



BITTER HARVEST

↳ *Politics Scandal Betrayal Love* ↳

CHARLES PAHUD

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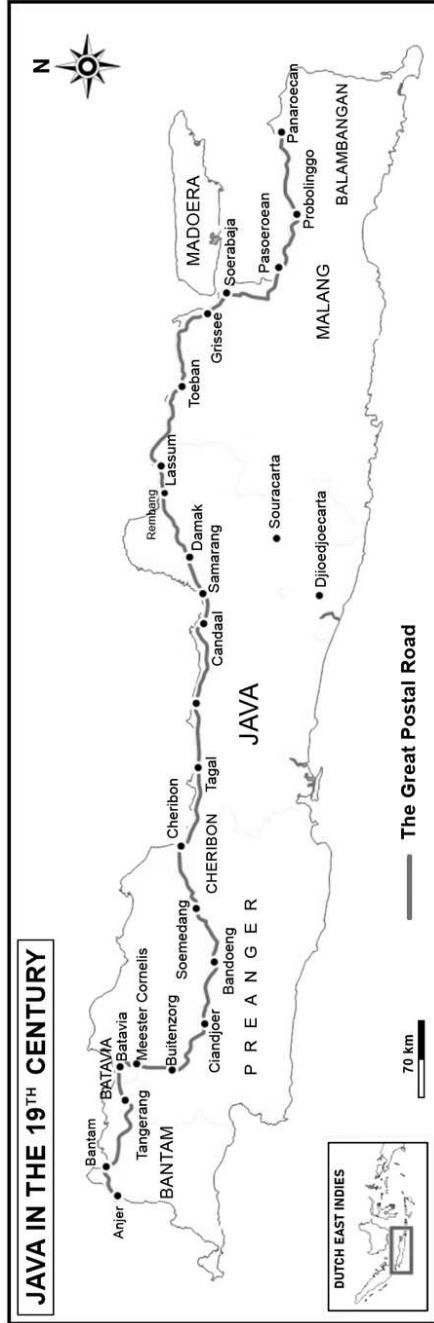
For more information contact : dpmc84@protonmail.com

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

True events have inspired this book. The Pangka affair was a major scandal in the mid-19th century, involving the issuance of a sugar contract within the Cultivation System in the Dutch East Indies. The incident led to the resignation of a senior cabinet minister and, eventually, the fall of the government. When transforming historical events into novels, certain adjustments must be made. To create a compelling narrative, I simplified timelines and altered the identities of the individuals involved. Certain characters were entirely removed, while others were amplified for dramatic effects. In addition, I introduced several personal elements to enhance the storytelling experience. Except where expressly stated, names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner.





PROLOGUE

The Dutch East Indies archipelago has a rich history that predates European influence. This region, spread over an extensive ocean area, was home to various principalities and sultanates, each with its own distinct cultural practices and traditions.

The dawn of the 14th century saw the flourishing of Islamic states, their roots firmly planted by Arab traders. These lands were farmed by local peasants who were forced to surrender a significant part of their yield to their princely rulers. Trade thrived among the islands, setting the stage for introducing coveted spices to Europe through Indian and Arab merchants. The scarcity and high value of these species has led to further exploration.

It was the Portuguese, driven by adventure and wealth, who first charted the treacherous course around the Cape of Good Hope to the East. In 1498, they became the first Europeans to set foot in the East Indies. A little over a decade later, they seized the prosperous city of Malacca, strategically located opposite the island of Sumatra on the southwestern coast of the Malay Peninsula. This gave them an entrepot for trade with the Javanese and Bandanese, who harvested spices from the Moluccas. As

the Portuguese ventured deeper into the archipelago in search of spices at more affordable prices, they were met with fierce resistance from the indigenous population, resulting in a steep decline in spice exports to Europe.

When the Netherlands decided to forge its own path to the East Indies, following Portugal's annexation by Spain, it began a new chapter in the region's history. In 1596, four Dutch merchant ships successfully sailed East across the ocean expanse, marking their historic arrival in the East Indies. Over time, multiple smaller trading entities evolved, their operations stretching across Asia. In a strategic move, these companies merged in 1602 to establish the Dutch East India Company, known in Dutch as the 'Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie' or VOC. This gave the VOC a monopoly over trade in a region stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan. The VOC's mandate, remarkably similar to the British East India Company, extended to waging wars, negotiating treaties, and administering justice in its unyielding pursuit of profit and dominance.

