

# One

Josie

Giethoorn, Holland

June 1933

Flower petals clung like scraps of wet silk on Josie's toes as she ducked alongside the village canal. Klaas Schoght could search all afternoon if he wanted. As long as she and her brother stuck to their plan, he would never find them or the red, white, and blue flag they'd sworn to protect.

Klaas's hair, shimmering like golden frost, bobbed above his family's neatly trimmed hedge across the canal from her. She watched the sprig of sunlit hair as Klaas combed through the shrubs, then between two punts tied up to a piling, before he turned toward the wooden bridge.

There were no roads in Giethoorn—only narrow footpaths and canals that connected the checkered plots. Most of the village children spent their time swimming, boating, and skating the waterways, but her brother preferred playing this game of resistance on land.

“Jozefien?” Klaas called as he crossed over to the small island her family shared with a neighbor.

She ducked between the waxy leaves of her mother's prized hydrangea bushes, the blossoms spilling pale-purple and magenta petals into a *slootje*—one of the many threads of water that stitched together the islands. Her brother had taught her how to hide well in the village gardens and trees and wooden slips. Even on the rooftops. She could disappear for hours, if necessary, into one of her secret spaces.

“Samuel?” Klaas was shouting now, but Josie's brother didn't respond either.

All the children learned about the Geuzen—Dutch Resistance—at school, their people fighting for freedom from Spain during the Eighty Years' War. Her

brother was a master of hide-and-seek, like he was one of the covert Geuzen members fighting for freedom centuries ago.

In their game with Klaas, neither she nor Samuel could be tagged before her brother pinned the Dutch flag onto the Schoght family's front door. Klaas didn't really care whose team he was on, as long as he won.

Between the flowers and leaves, Josie saw the hem of Samuel's breeches disappear up into a fortress of horse-chestnut leaves. They had a plan, the two of them. Now all she had to do was hide until her brother signaled her to dive.

It wasn't the doing, Samuel liked to tell her, that was key to resisting their enemy. It was the waiting.

And Klaas hated to wait.

The boy wore a black cape over his Boy Scout uniform, but she could see the white rings around the top of his kneesocks as he searched one of her family's boats.

This afternoon he wasn't Klaas Schoght, proud scout, tenacious son of their village doctor. This afternoon he was the pompous Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, the Spanish governor over Holland, trying to capture the Dutch resisters and their flag made from the fabric of one of Mama's old dresses that was, thankfully, too threadbare to remake into a shift for her only daughter.

Josie much preferred wearing the long shorts and blouses that her mother reluctantly allowed during the summer so she wouldn't keep ruining her dresses. And even more, the Brownie uniform she wore today—a light-brown dress that hung inches below her knee. Her knit beret and brown shoes and long socks were tucked away in the house behind her.

The three of them had developed the rules for this game, but she and her brother kept their own names—Josie and Samuel van Rees, the children of a teacher and a housewife who sometimes helped at the kinderschool.

Klaas didn't know that the Dutch flag had climbed the tree with Samuel this afternoon. When her brother gave the signal, Josie would distract Klaas so Samuel could hang the stripes of red, white, and blue on the door.

Water lapped against the bank, and she glanced again between a web of white blossoms and waxy leaves to see if Klaas had jumped into the water. Instead of Klaas, she saw a neighbor pushing his punt down the canal with a pole.

Her knee scraped on one of the branches, and she pulled it back, wiping the glaze of blood on a leaf before it stained the hem of her uniform.

The injuries from their battles were frequent, but now that she was nine, she tended to them on her own. Once, a year or so back, she'd run inside with a battle wound. Mama took one look and fainted onto the kitchen floor.

Ever since, Josie visited Klaas's father if she had a serious wound.

When the punt was gone, she listened for the thud of Klaas's boots along the bank, but all she heard was the cackling of a greylag, irritated at Josie for venturing too close to the seven goslings paddling behind her in a neat row. They looked like Dutch soldiers following their orange-billed colonel, each one uniformed in a fuzzy yellow coat and decorated with brown stripes earned perhaps for braving the canals all the way to the nearby lake called Belterwijde.

If only she could reach out and snatch one of the goslings, snuggle with it while she waited in her hiding spot, but the mother colonel would honk, giving away her location to the governor of Spain. And Fernando Álvarez de Toledo would brag for days about his triumph. Again.

This time, she and Samuel were determined to be the victors.

The battalion of geese swam around the punt below her and disappeared.

"Jozefien!" Klaas was much closer now, though she didn't dare look out again to see where he was.

Did he know Samuel was up in the tree behind her? Klaas didn't like climbing trees, but his fear of heights would be overpowered by his resolve to win.

A stone splashed into the canal, rocking the boat, and her heart felt as if it might crash through her chest. Operation van Rees was about to begin. While Klaas was searching for whoever threw the stone, she would hide on the other side of the bridge.

She shed her dress and slipped into the cool water in her shift like her brother had instructed, holding her breath as she kicked under the surface like a marsh frog escaping from a heron. Six long kicks and she emerged under the wood bridge, her long knickers and undershirt sticking to her skin, the water cold in the shadow. From the canal she could see Klaas rummaging through Mama's flowers, and above him, Samuel descending from the tree, ready to race across the bridge.

