

## SAUCY

In this excerpt: Nicholaas van der Voort has returned early from Gdansk, where he usually spends the entire trading season buying wheat and rye for his family's ships and selling whatever goods they are able to export. The last time he was in Amsterdam, he was frustrated by not being able to seduce buxom Griet, a young maid, who he thought would be an easy mark.

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After being in Gdansk for only a few months, Nicholaas returned to Amsterdam to fill a special order from a well-to-do Polish man who favored statuary and Amsterdam's fine cloth.

A few days later, Griet noticed him walking ahead of her on Warmoesstraat. She ducked into a side street and ran past Oude Kerk to get ahead of him. After tugging a piece of hair from under her cap and letting it dangle immodestly, she sauntered onto Warmoesstraat again and almost bumped into him.

"Griet! Griet from Gelderland. How're you doing?"

"Oh, Nicholaas, I didn't see you there. I thought you were in Gdansk."

"I was, but had to return to buy goods for an important client. I've already bought a lot of fantastic stuff." She seemed impressed, so he asked, "Want to see it? I have it all stored at my brother's house. I'm on my way there now."

"Sure, that'd be fun."

When Nicholaas opened the door of the house, Griet peered in. "Is your brother at home?"

"He's at sea . . . won't be home for awhile." Nicholaas followed her inside and closed the door. "Tell me, Griet, how've you been?"

"Me? Good. And you?"

"A bit lonely. I've missed you."

She smiled demurely.

"Look at all this," Nicholaas said, waving his hand in an arc around the room.

Griet marveled at the collection of candelabra, tapestries, and bolts of shimmering cloth, things she had never seen before. "Your family must be rich."

"Yeah," he said, without a trace of modesty.

"Buying and selling these things must be *really* hard work."

"Not for me; it comes easy to me. But my brother? He has to work hard. All he does is work, work, work, same as my father . . . very *boring*." Nicholaas sat down on the edge of the desk. "You wouldn't like them." He picked up a stick from the floor and began twirling it in his fingers. It whirled around faster and faster, and a look of terror came over his face, as if it were alive and dangerously out of control.

Griet giggled. "That's what I like about you, Nicholaas. Always fun and *unpredictable*."

"Unpredictable . . . and I am." With the stick still twirling, he added, "My brother used to be fun too. We did all sorts of crazy things when we were kids." He chuckled. "You know those outhouses sitting over the canals? Well, Dirck and I used to throw stones into the canal every time old man Jacobs went into one. The water'd splash up on his arse. We'd hear him curse, and we'd laugh until we cried. But you wouldn't know Dirck was so much fun then—now he's just *boring*. When he's not at sea, he stays home and goes on the Night Watch—but, other than that, he's just—"

"*Boring*," Griet said, matching Nicholaas's refrain. She burst out laughing.

"Griet from Gelderland, you're a lot of fun."

"And you're the *funnest*, most *unusualist* guy I ever met."

"I don't understand why we don't see each other more often." Nicholaas ran his fingers under her cap until curls came cascading down. "Your hair is beautiful." He pressed a lock to his nose and smelled it sensuously. "You're irresistible." He pulled her gently toward him . . . and kissed her.

Griet surrendered completely, letting his lips devour hers and hands roam her body. She had already resolved to do whatever was necessary *not* to lose him again. By the time his hand was at work under her skirt, she was simmering with passion. Lustily, she hiked up the skirt and wrapped a leg around him.