Before the Dutch arrival, the East Indies were an agglomeration of Kingdoms and principalities, with an already vibrant trade, including slavery. The religious landscape of the region underwent a transformation between the 14th and 16th centuries as Islam began to influence the animist and Hindu-Buddhist communities. By the time the Dutch arrived in the 17th century, only two kingdoms remained: Bantam and Mataram.

To secure and maintain their monopoly, the VOC sought to eliminate competition at every opportunity. They imposed exclusive trade agreements on indigenous peoples and local

rulers to secure these agreements. In the Moluccas, the VOC exerted control over the clove trade, centralizing production on a single island and compelling the population to cultivate clove trees. On Java, they exploited divisions among native rulers to secure monopolies and trade advantages. They expanded their territorial reach, maintaining a stranglehold on the spice trade even as intra-Asian trade began to dwindle in profitability in the 18th century.

As the 19th century dawned, the Dutch East India Company, buckling under the weight of its own ambitions, was on the brink of collapse. In 1800, a pivotal moment in the history of the Dutch East Indies, the Dutch government dissolved the VOC, assuming control of its debts and assets. This marked the transition from a powerful trading entity to the establishment of direct colonial rule by the Dutch state.

Following the acquisition of the VOC's territories, the Dutch state found itself presiding over the vast, heterogeneous archipelago of the Dutch East Indies, or 'Nederlands-Indië' in Dutch. This presented the Dutch administration with a complex set of challenges: managing trade, production, and maritime affairs while governing a large indigenous population. In response, a centralized leadership was established under a Governor-General, initially in Ternate on the island of North Maluku and later in Batavia on the island of Java. Batavia, previously known as Jayakarta, had been a trading port of the Banten Sultanate before its deliberate destruction and transformation into the capital of the Dutch East Indies.

During the tumultuous period of the Napoleonic Wars, the

British seized and briefly ruled Java. Under Lieutenant Governor-General Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British implemented a system of governance along the lines of their Dutch predecessors, embarking on expeditions against native rulers to maintain control. Raffles, a keen cultural explorer, brought global attention to the magnificent Borobudur temple and established the Botanical Garden on the grounds of the governor's palace, Buitenzorg.

Following Napoleon's defeat, however, the British handed back most of the former Dutch colonial possessions. While Java experienced a relatively smooth transition, other regions saw this as an opportunity for rebellion - uprisings that were quashed with ruthless efficiency.

It was during this period, from the 1830s to the 1870s, that the Cultivation System, or 'Cultuurstelsel' in Dutch, was introduced. Under this system, the indigenous population was coerced to allocate a significant portion of their land to cash crops, such as coffee and sugarcane, destined for the Dutch market. Despite its profitability, the system was tainted by widespread abuse and exploitation.

The Dutch wielded control with a two-tiered administration: the 'Internal Administration' of European officials atop a 'Native Administration' of local leaders, endorsed yet overseen by the Dutch. This structure enabled tight governance with few Dutch officials, creating an illusion of local autonomy.

The colonial administration employed a dual approach to expand Dutch influence: signing treaties with local rulers and intervening militarily in conflicts. Through these means, they

extended their control over Sumatra, Celebes, and parts of Borneo. They also dominated the islands stretching from Bali to West Timor.

Unfortunately, the colonial system was riddled with corruption and favoritism. The enactment of the Agrarian Law and the Sugar Law in 1870 marked an attempt to curb these malpractices. These laws marked the end of the Cultivation System and paved the way for private enterprises to establish themselves in the Dutch East Indies. Introducing new crops, such as tobacco and rubber, diversified the economic landscape. The Dutch East Indies blossomed as a leading exporter of tropical products, thus creating a robust economic base for the Dutch economy. Ambitious infrastructure projects, including the construction of railways, fostered the growth of towns and facilitated the transportation of goods across the archipelago. News and information used to travel only as fast as a man or horse could walk, or a ship could sail. However, the introduction of the telegraph system in the East Indies fundamentally changed this, enabling rapid information transmission over greater distances. This had a notable effect on both government and commerce in the region.

