with the only boy he registered being ten-year-old 'Freddie'. He found all the talk around him was of children which was rather tedious and he idly wondered if his view of them would change when his own arrived on the scene. For now, though, he was reduced to making polite noises as his mind attempted to desert to more interesting matters. He had even more of a struggle to keep up appearances when the women of the party began to make admiring comments about Paulina's Bride Dress and invited him to agree with them. He was never so grateful as when the butler announced that dinner was to be served.

A few glasses of wine and he began to feel more relaxed, although he felt he could contribute little of substance to the dinner table talk. Everyone wanted to know the details of the wedding, the wedding party, the honeymoon and where they planned to establish their home. On most topics he was as uninformed as all the other guests and learned a lot from the Paulina Maria's account of what was planned. It appeared was his task to arrange the honeymoon but it had come as quite a shock to him that he was expected to have this well in hand already when, in fact, he had given it no thought until now. He tried to hide behind a wish to keep it a secret from Paulina Maria but nobody believed that such a thing was possible so he was forced to make a plan on the spur of the moment. He remembered Paulina Maria showing him her albums from the coach trip she had made through the Alps to Italy and how enthusiastically she talked of the water, flora and fauna she had seen along the way. Inspired by the notion of water, he broadly hinted that they would be visiting the Mediterranean in the South of France before passing through to the lakes of Italy and Switzerland. To his great relief this suggestion clearly pleased and excited Paulina Maria so met with general approval. He only hoped that he would be able to make good on what was now taken to be his promise.

Paulina Maria and Marcellus were had already compiled a list of guests for the wedding party to which Gillis and Johan had contributed as many of names of family, friends and professional that they could think of. The Tivoli in Utrecht, owned by another of Marcellus's friends, had been chosen as the most suitable venue for this prestigious event. The city had good water, rail and road links across the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium with plenty of respectable accommodation to be had. The Tivoli consisted of an attractive park within which a grand hall had recently been built as an improved venue for the concerts that the gardens were known for. The replacement of the old wooden concert hall with a larger, stone-faced building now meant that this Grote Zaal had attained a reputation for hosting grand events, such as the 50th anniversary masquerade of the Utrecht university in 1868. Thus it was considered by the family to have the right pedigree for such a significant occasion as the marriage of Marcellus and Maria

Bisdom van Vliet's only daughter which needed to be socially conspicuous.

A scheduling problem had then arisen because the guest list was so long that it would require two separate sittings in order to accommodate everyone. Paulina Maria had therefore decided that two identical wedding parties would be held on consecutive days but this was not easy to arrange as the hall had other bookings and the caterers needed time to prepare. In the end she arranged that the wedding parties should take place on the Monday and Tuesday preceding the formal ceremonies scheduled for Friday the twentieth. She anticipated that they would depart for their honeymoon on Saturday the twenty-first, an idea which Johan did not disabuse her of. Once again, Johan was impressed by her ability to organise matters, especially as she already had preparations well in hand for the dual parties which were now only just over week away. Uncle Braet roused himself to give his blessing to the choice of the Tivoli venue and to offer the family accommodation for the duration of their stay in Utrecht as well as volunteering his wife's local knowledge of the best catering suppliers.

By the end of the meal Johan's head was swimming with information, as well as the various wines and spirits which he had sampled. It was no wonder that the house had been such a hive of activity since he and Paulina Maria had made their announcement. He could now see why Paulina Maria had made no time for him and could appreciate what a remarkable amount she had achieved in only a short time. He was now to return to Den Haag with Gillis and Mary and he was glad of some quiet time alone with his own people, finding it was relaxing to be able to be calm with them as a respite from the whirlwind of the dinner party. They were concerned that matters were moving too fast for him, despite wishing to see the match settled in short order. Johan confessed that his head was spinning at the scale and speed of what felt like a military operation set in train to the end of a rather more splendid wedding than he could ever have envisaged, but he did not want to change anything. He could adjust to the situation and was already starting to think about how he could play his own, distinctive part in it all.

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The man considered it a sound investment to spend a few days working at a menial task for poor payment whilst enduring the bullying tirades of the nasty little chap who considered himself to be his superior. He laboured away fetching and carrying everything from heavy tables to the starched white cloths that would cover them, from boxes of silver cutlery to delicate floral arrangements, from crates of Champagne to trays of the fragile glasses from which it would be drunk. Then the pace changed as the tables were dressed and the places set with a military regularity that was checked with a measuring stick to ensure perfect spacings and alignments. Once the Tivoli's *grote zaal* had been laid out to the exacting standards of the overseer, the hired help were given time to rest and eat a basic meal of bread and cheese washed down with water or milk that was not provided out of any concern for the workers' welfare but from the necessity of discouraging them from helping themselves from the food and drink intended for the banquet.

After being sent away to clean themselves up and put on the uniforms that would transform them from workmen into stewards, their next task was to greet the guests, surreptitiously checking that they were *bona fide* before showing them to their proper places. Two long tables ran the length of the *grote zaal* from the slightly raised top table which stretched across the head of the room. In the centre of the top table and right opposite the main doors so that it was the first thing the guests would see as they entered the *room* was the grand 'throne' upon which the bride and groom would sit beneath its fragrant canopy of pine branches which symbolised the evergreen nature the marital bond. Someone had put considerable diplomatic effort into the seating plan for the two long tables, making sure that the most important guests were seated in their proper order of importance whilst avoiding *cliques* or uncomfortable clashes of interests or personalities. So, it

had been impressed upon the stewards that no changes of place whatsoever were to occur, either by accident or design.

Although there was still an hour or more to go before the event was due to start, well-dressed men and women were already arriving and milling about the gardens. Whilst his colleagues were content to wait at the doors to the *grote zaal* for guests to approach them, the man set about unobtrusively identifying the wanderers and the new arrivals, shepherding them towards the stewards at the doors without them noticing either him or his influence upon them. His invisibility enabled him to overhear snippets of unguarded conversation, making good use of his knowledge of languages other than Dutch, and observe subtleties of behaviour. He noticed who bribed his colleagues in order to be seated nearer to whom, or further away from whom. This was why he was here, to gather information that would no doubt be of use to him in his usual, more lucrative, occupation. To this end he used his keen awareness of what was going on around him to avoid being co-opted to help with managing the press of carriages clogging the drive or carrying in the food which was being delivered to the back door.

As the last guests took their seats in good time for the arrival of the bride and her wedding party, the man insinuated himself into a position where he would naturally be attending to the most important guests who were placed near to the top table. At 17.00 hours exactly, Paulina Maria Bisdom van Vliet swept into the room and took her place on the 'throne' in the centre of the top table. The familiar figures of her father and uncle, brother-in-law Viruly and Gilles le Fevre de Montigny, all accompanied by their wives, followed her along with her soon-to-be husband, about whom the man knew more than he had ever told. The women of the party seated themselves amid much arranging of skirts whilst the men had only to worry about their coat tails. The bride was joined on the 'throne' by Johan Jacob le Fevre de Montigny seated to her left whilst her father was on her right flank. Once the top table had settled themselves and an expectant hush had descended upon the assembled body the Master of Ceremonies stepped forward and set the nuptial celebrations in motion with the traditional welcome:

Blijde feestdag, blijde feestdag, blijde feestdag

Wij juighen u tegen

Gij bragt aan de burger een zeer grote zegen

De velden doorklonk het uit iederen mond

Blijde feestdag, blijde feestdag

Ter eere van Bruid en Bruidegom

Een hartelijk welkom

Happy holiday, happy holiday, happy holiday

We cheer you

You brought to the citizen a very large blessing

It rings through the fields from every mouth

Happy holiday, happy holiday

For the honour of bride and groom

A warm welcome

A huge cheer rang out from the guests who clapped the couple with enthusiasm, although many of them had never before set eyes on either of them. The man thought that they were really celebrating the signal to begin eating and drinking as much as they liked at someone else's expense, as well as capitalising on the opportunity to further their political, business and amorous interests. He himself was not particularly interested in the food on offer, although one of the other stewards had gossiped that he had counted forty-seven different savoury dishes, gleefully listing pike, perch, chicken, suckling pig, snipe, hare, partridge, pigeon, lamb stuffed with cauliflower, *petit pois*, beans and endives before either his memory or his imagination ran out. This was

to be followed by seventeen deserts, apparently, but the man had lost patience with the fellow's account of these after the fourth type of tart had been described. What he was here for was what he would observe and overhear as he cleared away the empty plates and glasses.

As if all the food and drink were not enough to keep the diners occupied, the meal was frequently punctuated by speeches from friends and family who told the life story of the bride and the groom, or a version of it, as well as offering anecdotes which illustrated the admirable qualities of each. On a livelier note, the company were invited to join in several songs of a whimsical nature relating to magic mops and such like. One alleged that the Zweekuwse farmers were amazed at the agility and genius of the bride and groom, which the man thought could be taken in several ways. These interludes resulted in the majority of the guests returning to their seats providing a respite from the general milling about which made the man's job more complicated.

As well as for the usual calls of nature, guests who were not making speeches also got up to deliver presents to the bride and groom which she unwrapped there and then before handing them over to her intended so that they could both admire them before passing them around for the approval of everyone else. As was her nature, she kept a meticulous list of who had given them what so that the right gift might be brought out on show during future visits of the giver. All of this rigmarole took an inordinate amount of time and entailed a lot of wandering about, which made it difficult for the man to keep track of those people he had identified as of special interest to him. But, he also picked up some unexpected pieces of intelligence from others as they crossed his path.

The light had already faded from the summer sky by the time the gathering partook of the last few items on the carefully orchestrated programme. Three large silver bowls full of brandy and raisins, one for each table, began their progress from person to person whilst the assembly energetically sang the song;

Hoe zoet is het daar de vriendschap woont

How sweet it is where friendship dwells

Some of the stewards took up baskets laden with small gifts of the sweets and wine which they offered to each guest. The *Bruid suikas*, little packages of five sweets wrapped in tulle, symbolized the wedding wishes of love, happiness, loyalty, prosperity, and virility causing several of the recipients to make wry comments upon the latter. The *Bruidstranen*, small bottles of spiced wine containing a little gold leaf to represent the bride's tears, further provoked innuendos. The Master of Ceremonies made his closing declarations, thanked the assembled party for the Paulina and Johan's nuptial celebrations then bade everyone farewell on behalf of the bride and groom. The bride and groom rose from their throne to lead the platform party out of the *grote zaal* to a final round of cheers and applause.

In the body of the hall chairs scraped back, clothing rustled and the hubbub of conversation resumed as people headed for the doors and their waiting transport beyond. This was the last chance for the man to pick up morsels of information for the already brimming storehouse in his brain before he and the other stewards had to set about the task of clearing away and setting the room straight. There was a lull as the men changed pace again from the public performance of stewarding to the more relaxed nature of backstage domestics. Taking advantage of this social space, the man quickly and quietly made his way round the tables pocketing those lost, forgotten or abandoned personal items that might later be of use to him in his work.

Once the clatter of work resumed, the man joined in the camaraderie which so often spontaneously develops between those who serve as they wind down from of important events like this. They, too had heard things and were as keen to gossip to their fellows as he was to listen and encourage. Even the overseer was in better spirits now that the day had passed off successfully, no doubt helped by his having surreptitiously rewarded himself with the dregs of the bottles as they were taken out for collection. On the orders of the bride, any left-over food had been taken for distribution to the poor but she had forbidden them any alcohol and the overseer believed that it would

have been a shame to waste it. The men were instructed to take off their white aprons and shirts so that the laundry baskets, into which the table cloths and napkins had already been thrown, could be taken away for laundering overnight. They were to hang up the rest of their uniforms and change back into their own working clothes for the last cleaning up before they straggled out into the night to make their weary way home.

The man was careful to avoid company as he made his way along Kruisstraat in the direction of the his hotel which he had carefully chosen to afford anonymity by being the largest in Utrecht. As he walked along he adjusted his clothing to give a smarter appearance, altering his bearing and gait to such good effect that a gentleman returning from a late night stroll collected his room key and messages from the night porter. He ordered a good supper to be brought to his room, being now very hungry as well as wishing to sustain himself for the work of the day yet to be done. A ewer of hot water was waiting for him by the time he opened his door so he was able to wash and change into his nightshirt and dressing gown whilst waiting for his supper tray. The servant bringing his food stayed briefly to hang up his clothes and remove the empty water jug before being assured that he would not be wanted again that night.

Having made himself comfortable and secured the privacy of his chamber, the man set about organising the material he had gathered at the banquet. First he retrieved from his mental filing system all that he already knew about the persons of interest whom he had encountered that day. Then he put pen to paper making additional notes about each one as well as adding some new individuals to his bank of knowledge. One by one he dealt with the people he was watching, committing the contents of each sheet of notes to his phenomenal memory store. Once all had been attended to, the man bent over the grate and dismantled the fire which had been laid there against a sudden drop in temperature or bout of illness. He carefully twisted and knotted his now discarded papers into bows and placed them amongst those which had already formed the basis of the unlit fire. He replaced the sticks of kindling and the coals, from small to large. Taking a taper from the jar on the grate he lit it from one of the lamps and applied it to the foundations

of the fire, pleased to see the flames immediately take hold creating a sudden and intense conflagration which destroyed all it could find to feed on.

Only now could the man allow himself the luxury of a glass of brandy and a cigar sitting in a chair beside the roaring fire. It did not take long for him to relax into a state where he was able to get into bed, falling asleep to the first bird calls of a new day. It was only a few hours until he was woken by the arrival of his morning shaving water but he felt refreshed and alert, ready for another working day. Although his duties at Tivoli would begin later today, no furniture needing to be moved until the second day of banqueting was over, the man began his observations at breakfast in the hotel. Here he could keep his eyes on the numerous other guests, some due to depart after the previous day's celebrations and some preparing for those to come that day, all of whom seemed to share the feeling that they could not refuse their invitation as it was hard to plead prior engagements for both days. Only Hendrick Prins der Nederlanden en Prins van Oranje-Nassau could decline to attend without any embarrassment to anyone. Henrik *de Zeevaarder*, as he was known, was a naval man and a navigator like the groom with whom he frequently socialised in the manner of sailors on shore leave. The man had been very careful not to disclose what he knew of the activities of these men when making his report to Theodorus Viruly concerning the groom's suitability as a husband for the Bisdome van Vleit daughter.

Having lingered over breakfast, the man made a thorough check to make sure that all was in order in his room then paid his bill and left instructions for his luggage to be packed and conveyed to the station left luggage office. It was time to set out for his second day at the Tivoli, reversing the transformation from gentleman to working man of the previous night as he strode along. Although the programme was exactly the same as that of the previous day down to the last detail the different mix of guests made for a quite distinct experience. The man followed the same strategy as previously but found his task was complicated by the disruptive boisterousness of the groom's naval shipmates and the presence of several important political figures who had seen him before but in a different guise. To his relief and satisfaction,

he did not appear to have been recognised but nevertheless took pains to keep at a distance from those who might be able to identify him. On the other hand, the to-ing and fro-ing of the seafarers, who refused to stay in their allotted seats and demanded a great deal of attention from the stewards, added to the already raised levels of activity with the effect that they somewhat hampered the man's ability find an unobtrusive place from which to watch and listen.

By the time the guests had left and the clearing up began patience was getting stretched among the servants making everyone irritable. Tonight they had the added labour of clearing the furniture from the *grote zaal*, heavy work for the tired men whose minds were already elsewhere with wives and sweethearts, food and drink. At last the overseer was satisfied that the room was being left as it had been found and called the staff to line up to receive their payment before dismissing them to go their separate ways into the night. The man had a few hours to kill before catching the early train to Den Haag so took a circuitous route to the station, ruefully turning over the few coins in his pocket that had been his payment at the end of the two days. By the time he had bought himself an early breakfast at the bargee's favourite eetcafe on the Oude Gracht and tipped the station porter who dealt with his luggage there was not much left. His work was not yet done, either, as he still had his records to get up to date once he arrived back at his own, solitary dwelling.

If Paulina had harboured any concerns about being left at the alter they were soon dispelled. The whole village could hear the groom's procession as it came along the dyke top from Gouda since it was headed up by the band of the field artillery regiment playing for all they were worth. The groom's carriage was escorted by a huge troop, later reported in the *Schoonhovensche en Haastrechtsche Courant* to have numbered 90, of young men dressed in uniforms to match that of the groom. All of his guests followed in a long train of horse-drawn conveyances which added to their clatter and chatter to the din. As the whole noisy entourage arrived at the edge of the village another guard of honour joined them and escorted the groom, now on foot, in a swaggering and jubilant procession to the Bisdom van Vliet house.

The Haastrecht villagers had not been unsparing in their preparations for Paulina's marriage either. The front door of the house had been painted green, as was the tradition, and a triumphal arch erected in front of it for the bride to pass under. The children from the village school had greatly enjoyed decorating this arch and joining in with the making of green flags which were then strung between all the houses in Haastrecht and along the fronts of the farms in Stein and Vlist. Flowers, and various insignia completed the festoons and even the competing religious denominations had come together to raise money in order to make a display of their various arms and symbols.

