

# **DON'T BETRAY ME**

*To Mum and Dad*

MELINDA BRAAKSMA

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**DON'T BETRAY ME**

*The secret of Amsterdam*

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For readers aged 12 and older.



- |                   |                                  |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| ① Van Boserstraat | ④ Gaarkeuken,<br>Rechtboomssloot |
| ② Oudeschans 23A  | ⑤ Waterlooplein                  |
| ③ School          |                                  |

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| ⑥ Artis            | ⑨ Haarlemmerpoort |
| ⑦ Montelbaanstoren | ⑩ Westertoren     |
| ⑧ Centraal Station | ⑪ Rijksmuseum     |

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1940-1945)

This story takes place in 1943. Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, was waging war in several countries, including The Netherlands. The population suffered enormously. The Jewish citizens were hit especially hard: all Jewish people had to wear yellow stars, and were eventually deported to concentration camps, where many died. Important places in Amsterdam, such as the Anne Frank House Museum, are reminders of this dark period.

The city was also a place of resistance. There were Amsterdammers helping Jewish people in hiding, or distributing illegal newspapers; this was dangerous work. The 1944-1945 Hunger Winter claimed many lives, due to the extreme cold and lack of food.

Fortunately, there were also countries that wanted to liberate Europe: the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and later Canada and many others. These Allied Forces carried out a dangerous landing operation on the beaches of Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. City after city, country after country, Europe was finally liberated.

After the liberation of The Netherlands in May 1945, reconstruction began. The war had left deep scars, but the people's resilience helped Amsterdam to flourish again.

*A friend is someone who will hide you*

The events in this book are fictional. They are based on the wartime memories of my father, Henk Braaksma, who went to live on the Oudeschans in Amsterdam as a six-year-old boy after an Allied plane crashed into his family's house. Many details are realistic, but the whole is based on my imagination. Therefore, names, locations and relationships in this story may not match reality. This is a conscious choice.

*Melinda Braaksma, 2025*

A glossary is included at the back of the book.

## **Prologue**

This is the story of a house. And of the people who lived in that house, of course. But mostly of a house.

If the walls of the building had had eyes and ears, they would have wept with helplessness, have shaken their heads at so much ignorance and so many secrets, but also have smiled at the beautiful friendships that developed between some of the residents of the house.

And all this while there was a war going on. World War II they later called it. But at the time, it was just war and the people in the house on the Oudeschans in Amsterdam had to get through it – just like a lot of other people in a lot of other houses.

