

Chapter Six

JULY 30th

The night before, there had been a storm: lightning, winds, and heavy rainfall. Cook shook her head when she served Cees breakfast in the dining room, saying that the apple trees were drenched: dripping drops on the outdoor furniture. Father should worry about his arthritis. She poured him coffee and put the pot on the trivet, wondering aloud if it would be a good idea to use the family heirloom tablecloth for this important luncheon. Cees took her hand and whispered Ahdoo.

Cook went to the spare room. She opened the oak cabinet: from a drawer she took Pauline's special tablecloth and matching napkins; from a shelf, Mother's china: white plates with a gold border and initials J.P.L.: Jeanne Picot Lespine. She took four. Humming, she got four crystal goblets belonging to Pauline's mother Eugenia; and the cut glass vase, Antoinette's heirloom. Frowning, she looked at the ceiling, contemplating. "I must make up my mind," she said aloud. "Will it be Pauline's Javanese silverware or Mother's made in Holland?" With a resolute nod she took the Dutch. "Ahdoo. One day, Nel will marry!"

Hans entered holding a large basket that he put on the kitchen table. With a chuckle in his voice, he said, "Cook, here's your love food."

"Don't make fun of me, young man," Cook replied, wagging a finger. "I know all about it. Men like spicy food, and women have a sweet tooth. This is a male luncheon. I'm going to serve butcher Lukas' smoked ham. I'm making my famous potato salad." She pointed at the windowsill. "The tomatoes are ripe. I'll stuff them with spicy, diced cucumbers. Father likes those."

"How about the sweet tooth?" Hans winked.

"Father likes Dutch chocolate pudding. And to make everyone happy, I'll make my special vanilla sauce. You can be useful and peel those." Cook pointed at the potatoes. She went to the stove. "Of course, you'll stay for a taste and then help me do the dishes."

Cees came down dressed in tropical khaki and went to the kitchen. He asked Hans to go to the cellar and get two bottles of white Mosel wine. Then he went to the dining room. He raised his eyebrow when he saw four place settings.

Cook put Antoinette's crystal vase with red roses in the center of the table, saying, "Poldie is coming." She gave him a big smile. "Hans told him about this special luncheon. Anton told Poldie that he is always welcome to eat here. So, he told Hans that he was hungry."

Staring at the place settings, Cees slowly stroked his silvery beard. He pointed at the white plates. "Mother," he stated.

Cook put her hand on his arm and softly said, "One day . . . Nel will marry."

"Mother gave me a delightful daughter. Thank you for reminding me, *Kokkie*, . . . not to forget the present." Cees put his hand on her shoulder.

"I'm happy for Nel." Cook left for her domain.

"And I am happy that Poldie is hungry," Cees said with a big smile, adding, "Ahdoo!"

The clouds had lifted, and the sun hesitantly shone on Velp when a cab came to a halt at Villa Amourette. Nico got out, followed by Phlip. They spoke to a person inside, who handed them a parcel. A cab came to a halt behind the parked one. Poldie got out. He paid the coachman and rushed up to greet Nico and Phlip. He gave a smile of recognition when he saw Johan inside the cab. Nico said he was going to ask Cees first, but he was hoping that Johan could be included in the presentation of Phlip's painting *Boerenplezier*. Poldie held his hand out to Johan, saying the family was very hospitable, and Cook was prepared for extra guests.

The horses braying had alerted Hans. When he saw the four men walking to the front gate, he dashed into the kitchen, shouting that Johan also came. Then he went into the hall. Cees stood at the closed door. "Hans," he whispered, "get another bottle." With aplomb, he opened the door. "Johan," he said warmly, "how wonderful that you decided to join us on this special day!"

Cees ushered his guests into the parlor.

Phlip, who was holding the large parcel, said, "Can I put this on the coffee table so I can say hello to Queenie?" He smiled at Cees. "Mieke told me about the bird, saying she also wants a parrot."

Nico took hold of the parcel. He sat on a chair and started to unwrap the painting. "Cees," he said, "I hope you don't mind that I had it framed. If you don't like the frame, the shop owner told me that he'll gladly exchange." He stood up and said to Phlip, "It's your gift. Please present it to your host." He passed him *Boerenplezier*.

Shuffling his feet, looking uncomfortable, Phlip said, "Mister Jonkheer, I can't thank you enough for letting me stay at your beautiful farmhouse. And meeting Nico, Mieke, and Johan made my stay even more wonderful. Nico is an ardent pupil. Johan promised to continue giving him lessons."

"It was my pleasure, Phlip. And I am glad your father asked Anton." Cees pointed to the wall above the secretary. "Put up your painting so we can admire it."

Phlip did as was instructed, saying, "You have chosen a wonderful place for *Boerenplezier*."

Cees clapped. He joined Philip. Poldie, Nico and Johan also came, clapping.

Queenie screeched “*Happy Birthday To You! Happy Birthday To You!*”

Laughter filled the parlor.

Poldie gave Queenie a nut; then he put the cloth on the cage.

A sunray entered through the window and lit up the farmhouse painting. “A wonderful memory, Philip,” Cees said. “Thank you so much.”

The dining room doors flung wide open, and Hans announced that lunch was served.

Cees’ eyes opened wide when he saw five place settings. And when he saw the two crystal candlesticks with white tapers that Anton had given him on his 55th birthday, a huge smile spread over his face. “Poldie,” he said, “you are our cupbearer. Sit on my left. And Nico, please, you on my right, and across from me,”—he waved—“Johan and Philip.”

Hans brought the platter with the large ham, including carving knife and fork; Cees liked playing host. And while Cees was carving the ham, Poldie went around with Mosel wine.

“Tomorrow Philip is off to Zwolle. He’ll meet his sister Emma,” Nico said. “Johan will keep me company during August.”

“The wheat-fields behind your cottage are delightful for a painting session, Nico.” Johan elbowed Philip. “You also like doing wheat-fields. There are plenty around Zwolle.”

“Dutch scenes are very different from French landscapes,” Philip replied. With a nod at Cees, he said, “I’m forever grateful that my father dared to ask Anton.” He smiled toward Nico. “And that Nico asked me to keep Mieke company, once they have moved.” He took his goblet. “Here is a toast to my sponsors, Mister Cornelis Jonkheer and Nicodemus Uhrbach.”

Cees lifted his goblet. “Cheers to our future Vermeer!”

They raised their goblets.

Hans went around with the ham platter. Cook put the potato salad- and stuffed tomato dishes on the table near Cees to pass around.

As they were eating, Poldie informed them, speaking loudly for Cook’s benefit, that he was going to Amsterdam to negotiate with a realtor about Anton’s lodging in September. Johan was adamant that Poldie visit him. Winking at him, Johan mentioned that they would visit Mieke, who, no doubt, would jump for joy. Nico laughed, saying he got the hint; they all were welcome.

It came as a bombshell when Cees said that he was also interested in going to Amsterdam, and visit Mieke, his adopted daughter. The men cheered. Like a genie out of a bottle, Hans came from the kitchen and filled up the goblets. Standing behind Poldie, he murmured in a low voice that *the order* was ready in the parlor.

The chocolate pudding and vanilla sauce got a “standing ovation”—a handshake and thank you for Cook from the three painters.

Cook went to Cees. “Ahdoo.” She pointed to the parlor. “A surprise from your sons.” As swift as a breath of air, she left.

Cees rose. “From my sons?” He laughed. “Come yea all and see the surprise.”

They followed him into the parlor.

Hans was holding a champagne bottle and Cook a fluted crystal goblet; five goblets as well as one more bottle were on the tray on the coffee table. Poldie nodded at Hans, who popped the cork.

“*Happy Birthday To You!*” Queenie screeched.

Poldie dashed to the cage, and giving her a nut, put the cloth on the cage.”

Hans filled the goblets. Poldie handed everyone theirs, and said, “Here is to happiness and success. To a new future for Anton, Philip, Johan, and . . . Nico, because he’ll be our future torchbearer. Cheers!”

Cook raised her goblet. “Ahdoo,” she said, and drank bottoms-up! Hans had a belly-laugh. When Cees suggested he also have a “sip”, Hans said he preferred beer. After he had taken Philip to the farm, and Johan and Nico to Laren, he and Cook would again celebrate.

In a jolly good mood after the Landau with the painters had left, Cees linked arms with Poldie; thanking him for his contribution to a wonderful July 30th he would remember *forever*.

A WEEK LATER

Sporting a huge smile, Hans entered the kitchen, shouting, “Cook, a letter! Mister Jonkheer will be in a good mood when he reads that his wife and Nel are returning.”

Cook took the letter, frowned, and weighing it in her hand, she declared, “It’s an explanation letter why they are not coming.” Looking worried, she said, “Go to butcher Lukas. I’ll write down what kind of pork I need. Father enjoys eating soy-pork with noodles. I haven’t made it for some time. And then, Hans, will I give him the letter.”

When Hans returned from the butcher with the parcel, he said, “I hope no one is sick?”

Cook gave a snort. “That’s news for a telegram. And Hans . . . get us beer!”

Nodding, now also looking worried, Hans left.

Murmuring, “I hope he gets the message,” Cook set the table a la Mother: a lemon-yellow tablecloth, her white china, flatware, and the Bavarian beer tankard Mother had gifted Father the previous year. “Flowers? Ahdoo,” she said toward his armchair and left for the kitchen. She took off her apron and went in search for dandelions. Shaking her head, she crossed the street to the park where she found them in a patch of grass. She took two yellow flowers and, carefully, some puffballs. She returned to her kitchen. She put her bouquet in a yellow ceramic vase that Nel used for wildflowers she collected when walking with Mother.

When Cees entered Villa Amourette, he often took a stroll in Larenstein Park before lunch, he smelled the aroma of soy sauce and garlic coming from the kitchen—the hall door was ajar. He broke out in a smile and said, in a low voice, “Is it food for rejoicing . . . or for soothing me?” He glanced at the silver tray. No mail.

He entered the parlor and went to the bird cage. “Queenie, can you tell me what’s in the air?” She chirped and sat in front of him. “*Fiepjes! Fiepjes!*” she screeched. Laughing, he gave her a nut. He went to his wingchair and waited for Cook to announce that lunch was ready.

Cees sat in the dining room when Hans appeared at the kitchen door holding a letter. Cees told him to put the letter in the parlor.

When Cook entered with the platter of soy-pork and noodles, he said with a wink, “A special occasion, *Kokkie?*” He pointed at the vase. “It is Nel . . . this time?”

She put her hand over her heart. “Ahdoo-ahdoo,” she said.

“Aha!” Cees chuckled as he was helping himself to noodles. “A matter of the heart?” He looked into her eyes. “Puffball wishes?” She nodded. “I’ll read the letter after eating your delicious soy-pork.”

“I’ll serve coffee and coconut cookies in the parlor.” Cook pursed her lips. “We can *discuss* Nel’s puffball wishes.”

Cees gave her a big smile, pouring beer in Mother’s Bavarian tankard.

Cees told Cook that he would read the letter in the garden. He went to the parlor, took a cigar, matches, Mother’s letter and the letter opener. “A long explanation,” he mumbled; and he went to his padded armchair in the shade of the apple trees. He was puffing on his cigar, looking at the unopened letter on the table, when Cook came with a tray with his coffee mug, a plate of coconut cookies, and an ashtray. “Open Mother’s letter, *Kokkie,*” he said softly, “and read it to me.”

“Ahdoo,” she whispered, eagerly opening the epistle. “On both sides! Ahdoo!” She waved three pages.

“You read Mother’s story, and then you tell me...what it’s all about.” He put his cigar in the ashtray. He reached for the plate. “I want to enjoy eating your cookies and drink coffee.”

Cook's eyes were glued to Mother's clear handwriting: portraying their stay. She mumbled Ahdoo several times. Breathing deeply, she uttered, "They attend afternoon concerts! In the evenings they are invited to dinners and dances given by several embassies." Her voice rose and, brimming with excitement, she said, "Nel has made a great impression with the daughter of the German Ambassador! Ursula is the same age as Nel. In the morning, the girls play tennis." Her voice sank when she said, "Or they go boating." She looked up.

Cees reached for his cigar. "Go on,"—he said, and winked—"that's interesting news. I can guess what's coming next."

Cook's eyes, riveted on the pages, became larger and she gulped, "Nel wrote you! Dearest Father . . ." She gave him the page. "I think you should read it to me."

Cees put the cigar in the ashtray. He took his reading glasses and read aloud: "Dearest, my dearest, Father. I can't tell you in words how much I enjoy life in Den Haag. I'm like the bubbles in a champagne glass, full of life, ever since I met Ursula. She is the sister I never had. We are soul mates. We are twins! Oh Father, I am so happy! Father, Ursula suggested that I ask your permission if I can stay here. The boarding school for girls is highly recommended. Mother said that the daughters of our Dutch elite often stay for at least one year before attending a finishing school in Switzerland. Mother gives her blessings. And I hope you will too, my dearest Father. Embraces and kisses from your much loved and devoted daughter, Cornelia." Cees laughed his belly-laugh. "*Kokkie*, this is the first time she signs Cornelia, letting me know that she was named after me!"

