

STRING THEORY

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PROLOGUE

I'm standing at the door of my childhood home, about to insert the key into the lock, when I hear a car pulling into the driveway. Too fast; the gravel splatters.

A smile crosses my lips and, in my mind, I hear my father grumbling.

When the door opens, I see my little brother getting out.

My 'little' brother (he's well over 6 feet tall) looks at me and grins.

We nod to each other: we're here for the same reason.

I know what he's thinking. I'm thinking the same thing: they've discovered another secret.

'They' are our parents. Very ordinary people, average citizens. The only difference being where they live. My mother was my great-uncle's sole heir so, my parents inherited a house. A huge, detached, country house. And, that house, a completely unexpected surprise, is a story in itself.

It wasn't just grand, it was wonderful, complete with all the trimmings. Furniture, books: you name it. Paid off too... a very important detail.

The house had been maintained by a couple who managed it for my mother's uncle and everything from the time my great-uncle lived there was still there. Including an amazing attic with all sorts of things. We've been living here for over twelve years now.

We discovered, once we'd moved in, that it also has its secrets.

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A house like this *should* have them. It's not haunted. It doesn't have any resident ghosts. But, what it does have, is a rich history.

It's very old and situated on the edge of a kind of forest. There's a short driveway: it's not much to look at. It's not the sort of great, long stretch of driveway that lets you know you're going to arrive at a grand house. There are three floors and a kind of underground storage area running underneath the whole house. There's also a huge garden surrounding the house. We even have a section of the forest at our disposal.

I give my brother, Tim, a hug and together we go inside in search of our parents.

We find them in the garden. When we go outside through the garden doors, we both freeze. Our beautiful garden is now a disaster area.

Okay, let's back up a bit: we already knew that the garden was a mess. Last week, this part of the country was hit by a real summer storm. Dad told us about the damage it had caused, showed us photos. The large, majestic, chestnut tree, which had stood so beautifully in the middle of the garden, had been blown over. All that remained was a trunk about a meter high. The rest - roughly 20 meters - was lying in our garden. Unfortunately, the tree blew in just the wrong direction: right onto our garden shed, which had seen better days.

That garden shed, where I had spent many beautiful summer days, had to be demolished. That much Tim and I already knew.

But, what we see now, has nothing to do with the fallen tree. There's a lot more going on here. The garden shed is truly a thing of the past and the remains are piled up against the fence. The place where the garden shed used to stand is now the center of the action.

I look at my father questioningly, but he just grins mischievously. He asks us to sit down, takes out the thermos of coffee, and

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pours us both a mug without asking.

Mom removes the fly screen from the plate of cookies and, without asking, places a cookie in front of us. It doesn't matter whether we want it or not. It's just their way of doing things. Tim and I are used to it and we know how to respond; just accept that it's going to happen. Even though we're both adults, they can't let go of 'taking care of us' yet. It is kind of cute in its own way, though. When I look at them questioningly again, the answer we've both been waiting for comes.

"We found something..." they say simultaneously, looking at what used to be the remains of our garden and now appears to be a veritable crater.

Okay... whatever. We'll hear the details soon enough.

CHAPTER 1
SURPRISES

I'm Tess, Tess Ester. I live in the east of the country, fairly close to the German border. And, right now, it's hot where I live.

These days - or rather, for weeks now - the whole of Europe seems to be groaning under a heatwave. You won't ever hear me complaining about warm weather but, if I'm honest, even for me, a *little* less heat wouldn't hurt. My poor house plants can barely tolerate it. That's one of the downsides of the apartment I live in. I live at the very top of the building, with a sloping roof above my head. Nine times out of ten, it's not a problem at all. Except when the sparrows decide to roost on the roof above me. Then it's just a little too much. Fortunately, I have an air conditioner, but even that is struggling with this heat.

Officially, there are thirty-four apartments in the building. Two of the apartments have been merged though so, actually, there are now thirty-three and I know everyone who lives here. At almost twenty-five, I'm the youngest in the entire complex. The apartment where I live is a rare opportunity for someone my age, the opportunity of a lifetime. My parents bought it for me. With the salary I earn, and with the severe housing shortage in the current market, I'd hardly be able to even afford a room. Of course, I pay my parents what we call 'rent'. A fixed amount per month, agreed upon, because I don't want to live off them. That would be beneath my dignity, and it's not necessary. That's not how I was raised.