The correspondent for the *Schoonhovensche en Haastrechtsche Courant* was so overwhelmed by all these wedding preparations that he was reduced to somewhat heatedly reporting;

... het strekke alleen ten bewijze dat daar, waar eensgezindheid en erkentijkheid op de voorgrond staan, welwillendheid en liefde niet achterblijven.

... this demonstrates that, where harmony and gratitude are to the fore, benevolence and love are not far behind.

The groom's cavalcade halted when it came to the Bisdom van Vliet house and here they re-arranged themselves for the next stage in their progress. The chamber in the Raadhuis where the formal marriage ceremony was to take place was too small to accommodate more than a modest wedding party restricted to the couple's most intimate family and friends. All the other guests would be provided with light refreshments at the house before moving on to the church. Those members of the groom's band, escort and honour guard who were not required for the next stage of the procession were allowed to relax in the *overtuin* where they were given some rather more modest food and drink than that on offer indoors. It took a while for the clamour of the groom's arrival to die down during which time Paulina waited patiently in her room until the moment arrived when she could be sure of being the centre of attention as she processed through the village to begin her

nuptials. Those who were to accompany her to the Raadhuis gathered in the vestibule, the groom's excess of high spirits gradually being calmed by his brother.

Once the Raadhuis cortege, with a somewhat reduced number of musicians and guard of honour, had formed up Marcellus went to fetch his daughter. They were both rather disconcerted by Johan Jacob's grandiose and flamboyant arrival which threatened to upstage their preparations and to eclipse the augustness of the marriage rite itself. Marcellus was aware that Viruly still had doubts about the suitability of the bridegroom and for the first time he began to have misgivings himself. Paulina sensed a reserve in her father's behaviour which made for an awkwardness between them quite uncharacteristic of their relationship. She had felt a little on edge already but attributed this to the gravity of the occasion. On top of this, the delay caused by Johan Jacob's unanticipated departure from her carefully arranged schedule had perturbed her. So, she attributed the strangeness between herself and her father to bridal nerves which caused her to anxiously avert her gaze from him thereby effectively blocking any further communication between them. The distance between them meant that Marcellus felt unable to gently remind his only child that it was not too late to call the wedding off, so he followed her down to the vestibule in silence instead.

Once they reached the crowded vestibule both father and daughter found themselves caught up by the expectations of the assemblage which involuntarily propelled them into the day their, minds empty of all doubt or apprehension. They did, however, depart from protocol in just one way when, as a result of some tacit agreement between them, Paulina took her father's arm and not that of her bridegroom before stepping out through the green door, walking under the triumphal arch and out onto the petal-strewn street to take her place at the head of the wedding procession. The groom had been so caught up in putting on his own show for his admirers that he let the moment pass when he might have intervened and claimed his bride for his own arm. It took some management by his brother to focus his attention and prevail upon him to fall in behind his bride and her father ahead of the other members of their families and the chosen friends.

The Hoogstrat was lined with cheering adults and children who had come out in their numbers to scatter petals under the bride's feet and wish her well. Paulina and Marcellus walked slowly so as to acknowledge the crowd's good wishes and show their appreciation and admiration for the bedecked streets. At last they arrived at the bottom of the stone steps leading up to the marriage room within the Raadhuis. The pretty little step-gabled town hall was so old that it even pre-dated the arrival of Adriaan Bisdom in Haastrecht. At one point its steps decayed to become so unsafe that old Oma's husband, burgemeester Salomon Reynders Bisdom van Vliet, had ordered them demolished and replaced by the handsome hard stone steps which now rose to the door into De Burgerzaal where all the marriages were solemnized including those of Paulina's ancestors. It was only when they reached the bottom of the steps that Paulina's father looked round for Johan Jacob, signaling that the groom should now step up beside the bride to accept the greetings and thanks of the guests as they made their way into the wedding room.

When everyone in the intimate circle had disappeared into the Raadhuis, Paulina made her way up the seven steps supporting herself by holding onto the iron hand rail with one hand and her groom with the other. Perhaps it was that his feet were obscured by her huge skirts but Paulina did not feel that Johan Jacob was entirely confident on his feet and was glad when they reached the level platform between the steps and the doorway. A lion statue stood at either end of this balcony, one holding the coat of arms of Haastrecht and the other holding the arms of South Holland. Since she had been a child visiting her father in his burgermeesterskamer Paulina had been in the habit of touching the top of each lion's head for good luck and she did not intend to tempt fate by breaking this pattern today. As she reached for the first lion she inadvertently jostled Johan Jacob causing him to totter back down the top step, confirming her feeling that he had not quite lost his sea legs. Once the second lion had had his head tapped Paulina made her grand entry into the Raadhuis with the now recovered Johan Jacob in her wake.

Marcellus's deputy was to perform the ceremony and was there inside the door to greet the bride and groom, ushering them to their places

before the table which held the large book in which their marriage was to be recorded. As Johan Jacob removed his ceremonial sword and handed it to his brother before being seated, Paulina took her first proper look at her bridegroom. He was resplendent in a uniform decorated with shiny buttons, badges and shoulder boards as well as the belt which had held his sword and scabbard. Her heart leapt at the sight of him, restoring to the full her confidence in the marriage she was about to contract. But first they had to wait for the company to settle down. The room was full to capacity as the importance of the Bisdom van Vliet's dictated that the maximum possible number of guests be accommodated. The generous proportions of the floral arrangements placed on the floor at the end of each row of seats combined with the copious skirts of the ladies to fill every available niche so that it seemed as though the smiling faces of the guests were floating above a billowing sea of shimmering fabrics and colourful blooms. It was also quite dim and hot in the chamber as the door and lower window shutters had been closed for privacy allowing little light or air to wash over what remained of the unoccupied space in the room.

Paulina was, therefore, glad that the formalities were quickly under way and conducted at a brisk pace. After a brief speech of welcome, the Loco-burgemeester asked the couple to stand and face each other, clasping their right hands. First his marriage vow was read to Johan Jacob to which he assented in a clear, firm voice. Then Paulina Maria heard her vows and also gave her assent without hesitation. A murmur of delight ran round the room. In his role as Ambtenaar van de Burgerlijke Stand, Marcellus's deputy managed to balance due gravitas with a lightness of touch that left the gathering in a suitably celebratory mood when he seized the right moment to pronounce Paulina and Jacob wedded in the eyes of the law. Johan kissed his bride to a round of applause from the gathering before the couple took their seats again for the final formality of signing the register.

Man and wife now led the way back through the cheering villagers lining Hoogstraat, taking the turning down to the church instead of continuing to the house.. They passed beneath another triumphal arch and were scattered with more petals as they stood to one side and accepted the congratulations of the last members of the congregation

as they filed past them into the church. Once everyone was seated inside, the Pastor led the couple to their seats beside him at the front of the knave. The interior of the plain white church was decorated with floral displays of an even more striking size and vibrancy than those in the Raadhuis and swags of pure white tulle decorated the ends of all the pews.

Paulina was thankful that there was more space, light and air inside the church as she knew that the consecration of her marriage before God was going to be a more lengthy affair than the civil ceremony had been. She was glad of the presence of her parents seated nearby in the front row of pews, surprising herself at how much she drew support just from seeing them there. She was feeling more emotional than she would ever have thought she could be and, although she considered herself to be a devout woman who was a regular worshiper at the church, Paulina found the length of the wedding service tested her capacity for stoicism almost to its limit. With great self-discipline she sat through many readings from the Bible, a lengthy homily from the Pastor and more speeches by close family and friends. It was something of a relief when this seemingly endless stream of well-intentioned words was punctuated by music and, better yet, standing to sing a hymn.

Then Paulina and Johan were stirred to action as they were called to stand before the Pastor and take turns in repeating their vows before God, now more fully and explicitly stating the duties and responsibilities of marriage which they were accepting. A gold ring resting on a plush velvet cushion was brought before the Pastor who blessed it and reminded the couple that it was a symbol of the eternity of the marriage bond which was to be placed on the right hand as this was the good, not sinister, hand and so connected to the divine. Johan picked up the ring then gently took Paulina's right hand in his left and slipped the ring onto her third finger. She felt a lump rise in her throat and tears well up in her eyes, indeed she trembled with a suppressed sob. In response to this Johan gave her hand a gentle squeeze and, when she turned to look at him, she found that he, too, had moist eyes.

Another red velvet cushion was brought to the Pastor, this one supporting the wedding bible in the front of which their marriage was already inscribed and where they would go on to add the names and dates of birth of their children along with other significant events, not all of which would be so joyous. The bible was given into Johan's keeping with the direction that the couple should keep it as the family bible for the new le Fevre de Montingy - Bisdorn van Vliet line. Paulina felt a flush of pride when she heard her family name so openly and directly linked with that of her husband as founders of a new branch of the family. It mattered very much to her that she should produce an heir to the wealth and position of her family. But there was a deeper need arriving within her that suddenly demanded her attention - she wanted to have children, soon and lots of them. She was abashed at this very public allusion to such intimate matters, not fully realising that her private thoughts remained hidden from scrutiny and not as conspicuous to the congregation looking on as she feared. Rather self-consciously, she risked a sidelong glance at Johan and found him looking intently at the bible in his hands with a sheepish expression on his face which somewhat puzzled her.

Then suddenly it was over and Paulina felt thoroughly and very publicly married. As she and Johan turned to face the body of the church in preparation for making their exit, Paulina half hoped that he would be romantic enough to kiss her again in front of everybody whilst admitting to herself that this would actually embarrass her. She did not quite know if she was glad or not that no kiss was forthcoming, instead he took her hand and placed it through his arm for the procession out of the church where, reunited with his sword, he would escort her back to the family's house. Once more they made their way haltingly as they accepted the congratulations of the onlookers, smiling until their faces felt as if they might never go back straight again. When they had attained the sanctuary of the house they were tactfully granted some time to themselves in a small ante-room on the ground floor the old *familiehuis*. Now they held each other and exchanged kisses with the freedom that being married now allowed them as well as the awkwardness of novelty.

The rest of her wedding day did not pass off with quite the finesse that Paulina could have wished for. It had sounded eminently sensible when Johan had explained to her that, by the time they might reasonably expect to be able to take their leave from Haastrecht, it would be too late in the day for an immediate departure for Germany and the start of their honeymoon trip, yet she could not hide from herself that she was a little disappointed. This sense of blighted hopes deepened into disgruntlement when he told her that they would be spending their first night of marriage in his rooms at the Hotel De Zalm. Perhaps familiarity should not breed contempt but nevertheless she felt somewhat irked that commonplace old Gouda and Johan's habitual residence were to be the setting for the consummation that would mark the final covenant of their marriage. If the arrangements had been left to her then a more exclusive and original venue would have been found, one which held no resonances with their separate pasts. On the other hand, Gouda did have the cachet of being the place where they met.

To convey them to the hotel Johan had ordered an appropriately luxurious landau which was pulled by a pair of fine white horses and decorated with flowers and ribbons. When the time came for them to set out for their new life together their closest family gathered in the *familiehuis* vestibule for the final farewells. Paulina found it hard to tear herself away from her papa's embrace but saw that her mama was waiting for her turn to tearfully hug and kiss her youngest daughter as she left the shelter of her family to embark on the joys and sorrows of the wedded state. After discreetly allowing the Bisdom van Vliets a few moments of farewell Johan stepped forward to claim his bride, leaving her mother and father to cling to each other in their happiness and grief.

A liveried coachman assisted the couple into the landau to take the seats which faced forwards whilst a boy groom held the horses. When they were settled and ready to depart, the lad took his seat behind them whilst the coachman climbed up onto his box, taking the four reins in hand ready for the signal to set off. The top of the carriage was folded down which, along with its low shell, insured that anyone looking on

would have a good view of the couple in all their finery. In readiness for going away Paulina had changed into a quite plain but full cut skirt made of a richly patterned ivory silk on top of which she wore a jacket of a deep red satin silk which was ruffled around the edges as well as the top and bottom of the narrow cut sleeves. This was her new carriage costume which had been specially made for use on her honeymoon, her bride dress being now a discarded thing left behind whilst the rest of her trousseau already sent on ahead to await her arrival in Gouda. An ivory lace scarf tied at the high neck of an ivory under blouse completed the outfit and gave it a slightly jaunty look. Bare-headed as usual, her only adornment was the earrings which had been a gift from Johan during their brief courtship and, of course, her golden wedding ring.

The rump of Johan's musicians and guard of honour led the way out of the village and along the dyke top, but they had lost some of their enthusiasm and, for Paulina, all of their rather limited charm so she was thoroughly relieved when they called a halt at Stolwijkersluis so that she and Johan could continue the last leg of its journey alone and in peace. Their escort had served one valuable purpose which was distract from a sudden reticence that caused a lull in the conversation between herself and Johan. He seemed rather preoccupied with preening his uniform and smoothing his hair, having apparently paid scant attention to her or made any comment on her change of costume. Paulina was left to gaze rather sullenly at the familiar passing landscape and try not to feel . Upon their arrival at De Zalm she was disconcerted to find all his friends and fellow hotel guests assembled outside to greet him and, rather secondarily it seemed, his wife. She forced her aching face to smile and her complaining stomach to accept a glass of Champagne and some savouries from the trays which circulated in quick succession. Johan was reinvigorated by the attention of his cronies, not to mention the ingestion of several glasses of Champagne, whilst she was wilting and starting to doubt her ability to stay on her feet for much longer.

Not at all accustomed to the sensation of physical weakness, Paulina did not know what to do except try to lean on Johan for support but he had disappeared into the bustle of people and was lost to her. Sud-

denly a maid appeared at her side and suggested that she might like to follow her inside the hotel to find somewhere quiet to catch her breath. This pretty little creature seemed to know exactly what was needed and how to arrange things without making Paulina feel in the least bit inferior or vulnerable. Paulina followed the maid to a small drawing room where she was alone and allowed herself to be helped to take a seat in the protective embrace of a comfortable wing chair. A glass of seltzer water was fetched and the maid unobtrusively shut the curtains on the sunny side of the room before asking if there was anything else madam required. Paulina could think of nothing, nothing at all, so thanked the young woman and dismissed her with a slight waft of her right hand.

As soon as the maid was gone Paulina started to feel a bleakness of spirit which only grew worse as she brooded on the thought that Johan had abandoned her, seemingly heedless of his obligations, on their special day. She was glad to have the space to recover herself from the hurley burley outside and yet the notion that Johan had not noticed her absence and come looking for her promoted a sudden wavering in her belief in his love and his commitment to their marriage. She started to sink into a perilous quagmire of hurt and insecurity, a novel sensation which she did not like at all. As she reached the brink of despair and peered into the black abyss beyond, the apparatus at the core of her character stirred into action and drove a rallying of her strength that energised her will to deal with the situation. She must behave as the independent woman she knew herself to be deep down and not the sort of silly person whose role she had rejected not so many weeks ago and in the very church now just across the Maarkt. On that June day she had determined to have her own life and not be governed by conventions of marriage or the demands of a husband.

She had anticipated a period of quiet settling into their rooms would follow arrival at De Zalm so this was just what she would arrange for herself. Paulina rose from her chair and rang for a servant. When the little maid appeared she gave instructions that she wished to be shown to their rooms where she desired to have tea and cakes brought to her. A flash of spite held her back from asking for Johan to be informed of her whereabouts, however. The maid went to fetch a porter with

the key and Paulina followed him up the stairs to the second floor where she was let into a drawing room at the front of the building. She held out her hand for the key which the porter hesitantly yielded up in exchange for a small gratuity, quickly pocketed, before departing to organise her tea tray to be sent up. Going over to one of the rooms two tall windows she held back the edge of the net curtain and took in the view of the Stadhuis and, across the Maarkt, Sint Janskerk. Despite her taut nerves she could not help but appreciate the outlook and draw comfort and strength from seeing the tower of the great church rising above the city.

After some minutes contemplation of the view from the window, she turned to take in the rest of the room which she saw to be equipped with good quality, fashionable furniture of a style in keeping with that of the building itself. Through her visits to Aggie and Theo she was keenly aware of the controversy which had surrounded the granting of permission for the original De Zalm, claimed by some to be the oldest inn in the Netherlands, to be completely remodelled in the style fashionable in Den Haag. The new building towered over the old Waag, something that could never have been countenanced in earlier centuries, and its bright, white exterior dominated the market square and upset many local traditionalists. Theo had been keen to push for progress and she now found that she rather approved of what had been achieved, considering that the old place had been rather dilapidated and vulgar whereas the room she was standing in was light, tasteful and very respectable.

Aside from the main door leading out onto the landing, there was a second door in the room which could only lead to the more private quarters. It stood ever so slightly ajar tempting her to push it further open whereas she would have hesitated to open a closed door. It was a heavy door and a tentative nudge only moved it a little but that was enough to reveal a dresser on which stood an open gentleman's travelling dressing table case, a selection of its contents having been taken out for use and left lying on the dresser top beside it. Paulina was rooted to the spot as she looked at these personal items belonging to Johan and which now possessed the cachet of marital intimacy. Until now Paulina had not even considered what married life might mean in the

way of such personal details, having been completely caught up with the event of the wedding itself. The silver shaving brush and holder, the shaving stick in its holder, an ivory-backed clothes brush, an ivory-backed hair brush, various plain glass bottles with silver stoppers and an open red leather manicure set spoke to Johan's private preparations for the day. Of course she found Johan handsome and, despite his apparent carelessness towards her, still she longed to be in his arms again and quite understood what was to happen to consummate their union. But now, peeping round the door at these masculine items and imagining him applying them to his physical person, it struck her full force that Johan was corporeal and his male body was now part of her life. The idea confounded her as desire fought with distaste, rooting her to the spot.

