



THE  
DEVIL  
AND THE  
DARK  
WATER

STUART  
TURTON



sourcebooks  
landmark

MANIFEST OF NOTABLE PASSENGERS AND  
CREW SAILING ABOARD THE *SAARDAM*  
BOUND FOR AMSTERDAM, AS COMPILED  
BY CHAMBERLAIN CORNELIUS VOS

DIGNITARIES

*Governor General Jan Haan, wife Sara Wessel, and daughter Lia Jan  
Chamberlain Cornelius Vos  
Guard Captain Jacobi Drecht  
Creesjie Jens and sons Marcus and Osbert Pieter  
Viscountess Dalvohain  
Lieutenant Arent Hayes*

NOTABLE PASSENGERS

*Predikant Sander Kers and ward Isabel*

*SAARDAM'S SENIOR OFFICERS*

*Reynier van Schooten, chief merchant  
Adrian Crauwels, captain  
Isaack Larme, first mate*

NOTABLE CREW

*Johannes Wyck, boatswain  
Frederick van de Heuval, constable*

THE PRISONER

*Samuel Pipp's*

 I 

*Arent Hayes howled in pain as a rock slammed into his massive back.*

Another whistled by his ear, a third striking his knee, causing him to stumble, bringing jeers from the pitiless mob, who were already searching the ground for more missiles to throw. Hundreds of them were being held back by the city watch, their spittle-flecked lips shouting insults, their eyes black with malice.

“Take shelter, for pity’s sake,” implored Sammy Pippes over the din, his manacles flashing in the sunlight as he staggered across the dusty ground. “It’s me they want.”

Arent was twice the height and half again the width of most men in Batavia, including Sammy. Although not a prisoner himself, he’d placed his large body between the crowd and his much smaller friend, offering them only a sliver of target to aim at.

The bear and the sparrow, they’d been nicknamed before Sammy’s fall. Never before had it appeared so true.

Sammy was being taken from the dungeons to the harbor, where a ship waited to transport him to Amsterdam. Four musketeers were escorting them, but they were keeping their distance, wary of becoming targets themselves.

“You pay me to protect you,” snarled Arent, wiping the dusty sweat from his eyes as he tried to gauge the distance to safety. “I’ll do it until I can’t anymore.”



The harbor lay behind a huge set of gates at the far end of Batavia's central boulevard. Once those gates closed behind them, they'd be beyond the crowd's reach. Unfortunately, they were at the tail end of a long procession moving slowly in the heat. The gates seemed no closer now than when they'd left the humid dampness of the dungeon at midday.

A rock thudded into the ground at Arent's feet, spraying his boots with dried dirt. Another ricocheted off Sammy's chains. Traders were selling them out of sacks and making good coin doing it.

"Damn Batavia," snarled Arent. "Bastards can't abide an empty pocket."

On a normal day, these people would be buying from the bakers, tailors, cordwainers, binders, and candlemakers lining the boulevard. They'd be smiling and laughing, grumbling about the infernal heat, but manacle a man and offer him up to torment, and even the meekest soul surrendered itself to the devil.

"It's my blood they want," argued Sammy, trying to push Arent away. "Get yourself to safety, I'm begging you."

Arent looked down at his terrified friend, whose hands were pressing ineffectually against his chest. His dark curls were plastered to his forehead, those high cheekbones swollen purple with the beatings he'd received while imprisoned. His brown eyes—usually wry—were wide and desperate.

Even maltreated, he was a handsome sod.

By contrast, Arent's scalp was shorn, his nose punched flat. Somebody had bitten a chunk out of his right ear in a fight, and a clumsy flogging a few years back had left him with a long scar across his chin and neck.

"We'll be safe once we reach the docks," said Arent stubbornly, having to raise his voice as cheers erupted ahead of them.

The procession was being led by Governor General Jan Haan, who was stiff backed on a white stallion, a breastplate fastened above his doublet, a sword clattering at his waist.

Thirteen years ago, he'd purchased the village that had stood here on behalf of the United East India Company. No sooner had the natives

signed the contract than he'd put a torch to it, using its ashes to plot out the roads, canals, and buildings of the city that would take its place.

Batavia was now the Company's most profitable outpost, and Haan had been called back to Amsterdam to join the Company's ruling body, the enigmatic Gentlemen 17.