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If I want something, I have to work for it.

Of course, I could have continued to live at home. But, let's be honest. When you have the opportunity to move out, live in the city where you work, *and* your parents are willing to pay a large part of the purchase price of your new place, it would be foolish not to grab the chance, right? So, now here I am, in my own place, about thirty kilometers from my parents' house.

Tim is studying and still lives at home. He's currently doing an internship and staying with another student until it's over. He's often home on the weekends, but he hasn't been around the last few weeks.

I only found that out while I was driving from my place to our parents's. Tim called me to catch up. I had to smile when my phone rang. I could see my dad's face, hear his lecture. *Yes, Dad*, I thought to myself. *Of course, we're using hands-free.*

Tim and I have been asked to come home this afternoon, preferably around four o'clock, according to the accompanying note, because there's 'something important' we need to know that they *cannot* tell us over the phone.

"What do you think?" he asked me.

We ruled out the possibility that it was something serious health-related-wise. Our parents are well aware of our feelings about that. If that were the case, we want to know what's going on, no matter what.

Been there, done that, burned the T-shirt.

So, it's something completely different. Most likely, (and we've both already come to the same conclusion), they've discovered something 'strange' in our house. Our 'mystery house', as Mom jokingly calls it.

"Maybe they have plans for a new garden shed? Or, maybe they've finally decided whether or not to cover the pool."

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My suggestions don't go beyond this.

"*Sweet*," Tim responds to that last comment. "Then we can swim in the winter too."

"You spoiled brat," I scold him with a laugh. "If you really wanted to swim in the winter, you'd go to the pool at the campsite. You can't be bothered to do that though because, in your own words, 'it's too much trouble to go there' and 'it's too expensive'. You can't just expect Mom and Dad to spend money on that. Have you *any* idea how much it would cost to heat that pool all year round?"

The swimming pool was a gift from our parents to us. When I think about it, it sounds really spoiled and 'over the top' but, when you know the story behind it, it's not really that strange. Well, maybe a little. I admit. Tim and I are in a very privileged position and that's thanks to our great-grandparents. They started a business that did better than expected. My great-grandfather had the house built. The business, a clothing store, is one hundred percent a family business. My grandmother and my great-uncles continued running it after my great-grandparents passed away. The three of them also inherited the house, which is now in my parents' name. My mother is the one who actually inherited it but, because they are married under the community property regime, the house belongs to both of them. In addition to the house, they also received a large sum of money. Sadly, the actual store no longer exists. Nowadays, when you can buy almost anything online, it's no longer profitable to maintain a large building with staff. The building was sold and the employees moved on to other jobs.

The house we live in came with all the trimmings and, what's more, everything was taken care of. My parents never had to worry about paying rent or any other issues with the house. My great-uncle arranged everything before he passed away. Mom was his only surviving relative and my parents had always been good to him. Especially when he fell ill and ended up in a nursing home.

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They were the ones who visited him every week and occasionally sent him a card or brought him flowers. They never imagined they would be so richly rewarded.

My great-grandparents had three children: Willem, Laurens, and Louise. That's my grandmother.

When my grandmother turned ten, the country was officially at war. The years before had already been turbulent, but life had continued fairly normally. Of course, everyone was aware of the horrors that were happening around them, including *Kristallnacht* and the appalling persecution of the Jewish population.

Willem and Laurens, who were only a few years older than my grandmother, lived at home for the first few years and helped out in the shop but, it soon became too dangerous and they had to go into hiding, just like my great-grandfather. They were both too young for the army but they could be arrested and forced to work as laborers.

This was called the *Arbeitsersatz*, the labor deployment, in which men between the ages of seventeen and forty were required to work for the German occupiers. But, over time, age restrictions were relaxed and the younger brothers and the slightly older father could also be ordered to report for duty.

It didn't come to that. As soon as they knew they could be called up, they went into hiding. There had been stories, rumors of this happening in 1942, before the official announcement in 1943, so they left and my great-grandmother was left alone with my grandmother. In the winter of 1944, their house was requisitioned by the German occupiers and my great-grandmother and grandmother had to leave.

A year later, my great-grandmother was the first to return and found the house in reasonable condition. A few days later, the boys and their father also returned and, after a short period of recovery, they considered how the shop could continue to operate.

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Despite the extreme scarcity of materials, every effort was made to turn what was still available into usable clothing. This worked wonderfully and, as time passed, the business grew, and with it, their capital.

