

# Foreboding Feeling

by Brook Tayla, 2023

Johannes went to market every Friday to sell our potatoes. I anticipated his return so I could see what he had bartered for with the other farmers, as that determined our meals for the week, but, even more, I awaited news about the War.

'Timothy said his cousin in Germany knows Hitler himself and they are planning to attack us. He is sure we're next on the list.' 'Werner said he has started hiding food and his wife Maria has been preserving everything, even picking fruit from the trees before it's ripe. The other day she ripped out all the carrots and they were only half grown.' 'Diederik just laughs - 'What would they want from us?' he says, 'we don't have much to offer around here, we're all just humble farmers.' 'Ulrich from the piggery said the Germans are trying to do a deal to buy his pigs.' 'Diederik laughed at that too.'

'Oh Johannes, what do we believe?' I would say. 'I can feel it in the air, something's changed. We've had nothing but bad luck for years. First we lost Gerrit and now another War!' 'Come Tilda,' he would say, holding me tight. 'There are good luck days and bad luck days, we will handle it together. We don't know what to believe, the truth is nobody knows. The only truth we know so far is that this is a War against Jews and we're not Jewish, so don't get too worried yet.'

Some weeks later Johannes arrived home frazzled and pale. 'Thomas,' he yelled, can you come and unload for me today please.' 'Yes Papa,' yelled Thomas as he pulled on his boots. 'What is it Johannes?' I asked. 'The Eisenhower's are going to try and escape to Switzerland. Jacob confided in me today that he's 'acquiring" some fake passports but he needs a couple of horses. I feel uneasy Tilda, but he's my best friend and I think it's possibly the best plan for his family. They're planning on leaving after the Shabbat tomorrow. Look, he has given me all the family jewellery for safe keeping in exchange for the two horses, we must keep it all safe until they return.'

My heart sank for them but the responsibility of keeping their treasures and this secret landed hard inside me.

Later that evening, as I sat on the verandah watching the sunset, I couldn't help think that these wide, flat, open plains seemed a blessing. We could spot troops a mile away. Still I had a foreboding feeling that Jacob, Ruth and Noah could be open targets as escapees in this landscape.

I spent the next day preparing a care package: a dozen towelling cloths for Ruth, two pairs of knitted socks for Thomas, a warm vest for Noah and little bits and pieces from the pantry, including ten kilos of our best potatoes.

Ruth had given birth to Noah exactly one week after I had Gerrit. In the beginning it was lovely and we spent many afternoons together laughing at the antics of our babies as they grew. It

stopped after we lost Gerrit. Everything stopped for me after we lost Gerrit. I couldn't bear to see Noah, he was too much of a reminder.

Sunday arrived quickly. The horses were saddled and ready, with the care package in one of the saddle bags. Jacob, Ruth and Noah arrived early. We huddled in the stable. Ruth and I couldn't speak, but we held each other and cried. 'God be with you all Ruth,' I finally muttered. She sobbed, 'Tilda we cannot take Noah, the paperwork didn't come through for him. Please, Tilda, you must look after our boy. He'll be fine with you.' 'Of course, of course,' I said, without hesitation.

'You be a good boy Noah, Mama and Papa will be back, very, very soon. Be a big boy and remember we love you - take care of your konijn.' As they galloped away Noah cried and screamed, 'Mama, Papa,' over and over again. He threw his little furry, brown konijn on the ground. Johannes insisted that we call him Gerrit. 'Tilda, we have all the paperwork for Gerrit, I'll burn his Death Certificate.' We had to talk to Thomas, explaining the war and our secret. At three, Noah accepted the name change well and it was only weeks before it was normal to everyone - even to me!

Our bad luck day came months later. The soldiers arrived early. The Bang! Bang! Bang! on the door was so loud that we all jumped straight out of bed. When Johannes opened the door, six soldiers forced their way in with guns pointing straight at us. We had to state our names. 'My name is Gerrit Van der Veen,' Noah stated loudly. I held my breath. They weren't really interested. 'What do you grow on this farm?' one shouted. 'Potatoes,' said Johannes. 'Take your brother back to bed and don't come out or I'll shoot your parents,' he yelled at Thomas.'

They made Johannes fill sacks of potatoes, but they pushed me into the stable. After they left Johannes ran me a bath and said we were never to talk about it again. That was the War for us - the days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months and months turned to years. We struggled of course, like everyone, but looking back, our boys had a good upbringing. The photo on my mantel shows them on the stilts Johannes whittled out of wood. It was the first day they tried walking on them. Gerrit had fallen onto the gravel, grazing his lip. Thomas had picked him up to console him and they both ended up covered in blood.

After the war we waited for Jacob and Ruth but they never returned. We didn't hear anything about them, but nor did we enquire. The war had gifted us a son, had gifted Thomas a brother and Noah a family. He was our good luck day.