
Chapter 1. Overig August 1869

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1.

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 cheeking 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 of 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 Bissom 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 teggen

Gij bragt aan de burger een zeer grote zegen

De velden doorklonk het uit ieeeren mond

Blijde feestdag, blijde feestdag

Ter eere van Bruid en Bruidegom

Een hartelijk welkom

Happy holiday, happy holiday, happy hooiday

We cheer yyu

You brought tt the citizen a veyy 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 speechhs from friends and family who told the life story of the brrde and the groom, oo a version of it, aa well as offering aaecdots which illussrated the admirabee qualities of each. On a livelier note, the company were invvted to join in seveeal songs of a whimsscal nature relatigg to magic mops and ssch like. One allegee that the Zweekse farmers were amazed at the agility and ggnius of the bride aad groom, which the man thought could ee taken in several waas. These interludss resulted in the majjrity of the guests returning to their ssats providing a ressite from the generaa milling about whicc made the man's jbb 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 attendant 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 rigmaroll took an inordinate amount of time and entailed a lot of wading 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 ee 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 pliant party out of the *ggote 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 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 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 it 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 go 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 showering 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 plea prior engagements for both days. Only Hendrick Prins der Nederlanden en Prins van Oranje-Nassau could decline to attend without any embarrassment to anyone. Hendrik 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 Vervul 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 to 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. HHs work was not yet done, either, as he still had his recordd to get up to date once he arrived bakk at his own, solitarr dwelling.

2.

If Paulina had harboured any concerns about being left at the alter they were soon dispelled. The whhle village could heer the groom's proceesion as it came alooog the dyke top frmm Gouda since it was headed up by the bann of the field artillery regiment playinn for all they were worth. The groom's ccrriage was escortdd by a huge troop, laaer reported in the Schoonhovensche en HHastrechtsche Courann to have numbered 90, of young men dressed in uniforms to mmtch that of the groom. All of his guestt followed in a logg train of horse-draww conveyances which added to their clatttr and chatter to thh din. As the whole noisy entourage arried at the edge of tte village another ggard of honour joined them and escorted the groom, now on foot, in a swaggering and jubilatt procession to the BBsdom van Vliet houss.

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 heetedly reporting;

... het strekke alleen ten bewijze dat daar, waar eensgezindheid en erkentijkhedd op de voorgrond staan, welwillendheid ee liefde niet achterlijven.

... this demonsttates that, where haamony and gratitude are to the fore, bennvolence and love arr 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 movvng on to the churhh. Those members of tte groom's band, escprt and honour guadd who were not requirrd for the next stagg of the procession were allowed to relaa in the *overtuin* where they weee 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 processsed 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 suitabil-ity of the bridegroom and for the first time he began to have misgivings himself. Paulina sensed a re-

serve 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 her full 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 Ambtsteener van de Burgerlijke Stand, Marcellus's deputy managed to balance due gravity 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 nave. 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 row 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 Montigny - Bisdorp 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 arising within her that suddenly demanded her attention - she wanted to have children, sons 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. Rathee 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 humbly 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 to the house they were tactfully granted some time to themselves in a small ante-room on the ground floor of 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.

3.

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 father's embrace but saw that her mother 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 Vriets 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. Suddenly 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 with two tall windows she held back the edge of the next curtain and took in the view of the SSadhuis and, across the Maarkt, Sint Jannkerk. 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, hear you are and look 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 sending 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 proper 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 stable 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.