By the mid-19th century, many Indo-European families considered the Dutch East Indies their home, fostering unique cultural practices that diverged from those in the Netherlands. Despite this cultural integration, discrimination persisted, particularly against mixed-race families with lower socioeconomic status. Colonial society was built on paternalistic ethos, marginalizing women as second-class citizens.

Despite these hardships, the indigenous populations of

the Dutch East Indies exhibited remarkable resilience. They maintained their languages, traditions, and unique ways of life, often finding ways to resist Dutch rule. These acts ranged from subtle defiance to full-scale rebellions. This enduring spirit of resistance, their deep connection to their land, and their rich cultural heritage form an intrinsic part of the legacy of the Dutch East Indies.

Amidst this backdrop of colonial oppression and cultural resistance, the Dutch East Indies endured severe natural disasters during the 19th century. The devastating volcanic eruptions of Tambora in 1815 and Krakatoa in 1883 claimed tens of thousands of lives and dramatically affected the global climate causing widespread crop failures and famine. These cataclysmic events, unparalleled in Dutch history, are rarely mentioned but left a lasting imprint on the East Indies.

As the 19th century ended, the jewel-in-the-crown Dutch East Indies began to show signs of strain. The native population grew increasingly discontented, yearning for autonomy, and recognition of their rights. Reformists and political opposition emerged within the Netherlands itself, advocating for the dismantling of oppressive colonial rule and pursuing justice and equality.

The legacy of the Dutch East Indies is a complex tapestry, interweaving centuries of trade, exploitation, cultural exchange, and resistance. It is a narrative of the collision of civilizations, the struggle for independence, and the inherent complexities of colonial governance. It underscores the consequences of colonialism and stands as evidence of the resilience of the human spirit and enduring desire for justice and freedom.

The extent of favoritism and duplicity was painfully revealed with the sugar contract affair, a scandal that shook the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch government to its core in the 19th century. It was a tale of avarice and treachery that involved lucrative sugar contracts, made possible by the Cultivation System. At the heart of the scandal was a particularly lucrative sugar factory in East Java, whose highly valued contract was about to expire. These contracts, which granted the right to supply refined cane sugar, were hotly sought after by those who wanted to acquire them and jealously guarded by those who possessed them. The affair caused considerable political upheaval and would go down in history as a cautionary tale of the dangers of unchecked power and the corrosive effects of colonial corruption and greed.

As we delve deeper into this historical narrative, a tale of deceit and betrayal unfolds at the highest levels of government and royal circles. Amidst this, the colony's highest administrator found himself navigating through a sea of betrayal and injustice, becoming an unexpected moral compass in a landscape tarnished by corruption. Despite being surrounded by deceit, he chose to stand firm, fighting against the prevailing currents of exploitation and immorality. His journey, while personal, also symbolizes the broader resistance against the oppressive colonial system, reflecting the struggles against economic exploitation and cultural erosion, and standing as a testament to the resilience of those who sought justice, autonomy, and freedom in the face of colonial rule.



CHAPTER 1

The sun had long since disappeared behind the skyline of The Hague, casting the city into the cold embrace of night. At the Lange Voorhout street stood a magnificent old building that housed St. Georges, a private men's club. A small group of aristocrats who wanted a discreet place to meet their social equals found the club in 1748. To join St. Georges Gentlemen's Club, a candidate must be endorsed by two current members and undergo a thorough evaluation by a select committee. This includes an interview and consideration of both endorsements and objections from existing members. The club also assesses unspoken qualities, to determine if the candidate fits their exclusive criteria. Those who pass this rigorous process gain lifetime membership.

The club's dining room was a tapestry of history and sophistication. The scent of polished mahogany mingled with the subtle aroma of aged wine and roasted meat, evoking an era of opulence and empire. Walls featured hunter green silk damask wallpaper and mahogany wainscoting with gold-framed paintings of past members. A huge central brass chandelier illuminated the room, which had a plush Persian carpet in burgundy and gold.

Large windows with royal blue velvet curtains set the mood for intimate dining, and tables were arranged spaciously throughout the room to ensure privacy.



