

**Chapter One**  
**Amsterdam, Holland**  
**May 1939**

*The Night of Broken Glass (Kristallnacht) raged from November 9 to 10, 1938. After celebrating victories over Jewish neighborhoods, the Nazis announced a decree to remove all Jews from German economy, society and culture.*

Sam Goudberg's voice snapped like a whip through the entire office. "Hans, have you completed the accounts for the shops in Rotterdam?" Hans Bernstein wiped off the tips of his two pens and placed them in a jar on his desk. Silence announced that the bookkeeping staff had departed for midday. Tall front windows reflected spots of sunshine onto the marble floors, an uncertain promise of a sunny afternoon. The converted ballroom still had its gilded light fixtures, but its interior had been occupied with commerce for years. His desk was in a dark corner of the offices, where he counted his parents' wealth for hours on end.

He turned his head aside and muttered a quick response to his stepfather. A blotter lay across the sheet in an enormous book while he stretched his long legs and rolled back his cramped shoulders, waiting for the ink to dry. Columns of black and red numbers marched up and down the page, each entry standing for an item in a warehouse or a shop, stacks of laces here or rolls of ribbons there. The hefty volume contained more than a hundred balance sheets and Hans placed it on a shelf with a row of similar books, each dated with registers of accounts. Standing up from the stiff leather chair, he brushed off his tweed jacket and buttoned on a clean pair of spats in anticipation of mud on the streets. He checked his leather briefcase a final time and stepped out the doors of Herengracht 94. If this afternoon meeting went well he would not ever need to return to the ledgers.

Thank heavens the upstairs dining room curtains were closed. By now his stepfather, Sam, would be upstairs with his mouth full of boiled meat or potato, reporting to mother on the morning's profits and losses. Sara would ask a few questions and then serve dessert. Hans's

nervous stomach cramped at the thought of food. Bicyclists bumped and rattled across cobblestones, avoiding iron stanchions and bars that lined the canal. Barges poked along the water, sloughing off their loads of merchandise. The little shops were shuttered for midday. Hans dodged into a shaded alley and another turn placed him onto the next canal. A solid wall of dark red bricks continued along the Keizersgracht. Head down, he followed the angled patterns in the brick sidewalk, avoiding stray dog droppings that lay in his path, until the scrubbed white stone steps and arched double doors of the United States Consulate came into view.

The young man introduced himself at reception, and expected to be ushered right into the office of the consul. Hans's father had been Minister of Finance for the Netherlands, and Consul Van den Arend was a family friend. The receptionist looked at Hans as if he were nobody, just one person in a herd of civilians who asked for favors. It had been necessary to wrestle his way through phone lines and calling cards to obtain an appointment. In the noisy lobby, he took a seat and read the same pamphlet over and over. After several minutes, an unsmiling secretary came toward him, heels clicking on the marble flooring. She stood over his chair, waiting for him to look up. "*Heer* van den Arend will see you now."

Recent political actions in Germany had prompted the American consulate to expedite papers for those claiming refugee status. Jews in Berlin were *sweeping up the shattered glass of commerce and broken hopes*. Now Dutch Nazis participated in isolated incidents throughout Holland, raiding Jewish homes and shops, vandalizing synagogues, and killing nearly 40 Jewish citizens. Instead of expressing public outrage, Dutch people quietly went about their everyday lives.

Hans took a deep breath as he stepped into the office. The consul set his reading glasses aside. "Hans, my dear boy! How have you been?"

Van den Arend extended his hand, and Hans quickly wiped sweat from his palm. He smiled nervously as he glanced around the room. “Business has been steady... people still need ... the things they need.” Although he was heir to a prestigious Amsterdam mercantile enterprise, his stepfather had dismissed him from any duties that required working with customers. Hans took exception to a new business philosophy that the “customer is always the boss.” A business proprietor was not a servant.

Consul Van den Arend nodded. “Are you certain you wish to go through with this?”

Hans looked boldly at the consul and nodded his head.

The consul handed the thick envelope to Hans. “Everything is in order then. Your visas were approved.”

