3 FLEAS AND HOTTENTOTS

In the early morning of Friday, January 10, 1710, in the horizon, vague outlines of the Cape could be seen – Table Mountain and Lion’s Hill. From the shoreline shots rang out when the Sandenberg slowly navigated its way into Table Bay and cast anchor near the small town. The first part of the voyage had succeeded without incident and the relief was felt by all. Unfortunately this joyous feeling was not to last.

On shore, the first impressions were discouraging. Governor Louis van Assenburgh and his second in command, Jan Cornelis d’Ablaing, came on board to personally greet them and to accompany them on the barge that would transport them to shore, but it was cold and had begun to rain. The jetty head proved to be a ramshackle contraption – no stairs, instead some planks had been hammered onto poles to serve as such – they had to be hoisted up, with difficulty, the waves splashing beneath them. Once ashore the land appeared miserable and barren. The streets surrounding the Castle were sloped and full of potholes. It looked as though wild pigs had been rooting through them.

A coach was waiting and transported them to the castle and up to the governor’s residence. At first glance, it appeared to be a pleasant building, but it later proved to be hopelessly filthy. According to Johanna, it looked like a maze and there wasn’t a table to be found, so she was forced to sit on her bed while she wrote her letters. In need of finding accommodation, they first inspected a few private mansions located in town and also the governor’s garden house, which was located in the Company garden area, but they found these too small and more than that, they were very cold and draughty, finally deciding to stay on at the governor’s house, in the castle. Their sea chests, holding their personal belongings, could be placed in one of the town houses where they could be aired. What remained of the livestock were roaming around there as well, cared for by the jimmy ducks, and all was placed under surveillance. Their travel companions found lodgings ‘here and there’ in the town. That evening a festive meal was served, accompanied by music and attended by some of the Cape’s officers and their wives.

Perhaps the Van Hoorn family were far too critical. After all they were spoiled, having come from the wealthy and fashionable Batavia, at least in comparison with the Cape. It is also quite possible that they suffered a degree of embarrassment, especially since Johanna’s grandfather, Jan van Riebeeck, was the founder of this settlement in the Cape. That happened in 1652 and one year later, Johanna’s father Abraham was born. She was certainly moved by this fact and sent her parents, who were back in Batavia, a small sack of chestnuts, which, as she told them, were picked from a tree her grandfather had planted.

During their stay at the Cape, the Van Hoorn family became acquainted with the diverse population.
De Stadt, het casteel en de rheede van Caap de Goede Hoop uijt de thuijn van d’E fiscal Blesius, 25 januari 1710. The town, the castle and the roadstead at the Cape of Good Hope, as seen from the garden of the Hon. Fiscal Blesius, 25 January 1710. Elias van Staden, pen and brush, 37 x 53 cm. Collection Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, 4.TOPO 15.87.

Behind the vineyard in the foreground, the small settlement lies with the church in the centre. The large rectangular building in front of it, bordering the Company garden, housed the Company slaves. On the right stands the castle, where the Van Hoorn family resided during their three months’ stay at the Cape. In Table Bay the ships of the return fleet are riding at anchor.

T Casteel van Caap de Goede Hoop 19 mart 1710. The Castle of the Cape the Good Hope, 19 March, 1710. Anonymous, pen and ink, 32 x 41 cm. Collection Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, 4.TOPO 15.103

Joan van Hoorn probably ordered a copy to be made of a plan drawn by a map maker at the Cape for the Company archive there. The pentagonal castle housed the governor and his second in command, the lodgings for the military, warehouses, a bakery and technical workshops, all arranged along the walls. Along the dividing wall in the centre, former governor Simon van der Stel had built a spacious residence (nrs. 49-51) with a gallery and a pond (62). In one of these buildings the Van Hoorn family was lodged.