

Letters from (New) Amsterdam
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Gertje

Slide: The Love Letter by Jan Vermeer

Not until now the seventeenth century did artists paint the middle class. Not until this place, the Lowlands, did paintings show landscapes not romanticized. Not until the Dutch, were there so many exceptional artists earning a living from their craft, thanks to a burgeoning class of prosperous patrons.

The Golden Age of the tiny Dutch Republic not only brought changes to the art world but also to commerce and politics; its spheres of influence reaching the New World with the establishment of New Amsterdam in 1625.

While we have only a few images depicting New Amsterdam, we do have a literary trail—letters that went back and forth between families separated by the sea. These letters tell the story of women left behind in Holland who found new autonomy in managing the family businesses, of men who ventured to the new colony seeking prosperity, and women, again, who toiled anonymously doing the daily tasks that allowed others to strive and thrive.

The letters that you will hear tonight are a fictionalized exchange between Martin Schuyler in New Amsterdam and his wife, Annetje, back in Amsterdam. Keeping a watchful eye both on the correspondence and the churned butter is Gertje Gansevoort, their faithful and tireless maid, who lives with Annetje in a house near the Wester Kerk in Amsterdam. The letters were inspired by Johan Vermeer's 1666 painting *The Love Letter*.

Annetje

Slide: Weeping Tower

Dear Martin: I am writing a quick note to be sent on the Gelderland which is expected to depart just two weeks after your own ship left these shores. I pray that you are safe and sound. If only you had heard the women and children in the Weeping Tower, none of you would have left, no matter how dire the circumstances. Did you see us waving our handkerchiefs and scarves? We watched the Jupiter until it was a distant speck in the distance and even then we held our gaze, with some of us yelling, "I see it still."

The thought that I might never hold you in my arms again fills me with such sorrow that I can barely write. And yet even as I pity myself, there are others who are not only left without husbands or fathers, but their financial situation is more precarious than ours. As I stood in the Weeping Tower, I noticed a young woman who was particularly unconsolable. She said her name was Sara and that her husband had signed away seventy guilders from his future earnings in order to outfit himself as a gunner's mate. Sara confessed that it was because her husband loved her so that he signed onto the Jupiter, as his small family farm was flooded, and they had no other means of support. Knowing that such women have had to resort to prostitution until they can draw their husband's wages from the Dutch West India Company, I immediately offered her the use of our son's room, now that he is working on our behalf in

Leiden. Sara reluctantly accepted, saying she didn't want to take charity, but that she was a lace maker and could eventually contribute toward her rent. Her main concern was to protect Lucie, her 10-year-old daughter, a winsome bashful girl who looked up at me with such trust.

I didn't know how Gertje would take it, welcoming a stranger into our household, but after a fleeting glance of dismay, she put her shoulder to the wheel, like a hearty soul she is, and proceeded to air the extra bedding and clean out cupboards to store their meager possessions.

As for our business, we are all waiting to see how England's new king Charles II, who recently sailed from Scheveningen for England, will treat the land that had protected him. If he adjusts the tariffs on Dutch linen, we may be able to reverse our fortunes. I don't blame you for incurring your brother's debt from the tulip mania, but it was the singular event that started our downward spiral, eventually leading to your decision to go to the New World to recoup our losses. Tomorrow, I hope to hear good news from Johan de Brune of the Textile Syndicate.

Martin

Slide: Journey to New Amsterdam; image by Len Tantillo

My Annetje: I am hurriedly scribbling a note. I have arrived! It was a 63-day journey across the Atlantic Ocean, and if what I have encountered so far should foreshadow that what is to come, then I anticipate favorable business dealings indeed. Within a year, I predict I'll be able to make enough money to pay my brother's debts and right our own little ship.

Despite your fears, the trip was most uneventful, but for a few storms in which rain dripped from the deck onto our closely packed bunks. There was one squall in which the ship heeled precariously and we were all rudely thumped out of our bunks onto the floor. The cries for mercy and pleas for divine aid were cacophonous, along with many confessions of a

personal nature. Then the sea, as if it were a monster tired of toying with us, became calm. We sat up, dizzy and nauseous, but no worse for the wear with sheepish grins on our faces.