At a small table against the wall, sat two men their faces illuminated by the glow of candlelight. The elder of the two men was the king's former private secretary and manager of one of the king's estates, Sir Robrecht Van Amstel, Esquire. A tall, massive gentleman in his early sixties, with a neatly trimmed grey beard and piercing blue eyes. His younger counterpart, a slender man with a ruddy complexion and a keen intellect, was his brother-in-law, Pieter Daalmans. Van Amstel was a long-time member of St. Georges, Daalmans was simply his guest this evening. Whereas Sir Robrecht met all the club's requirements, Pieter Daalmans would be a challenge. Together, they were plotting a course of action that could change their lives.

"Pieter," Sir Robrecht said, pausing as he sliced his filet of sole, "think of it. The Kapanga contract - it's not just any opportunity. It's the break we need." The contract for the Kapanga sugar factory on the island of Java will soon expire and is coming up for re-issuance; it is one of the most productive sugar mills in the Dutch East Indies; a fortune waiting to be seized, as we are both painfully aware that our personal finances need a serious boost."

The two men had heavily invested in shares of railroad companies, mostly in the United Kingdom. The development of railroads was considered a lucrative investment opportunity. However, as more and more companies entered the market, an

investment frenzy known as ‘Railway Mania’ ensued. Many new railway companies were formed, often with little regard for the financial viability of their projects. Investors, like Van Amstel and Daalmans, eager to capitalize on the perceived potential of the industry, bought shares in these companies, driving up share prices to unsustainable levels. Sadly, for them, it was ultimately built on hearsay and speculation rather than sound financial fundamentals. Many of the newly formed railway companies had unrealistic expectations of their potential profits and the costs involved in constructing and maintaining railway lines. The rapid expansion of railway networks led to intense competition between companies, which reduced profitability. The bubble finally burst when it became apparent that many railway companies could not generate the profits they had promised their investors. Share prices plummeted, and many companies went bankrupt, leaving investors, like Van Amstel and Daalmans, with significant losses.

“Railroads in the United Kingdom. We thought it was a gold mine.” Sir Robrecht mused, a rueful smile on his face. “We weren’t alone in that. Most of Europe was caught up in the Railway Mania.” Pieter lifted a glass of Montrachet Grand Cru to his lips and nodded. “Indeed Robrecht, these railroad investments were a disaster. My family takes every opportunity to remind me of my foolishness and incompetence. So, with the Kapanga factory sugar contract we must tread carefully. Acquiring such a lucrative contract will not be easy, and we cannot afford to make any missteps.”

As Sir Robrecht spoke of the sugar factory, his mind briefly wandered to his family estate, now burdened with debts. Securing

this contract wasn't just a matter of pride; it was about preserving a legacy he feared he might be the last to uphold.

The acquisition of the Kapanga sugar factory contract had to be handled delicately, that much was clear. It was a task not for the unconnected neophyte, or fainthearted, and the potential for costly mistakes was all too high. The wrong approach could sabotage the entire operation, a risk they couldn't afford.

Ideally, to enhance their chances to secure the deal, they had an ace up their sleeve - the potential support of the king. Daalmans, although more of a scholar, was a man of sharp intellect who knew the importance of having influential allies.

"You have a personal connection with His Majesty," Pieter reminded Sir Robrecht, his voice laced with a level of urgency. "Perhaps, in a roundabout way, he could recommend us to the appropriate officials within the government. For instance, the Minister of Colonial Affairs."

Sir Robrecht, a seasoned veteran in civic affairs and life at court alike, leaned back into his chair. His brow creased into furrows of deep thought, a sign of the weight of Pieter's suggestion. "I have pledged my loyalty to the king for many years," he finally replied, his voice steady and resolute. "He holds my counsel in high regard. If we articulate our proposition convincingly, I am fairly confident he might be persuaded to assist us in our objective."

They continued their dinner at the St. Georges dining room, discussing strategy and tactics, well aware of the challenging task that lay ahead of them. Securing the sugar contract was not just about crafting a persuasive argument; it was a game of

chess played on a board of shifting loyalties and unpredictable politics – both in the Netherlands and the East Indies. There would be several parties vying for the contract, doing whatever they thought necessary to secure it.