As his stallion trotted along the boulevard, the crowd wept and cheered, stretching their fingertips toward him, trying to touch his legs. Flowers were thrown on the ground, blessings bestowed.

He ignored it all, keeping his chin up and eyes forward. Beak-nosed and bald-headed, he put Arent in mind of a hawk perched atop a horse.

Four panting slaves struggled to keep pace with him. They were carrying a gilded palanquin with the governor general's wife and daughter inside, a red-faced lady's maid scurrying alongside it, fanning herself in the heat.

Behind them, four bow-legged musketeers gripped the corners of a heavy box containing the Folly. Sweat dripped from their foreheads and coated their hands, making it difficult to hold. They slipped frequently, fear flashing across their faces. They knew the punishment should the governor general's prize be damaged.

Trailing them were a disorderly cluster of courtiers and flatterers, high-ranking clerks and family favorites, their years of scheming rewarded by the opportunity to spend an uncomfortable afternoon watching Haan leave Batavia.

Distracted by his observations, Arent allowed a gap to form between himself and his charge. A stone whistled by, hitting Sammy on the cheek, bringing a trickle of blood and jeers from the crowd.

Losing his temper, Arent scooped up the stone and hurled it back at the thrower, catching him on the shoulder, sending him spinning to the ground. The crowd howled in outrage, surging into the watchmen, who struggled to hold them back.

"Good throw," murmured Sammy appreciatively, ducking his head as more stones rained down around them.

Arent was limping by the time they reached the docks, his huge body

aching. Sammy was bruised but mostly untouched. Even so, he let out a cry of relief as the gates swung open ahead of them.

On the other side was a warren of crates and coiled ropes, piled-high casks, and chickens squawking in wicker baskets. Pigs and cows stared at them mournfully as bellowing stevedores loaded cargo into rowboats bobbing at the water's edge, ready to be transported to the seven Indiaman galleons anchored in the glistening harbor. Sails furled and masts bare, they resembled dead beetles with their legs in the air, but each would soon teem with over three hundred passengers and crew.

People rattled their coin purses at the ferries rowing back and forth, pushing forward when the name of their ship was called. Children played hide-and-seek among the boxes or else clutched their mothers' skirts while fathers glared at the sky, trying to shame a cloud out of that fierce, blue expanse.

The wealthier passengers stood a little apart, surrounded by their servants and expensive trunks. Grumbling under their umbrellas, they fanned themselves futilely, sweating into their lace ruffs.

The procession halted and the gates began to close behind them, dimming the sound of the braying mob.

A few final stones bounced off the crates, bringing the assault to an end.

Letting out a long sigh, Arent bent double, hands on his knees, sweat dripping from his forehead into the dust.

"How badly are you hurt?" asked Sammy, inspecting a cut on Arent's cheek.

"I'm fair hungover," grunted Arent. "Otherwise, I'm not too bad."

"Did the watch seize my alchemy kit?"

There was genuine fear in his voice. Among his many talents, Sammy was a skilled alchemist, his kit filled with tinctures, powders, and potions he'd developed to assist his deductive work. It had taken years to create many of them, using ingredients they were a long way from replacing.

"No, I stole them out of your bedchamber before they searched the house," replied Arent.

"Good," approved Sammy. "There's a salve in a small jar. The green one. Apply that to your injuries every morning and night."

Arent wrinkled his nose in distaste. "Is that the piss-smelling one?"

"They all smell like piss. It's not a good salve if it doesn't smell like piss."

A musketeer approached from the direction of the wharf, calling Sammy's name. He wore a battered hat with a red feather, the floppy brim pulled low over his eyes. A tangle of dirty blond hair spilled down his shoulders, a beard obscuring most of his face.

Arent examined him approvingly.

Most musketeers in Batavia were part of the household guard. They gleamed and saluted and were good at sleeping with their eyes open, but this man's ragged uniform suggested he'd done some actual soldiering. Old blood stained his blue doublet, which was dotted with holes made by shot and sword, each one patched time and again. Knee-length red breeches gave way to a pair of tanned, hairy legs riddled with mosquito bites and scars. Copper flasks filled with gunpowder jangled on a bandolier, clattering into pouches of saltpeter matches.

Upon reaching Arent, the musketeer stamped his foot smartly.

