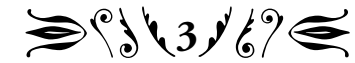




## II CIRCULATION (1671-1674)

*. . . yet what was most remarkable was to see the manifold small arteries, that came forth from the great one, and which were spread into several branches, and turning came into one again, and were re-united, that at last they did pour out the blood again into the great vein; this last was a sight that would amaze any eye, that was greedy of knowledge.*

*Antoni van Leeuwenhoek*



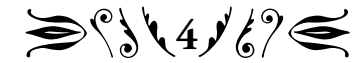
***REVERSALS IN THE GOLDEN HEAD***  
**1671**

In those numb, stealthy months of my recovery in the autumn, the space between grains of sand in the hourglass seemed to expand, as did the silences between the caroling of the Nieuwe Kirke bells, the lapses between words. The next sound was always startling, like knocking one's shin against something in the dark.

But in January as I watched the predikant's lips moving, announcing the banns for my father's marriage, his small blue eyes glancing up sightless at the tall chill windows, even I recognized the time for protest, if there had ever been one, was past. When had I had a chance? Save for the announcement to the family assembled at Aunt Gryetgen Molijn's on Christmas Day, my father never again mentioned his betrothal to me. Why had I believed it would be months, even a year until the marriage contracts were drawn?

Never once, I tell you, did my father, seated before his steaming plate at noonday, or eating the cold collation I set before him in the evening, again mention Cornelia Swalmius to me. Had I really understood aright? Surely I should ask my Aunt Gryetgen, my Aunt Maria—or even my cousin Antoni. Perhaps my father had thought better of it. Every day I scoured, I did the marketing with my friend Maria Vermeer's assistance. She made the requests whenever my tongue failed me, counted out the change I could sort only by sight. He'll see now, I'd think, sprinkling sand across the floor in huge swirling waves. See what? Somewhere in the space and time it took for the sand to spill from my hand to the floor, I forgot. My mind cleared again. Only the pattern on the floor recalled me to my task. No wonder I failed to ask.

But why didn't my father ask *me*? And why did my aunts and cousins say nothing? Were they all as frightened as my father that my wits would



***RAMPJAAR: WHAT TORE US APART***  
**1672**

*Rampjaar . . .*

There are times in one's life that are worse to remember than they were to live through. The summer of '72 was that, the whole year in fact. Even now my mind baulks when I remember the French savagery at Zwammerdam and Bodegraven. And the way we ourselves tore our own statesmen to pieces, more wicked than wolves. Was that really, as Cornelia insisted until the day she died, Our Creator's inscrutable will? I say that to remember is painful, but I don't mean we ever forget. It is like learning the depth of one's own rage—or passion—a knowledge that threads like the finest transparent vessels through every flesh fibre in the body.