In the complex world of government loyalties were often short-lived, vanishing at the first sign of problems. Deceit and betrayal were not just a potential threat, but a constant presence ready to emerge at any provocation. Thus, the political landscape was filled with risks, a challenging path they had to traverse to secure the valuable Kapanga sugar contract. Despite the obstacles ahead, Sir Robrecht and Pieter were not discouraged. They planned their strategy carefully, ensuring every detail was accounted for and every hurdle was anticipated and prepared for.



As Van Amstel and his companion made their way out of the dining room, he couldn't help but catch sight of Albert Bening, the current Minister of Colonial Affairs, tucked away in a secluded corner with Rudolf Dubois, the ex-minister. Dubois was a man of notable repute, having climbed the ranks to the vice-presidency of the Council for the Dutch East Indies, thanks to a highly distinguished career in the colonies. As acting Governor-General and former Minister of Colonial Affairs, he was a passionate supporter of Dutch colonial policy and the Cultural System, which yielded enormous financial gain for the nation. A thought struck Van Amstel with a sudden chill: *What were these two discussing? Was the esteemed Dubois eyeing the Kapanga sugar contract for himself – with the help of Bening?*



A few days later, in Sir Robrecht's study, the two men quietly immersed themselves in their work. The only sounds were the occasional rustle of papers, the soft click of a fountain pen, and the muted ticking of the grandfather clock standing against the wall. Its hands moved steadily forward, a silent reminder of the importance of their task and the limited time they had to achieve it. The air was filled with the smell of burning wood from the fireplace, a scent that spoke of aged chestnut. It melded seamlessly with the faint, yet distinct, smell of furniture polish - a sweet and waxy fragrance that clung to the heavy wooden furniture that dominated the room.

As the flames danced and crackled, casting a warm and flickering light across the room, the scent of the firewood became more pronounced. It was a comforting smell, one that seemed to enfold the men in a blanket of focus and contemplation, even as it evoked memories of past winters and simpler times. The polish added a hint of cleanliness and order to the study, its scent a testament to the care with which Sir Robrecht maintained his sanctuary of knowledge.

Occasionally, one of the men would pause, lifting his head as if listening to the voice of the fire or perhaps to the silent tales held within the leather-bound books that surrounded them. There was a timelessness in that scent-laden room, a sense of being cocooned away from the world's chaos. The gentle symphony of familiar sounds and smells created an almost tangible serenity, allowing the men to delve deeper into their work, undisturbed by the world beyond the study's walls.

As the days progressed, the two men toiled on, their eyes weary but determined, their spirits unwavering. They knew they were not just fighting for a contract but for a future that promised renewed prosperity for them and their families. And so, with the vision of that future in their minds, they continued their preparations, each step bringing them closer to their goal, the acquisition of the Kapanga sugar contract.

The influence of the king, they knew, was the key. With his support, the tides of favor would likely turn in their direction. Sir Robrecht had known the king for many years, not just as a loyal subject but also as a trusted friend. He understood the king's values and principles and knew that any proposal they presented would need to align with these for it to have any chance of success.

But gaining the king's support was not a matter to be taken lightly. They had to approach him with the utmost respect, humility, and a solid plan that showed not only the potential financial benefits but also its value to the Kingdom and its colonial possessions.

As the time to present their case to the king approached, the atmosphere grew tense. Sir Robrecht and Daalmans meticulously reviewed their strategy, ensuring that every argument was watertight, every statistic accurate, and every benefit to the Kingdom highlighted. They were not only seeking the support of the king but also to secure their own futures, the futures of their families, and the success of their endeavors. Let the disastrous railroad investments fade into memory.

So they crafted their pitch, not just as a business proposition, but as a vision for the prosperity of the colony and ultimately the

Kingdom. They positioned their pursuit of the Kapanga contract not only as a mere economic venture, but also as a step towards a brighter future for the people of Java.

As they refined their strategy, they also knew that they would have to navigate the minefield of party politics delicately. They studied the recent developments in government policy towards the colonies, identifying potential allies and adversaries, and strategized on how to handle each.