Grandma Louise hardly ever returned to the house after those war years. She, occasionally, helped out on weekends when she came home, or when she had a week's vacation, when her father still needed her help. She had found work in The Hague, the place where she had lived during the war. There she had worked for a 'well-to-do' family in a house close to the palace. "To her complete satisfaction," my mother told me. She 'served' there for years.

My parents told us that the family in The Hague owned a beautiful building. They even visited it once. It was a house with a huge front door and, when you entered the hall, you had to climb a marble staircase to get to the living area. I love that. I'd love to see the house, but the people who lived there at the time are long gone.

Like so many others, my great-grandparents were mentally 'damaged' by the war years. My great-grandfather was also affected by, what we now call, Alzheimer's disease. At the time, you were considered 'forgetful', 'lost', or 'senile'. My great-grandmother could no longer care for him; partly because the house was so large and he kept wandering off. So, he was admitted to a clinic, where he died within a month. This had such an impact on my great-grandmother that she became ill and needed care herself. My two uncles took care of the business together, but their mother needed someone to be there for her and take care of her, and the house also needed a woman's touch to keep it neat and tidy. There was a domestic helper, but that was all.

My grandmother, already well into her thirties at the time, seemed to be on her way to becoming an 'old maid', as they called it back then.

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That's when she met the love of her life, my grandfather, Carl Hosting.

When the situation in Haaksbergen threatened to become truly dire, my grandmother and Carl decided to return to my grandmother's childhood home. There, their long-standing relationship was made official with a wedding and my grandmother and grandfather moved into the house with my great-grandmother and both uncles.

Not long after, my great-grandmother passed away and my grandmother found out she was pregnant. My mother was born, and that was when Willem and Laurens decided to move somewhere else. They found a bungalow near the big house and lived there with a housekeeper who cooked for them, maintained the house and did the laundry. I never met that lady but, judging by my grandmother and mother, she was a very sweet woman. She would have loved to have a relationship with one of the brothers, but that was not possible at the time. My grandmother had laughed and remarked that neither of them had 'a woman's touch'. They were both so independent that they didn't want or need a 'relationship'.

Grandma Louise and Grandpa Carl have been dead for years. They spent the last years of their lives in Spain. They had a villa in Alicante, where they were very happy. They left the Netherlands when my mother went to work as an au pair in England for a year. The house was 'empty', at least, that's how Grandpa and Grandma felt.

Grandma Louise was diagnosed with rheumatism. The doctors back then didn't know much about it. The simple fact was that, when it was summer, my grandmother had far fewer complaints. In winter and autumn, she was in pain. She had been diagnosed soon after my mother was born and continued to live in the Netherlands until my mother found a job as an au pair. So, the moment she boarded the boat, Grandma and Grandpa officially emigrated.

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Someone had to stay in the big house and Uncle Willem decided it should be him. Uncle Laurens stayed behind with the housekeeper. A new housekeeper was found for Uncle Willem, and she stayed with him until his death.

It was on that boat trip to England that my mother met my father. He was traveling to Canterbury, something he did every month for the company he worked for. When the initial year was over, my mother returned to The Netherlands and found a new job as an au pair, working for a family who lived near her home. She didn't want to live with her uncle and his housekeeper and moved in with the family she worked for.

Mom had, of course, been given every opportunity to work for the company, but she didn't want to. She wanted for nothing and was well cared for by her parents. But, our tough mother wanted to show that she could stand on her own two feet without depending on her parents' gifts and went her own way. Knowing that there was always someone who could support her if necessary was enough for her.

Immediately after marrying my mother, my father was asked by my great-uncles to join the company and he accepted.

This enabled him to get a house near the company in our hometown. They moved and Tim and I were born and grew up there. When I was twelve, we moved to our current home. At that point, my father had already been working in the management of the company for a number of years.

Our grandfather had an accident in Spain. On his way from their villa to the center where he liked to chat and play billiards, he swerved off the road with his moped because of loose stones. At that moment, a bus was passing by and hit him.

After being in a coma for a few days, Grandpa passed away. That was almost 20 years ago. Grandma died three months later. She was done with life which, for her at that point, consisted mainly of

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sadness and pain. She didn't want to go back to the Netherlands, but she couldn't find her place in the villa where they had lived together all those years.