Just at that moment the main door to the room opened to the rattling of things on the tea tray. Paulina quickly turned back into the drawing room feeling as if she had been caught out like a naughty child. She expected to see a servant and was even more disconcerted to come face to face with Johan instead. Unbeknownst to Paulina, the little maid had taken the liberty, presuming upon their earlier dealings, to approach Johan and discretely inform him of Paulina's situation and the necessity for him to go to her. Realizing his oversight Johan had immediately gone to their rooms, just happening to arrive at the door just as the waiter with the tea tray was about to knock. He had hurried in ahead of the man, concerned to compensate for his laxity as a husband with solicitousness towards the wife he was not yet accustomed to having.

"My dear, I missed you at the party downstairs and grew concerned. Tell me truly, are you feeling unwell?"

Conscious that the servant might overhear them in their imperfection as a couple, Paulina waited until the door had closed behind him before replying;

"I am quite well, thank you. Just a little fatigued but I shall soon be recovered."

"I am so relieved to hear you say so. I was distressed to think that you had been taken ill and I was unaware of it. But, here you are and looking quite the picture of health!"

She had tried to be cool towards him but now that Johan was back with her she found that she just wanted his arms about her and this had brought colour into her face. Seizing his advantage, Johan took her in an embrace whilst saying;

"I took the liberty of asking for an extra cup and plate to be fetched so that we might take tea together and enjoy being alone. It has been a marvelous celebration of our marriage and I have revelled in every part of it but I am also looking forward to your private companionship."

He broke off to kiss her neck and stroke her unruly hair before continuing;

"Let us keep to ourselves for the rest of today. What do you say? Just an old married couple spending a quiet night together? "

Before she could reply there was a knock at the door, which caused her to start and break away from Johan, and the waiter came in with the extra crockery and cutlery. Once they were alone again, she felt herself enveloped by Johan as he pressed her close and began gently kissing her neck then her cheek and finally her mouth. His affection had a calming, almost soporific, effect on her and she found the closeness of his body brought her a sense of comfort. Indeed, the feeling she had was reminiscent of the times when, as a child, she had been soothed and sent to sleep by snuggling up to her nanny. But Johan was a man with a man's urges, yet an experienced lover who knew to slacken his embrace before the urgency of his erection could be felt even through Paulina's thick petticoats. He knew that he must take care not to cause her any consternation as that would only make her more resistant to him when the time came.

The distraction of taking tea was just what was required to soothe them both in their different ways and to reconcile them to the finality of their marital pledge. The social routine of an apparently normal evening

provided just enough interest and activity to distract from the tacit prospect of their impending first sexual encounter. As there was only one suite of bedroom and dressing rooms and it would have been unthinkable as yet for both to occupy them simultaneously whilst changing for dinner, so Johan deferred to Paulina who summoned her maid and the two women disappeared into the private apartments. Paulina now saw what lay behind the door which she had earlier peeped round, finding that her maid had already unpacked her necessary things and laid out her new dinner dress on the bed. Paulina, with the help of her maid, took great care over her toilette not simply in order to please Johan but also as a way of taking the time to calm herself in this rather thrilling but slightly alarming new situation through the slow performance of familiar routines.

At last she emerged and accepted Johan's admiration of her appearance. He had not been idle during her absence having provided a selection of newspapers and magazines for her to peruse. He had also ordered Champagne and, in case she might prefer it, Paulina's favourite red vermouth and some seltzer water all of which were ready for her to make her selection of beverage. Johan settled her in a chair with all that she said she required readily to hand before bending to kiss her once more prior to taking his leave to get changed. In his absence she sipped some seltzer water and looked through the newspapers for anything about Haastrecht or anyone of her acquaintance but, since there was very little to arouse her interest, she began a desultory examination of the magazines.

She was on the point of having to admit to herself that she was simply waiting for Johan to return when the bedroom door opened and he rejoined her, looking very smart in his dinner clothes and smelling of a pleasingly light and fresh cologne. Johan uncorked the Champagne but she declined his offer of a glass and he did not entreat her. He did, however, help himself before drawing his chair close to hers and taking his seat. They both confessed to being glad to be rid of their bulky and hot outdoor clothes. It had been an unusually hot day for late summer, which Paulina felt had blessed their wedding day although she could see that Johan would have been more affected by the heat in his thick uniform clothes than she was in her relatively light gown.

Johan amused her with an account of how uncooperative he had found his ceremonial sword, leaping to his feet to re-enact some of his less adroit moments as he found it necessary to remove and re-attach this willful prop at several points during the day. Laughing conspiratorially with him made her feel that they were sharing a secret which must serve to bring them closer together.

Johan proposed that they should dine in their rooms, to which she readily assented feeling that she had been in the public eye quite enough for one day. Having first solicited her approval, Johan then took charge of ordering a selection of dishes that he thought to be her favourites and which he believed that the De Zalm chef could execute to a high standard. She found it pleasing that he showed himself to be aware of her tastes in food and honoured that he was so desirous of ensuring that his knowledge of the hotel kitchen could be applied to making sure that the best available fare was placed before her. She was delighted by the sumptuous array of elegantly presented plates that were placed before them and was eager to sample them all. Oddly, her appetite somehow deserted her and she found that she could only manage the first mouthful of each thing on her plate, delicious though everything tasted. She was grateful for Johan's consideration in that he did not push her to eat or drink more than she chose to although she noticed that he ate heartily himself as well as drinking the whole bottle of Champagne.

Once their repast had lost its appeal and the evidence of it had been cleared away by the servants they found themselves alone again. Paulina felt a brief flash of awkwardness but Johan soon dispelled any strangeness between them with his attentiveness and she quickly found that they were chatting away quite comfortably and finding themselves in accord on anything and everything. She was charmed by Johan using endearments without committing the error of being overly familiar. She also found him quite enchanting in the way he added the frisson of a little touch here and a kiss there to the rapport developing between them. He knew exactly how and when to suggest that they prepare for the night so that it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should find themselves alone together in the bedroom after her maid and his man had been dismissed. She found

that he also knew just how to tantalize them both with glimpses and assurances, kisses and caresses so that she willingly joined him in the big hotel bed. But once they were between the sheets with the lamps extinguished the night did not pass quite as either of them might have predicted.

Maybe Johan had drunk too much Champagne. Perhaps Paulina had become overheated by his long, slow seduction. Possibly he had been too proficient in his conquest. Certainly both were overwrought after the hectic and tiring few weeks leading up to this climax of their nuptials. It could be that Paulina had shed her sexual inhibitions along with all the other strictures placed upon a woman of her station in life. What was certain was that Johan, who had been prepared to coax and cajole his way into her in the belief that patrician women were not by nature sexual beings, shrank in the face of her frank interest in his genitals. She, in turn, was somewhat discomfited that her knowledge of how these matters proceeded, which had been largely gained in the stables and farms with little ameliorating advice from her mother, did not lead to the deflowering she had imagined would follow naturally. She found that Johan now started to flounder about whilst her efforts became increasingly fraught and useless until she simply gave up then fell into a fitful sleep that left her both exhausted and unsatisfied when she woke the next morning. Her cherished hope of a honeymoon pregnancy now took on the appearance of a fading dream.

New Year 1871

They had travelled to Haastrecht to join the big family gathering at her parents' house, which Paulina still thought of as 'home', for the celebration the start of a new year. Aggie and Theo were there with their brood of eight children as was Uncle Otto and Adelaide with their six. Next to her own family the le Fevre de Montigny's made a sorry contribution to the numbers with just one child between them, Gillis and Mary's small son now aged three. The total of fourteen children whose ages ranged between two and twenty three along with the mix of adults who brought with them a variety of ill-concealed tensions made the assemblage a somewhat complicated one. The more grown up offspring tried to be part of the adult festivities unaware of their undercurrents to the rather strained atmosphere so innocently adding their contribution. The six little ones became rather rowdy in the excitement of a game of hide-and-seek in the favourably rambling old *familiehuis*. The four youngsters who were neither children nor yet grown up didn't quite know what to do with themselves so roamed about feeling awkward, especially since they were divided equally between two different family groups so did not know each other very well.

Paulina had some sympathy with those who seemed out of place among the party. It was at times like this that she felt something of an odd one out herself having failed to produce a child after sixteen months of marriage. She was acutely self-aware that the others were noticing her barrenness and negatively judging her marriage or, more precisely, her was distressing and only served to intensify the pain of her unfulfilled longing for children. She wished that she could tell someone, her mother maybe or, better still, Aggie, what her situation was but it was too private a matter to be spoken of. Besides, there had been some sort of cooling towards her on Aggie's part since she mar-

ried Johan which she suspected had its origins in Theo's unspoken but evident disapproval of her choice of husband.

If she could have spoken out, she would have reassured them that all was normal with her monthly cycle and that marital relations were not lacking. Indeed, following the rather disappointing first night their honeymoon had proved a singular success on all fronts with the exception that she had not conceived. They had set out from Gouda to take the train down through Germany where they embarked on a Rhine steamer at Koblenz for the passage upstream to Mainz through the stunning and romantic scenery of the Mittelrhein gorge with its vine-clad slopes and skyline of medieval castles. The passage was a slow one but not without charm and periods of danger and excitement. Just above Koblenz the steamer encountered a vast raft of hundreds of tree trunks being swept downstream towards its destination at Andernach where it was to be separated into batches for dispersal all across the north of Europe. Even such an experienced sailor as Johan was taken aback by this enormous platform of timber so vast that the hundreds of men required to navigate it had built a village of huts on top of it to shelter them on their long journey north from the upper reaches of the great river. The pilot of the steamer had a delicate task to perform in order to avoid the timber raft, which had very little steering, whilst keeping his ship in the narrow channel cut through the sharp rocks of the river bed.

No sooner was the encounter with the raft safely behind them than they had cause to marvel again at the pilot's skill as he threaded the steamer between the many barges transporting their cargoes up and down the river. Only a small proportion of these commercial vessels were powered by steam so those under sail on the downstream run wove and tacked across their path, borne down upon the current. Going their way, steam tugs with their lengthy tows of barges crept upstream impeding the progress of the faster passenger ship, itself battling upstream against the strong current. The dogged pounding of the steam engine found its echo in the progress of Paulina and Johan's physical relationship as they persevered with the consummation of their union. The strain on their relationship at last relieved during an overnight stop at Sankt Goar, they were able to enjoy being on deck the next

day to admire the Lorelei rock around which the river was forced into a treacherously sharp bend causing notoriously dangerous whirlpools. Soon after this excitement they came upon the Pfalzgrafenstein castle moored out in the river like ship of stone whose purpose had been to exact tolls from river users until just two years previously. They joined in with the spontaneous cheer that went up from the passengers as the note of the ships' engine relaxed once a line from a hauling engine on the bank had been attached to pull them up through the rapids to their next halt at Bingen.

They finally quitted the Rhine steamer at Mainz to travel on by stage-coach to Metz . This soon brought them into the still disputed border between Germany and France following the recent Franco-Prussian War whose legacy of refugees and the grim evidence of military action was distressing to Paulina creating the need for the comfort of Johan's arms at night. Moving into more peaceful territory, they took time to enjoy the French countryside as well as the cities of Nancy, Langres and Dijon before arriving at Lyon where they embarked on another river steamer, this time going with the current of the river Rhone which carried them south through Arles and the Camargue to the Mediterranean. The season was now turning from summer to autumn and they were glad to be journeying into warmer southern climes where the freezing of the rivers would arrive somewhat later than at home.

Their passage down the Rhone was quite unlike their earlier Rhine trip. This time it was the speed of the river that made it thrilling, compounded by the ever-present risk of running aground as a dry summer had reduced water levels. Although the steam vessels on the Rhone could make the trip from Lyon to Arles in a day, Johan had arranged for them to break their journey at Vienne to see the Roman buildings and at Avignon for the Palace that was once the seat of Popes. Johan had booked a cabin for the leg of their voyage between these two stops feeling that because the evenings were lengthening towards winter they would appreciate having somewhere to retire to for the evening.

After embarking again at Vienne Paulina and Johan went out on deck to enjoy the warmth of a sunny autumn afternoon as the ship gathered speed towards the looping curves in the river at Les Roches de Con-

drieu. Caught up on the fast flowing current as she took the outside of the tightest bend it seemed as though the ship was being swept out of control to only avoided coliding with the right bank butress of the bridge by dint of good fortune. Paulina clung to Johan as she felt the danger mounting and was surprised to find that, beneath his calm exterior, she could sense that he, too, was excited and thrilled. No word needed to be spoken as they made their hurried towards their cabin and, once inside, made haste to assist eachother out of the layers of clothing put on against the chill river airs. Buttons, ties and all manner of fastenings were dealt with as sleeves, skirts, trousers and linnen undergarments were made to obey the force of gravity with embarrassment now giving way to laughter and boisterous delight. They tumbled together in a tangle of strange bedding within the narrow confines of their box-like bunk until both were exhausted and completely sated. They had fallen into a serene doze when the steward knocked on the door to inform that dinner was soon to be served, causing them to realize that they were parched and ravenous.

They emerged on deck to the sad sight of the scoured vinyards following the devastating phylloxera infection which had its origins at Roquemaure a little to the north of Avignon which Paulina later took to be a portent of her own barrenness. The warmth of the Medditer-ranen creeps up the Rhone valley to temper the climate of Avignon and kept the passionate connection she had found with Johan alive. This honeymoon spirit lasted all through their time at Arles but, by the time that they turned north to climb up into the mountains to Gap, Grenoble, Annecy then into Switzerland, she knew that she had not conceived. Hope and longing cooled with the mountain air and the arrival of October. The change of landscape, archtiecture and a whole way of life mirrored the calming and cooling between Paulina and Johan as intensity and heat gave way to less sensual and more regulated emotions.

With Johan at her side she was able to recapture her facsination for the flora and fauna of the mountains which had had such a profound effect on her during her first visit in 1865. Together they admired the glaciers in the Swiss Alps, especially the vast Rhone glacier at Valais and gazed out over Lake Geneva from the balcony of their hotel room

in Lausanne. Feeling the majesty of the towering mountains and fathomless water and ice. Then it was time to make the last leg of their journey back to Den Haag through the familiar territory of Germany and The Netherlands to the anti-climax of a house that was serviceable but still required some work to bring it up to scratch and the realities of day to day married life.

Now, more than a year on, they had become accustomed to inhabiting a house that still wanted for its final polish and to their relationship which had settled down to the comfort of the habitual. Yet, there were times when they were undeniably at odds with each other in some way which neither of them seemed able to fathom or put right. Whilst Paulina's mind could accept that Johan was free to continue his own life just as she was still continuing her own occupations and activities just as before their marriage, there were times when her head could not rule her sensibilities. She had come to associate her periods of discomfort with the glimpses she would catch of a strange man who seemed to appear as if out of thin air and disappear again just as mysteriously. This man had the effect of causing Johan to immediately order his bags packed for travelling, pleading business interests that urgently required his presence. He would leave without giving any indication of where he was going or how long he expected to be away. Sometimes he returned quickly but occasionally he was away for some weeks with no word being sent to her and no means of her being able to contact him. On his return he never spoke of where he had been, who he had seen, what he had done or why he had been gone yet he was evidently glad to see her and resumed their intimacy with some urgency.

Paulina found herself prey to feelings of boredom and malaise on being left alone in the house during Johan's unpredictable and secretive absences. As a seasoned letter writer she longed for a correspondence with Johan such as she had enjoyed during their brief courtship, at first continuing to write him letters that were destined to languish unsent in her bureau drawer. Eventually she gave up this abortive attempt at correspondence only to fall prey to a need to find some plank of

certainty to support her across the void between them. On one particularly grey and empty afternoon she found herself loitering outside the door to Johan's rooms. Although she knew that she was alone in the house which, in any case, she was mistress of, Paulina still had to struggle against the idea that trespassing on Johan's private affairs would somehow cojure up someone on the other side of the door who would catch her in the act.

Suddenly she was in Johan's drawing room with her back to the door she had hastily but quietly closed behind her. listening intently for any disturbance to the silence of the empty house. She had been in this room often so now her eyes roved around it looking for what was new, what was missing or any clues to the riddle of his absences. She was well aware of the fact that many married men took mistresses but it was painful to think that Johan might be straying so soon after marrying, she believed, for love and whilst their own passion was not yet spent. Was he was seeing another woman or even, and this was an excruciating thought, did he have a family hidden away somewhere? Of course, she would have to turn a blind eye, before which she would need to know what it was she must not see.