They understood that their proposal would likely meet resistance from some quarters. It was well known that the liberal wing of parliament wanted changes to be implemented how sugar contracts were awarded; preferably through public tender, in other words open bidding. After all, the Kapanga sugar contract was a lucrative prize that many would covet. There would be those in the Indies who would try to undermine them, sow seeds of doubt about their intentions and competence, or even attempt to snatch the contract from under their noses. However, they were prepared for such eventualities, and their strategy encompassed not just how to win the contract, but also how to defend it.

Daalmans' ability to discern hidden motives and anticipate potential challenges proved invaluable in navigating the murky waters of politics in The Hague. He was both strategist and tactician, always two steps ahead, carefully guiding their course. 'Fail to plan, plan to fail' was his motto. Luck, timing, and fear are the important elements of success. Luck plays a major role and you must come up with the right idea at the right time. And you always have to be fearful of failing.

Sir Robrecht was the face of their mission. His longstanding

loyalty to the king and his charismatic demeanor made him a respected figure within royal circles. He was the one who would present their case, the one rallying support, reassuring doubters, and charming skeptics. He was ever the diplomat, the one who smoothed over any ruffled feathers and built the bridges they needed to reach their goal.

He also knew first-hand, that King Willem III was a study in contrasts. His charm and kindness could warm the coldest hearts, his roars of laughter filling the palace halls. Yet, beneath this affable exterior lurked a volatile temper. His moods could shift like the wind, instantly turning from a gentle breeze to a violent storm. His rage, when provoked, was a fearsome sight, his words sharp and cutting. This unpredictable nature made him both loved and feared, a man who could be as cruel as he was kind, a ruler whose mercurial temperament kept those around him in a constant state of alertness and bewilderment.

As the day of their audience with the king drew near, they reviewed their plan one last time. They went over every detail, every possible question, every potential objection. Their pitch had to be perfect, their arguments convincing, and their resolve unwavering. They knew they had one shot, and they could not afford to miss.

Van Amstel and Daalmans were fully aware of the fact that they were relying on the king's favoritism to gain an advantage. The practice of showing preference to friends or trusted associates when awarding jobs, positions of authority, and other benefits, without considering their qualifications did not bother them in the least. In the past, before the establishment of comprehensive

legal systems, favoritism was the norm for accomplishing tasks. After all, throughout history, individuals have always depended on family members, close relatives, or trusted allies to make deals and navigate their way in society. In many parts of the world transactions are facilitated through connections within and among families, clans, or ethnic groups. There are numerous examples of rulers who attain power through unscrupulous means who are unlikely to completely eradicate corruption.

However, the role of modern institutional order is to restrain and regulate such practices. During the 19th century in northern Europe, relatively incorrupt governments emerged and introduced new rules that prohibited previously acceptable corrupt practices, while improving the enforcement of these rules as well. This transformation also took place in the Kingdom of the Netherlands with the introduction of a new constitution.

Despite these changes in sentiment and developments in the law, Van Amstel and Daalmans blissfully disregarded the moral significance of their intention to request a big favor from the king. And recommend themselves for acquiring the Kapanga sugar contract, even though there were undoubtedly more qualified candidates available.

They didn't care that when jobs and positions are granted based on relationships rather than merit, it can lead to inefficiency. The most competent individuals are excluded in favor of those with connections, resulting in poor performance and reduced productivity. Observing that Van Amstel and Daalmans prioritized connections over knowledge and experience may cause others to lose faith in the system, especially when it comes to awarding

contracts in the Dutch East Indies. Individuals with connections are granted opportunities that others simply don't have.

Equally significant is the fact that favoritism can foster further corruption. If Van Amstel and Daalmans believe they can rely on their royal connections to evade consequences, they may be more inclined to engage in other questionable behavior. However, before any of these potential scenarios transpire, they must first convince the king to take part in their scheme.



CHAPTER 2

Willem III, King of the Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg was not a pleasant man. Although he could show kindness and empathy, he was also hot-tempered, selfish, and mean to many around him.

His first wife, the Princess Sophie von Wuerttemberg, became a regular victim of his anger and malevolence.

Only three years had passed since Sophie exchanged her wedding vows with her husband, yet she already yearned to escape the confines of their tumultuous marriage. The burdens she bore were heavy, caused not only by Willem's flagrant infidelities, but also by his unbridled sexual appetites and mercurial disposition. The heartache gnawed at her soul, rendering her increasingly desperate for a reprieve.