No calamitous events occurred, neither pirates nor Spaniards, but what vexed us the most was the common inconveniences, having to go to the ship's bow to void my bladder and bowels. When I protested to a sailor that a gentleman such as myself shouldn't have to experience such indignities, he managed to scrounge up a chamber pot that was extremely welcome in the middle of the night. However, I was expected to empty it myself, which meant climbing a steep narrow ladder to the top deck. One day the ship took an unexpected dive, and the contents of the pot spilled on the very clothes that I had labored to keep spotlessly clean. Cleanliness, I always say, is half your health. If everyone swept the pavement in front of his house, the whole street would be clean. And here I was in total disgrace.

But after a week of such annoyances, we all managed to adopt a keen sense of humor. By far, the most agreeable pastime was talking to fellow passengers. A sailor named Pieter with eyes as bright blue as cornflowers talked to me after the evening shift. I quipped that the business between New Amsterdam and the mother company is tied together with a long string of yarn. "More like a skein," he said, puffing on his clay pipe. "Hear me a piece. Us sailors only get paid by the company when we are in Amsterdam. We manage with room and board on ship, but if we stay in New Amsterdam, we have nothing to live on. So passengers have taken it upon themselves to bring over the sailors' wages or look after their property. Those who are owed promissory notes sometimes sell these notes to others at a discounted rate, figuring that if the ship goes down, they'll get nothing from a dead sailor. If you only knew everyone's story on board, those who either owe, borrow, lend, or sell, we are connected like a big ball of yarn. Remarkably, despite the opportunity for corruption, the goods are delivered; the wages are secured, every penny of it; and debts are repaid. It couldn't be but otherwise."

Slide: View of New Amsterdam harbor

My dear, I must hastily conclude. The crew is hoisting up our glorious flag—how we have fought for it. We will greet Fort Amsterdam with a formal gun salute. I'm told that a ship is being loaded now for a return visit to Amsterdam, and my letter—all of our letters, in fact, will find their ways to our loved ones but I can assure you that no one is more loved than thee. —

Martin

GertjeSlide: Vermeer's Milkmaid

My cleaning regimen is done with military precision, as specified in the household manual, *The Experienced and Knowledgeable Holland's Householder*. Monday: Wash the front steps and sweep the path leading to the house. Tuesday: dust and polish reception rooms and bedrooms. Wednesday. Do the rest of the house. Thursday, Scrub the floors and scour the pots. Friday. Clean the kitchen and cellar. Saturday. Wash clothes. Sunday, Go to church. Everyday: shop and prepare food. Repeat the following week.

AnnetjeSlide: The Drapers' Syndicat by Rembrandt

Unfortunately, Johan de Brune has no news about trade agreements, only rumors and that is this: All goods will be permitted to be transported on Dutch ships to England except for goods from the colonies, Levant cottons and naval supplies. Johan didn't know if prohibitions will continue on linen made in Leiden. Having never met Meneer de Brune before, I didn't want to take up his time, but he proved to be a congenial fellow, and, I might, add garrulous. He wanted to know about your cousin's affairs in trading beavers and thought him a clever fellow, although I didn't disclose that it was you who had helped to underwrite the venture.

He asked if you were afraid of these Indians, Mohawks. Do they train hawks? Do they scalp their victims? I could only tell him what I had heard. "Indians don't wear any clothing. Not a stitch." He stroked his well-trimmed goatee and frowned. "Most unfortunate." I readily agreed, thinking they must get quite cold in wintertime. "No, my dear, I was thinking that if they don't wear clothing, we needn't expect a robust textile industry in New Amsterdam."

Abruptly changing the subject, Meneer Johan remarked how well our son is doing in managing our Leiden affairs. Willem Schuyler is a credit to the family's honor. He seemed to say it without guile, but I couldn't help think it was a covert reference to your hapless brother.

Slide: Mother's Duty

When I got home, little Lucie had her head on Sara's lap. How charming, I thought, this tranquil scene, with the sun illuminating our floors, Delft wall tiles with blue figures, the spotless brass bed warmer and our little dog. Gertje was standing behind me, and I think she was the first to realize that Anna was searching the girl's head for

lice. Gertje turned so red, she looked like a russet potato. For the next twenty-four hours, the household was turned upside down, every inch scrubbed, but to Gertje's credit she continued to be polite to Sara, only suggesting that she best remove lice outdoors.

