

## Love

In this excerpt: Maarten and Betje's goddaughter Catrijn has a suitor, Konrad, who is a family friend, a Calvinist refugee from Antwerp, and longtime widower. Konrad has been in England acquiring raw materials for his new business in Amsterdam. Dirck is mentioned in the passage as being essentially Catrijn's brother because the two were raised together and are close, but are not blood relatives.

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Konrad had been particularly lonely while in England. So when invited to dine at the home of a congenial business colleague, he eagerly accepted. There, he met the man's very pretty and recently widowed sister, who charmed him with her knowledge of English literature and ethereal harp playing. Invited again, Konrad was so taken by the soft-spoken woman, her music, and the warmth of family life that he began to contemplate remarrying. After repeated encounters, however, the woman's reticent nature wore on him and his thoughts drifted to Catrijn. Almost from the start, Catrijn had fascinated him with her high ideals, insatiable curiosity about all things, independent streak, and penchant for reciting favorite passages from the classics, many of which were his favorites too, such as Cicero's "A room without books is like a body without a soul." Nonetheless, he had suppressed his attraction to her due to their age difference, seventeen years, and the need to start a business. Now with his enterprise established and fortieth birthday approaching, he resolved to ask Catrijn to marry him.

The day Konrad chose was an unseasonably warm Sunday in late November, perfect for an unhurried stroll after church. It started out with a stop along a canal to observe Catrijn's former students skipping stones and then coaxing their teacher to show her skills, which she did admirably. With all the laughter and Konrad showing them up, the time seemed ideal for him to find a quiet spot and segue into the subject of marriage. His plan was to use logic, note their common interests, and avoid getting emotional. Only a cool rational mind could accurately gauge her response and discern whether she loved him or merely liked him, and whether he was making a fool of himself.

"Is something wrong, Konrad?" Catrijn asked, sensing his preoccupation. "Something in your business?"

Konrad stopped, looked into her eyes, and logic vanished. "I've been a sojourner for so long, lonely beyond belief sometimes, and I'm . . . I'm ready to settle down, start a family. Your enthusiasm for life lifts my world-weary soul, and inquisitive mind gives me faith in the future. You stir my passions."

"Oh," Catrijn said softly. Though the proposal was not a complete surprise and she had occasionally fantasized about life with him, now the choice was real and the decision final. Stalling for time, she said, "I always felt I embarrassed myself in front of you. You often seemed distant," which was true anyway.

Konrad was getting a sinking feeling. I've made a fool of myself.

Catrijn was thinking. Is he really right for me? He's so cultured and sophisticated, handsome too . . . but not terribly exciting. Is it love I feel? What is love anyway? What if I say no, what will—don't be ridiculous! He's the dream of any intelligent woman. Do you have a better prospect? Dirck fleetingly entered her mind, but her emotions were too jumbled and his intentions unclear and he was essentially her brother anyway, as godmother Betje often reminded her. You need to make a decision, Catrijn scolded herself. He's waiting. Maybe I should say yes. If I let him get away, I may never get married.

Konrad was searching for ways to salvage his dignity after making such an imprudent proposal.

Catrijn's eyes raised, connected with his, and . . .