"Father," Cook said, "Mother made it clear that Nel will soon be sixteen. She is very pretty. We must think of her future." She waved Mother's letter toward Annastraat. "Mother and I face the truth. Arnhem is not a place for husband hunting." She winked. "Isn't that the reason they went to Den Haag? Unsuitable admirers?"

Cees put Nel's letter on the table. With a sigh, he took his cigar—puffing plumes—and then said, "Mother and you must love our Nel so much to let her fly the coop this young." He waved his cigar in the air. "Let's look at the pros and the cons. I can't prevent her from the treachery of men breaking the hearts of their wives when they have love affairs: the eternal triangle is like sweet and sour gherkins."

"It's not only men that like sweet and sour. Your mother-in-law had affairs!" She giggled.

Cees raised his eyebrow. "Don't remind me, *Kokkie*! Indeed, Eugenia was famous for her flirting. Everyone adored her. She became the center of colonial life." He took a puff. "To return to our vivacious Nel . . . I acknowledge that in an environment where culture is cultivated, she'll learn quickly"—he took another puff—"by watching how adults interact."

"Wim and Eugene are in Den Haag. They will keep an eye on their sister." Cook snorted. "And their wives will be interested visiting her so they can meet elite daughters."

Eyes twinkling, Cees said, “Three children in Den Haag will be a good reason for us to visit them often.”

“Ahdoo-ahdoo.” Cook took a cookie. “Father . . . I have . . . a suggestion.” She popped the sweet in her mouth.

Cees stopped puffing—and stared at her as she was chewing. Slowly, he put his cigar in the ashtray. And slowly he took a cookie, gazing at her. “*Kokkie* . . . what is brewing in your mind?” He put the sweet in his mouth and chewed.

Cook swallowed; then, looking at the front door, she said, “I want to see my red chair.”

Cees put his hand to his neck. “We . . . go to . . . Amsterdam?”

Cook smiled brightly. “I have a family plan,” she said, still looking at the front door.

Cees swallowed. Clearing his throat, he said, “I am all ears. Go ahead.”

Cook got up and took his mug. “We need some rum punch.”

“Rum punch,” Cees muttered, “that’s going to be interesting.” He took his cigar and started to puff . . . staring at the front door.

When Cook returned with a carafe of punch, two goblets, and two plates, with peanuts and olives, he put his cigar in the ashtray and folded his hands as if in prayer.

Cook smiled and gave him a wink. “Remember when we were children and got angry with each other?” She winked again and handed him his punch. “We ate...and threw food at each other. *Fortify yourself, handsomeboy!*” She sipped, watching him guzzle his fortifier bottoms-up.

Handsomeboy sighed deeply. With a grin on his face, he reached for a peanut and threw it at her. “I am ready, little mouse!”

They laughed.

Holding up his goblet, handsomeboy said with a chuckle in his voice, “I need more punch because we also need green olives . . . for making peace.”

Little mouse nodded as she filled up his goblet. “Eugenia introduced olives from her native Calabria to the gin-and-tonic troops. Most of the time, they weren’t sober. She called it the offering of peace.”

“Mousy . . . what is the family plan?” He popped the question.

Mousy giggled. She took an olive, popped it in her mouth, and chewed. Narrowing his eyes, handsomeboy watched her. When little mouse folded her hands and lifted her head toward the sky, he took a sip of punch. Their eyes met—they winked at each other.

He laughed, his belly shaking. “We are plotting again?”

“How about . . . we are going to be the finger of fate?”

“Sounds like fun,” he replied. “Go ahead, Mousy.”

Mousy said, “I have been thinking. Three children in Den Haag, and the fourth in Amsterdam. Instead of celebrating Anton’s birthday here, you and Mother go to Amsterdam so the three can join for a great family happening.”

“You told me you want to see your red chair?” He eyed her intently.

Narrowing her eyes, she whispered, “Handsomeboy, who’s going to cook the goose?” She threw him a peanut.

Handsomeboy’s jaw dropped. Then he took a peanut and threw it at her. “Mousy the plotter! Our finger of fate!” He pointed at the sky. “A family reunion in Amsterdam sounds wonderful, knowing you will be cooking the goose.” He got up and paced around the table. “I shall pay Hendrick a visit and establish friendship.”

Little mouse gazed at the sky. “Laren het Gooi isn’t too far. We can pay the family a visit and admire the new-born baby.”

Handsomeboy stopped in his tracks and returned to his chair. He took his goblet, and said, “And we can pay a visit to Ava Riss Gallery and meet Antonia and her son.” He smiled brightly. “I shall ask Poldie to reserve rooms at a nearby hotel. But you must stay with Anton as you do the cooking.”

“How about. . . I go ahead by train. Like ten days? So I’ll get used to the neighborhood. You know, where the vendors are: the butcher; the baker?” She giggled.

“Good idea. Anton will be delighted to have you for a while all to himself. You can sit in your red chair, and he can sit in your lap again.” He roared with laughter.

Little mouse threw him a peanut as she got up.

Handsomeboy took two olives and got to his feet. Mousy opened her mouth; she received the peace offering. Watching her chew, he then put the second olive between *his lips*.

They looked at each other— eyes shining.

She watched him eat his olive.

They embraced.

AHDOO!

Chapter Seven

AMSTERDAM

DECEMBER 1911

The doorbell rang. Cook opened the front door of Herengracht 56BB

“Telegram for Mister Jonkheer!” The postman gave it to her with a broad grin.

Cook kept turning the telegram in her hands. Mumbling Ahdoo, she closed the door and walked along the hallway to the rear of the house. She knocked on the dining room door and entered. Waving the telegram, she said “Ahdoo,” and gave it to Anton who was writing at the table. “Is someone indisposed?” She went to the windows and, frowning, she looked at the sky.

“Nel in hospital. Staircase accident. Sprained ankle. Mother with Eugene. Poldie and I arrive Thursday 21. He will stay with Johan. Father.” Anton’s voice rose when he said, “Hospital! I hope Nel didn’t have a concussion.” He put the telegram on the table. “I suppose Father will go to Den Haag after Christmas.”

“Cancel the hotel reservation,” Cook said. “Father can stay in the guest room. I’ll sleep here. There’s a folding cot in the cloakroom.” She joined Anton. “Now . . . about the goose.” She pulled up a chair and, with a twinkle in her eyes, said, “Mother, Nel, Eugene, Wim, and their wives, make six.” She gave him a wink. “How about inviting the DeBron family? And Antonia Riss and her son? Let’s add Johan to the list and it will make for a lively party.”

“*Kokkie*, what would I do without you! Father will be in his element.” Anton beamed. Then, frowning, he said, “*Kokkie*, please get all the help in the kitchen you need. And on my birthday, you must, as always, sit on my left.”

“Guusje, your charwoman, and Klaas her husband will assist me.” Cook took his hand to assure him. “I told them they can take the leftovers home. And I offered double wages. They live nearby on Langestraat.” She giggled when she confessed, “I took along my sarong and kabaya.”

Anton got to his feet. “All settled then, as usual,” he said as he went to the hall door. “Now I will do my share, cancel the reservation and invite our guests. Plenty to do, *Kokkie*!”

It was Thursday afternoon when Anton and Johan were at the station to welcome Cees and Poldie.

Cook stood at the door holding two bouquets of carnations when they arrived at Herengracht 56BB. The coachman handed Klaas the valises; he went up the stairs to the door and entered.

“Welcome to Anton’s house,” Cook said. Cees gave her a wink as he took the red bouquet. Her face lit up. And when Poldie put his arms around her, thanking her for the white carnations, she looked radiant.

Guusje took their overcoats and hats and put them in the cloakroom to the left of the hallway behind the staircase to the upper floor. The bouquets she took to the kitchen.

“Anton, everything is ready in the drawing room,” Cook said all smiles. ‘I’ll serve dinner in half an hour.’”

Anton ushered Father, Poldie, and Johan into the yet sparsely furnished salon on the right of the small foyer. An emerald-green tufted chair stood in front of the fireplace. The red chair was between the fireplace and a window. Anton took Father by his elbow and insisted that he sit in *their chair*. On the other side of the chimney was a carved oak table. A bottle of champagne invited them to a cheerful welcome. Poldie popped the cork and served the bubbles. As they stood sipping at the windows, admiring the view of the canal, Anton informed Father that *Kokkie* had insisted he stay with him, and that he had invited on his birthday the DeBron family and Mina’s sister Francine, also Antonia, her son, and their cousin Nana. When Father showed concern for *Kokkie*, he said that she had helpers.

The French doors were opened by Klaas. Cook announced that dinner was ready.

Anton took Father by his arm, and they entered the spacious dining room. On the right was a fireplace and next to it an oak bookcase that stretched to the windows facing Keizersgracht. The room was gas-lit by two porcelain lamps on either end of the mantelpiece. The oak dining table stood vertically in the room, so everyone had a view of the canal. An oak buffet, with on it a porcelain lamp, stood against the wall between a window and the door to the hallway. A bottle of Father’s favorite Mosel wine was on this buffet, ready to be de-corked by Poldie, who poured the wine in colored goblets; a house-warming gift from Mother.

Kokkie entered with a platter with her famous Javanese meatloaf—that she put next to Father so he could serve everyone. Then she put the plate with Brussels sprouts at one end and the plate with mashed potatoes at the other end of the table. As Father was serving portions of meatloaf, she entered with a huge saucer with her famous *jus*: gravy. Father winked at her, saying this was indeed a hearty welcome. She winked.

As they were eating, Poldie told them that he had been able to get Anton a seven-year lease for the ground floor and the first upper floor where the bedrooms were located. The second, top floor was occupied by a woman who had been living there for the past twenty years. She shared the lavatory/water closet and bath located beneath the staircase: between the cloakroom and the kitchen. The basement was huge and served as a food larder; it was too damp to be used for anything else.

Klaas entered and cleared the table. Cees thanked him for helping Cook. Then he wondered aloud how twelve people, he knocked on the table, could fit at *this table*. Klaas said he and Cook came to an agreement to rent an extra table and chairs as well as place-settings from a friend who operated a rental service; mentioning that city houses were not equipped for large parties. Smiling, stroking his silvery beard, Cees thanked Klaas for helping celebrate his son's birthday. With a nod Klaas put the dessert plates, forks, and coffee cups next to Cees; and he left.

With a big smile, Cook entered with a cake. She put the plate next to Father, saying it was her famous rum cake, and he would sleep like a baby if he ate two slices.

Laughter filled the room.

Klaas came with coffee. Cees pointed at the cake and said that this cake was a sleeping potion for old men like himself. Grinning, Klaas replied that Cook's recipe would become a party special for merry-making youths, and that Guusje would sell the cake at the rental service.

The men cheered. They had a wonderful time bantering about thriving businesses.

Anton proposed to take Father to his bedroom upstairs. He took a kerosene lamp, and they arrived on the first-floor landing. He went along the corridor, followed by Father, and opened a door to the right. The dressing room had a washstand. Father's valise was on a bench next to the oak armoire. The single window faced Herengracht.

They re-entered the corridor; Anton opened the door across to the yet sparsely furnished guest-bedroom. The fire in the chimney was crackling. The closed curtains were dark brown velvet. There was an oak-framed bed with a sparkling white duvet, a beige upholstered chair, and a round oak table with a kerosene lamp and a vase with the red carnations.

Cook entered through the open door and announced that she was going to unpack Father's valise and kiss him goodnight. Cees blew her a kiss. Anton lit the lamp; he wished him goodnight and left. He went to the dressing room and whispered that she should not forget the hot water bottle.

SUNDAY

The day before Christmas, early in the morning, a canal boat moored at Herengracht 56BB. Three sturdy men jumped out. Klaas stood at the open front door, shouting. Anton and Cook were behind him. They were talking to the men when Cees joined them. "What is going on?"

"The rental service people," Klaas replied, pointing at the boat. "They are delivering the furniture."

"Since when do Christians work on Sunday?" Cees raised his eyebrow.

Klaas laughed. "They are Moses people."

"Jews can work on Sunday." Anton enlightened Father.

The men started to unload ten beige-upholstered chairs and five round walnut tables for the drawing room. Cook and Guusje supervised the placement of the furniture.

Klaas supervised the unloading of a dining table and eight armless chairs. Guusje reminded her husband about the eight kerosene lamps, and the twelve place settings, flatware, platters, dessert plates, as well as two dozen dinner goblets, a dozen dessert goblets, a dozen coffee cups, coffeepots as well as sugar- and milk saucers.