"Lieutenant Hayes, I'm Guard Captain Jacobi Dreht," he said, waving a fly from his face. "I'm in charge of the governor general's household guard. I'll be sailing with you to ensure the family's safety." Dreht addressed himself to the musketeers escorting them. "On the boat now, lads. The governor general wants Mr. Pipp's secured aboard the *Saardam* before the—"

"Hear me!" commanded a jagged voice from above them.

Squinting into the glare of sunlight, they craned their necks, following the voice upward.

A figure in gray rags was standing on a pile of crates. Bloody bandages wrapped his hands and face, a narrow gap left for his eyes.

"A leper," Dreht muttered, in disgust.

Arent took an instinctive step backward. From boyhood, he'd been taught to fear these wasted people, whose mere presence was enough to bring ruin to an entire village. A single cough, even the lightest touch, meant a lingering, dreadful death.

“Kill that creature and burn it,” demanded the governor general from the front of the procession. “Lepers are not permitted in the city.”

A commotion erupted as the musketeers peered at one another. The figure was too high up for pikes, but their muskets had already been loaded onto the *Saardam*, and none of them had a bow.

Seemingly oblivious to the panic, the leper’s eyes pricked every single person gathered before him.

“Know that my master”—his roaming gaze snagged on Arent, causing the mercenary’s heart to jolt—“sails aboard the *Saardam*. He is the lord of hidden things, all desperate and dark things. He offers this warning in accordance with the old laws. The *Saardam*’s cargo is sin, and all who board her will be brought to merciless ruin. She will not reach Amsterdam.”

As the last word was uttered, the hem of his robe burst into flames. Children wailed. The watching crowd gasped and screamed in horror.

The leper didn’t make a sound. The fire crawled up his body until he was completely aflame.

He didn’t move.

He burned silently, his eyes fixed on Arent.



 2 

*As if suddenly aware of the flames consuming him, the leper began beating at his robes.*

He staggered backward, falling off the crates, hitting the ground with a sickening thud.

Snatching up a cask of ale, Arent covered the distance in a few strides, tearing the lid free with his bare hands and dousing the fire.

The rags sizzled, the smell of charcoal singeing his nostrils.

Writhing in agony, the leper clawed at the dirt. His forearms were terribly burnt, his face charred. Only his eyes were still human—the pupils wild, thrashing against the surrounding blue, driven mad with pain.

A scream wedged his mouth open, but no sound passed his throat.

“That’s impossible,” muttered Arent.

He glanced at Sammy, who was straining against his chains, trying to see better. “His tongue’s been cut out,” Arent hollered, struggling to be heard over the din of the crowd.

“Stand aside, I’m a healer” came an imperious voice.

A noblewoman pushed past Arent, removing a lace cap and shoving it into his hands, revealing the jeweled pins glittering among her tight red curls.

No sooner was the cap in Arent’s possession than it was snatched away again by a fussing maid, who was trying to keep a parasol over her mistress’s head while urging her to return to the palanquin.

Arent glanced back toward it.

In her haste, the noblewoman had yanked the curtain off its hook and spilled two large silk pillows onto the ground. Inside, a young girl with an oval face was watching them through the torn material. She was dark haired and dark eyed, a mirror of the governor general, who sat stiff on his horse, examining his wife disapprovingly.

“Mama?” called out the girl.

“A moment, Lia,” replied the noblewoman, who was kneeling beside the leper, oblivious to her brown gown piled up in fish guts. “I’m going to try to help you,” she told him kindly. “Dorothea?”

“My lady,” responded the maid.

“My vial, if you please.”

The maid fumbled up her sleeve and removed a small vial, which she uncorked and handed to the noblewoman.

“This will ease your pain,” she said to the suffering man, upending it above his parted lips.

“Those are lepers’ rags,” warned Arent as her puffed sleeves drifted perilously close to her patient.

“I’m aware,” she said curtly, watching a thick drop of liquid gathering on the rim of the vial. “You’re Lieutenant Hayes, are you not?”

“Arent will do.”

“Arent.” She rolled the name around her mouth as if it possessed an odd flavor. “I’m Sara Wessel.” She paused. “Sara will do,” she added, mimicking his gruff response.

She gave the vial a slight shake, dislodging the drop into the leper’s mouth. He swallowed it painfully, then shuddered and calmed, the writhing ceasing as his eyes lost focus.