With this I close, I remain yours, Annetje

Martin

Slide: Peter Stuyvesant

My dearest Annetje,

There are so many pressing things to say, but I must put them all aside in order to tell you about a man whose name you know well, one who has been both cursed and praised in the hallowed halls of the Dutch West India Company in Amsterdam.

When I first met the director-general of the colony of New Netherland, none other than the esteemed Petrus Stuyvesant, I thought to myself, what an unfortunate creature to have been burdened throughout his life with a proboscis so large that one could smell a half-rotten apple a mile away. This reddish protrusion on his face dwarfs his small, calculating eyes. Not only that, he has a wooden peg leg, having lost the lower part of his right leg to a cannonball, leading an attack on the Spanish-held island of Saint

Martin when he was director of the West India Company's colony of Curaçao, in the West Indies. Since the prosthesis was with silver nails, the Dutch here call him *Peg Leg Pete* or *Old Silver Nails*.

What possessed the sage and practical Lords Herren who sit on the Board of the Dutch West Indies Company to appoint this deformed and tormented man as director-general totally mystifies me although one might attribute this blunder to either their avariciousness or ignorance.

I had only been in New Amsterdam for a day or two before I was regaled with stories of Stuyvesant's malfeasance. Only one year after Stuyvesant arrived in 1647 to these shores, he commenced to engage in a bitter quarrel. Against whom? The English? The Mohawks? Indeed not, but against our own countrymen in the Hudson River Valley. When they objected, he said, We derive our authority from God and the company, not from a few ignorant subjects."

He has little tolerance for anyone who worships outside the Reformed Church. He says Jews are from that "repugnant race" and refuses the same rights accorded to Jews in Amsterdam, lest members of that other despicable minority demand their rights, and I'm referring to the Roman Catholics. Just days after I arrived, he ordered the public torture of a popular 23-year-old Quaker preacher and made an ordinance that anyone harboring a Quaker would be heavily fined.

So you can imagine my trepidation when I was summoned to the director-general's farm to give a report of myself. So last week, I drummed up my courage and found the road that branched north from Fort Amsterdam to the *bouwerij*, our Dutch word for farm, which some Englishman here have bastardized as the Bowery.

I'm eager to tell you about my meeting with Stuyvesant and its unfortunate outcome but the messenger is standing at the door, waiting for this letter that will be carried from our shores to your harbors and with it my deepest love. I wait to hear word from you. With the greatest affection, I remain your devoted husband.

Gertje

Slide: Skating

How time has passed! The days have been cold for weeks now and the canals are frozen. While others might bemoan the fact that fresh goods are in short supply, we love donning our skates and having a good spin down the canals. This was the first time that Lucie went skating. You should have seen the joy on her little face. She managed quite well. Not me! If it weren't for so much padding, clothing and flesh, I surely would have broken a hip.

Slide: Girl with Lace Collar

Sara and Lucie have settled in nicely. Sara wanted to help me with the household chores but frankly I didn't want her fussing around me. As it turns out, she is a talented lace maker, and we have introduced her to several members of the prestigious burgher class who have purchased her lace collars. She is doing quite well for herself, paying not only for Lucie's tutor but also contributing to the household expenses, which lightens Annetje's burden.

Annetje seems so sad these days. It has been a couple months since we have heard from Martin, and then too, Willem has taken ill. She goes as much as possible to

see her son in Leiden, but it exhausts her. There is talk that Willem will come back home for awhile until he regains his health, but he absolutely refuses to hear of it. He loves negotiating with the linen workers and has made some nice purchases which should sell well in London. Despite that good news, there is bickering in Amsterdam, with some living comfortable lives; others working ten hour days six days a week, with little to show for their toil. These are worrisome times.

Martin

Slide of New Amsterdam emblem

My greatest apologies for not having written. It is never easy to reveal reversals of one's fortunes. Let me continue the story with Petrus Stuyvesant, and you will understand better my circumstances.

At first, my conversation with Stuyvesant was cordial. The conversation drifted more than the meandering Maas River, and I, not knowing where the ax was to fall, stayed alert. It wasn't long before he said, "Sir, you may think that those of us who have chosen to toil in this new land have not kept abreast with current affairs," On the contrary," and here he wagged a finger toward me, "I've keenly followed men's affairs in Holland, for example, that nasty disagreement between the theologians Jacobus

Arminius and Franciscus Gomarus. Of course, you have most recently come from the Mother Country, can well enlighten me. "What do people now think about Arminius and his philosophy of free will."