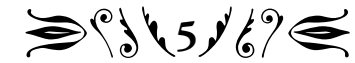
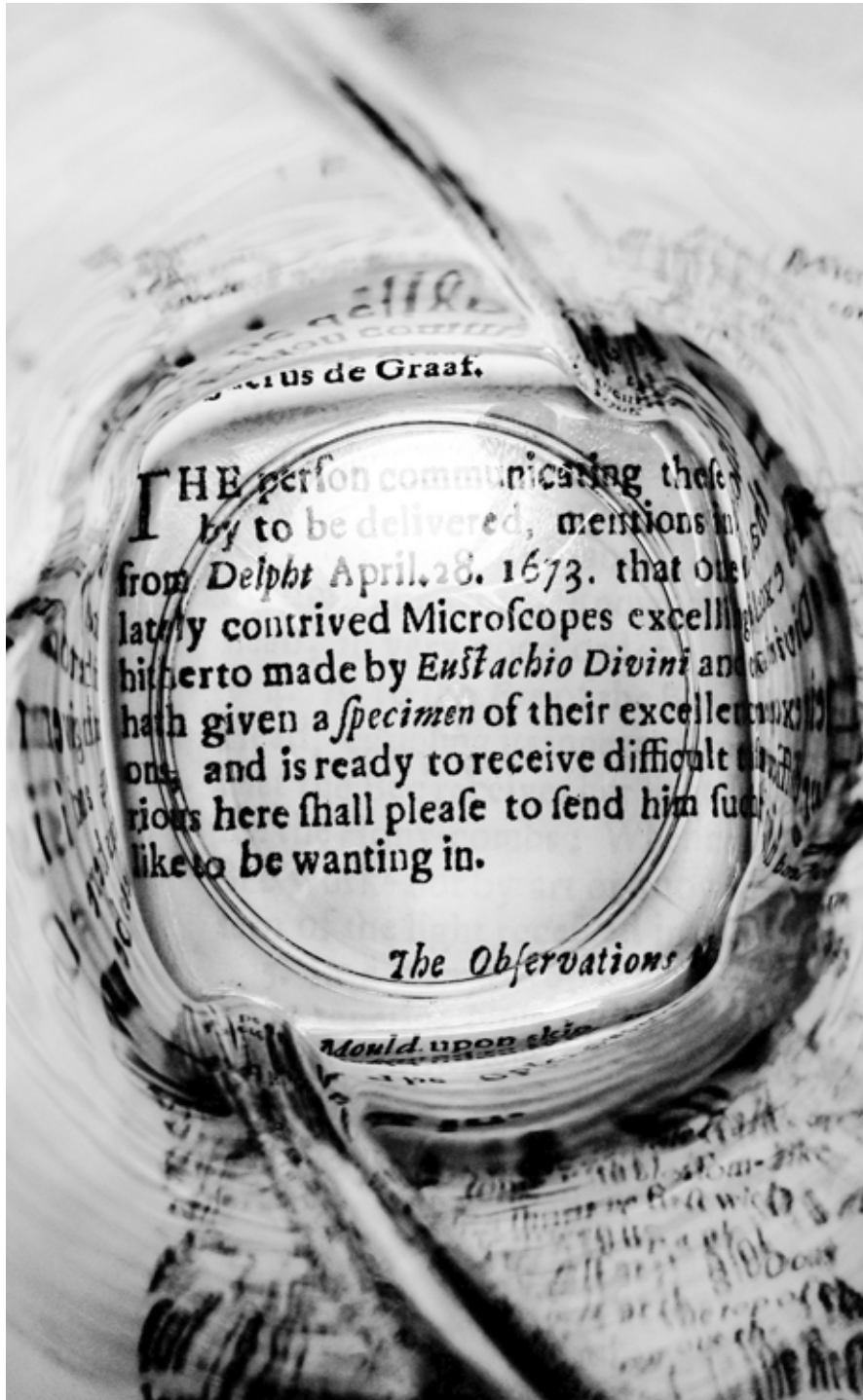
When I remember the summer of '72, I remember the small events. I retreat to them now, as my father might to his glasses when frightened by illness, harassed by grief. These memories are as small, clear and shapely as the veins and arteries in a tadpole's tail, or the trees of gold sal vitriol will leave etched onto a glass plate.



First, I remember the Vermeers removing to Johannes' mother's house on the Oude Langendijk in late May.

"Antoni's daughter," Johannes called from the door of the Mechelen. His face was gray with dust. He'd been up to the drying rooms, gathering sacks of flour they would take with them to the next house. "Take a message for me to Cornelia Swalmius. There's still ten guilders owing on her portrait."

"Ten guilders?" I remembered the argument Cornelia and my father had had just the day before when Cornelia purchased yet another ten ells of



**RAMPJAAR: WHAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER  
AGAIN  
1673-1674**

By March, when the danger of the dikes freezing fast was over for the year, we Dutch began to concern ourselves with our private fortunes again. The French invasion, it was now evident, had been stopped. The French would never again dare to cross the flooded polders dividing Utrecht and Holland. It was as if God had said to King Louis, "You can come just this far—and not a step farther."

We looked to the uncompassable sea and were reassured. We all, the learned gentlemen and merchants as well as the Prince and his soldiers, waited eagerly upon our allies for assistance. It was in this time of tentative peace, when men no longer spent their days reinforcing the city's ramparts or inventorying its store of munitions, but could not yet occupy themselves with trade for our ships did not ply the seas again with profitable regularity, that Dr. de Graaf convinced my father to write down what he'd seen through his newly invented glasses and to send it to the Royal Society in London.

My father's duties at the stadthuis were not onerous—or satisfying—enough to require his complete attention. Dr. de Graaf's practice had fallen away with the war. He and my father could meet almost daily to share their latest observations. De Graaf brought my father the book written by the Englishman, Robert Hooke, that he had seen once in England. Although Mr. Hooke's microscope was more complicated, he saw no more clearly through it than my father did through his own simpler lens. Indeed, he saw less.

"Not so," my father cried. "I see five articulations in the leg. Mr. Hooke is in error." It was a louse, I believe, they had glued to the pin behind my father's glass.

"Are you sure?"