Cook reminded Klaas about the two Persian carpets Anton had chosen to enhance the parquet floor.

The men left in a jolly good mood, having received a welcome *pourboire*. Anton linked arms with Father, and they went to inspect the drawing room.

Cees' face lit up when he counted aloud . . . "Twelve chairs exactly!"

"On Christmas day we will represent the twelve apostles." Anton squeezed Father's arm.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Cook knocked on Cees' bedroom door and entered with a breakfast tray that she put on the nightstand Klaas had put there on Anton's request.

She opened the curtains. "Father, please stay in your room until Anton fetches you."

"Why?"

"The Moses people are here to get the house ready for our special celebration," she said, beaming. "Flowers and house plants will be delivered to cheer up the drawing room. We'll be very busy, and you'll be in our way."

He sat up in bed. "The menu! Will there be enough goose for all of us?"

She poured coffee into his cup. "Three geese," she said. "I promised Guusje and her two helpers that they can take home the leftovers."

"Noodle soup to start the meal?" He slurped coffee.

"No soup," she replied, "too many dishes to clear the table. We have only two men to serve the meal. With the goose I'll serve my delicious sticky rice balls, two per person, with my famous herb sauce. And stewed red cabbage with apple-cider, Mother's favorite."

"How about my favorite . . . crunchy curried cauliflower?"

“Of course, Father!” She smiled. “I always serve them together.”

“And dessert?” He took a sip of coffee.

“A friend of Guusje is a professional baker. She made us three fruitcakes; one with dates, one with sultanas, and the third with Spanish citron and oranges from Seville.” She giggled. “I shall add a few drops of rum to the sultana cake.”

He laughed and waved his coffee spoon. “You are my girl!”

“And you know what, Father . . . we’ll have my famous advocaat with the cakes.”

Folding his hands, he blew her a kiss.

Wagging a finger, she said, “Father, remember, you stay here until Anton comes to help you get down those treacherous stairs.”

He gave her a big smile.

Before she closed the bedroom door, she blew him a kiss, saying, “Be a good boy and eat your breakfast!”

Anton was holding Cees by the elbow when they stood at the open door to the drawing room.

“Son,” Cees said, “this room has turned into wonderland.” His face aglow, he put a hand on Anton’s arm. “Your fairies have used their magic wands.”

The curtains were drawn, and in front of the windows stood three feathery palms, giving the impression of a jungle. On the mantel piece, between the two porcelain lamps, was a potted orchid—its pristine white flowers dancing in the air. A velvety red-flowering gloxinia stood on a table near the fireplace between the emerald-green chair and the red chair. The ten beige-upholstered chairs, in a horseshoe arrangement, faced the crackling fire. A silver bowl with holly and its red berries fronted the fireplace.

“Father, *Kokkie* and her helpmates created this fantasy.” Anton ushered Father toward the open doors of the dining room.

Cees shook his head as his eyes wandered around the room. “Amazing,” was all he could say. The two tables, side by side, forming a vertical line, were draped in green damask; and red ceramic candelabra with white candles stood at each end. The windows were festooned with chains of holly, their red berries cheering the view of Keizersgracht. The hallway door and the bookcase were framed with more holly.

Looking into Anton’s eyes, Cees said, “Son, this must have cost you a pretty penny.”

Anton laughed. “To please you, Father. You told me that first impressions are a calling card! Hendrick and Antonia must be impressed.”

“Indeed, son.” Father gave his assenting nod.

Anton guided Father to the red chair in the drawing room, saying, “Today, this is your throne.”

AFTERNOON

The first to arrive were Antonia, Anton, and Nana. As Poldie ushered them into the drawing room, Hendrick, Mina, son Wim, and Francine were welcomed by Anton.

They all knew each other, and the introduction with Cees was lively. The seven-year-old boy played hide-and-seek between the palms with Nana. Antonia, called Tonya, admired the Persian carpet between the drawing- and dining rooms with Johan in attendance, who was more interested in her long black locks. Anton had a chat with young Anton, known as Tony, who had turned sixteen the week prior, and who told him that he, also, wanted to become a literary journalist. Cees was talking with Hendrick sitting in the green chair. Mina and Francine admired the orchid.

Poldie popped the champagne cork; Klaas, dressed as a waiter, went around with the goblets. A toast was made for Anton’s good health.

Wearing her flowery sarong and the traditional white *kabaya*, topped with a sleeveless white angora vest knitted by Mother, Cook appeared—announcing that dinner was served. Tonya clapped, shouting approval of her attire.

Beaming, Cees rose; he escorted Mina, wearing a dark green taffeta dress, to the dining room. Hendrick followed him with Tonya, in burgundy attire, and Anton with Nana, in beige velvet. Poldie escorted Francine, wearing a blue skirt and white silk blouse. Johan, Tony, and Wim made the tailend.

The candles were lit, the goblets filled with Mosel wine, the chairs pulled out so everyone could sit, and the merry-making could start.

Cook took the boy by the hand. “You sit next to me so we can talk. What’s your name?”

“Wimpie,” the boy said, holding her hand tight. “And what’s your name?”

“People who like me . . . they call me *Kokkie*.” She squeezed his hand. She pulled out a chair close to the hallway and said, “We sit here in case I must go to the kitchen. If you don’t like a dish, let me know, and I will get you something else.” She sat next to him. They were facing his

parents, Cees, Francine, Tonya, and Poldie. To the left of Wimpie were Johan and Tony. Anton sat on Cook's right with Nana next to him.

Cees cleared his throat and said, "Today we are celebrating Anton's special birthday because he was born on the same day as his mother." He gave a nod toward Anton sitting across from him. "Who would have thought that his trip to Paris this spring would bring us together celebrating?" He smiled. "Let us celebrate this special event with a toast to Gallery Ava Riss!" He took his goblet, raising it. "This gallery's mission is to promote young artists. Let us toast for Johan and Phlip, two promising painters!"

Everyone enjoyed drinking the excellent Mosel wine.

Two waiters entered with platters of goose meat and started serving. Excited, Nana said she had eaten goose while on holiday in Bavaria, where it was a specialty. Wimpie's nostrils flared; he made a face. He pulled at Cook's vest and loudly asked if she had something else for him to eat. His mother looked at him sternly and mouthed: "Wimpie." Wimpie banged his shoe against the leg of his chair. Cook whispered in his ear to follow her. She got up. Wimpie clasped her hand and they left. Tony guffawed. Her eyes like daggers, Tonya flashed her son a silent message of discontent. Poldie put his arm around Mina, who laughed.

Then they all laughed!

The waiters served rice balls, herb sauce, and vegetables. As they were busy eating, Cook showed up, saying that Wimpie had the time of his life entertaining the kitchen crew. Anton whispered, "Thank you, *Kokkie*."

Kokkie looked at the guests eating with gusto, and, taking a deep breath, smiled.

Mina's brown eyes glowed with pleasure when she said, "Absolutely wonderful! I never thought of eating goose. But now I will . . . you will give me the recipe, *Kokkie*?"

"Mina, *Kokkie* makes her famous dishes for my father to remind him of his youth,"—Anton elbowed Cook—"when they played together in the sandbox."

Everyone laughed.

"*Kokkie*, do we eat dessert here . . . or in the drawing room?" Cees wanted to know.

"It's more family-style to eat in your prettily decorated salon," Tonya suggested.

"I'll tell the help to bring the cakes to the drawing room." Cook rose. "Please make up your mind which cake you would like; date cake, sultana/rum cake, or Spanish citron and orange cake." Her face lit up when she said, "I hope you can still walk after you have eaten my famous advocaat."

Tony laughed loudly, showing off his rabbit teeth. "Don't worry, *Kokkie*, I'll offer my mother my arm so she can hang on."

Kokkie dashed to the kitchen; laughter following her.

In the drawing room, the silver bowl with holly in front of the fire had been demoted to a corner and a rectangular table stood in its place with the sliced cakes. Dessert plates, forks, and napkins were at one end. Coffee cups were on each table between the chairs.

Talking animatedly, the guests entered. They sat—like cats curling up on their cushion—in their previous chairs.

“Those who want the Spanish cake, hands up!” Anton did the bidding. Francine, Mina, and Nana waved. He served them.

“Those for date cake, hands up!” Anton grinned.

Johan waved. He helped himself.

“So,” Anton said, chuckling, “that leaves the famous sultana/rum cake for us. Tony, please pass us a portion.”

Tony, snickering, brought his mother the cake. “Mother, dear, take it easy. I sneaked into the kitchen and had a dollop of delicious advocaat.” He licked his lips. “I may need *your arm* . . . to get home!”

Cees and Hendrick had a belly laugh.

“Elegantiersgracht, where Tonya lives,” Hendrick said to Cees, “is a stone’s throw from here. And our home is also nearby. We’ll manage.” He gave a deep sigh and, with pleasure showing in his flushed face, he ate the sultana/rum cake.

The waiters went around with coffee.

“Anyone more cake?” Anton inquired.

“Would you like to take home a second helping?” Cook looked at Mina and Francine.

In chorus, the guests shouted, “Yes, please, *Kokkie!*”

Cook had thought of everything. She returned with boxes and gave the four ladies each one. “Please . . . take as much as you like. There’s more for us in the larder.”

The table was cleared and the coffee cups taken to the kitchen when Cook stood at the entrance of the dining room. “Here it comes,” she said, folding her hands as if in prayer, “my *famous advocaat!*” She stepped aside and the two waiters came: each holding a tray with advocaat goblets and spoons.

Faces shining, everyone cheered.

When they had been served, Cook, standing in front of the fire, waved her hands like a magic wand and said, “We shall remember this evening *forever!*” She giggled, pointing at Poldie. “Dig in!” she shouted.

Roaring laughter filled the drawing room.

“Absolutely divine!” Hendrick said, his tongue swirling around his lips. “The angels are kissing me.” He sighed deeply. “*Kokkie*, please give my beloved Mina your recipe.” Discreetly unbuttoning the lower button of his vest, he turned to Cees. “So . . . Wednesday you are leaving for Den Haag, Poldie informed me. He’s looking forward to meeting your wife and daughter.”

“Yes,” Cees said with a sigh. “I wish I could stay a few more days and enjoy your company, but I am anxious to embrace my Nel. She had a small accident and hurt her ankle.” He waved at Anton to come.

“Son, you said that Johan went to see Mieke. And that earlier this month, Dina had given birth to a boy.” His brown eyes twinkling, Cees looked at his son. “Do you think it a good idea to come again next year and pay them our respect?”

“Father, that’s a wonderful idea.” Anton smiled at him. “How about . . . the end of May? Travel will be more agreeable and the baby, his name is Augustus, will be six months old.”

“Yes,” Hendrick said, his face flushed red, and not only from the excitement of meeting Cees: who had written him about Philip and the Faun painting. “Let’s meet again in May.” Eyebrows raised, he gave Cees a nod. “That’s settled, then.”

The two seniors looked contentedly at the women putting cake slices in their boxes when Hendrick said, “Do you have transportation to Den Haag?”

“Klaas,” Cees replied, “made the arrangement. I hired a coach for the four of us. *Kokkie* has held Nel in her arms since she was a day old. And Jeanne wouldn’t know what to do without her. *Kokkie* will look after Nel, who is with Eugene, my older son. I have booked two rooms at a center city hotel for Jeanne and me and for Anton and Poldie.” Cees smiled when he said, “Nel’s best friend is Ursula, daughter of the German ambassador Count Georg von und zu Steinhof. I want to pay my respects to the parents of Ursula.” He winked at Hendrick. “She may get an invitation for the summer holidays to their estate in Sauerland.”

“We, fathers,”—Hendrick returned the wink—“must make plans for our children’s future. Your Nel may meet a handsome aristocratic young man. It’s good for us to steer them in the right direction. Cees, where are you staying so I can contact you if I hear something interesting from Mina regarding Philip.”

“I chose Hotel des Indes because the food is excellent.” Cees winked. “One cannot go wrong staying at this excellent establishment.”

Mina and Tonya joined them, announcing it was time to go home.

They went to the foyer where Guusje and Klaas were at hand to help with the overcoats and hats.

Cook stood at the open door of the drawing room watching when Wimpie came to her. “*Kokkie* . . . can I come again?” He took her hand. “I had a terrific time!”

The guests left, Johan escorting Tonya and a tipsy Tony.

Poldie and Cees waved. “Until we meet again in May!” they shouted.

Cook, standing behind them, whispered, “Ahdoo! Visiting little Augustus and Mieke?”

“Hendrick, Tonya, and I will do some plotting,” Cees replied. “We will put Laren het Gooi on the painters map.”