“You’re the governor general’s wife?” asked Arent disbelievingly. Most nobles wouldn’t leave a palanquin that was on fire, let alone leap out of one to aid a stranger.

“And you’re Samuel Pipp’s servant,” she snapped back.

“I—” he faltered, wrong-footed by her annoyance. Unsure of how he had offended her, he changed the topic. “What did you give him?”

“Something to ease the pain,” she said, wedging the cork back into the vial. “It’s made from local plants. I use it myself from time to time. It helps me sleep.”

“Can we do anything for him, my lady?” asked the maid, taking the vial from her mistress and putting it back up her sleeve. “Should I fetch your healing sundries?”

*Only a fool would try*, thought Arent. A life at war had taught him which limbs you could live without and which nicks would wake you in agony every night until they killed you quietly a year after the battle. The leper’s rotting flesh was bad enough, but there’d be no peace from those burns. With constant ministrations, he could live a day or a week, but survival wasn’t always worth the price paid for it.

“No, thank you, Dorothea,” said Sara. “I don’t think that will be necessary.”

Rising to her feet, Sara gestured for Arent to follow her out of earshot.

“There’s nothing to be done here,” she said quietly. “Nothing left except mercy. Could you...” She swallowed, seemingly ashamed of the next question. “Have you ever taken a life?”

Arent nodded.

“Can you do it painlessly?”

Arent nodded again, earning a small smile of gratitude.

“I regret I have not the fortitude to do it myself,” she said.

Arent pushed through the whispering circle of observers toward one of the musketeers guarding Sammy, gesturing for his sword. Numb with horror, the young soldier unsheathed it without protest.

“Arent,” said Sammy, calling his friend closer. “Did you say the leper had no tongue?”

“Cut out,” confirmed Arent. “A while back, I reckon.”

“Bring me Sara Wessel when you’re finished,” he said, troubled. “This matter requires our attention.”

As Arent returned with the sword, Sara knelt by the stricken leper, reaching to take his hand before remembering herself. “I have not the art

to heal you," she admitted gently. "But I can offer you a painless escape, if you'd have it?"

Stricken, the leper's mouth worked, producing only moans. Tears forming in his eyes, he nodded.

"I'll stay with you." She looked over her shoulder at the young girl peering at them from inside the palanquin. "Lia, join me, if you please," said Sara, holding out a hand to her.

Lia climbed down from the palanquin. She was no more than twelve or thirteen, already long limbed, her dress sitting awkwardly, like a skin she hadn't managed to quite wriggle out of.

A great rustling greeted her as the procession shifted to take her in. Arent was among those curious onlookers. Unlike her mother, who visited the church each evening, Lia was rarely seen outdoors. It was rumored her father kept her hidden out of shame, but as Arent watched her walk hesitantly toward the leper, it was difficult to know what that shame could be. She was a pretty girl, if uncommonly pale, like she'd been spun from shadows and moonlight.

As Lia drew closer, Sara flicked a nervous glance at her husband, who was sitting rigid on his horse, his jaw moving slightly as he ground his teeth. Arent knew this was as close to fury as he'd come in public. By the twitching of his face, it was obvious he wanted to call them back into the palanquin, but the curse of authority was that you could never admit to losing it.

Lia arrived by her mother's side, and Sara squeezed her hand reassuringly.

"This man is in pain," she said in a soft voice. "He's suffering, and Lieutenant Hayes here is going to end that suffering. Can you understand that?"

The girl's eyes were wide, but she nodded meekly. "Yes, Mama," she said.

"Good," said Sara. "He's very afraid, and this isn't something he should face alone. We will stand vigil; we will offer him our courage. You mustn't look away."

From around his neck, the leper painfully withdrew a small, charred piece of wood, the edges jagged. He pressed it to his breast, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Whenever you’re ready,” she said to Arent, who immediately rammed the blade through the leper’s heart. The leper arched his back, going rigid. Then he went limp, blood seeping out from underneath him. It was glossy in the sunlight, reflecting the three figures standing over the body.

The girl gripped her mother’s hand tightly, but her courage didn’t falter.

“Well done, my love,” said Sara, stroking her freckled cheek. “I know that was unpleasant, but you were very brave.”