Beside her, carved into the wood, were three sets of initials.

S.v.R. J.v.R. K.S.

The boys didn't know that she'd carved their initials here, but this recording of their names made it feel permanent. As if nothing could ever change between them. Often she, Samuel, and Klaas were the worst of enemies in their play, but in reality, they were the best of friends.

Josie inched away from the bridge, toward the narrow pilings behind her that kept the bank from sliding into the canal. Something moved on her left, and she turned toward the house of Mr. and Mrs. Pon. The Pons didn't have any children, but an older girl was watching Klaas from the porch.

A German Jewish man and his daughter—refugees, Mama had said—were moving in with the Pon family. Josie had learned German, along with English, at school. Tomorrow, perhaps, she would ask the German girl to play. They could resist Spain together.

Samuel's bare feet padded across the bridge; Klaas would be close behind. She dove back under the surface and emerged once again, this time in her

secret hiding space between the moss-covered pilings, tucked back far enough under the quay so Klaas couldn't see her chestnut-colored hair.

She couldn't touch the bottom in the middle of the canal, but it was shallow under the wood awning. Her toes sank into the mud as her chin rested an inch or two above the surface, and she waited patiently between the pilings, like Samuel had instructed, until he hung the flag on Klaas's door.

One of the goslings, a renegade like her, paddled by without his fleet. Then he turned around to study her.

"*Ga weg*," she whispered, rippling the water with her hands. The gosling rode the tiny waves, but he didn't leave.

She pressed through the water again, the ripples stronger this time, but the gosling moved closer to her as if she were his mother. As if she could rescue him. She reached out a few inches, just far enough to pet the creature but not so far that anyone could see.

The moment her hand slipped out from under the platform, a face leaned over the ledge, lips widening into a smile when he saw her. Then his fingers sliced across his throat.

"Klaas!" she screamed, her heart pounding.

He laughed. "You have to find another hiding place."

She huffed. "Samuel told me to hide here."

Klaas jumped off the bank in a giant flip, knees clutched to his chest, and when he landed, water flooded over her nose and mouth. She swam out into the center, splashing him back as he circled her. He might be four years older, but neither he nor his impersonation of Fernando frightened her.

"You don't always have to listen to Samuel," he said.

"Yes, I do." Klaas didn't know anything about having a brother, or a sister for that matter. Nor did he listen to much of what anyone told him, including his

father. Sometimes it seemed that he believed he was governor of Giethoorn instead of the make-believe Spanish general.

“The Dutch have won!” Samuel exclaimed triumphantly from the opposite bank.

Klaas shook his head. “I found Jozefien before you pinned the flag.”

“I pinned it five minutes ago.”

Klaas lifted himself up onto the bank, facing Samuel. They were the same age, but her brother was an inch taller.

“It’s been at least six minutes since I found her,” Klaas said, hands on his hips, the black cape showering a puddle around him.

“You did not!” She whirled her arms through the water, attempting to splash him again, but the canal water rained back down on her instead.

“I did.”

The two boys faced off, and for a moment, she thought Klaas might throw a punch. Maybe then Samuel would fight for what was right instead of letting Klaas win again.

“I suppose you won,” Samuel said, surrendering once more.

She groaned. Her brother always let Klaas win whenever his friend claimed victory. Why wouldn’t he stand up for himself and for her? For Holland?

Klaas raised both fists in the air. “To Spain!”

“To the resistance,” she yelled as the boys turned toward Klaas’s house.

Fuming, she swam back toward the bridge, to the underwater steps built for those who didn’t want to hop up on the planks as Klaas had done. When she passed by the cropping of initials, she rapped them with her knuckles.

The best of friends, perhaps, but some days Klaas made her so mad. And Samuel, too, for not fighting back when Klaas lied to him.

The next time they played, the resistance would win.

As Josie climbed the mossy steps out of the water, the German girl inched closer to the canal. She had dark-brown hair, draped rather short around her head, and her brown eyes seemed to catch the light on the canal, reflecting back.

“I’m Anneliese,” the girl said in German. “But my friends call me Eliese. I’m ten.”

Josie introduced herself, speaking in the German language that her father had taught all the village children.

The girl sat on the grass, pulling the skirt of her jumper over her knees. “Would you like to be friends?”

Josie smiled—another girl, a friend, living right next door. They would be friends for life.

“I’m Klaas.”

Josie turned to the opposite bank to see both boys standing there, Samuel with his mouth draped open as if he might swallow the light.

Josie waited for Samuel to introduce himself, but when he didn’t speak, Josie waved toward him. “That’s my brother standing beside Klaas. He’ll come to his senses soon.”

Samuel glared at Josie before introducing himself. And when he did, Eliese smiled at him.

Samuel didn’t speak again, just stared at the girl. And in the stillness of that awkward moment, with her brother utterly entranced, Josie knew.

Nothing in her world would be the same again.