The first time Paulina entered Johan's rooms she did not dare to make more than a cursory inspection of his personal items, not caring to attribute to herself the judgement she would have passed had she caught someone else prying into his privacy. However, as her visits became an established habit so the voice of the moral other gradually quieted, a danger repeated assuming the safety of a commonplace. She began by looking inside drawers and cupboards, then would remove and inspect their contents. Eventually, she crossed the line between curiosoty and investigation so that the more hidden the item the greater the frisson gained by removing, inspecting then replacing things exactly as she found them. She read every paper she could unearth however trivial until it was unclear whether the challenge of spying had supplanted the need for certainty in driving her on.

In any case, what she found made no sense. Sometimes his naval things were missing and she felt secure in the belief that he was at sea until it ocured to her that his life mght be in danger. At other

times, nothing seemed to have been taken apart from the bare minimum required by a gentleman on the move. His papers mostly referred to business dealings which her sharp mind for such matters told her were all above board and in good order. Such items of personal correspondence as he appeared to have kept mostly related to exchanges of letters with his brother, her father and, reassuringly, herself. Not a hint of anything that she could latch onto for an explanation for where her husband was or what he was doing.

Then, out of the blue, something intriguing to her came along, not through her snooping, but in the post. She found a letter addressed to Johan mixed up with her own letters on the silver post tray brought to her by the maid. Usually Johan's correspondence was sorted from hers and left on the hall table where Paulina was in the habit of checking for anything unexpected when she was sure she was not being observed. On this occasion something out of the ordinary had been literally handed to her on a plate. She tried to ignore it and attend to her own business but the tiny envelope with a Rotterdam postmark drew her attention away from everything else. Had the maid left it on purpose? Would the maid see her mistake and try to retrieve the letter? Paulina made sure that she kept the stray item out of sight whenever she thought she might be disturbed, sneaking looks at the envelope whenever her curiosity had to be answered. It seemed a long day until the maids went home and Paulina was alone with what had by now grown into a great mystery. But how to discover the contents of the envelope without detection?

Remembering that they had a *Gazeteer of Rotterdam* in the library, Paulina fetched it and set about interrogating the postmark for clues as to the business of the area from which the letter had been dispatched. From what she could gather, the district around the post office indicated was comprised mainly of the residences of professional people some of whom had their business rooms as well as domestic quarters at the same address. She looked at the writing on the envelope for signs of a legal hand, for example. Oh, but what did she know of such things! Next she tried to match the initials on the wax seal with those of the house occupants but this produced a list of a dozen possibilities.

Among the lawyers, university professors, doctors and others on her list one name stood out because it alone belonged to a woman.

Alone and with no occupation to distract her and nothing else to give her mind exercise, Paulina began to torment herself with visions of Johan in the arms of this unknown woman. As night's dark silence spread throughout the house she could no longer curb her imagination. It became imperative that she should discover the secret inside the envelope. But how to break the wax seal? Would it be better to apply heat to melt the wax or cold to harden it? Heat might leave tell tale smears of red and blunt the original sharpness of the impressed initials. Cold could only come from the employing ice which might melt and leave water marks unlike those naturally left by exposure to rain, and in any case it had been dry for several days.

As Paulina turned the envelope over and over in her hands she noticed that the edge of the wax seal was slightly detached. Had someone else been tampering with it, she wondered? If so, why? The possibility that she was not alone in having an interest in the contents of the envelope served to fuel Paulina's desire to open it. She placed it on the silver plate again then held this over the flame of a candle, thinking to protect the paper from smoke yet soften the bottom of the wax seal just enough to be able to remove it. Almost immediately the tray got too hot for her to hold comfortably so she had to give up on that approach.

Then it occurred to her that, just as the letter had been delivered to her in error, so was it believable that she could have opened it in error having unthinkingly failed to check that it was, indeed, addressed to her. Paulina was pleased with this idea, and in no small measure because it would immediately gratify her curiosity. This plan also had the benefit of not requiring her to reassemble the letter or conceal that she had opened it. Acting upon the impulse, she broke the seal, opened the envelope and soon found herself holding the paper it had been protecting in her fingers.

It took a while for her to comprehend what she was looking at, so strong had been her conviction that she would find a lover's note. What she struggled to make sense of was that this was not, in fact, a letter

but an account for services rendered. The amount was quite modest so not in itself of any significance to her. What more a source of consternation was that the name on the paper's heading was that of a doctor and the account was for a consultation and the provision of medicines as prescribed. But Johan wasn't ill, she felt sure she would have seen signs of it if he had been and that he would have consulted their usual doctor in Den Haag. Yet, the account brooked no other interpretation. Johan's name and address were on it and whatever ailed him had required immediate treatment. The fear of Johan's infidelity now seemed trivial in comparison to the fear that he might be concealing a grave illness from her.

In an instant Paulina's own health worries paled into insignificance. Her failure to conceive had led her to consult any and every medical person who might be able to find a cure for her empty womb. She had submitted to all sorts of unpleasant examinations that had not spared her blushes or her discomfort. She had been made to answer questions of a most personal nature concerning her relations with Johan, including his performance and its outcome. She had received many assurances that there was nothing wrong with her and no reason why she should not conceive. Unless, one doctor implied, Johan was at fault. To her absolute horror, this doctor made the improper suggestion that he might father her a child himself. Needless to say, she never returned to that particular person.

Recently she had heard of a new form of treatment at the Zander Clinic that was soon to open in Amsterdam. She had made an appointment to see Dr Zander in the hope that he would deem her suitable to become one of his patients. To her immense relief she found him less concerned than other doctors with the details of her marital relations. Instead, he asked a lot of questions about her daily routine her answers to which seemed to cause him to nod wisely, although he himself said very little and offered no diagnosis.

Instead, at the end of their interview Dr Zander set out a regime of exercises using his range of machines that were designed to be suitable for ladies since there was no need to remove clothing or become over heated. Dr Zander had explained that his course of treatment

would strengthen the relevant muscles, and here he was mercifully not explicit, necessary for ease of reproduction. She was shown photographs of ladies demonstrating the machines, appearing to be comfortably seated inside the wooden-framed contraptions which, she was assured, were gentle despite their size. It all seemed so sensible and straightforward that she was looking forward to starting her treatment and hopeful of its efficacy.

Now her hopes for Dr Zander and his machines were as nothing when weighed in the balance against her horror at the kind of serious illness that could take away Johan's life. Paulina spent the hours of a sleepless night re-living every moment of her life with Johan looking for any signs of illness. Then she went over it all again for indications that he had been unwell but concealed it from her. Throughout their honeymoon he had been almost constantly in her company and gave every sign of being in the best of health. Since then, when he was at home he had given every appearance of rude health leading her to conclude that if he was concealing something then he was taking such great pains about it that it had to be a terrible thing. Was this the explanation for his absences?

Why was Johan keeping secrets from her? She understood that his naval work might require him to be circumspect in what he divulged. Secretly she found the possibility that he went on some sort of important and covert missions gave him an added aura of masculinity and importance that she found arousing. It pleased her to perpetuate this illusion rather than the alternative one of another woman, although she knew that there was no sound basis for either interpretation of his absences. Now faced with concrete evidence suggesting a third possibility which did not bode well for their future, Paulina found herself completely at a loss as to what to think, say or do.

By opening the letter she had burned her bridges and must now confess what she had done to Johan. She could try to convince him that she had realised her mistake and not read the letter once opened, but even a cursory glance would have been enough to give the game away that Johan had been seeing a doctor. There was now no going back from a confrontation with him on the matter of his health. Now she needed to

formulate a plan of what she was going to say to him upon his return home and when the right moment to say it might be.

Johan had returned home just before Christmas but so far Paulina had not found the right moment to hand him the doctor's account and to make her carefully rehearsed speech to him. At first she had not wanted to spoil their delight at reunion, then they had become caught up in the celebration of Christmas and a round of social engagements that was now culminating in a grand party to give thanks for the year departing and in anticipation of all the blessings in the year to come. Yet Paulina felt burdened with worries that she had been unable to lighten by sharing and which left her feeling alone in the midst of company.

It did not escape Marcellus that his daughter was somewhat distant from the mood of the festive party. An ebullient person himself, he had usually been able to lift her out of her tendency to melancholy by the generous application of his own good humour. But they had grown apart a little since her marriage and she has come to have concerns that were private from him. She now found that she was unable to respond to him as she once did, which was painful to her as she could see that he was at a loss as to how to change his bantering to suit the inevitable shift in their relationship now that she was a married woman. What was more, Paulina could tell that Marcellus was distracted by cares of his own that even his well-practiced public persona could not conceal from her.

The source of these cares was not hard to find. There was no getting away from the fact that Oma was failing and, looking back on the last year, had been increasingly prone to sudden falls although, mercifully, she had never injured herself seriously. Yet each time she had taken longer to recover from the bumps and bruises, relying more and more on her nurses to get through each day. Her mental world had shrunk as much as her physical world so that now her attention could only be persuaded to focus on her own immediate concerns and a few accounts of past events that were worn to word perfection in the repeated telling. Nobody appeared able to distract, much less interest her, to

the extent that Paulina sometimes wondered if Oma really knew who she was any more.

May God punish her for the thought but old people perish and Paulina wished for Oma's end to be soon, swift and easy rather than a long, drawn-out decay as the remaining strength of her body fought to keep captive the last whisp of a spirit that had already largely departed. Surely her father was preparing himself for whatever course Oma's last weeks and months might take and the inevitable conclusion. Unless Paulina was very much mistaken, her father had something more serious on his mind irectly upon their returnthan old Oma's health.

The reason for her father's disquiet soon became apparent to Paulina as she took Johan's arm to follow her parents into the Grote Salon for dinner. This was the first time for a long while that she had really looked at her mother and was shocked to see how old and worn out she had become and how she seemed to need to lean on her father for physical support. A great wave of anxiety passed over Paulina as, on top of all her other worries, she now understood that there was something amis with hreer mother's health. She had been half expecting Oma to be showing signs of her mortality but for her mother to be treading the same path did not bear thinking about.

What Marcellus could see and Paulina could not was the toll that Paulina's marriage and Oma's decline had taken on Maria's health. Without Paulina's constant presence and able assistance the extra work Maria now undertook in the management of their business and estate affairs was gradually draining her strength. That he had married a woman some years his senior who was now herself becoming elderly was making itself evident as she tired more easily and seemed to be losing the sharp edge of her aptitude and acumen in managing their affairs. Yet she was still as able as ever at organising the social events that were such an intergral and important part of his political career. But even in this sphere she was under added pressure now that his mother's decline was putting her in the way of extra work and worry in the management of the household.

He had lain awake at nights trying to come up with a way to give his wife an easier life. Every plan that he had contrived so far had involved Paulina's return to the family house. He had entertained the hope that giving him a grandchild and heir would rouse in her the sort of family feeling that would make it easier for him to persuade her to come back to Haastrecht. Now he was starting to consider what else might prove incentive enough to persuade her away from city life in Den Haag. Of course, it wasn't just Paulina that he had to take into consideration but also Johan, a man whose lifestyle was a mystery to him being so very different from anything Marcellus could relate to. He searched his mind for anything they might have in common on which to attempt to build an alliance. This train of thought at least had the advantage of giving him the feeling that there was something he could do to achieve the end he desired, even though he did not yet know what it might be.

Had Paulina but known it, Marcellus had a lift to his shoulders as he led the way into dinner as a result of feeling that he had some measure of control over the worrying developments in his domestic life. More usually of late he had exhibited an air of dejection about his posture which would have further upset Paulina had she witnessed it.

Before she and Johan left to return to Den Haag Paulina made sure that she found an opportunity to speak privately with her father. He did not take much persuading to share his anxiety about the state of her mother's health and they fell to discussing remedies for the overwork which they both thought was at the bottom of her physical decline. Paulina quickly pledged to spend more time at Haastrecht in order to relieve her mother of as much of her work as she would allow. Johan would understand and her romantic steak envisaged that their letters and his visits might bring reawaken the intensity of their courtship.

As well as a permanent lightening of her duties, father and daughter also agreed that Maria would need some period of rest and recuperation to restore her to her previous state of health. Their discussion moved on to how to persuade Maria to take a complete break from her duties, something which she was unlikely to do, or be given the peace

to do, unless she was away from home and all its demands for a while. They considered which of their relatives and friends might be able to give Maria the peace and tranquility she would need for her recovery and who she would not mind being lodged with. It went against the grain for either of them to think of asking a favour of even the closest of relations and they knew that Maria would hate to be put in the position of self-invited guest, nomatter how weighty the reason behind it. Then Paulina recalled hearing talk of the benefits to be gained from visiting the mineral spas in Germany whose names all seemed to begin with Bad. Her father greeted this suggestion with enthusiasm and undertook to speak to their doctor about which of the many cures he would recommend for Maria.

Directly upon their return to Den Haag Johan and Paulina went to their separate quarters to await the announcement of dinner, as had become their domestic habit. However, on this occasion Paulina soon came to the conclusion that she would have to instigate some sort of discussion with her husband about the several matters that were weighing heavily on her conscience. The couple were not accustomed to sitting down together for the purposes of having a serious conversation about the state of their private affairs as a result of which a joint view or mutually agreed course of action might emerge. Instead, they each went their own way, as Paulina had envisaged they would, only informing each other of what they were doing as a matter of courtesy and only when necessary at that. Now Paulina had to overcome her anxious state and find a way to take the initiative in engaging Johan in a conference.

She sent her maid to set out a tray of drinks in the salon in order to tempt Johan into accepting her invitation to join her there. Having dispatched her maid with this invitation, Paulina did her best to smooth her appearance and cool her head before going to the salon to wait for him. Johan found his wife's invitation slightly odd but he did not hesitate to rise to what he decided to take at face value as being a social approach with the added bonus of alcohol on offer. He arrived at the salon to find his wife looking more ill at ease than welcoming.

Paulina struggled to keep her composure and not show her impatience as Johan fussed over glasses, decanters, bottles and cigars whilst mak-

ing easy small talk. At last they were seated either side of the fire place in the apparent ease of a settled married couple and Paulina looked for an opportunity to shift the ground of their encounter and reveal the motive to her invitation. Taking advantage of a lull in Johan's chatter as he lit a taper from the fire and applied it to his cigar, Paulina gathered herself and began the speech which she had carefully prepared beforehand.

"My dear, there are some matters about which we should have a serious discussion. Mainly they concern my mother's health - and yours."

Her last two words suddenly caught Johan's attention, an expression wavering between guilt and bewilderment passing across his face. Without pausing to give him a chance to speak, she produced the letter containing the doctor's bill from her skirt pocket as she continued;

"Let us take this latter concern first, then. This letter addressed to you found its way among correspondence sent to me and I confess to opening it in error, not having read the envelope carefully enough. I find its contents rather disturbing."

Handing the item in question over to its rightful recipient, she continued;

"Disturbing on two counts. First, that you are ill and, second, that you have hidden this fact from me."

Here she deliberately paused to give Johan time to open and read the doctor's invoice then come up with a response to her raising of the matter. She waited longer than was entirely comfortable as it seemed to her that Johan was visibly struggling to compose himself.

"I am deeply ashamed that you have caught me out in a small dishonesty in concealing this from you. But, in my defence, the consultation alluded to in this invoice revolved around such a trivial ailment that it must have slipped my mind to tell you of it."

"so, my dear, whatever is the matter that you could not see our own doctor?"

"let me assure you that there is nothing sinister about my action. Merely the convenience of going to a doctor well versed in the disorders common among members of the marine. Something that I contracted during my time at sea sometimes threatens to recur and did so whilst I was visiting Gillis so I sought out a medical man I had consulted in the past who is familiar with such problems and their treatment. Please be reassured that it signifies nothing at all serious or of any danger to you."

Paulina was a bit thrown by the gravity of his last remark but did not question it as she was preoccupied with her own pressing concerns.

"I have to ask: Might it have a connection to our failure to produce children, and does it have anything to do with your absences from home about which you tell me so little?"

This double question came as a challenge to Johan, its boldness aiming directly at two matters of such a private nature that he found himself suddenly off guard and on the defensive. The first question was simply too intimate and threatening to his masculinity for him to be able to take in, never mind address thoughtfully. The second question defaulted as the lesser of two evils but still defied his considered reply. Instead, Johan found that he had made a snap decision to trust his wife's discretion if he confided in her the reasons for his secretive absences with not a little desire that this would distract her from pursuing and answer to her first, and simpler, question.

"What I have to tell you must not be divulged or even hinted at to another living soul. Before I begin, do you swear to me that you will never betray the confidence which I am about to put in your discretion, not even to allude to what I am about to tell you when you write in your journal?"

"Oh my goodness! This sounds grave indeed!"

"Do I have your word?"

"The swear it!"

"Johan, you are frightening me!"

"I have good reason for this. Do you swear secrecy?"

"Yes, then, I swear on my life that I will keep what you tell me hidden inside and not whisper a word of it."

"Good. I am sorry to upset you but you will soon see why it was necessary."

I am often called away on matters of importance to our country and its international affairs. I can give no better illustration than what is about to occur. But before I go any further, may I ask if I am correct in surmising that you also wish to talk to me about your mother's health and your desire to spend a good deal of time in Haastrecht with the aim of easing her burden of work?"

Paulina nodded in assent, realizing that her account of her talk with her father which she had given to Johan during their journey home would have made him aware of the topic she was hoping to broach with him later.