Chapter Eight

AMSTERDAM

JUNE 1912

Sunny and windless, it was a late spring day when Hendrick DeBron left Keizersgracht 25A. He walked along the canal and crossed to Herengracht to meet Cees and Anton, who were watching the canal traffic. They shook hands; and then walked to the neighborhood known as the Jordaan. As they admired the leafy view, Anton mentioned that Amsterdam was the Dutch version of Venice without the picturesque gondoliers.

They entered Elegantiersgracht. Hendrick said, "Tonya lives at number sixty-nine, and next door, seventy-one, is the gallery. Adolf left her well-padded." He chuckled as they were nearing the premises. "Adolf was very fond of Tony and left him a legacy. The boy will receive it on his twenty-first birthday." He shook his head. "Poor boy never met his father. I wonder if he's still alive."

"He'll be seventeen in December," Anton said. "He'll be independent in nineteen-sixteen. His last name is Welling. Perhaps Tonya will reveal this mystery."

"What about Cousin Nana?" Cees wanted to know.

"Nana is twenty; she's the daughter of Tonya's older sister. Her last name is Belafonte. They were Portuguese Jews who fled the Spanish persecution and settled here." Hendrick waved his hand toward number 71: Tony was sitting on the stoop. When they approached, he opened the door. The party entered.

In the center of the front room, Tonya and Mina were looking at a painting held by Tonya, and Johan was putting up a painting on the wall facing the front door.

Cees joined Johan, saying, "The Uhrbach family is expecting us next week. Have you reserved rooms for overnight?"

"Of course," Johan replied. "Two double rooms and two singles at Hotel Hamdorff. I'm staying at Het Bonte Paard." He smiled as he stroked the painting on the wall. "Mieke can't wait to see you. Nico and Phlip are planning his museum future." He pointed at the painting near the front door. "That's Phlip's painting of a Dutch house." He laughed. "Tonya thought it was yours in Velp."

Cees went to have a look. "I think I know the house. It is near Dieren."

“Will your wife and daughter join you . . . later?” Johan inquired.

“They have been invited for the summer to Sauerland by the German ambassador,” Cees replied. “His daughter is my Nel’s best friend.”

Hendrick was talking with Tonya and Mina. Cees joined them.

“Who is that?” Cees looked at the sketch of an old man Tonya was holding.

Johan, having followed Cees, said, “When Phlip is in Paris, he paints or sketches his father.” He pointed at the sketch. “I got to know him well while painting together at the apple orchard. I was hoping Poldie could also come. He’s always welcome to stay with me.”

“Poldie could not join us, summer real estate is blooming. But he’ll stay with you next time.” Cees put his hand on Johan’s arm.

Mina laughed. “Francine is infatuated with Poldie. She’d like him to stay with us.”

“Mother,” Tony said, “I like Poldie. Can he stay with us?”

Cees laughed a belly laugh; they joined his laughter.

Anton came down the gallery stairs where two upper rooms were devoted to Dutch landscapes. He joined the group. When Cees told him that Poldie was in great demand as guest, Anton said to Hendrick, “Perhaps you can find him employment at a real estate office?”

Hendrick raised his eyebrow. “I’ll do my best to make my sister-in-law happy,” he said with a chuckle in his voice.

Tonya gave the sketch to Tony and told him to take it to the office. Then she turned to the group, saying they should follow her; on this sunny day they should discuss their trip to Laren ’t Gooi outdoors.

They went to the rear of the house. Tonya opened the French doors and they stepped outside. The walled garden had a red brick paved terrace. There were clay pots with mauve, blue, and pink-flowering freesias. Six white wicker chairs with blue cushions were waiting for this important discussion to commence on the future of young painters: the bread and butter of Tonya’s gallery.

Cees said, they were sitting in a circle, “Johan reserved rooms at Hotel Hamdorff. He told me that Nico and Phlip are planning his future. So far, Tonya put up his painting of a Dutch house.” He smiled at Johan. “I noticed that the painting you hung up was signed Josseaud. Your views of Amsterdam are superb. Tonya,”—he turned to her—“I believe Phlip should paint more French scenes. We do not want too much competition between them. Foreigners will go for Johan’s work, and the Dutch collectors will decorate their homes with Phlip’s oeuvres.”

Tonya clapped. “Indeed, Johan’s scenes of Amsterdam are wonderful. I’ll let Phlip know and advise him what the Dutch like. Time is all important for giving a showing, an exhibition of paintings by a single artist.”

“How long will it take you to give him a single showing?” Hendrick wanted to know.

“Years,” Tonya replied. “Mina can testify to that.” Mina nodded.

“In that case,”—Anton folded his hands—“we better start planning *now*.”

“How about four years from now?” Mina suggested.

“Excellent. How about spring nineteen-sixteen?” Cees looked at Hendrick; after all, they would help with financing this project.

“Perfect,” Hendrick said. “And once we have talked with Nico and Phlip, we . . .” He looked at Mina and then Tonya. “I mean the ladies who will do all the planning and work, can tell us, men, what to expect. I arranged for a private omnibus to take us on Wednesday to het Gooi. Klaas was very helpful.” Hendrick smiled at Anton. “Cees, I’ll give the details to you on the way home.” He stood up. Mina rose. On cue, Tonya rose, and Cees, Anton, and Johan followed suit.

They left the gallery talking animatedly.

’T GOOI

Noord-Holland

Klaas had told Hendrick that he would sit next to the coachman and direct him to drive along the scenic routes; having spent his childhood in ’t Gooi, he was the perfect guide. He had arranged for a rest-stop, an early lunch, at a friend’s inn at Wijdemeren, north of popular Loosdrecht. They then would take the much-travelled road to Bussum that had a flourishing cottage rental industry catering to families from Amsterdam and Utrecht; and on to Blaricum, where the Uhrbach family resided. After meeting the family, the coach would take the party to their lodging at Laren. Johan had made a dinner reservation for eleven people at the hotel’s terrace restaurant. Dina, Mieke, their guest/Phlip, and Nico would join them.

The family omnibus was decorated with chains of papier-mâché red roses and was a sure success with the party of seven. The valises were on the roof. They sat, facing each other, on the two long benches so everyone could enjoy the vista. As they started their much-anticipated trip on this sunny, breezy day, *Kokkie* said, as she put her hand on her heart, that she was thrilled to hold the children in her arms again. She had a wicker basket with cookies; with funny faces that the children would enjoy.

The luncheon at the inn was beyond everyone's expectation. Beneath a huge oak, a table and stools invited the party to sit and enjoy the view of ponds and canals toward what Klaas pointed out as Loosdrecht, a picturesque village. They were offered *broodje croquette*, herring with fresh sliced onions, smoked eel, home-made cheeses, and rustic bread. Their thirst was quenched with beer served in mugs.

When the party returned to the coach, *Kokkie* warbled a tune as she went to her place on the bench. Anton grinned; then crooned along. Tonya entered, vocalizing her version. When everyone was seated, the coachman waved his whip and the omnibus left: the party singing in chorus the Dutch ditty *Sinterklaas kapoentje, gooi wat in mijn schoentje*.

Waving, the innkeeper and his wife smiled broadly. She nudged him, saying it was a thank you for their cousin Klaas. He nudged her, saying that the nicest reward is money.

The coach stopped before entering Blaricum. *Kokkie*, holding her basket, wanted to sit near the exit. Klaas made room for Johan so he could direct the coachman to Villa Uhrbach; nestled in a leafy cul-de-sac.

Kokkie waved as Mieke dashed out of the front door, followed by a squealing Nikolay, flapping his arms, and Claudius howling peepeekaka. Anton opened the coach door and as *Kokkie* stepped out, a swarm of hands pulled at her skirt. She bent down to receive their wet kisses. "Mieke, show me where we can sit outside so we can open this basket." She gave it to her. Giggling, holding the basket with both hands, Mieke rushed to the rear of the house. *Kokkie* followed, holding hands with the spitfire boys.

Nico and Philip welcomed their visitors with handclasps and warm embraces. Mina and Tonya went to the front door where Dina stood, holding baby Augustus in her arms. Johan suggested that they go to the parlor. He would get refreshments.

Mina and Tonya were cooing at the baby, swathed in a cream-colored blanket that Mina had crocheted, when the men entered. Hendrick touched the baby's nose, saying he wanted to see him open his eyes. But Augustus gave no reaction. Cees nodded, saying how he envied the baby for sleeping so soundly.

Johan entered with two bottles of champagne. Nico went to the sideboard and got the goblets. Dina and the baby sat down on the sofa; Mina next to her, and Tonya stood behind them. Nico served the ladies first, and then the men. Hendrick proposed a toast to Augustus.

The front door flung open and Mieke rushed into the parlor. "Look what *Kokkie* made for us!" She held a funny-face cookie.

"I want one, too," Johan said and went to the door. "Let's join *Kokkie* and her magic basket."

Mieke gave the cookie to her mother. "For Augie." And then she ran after Johan.

"Good idea. Let's!" Tonya said, and goblet in hand, she left.

Dina put the baby on the sofa and said to Mina, “Augie’s asleep. Let’s join the children.”

Clutching their goblets, and chuckling, the men followed them.

Kokkie was sitting on a low stool at the head of a rectangular table on which stood the basket. On either side of her were the boys, whining, and snatching at her hands. Johan, standing behind them, seized the cookies. Nikolay turned around, and his face distorted, snarling, he attacked Johan. Grabbing one of his trouser legs, he bit Johan, kicking him. Before anyone could utter a sound, Claudius ran riot, screaming peepeekaka.

Tonya, fear showing in her face, dropped her goblet. Mina and Dina stood there: like frozen statues. Hendrick, Cees, and Anton dropped their jaws—taking in the scene.

Phlip ran after Claudius; holding him firmly—he rushed to the house.

Nico got hold of Nikolay and took the enraged boy to the house.

Mieke jumped in *Kokkie*’s lap and burst into tears; sobbing, she said the boys had one of their bad days.

Dina and Mina, holding hands, approached the table. Dina whispered in *Kokkie*’s ear that Mieke didn’t know the boys were unbalanced. Tonya joined them, her face solemn.

The men wandered around the yard. Nico and Phlip returned.

Nico joined Dina. “I apologize for the boys’ behavior,” he said, choking on his words. “They were overly excited.” He put a hand on Dina’s shoulder. “However, I admit it has taken the load off my mind that their rages are exposed.” He looked at Mieke when he said, “We have consulted a physician and were told that they are simple-minded. They’ll never be able to speak properly. They will always have difficulty with social communication.”

“They have fixations,” Phlip spoke up. “Claudius is attached to his potty. He treats it as if it’s his pet.”

“Nikolay wants to be a bird,” Mieke piped up as she smiled at Phlip. “He flaps his arms and thinks he’s flying. He wants to be a talking bird like Queenie.”

Cees went up to Nico and put an arm around him. “Nico, we feel for you and Dina, and not only the burden of raising the boys. Rest assured, you can count on Anton and me in case you may need us.” They embraced.

Anton, Hendrick, and Johan joined them. It was the beginning of their special brotherhood.

Klaas came to remind them that it was time to leave for their lodging.

Hotel Hamdorff was a sprawling complex offering guests and day-tourists a variety of pleasures: afternoon teas; entertainment; a band playing the latest foreign tunes; and dancing in the moonlight. It had also a large exhibition center for young and upcoming painters. No doubt, this hotel was a magnet for spending a weekend vacation, and a favorite destination for honeymooners.

A large, rectangular table was reserved for the DeBron party. When Nico, Dina, Phlip and Mieke arrived, the owner of the hotel, Jan Hamdorff, took them to their table.

The head waiter offered the guests the a la carte daily menu with two choices.

Mieke, sitting next to *Kokkie*, whispered that she wanted a sandwich. *Kokkie* took her hand and got to her feet, saying to Cees that they were going to her room and chat.

The nine adults ordered the roast beef special. Cees, acting host, chose the wine: a red Bordeaux.

When the plates were cleared, Tonya took her glass and said, "I want to offer a toast to June the twelfth because this is the start of my venture with Phlip, a rising star in the art world."

They cheered and sipped Bordeaux.

His face aglow, Hendrick raised his glass toward Nico. "Cees and I are grateful that you and Dina offer your hospitality to Phlip." He raised his glass toward Phlip. "We have great confidence in your very special talent."

"Phlip," Anton said, "we all agreed that you deserve a single show at Gallery Ava Riss. And we have settled for spring nineteen-sixteen." He stood up, cheering, "To a wonderful and exciting future for Phlip!"

Johan jumped up and said, "A toast to Tonya and Gallery Ava Riss!"

"A toast to Mina," Cees said, looking at Hendrick. "Mina is Tonya's right hand."

Mina's brown eyes flooded with tears when she said, "Phlip, Tonya and I will be devoted to promoting you. The show will be five stars. We promise!"