I was thunderstruck, since religious affairs concern me not, I had to struggle to think who the devil were Arminius and Gomarus. Looking completely befuddled, Stuyvesant continued his pontifications, "Certainly, Sir, you are aware of the Reformed Church's stance which has aligned itself with Gomarus belief of predestination?" I rarely muddle over such things but frankly I find it utterly bizarre that we are all predestined to either succeed or fail, that we are either princes or scoundrels, either rich or poor, and that the fate of each and every one of us has been predetermined. If that were the case, why should anyone be born at all? When I hesitated, Stuyvesant sharpened his knife for the kill. "So you have decided to refuse my generous offer to farm in Haarlem because you are exercising your free will?" I tried to labor through the implications should I admit to such arrogance, so I simply said, "I don't think I am suited for farming."

In triumph, Stuyvesant half rose from his chair in excitement, "You aren't suited? So God hasn't given you the aptitude to put your shoulder to the plow? So, in effect, my good man, you are predestined not to be a farmer?"

When I looked at him blankly, he continued. "I think your silence is an admission that you follow the tenets of Gomarus and thus you heartily agree with Reformed Church's strict teachings that some are doomed and others are saved. The question is this, Martin, "Are you saved or doomed?"

I sputtered, “Sir, I understand your father was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. Mine was a keg maker. You must excuse my ignorance of these matters of the church. I don’t have the slightest idea who is saved and who is not in that God and I are often not on speaking terms.”

“Pity because if you were better informed, you would know that those who are prosperous are saved, God has blessed them with beneficence, while those who are poor obviously have committed some sin, known only to God.”

It suddenly dawned on me where Stuyvesant was driving his argument, and it didn’t embolden well. He wanted farmers in Haarlem as a buffer between the Indians and Fort Amsterdam. I was merely fodder for the cannon. Yet, if I refused his offer and fell upon hard times, then most surely it would be a worldly manifestation of my condemned soul. Yet I reasoned that my affairs, trading beaver pelts with my cousin in Beaverwijck, was outside of Stuyvesant’s grasping control, and I could afford to refuse his offer and thus servitude to the director general of New Amsterdam. Fortunately, I didn’t have to answer as Stuyvesant was interrupted by a messenger. Little did I know that this note would also radically change my life.

Slide of Tavern Scene

I put this disagreeable meeting behind me and concentrated on matters at hand, meeting my cousin in Beaverwijck, some 150 miles north of New Amsterdam. Inclement weather had prevented me from making an immediate departure. In the meantime, I met an Englishman who was a godsend. John Wilson used to sail the high seas on behalf of the Dutch East India Company but came to New Amsterdam some two years ago. Half the population of Fort Amsterdam are not Dutch, so it’s not surprising at all to

meet an Englishman who seems to have his thumbs in many pies. Despite our language barriers and political differences, we took an instant liking to each other. I remember one meal in which we had quite a heated argument about Dutch immigration to England, and the English dislike for anything that was Dutch. John explained it in this way. The English language has a number of pejorative words that cast the Dutch in an unfavorable light. For example, he who has Dutch courage is a coward. A Dutch uncle is someone who gives unwanted advice. With that I raised an objection. I never give unsolicited advice except to my nephew who is a dunderhead, taking after my brother. "Mark my words," he said, with a gleam in his eyes. "It won't be long before the English will have your Fort Amsterdam?" I retorted that I thought this highly unlikely. On what basis, may I ask? I've met the English and find them, with the exception of the present company, to be incompetent."

"For this reason alone. We, English, are better at propagating than the Dutch."

With that, I had to agree and saw that he had a point. "The English do have a talent for that sort of thing." But then, too, we simply aren't sending enough settlers from the Lowlands to the colony here.

"So what country do you hate more than the Dutch?"

"The Spanish," he said, spitting onto the floor. We still talk about their foolish Armada of 1588."

"I too spit on Spanish grave," hurling a volley of spittle. "For sieging Leiden and starving our people."

Not to be outdone, John spat again. "I spit on the Spanish for their Papish ways."

Just then the innkeeper approached us and said he observed that there seemed to be a lot of spitting, and that Director General Stuyvesant has decreed there will be no spitting in public establishments, even if it was on the Spanish dogs. “Alas,” I admitted. “I see the trouble now. We’re too content in the mother country, so no one wants to leave, and too intolerant here. It should be the other way around and then we would have no trouble finding Dutch settlers.”