"I should tell you that I, too, have to be away from home and that my business may take some time. You may have heard or read in the newspapers that Prussia is likely to defeat France in the current war between them. This will result in the unification of all the German states creating a lengthy border between us and them. Feeling empowered by their success over the French, it is feared that their attention may next turn to encroaching on our territory."

As far as my involvement goes, there is a fear that the Prussian navy will make an incursion into the Friesian Islands and threaten our trade routes to the Zuiderzee and north coast ports, perhaps even beyond. As we speak, I am awaiting a summons to join the Dutch fleet bound for the waters off Denmark."

Paulina interrupted with a question she just had to know the answer to;

"Will the summons come in the shape of that peculiar little man I catch sight of from time to time? He never looks the same twice running but you always seem to go away just after I glimpse him."

"Yes, he is an agent of the Rpyal Family and usually so discrete as to barely visible. It was extraordinarily observant of you to notice him and clever of you to connect him with my departures."

"Johan, I have been so anxious about what clandestine purposes lie beneath these brief desertions that I have become extremely vigilant for any signs that might point to an explanation of what is going on."

"Such as a letter? Or going through my things?"

Now it was Paulina's turn to feel embarrassed.

"Oh, my love, please do not concern yourself! It is flattering and reassuring that you still care so much since our marriage has had its disappointments for you, I know. I admire your initiative in spying on me and your bravery in confronting me today. I like you the better for it."

There was a brief lull in their talk as each adjusted their understanding of the other and took in the shift to a more open basis to their relationship now that things had been said which were previously left unsaid. Johan took a long draught of his drink and a pull on his cigar as he ordered his thoughts and considered how best to continue.

"I have a special talent which the marine has serious need of. Although I left the service some time ago, I am honour bound to answer the King's call whenever it comes. This is how I remain entitled to still wear my uniform whenever I so choose.

Oh, don't look so surprised, my dear. I know that I must seem a dull wit when held up to the men in your family, but I am not totally lacking in intellect. I have a gift with maps: reading them, interpreting the land and sea scape depicted by them and for making maps which others can easily comprehend. This is of strategic importance for the defence of our country and for the conduct of international affairs.

My next mission will involve me in a detailed survey and mapping of the area at risk from the Prussian navy. The aim is to determine where a fleet might penetrate our defences, where a ship might hide itself close to land, where a boat might land a spy or armed forces, and so

on. My cartography is needed in these matters and is of importance in deciding how we might deploy our own forces defensively."

Paulina hardly dare ask the obvious question;

"Will you be in danger?"

Johan paused before answering, briefly pondering how truthful he should be, not wanting to worry Paulina then realizing that she would worry nomatter how he played down the risk.

"I will be honest with you, my love. Yes, there will be some danger involved over and above the usual perils of the sea. As I said, there is a war and both Prussia and France have their spies about who will use force against anyone seen as thwarting their efforts at gaining advantage. There is always a chance that we will run into trouble despite our best efforts to be clandestine and cautious. I am not a reckless man so I shall be as careful of myself as is consistent with achieving the desired ends."

"And will this work require you to be away from home for long?"

"Again, I'm afraid that I must answer in the affirmative. There is a lot of coast and sea to map with many islands, sandbanks and complex tide lines to be accurately rendered. Some of these are subject to alteration by the action of the sea so will need to be charted again and again to maintain accuracy. Our mission also involved reporting on any unusual vessels or activity, which will also keep us at sea for long periods. You will by now appreciate that all of this means that I shall be unable to send word to you or receive any of your dear letters.

So, it is for the best that you go to Haastrecht where you will be occupied and thus somewhat distracted from concerns about me. You will have the comfort and support of your family and friends ad the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing all you can for Maria and Oma."

A rapid succession of thoughts and feelings swept through Paulina as she grappled with a new understanding of her husband and an altered appreciation of her marriage. Now that Johan had explained every-

thing she found that she felt less rather than more anxious. Now that her suspicions about his infidelity had been laid to rest she felt a sense of relief that their marriage was not under threat. More than that, she found her feelings for her husband were strengthening now that he was turning out to be a gifted man who was engaged in important work in the service of their King and country. It must be admitted that her pride in being his wife was starting to tarnish as he had every appearance of lacking any occupation. Being raised to hard work as a duty it had been hard for not to think less of him for his seeming idleness. She was overcome by a sudden rush of love and desire for him that reminded her of their courtship and the best parts of their honeymoon.

Johan, of course, discerned the subtle alteration in his wife which signalled the re-awakening of her desire. He rose and fetched her a small glass of the red vermouth she had a fondness for, taking the opportunity to lean close to her as he handed her the drink. He rested his hand lightly on her shoulder for a few seconds, laying the groundwork for later intimacies.

The tie for deep conversations thus reached its conclusion without further concerns surfacing. Paulina would have liked to return to the theme of their childlessness but feared that crossing the bounds of delicacy, even between husband and wife, might destroy the atmosphere of closeness which had developed between them during the course of the evening. The prospect of a prolonged separation, entailing Johan's absence from her bed, was setback enough to her hopes of motherhood, although she knew that this could not be helped.

On Johan's part, he was all too willing to let the subject of his medical situation drop. It had given him a nasty moment when Paulina produced the doctor's bill and he had had to think on his feet to come up with some sort of plausible explanation for it. He hadn't exactly lied in what he had said, but he hadn't been entirely honest either. But, a risk of discovery past is a risk forgotten so his mind focussed on managing a smooth progress towards bedding Paulina.

Summer 1871

Joahn's sea chest had stood next to Paulina's trunks and boxes in the voorkammer of Van den Boschstratt 12 as the couple made their farewells on a freezing January morning. Four months had now passed since that day when the Den Haag house had been shut up and Paulina moved back to the family home in Haastrecht. Paulina had gradually taken over her mother's tasks as Maria's poor health forced her to relinquish them bit by bit. Once settled back into her old room, Paulina had found it easy to fall back into the old routines and habits of the Haastrecht life she had led before her marriage. Indeed, she found that for long periods she could forget that she was married, especially with the added burden of all her mother's work. This state of affairs made it easier to bear the total absence of any communication for Johan and distracted her from her anxiety for his safety. From time to time she felt a pang of remorse at just how easily she had abandoned her recent life style which made her feel as though she had rejected her marriage to Johan.

For all that, things at the Bisdom van Vleit house were not quite the same as they had been two years previously, and not just because Paulina herself had been changed by her married life (how?). She found her father to be even more busy with his Rotterdam business interests which were causing him some concern since profits were not holding up as well as he wpuld have hoped. At home, his political involvements were not pleasing everyone locally so he had found himself the subject of a number of ungrateful lampoons. His progressive ideas for land drainage did not meet with universal favour, especially his plans for the installation of steam pumping engines. He was encountering resistance to such technological advances so keeping this project moving forward required his constant vigilance and the devotion of both time and energy in chivying people along in order to get the work done.

Once Paulina was installed and doing everything that was required it was time to arrange a spa cure for Maria, whose complaints were problematically hard to specify that the type of cure that would benefit her was not easy to identify. She said that she lacked her usual energy and certainly seemed to need to rest more than ever before. Her appetite was sometimes slight so she was becoming thinner and suffered with irregularity in her habits. Climbing the stairs made her gasp for air yet she had no cough. The doctor could find no diagnosis and wondered aloud if she might simply be affected by a nervous disorder. Paulina thought this unlikely as her mother had always been a strong woman although she had to concede that her mother had been working increasingly hard, as her own experience of stepping into her shoes attested. Eventually they settled on Bad Ems as the solution because of its ease of access by train, spa waters efficacious for chest and digestive problems, stunning environment and social cachet. The end of the Franco-Prussian War in early May meant that travel across the border was once again reliable and safe So, preparations completed, Paulina and her father saw Maria and her entourage off with high hopes for the benefits of the cure before both returned to their duties.

Paulina soon received a letter from her mother giving an account of the regime at her hotel. It did not sound either very appealing or very restful and Paulina was glad that she did not need such a 'cure'. The day began with a glass of water from the Kraechenbrunnen spring to aerated the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract and a glass from the Kesselbrunnen spring to stimulate the secretions of the digestive tract. The action of the latter was assisted by a gentle stroll beside the River Lahn whose real attraction seemed to come from the opportunity to spot the royalty and famous artists from Europe and beyond who happened to be in town at the time. More water was drunk before lunch and in the late afternoon with further application of spa waters through inhalation and warm baths. Eating and socialising, it seemed, left little time to retreat to the quiet of her room. At the conclusion of her letter, Paulina's mother sought to reassure her that she was confident in the positive effects of the cure over the ensuing weeks.

It was shortly after this letter that word reached Paulina and Marcellus that Maria had been unable to complete her stroll in the spa gardens

despite the assistance of a walking stick and the support of her maid. A bath chair had been sent for and she had not felt up to leaving her room since having been helped back to the hotel. Paulina and her father made arrangements to go to Bad Ems to see Maria but felt no sense of urgency or gravity about their visit, each convincing the other that Maria's collapse was to be explained by the results of all her exertions at home finally catching up with her now that she could relax at last. The reality was that by the time Maria had arrived in Bad Ems it was already too late for her to recover.

Paulina and her father arrived in Bad Ems fully expecting to witness Maria making steady improvement as the cure combined with complete rest had their beneficial effects. Once Paulina saw the Bad Ems for herself she was even more convinced of its restorative properties. Here the River Lahn flowed through a steep, wooded valley between the Westerwald and Taunus mountains providing a magnificent backdrop to the town. A striking river frontage had been created by the architecture of the Staadtsbad, Kursaal and Casino as well as the opulent hotels all around. Grand villas were colonising the less sunny southern bank and churches of all denominations seemed to be springing up everywhere to cater for the varied spiritual needs of the shifting population. She quickly determined that such physical beauty combined with a tranquil ambience could not fail to restore her mother in both mind and body.

Indeed, her mother rallied upon their arrival, managing to eat a little of the delicious food on offer as well as drinking the prescribed glasses of mineral waters. She seemed to rest peacefully in her room after meals, so Paulina and her father occupied themselves with outings which took them increasingly further away from the hotel. At times, she even felt as though she were on an adventurous trip just like her excursion through the Alps or her honeymoon. She forgot about her mother's state of health for hours at a time so preoccupied was she with all the new experiences Bad Ems and its surrounding brought to her.

At first, Paulina and her father took strolls around the town where everywhere they encountered fashionably dressed members of Eu-

rope's royalty, aristocracy and wealthy classes could be seen taking the air on the riverside promenades or exploring the many other attractions on offer. Paulina found herself even more fascinated by the less regal and more unusual residents of the town. Chatting with new acquaintances, she discovered that a number of well-known writers and artists were there to take advantage of the creative atmosphere and ready source of patronage. The lone, tall stooping figure of Turgenev, and the more attractive Dostoyevsky accompanied by his second wife, Anna, were pointed out to her as members of the Russian crowd. However, most of the whisperings amongst her fellow guests related to craggy old Richard Wagner and his wife, Cosima, more than twenty years younger than him, and the scandal surrounding their previously adulterous relationship and brood of illegitimate children. The rather gruff-looking Victor Hugo was said to be taking the cure to aid his recovery from near starvation during the Prussian siege of Paris during which, Paulina was alarmed to learn, he was forced to eat animals from the zoo. She listened with mounting horror to the romantic story of the death of his favourite daughter when she fell out of boat into the River Seine and was drowned under the water by the weight of her sodden skirts, her young husband joining her in death as he entered the water trying to save her.

Exploring further, they climbed up to the Concordium to enjoy the splendid view of the Lahn valley from the viewing platform atop the tower. Paulina found this excursion quite exhausting so was glad that the next trip was by boat along the river followed by a train journey further along the Lahn Valley Railway. The train took them to the city of Limburg, the track winding along beside the river, halting at seven stations before their destination. There was plenty of beautiful scenery to admire from the carriage window, but the eleven tunnels which interrupted the view provided a modicum of thrill also. At Limburg they hired a cab to drive them around the

The Altstadt ("Old Town") boasts a fine cathedral and is full of narrow streets with timber-frame houses, dating mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries. That's why it is located on the German Timber-Frame Road. Limburger Dom, one of the most complete creations of Late Romanesque architecture. It was printed on the reverse of the 1,000

Deutsche Mark note from the second series,[2] which was in circulation from 1960 to 1989. The cathedral was recently renovated and painted to reflect its original appearance. Limburger Schloss, built in early 13th century by Gerlach von Ysenburg Burgmannenhaus, built about 1544; serves as a museum today St. Anna-Kirche (church), stained glass from third fourth of 14th century with eighteen scenes from the New Testament Old Lahn Bridge, from 1315, place where the Via Publica (road) crossed the Lahn In the Old Town stand many timber-frame houses from the 13th to 19th centuries. One peculiarity seen among the timber-framed houses of Limburg is the "hall house" from the High Middle Ages, which has a great hall on the ground floor. When restoration work began in the Old Town in 1972, the houses were carefully restored. Among the best known timber-frame houses are: Haus Kleine Rütsche 4, narrowest spot on the historic trade road between Frankfurt and Cologne, whose breadth is written at the Haymarket (Heumarkt) in Cologne Haus der sieben Laster ("House of the Seven Vices") at Brückengasse 9, built in 1567,[3] timber-frame house with carvings showing Christianity's seven deadly sins, namely pride, greed, envy, lust, gluttony, wrath and sloth Werner-Senger-Haus, a beautiful stone hall house with timber-framed façade dating from the 13th century Houses at the fishmarket. The square's name in the 13th century was still Fismart ("Yarn Market" or "Wool Market") in the Limburg dialect, and it was the Limburg wool weavers' trading centre[4] Römer 2-4-6, Germany's oldest freestanding house; in the garden a mikvah was found Rathaus ("Town Hall"), built in 1899 "Huttig" (town wall tower remnant) Former noble estate of the Counts of Walderdorff at Fahrgasse 5

They recounted all their adventures to Maria who seemed interested in everything they did. Paulina suggested to her father that one of their local discoveries might be something that her mother could be persuaded, Fench ambassador to Prussia, during their famed conversation in the Kupark the previous July. Otto Van Bismark's rather manipulative account of what was reputedly a very friendly talk was known as the Ems Dispatch, its blunt tone was generally regarded as having triggered the Franco-Prussian war that had ended only a matter of days earlier. Maria's doctor was consulted about the proposed outing

He pronounced that a short excursion in the warm summer air and with good company could only do her good as she seemed to be on the road to recovery. Paulina's father arranged a dog cart into which Maria was helped then, Paulina and her father walking alongside, was driven to the very spot where this diplomatic event took place. Now confident of the eventual her mother's restored health, Paulina felt relaxed and thoroughly entered into the spirit of the afternoon.

Paulina and her father made arrangements for their return to Haastrecht on the following day. As soon as they had made their farewells Maria collapsed, exhausted by her efforts on behalf of her husband and daughter. She had not wanted them to see how weak and ill she felt as it would only cause them to worry and that was pointless as there was nothing they, or anybody, could do to change the situation. She soon became confined to her room, then took to her bed. The doctors and nurses could plainly see that she was slipping away, despite their best efforts and previous optimism. Paulina and Macellus had barely had time to settle down back at Haastrecht before a further summons to Bad Ems arrived. Still unprepared for the gravity of the situation, they made no haste in arranging for their return to Bad Ems. On 7th June Maria died quietly and alone, aged 67.

If Paulina had thought herself busy before, then the death of her mother left her with not a second to spare in the day. Organising a funeral had the added complication of Maria's body being in Ems but her burial to take place in Haastrecht, some considerable distance away and across the border between two nations. It was agreed that Marcellus would return home in order to take up his duties there as best he could in the circumstances. Paulina was to remain in Germany to take care of formalities there before accompanying her mother's body back to Haastrecht. Before his departure Paulina had armed her father with a list of things he needed to do once back home but she rather suspected that pressing matters of other kinds would distract him from giving her instructions his full attention. She was fairly confident that her father's friendship with the Pastor and good business relationship with their lawyer would progress some matters. What was less certain was the commissioning of a new grave stone and the making of arrangements

for its installation, not to mention the detailed preparations for the interment itself. She would have to keep an eye on him if everything was to go smoothly.

Paulina returned to her hotel room and the many tasks which now vied for her time and attention. Etiquette dictated that she should only appear in public wearing mourning clothes but she had nothing suitable with her. A local seamstress was summoned on the recommendation of the hotel manager. The woman gave assurances that she could produce sufficient garments to satisfy society by the next day. Measurements were taken, fabrics chosen and designs recommended with facilitating a speedy outcome in mind. Then the milliner arrived with a selection of appropriate hat and veils from which Paulina selected something that would sit as decorously as was feasible atop her unruly hair. Fortunately she had gloves and boots in black so did not need to trouble herself to acquire these. Attention to her appearance was but an irritating interruption to the constant stream of correspondence that flowed from Paulina's pen, including instructions for further garments and accessories from her own seamstress which were to await her arrival back home.