Nico looked at Phlip and nodded. He stood up, glass in hand; Phlip followed suit. They faced Cees. "Phlip and I will be honored if you will sit for him," Nico said. "He wants to paint your portrait." **[PS166]**

"I'll be honored," Phlip said. "This portrait will become the centerpiece of the nineteen-sixteen exhibition. I promise."

Tonya rose, glass in hand; they all got up and toasted.

THURSDAY

After a late buffet-style breakfast au plein air, Tonya, Cees, Anton, Mina, Hendrick and Johan decided to play tourist. *Kokkie* had left on foot to see the children; Klaas told them.

Along the way, Johan pointed at the many attractive villas; Villa De Elegantier could be rented. Tonya laughed, saying sometime in the future she might; it was a lucky address.

Anton pointed at a recently-build grand villa named De Wilde Zwanen; the landscapers were busy planting flowering bushes. Johan said that a rich American couple by the name of Singer decided to settle here because they had many artist friends who frequented this artist colony. William Singer was a professional painter known for his seascapes. Johan was eager to meet him next time he visited Mieke.

Hendrick looked at his watch, saying that Klaas wanted to leave at eleven o'clock and drive to the Uhrbach family to say farewell. Klaas had another surprise for them. Before entering Amsterdam, they would have a late lunch at a friend's restaurant; a refitted windmill going by the name of Sea Serpent. The owner was once a bargeman. The restaurant was very popular year-round.

Saying goodbye was not a happy occasion. The absence of the boys was that they were visiting friends.

Mieke waved her handkerchief at *Kokkie* when the omnibus left. There was the promise of a reunion at Christmas in Amsterdam; she had been invited!

VELP

WEDNESDAY

DECEMBER 11, 1912

Hans entered the kitchen with a basket containing the family's breakfast staples of milk, butter, eggs, and bread that he put on the kitchen table. He turned up the kerosene lamp near the stove and then hung his coachman's winter cape and cap on the peg near the door. His eyes widened when he saw the envelope addressed to "Father" resting against the heirloom vase with three white lilies. He touched the flowers; they were made of fabric. He stared at the door to *Kokkie's* room. His hand shook when he took the envelope. His chest heaving, trembling, he sat down at the table. Beads of perspiration appeared on his upper lip as he took out the letter and, unfolding it, read.

Father, I'm dying of the same disease my grandmother and mother died of, and I don't want to suffer as they did. I want you to know that "my family life" has been my road to happiness. You are the older brother I craved.

Handsomeboy, I have one wish and hope you will fulfill it. The portrait Philip wants to paint of you: Please sit in the red chair I gave Anton for his 25th birthday.

Handsomeboy, I have lived a wonderful life being with you and the children. Anton and Nel are the apples of my eyes. I love you dearly, and say, until we meet again, as always, your little mouse,

Mousy

Hans put the letter on the table. Eyes brimming with tears, shoulders shaking, he collapsed, head on the table, sobbing. After a while he sat up. Drying his face rubbing against his jacket sleeve, he returned the letter to the envelope.

He got up, took the vase and the envelope, and went to *Kokkie's* room where he put them on her nightstand. Looking at her peaceful face, he folded his hands, bowed his head, and mouthed a silent prayer.

He returned to the kitchen. He put the basket on the windowsill, put on his cap and cape, and left the house, closing the kitchen door firmly. He drove the carriage at great speed to Poldie's place. Tears running down his cheeks, he told him about the letter, apologizing for reading it, but . . .

Poldie put his hands in front of his face and wept. "Hans," he whispered, "let's go. I must be there when Father reads her farewell letter."

"Thank you, Mister Poldie." Hans put his hands on his chest. "I wouldn't know what to do if Mister Jonkheer comes apart. He and *Kokkie* have always been a span." He wiped his eyes with the handkerchief Poldie gave him. "They whispered in the parlor. I guess they were sharing secrets."

Poldie said with a deep sigh, "Yes. They . . . were a team. Perhaps Misses Jonkheer felt she had no say in managing her home."

"Mister Poldie,"—Hans returned the handkerchief—"Misses Jonkheer was hard to please. Katrien, who cleans upstairs, cried when they had words. *Kokkie* would put her arms around the girl." He swallowed; his Adam's apple moved rapidly. "Our *Kokkie* was a saint. Other cooks would have left if they were insulted like Katrien." He sniffled. "I think we should return before Mister Jonkheer comes down for breakfast."

Mother sat at the kitchen table holding with both hands the envelope addressed to "Father." With a nod of her head, she took out the letter. She pulled her candlestick closer. When she read *Kokkie's* request about the portrait, she pressed her lips. "God forbid," she mumbled, returning the letter, "not if I can help it. Never!" And taking the envelope, she held it above the candle.

Poldie threw open the kitchen door, followed by Hans.

"Mother!" Poldie shouted as he dashed to *Kokkie's* room.

In the wink of an eye, Mother dropped the smoking envelope on the floor and with her slipper she swept it under the table. She drew the collar of her house-robe closer around her neck and said, "*Kokkie's* dead."

"Misses Jonkheer, shall I make coffee?" Hans took the breakfast basket, putting it on the table.

"Where's the letter?" Poldie asked, returning to the kitchen.

Hans pointed to the kitchen floor behind Mother.

Mother rose. And looking at Hans, she said, "Go to the agency and tell Mister Jansen to send us an experienced cook, starting tomorrow." She went to the hall door to leave when she collided with Cees in his house-robe. "*Kokkie's* dead," she said in a matter-of-fact-voice. His eyes widened, and his mouth opened; it was as if she had slapped him in his face. Without saying more, she swept past her husband.

Cees stood, stiff as a rod, at the door. Poldie held up the envelope. Hans was at the stove making coffee.

"She wrote a letter?" Cees said in a choking voice.

"The letter is addressed to "Father"." Poldie pulled out a chair for him.

Cees whispered, "The edge is burned."

"I found the letter on her nightstand," Hans said. "I believe she wanted to burn it but changed her mind." He brought the coffee-pot to the table. "I saw she was departed, and I thought to tell Mister Poldie so he could be here to give you comfort." He took coffee mugs from the sideboard and poured coffee; then brought the sugar bowl and milk jug. "I'm going to Mister Jansen because Misses Jonkheer needs a cook, starting tomorrow, she said."

"Hans," Poldie said, "tell Doctor de Wit that *Kokkie* died. He must come."

With a wave of his hand and a nod, Hans went out the kitchen door.

Cees went into *Kokkie's* room.

Poldie folded his hands and stared at the envelope.

When Cees finally returned, eyes brimming with tears, he sat down. Poldie got a tea towel that he put on the table; Cees nodded. He read the letter aloud for Poldie's benefit. When he read, handsomeboy, I have one wish, he broke down and sobbed. Poldie put his arm around his shoulder and squeezed him, whispering if he should continue. Cees nodded. So Poldie went on reading aloud while Cees wiped his tears with the tea towel. When Poldie read, as always, your little mouse, Mousy, Cees cleared his throat and said, "The wishes of our dearly departed must be fulfilled."

"What disease did her mother die of?" Poldie wanted to know.

"Stomach troubles," Cees said. "That's why"—he wiped his eyes—"I wondered. I had noticed that lately her sauces were mild. I asked Mother to ask *Kokkie* if she needed to see a physician."

"I knew she was dying. She told me," Mother said, standing at the hall door. "Cornelis, I want to talk to you in private."

"About what . . . Jeanne?" He looked at his wife. "Poldie is like a son, a brother of Anton. We can trust him."

"If . . . you say so, Cornelis." Jeanne entered and sat across the table. She poured herself coffee. "I agree that a dearly departed wish must be fulfilled," she said. "However, . . . Cornelis, I want your portrait done here, in the red chair that my aunt Saskia gave us as a wedding present."

Cornelis closed his eyes. With both hands he tugged at his silvery-streaked beard. His Adam's apple moved rapidly. He squeezed his large ears until they turned red. His chest heaving, he opened his eyes, and said in a low voice, "My red line, Jeanne, is . . . over my dead body." He turned to Poldie. "Come with me to the parlor for instructions." He got to his feet and took Poldie's arm.

Cees sat down in the red velvet Victorian wingchair.

Queenie shrieked.

Poldie went to the windowsill, took the cloth, and covered the birdcage. He sat in Anton's chair, took his notepad and pencil, and said, "I'm ready, Father."

"Please send Anton a telegram to come immediately; and messages to Nico, Hendrick, and Tonya that the Christmas party is cancelled; and that a letter will follow to explain everything. Mother will be obstinate and disagreeable for a while, but I shall sugarcoat my decision with a promise that Nel can go with Ursula to a finishing school in Switzerland." Cees eyed the notepad. "You know, Poldie, revenge is a dish best eaten cold."

Poldie laughed. "Strategy is your forte, Father!"

“That is how I survived, son,” Cees said with a sigh. “I learned this while in the military. I knew a monk from a Buddhist colony south of Semarang, where I was born and served our country, and he told me that I will not be punished *for* my anger, but I will be punished *by* my anger.” He nodded when he said, “I made a mental note when he said that . . . as a soldier, I should take into account that the tongue, like a sharp knife, kills without drawing blood.”

Poldie waved his notepad. “Speaking of tongues, my father liked quoting Jeremiah.”

Cees raised his eyebrow. “Jeremiah, the prophet of doom and gloom?”

Poldie smiled. “Jeremiah nine: They make ready their tongue like a bow to shoot lies. My father’s take on priests and politicians.”

“Adam and Eve lied to God,” Cees said with a glint in his eyes. “We still pay the price. Write down what Anton told me.”

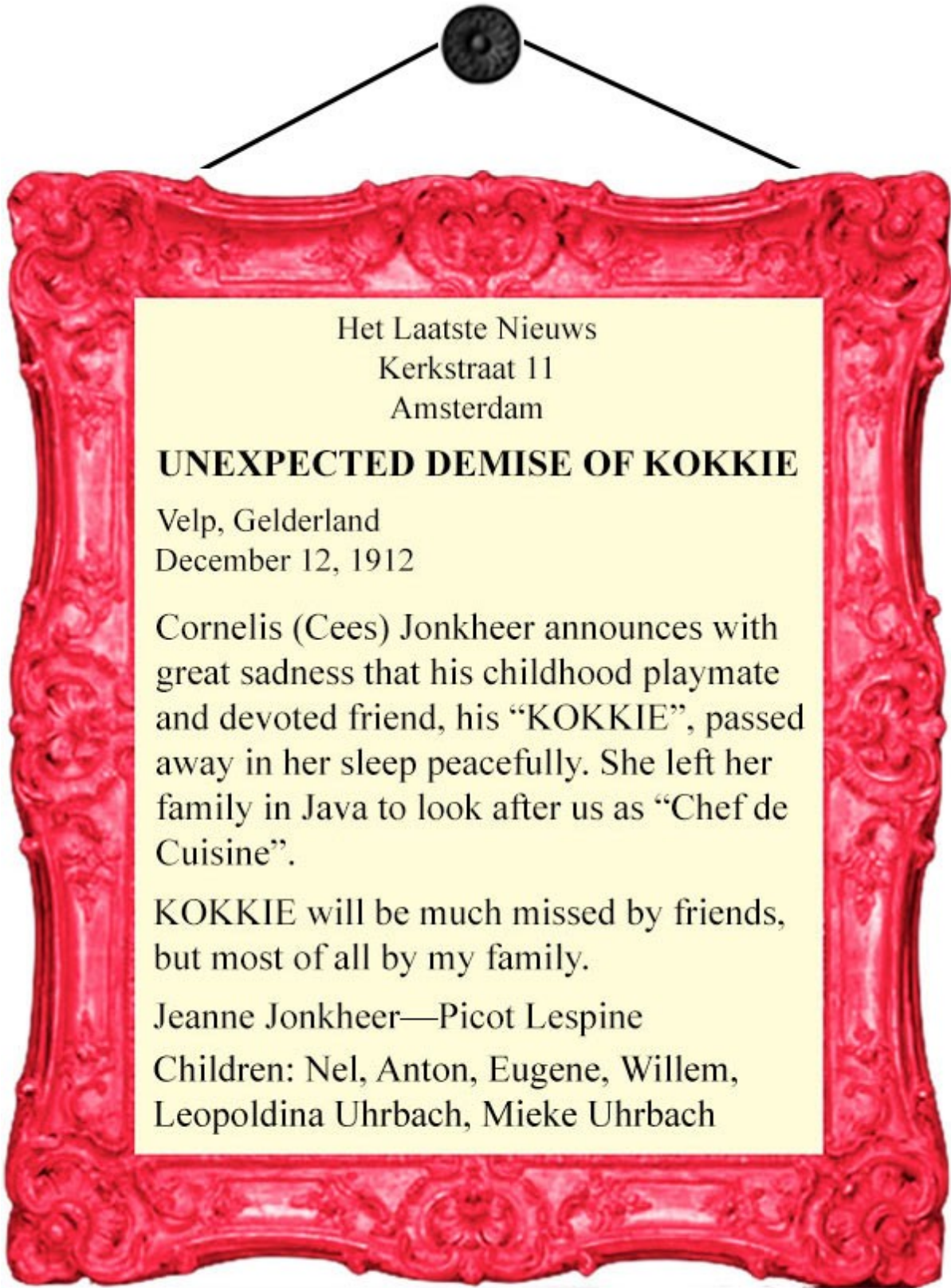
Poldie waved his pencil.