One evening, Sophie penned a heartfelt letter to her father, divulging the agonizing truth of her marital strife. Her words flowed onto the page - a torrent of anguish that could no longer be contained. She revealed how her husband had threatened and mistreated her, subjecting her to the most vile and degrading acts. These offenses, she wrote, were an affront to the morals

and dignity of any woman.

“My situation is unsustainable,” Sophie confessed in her letter, a last-ditch attempt to seek understanding and solace from the one person who might be able to intervene on her behalf.

As she sealed the letter, Sophie could only hope that her plea would not fall on deaf ears, that her father would empathize with her plight and offer the support she so desperately needed. The future of her marriage, and perhaps even her own well-being, hinged on the outcome of this desperate cry for help.

In the halls of the royal household, those who served King Willem were well-acquainted with the darker side of their ruler’s temperament. It was commonly accepted among the servants that the king could be unspeakably cruel, delighting in the torment of those beneath him.

One such tale, often recounted in hushed tones among the staff, involved a simple yet painful ritual. Whenever Willem desired a smoke, a hapless footman was summoned to light the royal cigar. With a mixture of fear and reverence, the servant would strike a match, praying that the flame would hold steady in his trembling fingers. However, as the match was struck, the king would linger, feigning to be lost in thought or perhaps deriving perverted pleasure from the impending pain. As the flame crept closer to the footman’s skin, threatening to sear his flesh, the servant would have no choice but to extinguish the match before blisters formed from the burning match.

Rather than expressing concern, or even indifference, king Willem would seize the opportunity to punish the unfortunate footman. With a mean glint in his eye, the king would declare

that the servant's failure to keep the match alight warranted a deduction of two weeks' salary – a serious blow to those who relied on their modest wages to survive.

In the throne's shadow, the royal household staff braced themselves for the caprices of their unpredictable ruler, knowing that at any moment, they too could fall victim to his unwarranted cruelty. To the general public these things remained largely private and hidden.

It was widely known, however, that the king was greatly frustrated by the new Constitution adopted in 1848. A mere four months prior to his ascension to the throne, a drastic overhaul of the Dutch constitution took place, much to his chagrin. This revision significantly curtailed the king's authority. At first, he adamantly declined to assume Kingship under the reformed constitution, but ultimately, he acquiesced to the inevitable. Willem's most notable political accomplishment was becoming the first Dutch king of a nation governed by an elected parliament. The Netherlands had become a Constitutional Monarchy which clearly established that it is the ministers, not the monarch, who bear the responsibility for governmental actions. These ministers are held accountable by the parliament for the policies the government implements. Moreover, they also carry the political responsibility for the monarch's words and actions, something Willem detested.



At last, the day had come when Sir Robrecht Van Amstel and Pieter Daalmans were granted an appointment with the king.

For weeks, the impending appointment with the king had cast a shadow over them, each day heavy with the gravity of what was at stake. The meeting was not to take place at the royal palace Noordeinde in The Hague, but at the king's hunting lodge in the East of the country. The description 'hunting lodge' was a private joke of the king, but in reality, a misnomer. In the late 17th century, one of the king's forefathers, had bought the land and indeed intended to build a hunting lodge, which turned out to become much grander. Now, as they journeyed to the king's country residence, every turn of their coach's wheels felt like a march towards a verdict that could either salvage their fortunes or spell their ruin.

Today, the imposing estate stood proudly, its majestic architecture a testament to the opulence of the current era. The main building, a square structure adorned with the graceful lines of classicism, was flanked by side wings that extended like protective arms. Connecting the main building and the wings were elegant, semi-circular colonnades, giving the entire edifice the regal air of a palace rather than a mere lodge.

Over time, the buildings underwent a series of expansions, with inner and outer pavilions rising on either side of the main building. These pavilions served as a bridge, connecting the central structure to the side wings. Within their walls, the royal apartments could be found, as well as the grand dining room, the palace chapel, and the prestigious art gallery.

The king took special pride in the royal collection, which was prominently displayed in a long and wide corridor. Here, works by Rubens, Titian, Van Dyck, and a myriad of Dutch masters