Having sent out for a quantity of black edged notepaper and envelopes, she began the work of writing to all the names on the list of family and friends she had compiled, informing them of Maria's passing. Once she had word from her father of the date and time of the burial she could pass these details on to the close family members who would attend the house for prayer and meditation led by the Pastor before moving on to the burial itself. Although the family had a vault inside the church, a law passed in 1829 forbade further interior burials so Maria would be interred just outside the church walls in ground which was once the choir of the old church which burnt down in 1624 but was never completely re-built. Hopefully, this would still give access to the family vault just the other side of the church wall thus meeting the need of the family whilst staying within the law. Oh, how Paulina wished that she could include Joahn in her letters! She would just have to make do with dashing off notes to her father as matters requiring his attention came to her mind.

It was not all writing, however. There was a doctor to be seen in order to obtain a death certificate and medical documents necessary to transporting a corpse back to Holland. He did, of course, have to be paid, too. Then undertakers were summoned and the business of selecting a suitable casket (kist) gone through. Paulina tried to choose something which she thought would have met with her mother's approval and which reflected the family's station in life. The undertaker seemed to endorse the outcome before departing with haste in order to prepare the deceased for her last journey by suitable preservation, dressing her hair and applying the make-up which would lessen the waxy look of death and create the illusion of a living complexion. Lastly, with the help of his wife, he would clothe her in the garments and jewelery which Paulina had provided before arranging her in the casket and sealing it for transportation.

This final journey itself necessitated a not inconsiderable feat of organisation but the undertaker was no stranger to the deaths of foreigners in Bad Emms so knew the ropes. First, a hearse and mourner's carriage would convey the parties to the railway station, a short distance but the proprieties of a glass hearse and black carriage both drawn by plumed black horses were observed. A floral tribute of suitable size would top the casket and must be made using the most expensive and rare blooms. Two chief mourners would walk before the funeral cortege and remain at the bereaved's disposal throughout the journey to Gouda where a local undertaker would receive the party. Pall bearers would follow the cortege ready to transfer the coffin from hearse to train, then between trains at Koblenz, Koln and Utrecht. These men would also stand guard outside the compartment containing the coffin to ensure the deceased's privacy and safety. All these mourners would need to be provided with a compartment where they could take rest and refreshment on both the outward and return legs of their journey. Paulina's own food, drink and personal comfort also needed to be arranged. Things began to fall into place when her new clothes arrived and were to her liking. Up until now she had not left her room so, now that she was suitably attired, she was glad to go out for some fresh air and to receive and acknowledge in person the condolences of fellow guests. But she only began to properly relax once the travel home had

all been planned down to the last detail, including the choice of her personal menus and stipulation of her meal times. There were even contingencies in place in the event of missed connections, inefficiencies on the part of railway staff or other unforeseen delays.

It was a long, grim day for Paulina as she accompanied her Mother's casket (kist) back to Gouda during which she retreated into herself. Her habitual recourse of writing in her journal, composing poetry and writing letters to her friends was denied her by the jolting and swaying of the train which rendered even her large and fluid script distorted into illegibility. Even the diversion of reading was denied her as focussing on the unstable page brought on feelings of nausea, even were she in a frame of mind to concentrate on the story. So, she spent most of the journey gazing out of the compartment window without registering the changing landscape or the towns and cities passing by.

Finally arriving at Gouda, her wits were so dulled that she allowed herself to be escorted onto the platform by the Chief Mourner on duty and passed into the care of his opposite number from the Gouda firm. She felt herself being handed on to yet another man who had the boldness to put his arm around her shoulder. She suddenly jerked into awareness at this unwarranted intrusion upon her person, experiencing a moment of utter confusion as a familiar voice struggled for recognition and location in the man in such intimate contact with her. It was Theo! At last she could let go of the need to hold herself up under the burdens of the previous days, weeks and months and relinquish all to Theo's care. It was such a relief to find herself safely ensconced inside The Haven.

Paulina soon realized that Theo had in fact taken charge of everything at Haastrecht. He had taken Marcellus to The Haven and she was shocked to see him looking so worn and ashen, barely able to raise a smile at the sight of his daughter. It seems that he had been carrying out his business and public duties as usual, preferring to keep busy rather than sit and ruminate on his loss. Paulina felt much the same, being of the opinion that life goes on and it does nobody any good to simply succumb to emotion. Unfortunately, she found that

this is just what Aggie had done. As soon as she saw her sister, Aggie fell against her in floods of tears, clinging to Paulina like a drowning woman. Reluctantly, Paulina put her arms around her step-sister and tried to summon the energy to comfort her whilst willing her to pull herself together. In the end it was Theo who gently detached his sobbing wife, helped her to a seat in an armchair then wrapping her in a shawl and putting her feet up on a footstool. His solicitousness caused Paulina a sharp stab of regret that Johan was absent.

As if reading her mind, Theo came to her with an account of the efforts which he had made to try and reach Johan through his contacts, calling in some of the favours he was owed. Although nothing was certain, he had a feeling that a message had reached Johan's ship and that it might be possible, but not to raise her hopes too high, that he could be discretely landed somewhere. Clearly Theo knew more about Johan's activities than she did, or he had previously divulged, but it did mean that he could give her good news about this welfare despite all the other uncertainties. For now, it was a relief to Paulina to be back among her family with her burden shared.

Cook had prepared a selection of savouries and cakes for a light supper which the maid had laid on a small table in the salon. Theo pressed a small glass of sweet wine on both Paulina and Aggie before pouring a healthy measure of cognac for Marcellus and himself. The diminished family group arranged themselves around the table then toyed with the food whilst managing to make small talk by dint of long-established social habit. Paulina soon felt her eyelids beginning to droop and had to beg to be excused to her room. There she found that her own maid from home had already laid out her nightgown and prepared hot water so that she may wash away the soot of the trains and the grime of travel. Grateful to feel clean and be released from her corsets, Paulina was soon fast asleep in the arms of a large, soft feather bed.

In the early hours of the morning word had reached The Haven that Johan had arrived at his brother's house and had elected to rest there before making the journey to Gouda in time to join the funeral cortege for the journey to Haastrecht. Gillis had been shocked by the sight

of his brother. Unsurprisingly, Johan was salt encrusted, sooty, and generally dirty but he also smelled rather repulsively of rancid fish oil, not to mention neglected bodily hygiene. But more than this, he looked far more unhealthy than could be accounted for by his arduous journey home or the rigours and deprivations of life at sea. He had lost weight but that wasn't the worst of it. His face beneath the beard growth was covered in small ulcers and scabs which he passed off as salt burns from the lashing of sea spray whilst on deck. He vehemently denied feeling ill saying that he just needed time to recover himself.

By the time Johan presented himself to Paulina later that morning he had bathed, shaved and was dressed in his good, black clothes. A faint fishy odour hung about his person despite the liberal application of cologne in an attempt to cover it. He had also tried to conceal the mess that was made of the skin on his face by shaving across a rash of small scabs and lesions by the application of pigmented ointment but this hadn't been entirely successful as it created a complexion of a most unnatural colour and texture. Furthermore, beneath the fumes of cognac on his breath there lurked a rottenness from within. Paulina had expected to fall into his arms after so long a separation but found him rather repulsive. He didn't force the matter, either, creating an atmosphere of strained politeness between them. Paulina wondered just how much he was hoping to keep hidden from her than was necessary and despite his protestations of openness when she had broached the subject of his secrecy back in Den Haag. Indeed, she was quite distracted from the purpose of the day, having to be shepherded through it all by Johan and Theo.

During the carriage journey to Haastrecht Paulina sat between Marcellus and Johan in what promised to be a leaden silence because of the strained atmosphere and the Marcellus's growing morbid pre-occupation with the hearse in front of them and the the casket it contained. Then Johan suddenly decided to entertain father and daughter with a lively account of his tortuous journey back to Gouda. This began with a hazardous transfer from his ship to a small, local fishing boat in a rolling sea, followed by an uncomfortable run to the fishing port of Zoutkamp on the coast to the north of Groningen,. This gave him the opportunity to explain away the state of his face by means of a dra-

matic enactment of being repeatedly stung by salt water spray. Once ashore, he had engaged in canny negotiations with the skipper of a Tjalk (?) conveying smoked eels to market in Groningen before he was granted passage. Keen to be under way, the skipper had frustratingly elected to wait for the most favourable run of the tide to assist the sails in carrying them along the Reitdiep. Johan feared that being in close quarters with the smoked eels for such a length of time might have left him with an unfortunate fragrance, a point with which father and daughter could only tacitly concur. From Groningen he could reach Rotterdam by train but a badly timed connection meant that this seemed to take forever. After just a short time with his brother, he had needed to leave at the crack of dawn to make the train for Gouda in order to be in time to be with them before they left for Haastrecht.

Grudgingly, Marcellus and Paulina had been distracted by Johan's recounting of his tale, which had managed to consume the whole of the ride to Haastrecht. Nevertheless, they were glad to arrive and gain release from the close confines of the carriage. The Pastor was waiting at the house to greet them, ushering them into the grand salon where Otto and Adelaide were waiting. Paulina registered their recoil at the sight of Johan in the instant before they regained control of their expressions. She surmised that they were thinking that he looked more embalmed than her mother, whose closed casket meant that they would not be able to make the actual comparison.

Poor old Oma, who had not expected to outlive one of her sons much less her daughter-in-law, was wheeled in by bath chair to join the company as they sat round for the Pastor to lead their prayers and prompt the direction of their silent contemplations. Then, Oma having fallen asleep, was taken back to her room before the rest of the party set out for the churchyard. The Pall Bearers hoisted Maria's casket onto their shoulders and the Chief Mourner led the sedate procession the short distance to where the grave had been opened ready to receive its offering. Judging from the most unpleasant smell hanging over the churchyard, the family vault had been penetrated allowing Maria to be lowered into the ground to join the Bisdom-van-Vliet's who had predeceased her. The Pastor led his congregation in the Lord's Prayer before the funeral party turned to return to the house allowing the

gravediggers to cover the coffin with earth and seal in the smell of the stinking rich. Before the family went their separate ways to resume their daily lives marcellus laid before them a substantial meal accompanied by plenty to drink in order to to sustain them for the start of their journey.

Once Marcellus, Paulina and Johan has bade farewell to the rest of the funeral party, a sense of emptiness and malaise afflicted each of them. They shared the anti-climax at having no focus for their activities and attention now that the event for which they had expended so much energy in preparation was over. Now what should they do with themselves? Marcellus would ordinarily have gone back to his work but desisted so as to honour of the memory of his wife. Paulina was also thinking of what she needed to do in order to catch up with the management of the house and estates which had surely been neglected during her absence. Mostly, though, she was pre-occupied with trying to make sense of the state that Johan had got into. As for Johan, he sought to avoid for as long as possible the inevitable questioning by his wife, ideally until his skin had a chance to heal so that there was no outward sign to give force and direction to her inquiries. He wanted to be alone with a few good, Haastrecht cigars and a bottle or two of Marcellus's best Cognac.

After a period of desultry conversation all three agreed that they should retire in order to begin the process of recovery from their exertions with a period of uninterrupted rest and, hopefully, a good night's sleep. Johan took his leave of father and daughter with an almost unmannerly haste then shut himself up in his quarters in a way that clearly signalled that he did not wish to be disturbed. Marcellus and Paulina exchanged glances registering their surprise at Johan's departure but they neither discussed nor commented on his motivation. Instead, they spent a quiet half hour in reminiscing about Maria whilst permitting themselves a few tears for the loss of her. Then, having released the tensions of the day, they took their individual thoughts off to bed.

Maria was barely cold in her grave before the churchyard beside her was disturbed in preparation for Oma's burial. Once again, the family

gathered in prayer and reflection at the house. Once again, they stood in the churchyard to watch the small coffin containing Oma's shrivelled and shrunken corpse being lowered into the foetid extension of the family vault. Once again, they dined until replete before going their separate ways. But this time there was no subsequent sense of a void left by the person now gone. Instead, a sense of relief that was only be tinged with sadness. At the age of 84, it had been Oma's time. The force of the woman who had ruled the household in the wake of her husband's untimely death, had continued to make her presence felt after Marcellus's marriage brought another woman into the house and then gone on to hold her own in the trio of mother, wife and daughter that followed had long dissipated as she became increasingly frail and infirm then, for the most part, confined to her room. They had gradually become accustomed to her absence but not innured to the growing suffering from which only death had the power to relieve her.

Another difference between Maria's funeral and Oma's came later in the day when Paulina and Johan shared the same bed. Over the six weeks that intervened between the two funerals Johan's skin had returned to its normal condition, he had regained a healthy-looking physique and regained the confidence to tackle the demands of marital intimacy, both physical and otherwise. The odours about his person had returned to their usual combination of cologne, cigars and cognac in various stages of staleness, contributing to his person being generally more approachable. Paulina had not quite recovered from the horror of the realization that the skin rash attributed to salt burns had, in fact, covered all of his torso as well. She was astute enough to see that he had been trying to pass it off as something far more trivial than it actually was, and to form the view that only some contagious disease could have led him to keep her at arm's length for several weeks. His complete recovery allowed her enough optimism to conclude that whatever the illness had been, it was now a thing of the past. She could not quite ignore the nagging recollection of that invoice from a strange Rotterdam doctor and Johan never quite regained even the semblance of his earlier interest in his wife.

In fact, nothing was ever be the same for the Bisdome van Vliet's after Oma's death. Paulina and Johan would soon return to their home

in Den Haag leaving Marcellus to wander the empty rooms of the old familie huis trying to escape the fact that he was now all alone there. Of course, it was only right that Paulina should return to her own house, especially now that Johan seemed to have returned from his duties at sea. Now that there was no possibility of Maria ever returning, more permanent arrangements had been put in place to cover her roles in managing house and estates. A man of business had been engaged for the latter and seemed to be keeping on top of things. Marcellus had also taken on a housekeeper after interviewing many suitable women but rejecting them all until he finally could find no possible grounds on which to continue to deny that he needed the services of such a person. So far, these new arrangements had been to his satisfaction. Not that he cared much for his domestic comfort now that he was bereft of family, but that the management of the lands and estates was no longer to be conducted at the grace and favour of his daughter came unexpectedly as a relief.

Paulina was glad to be released from the heavy burdens of filling her mother's shoes. She had plenty to manage on her own behalf now that her mother's will had been enacted. Maria had bequeathed her five houses, two warehouses, two farms, five orchards, a mill, a stable and meadow and hay lands so she was a woman of property in her own right now, although in a modest way compared to her father's property and lands. She felt that she had neglected her friends over the past months and wanted, when needed, to see them again to gain succour from their amity. Before they left Haastrecht she took the opportunity to spend some time first with Mientje Blanken, whom she considered to be her very best friend, then with Helena and Cornelia Droost. Their sympathy with her loss gave her much succour which itself helped her to put her worries about Johan into some sort of perspective, although she did not divulge any hint of her marital situation to her spinster friends.

All too soon, Paulina and Johan departed for Den Haag leaving Marcellus feeling very alone in the rambling, old familie huis. In a matter of a few months he had gone from feeling his life complicated by the presence of three women in his home to missing their company and the civilising touches a woman brought to the house. He wandered

through the rooms now devoid of human occupancy since even the servants kept away, there being little for them to do most of the time, almost feeling a stranger in his own home. It was as if the house no longer belonged to him and he began to see it as an outsider might. The old rooms were now so outdated that they could almost be museum exhibits. Even the new part of the house seemed slightly shabby and old-fashioned as the sunlight through the windows threw a spotlight onto every little scuff and stain. He took his meals alone, as he had done many times recently, but now he knew there was no Oma dozing in her room and no Maria to return to him from an errand or visit. Only Paulina remained a possible companion. Whilst she had been living back at home he had grown used to her companionship despite her morose temperament. Now she had gone back to her life as a married woman and some else's companion. He felt bereft.

His natural recourse in times of personal disquiet was to seek the creative uplift he got from his work, from seeing a project through from the first idea to the final product. Normal duties were a distraction, yes, but now he needed more so he turned his attention to his latest grand scheme - the pump house which would keep the polders of Lopikerwaard drained. Marcellus had been working in partnership with Lopik's burgermeester to apply a modern solution to the flooding problems in this area caused by the conjunction of sinking peatlands and rising river levels. The mills had been coping by pushing water into a holding pond behind Haastrecht then discharging it into the Hollandse IJssel through small locks into the harbour then onto the river. But the mills now needed some help, especially when the wind did not blow to turn their sails.

Marcellus had joined a party of dignitaries on a visit to the new Cruquius pumping station, one of three that had been built to drain the vast Haarlemmermeer lake to the south west of Amsterdam. It had been a truly inspirational visit, not least because the drainage was the first project to be accomplished, not by the use of windmills at all, but solely by the use of steam powered pumps. Quite a departure for Dutch drainage engineers for which they had the English to thank with their advanced steam technology. Once the lake had been enclosed by a retaining dijk, the three pump houses had taken moved all the water

out into a ring canal in just a little over four years. A feat which, until he saw The Hydraulic, as they called it, for himself, had seemed impossible to Marcellus and made his own battles with flooding polder seem puny in comparison.