By then our meal had ended, and the innkeeper brought us two checks. “What is this?” I asked dismayed, looking at the long list of items that I had ordered. John laughed robustly. “It’s what us English call a Dutch treat.”

As if to assuage my feelings, he said, “When the English take over, you will be able to spit in the taverns.”

As it turned out, John Wilson threw me a lifeline. Perhaps you have heard of the Peach War? It all started when a Dutchman shot a young Indian girl who was stealing a peach from his orchard. In retaliation, five hundred Indians attacked Hoboken and Staten Island, and my cousin was one of the victims. This was devastating news, in that I had invested our available capital in his beaver trading business. I visited the young widow with three small children, with the intent of straightening my cousin’s affairs, but the books were so mismanaged that I could readily see he had squandered my investment and left little for his wife. It then struck me. I would never be able to recoup my financial losses, repay my brother’s debts, or even return home with enough money to keep our own house on the canal.

Forgive me for now relaying this tragic news, but I had to explain that I first refused to become a farmer, vulnerable to Indian attacks, and with Stuyvesant's curse, maybe I was indeed doomed to poverty and God's condemnation.

That's where John Wilson came to my rescue, introducing me to an Englishman who is making a comfortable living as a cooper. It has been many years since I assisted my father in his shop, but my hands, at first soft from trade dealings, became hardened, and my back no longer minds the pain of working long hours steaming wood for barrels. It's with a sad, but faithful heart, that I close this letter. Martin.

Gertje

Portrait of a Young Man, Workshop of Rembrandt

My mistress is sad most days and then if anything could get worse, it did. Willem, their only child, suddenly died. Evidently, he had been sick for sometime but didn't say anything to his mother, for fear of adding to her burdens. He had been working long hours in Leiden, trying to keep their struggling business afloat, but more and more textile workers were immigrating to England where they could get better pay. Despite his best efforts, he could only bring enough money to keep himself lodged and fed and generate minuscule profits for his mother. With a demand for better wages and limited

access to the markets, the family fortune which had reaped wealth over the years had vanished. Plus, his brother's creditors were demanding immediate payment. Annetje talked more and more of selling the house and joining her husband in New Amsterdam. Our only joy was Lucie who continued to amaze us with her cleverness, and her mother whom we had taken in as a charity case was doing so well with her lacemaking that she selflessly was supporting the household.

Still life with Skull

In the spring, I met a painter by happenstance in the market place who was buying vegetables, not for his table, but to be displayed on his table. He was a quiet, modest man by the name of Jacob Peschier, who offered to show me his oil paintings. I quickly told him that neither I nor the mistress of the household were in the position to buy paintings, but he shrugged, and said he only sought to show his paintings to an appreciative audience. I don't know how appreciative I am. There are hundreds of paintings for sale at country fairs each year, and it seems almost every corner stall shelters a painter. If this nation falls, it won't be due to outside aggression, only that people who once chased tulip bulbs are now dabbling in paints, having forsaken sensible pursuits.

Jacob came to the door one fine spring morning and lugged in several large framed paintings. My immediate thought was one of woe: Now I'll have to scrub the floor again. He proceeded to place the first one on a table, and I must say he had a keen eye.

“The skull, of course, signals death, he said. “And these other objects—the playing card, a book, sheets of music and the violin, the ink pot, all remind us of death. And the hour glass is a symbol of. . .”

I interrupted, “Let me guess—death. Well, I said, you are certainly a jolly fellow. Do you often think of death?”

He answered in a soft sad voice. “My wife died a year ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” regretting my flippant remark. He showed no sign of irritation but his face continued to express goodness and sincerity. “She was my second wife.”

And words came out before I could curb my tongue. “Seems you have a bad luck on that account.”

I thought surely he would take offense but he smiled wistfully, “They were both slight ladies of a fragile constitution. I thought next time I would search for a sturdy one.” And then he looked at me, built like a workhorse, and the thought occurred to me, “I have a gentleman caller.”

And, indeed, in the next several months, he did come calling.

I often accompanied him on his sojourns into the country which he loved to paint. He has opened up my eyes to the beauty of this watery country with a wide, welcoming sky that stretches across its dunes, polders, windmills, and villages.