“Anton said”—Cees pointed to the notepad— “that Horace wrote that the pen is the tongue of the mind.”

“Is that why Anton likes writing for a newspaper? So everyone reads his thoughts?” Poldie burst out laughing.

Cees put his hands on his ears. “Poldie, please write a letter explaining what happened here. Do your best, son. And tell Anton to put an obituary in his newspaper immediately. I’ll discuss with him . . .” He took his handkerchief and wiped his face. “We shall discuss this as soon as Anton arrives.” Cees put his hands in front of his face.

Poldie got up, and with a nod, he went to the kitchen: to wait for the doctor. He and Anton would need a death certificate so they could arrange her funeral.



Het Laatste Nieuws
Kerkstraat 11
Amsterdam

UNEXPECTED DEMISE OF KOKKIE

Velp, Gelderland
December 12, 1912

Cornelis (Cees) Jonkheer announces with great sadness that his childhood playmate and devoted friend, his “KOKKIE”, passed away in her sleep peacefully. She left her family in Java to look after us as “Chef de Cuisine”.

KOKKIE will be much missed by friends, but most of all by my family.

Jeanne Jonkheer—Picot Lespine

Children: Nel, Anton, Eugene, Willem,
Leopoldina Uhrbach, Mieke Uhrbach

When Anton arrived the next day, he went to see Poldie first. They embraced and wept; reminiscing about *Kokkie* and her big heart. Then Anton showed him a copy of *Het Laatste Nieuws* with the obituary. He said, “Hendrick is inquiring about real estate positions for you. Poldie, you don’t want to be connected yet with our name. So I thought it was smarter to mention your sister and Mieke instead. Also, Phlip is their house guest. Tonya will put copies of the obit on the table in her gallery to catch the eyes of customers, telling them that Father and Hendrick are sponsoring his show in nineteen sixteen.”

“Of course, Anton. I understand. Mother and Father are grinding an ax about *Kokkie*’s red chair in your house. I’ll tell you all about it on our way.” Poldie took Anton’s overnight valise. “It’s time to weep with Father.”

Cees sat, eyes and nostrils red from grieving, in front of the fireplace when Anton opened the parlor door softly. He saw an old man warming his hands. Anton sneaked toward the birdcage to cover it. Queenie screeched! Cees turned around slowly, to look at the door.

“Father,” Anton said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

Cees took Anton’s hand, tugging at it, and whispered, ‘Son, I need you.’”

Anton went on his knees next to him. He put an arm around Father and put his head in his lap. After a while, the sobbing came to an end.

“Son, I feel rootless without *Kokkie*,” Cees said, blowing his nose. “She is my past,” he wailed. “I have no siblings to remind me. I no longer have a past!” Wheezing, he looked at Anton. “Mother doesn’t understand.” His shoulders shook.

“Poldie told me how it happened, Father. We will take care of everything.” He stroked his head. “Let’s go upstairs to my room and you can relax on my bed.”

Cees got to his feet. “I like that, son. I need peace and quiet.”

The funeral was held on Monday, the 16th at the New Baptist Church. The pastor hadn’t known *Kokkie*, so the sermon was short. Cees’ eyes lit up when several business owners: the butcher; the baker; the grocer supplying the family with exotic sultanas and other delicacies, and even delivery personnel gathered at the graveside ceremony. He asked Hans to invite them to the local inn for a beer and sausages. He also thanked Hans for having Poldie come to comfort him.

The family had a meal at De Schimmel. In the afternoon, Cees, Anton and Poldie had a discussion in the parlor about the future. Cees, Mother, and Anton would celebrate Christmas in Den Haag with Nel, Willem, and Eugene. Poldie decided to visit his family in Blaricum.

The scheduled meeting at Gallery Ava Riss was now to take place in February 1913.

AMSTERDAM
GALLERY AVA RISS
FEBRUARY 15, 1913

It was three in the afternoon.

In the backroom, Tony and Nana were putting up a table and chairs for the gathering to discuss the exhibition of Philip Smid in the spring of 1916. Tony put two low kerosene lamps in the center of the table. Nana put Tonya's favorite cherry-red table mats bordered in black and matching napkins on the table; Tony saying his mother liked exotic settings. Raising his eyebrows, and grinning, he put pink sheets of paper and a pencil on his mother's placemat at the head of the table. He put a card on her left with Philip's name; then the card for Anton on his placemat; his name card; then Mina, and Cees'. Nico was to sit opposite Tonya. Tony put Poldie's card on Nico's left, then Johan, Nana, and Hendrick on his mother's right. Nana put a black-and-white cushion on Cees' chair, saying with a chuckle that old people deserve to be molly-cuddled.

Tonya and the housekeeper entered holding trays with snacks and they went into the office. On a shelf were jugs of beer and bottles of Cees' white wine. Tonya told the housekeeper to return at four; Tony would assist her, serving.

Tonya joined Nana and Tony in the backroom; they were warming their hands in front of the fireplace. She thanked them for helping her. She told Tony to make sure that the French doors to the terrace were locked, and to draw the curtains. Tonya took Nana by the elbow, instructing her to be attentive to Johan because she needed him at this exhibition; he was very good at putting up paintings.

Hendrick, Mina, Nico and Philip arrived: on their heels Johan, Poldie, Cees and Anton. Tony and Nana took the coats and hats to the office. Tonya ushered them to the backroom and asked them to sit at their designated seats.

Then Tonya sat down. She folded her hands and said, as she bowed her head, "Let us say a silent prayer for *Kokkie*." When she said, "Amen," everyone unfolded their hands.

Wiping his eyes with a handkerchief, Cees said, "Tonya, *Kokkie* has a wish about the portrait Philip wants to paint of me . . . and I want to fulfill her wish."

"Of course, Cees." Tonya turned to Philip. "I'm sure you agree?"

Philip nodded. He turned to Cees. "And *Kokkie*'s wish is?"

Cees looked at Nico when he said, "*Kokkie* liked the red chair in our parlor. So, she decided to get Anton one for his house."

“A handsome chair, indeed,” Mina said as she put her hand on Cees’ arm.

“I remember the red chair in your parlor when I put up my painting *Boerenplezier* [PS38]”, Phlip said. “Tonya, you would like the velvet curtains, an attractive shade of salmon.”

“Yes, Phlip.” Cees smiled. “Well . . . *Kokkie* wants you to paint me sitting in Anton’s red chair.” He put his hand on Nico’s arm and squeezed it.

Poldie clapped. “Great idea!”

“Wonderful. Let’s celebrate this portrait.” Tonya nodded at Tony: he gave Nana a nod, and she joined him to the office.

They came with goblets and snacks, passing them around.

The red chair was toasted. All smiles, they thanked *Kokkie* for her wish.

The housekeeper cleared the table.

“Let’s talk about Phlip’s exhibition three years from now,” Tonya said, holding up her pencil ready to take notes. “I need your ideas.” She smiled at Hendrick.

“I suggest,” Hendrick said, “that Nico gives the au courant.” He looked at Phlip. “Johan told me that you and Nico have been planning.”

Poldie clapped; Anton and Tony joined the clapping.

Tonya laughed. “Very well, Nico,” she said, pointing her pencil at him across the table.

“We made plans,” Nico admitted, “for his greater future.” He looked at Mina. “You and Dina are Tonya’s fairies and will manage everything to do with the exciting exhibition.” He turned to Cees. “We were thinking of Phlip’s paintings getting the attention of internationally known museums.” All smiles, he said, “We have big plans.”

“Our present plan is the nineteen-sixteen exhibition, Tonya said.” “I suggest we settle for his finest forty-five paintings. You agree, Nico?”

“Tonya, I endorse your proposal.” Hendrick gave Nico a nod.

“And I, also approve.” Cees said.

“Amen.” Anton elbowed Phlip.

“In that case, Nico,”—Phlip put his hand on Tonya’s arm—“I’ll leave next month for France and start painting.”

Tonya put her pencil on the pink sheet and, with a laugh, said, “Our meeting is adjourned until we hear from Phlip.” She squeezed his hand. “You’ll write us how you are doing?”

“Tonya, we’ve been corresponding for some time,” Johan said. “I’ll keep you up to date.”

Nana and Tony went to the office and got coats and hats.

“I have important news.” Cees looked at Hendrick. “Anton will go to Germany and interview Bertha von Suttner. You know that she received the first Nobel Peace Prize eight years ago?”

Hendrick’s face lit up. “If I remember correctly, she wrote a book with the title *Die Waffen nieder*.”

“Yes.” Anton smiled. “Albert Heyn, my boss at *Het Laatste Nieuws*, is eager to print sometime late summer my interview with this famous author, who is against wars.”

Chapter Nine

AMSTERDAM

GALLERY AVA RISS

SEPTEMBER 1913

Tonya, Hendrick and Mina were chatting on the terrace.

“I have wonderful news!” Clutching a letter, Johan joined them. “Phlip has ten canvases with French scenes!” Breathless, he sat next to Tonya. Visibly excited, he said, “Tonya, he wants me to come to Paris and take them for the gallery.”

“Good news, indeed,” Tonya acknowledged. “These ten will be the starter for his exhibition. Cees pledged *Boerenplezier* and *the cow*. I reserved *Dutch house*, making it thirteen paintings.”

“Dina has promised *Zuiderzee* and the three with *sailboats*,” Mina said. She turned to her husband. “We’ll submit *Place de Clichy* and *Place Pigalle*; if you agree, Hendrick?”

Hendrick gave his nod. “So far, nineteen canvases. And, Tonya, Cees in Anton’s red chair [PS166] will make twenty.”

Johan gave Tonya the letter. “For your archive,” he said with a smile.

Tonya sighed, saying, “We need twenty-five more.” She looked at Mina. “Please, tell Dina to remind Phlip.”

“May I suggest,” Mina replied with a chuckle, “that Mieke writes to Phlip that she misses him terribly, and he must come soon.”

Johan applauded. “Tonya, do I have your approval to get the paintings?”

“Go next month,” Tonya replied. “And, Mina, Mieke’s note must arrive when they are together, so that you, Johan,”—she chuckled—“can fan the fire of affection.”

“Using a little girl as bait?” Hendrick muttered. He winked at Mina, got to his feet and took her hand.

Tonya escorted the couple to the front door; Johan followed like a puppy waiting for a treat.

GALLERY AVA RISS

OCTOBER 28th

AFTERNOON

In the backroom, Tony put four kerosene lamps on the mantelpiece of the unlit fireplace. And opposite the fireplace, Tonya and Nana arranged nine chairs. Then the three set up an easel in front of the fireplace for the unveiling of the French paintings, stacked in the corner near the front room.

As they stood at the easel, they talked about Philip's exhibition. Tonya went to draw the curtains, muttering she hated rain and was looking forward to sun-filled French scenes.

When the doorbell rang, Tonya went to the front. The housekeeper stood at the coat stand, in the center of the room, to receive raincoats and hats. The fireplace was lit.

Tonya ushered Nico, Anton, Hendrick and Mina as well as Johan and Philip to the backroom. Tony and Nana welcomed them. As they sat down, Nana said she loved everything French and couldn't wait to celebrate the success of these paintings with a clinking of champagne goblets.

Pointing at the canvases in the corner, Tonya suggested that Philip narrate his oeuvres.

Philip put one on the easel. "I was staying at a farm," he explained, "helping with chores to pay for my room and board. This is a typical *Village Street*."

Tony went up to look. "So peaceful. People will be soothed, contemplating this scene." He took the painting down so Philip could put up his next oeuvre.

"*Place de la Concorde*," Philip said.

Hendrick and Mina applauded.

"Another one of your magnificent conversation pieces," Anton declared.

Nico said, "No problem selling this one."

"Very popular scene," Tonya acknowledged.

Tony chuckled. "Next one!"

"Everybody likes *Sunflowers*," Philip put the painting on the easel.

They applauded.

With a big grin on his face, Tony removed the painting, saying, "Don't let us down, Philip. We want another clapper!"

Philip returned Tony's grin, and, eyes brimming with glee, put a canvas on the easel, announcing, "*Bouquet de Fleurs!*"

"French flowers!" Nana exclaimed. "I'd love to have this painting for myself. We don't grow these flowers in Holland."