AS the barge conveying the party approached Cruquius along the canal their first impression was of a sort of castle but with the addition of a tall chimney. The engineer leading the tour explained that the boilers were housed in the hall which they could easily have mistaken for a medieval great hall, whilst the pumps themselves occupied a crenelated round tower beside it. However, the tower had eight great legs sticking out evenly around it which moved up and down in a manner that was disconcertingly like a vast spider on the move. Of course, the tower stood still and these legs were, in fact, the driving beams and piston links. The tour of the inside of the pumping station compounded the impression of animus as the boilers and steam engines roared, hissed and snorted. The amount of water that this working monster could move with the combined efforts of the eight pistons would have beggared belief had Marcellus not seen it with his own eyes. He found the whole experience exhilarating to the verge of frightening. It did, however, open his eyes to the power of steam which he now championed as the solution to the local problems back at home.

He could not as single-mindedly apply steam engines to the drainage of the troublesome polders of Lopikerwaard as the engineers of Haarlemmermeer had for a number of reasons. Marcellus realized that his own reluctance to abandon the use of windmills, which had been tried and tested across the centuries, would be echoed by the people of the Vlist. Replacing the mills for a new-fangled and alien mechanical contrivance was a risk too great to be contemplated by the ordinary man. The workings of the machinery would be unknown territory for them, almost like a magic trick moving the water around - or something biblical. They would fear what they didn't understand rather than embrace it. The value of steam pumping needed to be demonstrated in action so that it might become commonplace and no longer a mystery. Although he had been assured of the reliability of these engines, what if the machine did break down? He would need to find at least one local man who would be willing to learn not only how to operate the engine

but also how to maintain and, if necessary, repair it. Meanwhile, the current mill workers should be reassured that they were not about to be deprived of their livelihoods and homes in short order. There had been many reports of workers displaced by machinery seeking terrible revenge on their masters and their infernal engines. The change to steam needed to be accomplished gradually and the support of the millers courted along the way.

But now, in his bereavement, Marcellus threw his energies into the Haastrecht steam pump project. He haunted the architects of the buildings which would house the pump and the man who would operate it. The pump itself was being made in Cornwall and he contemplated paying a visit to the engineering company there but, in the end, decided that it was too long a journey to make and would necessitate too long an absence from home so reluctantly abandoned the idea. Maps and calculations absorbed him as he went over the plan and the predicted benefits that it would deliver. He kept up with his business and political interests yet the new drainage system was there to fill the void left by the absence of his three women.

He was also prone to distracting himself with pondering the state of his daughter's marriage which he could easily have worked himself up into a state of worry over. She seemed unable to settle down to life in Den Haag despite her husband being home from his wanderings permanently, or so it would seem. Paulina seemed to be busying herself with social activities which her husband seemed not to share in. Marcellus found that he was none too keen on Johan, although he was hard pressed to put his finger on quite why this should be. The chap seemed friendly enough but there was something a bit off kilter about him. A recently received letter had brought this feeling of unease to the front of Marcellus's mind as it seemed to typify something vaguely distasteful about the man.

For a start, Johan had addressed him as "Valued Papa" which seemed a little too familiar to Marcellus. Although Johan had lost his own father when just a boy and perhaps had a need for a father figure even now he had grown to a man approaching middle years, Marcellus felt uncomfortable at being thrust into his shoes. The text itself began with

some talk of business in the form of the mortgage value of a polder near Middleburg, the ledgers relating to Hilletje and some matters concerning wills which left Marcellus wondering why he needed to know all this. What was of more interest was a passage reporting the couple's good health and the curtailing of their pleasure in Den Haag and Scheveningen by the inclement weather. It seemed that Paulina's friend, Jenny van Zijll, was visiting them but due to leave imminently. Johan said no more about her visit. More appositely, he made no concession to Marcellus's situation as doubly bereaved. In fact, Marcellus found it in rather poortaste that Johan went on to end his letter with an extensive account of Utrecht gossip concerning a man marrying a beautiful girl 35 years his junior (was that a hint to Marcellus to followsuit) and a couple who wed against the wishes of her family which ended with the jilted groom trying to drown himself by jumping from the Hoornbrug (again in bad taste considering Marcellus's own losses). Somehow Marcellus felt that the final salutation from "Your loving son" was rather overblown. However was his daughter faring in a marriage with someone so lacking in sensitivity to others and so keen to inflate his emotional connections to them?

Summer 1872(3)

The arrival of Theodorus Hooft caused something of a stir amongst the inhabitants of Haastrecht. There had, of course, been rumours that a new family had taken a house just beyond the sluis which could be interpreted as indicating that they are clearly not patrician or even simply wealthy. On the other hand, they were not simple folk who tended to live even further out along the dyke in dwellings which could only be described as basic or even hovels. The labouring population was almost entirely made up of folk born and raised in the village or who had married into these local families, but the Hoofts were clearly incomers, thus of great concern. The consensus among the watchers had to be that newcomers fell somewhere in between the Bisdome van Vliets and the common folk, likely the man of the family would be some sort of tradesman.

Grist to the rumour mill came from the Straver family of carpenters who had let it be known that they had been approached by 'building interests in Den Haag' with a view to engaging one of them in a 'grand and important' local construction project. Details of the Den Haag end of things were few and far between, the Straver family being more exercised with spreading it about that young Cornelis Straver, at the age of only 18, was to be given the honour of being a senior journeyman on this project. Details of the who, what, when and where of the putative construction remained the subject of much inventive conjecture. Thus, as soon as a stranger, accompanied by a woman and child, came into view on the dyke top word soon spread and people materialised at every vantage point to inspect the newcomers and their cart load of possessions as they steadily made their way towards their new home.

As soon as the cart had come to a reliable halt, Theodorus stepped down and raised his arms to help his wife safely down to earth, an especially delicate task since, as all could plainly see, she was preg-

nant. Next came a boy of about four who seemed less than keen to explore his new home, clinging to his mother's skirt thumb in mouth. Having secured his horse, the carter made haste to uncover his cargo and carry a chair into the house in order that Mevrouw Hooft might sit and recover after their long, uncomfortable journey from Den Haag. A box of toys followed in the hope that the young boy might be entertained and not get in the way of the men as they unloaded the rest of the family's goods. This latter task was arguably facilitated by the many volunteers from amongst the curious crowd who would later benefit in the way of kudos, taking material form as free food and drink, when disseminating their accounts of the family and their things in every detail.

At last, Theodorus paid the carter and closed the front door on the intrusive helpers who had been reluctant to leave. It had been a long day indeed! Maria Francina had wanted to supervise the unloading of their kitchen equipment, linens and clothing but he had been quite stern about making her stay sitting down. Hendrik Willem had been fractious and clung to his mother and attempted to do the same to his father, which was rather less than convenient. He had more than enough to cope with managing the location of every unloaded item, especially when people were crowding into the small house carrying anything they could lay their hands and requiring Theodorus to be in several places at once. He was, frankly, exhausted but the day was not over yet as he needed to make a site visit to check on progress and make his presence felt among the labourers. It was a considerable relief to him when a thoughtful gesture by *Burgemeester* Bisdorff van Vliet materialised in the shape of two maids who stepped into the middle of the chaos and set about making up beds and organising basic kitchen and toileting facilities.

Paulina had never felt so perturbed in all her life, not even when she met Johan Jacob. Her uncommon disquiet was compounded by the sensation that she was about to be overwhelmed and suffer an uncharacteristic and disgraceful public emotional collapse. She desperately

cast about for some sort of refuge from being exposed to social humiliation. Although she would have preferred solitude, nevertheless she was so glad to see her friend, Cornelia Droost, making haste in her direction. Allowing herself to be guided by Cornelia's hand under her elbow, Paulina entered the cool, calm quiet of the Droost house where she was passed into the enveloping wings of a plush armchair. Tea was ordered and Helena sent for.

As the disturbance of her arrival died down, the Droost house tried to regain its usual deep silence only punctuated only by the ponderous tick of the long case clock in the hall. But not today and a miserable Paulina realized that she could still hear the commotion outside from which she so badly wanted to escape. Granted, the clamour of destruction was now muted by the fabrics and furnishings of the house, yet the sounds of wrecking that filtered through retained the power to unsettle her spirit. It was incomprehensible yet it manifestly true that the home she had grown up in, which had seemed so solid, secure, immutable even, was being reduced to unrecognisable chunks of stone and wood accompanied by clouds of dust. Oh, so much commotion and chaos! Horrified, she could feel herself about to swoon in front of other people, even if they were her oldest and best friends.

When her father had first put forward his scheme to demolish the old *familie huis* his idea was clearly a bold one but, the way he presented it, seemed to make sense. His vision was to replace the existing arbitrary assemblage of buildings with a single, modern and stylish property. Part of his argument was that the old house was woefully lacking in domestic comforts and innovations, yet this was true of so many properties built by 17th century patricians. Many wealthy families had stuck to the Dutch way and periodically made additions and adaptations to their old houses thus giving them a new lease of life. It was obvious to Paulina and others that something more than replacing an old house, which was not exactly falling into ruins, was at work here. Marcellus's next point was incontestable. A new house was the way he wished to mark the anniversary of his fifty years as *burgermeester* of Haastrecht, which was undoubtedly a momentous achievement worthy of some grand gesture. But knocking down buildings which could have been the basis for a perfectly good house then to replace them

with a completely new one? The family were puzzled and dismayed, although they attempted to hide this from the proud and elated Marcellus.

With the utmost secrecy, Marcellus had set about finding an architect who was familiar with the new style of houses currently the fashion in Den Haag. He wanted something that had the same character as Paulina and Johan's new house, on the subject of which he had surreptitiously quizzed the couple and received glowing reports. The architect paid a site visit to Haastrecht early in 1972 which resulted in the advice to build the new house on the footprint of the old one. This strategy would avoid the trouble and expense of putting in new wooden piles for the foundations since the existing ones were still in good condition. It also had the virtue of keeping to the size of the original plot thus obviating the need to negotiate ownership of more land from adjacent properties. With his brief clearly established, the architect soon had a set of plans for the new Bisdom van Vliet house available for the perusal of his client.

Marcellus was delighted with the look of his new house so set about finding suitable master craftsmen to build it. He preferred to use local men where at all possible, but the architect championed a talented young mason and plasterer, Theodorus Hooft, who had experience in the modern building techniques currently in demand in Den Haag. Marcellus was impressed by Heer Hooft when they met, finding him amiable yet polite. They were soon collaborating effortlessly in making a refinements to the original plans so as to better fulfil Marcellus's aspirations. The young man was also willing to uproot his wife and young son from their home in Den Haag and move the family to Haastrecht in order to be near his client and his place of work.

Then came the day when Marcellus, Heer Hooft at his side, called together family and friends for a somewhat theatrical unveiling of his radical project. He was so delighted with himself and his vision of the future that nobody had the courage to challenge his decision, and Heer Hooft seemed such a nice young man who had clearly committed so much to the project and worked so hard on behalf of his client. In short, the two men put up a united and unassailable front.

Once the cat was out of the bag the gossips got to work. In parlours and kitchens all over the Province of South Holland the mention of Marcellus was heard to provoke phrases such as:

"Hier kan je je ei kwijt ..."

as a ringleader would invite those around them to openly share their opinions on Marcellus's grand plan and "loose their egg here", allegedly in private.

Then someone would venture that,

"Hij heeft een klap van de molen beet!" or *"Een klap van de molen gehad hebben!"*

to convey the view that he was not acting very wisely as though he had been "hit by one of the sails on the windmill" and has lost his mind as a result of it.

In his defense would come the reply,

"Leder kaasje heeft zijn gaatje!"

to caution that "every cheese has its hole" so nobody's perfect.

The dismayed would retort,

"Als de herder verdwaalt delen the schapen."

"If the shepherd gets lost the sheep just wander around." In other words, if the leader goes off in a wrong direction then other people don't quite know what to do.

Or,

"Nu breekt mijn klomp!"

"Now my clog is breaking!" I am totally amazed and I certainly didn't expect that!.

More colourfully,

"In de nesten zitten of werken!"

"He is sitting on a nest!" A country expression referring to the important task that millers have in keeping the area where the top rollers are free of birds nests. If birds get in there and build their nests then the rollers to turn the cap of the windmill jam resulting in a complete mess. So, the more thoughtful gossips have realized that Marcellus finds himself confused and not quite knowing what to do.

The less kindly, or more jealous, counter that,

"op grote voet leven!"

He is wealthy, or "living on a big foot", so can afford to spend a lot of money on whatever he wants, including a new house.

Those who envy his social position chip in with,

"Hij laat de wereld op zijn duim draaien!"

"He lets the world spin on his thumb", implying that he has too much power!

Countered by,

"Je wordt geleefd!"

"He is being lived by life" rather than living life and is so busy that his life is out of control.

"Hij heeft het zo druk als de kippen voor Pasen!"

"He is as busy as the chickens before Easter!"

One thing all agree on is that,

"Hij staat vast in zijn schoenen."

"He stands firmly in his shoes" so he knows his own mind and stands his ground.

Inevitably the village chatter reached Paulina, who came to appreciate that the general view was that her father has upset people by not doing what they expected him to do. Whilst some shared her own thought that his recent personal losses and his hectic work schedule had clouded his judgement, all acknowledged that it had to be accepted that a man as wealthy, powerful and sure of himself as her father was not likely to question his chosen course of action or examine the reasons for it. Nor, she would add, is he likely to consider the impact on his daughter of seeing her childhood home razed to the ground.

So, once she had grasped it, the opportunity that the Droost sisters provided of being able to unburden herself to good and trusted friends afforded Paulina some much needed relief from her private distress. But then she heard something which cast a new light on the situation and upset her once again. Helena and Cornelia, feeling that they may also speak freely to their friend, offered an additional insight concerning Marcellus's motivation behind the new house. By overhearing the talk around the building site, they had come to the view that Marcellus hopes to lure Paulina back to live with him permanently by building her a house in the style to which he fancies she has become accustomed in Den Haag. In addition, it seems that he hopes that such a grand property, coupled with the rise in status through association with himself, might overcome any reluctance on Johan's part to settle in Haastrecht. His strategy seems aimed at removing any conflict his daughter might feel between her duties to her husband and to her father by locating both men in the same place.

Paulina was astounded by this perspective on matters. Her father had been astute only in so far as he recognised how torn she was between her life in Den Haag and her ties to her former home, however much she had hoped to conceal this from him. Since her mother's death she has felt the burden of management of the family's fall entirely onto her shoulders whether she wanted this or not. It would not be easy to find someone else to assist her father in matters which were second nature to her after a lifetime of involvement in the Bisdome van Vliet estate.

There would be a lot for an incomer to get to grips with, not to mention the time it would take her to initiate them into the ways things should be done. Then there was the question of security and being able to trust an outsider with matters of business and politics which they would not wish broadcast. Perhaps her father had everyone's best interests at heart after all, but did it have to involve so much destruction!

Paulina was distracted from her bewilderment and distress by a sudden outburst of excitement from Cornelia who had been punctuating their discussion with trips to peek around the lace curtain at the big bay window to their first floor salon from which vantage point she could look down into the street.

"Oh, Paulina! Have you met Heer Hooft yet That's him outside now! Isn't he handsome! Oh, Paulina, do let's go down so that you can introduce us all. If you make as if to leave our house it would seem quite natural!"

Clearly Cornelia had been smitten by the builder! Feeling that no good could come of encouraging her friend in yearning after a married man of unknown provenance and unsuitable social standing, Paulina made the quite legitimate excuse of not feeling up to such a demanding social encounter and wishing remain quietly where she was for a while longer. Besides, the three women still had many snippets of news to share and mull over.

At last the clamour outside seemed to have died down to a tolerable level as the working day came to an end. Paulina rose and bade her grateful farewells to the Droost sisters before availing herself of the opportunity to venture outside again in relative calm. She was to join her father for dinner with their Pastor who had insisted that the temporarily homeless Marcellus lodge in the first floor corner room of his Kerkstraat *pastorie*. The two men were lifelong friends and very easy in each other's company so Paulina was looking forward to a relaxed visit and, since the weather was fine, enjoying the short stroll on the way there.

Her mind on the pleasures to come, Paulina failed to notice the man about to cross her path so was brought back to the present with a jolt when Heer Hooft slowed to a halt in order to avoid a collision. He raised his hat to her with the clear intention of doing more than just politely greeting her before resuming his journey. Indeed, he made plain that he knew who she was and begged her indulgence as he introduced himself. It seems that he had noticed her visit to the building site earlier on and how distressed she had been by what she had found taking place there. He graciously expressed his concern for her and enquired as to how she now fared. She sensed his empathy with her feelings at seeing her family home and all its memories and associations reduced to a pile of ugly and useless rubble.

Now having the opportunity to take him in, Paulina found that he was, indeed, a handsome man who was surprisingly young-looking to hold such a responsible position. He told her that he had just moved his household to Haastrecht from Den Haag so as to be more closely involved with her father's project. Paulina enquired after his family and discovered that he had a son, Hendrik Willem, who was approaching his fourth birthday and that his wife was expecting their second child in a month or so. Paulina remarked that she had moved in the opposite direction, leaving Haastrecht for Den Haag upon her marriage a few years earlier. She found him easy company and that their encounter was not the socially strained affair that their difference in standing had led her to anticipate. So, their first conversation came to a well-orchestrated and amicable closure with both going their separate ways having made positive comments on the almost certainty of their meeting again. As they parted, she caught out of the corner of her eye the twitch of a lace curtain at the Droost first floor window!