As Arent cleaned the blade on a sack of oats, Sara tugged one of the jeweled pins from her hair, a red curl springing loose.

“For your trouble,” she said, offering it to him.

“Ain’t kindness if you have to pay for it,” he responded, leaving it sparkling in her hand as he returned the sword to the soldier.

Surprise mingled with confusion on her face, her gaze lingering on him a moment. As if wary of being caught in such naked observation, she hurriedly summoned two stevedores who’d been sitting on a pile of tattered sailcloth.

They leaped up as if stung, tugging a lock of hair when they were near enough.

“Sell this, burn the body, and see his ashes receive a Christian burial,” commanded Sara, pressing the pin into the nearest calloused palm. “Let’s give him the peace in death he was denied in life.”

They exchanged a cunning glance.

“That jewel will pay for the funeral with enough left over for any vices you seek to indulge this year, but I’ll have somebody watching you,” she warned pleasantly. “If this poor man ends up in the undesirables lot beyond the city walls, you’ll be hanged, is that understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they muttered, tipping their hats respectfully.

“Can you spare a minute for Sammy Pipp’s?” called out Arent, who was standing next to Guard Captain Jacobi Drecht.

Sara glanced at her husband once again, obviously trying to weigh his displeasure. Arent sympathized with her predicament. Jan Haan could find fault in a bold table arrangement, so watching his wife dash through the dirt like a harlot after a rolling coin would have been unbearable to him.



He wasn't even looking at her. He was watching Arent.

"Lia, return to the palanquin, please," said Sara.

"But, Mama," complained Lia, lowering her voice. "That's Samuel Pipp's."

"Yes," she agreed.

"*The* Samuel Pipp's!"

"Indeed."

"The sparrow!"

"A nickname I'm sure he adores," she responded dryly.

"You could introduce me."

"He's hardly dressed for company, Lia."

"Mama—"

"A leper's quite enough excitement for one day," said Sara with finality, summoning Dorothea with a lift of her chin.

A protest formed on her daughter's lips, but the maid stroked her arm, encouraging her away.

The crowd melted from Sara's path as she approached the prisoner, who was busy straightening his stained doublet.

"Your legend precedes you, Mr. Pipp's," she said, curtsying.

After his recent humiliations, this unexpected compliment seemed to take Sammy aback, causing him to stumble on his initial greeting. He tried to bow, but his chains made a mockery of the gesture.

"Now, why did you wish to speak with me?" asked Sara.

"I'm imploring you to delay the departure of the *Saardam*," he said. "Please, you must heed the leper's warning."

"I took the leper for a madman," she admitted in surprise.

"Oh, he was certainly mad," agreed Sammy. "But he was able to speak without a tongue and climb a stack of crates with a lame foot."

"I noticed the tongue but not the lame foot." She glanced back at the body. "Are you certain?"

"Even burned, you can see the impairment clearly. He would have needed a crutch to walk, which means he couldn't possibly have climbed up on those crates without help."

"Then you don't believe he was acting alone?"

"I don't, and there's a further cause for concern."

"Of course there is," she sighed. "Why would concern want to travel alone?"

"Do you see his hands?" continued Sammy, ignoring the remark. "One is very badly burned, but the other is almost untouched. If you look carefully, you'll notice a bruise under his thumbnail and that his thumb itself has been broken at least three times in the past, rendering it crooked. Carpenters accrue such injuries as a matter of course, especially shipborne carpenters, who must contend with the unsteady motion of the boat while they're working. I noticed he was bowlegged, another common trait of the sailing class."

"Do you believe he was a carpenter on one of the boats in the fleet?" ventured Arent, examining the seven ships in the harbor.

"I don't know," said Sammy. "Every carpenter in Batavia likely worked on an Indiaman at some time. If I were free to inspect the body, I might be able to answer the question more definitely, but—"

"My husband will never free you, Mr. Pippas," said Sara sharply. "If that's to be your next request."

"It's not," he said, his cheeks flushing. "I know your husband's mind, as I know he will not hear my concerns. But he would hear them from you."

Sara shifted her weight uncomfortably, staring at the harbor. Dolphins were playing in the water, leaping and twisting into the air, disappearing back beneath the surface with barely a ripple.

"Please, my lady. You must convince your husband to delay the fleet's departure while Arent investigates this matter."

