



## IV SCURF (1680-1683)

*We certainly see many fighting on behalf of the testicles as though on behalf of their homes and their holy places but they offer such diverse explanations of how semen is conected in the testicles that one could not presume anything they say is true.*

*Regnier de Graaf*

*Mr. Francis Aston, Secretary of the Royal Society . . . wrote to tell me that my theory of animal generation through male semen is very ingenious but that I shall be contradicted by many all over the world. That is exactly what I thought for the world is prejudiced in favour of the ovary. However, I have found many learned gentlemen in our country who approve my theses. Consequently, I shall continue my observations and contemplations on this subject.*

*Antoni van Leeuwenhoek*



## *THE ITCH OF DOUBT*

"It is man's duty to cultivate honor," my father wrote in February, 1680 to the Secretary of the Royal Society, Mr. Robert Hooke. "And this honor is the greatest in the world. I ask all your help in gaining it for me." My father meant membership in the Royal Society. He was touched by the man who had offered to propose him, for Mr. Hooke is as twisted in spirit as he is in body. To offer my father something like this must have racked the poor hunchback quite painfully.

All that year, both before and after my father learned of his election to the Royal Society, he pursued his observations with a wonderful vigor. He discovered animalcules in the sperm of fishes, in perch, bream, roach, and tench. He even discovered animalcules in the sperm of insects, of fleas and may-flies, grasshoppers, and dragon-flies—and he exclaimed aloud at their disproportionate size. It was as if a man had animalcules large as eels swimming in his testicles.

But my father did not restrict himself to questions of generation. He laughed with joy and went on. He studied the globules found in yeast, in blood, in wine, in water, in mother's milk, and everywhere he saw Our Creator honoured symmetry and proportion. The globules clustered like grapes in groups of six. Everywhere my father looked, he saw this was Nature's favored shape, one which, turned right or left, up or down, transmitted an identical contour to the mind.

My father's fame seemed to spread faster than rumor. Men came from Leyden, from Amsterdam, from England to meet this burger honored by the English King. Even in Paris, my cousin Antoni wrote, my father's name was on every tongue. In the square, my father bowed to the burgomasters, to the doctors 'sGravesende and D'Aquet. He opened the door for them in the stadthuis. But at his own house he had them wait for admittance. They had



## TO EACH OUR OWN INFIRMITY

Leprosy is a terrifying disease. Here our sin becomes manifest. In this it is like the diseases that afflict men who lie with unclean women, giving dreadful proof of their lechery. But leprosy can afflict even those chaste in body. It can afflict anyone with an unclean conscience. And it can afflict all those who come in contact with him.

Once my father's illness was discovered, it would not be he alone who would be called to Haarlem to submit to examination by the Leper Board. No, Cornelia too. And me, Maria Antoni's daughter, for I was twenty-six and unmarried, still resident in the Golden Head. For years I had been unwilling to leave my father's house, and now, willing or unwilling, it was too late. I, like my father, would be given a Lazarus rattle, a license to beg, a bowl for alms and gruel. All because I had clung for years too many to the security of my father's house and his particular favor. I was guilty of both pride and disobedience. I wanted to share my father's highest fortune, but I did not want to join him in penury and exile.

I took charge of my father's clothes. I gathered full ruffles to hide the backs of his hands, cravats to hide his neck. I adjusted his periwig to hide the scabs on his temples. I bought five new pairs of undersocks. Adriaen Beijeren teased me for my many purchases.

"You'll ruin your chances," he said. "Such extravagance. I have made as many claims for your modesty as for your sagacity. You'll put me to shame, Maria."

I bit my lip. For wasn't shame already my constant companion?

I would rather have had another. I think the time has come to describe my own life. Describe the man Adriaen Beijeren alluded to with a meaningful smile. *Frans Corneliszoon*. He was a distant cousin of Adriaen Beijeren. He lived in 'sGravenhage and followed the same trade of draper.