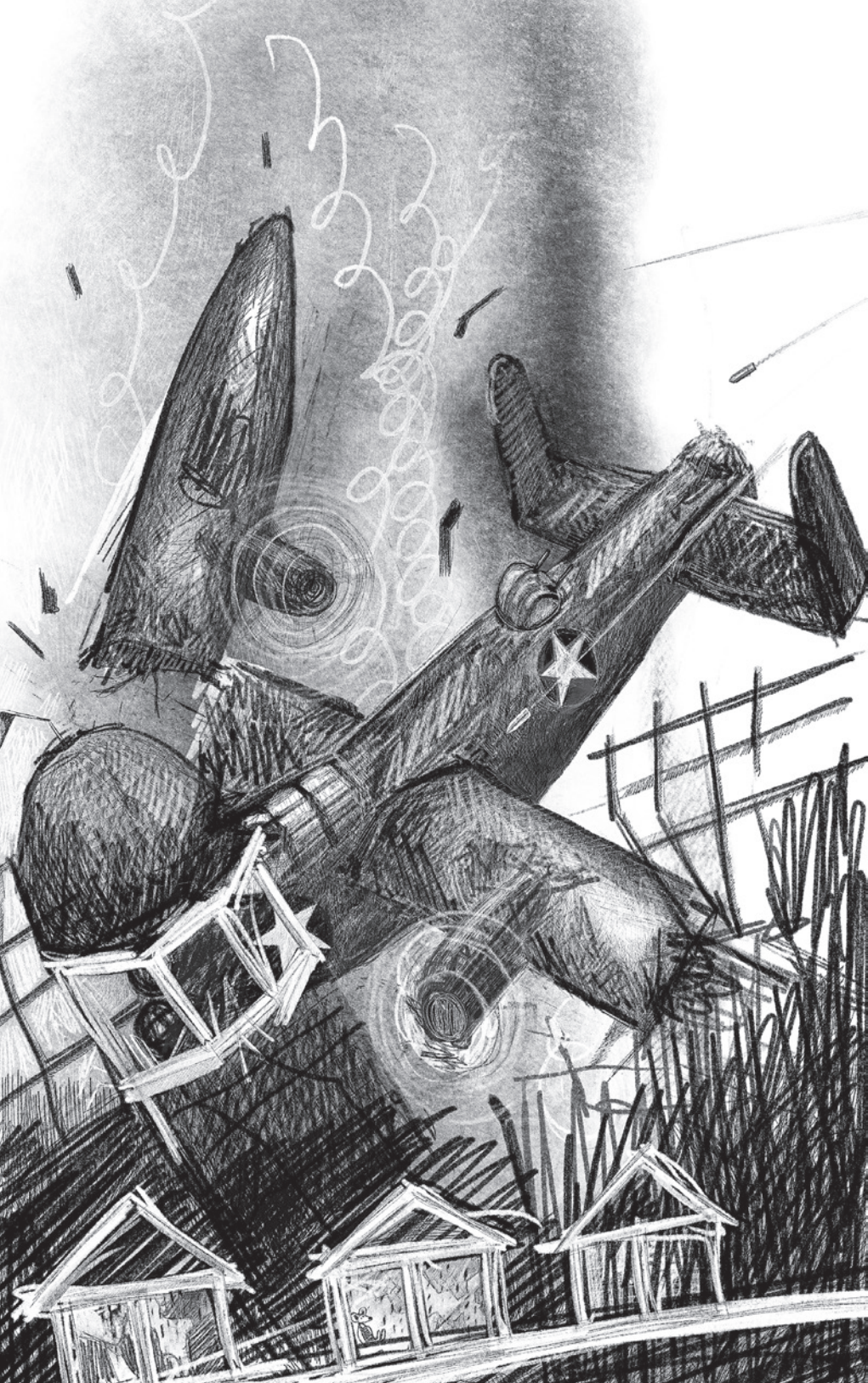
And that is quite difficult to do if you don't know who around you is good and who is bad.

## PART I

Van Bossestraat,  
Amsterdam Old-West  
*1943*







1

3 May 1943

The plane's smoking engine sputtered and spat. Thick black clouds rose from the gasping interior and flames licked at the metal walls.

'I've been hit! I've been hit! May Day! May Day!!!' the pilot shouted into his microphone.

The aircraft tilted dangerously to one side and although the left engine was doing its best to pull the plane to a spot outside the city, the machine began to lose altitude rapidly. The pilot pulled at the controls and tried to steer the nose of his bomber between the two rows of houses on Van Bossestraat.

Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!!! Bullets flew past him left and right and the pilot lost control.

'Going down!!' he shouted, but as he tried to pull himself to safety, he could already see the turret in the middle of the housing block looming ahead. For a moment, a quick prayer flashed through his mind,

*Heaven help me!*

Then everything went black.

2  
July 1943

Before we start this story, you should know that there were only three things that were really important in the young life of Peter Hendriks: Mum, Mouse, and Magic.

To start with the latter, Peter had received a magic box as a gift from his parents two birthdays ago. Since then, he had spent almost every night trying out new tricks and perfecting the ones he already knew.

Every Saturday evening, Peter gave a performance for the whole family. And although his brother John always made bullying remarks, even he secretly enjoyed watching his brother's shows. He usually did not understand the magic that Peter conjured up. And now that they were at war, they could use every trick that kept the nasty reality at bay.

Because it was war. It had been for more than three years now. Peter had not noticed it much at first, even though the city around him was slowly starting to change. There were new rules. For instance, that you had to be inside on time and that some people suddenly had to sew a yellow star onto their coats, but otherwise Peter could just go to school and play outside as usual.

Until a plane had come down in May. In their street. On their house. But I'll tell you more about that later.