Everything concerning Grandma's inheritance was settled. Her share of the company's capital was divided between her two brothers and my parents. The house remained with my two great-uncles.

The same thing happened when Uncle Laurens died. The house now belonged to Uncle Willem, as specified in my great-grandparents' will. Uncle Willem inherited part of Uncle Laurens' capital. My parents also received a share, and his housekeeper was generously rewarded and also received the bungalow in which they lived.

Uncle Willem stayed behind. He lived a secluded life with his housekeeper, Hanna, who was also his companion. Everything had to be easy for them. They didn't like any 'fuss' around the house, and that included all the 'problems' my parents will never have again when it comes to housing. At the time, Uncle Willem and Hanna hired tradesmen for all kinds of maintenance, who would still come to our house every so often to check things, paint, clean, or whatever else needed doing. My parents did, eventually, put a stop to that, though. They took on a lot of the jobs themselves, because they enjoy being 'hands on' and are quite capable of doing things themselves.

Uncle Willem and Hanna both lived to a ripe old age. Unfortunately, they couldn't continue living in the house and both had to move into a nursing home. The house was managed by a couple who took very good care of it. My parents knew this and visited from time to time to find out how things were going and whether there was any news they could pass on to Uncle Willem.

Tim and I have been summoned to come home as soon as possible because they have something to tell us. And no, we don't

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need to worry. Something we tend to do anyway when they come with news like this. Our parents are getting older and, after our father's heart attack a few years ago, any message that comes out of the blue from our parents is accompanied by a moment of shock.

They come to meet us and escort us to the chairs that have been set out for us. We don't even get a chance to see what's going on in the garden, because we are, as it were, pushed into our chairs. We're offered coffee and a cookie without being asked. Refusing is not an option with our parents and we have to finish everything before we can move on to what we came for: the revelation of 'The Secret' they have discovered. But it doesn't get that far. They are far too excited to wait.

"We think we've found a tunnel," my mother blurts out after I've swallowed my first sip of coffee.

I almost choke on my coffee at the look of bewilderment on my father's face. I see him glance irritably at my mother and know that he was about to say the same thing. Mom grins contentedly.

"We weren't going to say anything yet," he says indignantly, but she gives him a friendly nudge and he bursts out laughing.

"You beat me to it," he laughs and Mom nods.

"I know you," she replies. She looks at us questioningly. "What do you think?"

I stand up to take a closer look and point to the remains of what used to be the garden shed.

"Underneath?" I ask.

They both nod.

"Where does it lead?" I want to know.

"We have no idea. But we suspect that, if it is indeed a tunnel, it leads to the house," my mother says.

"So you don't actually know what it is?" I ask, somewhat disappointed.

They both shake their heads, almost shyly.

"We wanted to wait for you before continuing with the

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investigation,” Dad explains.

Tim now gets up and walks a little way toward the sand pile on the grass and then looks around. He shrugs his shoulders.

“I agree with you. Going anywhere else doesn’t make sense. And you haven’t looked yet?”

Again, they shake their heads.

“That’s what they just said! Listen, boy!” I say sternly. I know Tim, and I know he can hear us talking but, when he’s absorbed in something, nothing else gets through to him.

He looks from the mess in the garden to our house and I see him counting.

“That must have been quite a job,” he says. “I’m already at about 20 meters, if not more. That’s hardly possible, is it? How did they manage that? And *who*, that’s the question,” he comments.

I’ve also walked over to the remains of the garden shed and can see what my parents have found: planks that were covered by a stone floor. Now that it’s been demolished to lay a new, presumably, knowing my parents, larger foundation, it has finally become visible.

The striking thing is that you can clearly see where the old floor used to be. There is a sort of ‘foundation’ underneath. The planks are lying in the middle of that foundation and I can’t stop myself from trying to lift one up.

Immediately, someone yells at me to stop and both my parents and Tim rush over to me.

Dad walks to a small table and comes back with a crowbar.

“Try this,” he says.

I want to take the tool, but then I remember that the honor belongs to my parents. After all, Uncle Willem left it to them. They are officially the owners of the house.

“The honor is yours. The house is yours, so is the tunnel. If it is a tunnel, that is, because I’m not so sure. This can’t be...” I say and I immediately see both their eyes light up with excitement.

Mom grabs the crowbar, places it under the middle board and

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lifts it up without any effort.

Dad, now wearing work gloves, takes the board away and throws it with the rest of the junk that's already there.