Three landscapes by Ruesdale. Pause while slides are shown. (No commentary) Fourth landscape with oak tree

I became fond of his quiet ways, his gentle sense of humor, and, most of all, his kindness. It was during one of these forays into the countryside that he put aside his painting, took my hand and asked me to marry him. We had found a sunny patch

underneath an old oak tree, where we had comfortably nestled into the pockets of the earth. I knew exactly what I was going to say but I begged off, saying that I had to deliberate. It's not a wise idea for a lady of a certain age to appear too desperate. When I got home, I received a letter from a lawyer, saying that Saskia, my only sibling, a dear sister, had passed away in Haarlem and that I was to come right away and meet him at her cottage. Jacob said that he would wait patiently for my return.

Time doesn't permit me to tell you more about my sister, but never was there a kinder soul with the possible exception of my mistress Annetje. Saskia had married a miller, an industrious man who loved to work in their large fenced garden behind their house, somewhat removed from Haarlem. He had died about a year ago. So it was a heavy heart that I traveled to Haarlem, mostly by boat, and trudged to my sister's house, reflecting on our childhood, youth, as well as our mature years, she married without children, and I, single, about to be married.

Slide: Semper Augustus

In the cottage, everything was in its place, as if she had just stepped out for an errand. Since Saskia preferred to come to Amsterdam to shop and visit friends, I had not been to Haarlem in the last couple years. I therefore was astonished to see that the walls were covered with exquisite paintings of tulips, particularly of the rarest of all, the Semper Augustus with ruby red flares and a pure white corolla. The lawyer, with a good-hearted ruddy face, expressed his sincere sympathies and then proceeded to business. He handed me this letter, which I will read:

"Gertje, my dearest sister, if you are reading this, It is because I've passed from this world. Don't cry for me. I'm always with you, my breath is in the wind, the warmth of

my heart is in the fireplace, my eyes are the sparkles of water on a sunny day. I will walk with you, day in and out.

Therefore what I write is short and no doubt will shock you. We have always lived a modest life. Derek and I loved the simple joys of life but the reality was far different. Years ago Derek had gone into Amsterdam after some of the coldest days in memory, due to pressing business obligations. A mild wind had swept from the south, bringing in several days of unseasonal warmth. It was one late afternoon, the blueness of the evening had descended onto the city. Most people had hurried inside, and there were but a few skaters on the canals. Suddenly, there was a frightful shriek and the horrible sound of cracking ice. Derek hurried over to the canal to inspect; indeed a fissure had developed in the ice with only one remaining section intact. People had scurried to the safety of the banks, but even as the darkness descended, it was obvious that someone was floundering in the freezing water. Anyone who attempted to save this individual was in imminent danger. It seemed nothing could be done. But Derek, as you well know, was a man of action. Without thinking, he told one man to hold onto his legs, and then another man hold his legs, and so forth, until there was a human chain snaking across the ice toward the fissure. I don't know how he did it, but Derek managed to get a hold of the man's arms and pull him onto the ice, and with that the chain of humans retracted, foot by foot, until the hapless unconscious man was pulled to safety. By then the man's family had arrived onto the scene, and they carried him off to one of the largest houses on the canal.

I've promised to never reveal his name for circumstances that you will understand. Derek was hailed as a hero, but he shrugged off the praise. Some said he

should be compensated for his troubles but he thought not. As it turns out, the man he saved was one of the richest merchants in Amsterdam, who had developed a passion for the new tulip craze, which had devastated your brother-in-law. This wealthy connoisseur owned all twelve of the Semper Augustus bulbs which were so rare, he was offered four oxen (he didn't need those in Amsterdam), a thousand pounds of cheese (he ate his fill every day) and even a ship. His refusal made the prices go even higher. In the spring time, Derek was summoned to this man's house, expecting that he would get a nice meal and a little gift of coins. Instead the man gave him a bulb with two offsets from its base. The connoisseur said that he had investigated Derek's life, learned that he was an honest, hard-working man, and that he liked to garden. The prices for the Semper Augustus will remain high as long as the market is not flooded with them, this merchant advised.