Philip nodded at Tony, who obligingly took down the painting.

"Nana,"—Philip put a painting on the easel—"how about my *Yellow Irises?*"

"You are exceptionally good at painting flowers, Philip," Tonya spoke before Nana could say a word. "People put vases with flowers on their walls. Concentrate on painting Dutch flowers for your exhibition."

"Yes!" Nana exclaimed, putting her hand on Nico's arm. "Tell Mieke to encourage him."

Anton clapped.

"Nana," Mina said, "I'll tell Dina. She's very good at arranging flowers."

"Next one!" Tonya nodded at Tony.

"This one is *Paysage*, Very French scene," Philip said with a nod at Tonya. "Do you agree?"

Tonya clapped. "Bravo, Philip!"

Philip winked at Tony, who put up another painting. "I took my neighbor's little boy to the circus. He was totally captivated, really absorbed. I decided to paint *Circus*. Mieke will like it, I'm sure. I enjoyed doing it, so I painted another one."

Mina smiled, her chocolate brown eyes gleaming. "We'll buy this one for Wimpie's bedroom. You agree . . . Hendrick?"

"Indeed!" Hendrick beamed. "It will cheer him first thing in the morning." He turned to Tonya. "We'll take the painting home and give it to him at Sinterklaas. And next year, you'll do Wimpie's portrait." He took Mina's hand. "It will be a present for your birthday, dearest wife."

Anton took the circus painting and put it, softly chuckling, aside. He went to the corner and took a canvas. He put it on the easel.

"This is *Girl in a barge*," Philip explained. "I thought the girl was floating on the water like in a dream."

Tonya clapped softly. "I go for this one," he whispered. "I like to dream." He took the painting and put it near the window.

"This one," Philip said, as he put a painting on the easel, "is *Bord de Seine*."

"Lovely scene. It will sell well in our country of canals." Tonya pointed at the last canvas.

Philip put up the painting and said, with an apologetic smile, “Old Church. Just an old church at Rambouillet.”

Anton applauded. “Thank you, Philip, for showing us your oeuvres. Next year, when you return with more French scenes, we’ll have another show.” He turned to Tonya. “And you and Johan will start getting the exhibition on the map.” He laughed. “I mean . . . on your walls.” He joined Nico and Hendrick talking with Nana.

“Let’s have a toast in the front room,” Nana suggested, and took Anton by the elbow.

In front of the fireplace, they clinked goblets. Nana said to Nico, “Here’s to your plans for Philip: that they may be fruitful.” She winked, and putting a hand on his arm, whispered, “Isn’t Philip *your* protégé?”

Nico laughed. “Ask Mieke.” He winked. “Dina encourages the relationship.”

Hendrick and Tonya, who had gone into the office, appeared. With a huge smile on his face, Philip stood behind Tonya when she gave Mina the wrapped circus painting.

The couple waved and left.

Nico said to Tonya, “The other circus painting is for Mieke. I’ll buy it.” He turned to Nana. “If Mieke hears that Wimpie got from his parents for Sinterklaas a circus painting, she’ll cry her eyes out.” He raised his goblet and with a nod at Philip, he said, “Mieke shall have her circus painting also at Sinterklaas.” He turned to Tonya. “Please wrap it up real fancy, with red ribbons. Next month, I’ll collect the parcel in time for the saint’s celebration.”

AMSTERDAM
GALLERY AVA RISS
MAY 1914

Philip and Johan, carrying five parcels, entered the gallery. Tonya rushed up to welcome them. Looking very pleased, she asked them to unwrap the paintings in the backroom. She went into the office and told Tony to get refreshments from a nearby café.

“Flowers?” Tonya said, watching Philip put a painting on the every-ready easel.

“You wanted more flowers!” Philip grinned. “This is Ginger jar with country flowers.”

“Ooh!” Tonya whispered. “Just gorgeous.”

“And this one, I like,” Johan said, holding a painting. “Sunflowers and pansies.”

Philip put up a canvas. “This is *Still Life*, shiny green apples. I painted my five oeuvres from December until February.”

“Everyone likes apples,”—Johan chuckled—“Dutch people like fruit paintings for their dining room.”

“My neighbor’s wife had on the windowsill a vase with *anemones*.” Philip put the painting on the easel.

“Gorgeous flowers!” someone shouted. Poldie entered.

They admired the velvety anemones.

“They are Dina’s favorites. She hadn’t enough vases.” Poldie snickered.

“Brilliant colors,” Tonya acknowledged. She pointed to the last painting.

Obligingly, Johan put it on the easel.

“My neighbor’s *Little girl*,” Philip said.

“You like little girls?” Tonya said with a glee in her hazel eyes.

Philip smiled. “I have three sisters.”

Tony entered the gallery, shouting, “I got us hot tea with rum and sugar cookies!”

As they stood drinking laced tea, Nico entered; followed by Nana who was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief.

Poldie rushed up to his brother-in-law and put an arm around his shoulder. “Our dear little Augustus,” Nico said in a hushed voice, “has departed for heaven.”

With trembling lips, Philip joined Nico and Poldie. “I’m so sorry,” he said in a muffled voice. “How’s Mieke doing?”

“She’s sobbing like an overflowing brook,” Nico replied, barely audible. “And Dina is adding her tears.” He reached for Poldie’s mug and drank.

Philip turned to Johan. “I’ll get my valise and go with Nico to help Dina with the boys.”

“Thank you, Philip, for your offer,” Nico said, returning the mug to Poldie, “but it is better that we grieve alone as a family. We’ll manage.” He turned to Tonya. “I just wanted to inform you that for the next two weeks, I’ll not be at your disposal.” He put up his hand, turned, and left. Poldie gave his mug to Tony, and with a wave of his hand, followed Nico.

Nana sniffled, saying, “Little children become little angels.”

“Let’s go to the terrace,” Tonya said, “and discuss what to do.”

They sat in a circle.

Tonya addressed Philip: "I suggest that you start painting Wimpie's portrait. Knowing Mina, she'll prefer you set up your easel here . . . not in her salon." In high spirits, she said, "And you can entertain us by telling about your winter in Paris: about the people you met that may influence your work . . . sooner or later."

"Mother," Tony said, "at our café I met Willem Dooijewaard. He just returned from Sumatra with exotic paintings."

"Very talented young man," Tonya said with a nod toward Philip. "Last year I sold one of his oeuvres."

Philip said, "As a matter of fact, I met Co Breman at the studio of Seurat, *the* celebrated pointillist. And imagine, I found out that Co was also born in Zwolle."

"How exciting," Nana breathed, twirling her handkerchief. "I met at a Theosophist meeting a painter who also uses dots."

"That must be Ferdinand Nibbrig," Tonya said. "I heard via the grapevine that he's quite ill and went to Laren to die." She turned to Philip. "When you visit the family, you may look up my dear old friend Ferdinand. We used to argue about styles of painting."

Johan stood up. "Tonya, until Philip goes to Blaricum, we'll be very busy. I'll see to everything, like schedules, with Tony's help."

Tonya escorted the duo, closing the front door firmly. Then she returned to the terrace where Tony and Nana were in deep conversation. She wanted to know what they were talking about. "Mother, Nana mentioned the Theosophist meeting that Ferdinand also attended."

Philip let Tonya know that he wasn't happy that Mina intended to escort Wimpie to his portrait sittings. So, Tonya decided to ask Hendrick to discourage her, that it would distract Philip. She decided to also be absent.

Philip said to Wimpie, "Relax, boy. Be yourself. If you do, then you have to come back for a sitting only for the final touches."

"Wimpie," Johan said, "can I also get your face on paper?"

Wimpie gave a huge smile.

Nana and Tony entered the backroom. "Can we watch?" she asked.

"If you tell me a story," Wimpie whispered, not moving his eyes.

“Have you heard,” Nana said, “that Mieke’s little brother went to heaven?”

“He died,” Wimpie breathed.

“Little children,” Nana said, “go to heaven and become little angels.”

The boy’s eyes were wide open when he said, “Please, tell me about little angels.”

“I met a man who told me,” Nana said, “that baby angels have nannies taking care of them in heaven. They teach them how to walk and talk.”

Pointing his brush at Nana, Phlip said, “I’d like meeting that man. When El Greco was in Toledo, he painted scenes with famous people going up in clouds toward heaven.” He looked at Wimpie. “Nana will continue her story after we have finished for today.” He waved his brush toward the front room.

Nana took Tony by the elbow. “We’ll be back!” Laughing, they left.

When Nana and Tony returned, Johan had just left with Wimpie. They went looking for Phlip; he was on the terrace.

“Tell me about that meeting where you also met Ferdinand Nibbrig,” Phlip said, holding a notepad and pencil. “Tonya wants me to get in touch with Ferdinand next month when I’m in Blaricum. I want to be prepared when I ask pertinent questions.”

Nana sat across from Phlip, gesturing to Tony to sit next to him. “You should know, Phlip,” she said, “my deceased father was a Jew. I was raised in a Jewish community here in the Jordaan. My mother and Tonya are sisters. My mother is very progressive, and she often attended Jewish meetings where they discussed the Kabbalah, a kind of esoteric language based on the Jewish alphabet.

“Well, one day I met at a café a young man from Den Haag. He was reading an interesting journal called Theosophist, and we got talking. The subject was so interesting that when he asked if I would like to join him to a meeting, I accepted.” She rose. “I’ll get something to drink.”

“Stay, Nana, I’ll get us Mosel,” Tony said. He returned with a tray with goblets. And as they were sipping, he said, “Nana, I’d like to get in touch with him. Do you have his name?”

“Friso de Jongh.” Nana laughed.

Phlip waved his pencil to get her attention. “What does Theosophy mean?”

“Theosophy means divine wisdom.” Nana giggled. “Theosophists preach that there is no religion higher than truth. They embrace the brotherhood of all men.” She added with relish, “And women. They acknowledge that there are special people who can transmit messages from beyond the grave. I liked the idea that they believe in reincarnation.”

Philip looked up from his notepad. "Do you know when this society was founded, and where, and by whom?"

"The Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in 1875 by a mystery woman called Helena Blavatsky. She was, I believe, Russian, and by an American, Colonel Henry Olcott. Thomas Edison was an early convert. And the Irish poet Yeats was an ardent admirer of Helena." Giggling, Nana added, "She wrote a manifesto called The Secret Doctrine."

"Now, about your baby angels," Philip said, "do Theosophists preach that angel nannies take care of them in heaven?"

Nana's eyes sparkled when she gushed, "That's what other spiritualists preach. Friso told me that not only Theosophists believe in an afterlife, where people continue to live as on earth, but there's a small community in Den Haag who gave him a book about heaven and hell written by a Swedish mystic. And that book tells you what to expect when you enter heaven or hell." She drank; and held out her goblet for a topper.

"Very interesting." Philip closed his notepad. "Tony, when you get in contact with Friso, ask him if we can buy a copy of that book on heaven and hell."

"With pleasure," Tony replied. He looked at Nana. "We have an appointment with Wimpie. He also wants to know about baby angels."

Nana got to her feet. Full of beans, she took her cousin by the hand, and as they sprinted to the front room, she shouted, "Philip, we wish you success with the interview with Ferdinand!"

LAREN

JUNE

Philip and Johan arrived in Laren where they lodged at Het Bonte Paard. Johan explained that for this important interview they had to concentrate; and the Uhrbach family situation wasn't conducive to peace and quiet.

They entered gallery "Larensche Kunsthandel". The owner, Jan Hamdorff, welcomed Johan with a hearty slap on the shoulder. When he heard that Philip wanted to interview Ferdinand Nibbrig about his membership in the Theosophical Society, he informed them that the ailing artist was convalescing at the villa of William Singer, the well-known painter, who wasn't expected to be in Laren until sometime in July. He offered to walk over to De Wilde Zwanen and ask Ferdinand. They should return after lunch to find out if the artist was willing to talk.

Jan greeted them with a big smile. “Ferdinand accepts. I’m curious learning about this religion and join you.”

The three walked to the villa. Ferdinand sat in a chaise-longue on the terrace. Jan introduced them. The housekeeper offered beer.

“Fire away!” the old artist said, smiling from ear to ear.

“First, Tonya Riss asked me to give you her most sincere greetings,” Philip started. “She told me that you two had wonderful debates on painting styles. She was impressed that you adopted Seurat’s pointillism.”

“Variety is the spice of life.” Ferdinand nodded toward Jan, saying, “This gallery owner likes experiments and has exhibited my oeuvres.”

Johan clapped.

Philip said, “Tonya’s niece, Nana, told me that Theosophy embraces, or rather includes, all religions. That Theosophy is to become ‘One Great World Religion’. However, she couldn’t tell me much about how and why this movement became so popular.”