From another first floor window, her father had been watching for her arrival so was waiting on the steps of the pastor's house before Paulina had reached the door. He greeted her enthusiastically before sweeping her inside to be taken under the wing of the pastor in his salon where his wife was waiting to serve refreshments to the small party. Marcellus was keen to hear Paulina's impression of the work on his new house but Paulina didn't have the heart to tell him how awful she had found the whole thing. Her father was more animated than

she had seen him for a long time and looked in good health. Clearly the new venture had given him a fillip, whatever she might be feeling about it.

As her visit progressed, Paulina came to understand that her father's rejuvenation was at least partly the result of the good food and congenial company he was enjoying at the pastor's house. The temporary hiatus in his own domestic affairs, since there now was no household, had also lifted some of the burden he usually carried. Paulina felt a rush of guilt as she realised that her father had been starting to fade away and it would not have been long before his health began to suffer. On top of the revelation that the new house was, in no small part, designed to lure her back to Haastrecht, she suddenly saw how much her father needed her. By contrast, she had to admit to herself, however, painfully, that Johan only came alive when he was away from home. Indeed, he seemed to shrink into himself when confined to the routine behaviours expected of a man of his social standing. She had much to think about on her carriage journey back home.

Paulina was next in Haastrecht when her presence was requested at a meeting between her father and Theodorus Hooft. By this time the roof of the old house about to be removed. The tiles would be sorted and neatly stacked ready for re-use on other buildings in the area, discarding any that were too fragile or already broken. The money from the sale of the old tiles would go at least a little way towards offsetting the cost of the new roofing materials. By the same token, the wood from the supporting timbers would be kept for building purposes if it was sound, or cut for firewood if it was rotten, wormy or damaged in removal.

Theodorus had a gentle soul in spite of the tough exterior required to do his job. This was why he had wanted his clients to see the old house whilst it still resembled a habitable dwelling, conscious of the associations it would have accrued through a lifetime of memories. He understood the form of grief that was in store for them. Once the roof had been taken away, the next stage in demolition would be removal of the ceilings, at which point the interior would be open to

the elements. The rooms where the routines of daily life and the outstanding significant events of their times had taken place would be crudely exposed to public view. Prying eyes would make gossip over the rain sodden wood, plaster, paper and fitments that once graced the public and private chambers of the Burgermeester's family. For the two remaining members of that family, the shell of their home would be shorn of all their human activity. The old house would be dead and lost to them forever. Just simple lumps of material on a building site, as it already was for him.

"I respectfully requested that you join me here today because I have had an idea which I wanted to put to. I realise that this destructive phase of the new house project is very hard for you both. So, I have been entertaining a notion which might make the wrench with the past a little easier. Perhaps if we could carry forward something of the old house to incorporate into the new one then you would be comforted by a sense of continuity."

He paused in order to gauge how his idea was being received. Encouraged by their apparent openness to his proposal, Theodorus continued,

"I wondered if there might be some discrete, structural part of the interior which hold special meaning for you and which would be suitable for relocation. If you can bear it, take a look around inside whilst it is still safe to do so. You might bid farewell to each room whilst having in mind the selection one fixture, such as door and frame or fireplace, in the old house which you would like me to transplant into your new home. Take care to choose something you both like and gives you pleasant feelings just to look at it. But also bear in mind that I need to be able to ensure that it can be removed intact and that we can find a place for it in the new design where it will look natural. If you approve, I will leave you to look around by yourselves but will be on hand should you need me and when you are ready to discuss your choice."

With that, Theodorus bowed politely then withdrew to continue his supervision of his workmen. Out of the corner of his eye he saw his clients regard each other for a long moment then exchange a few

words before the Burgermeester gave a quick, decisive nod and they turned towards the open door and slowly made their way inside the house that was no longer their home.

He has expected it to take them a considerable length of time to tour the property and reach a decision so was taken by surprise when, barely fifteen minutes later, he noticed one of his men hurrying in his direction with a message from the Burgemeester requesting his attendance. He located his client and Mevrouw le Fevre de Montigny by almost bowling them over as he entered the lage huis voorkamer. Both were calmly contemplating a large section of wooden screening which incorporated two doorways and a number of etched glass panels. It was rather larger than Theodorus had foreseen but he could see the attraction as it was both decorative and functional with the benefit that it met his needs as a builder. It was an easy assumption that the screen held some significance for his clients since they had agreed upon it so rapidly. So, before matters went any further he needed to make a detailed inspection to make sure that this quite delicate installation could be removed without peril and that it was sound in itself. The last thing any of them would want would be to introduce a pest, such as woodworm, into a brand new building. However, on the face of it, they had made an excellent choice. So much so that he wondered why he hadn't spotted its potential himself!

Bidding farewell to his clients with the promise of letting them know his verdict next day, Theodorus set about his inspection but not before he had instructed his men to make haste to remove the roof since the upper floors were not involved in the preservation of the screen. Although his initial impression of the soundness of the piece was favourable, he had a secondary motivation in taking time to reach a final decision. He wanted to test out the local man appointed as his second in command, Cornelis Straver. Cornelis came from a long line of timmermen, carpenters, by trade from a well respected village family and was assumed to have some expertise to bring to the matter at hand. However, he was only nineteen years old and had never been involved in a big project before. Theodorus wanted to take the opportunity to test Cornelis out and, all being well, begin to forge good working relations with him.

Cornelis was employed on the carving of a sturdy, oak door for one of the high street houses when the messenger from Heer Hooft reached him. He wasn't due to begin work on the Bisdom van Vliet new house until construction started and wondered why he had been called upon now. His father looked up from his work and, with a slight smile, nodded that it was alright for Cornelis to leave the job he was doing, saying,

"Go! But best clean yourself up a bit first!"

All the family knew that it was important that Cornelis make a good first impression on Heer Hooft. He put away his tools in their proper places in the workshop, as was the disciplined habit of his trade, then crossed the yard and went into the family's cottage. In the kitchen he took one of the buckets of water his mother had lined up after she had filled them at the river that morning. He filled a basin at the sink, removed his shirt and splashed himself in the cold water down to his waist, drying himself off on the discarded shirt. His mother had fetched him a clean shirt and a comb for his hair.

Aware that it would have been easy for the young carpenter to be overawed by a man old enough to be his father as well as well versed in the construction of Haagse style houses, his mother sought to calm his nerves before this sudden and unexpected meeting. As she fussed round him she reminded him that,

"Your father never had much regard for plasterers, it being an inferior trade to ours. And you know what they say about Haagenars? All show and no substance."

"Oh, mother! I'll be alright! After all, he's just a man like any other!"

With that, he headed back outside, collected his satchel of basic tools from its peg in the workshop, slung it across his body and set off to see what Heer Hooft wanted. Arriving at the site, he was directed into the Lage Huis where he found Heer Hooft examining a painted and glazed screen. Cornelis removed his hat, stuffing it in his bag, before taking

the hand stretched out towards him. After exchanging pleasantries, Cornelis remembering to congratulate his senior on the recent birth of his daughter and been assured that mother and baby were thriving, they got down to the matter at hand.

Cornelis understood that his carpenter's knowledge to be applied to forming a judgement as to the viability of removing the screen intact with a view to using it in the new house. Both men applied themselves to a close scrutiny of the state of the wood, Cornelis begging leave to scratch away the paint in places in order to be assured of the integrity of the raw wood concealed beneath. Having concluded their survey, both agreed that there were no signs of infestation on rot which would preclude the introduction of the screen into a new construction.

Next, Cornelis investigated the means by which the screen had been inserted into its current position. After a while, he turned to Heer Hooft with a question in mind,

"Do I understand correctly that this building is to be otherwise demolished?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he continued,

"This screen is an original dating back to the time of King Louis XV of France and was put in place when the Lage Huis was built by Theodorus Bisdom in the middle of the 18th Century. This means that the screen is a classical piece and the it is important to preserve it if at all possible In addition, as you probably know, Burgermeester Theodorus Bisdom used his wealth to expand the family home and acquire the Slot van Vliet and surrounding lands. It was his investment that gave the Bisdom van Vliet's their full name as well as establishing them as important patriarchs. So, screen is a reminder of the rise of the family so not only a good choice for what it is in itself but also what it means to the current family members."

Heer Hooft expressed his surprise at the significance of what he heard and complimented Cornelis on his knowledgeableableness. Cornelis returned to the thrust of his original question,

" The only way such a delicate and old piece can be safely removed is by careful removal of its surrounding structures. In other words, it will need painstaking excavation rather than the usual level of care applied to demolition work."

Heer Hooft acknowledged what he was being told and that it would mean slow, painstaking and, of course, expensive work the cost of which would need to be put to Burgemeester Bisdome van Vliet in balance to the significance of the screen. Cornelis had proved his worth and impressed his senior with his confidence and maturity during their first working encounter. This encouraged Heer Hooft to further include Cornelis in the next phase of the screen project, namely where, and how, in the design of the new house the screen could be put to use. In order to further this discussion, he conducted Cornelis to his makeshift office where the plans for the new house were unrolled onto a large, plain wood table, the corners weighted down with fragments of complex plasterwork.

Both men poured over the ground floor plan, each suggesting possibilities but rejecting them all. Cornelis was concerned that there should be no structural load on the delicate, if not quite fragile, screen and Heer Hooft raising matters of the utility of the public rooms, possible privacy issues and the undeniable fact that they just did not fit with the modern architectural style. Cornelis found it increasingly easy to voice his thoughts as they occurred to him and that he could accept the older man's sometimes opposing views without feeling diminished. In short, the two men seemed to have got off on a sound footing.

Turning to the plan of the upper floor, there developed an optimistic atmosphere. The architect had divided the floor into two, separate apartments: one for Burgermeester Bisdome van Vliet and another for his daughter and her husband. So, whilst the public rooms were shared, there were private quarters upstairs for the two generations of Bisdome van Vliet. Since each apartment had a separate entrance from the spacious area at the top of the main staircase, they came to the resolution of dividing the screen so that part formed the entrance to one apartment and the rest the entrance to the other.

Now Cornelis needed to look at how the screen might be divided whilst Heer Hooft persuaded the architect to alter his plans. The latter proved easier than anticipated since the architect had harboured some uneasiness about the upper hall, worried that it was too dark. The only natural light in his plans came from a window at the head of the stairs which, although the same large expanse of glass as all the other windows, was really not enough to penetrate the centrally located space of the upper hall. The glazed and white painted panels he was being asked to incorporate into his design suddenly prompted a radical change of perspective. The theme of light paint and maximum glazing could be the answer to lighting up the whole area!

Summer 1876

Theodorus and Cornelis were going at each other hammer and tongues, oblivious to the audience they were attracting. The new batch of workmen who had been taken on in an effort to speed things up were looking on with some anxiety, somehow intuiting that they were the focus of the disagreement and hoping that it was not going to lead to their dismissal with the consequent return to poverty and idleness. The old hands, however, just shrugged and rolled their eyes, barely pausing in their work. The tension between the two bosses had been building for some time culminating in a storm that would blow itself out before the end of the day. No need to worry, they advised the new men, just get on with your tasks.

It was, indeed, the arrival of the gang of new workers which had been the catalyst for the rather public venting of anger by the two overseers. They and their attendant problems were not the direct cause but consequent upon the approaching deadline for completion of the house which had been imposed by the *burgermeester*. Marcellus Bisdom van Vliet had his heart, and his *gilders*, set on being able to celebrate his 50 year anniversary as *Burgermeester* of Haastrecht from the new house which had been commissioned specially for this occasion. The whole village had involved themselves in grand plans to honour him, suddenly making concrete the date by which the house should be finished.

August 23rd - and there was such a lot left to do!

Much had been accomplished so far. Once the old house had been raised to its foundations, these had needed strengthening with new brickwork onto which the heavy timbers for the floor joists had been laid. Once the shell of the house had been built using thousands upon thousands of bricks it was time for the hard work of lifting and fitting

the roof beams and trusses. The complex structure and area of the upper floor of the house made for a cats cradle of necessary wooden supporting structure which would be strong enough to take the Fries flat pan tiles of the roof. Meanwhile windows and doors were created and installed so that the building was weather proof and the interior work could begin.

All of the heavy construction materials had to be brought along the river by barge. The craft were sized to fit the confines of the waterways they operated on and were each crewed by a single family who lived on board. To maximize cargo space the living quarters were squeezed into the stern with cooking, eating, washing and sleeping all vying for space. Boards laid across the space served as beds and had to be taken away before the day's domestic activities could begin. Families with many children crowded together so disease was rife, as was malnutrition as parents struggled to fill mouths on their meagre income. Yet more babies easily came along but many died before they were old enough to walk. It had not been unusual to see the wife harnessed to a line ashore pulling the laden barge whilst her husband, worn out by the effort of lading and unloading cargo, stayed on board and steered from the tiller at the stern. Wind and current were not always favourable to these folk and horse power often beyond their means. These were weatherbeaten and hard-muscled folk, old before their time with lives often prematurely ended by illnesses which the doctors were too busy to diagnose or treat, scrawling the word "exhaustion" when registering their death.

At least the carters who then brought the finer timber for interior work and all the necessities for plasterwork and decorative finishes could go home to a roof over their heads, however mean a hovel they called home. They worked their horses hard but Paulina, who had a strong interest in matter equine, made sure that the animals were not ill treated or underfed. Some said that she showed more care for the welfare of the horses than their handlers.

Since Theodorus could not manage the building work and do the plasterwork himself, he had engaged FPC Schild to undertake the massive amount of skilled work in plastering the ceilings and all the dec-

orative plasterwork of the interior. Herein lay the source of the argument between Theodorus and Cornelis. The plasterwork was falling behind schedule because other work, which needed to be done first, had not been completed. Hence the influx of new workers. However, both Theodorus and Cornelis had laid claim to these men and set them on competing tasks. Given the tense atmosphere created by time pressure, it was perhaps understandable that the conflict erupted into an angry exchange. Once some steam had been let off, both men were able to regain their usual level headedness and their usually excellent working relationship was able to reassert itself so that the next time men looked in their direction they saw the tow men briefly embracing each other then shaking hands with smiles on their faces.

Theodrus and Cornelis shut themselves up in the makeshift office and let it be known that they were only to be disturbed in case of dire emergency. Any knocks on the door or timid calls were ignored. Their agreed strategy was to take an imaginary walk through the house, compiling lists of unfinished work in each room as they went. They also had a draft of the plans for the day of Marcellus's 50th anniversary burgermeester celebrations.

The obvious place to start was with the ingang/entrance and vestibule which it led into. Placed in the centre of the the six bays on the ground floor, the large, sturdy wooden door was already in place. Although it opened as a single door, a central column decorated with vines and grapes gave the impression of double doors. Symmetrical panels were glazed and decorated with wrought ironwork. Above and below each inset glass were carved panels, oblong below and circular bosses topped with semi-circular arches above. The rich colour of the wood and the multi-faceted carving were pleasing to the eye and the whole was sturdy and clearly designed to offer protection to the valuable contents which would eventually be contained within. Cornelis was proud of it and Theodorus thought this was rightly so.

But, they couldn't linger in admiration as there was a long way to go and both agreed that the impressive entry needed no improvement. Once inside the door. An entrance hall led up to the doorway into the

inner hall or gang at the end with a door leading off either side to a small salon on the left and a reception area on the right. In order to create symmetry, two false doors, one either side, had been created with a central bay of plasterwork between them. Since this was the first impression visitors, not to mention Marcellus, would have it needed to show how important and wealthy the occupants of the house were. The decoration of the vestibule was, therefore, designed to provide an opulent impression but only as a backdrop for the displays of valuable items and family crests destined to be placed there. So, whilst the ceiling rose, cornicing and the headers above the doors involved complex plaster mouldings which had been delicately painted in muted creams, the central panels were relatively plain with a touch of blue in places to set off the blue of the Chinese plates destined to be hung nearby. A marble floor provided the finishing touch to this relatively small but hugely important space.

The first room off the vestibule was the spekkamer or reception room. This would be where the maid who answered the door would take visitors to wait whilst she conveyed messages to and fro the occupants of the house. Tradespeople would wait here to be paid and more important callers to be admitted to the grote salon through the far door. A relatively plain room, then. Even so, it was yet to be finished as the expensive red flock wallpaper from England, chosen as a foil for the gilt framed paintings destined to be displayed against it, remained to be hung. Again, concerns about keeping the decoration clean came to the surface as flock wallpaper was notorious for attracting dirt. Since the guests admitted to the house for Marcellus's celebration were by invitation only, it was agreed that the completion of this room could be assigned a low priority.

The same could not be said of the kleine salon through the second door off the vestibule. This was where Marcellus planned greet his guests and provide refreshments.

Again, all the work had been done but the challenge was to keep it in pristine condition despite the mess being created by work in progress in the rest of the house. Use of the front door had been banned with everything and everyone coming in through the kitchen and garden

room entrances. The doorway at the end of the vestibule marked the transition from the public to the private areas of the house and, to mark the importance of this, had been built to double thickness to accommodate two doors, one after the other. To create a further barrier, provision had been made for a heavy curtain to span the width of the wall at the end of the vestibule. A temporary curtain had been hung here then both doors closed with the door on the family side sealed.