We all bend over the hole that has now been created, but it's far too dark to see what's underneath.

The other four boards are quickly removed and we see a hole with boards on the side.

"How?" Tim exclaims in surprise.

"A reinforced tunnel?" Dad wonders aloud.

Mom is now on her knees, carefully feeling around with her hand in the space. Brave. I certainly wouldn't have dared. Scary creatures, no thanks. There's a reason I live high up. Fewer spiders, ants, and other creepy crawlies. Something I'm going to have to get over. I'll have to tell my parents the reason soon but, for now, I'm putting it off. We'll see how brave I am to make that announcement one day.

Back to the here and now, I keep a safe distance from the hole and think about how this should be done. Somehow, the math doesn't add up.

Mom sighs and complains that she can't see anything. I hand her my phone so she can try to see more with the flashlight. Unfortunately, all we see is sand and dust. Dad and Tim have gone inside and come back with a long stick and a roll of duct tape. Genius. I immediately understand what they want to do so we'll be able to see much further inside the tunnel.

"Video call or just make a recording?" I ask and they shrug their shoulders.

"I'd say whatever is most convenient," Mom says diplomatically,

I suddenly have an idea. It's a pretty scary idea, but it might work. I want to suggest something we haven't done in years, but it's necessary in order to move forward. We have to go into the secret room in our house before we can continue. In order to do that, we have to take the books out of the bookcase in the living room. The books that revealed the secret of our house.

CHAPTER 2
BACK IN TIME

A while after we moved in, it became clear that our house turned out to have a big secret.

I was twelve years old and at home one afternoon with Tim and our neighbors' children, Toby and Winny, while all our parents were out. Tim was about nine at the time and I was allowed to babysit. Tim hated that word, but it made me feel so grown up. I earned a little money, especially because I also had to look after seven-year-old Toby and three-year-old Winny. They were always pretty quiet, so my parents and Toby and Winny's parents weren't worried.

My clearest memory of that day, is that it was incredibly hot. We were all in the living room. It was the coolest place in the house and I could keep an eye on everyone. Tim and Toby were watching an exciting children's movie on television, Winny - who was still a toddler at the time - was walking around with her stuffed animal and I was lounging in a big chair, playing with my phone. Caroline (or Caro), my best friend since kindergarten, was on vacation and her parents allowed her to use her phone for an hour every now and then. Her parents, like mine, were quite strict when it came to phone time. Caro kept me up to date on what was going on in her life.

I thought that our cat, Janeway, a big gray cat who was never allowed outside alone without a leash, was somewhere nearby. That is, until Winny came to me and told me, in her childish language,

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that she had let Janeway out.

We all ran outside and saw it happen: Janeway slipped through the hedge from our garden and was hit by a passing car on the busy street. She survived, but she needed to go to the vet and quickly.

With the help of a passerby who stopped to help us get our cat off the street, we brought Janeway inside. The vet had a practice only about 150 meters from our house but we couldn't carry her in our arms. We had to find another solution. It was then that I remembered the toys stored in the attic of our house.

I rushed inside to fetch the doll's pram and carry it downstairs. As soon as I had taken the dolls out of the pram, I felt something hidden under its mattress. It turned out to be a package, wrapped in old brown paper with a piece of string tied around it to keep it closed. In elegant letters, there was a text written in a kind of secret code. It was childishly composed and seemed easy to decipher, even to me at that age. I was intrigued, but didn't have time to look into it further. I put the package, which was about the size of a large book, in one of the boxes that stood at the entrance to the room that contained old clothes; hiding the package underneath them.

Janeway survived and, apart from a bruised ego and a sore paw, she hadn't suffered any serious injuries. In fact, she's still with us. She's now a very old lady; sixteen years old and deaf but happy with life as long as she gets food and drink and, above all, doesn't have to go outside.

As for that package, the one found purely by chance? It turned out to be the beginning of a quest; a quest to unravel the secret to our house. An adventure in itself!

Once back from the vet's, I needed a moment to collect myself. I went to my room and collapsed on my bed. I laid there thinking about everything that had happened. And then I remembered the package. I decided that I wanted to investigate it alone, without Tim knowing about it.

I got up, walked to my door and opened it as quietly as possible.

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I tried to hear where Tim was and soon heard noises from the garden. He was busy with my father, tending to the plants, so I had the house to myself. I crept upstairs and opened the door to the attic.