Arent started at that. The last time he'd investigated a case had been three years ago. Nowadays, he kept out of that side of things. His job was to keep Sammy safe and trample underfoot whatever bastard he pointed his finger at.

"Questions are swords and answers are shields," persisted Sammy, still staring at Sara. "I'm begging you, armor yourself. Once the *Saardam* sets sail, it will be too late."

 3 

*Under Batavia's burning sky, Sara Wessel walked the length of the procession, feeling the scouring eyes of the courtiers, soldiers, and sycophants upon her. She went like a condemned woman, shoulders square, eyes down, and fists clenched by her sides. Shame reddened her face, though most mistook it for heat.*

For some reason, she glanced over her shoulder at Arent. He wasn't hard to spot, standing a clear head and shoulders taller than the next man. Sammy had put him to work inspecting the body, and he was currently picking through the leper's robes with a long stick that had previously been used to carry baskets.

Feeling Sara's gaze upon him, he glanced at her, their eyes meeting. Embarrassed, she snapped her head forward again.

Her husband's damnable horse snorted, kicking the ground angrily as she approached. She'd never got along with this beast. Unlike her, it enjoyed being underneath him.

The thought drew a wicked smile, which she was still wrestling from her face as she came upon him. His back was to her, his head bowed in hushed conversation with Cornelius Vos.

Vos was her husband's chamberlain, foremost among his advisors and one of the most powerful men in the city. Not that it was obvious by looking at him, for he managed to carry his power without charisma or vigor. Neither tall nor short, broad nor thin, his mud-colored hair topped a weathered face

devoid of any distinguishing features, beyond two luminous green eyes that always stared over the shoulder of whomever he was speaking to.

His clothes were shabby without being ragged, and there hung about him an air of such potent hopelessness one would expect flowers to wilt as he walked by.

“Is my personal cargo boarded?” asked her husband, ignoring Sara.

“The chief merchant has seen to it, my lord.”

They didn’t pause, didn’t acknowledge her in any way. Her husband couldn’t stand being interrupted, and Vos had served him long enough to know that.

“And matters have been arranged to ensure its secrecy?” asked her husband.

“Guard Captain Drecht attended it personally.” Vos’s fingers danced at his sides, betraying some internal calculation. “Which bring us to our second piece of important cargo, my lord. May I ask where you wish to store the Folly during our voyage?”

“My quarters seem appropriate,” declared her husband.

“Unfortunately, the Folly’s too large, sir,” said Vos, wringing his hands. “Might I suggest the cargo hold?”

“I’ll not have the future of the Company packed away like an unwanted piece of furniture.”

“Few know what the Folly is, sir,” continued Vos, momentarily distracted by the splashing oars of an approaching ferry. “Even fewer know we’re bringing it aboard the *Saardam*. The best way to protect it might be to act as though it is an unwanted piece of furniture.”

“A clever thought, but the cargo hold remains too exposed,” said her husband.

They fell silent, puzzling the matter over.

Sunshine beat at her back, thick beads of sweat gathering on her brow and rolling down her face, clogging the white powder Dorothea applied so liberally to conceal her freckles. She yearned to adjust her clothes, to remove the ruff around her neck and tug the damp material away from her flesh, but her husband hated fidgeting as much as being interrupted.

“What about the gunpowder store, sir?” said Vos. “It’s locked and guarded, but nobody would expect something as valuable as the Folly to be housed in there.”

“Superb. Make the arrangements.”

As Vos walked toward the procession, the governor general finally turned to face his wife.

He was twenty years older than Sara, with a teardrop head, which was bald except for a tonsure of dark hair connecting his large ears. Most people wore hats to shield them from Batavia’s harsh sunlight, but her husband believed they made him appear foolish. As a result, his scalp glowed an angry crimson, the skin peeling and collecting in the folds of his ruff.

Under flat eyebrows, two dark eyes weighed her as his fingers scratched a long nose. By any measure, he was an ugly man, but unlike Chamberlain Vos, he radiated power. Every word out of his mouth felt like it was being etched into history; every glance contained a subtle rebuke, an invitation for others to measure themselves against him and discover the ways in which they were wanting. By merely living, he thought himself an instruction manual in good breeding, discipline, and values.

“My wife,” he said in a tone that could easily be mistaken for pleasant.

