

## Drama

In this excerpt: The rebellion has pushed Spain from northern Netherlands, and exiled Protestants are returning to their hometowns. Amsterdam's Catholic city council has reluctantly allowed them in, but fears violence from Calvinist extremists. Maarten van der Voort, a Calvinist and captain in the rebel Sea Beggar fleet, has returned and learned that the Inquisition has taken his home and killed a family member. The excerpt starts with Maarten taking a walk through Amsterdam, and it concludes with him going to the Begijnhof, the compound where his Catholic Beguine Aunt Margaretha resides and where his son Dirck is staying to protect her from attacks by extremists.

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As Maarten strolled, he passed by Gebed Zonder End Straat (Prayer Without End Street), crossed two more bridges over canals, and then turned northward. Along the way, he saw the Saint Agnes Monastery on the other side of the canal and walked past the Sisters of the Lilies Convent and the Bethany Cloister, whose nuns he recalled sold their renowned oxen at the Kalverstraat market. He stood there looking at all the walled edifices and, for the first time, realized just how much land was occupied by Catholic institutions and their orchards, gardens and paddocks. More importantly, those compounds seemed more like places of business than where God dwelled. Annoyed, he trudged on.

Finding himself near the stairs leading to the top of the city wall, Maarten decided to go up, something he had not done since childhood. The view was expansive. The churches and their steeples soared above everything else. Each house and tree was visible. He found Papa's house . . . his . . . and the Begijnhof. Everything seemed to be as it was before he left. The Damrak and Rokin canals were the dominant features: wide, busy with traffic, and bisecting the city from north to south. Other smaller canals formed an interesting pattern, one he had not discerned at street level. The two canals coursing through the older east side were symmetrical with the two on the newer west side. He studied them with interest, not knowing that each canal was a former moat, which had been incorporated into the city through successive expansions. He did remember, however, that Papa had told him the current moat, which he now realized mirrored the curve of the canals, had been dug a century earlier to allow more land to be added to the city and the present wall had been built to enclose newly enlarged Amsterdam.

When Maarten descended from the city wall, he was confronted with the imposing Minor Friar Monastery, home of the odious Inquisition. There was an eerie stillness about the place. A knot formed in his stomach. He tried to walk away, but his legs felt leaden, as though some malevolent force were keeping him there. Faint noises filtered out. He strained to hear them . . . muffled cries . . . innocents under torture . . . Papa's voice . . . an ear-piercing scream. They grew louder. From beneath the massive front door came a trickle of blood. It headed straight toward him and turned into a torrent. He jumped back. The blood kept coming, and the voices seemed to be within it. Unable to bear any more, he slammed his eyes shut and covered his ears. When he opened them, the blood was gone. The sounds were no more. He shook his head. Gotta get hold of yourself.

Clink. The latch moved, and the monastery door creaked open. A well-fed friar stepped out. He saw Maarten and slipped back inside.

"Coward!" Maarten shouted, his fists clenching.

From there, he went on to Saint Nicolaas Church and saw a rowdy crowd forming in its square. He glimpsed a familiar face, a moderate Protestant he wouldn't have expected to get mixed up with extremists. Next to him was a Calvinist zealot Maarten knew from Hoorn, who espoused hateful theories about Catholic clergy not being humans and needing to be eradicated. He was a dangerous man. Maarten strode into the crowd, intending to confront the zealot. He slowed . . . maybe it would be more productive to talk to the moderate. He stopped. Nee, you can't risk getting involved. He veered south and exited the square.

Maarten returned home, and Betje thought he looked agitated and offered consolation in the form of soup. Food was her remedy for everything. She also reminded him that they were all going to the Begijnhof for their evening meal, where Dirck was staying to protect Margaretha from extremist attacks.

Maarten was still out of sorts when he arrived at Margaretha's house, but she did not notice, for she was equally so. He placed the pot of soup on the table, Catrijn filled the bowls, and they ate in silence.

"Have you noticed all the ruffians coming into the city?" Margaretha asked.

Maarten nodded yes and thought to himself: Who couldn't notice them?

"Yesterday, a man stopped Sister Geertruyd and snatched her cross and yelled obscenities. He thought she was a nun. Father Hein is too afraid to go out anymore. All night long we hear 'Death to papists!' This *can't* go on. Something has to be done."

"Hmm." Maarten kept on eating.

"Maarten, you're a Sea Beggar leader. You *must* do something."

"*Me?* Why do *I* have to do something? I have no power. What about the City Council? What about the Minor Friar monks? The Inquisitors? What're they doing? And why aren't *they* being held accountable for anything? Someone needs to be held accountable! Someone needs to be punished!"

Margaretha was aghast, not only at the tone of Maarten's voice but also by the disturbing look on his face.

Maarten desperately wanted to scream! Cry! Pummel someone! Do anything to get the anger out! Seeing the shocked look on Margaretha's face, he instead buried his head in his hands.

Minutes passed while Maarten's fingers kneaded his hair, and Margaretha stared at the little red flowers painted on the wall. The family sat mutely, including Nicolaas, perhaps for the first time in his life.

"Maarten," Margaretha said, "I'm sorry . . . I—"

"*Nee* . . . I'm sorry. I shouldn't have spoken to you that way." Maarten rolled his head back, working out the kink that had formed in his neck. "It's just that we're—us exiles—are having a difficult time putting our lives back together. And all we hear is how rough it is for the Catholics—Honestly, it makes me sick."

Margaretha blinked away a tear. "You're right, Maarten. And I haven't been . . . I'm sorry."

Maarten grunted an acknowledgment and returned to his soup.

More silence.

"Maarten, would you go with me to the chapel tonight? We pray and chant . . . it calms us. I'd appreciate if you'd joined me."

Maarten suspected what that was about. Margaretha was a mystic, and, as far as he could tell, so were the other Beguines. Mystics tried to commune with or become one with God through chanting or ecstatic singing. He never really understood it, nor did Papa, and evidently

the Catholic Church didn't either, because Margaretha often complained that the church hierarchy didn't appreciate her brand of Catholicism. Maarten exhaled slowly, not wanting to go, yet feeling guilty for having been harsh with her. "All right, I'll go."

During the time needed to put the soup away and walk across the courtyard to the chapel, Aunt Margaretha instructed him.

"When you're listening to the chanting, Maarten, you must focus on the sound alone. Clear everything else from your mind. And eventually you will no longer hear it and will be in a silent, tranquil place where all the cares of the world are irrelevant. To arrive there, you must find your own path. Some people hum; others make a soothing sound. Catrijn, who I brought after your father's death, used a rosary. She didn't say the prayers, just fingered the beads, and soon the fingering matched the rhythm of the chant, and I believe it brought her a degree of peace."

A final word of advice came when Maarten reached for the latch of the chapel door.

"Remember, Maarten, revenge is never satisfying. It's like spitting into the wind—you only foul yourself. If you must have it, then the best revenge is to be *unlike* the person who injured you. That's what Marcus Aurelius said."

While in the chapel, Maarten tried but never achieved the peace his aunt spoke of. However, all the sitting and relaxing did work out the stiffness in his neck. For that, he could honestly tell her that he had found some relief.

After Maarten returned home, Aunt Margaretha's ideas began to sink in. It started the next morning when he went to Betje's linen cabinet and retrieved his Beggar purse, which reminded him of the Sea Beggar motto: Help thyself and God will help you. He realized he needed to somehow use "help thyself" to achieve justice, if he was to overcome his overwhelming desire for vengeance. But he had no idea how to do that.