Derek and I agreed not to tell anyone, not even you. If the word got out, our garden would have been ravaged. If we started to buy luxurious things for the house, people would wonder where we got the money. And, beside, we liked our quiet lifestyle. So through an intermediary, who never revealed our identity, we sold a few Semper Augustus bulbs every spring, and with that money, we purchased bulbs of other varieties. Eventually, we contacted the lawyer who is sitting with you to buy shares of stock in merchant ships. While one or two were lost, we did quite well for ourselves. My dear, we are leaving the lot to you, and as you can see from the sums, you, who have scrubbed pots all your life, will never have to pick up another pan in your life. You are a rich woman. Until we meet again, with the fondest heart, Saskia."

I shed a good many tears at that moment and after I got a grip on myself, I inquired what I should do with so many guilders. “Anything you like,” he said, smiling kindly.

I contemplated my good fortune and decided to tell only Jacob. “Imagine, my dear husband, you will never have to work again. You can be the patron, not the painter.”

He smiled sadly. “My dearest Gertje, painting is all my life but now for you. I can provide a comfortable living for you without this money. I would certainly annoy you if I didn’t go about my business.”

I knew then that I had found my soulmate for as many years as we would share together on this earth.

And, so then I thought about the people next closest to me: Annetje, Martin, Sara and her daughter Lucie. Before I could say anything, another letter came from Martin.

Martin

Slide: Rembrandt drawing

My dearest, Annette: How the death of our son weighs heavily on me. I’ve been so foolish. While I had no choice but to assume my brother’s debts, we could have sold the home, but I couldn’t bear the thought of losing our material comfort in the world. If Stuyvesant is right, that God showers beneficence on those he loves, was I afraid of being disgraced in this world and condemned in the next? Yet, it came down to pride. I

was so ashamed of my brother selling ordinary tulip bulbs as fine varieties, that I feared that he had sullied the Schuyler name. With his suicide, throwing himself in the canal, inebriated, he escaped the angry buyers who demanded recompense, and thus they went after the only family member who had money.

By coming to New Amsterdam, I sincerely thought I could pay the debts and make enough money to secure our social standing but it was not to be. If you only saw me now, my brow lined with worries and my hair nearly gray, I work hard making barrels, although my hands are now arthritic, and I can barely hold the tools some days.

All that is precious to me is so faraway. My dear. If we could only be together, there wouldn't be any trial so great that I couldn't face it, not with you by my side. I send all my love, Martin.

Gertje

Commentary to the Audience

I will interrupt this drama and conclude it because you, the audience, will decide the ending. First choice: Martin dies in New Amsterdam, never seeing Annetje again. Gertje's largess allows Annetje to become a major benefactor of an orphanage in Amsterdam. With her business acumen, she manages Sara's lace business making her a wealthy woman, as well.

Second choice: Annetje joins Martin in New Amsterdam, where they live a modest life, purchasing a farm house and land. They have another son, starting the line of Schuylers in America. They never see their beloved Amsterdam again.

Vote.

First Conclusion: Martin Dies and Annetje stays in Amsterdam

Dear Gertje: I am so pleased to hear of your new home in Delft, and Jacob's great success as a landscapist. All is well here. The women's board has recently met, and I'm delighted to say that we will build a new wing to the orphanage, housing fifty more children. Sara's business is thriving, and our little Lucie is now a grown woman, about to be married. I've been showered with bountiful blessings, due to your generous gift. I can never thank you enough. Yet even with all the good deeds that I've been able to do for others with your money, plus the material prosperity, I would give it all away if I could but hold Martin in my arms one more time. That awaits for the hereafter, where I know he will be standing at the gates, waiting with open arms, with these words on his warm lips, "My dear Annetje, what took you so long?"

Second Conclusion: Annette and Martin start anew in New Amsterdam

Dear Gertje: I am so pleased to hear of your new home in Delft, and Jacob's great success as a landscapist. All is well here. Our little farmhouse is thriving, as is Martin who loves walking through the rich golden fields of corn and surveying the orchards, marveling at all that God has shown us. Never does a day pass that your name doesn't come to his lips, a prayer for Gertje, may her days be joyous. Our cheerful little son, Martin, loves chasing rabbits and helping his father in the tool shed. He can speak

English without an accent. I fear that he isn't remembering much Dutch. At the end of the day, when the sun is settling over the fields, my thoughts wander back to the old country. I fear never again will I see our watery land that I hold so dear in my heart and memory, and never again will I see your steadfast cheerful smile that got me through the darkest of times. Sending all our love, Annetje, Martin, and little Martin, too

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