Once there, you first had to walk past a number of cupboards and then slide open a room-high curtain to enter the playroom. My mother once told me that that playroom had been specially made for my grandmother. Her brothers had had their own play area too, somewhere in the garden, but we never managed to find it. Apparently, it hadn't survived the ravages of time.

Grandma's room was like something you see in old movies. A space, completely decorated with beautiful things, especially for a young girl. There was an old chair in front of the window, a matching table and lots of beautifully-shaped boxes containing gorgeous dolls. Along the walls were dollhouses, doll carriages and a bookcase full of books. It was a paradise to wander around in, but we only discovered that later.

I walked over to the box and took out the package. I could see that the writing on the brown paper was somewhat faded, probably because it had been lying in the attic for so long. The handwriting was typical of a young girl who had just learned to write at school. I took the package to the chair in front of the window and opened it very carefully. A book appeared. 'Arrabel. Stories of an Eastern Princess. By Clara von Morewick.' It was a beautiful book with a cover that looked like it was made of leather, with letters printed on it and covered with a kind of gold coating.

When I, very carefully, opened the book, I saw that it was the first part of a series of books. My grandmother's name was on the first page. It had apparently been a gift from her father and mother for her tenth birthday. I looked around and saw that there were three other books with the same kind of cover in the bookcase. Only this first part had been wrapped.

When I looked at the brown paper again, I saw a riddle and took

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a photo of it. After studying it and realizing that I couldn't immediately see the solution, I sent it to Caro. Within five minutes, she texted me back with the solution.

I had to bite my hand to keep from screaming with excitement. How wonderful! I had discovered a secret, with Caro's help of course, and I had plenty of time to solve it.

At first, it was a big disappointment. I didn't see anything. There were no notes, no dog-ears to indicate that something was happening on that page. Nothing.

Then I laid the book open flat on my legs because I wanted to send Caroline a text message. The light coming in from the attic window allowed me to see tiny dots here and there under the words in the book. The book contained a message and, after a while, I was convinced that my grandmother must have done it. My search had begun that afternoon in the attic, and I was sure I wanted to keep everything secret until I had solved it.

The next day, I broke that promise to myself when I tripped over a tree stump in our garden while trying to jump over it in my flip-flops.

Of course, I failed and tore my ankle ligaments. With my foot in a cast, I couldn't go up to the attic, so I had to confide in Tim. He fetched the book and together we set to work on the puzzle our grandmother had created.

A few days later, we found the first clue. The letters formed a task in the form of a story:

If you can read these sentences, you have almost discovered my secret. Bravo, you have come this far. But, you are not there yet. First of all, make sure that the secret is safe with you. If any of 'the others' find out, everything will have been in vain and we will still be dead. Trust no one and wait to carry out the instructions until the war is over. The day may come when we have to leave here and the occupiers claim our house. Then my treasure must be gone, safely stored away.

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Continue your search, but be alert. The enemy is everywhere. Find the sequel!

There we were: in the garden shed, with a huge secret we couldn't do anything with. After all, we couldn't go any further.

When I think back to that time, I feel a real sense of melancholy.

That garden shed played a very important role in my life. First of all, because we 'deciphered' the book there. But later, too, when I got a boyfriend. It was very convenient to be out of my parents' sight. I can barely suppress my grin. How lucky I am to have my own place now. Bob comes when he has time. Unfortunately, that's not very often at the moment. As a professional soldier, he's often away. I knew that when I started a relationship with him.

But we can handle it. It makes us stronger. When we see each other again, it's extra special. We don't need a garden shed for that anymore. When he's home from his deployment, Bob lives with his mother, Netta, and her husband, Caz. They have a beautiful guest house in their garden: a tiny house that's also perfect for 'secret meetings'.

I'm digressing. *Big time.* That's probably because I'm so excited about *another* secret. As if the previous one wasn't exciting enough.

Anyway, Tim and I had solved the first part of the puzzle and we came to the conclusion that we had a lot more to do before we could figure out what was going on. So, our parents had to know too. That didn't go without a struggle because, young as we were, we weren't always very smart.

In the middle of the night, Tim and I were in the attic looking for the second book, me on my crutches and Tim with a burning candle in his hands, when our parents suddenly appeared behind us. We were sent to bed as punishment, without the rest of the story, and had to confess what we had done the next day. And why.

My parents were furious. Furiously enthusiastic! Dad immediately