“I understand,” Ferdinand said, “from my talks with Johan van Manen, who was my tutor and later became very much involved with the society in India, that it was a reaction against Darwin’s theory of evolution.” He slowly sipped beer; Philip scribbled on his notepad.

“It all began in Vermont, America, where Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott attended what in those days was called a ‘*spook shop*’.” Ferdinand chuckled. “Moving chairs; things flying through the room; voices and messages from the dead, you name it. These spiritualist evenings were popular; very entertaining.” He sighed. “So, Helena and Henry set up shop in his apartment in New York City, preaching about ‘divine wisdom’. She wrote a book that became a hit; the title is *Isis Unveiled*.” Ferdinand barely could keep from smiling. “She also wrote *The Key to Theosophy*; about reincarnation that she considered an evolutionary process. But because the media became intrusive, they decided to move to Bombay, India. And two years later, they went to Madras. That’s where they spent most of their time.”

Ferdinand put his hands on his chest, closed his eyes, then continued:

“Helena became very sick and left by steamer for London; where she wrote another book, *The Secret Doctrine*, which was welcomed with fanfare.” He opened his eyes. “She died during the eighteen-ninety-one influenza epidemic.”

“I understand”—Philip looked at his notes—“that in those days Henry Olcott joined Helena. He continued living in India?”

“Yes.” The artist nodded. “He died in Madras some years ago. Well . . . there was a very influential woman named Annie Besant. She took over Helena’s work with the assistance of

Charles Leadbeater, who had been a London pupil of Helena. The society ousted him because he advocated that, to relieve anxiety, the boys should masturbate.”

Jan and Johan split their sides.

“Please continue.” Philip’s pencil shook.

“Masturbation was considered immoral. However, being an excellent speaker, Charles gathered crowds. He discovered a young, dreamy Messiah . . . known as Krishnamurti.”

“I have heard his name mentioned here by some young Dutch artists,” Jan said.

Ferdinand put his hands over his eyes. “Philip, write down the basics of this religious society. First: brotherhood of all men. Second: study other religions for wisdom, also general philosophy, and modern science. They are all inclusive. Third: be eager to investigate unexplained phenomena, cosmic nature, as well as human nature. In one word,”—he removed his hands—“we are curious. We are open to travel to unexplained . . . new territories.”

Jan got to his feet, and with a nod at Philip and Johan, he said, “Thank you, Ferdinand, for enlightening our vision.”

Ferdinand closed his eyes, and waved . . .

AMSTERDAM

JUNE 26th

Albert Heyn went to Herengracht 56BB. Moving his lips, visibly agitated, he rang the doorbell. Anton answered and let his superior inside.

“Anton,” Albert said as they entered the drawing room, “Bertha died this Sunday!” He sat in the red chair. “I want you to go to Vienna and attend her funeral. And write a follow-up on the article about her you wrote last year.”

Anton offered Albert a cognac. In a hushed voice, Albert said, “Thanks, Anton.”

The two sipped. Anton watched his superior; Albert’s face was flushed.

Then Albert said, “And while you are in Vienna, write an article on the famous Lipizzaner horses.” He took a deep breath. “And then go to Trieste. And write about Miramar, that fairy-tale castle, where, in April, the German Emperor was guest of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. I heard the castle is cursed. Hopefully, it has a ghost. Create a good story, Anton.” He stood up and put the cognac sniffer on the side table.

“Tomorrow I’ll be on my way to Vienna,” Anton said as he escorted his superior to the front door.

HET LAATSTE NIEUWS

AMSTERDAM

ASSASSINATION !

SARAJEVO, SERBIA

JULY 25, 1914

Yesterday, Friday, July 24, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie **SHOT DEAD** in Sarajevo, Serbia! The royal couple, riding in an open carriage, was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip; by Anton Jonkheer from Trieste, Gulf of Venice. Page 2.

HET LAATSTE NIEUWS

Special evening edition

WAR !

Berlin, Germany

TUESDAY, JULY 28th

WAR DECLARED! Emperor Wilhelm has given Austria-Hungary unconditional support by declaring war on Serbia! Our Anton Jonkheer reports from Berlin about the details. Page 2.

LAREN

AUGUST

Philip was having coffee at Het Bonte Paard when he read in *Het Laatste Nieuws* that Germany had declared war on France. He jumped up and in haste walked to Villa Uhrbach.

Red-faced, agitated, Philip told Nico and Dina that if he returned to France, he would be recruited in the French army; and his father would worry that he may die. Dina put an arm around him and, looking at Nico, said that he could stay with the family. He was born in Zwolle! He was Dutch! She asked Nico to get in touch with her brother. Poldie had contacts with the Amsterdam gendarme; their father was a police constable!

Poldie and Johan showed up waving newspapers, shouting that their country had opted to be neutral. They were thrilled that Anton would be covering the war for his newspaper. Nico said he would write to Cees; making sure the family was not forgotten.

SEPTEMBER

Everyone in Laren was talking about the important **Treaty of London**: The British Empire and its colonies, the Russian Empire, as well as Italy, Japan and the United States of America had joined forces with France **AGAINST** Germany and its colonies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire.

OCTOBER

Nico received a letter from his employers; letting him know that due to the war next door the company was closing its doors. They no longer would issue insurances. He stared at the envelope. Dina and Mieke entered the parlor. The nine-year-old girl rushed to her father, threw her arms around him, and whispered in his ear, “Faty . . . Moeke will have a baby next year.”

Nico put the letter inside the envelope, gave it to her, and said in a calm voice, “Give this letter to your mother. Moeke, please go outside and read.” Dina’s eyes widened and she opened her mouth to say something, but Nico put a finger to his lips.

Dina went to the backyard and sat on a bench. Her hands shook when she took the letter. While reading, her eyes filled with tears and her lips trembled. Nico approached. He sat opposite her. “We’ll make do, Moeke. I have some savings. Our lease ends this year. I’ll ask Poldie to look for an affordable apartment in Amsterdam.”

Hand in hand, Mieke and Philip strolled up; they sat next to Nico.

Dina pressed the letter against her bosom. “Exciting news, Mieke.” She smiled at Nico. “We are moving to Amsterdam!”

“Yes.” Nico put his arm around the girl. “My employers want me in the office every day.”

“Uncle Poldie is getting us an apartment near Johan!” Dina exclaimed.

“Can I play with Wimpie?” Mieke got up and sat next to her mother.

“You and Wimpie will make mischief,” Philip said, “and his parents will blame us.” He turned to Nico. “I’m sure Johan will put me up until Poldie gets me lodgings.”

“No, Philip,” Dina said, “we need you. I can’t manage the boys by myself.”

“That’s a done deal,” Nico said as he put his hand on Philip’s shoulder.

Poldie, Johan, Philip, Nico, and Dina were in the parlor of Villa Uhrbach.

“I have found a furnished apartment belonging to a family stationed in Java,” Poldie said; on his lap were a folder and a notepad. “They decided to stay until the war is over as sea travel is treacherous in these circumstances.” He took a letter from the folder. “They asked me to lease the

apartment because they believe this will secure their property from being occupied by refugees.” He tapped his pencil on the letter. “They are most eager that I find a reliable, Dutch family.” Poldie smiled. “Dina, Nico, this bijou apartment is in the Jordaan, near the gallery.”

Philip broke into a smile and put up his thumb at Johan.

“Thank heaven,” Dina uttered and put her hands in front of her face; her shoulders shook.

“Poldie, I knew we could count on you!” Nico crossed his arms. “What’s the yearly rent?”

Poldie smiled. “I’ll tell them that my sister, her husband and three children would like to move in, and if they can stay rent free.”

Dina jumped up and put her arms around her brother, kissing him, saying between tears, “Poldie, love, you have rescued us.”

Johan appeared with a bottle of champagne and popped the cork. “We must celebrate this move to Amsterdam.”

“Here’s to AMSTERDAM!” Johan and Philip cheered.

Poldie, Nico and Dina shouted, “AMSTERDAM!”

“Anton wrote,” Poldie said. “He asked for my help. Arnhem is too close to the German border. He thinks Father should move to Den Haag. He wants me to rent for him a villa near his brothers.” He took a sip. “Anton wants me to lease Villa Amourette, furnished, to a rich Belgian refugee.” All smiles, he said, “It so happens that a real estate colleague in Brussels contacted me. A certain Belgian aristocrat, a family of two adults and three children, is looking for a villa in the countryside.”

Poldie took his folder and removed a sheet of paper. “This is the letter from Brussels stating that the aristocrat is delighted renting Villa Amourette; especially since Boerenplezier is included in the lease. His children like animals; and milk, eggs and produce are available year-round. The family’s cook will join them. He is also pleased that Hans and the carriage are at his disposal.” He looked up. “Hans can’t do it alone, so I shall involve Klaas and Guusje. The house must be presentable. The men will do the logistics. Hans will take Father, Mother and Nel in the Landau to Den Haag. Guusje will cook for the men until the Belgians arrive. She’ll make sure the pantry has enough food for a week and welcome them with in each room vases with Dutch flowers.”

“And when will this exchange take place?” Nico wanted to know.

“April of next year,” Poldie replied, waving the letter.

Chapter Ten

AMSTERDAM

APRIL 1915

Tonya gave a party at the gallery for family and friends to celebrate the birth of Philippa Nanette, born on March 31st. Philip and Nana had taken turns looking after the unruly Uhrbach boys, and in gratitude the parents decided to honor them by naming their newborn PHINA—short for Philippa Nanette. Johan popped the corks. Poldie toasted to niece “Phientje”.

Anton had borrowed a camera from the newspaper’s photographer; he explained that every newspaper had to print photographs of important events for—the sake of history. He took a picture of the infant held by proud sister Mieke with Wimpie at her side. Philip and Nana, holding Phina, were immortalized; and Nico and Dina with their youngest daughter, flanked by Hendrick and Mina. Everyone cheering, Anton took a photo of Johan, Poldie, Tonya and Tony holding goblets, standing behind Cees in a chair. Nico took a photo of Anton and Father.

Cees told Philip that he met at a café in Den Haag the painter Isaac Israels, who told him that Jan Hamdorff’s gallery in Laren was well-known with young painters abroad. Anton told Tony, who had decided to become an art critique, to read extensively and investigate the background of his chosen subject. And he told Philip to familiarize himself with inspirational literature and current composers that were on everyone’s tongue. Tonya joined them. They decided that Philip was to paint Cees’ portrait the end of the month when Klaas and Guusje had returned. The couple would look after Cees; Anton had to return to Berlin.

Philip entered Gallery Ava Riss. Tonya was in the backroom looking at a painting on the easel. He joined her. “Tonya, I need for my portrait a large canvas. I hope you can spare me one?”

Laughing, Tonya went to the front. She opened the door to the office. “It so happens that Tony found a large one in our attic. He thinks it’s perfect for Cees’ portrait, three-and-a-half feet wide and four-and-a-half feet long; ideal for our formidable sponsor in Anton’s red chair.” She chortled. “*Kokkie*’s wish fulfilled. Have a look!”

When Philip saw the canvas leaning against the wall, he took her in his arms. “I thank you and Tony for making it possible that this portrait will be the jewel of my exhibition.”

“Tony promised,” Tonya said with a nod, “that he’ll laude this portrait so art collectors will show up.”

Phlip lifted the canvas, but Tonya said, “Leave it here. Klaas will deliver it and the easel to Herengracht. Tomorrow, Cees arrives, and Anton will depart for Berlin. We’ll go together to welcome Cees and say goodbye to Anton.”

GALLERY AVA RISS

JUNE

With Phlip at his side, Cees eyed his portrait on the easel. “Your idea of painting the background salmon was a stroke of genius,” he noted with a nod. “The red chair, I in black, and my silvery-streaked beard are so vibrant that we come alive!”

“I remembered the salmon-colored curtains in your villa,” Phlip said. “And your idea of holding your Bible, focusing your eyes on it, gives this painting serenity.”

A commotion in the hallway interrupted their conversation.

“Father,”—Mieke entered, her mother on her heels—“Phlip said I could come to see your portrait!”

“You must look at it from here.” Phlip waved.

Mieke giggled. “The curtains, Father,” she shouted excitedly, “the same color!”

“Clever girl.” Cees put an arm around her.

Wagging a finger, Mieke turned to Phlip. “But you forgot Queenie!”

Cees and Phlip looked at each other. A slow grin spread over Phlip’s face. He left; and returned with a palette and a brush. In a flash, he painted on the top left of the canvas a tiny yellow bird. “Voila!” He waved the brush. “*Here* is your Queenie.”

Mieke blew him a kiss. Cees clapped. “Great idea,” he said. “What would we do without our talking bird?” He smiled. “Queenie is with Nel. Upon my return, I will tell Queenie that thanks to Mieke, she has been immortalized with me.” He turned to Dina. “Please invite everyone at the gallery for a celebration preview of my portrait.”