Dad had gotten very angry last week. He stood in the middle of the room and read a piece aloud from the newspaper.

'Listen to what that Mr Sassy Quarter<sup>1</sup> said.' He cleared his throat and said with a German accent:

*'Your Dutch soldiers have had to report in captivity and hard measures have been taken to restore order and peace to the country.'*

Dad's eyes searched for more lines in the paper that he thought worth reading out. 'Oh, and Herr Reichskommissar claims ...,' he said in a pinched voice:

*'The Dutch should be glad that the casualty count was not higher than it was and that the Wehrmacht was not called in.'*

'Ah ...,' muttered Mum.

*'Therefore, I warn against the futility of an Allied victory, because that will mainly mean surrender to Jewry and that is the surest path to Bolshevism. You Dutch are better off going to war alongside the Germans for the sake of the Führer<sup>2</sup>.'*

Dad angrily slammed down the newspaper on the table and stomped out of the room. Those Krauts had struck a nerve with his parents, Peter saw, but why they were so upset was not entirely clear to him. All those difficult words meant nothing to him. He knew that this Nazi man, Sassy Quarters or whatever his name was, was calling the shots in the Netherlands, because the queen was now living in England – because it was safer. But his family hadn't done anything wrong, had they? Or was everyone in Amsterdam in danger now? To be on the safe side, he had crawled onto the sofa into the crook of Mum's arm.



Because Mum was the most important person in Peter's life. Of course, Peter loved his Dad too, but Mum had a scent of rose petals around her that reassured him. He needed that, because it was not a happy time right now. Sometimes he would crawl up close to her, just to catch her scent. As long as he smelled her, everything was fine. You understand, of course, that this remained to be seen because in a war there are also many things that do not end well. Similarly, Mum's scent had failed to comfort him on the day of the disaster.

And that had everything to do with his third love: Mouse. For Mouse had lain helplessly on Peter's bed the day the plane crashed into their house.

'Peter!' Mr Stips, the headmaster, beckoned Peter from the doorway. Mum was standing next to him. Peter was startled. Mum never came to school. Only on special occasions, or when John had been up to something. But John was no longer at school with him. She hadn't come to pick him up, had she? He was perfectly capable of walking home from school by himself, he had been doing so for almost a year.

Her face was tight. Peter slid out from his school desk and walked with the adults to the corridor. Silently he put his hand in Mum's.

'Peter ... There has been an accident at your house. We need to see how to proceed.' Mr Stips looked serious.

Peter looked at Mum. She knelt down beside him, and Peter could see she had been crying.

'A plane has crashed into the house, Peep. It's terrible. Everything is burnt. I only just escaped. We can't live there anymore. Dad's already gone to John's school; tonight we're sleeping at Uncle Marcus and Aunt Greet's.'

Behind his big dark eyes, Peter tried to understand what she was saying. His house gone? Live with Uncle Marcus? What about his room? His bed? And his magic box? Were those burnt too?

And then he thought of Mouse. 'Mouse? Where is Mouse?'

Mum looked at Mr Stips in despair. 'Mouse ... Mouse is ...'

'Is Mouse burnt too?'

A sudden sadness overtook him. Mouse. His own, sweet Mouse. He was already eight and actually too big for a cuddly toy, he knew that, but Mouse was ... well, Mouse was Mouse.

A tear slid down his cheek and he tasted a salty drop of snot on his upper lip. He couldn't sleep without Mouse, even though he would never admit it if anyone asked. John used to tease him about it: 'Baby! Baby!' But what did John know? Peter tried not to cry, but the thought of poor Mouse, lying there all alone on his bed, produced an ever-growing lump in his throat. He tried with all his might to swallow it, but his throat was too dry. He had not even said goodbye to Mouse this morning. He had simply jumped out of bed and run to school.

Mouse, who had comforted him when he was sad since he was little. It was precisely Mouse whom he needed. Who was he supposed to talk to now that his dearest cuddly toy was dead because of a pilot who couldn't fly?

That is how Peter lost two of his dearest things in one day: his box full of magic and Mouse. Peter resolved to be extra nice to Mum; after all, it was war and you never knew what other dangers might be lurking in the dark.