His hand jerked to her face, causing her to flinch. Pressing a thumb to her cheek, he roughly wiped away a clot of powder. “How unkind the heat is to you.”

She swallowed the insult, lowering her gaze.

Fifteen years they’d been married, and she could count on one hand the number of times she’d been able to hold his stare.

It was those inkblot eyes. They were identical to Lia’s, except her daughter’s glittered with life. Her husband’s were empty, like two dark holes his soul had long run out of.

She’d felt it the first time they’d met, when she and her four sisters had been delivered overnight to his drawing room in Rotterdam, like meat ordered special from the market. He’d interviewed them one by one and chosen Sara on the spot. His proposal had been thorough, listing the



benefits of their union to her father. In short, she'd have a beautiful cage and all the time in the world to admire herself in the bars.

Sara had wept all the way home, begging her father not to send her away.

It hadn't made any difference. The dowry was too large. Unbeknownst to her, she'd been bred for sale and fattened like a calf with manners and education.

She'd felt betrayed, but she'd been young. She understood the world better now. Meat didn't get a say on whose hook it hung from.

"Your display was unbecoming," he rebuked her under his breath, still smiling for his courtiers. They were edging close, wary of missing anything.

"It wasn't a display," she muttered defiantly. "The leper was suffering."

"He was dying. Did you think you had a lotion for that?" His voice was low enough to crush the ants crawling around their feet. "You're impulsive, reckless, thickheaded, and softhearted." He flung insults the way rocks had been thrown at Samuel PIPPS. "Such qualities I forgave when you were a girl, but your youth is far behind you."

She didn't listen to the rest; she didn't need to. It was a familiar rebuke, the first drops of rain before the fury of the storm. Nothing she said now would make any difference. Her punishment would come later, when they were alone.

"Samuel PIPPS believes our ship is under threat," she blurted out.

Her husband frowned, unused to being interrupted.

"PIPPS is in chains," he argued.

"Only his hands," she protested. "His eyes and faculties remain at liberty. He believes the leper was a carpenter once, possibly working in the fleet returning us to Amsterdam."

"Lepers can't serve aboard Indiamen."

"Perhaps the blight showed itself when he reached Batavia?"

"Lepers are executed and burned by my decree. They are not tolerated in the city." He shook his head in irritation. "You've allowed yourself to be swayed by the ramblings of a madman and a criminal. There's no danger here. The *Saardam* is a fine vessel, with a fine captain. There isn't stouter in the fleet. That's why I chose her."

“Pipps isn’t concerned about a loose plank,” she shot back, quickly lowering her voice. “He fears sabotage. Everybody who boards today will be at risk, including our daughter. We already lost our boys. Could you really stand to...” She took a breath, calming herself. “Wouldn’t it be wise to talk to the captains of the fleet before we set sail? The leper was missing his tongue and had a maimed foot. If he served under any of them, they would certainly remember him.”

“And what would you have me do in the meantime?” he demanded, tipping his chin toward the hundreds of souls sweltering in the heat. Somehow, the procession had managed to edge within eavesdropping distance without making a sound. “Should I order this procession back to the castle on a criminal’s good word?”

“You trusted Pipps well enough when you summoned him from Amsterdam to retrieve the Folly.”

His eyes narrowed dangerously.

“For Lia’s sake,” she continued recklessly. “Might we take quarters aboard another ship at least?”

“No, we will travel aboard the *Saardam*.”

“Lia alone, then.”

“No.”

“Why?” She was so confounded by his stubbornness, she failed to take heed of his anger. “Another ship will do well enough. Why are you so intent upon traveling—”

Her husband slapped her with the back of his hand, raising a stinging welt on her cheek. Among the courtiers, there were gasps and giggles.

Sara’s glare could have sunk every ship in the harbor, but the governor general met it calmly, retrieving a silk handkerchief from his pocket.

Whatever fury had been building inside him had evaporated.

“Fetch our daughter so we might board together as a family,” he said, dabbing the white powder from his hand. “Our time in Batavia is at an end.”

Gritting her teeth, Sara turned back toward the procession.

Everybody was watching her, tittering and whispering, but she had eyes only for the palanquin.

Lia stared out from behind the tattered curtains, her face unreadable.

*Damn him*, thought Sara. *Damn him*.