Instead of tearing the envelope open, Hans examined it, took out his penknife and carefully cut the U.S. stamps from the corner. “For my stamp collection.” He pulled out two visas, one for himself and one for his sister, Esther. There were lengthy explanations and fine print in English, and he asked for help understanding the detailed instructions before placing the visas in his leather briefcase. The consul came around his desk and grasped Hans by the shoulder. “Good luck.”

The morning rain had dried completely. He looked through the narrow brick buildings into a bright sun and a renewed day. Amsterdam was beautiful, with vibrant greenery filling out branches of the trees and reflecting into the canals. Flower stalls were full of fresh tulips and every window box was overflowing with colors. Freshly washed lace curtains hung in windows that had been sealed all winter. These were ordinary things that he would miss when he left Holland.

Another stone street led toward the Leidseplein and to the Café Americain. Its sparkling windows and black and white stone floors evoked jazz and fun. It was easy to spot his coquettish sister at a table for two, her auburn hair bobbing to music. He grinned, slipped through the glass doors and moved toward her table. Beautiful and headstrong, his younger sister Esther had once again fought with mother. God knows what this most recent rift was about.

Waiters hurried everywhere, rolling their carts of pastries and delicate china cups. He followed behind a large cart with a heavy silver urn and retrieved his new Leica from a coat pocket. Esther startled at the pop of the flashbulb.

“Why, it’s you! I thought I was meeting Hedy Lamar. Happy Birthday!” He reached his arms out for an embrace.

Esther stiffened as he kissed her cheeks, then pushed his elbows away.

“You’re dreaming again.”

He took his seat, folding his long legs under the small table. “But we need to celebrate. Mother and Max both asked me to wish you a happy birthday.”

Sparks flashed through her deep green eyes. “Oh, Mama. I haven’t seen her for weeks. I’m sure she must be *devastated* by my absence.”

Hans searched for a vague comment, something to avoid any eruption of Esther’s temper. “She goes out for tea every afternoon, and still orders extra whipped cream on her pastry. The old ladies gossip about misbehaving adult children, trying to arrange our lives.”

Esther’s tapered fingertips pushed at her bobbed waves. She raised her penciled eyebrows and laughed. “Then she is still fat, or fatter if that is at all possible. I don’t know how Sam stands her. He likes our money, but there has to be a limit to his lust.”

Hans's ear twitched and he blinked. "Ah well, enough about them. Esther, we need to talk. I have something for you."

"What?"

"In my briefcase."

"Ooh la la, it must be small and lovely!"

"Esther, you're the limit. And I'm hungry. What shall we have, sandwiches, cakes, or both? My God, are those strawberries?" The gloved waiter displayed his trays proudly, and poured a fragrant dark tea into their cups.

"They're probably from Spain. They won't be ripe. Sometimes they aren't as sweet as they look."

He selected a large strawberry pastry with golden custard and whipped cream. Esther picked over the tray, and settled on dark chocolate gateau drenched with a rich orange liqueur. The noise of the busy café rang around them with the clatter of dishes and the buzz of conversations. Casting a glance about the room, Hans leaned in to comment quietly.

"You know this is just as serious for me as it is for you. My inheritance is gone – Mother signed over our business to Sam. I work in a place that I should own. A job? I don't even get a salary – Sam says there aren't enough profits. He gives me an allowance, like a spoiled child." His intense blue eyes looked at her, unblinking and seeing all.

That look frightened her. They had conspired against adults all their lives, and she knew when he was joking and when he planned to act. Helpless inaction was not part of his lexicon.

"What are you thinking?" She picked at the dense glaze on her pastry. "You make me nervous."

"Have you even been paying attention to the news reports?"

Esther pouted. “Boring. All about market prices. And I certainly don’t listen to German radio. Who cares about the Germans? I like American music.” Hans smiled in anticipation of delivering her surprise, and then the light left his eyes.

“What about Kristallnacht? Esther, the Nazis are not just German thugs. We have them here too. Nothing else will matter if they gain any more power, or worse, if their ideals take hold in the rest of Europe. They are not going to stop with Berlin.”

“Politics! Look, I came to see you and have tea.” She picked up two more sugar cubes, put one into the cup and the other into her mouth. “For God’s sake, *Kristallnacht* was six months ago. There’s no reason to be afraid of the Nazis. We’re half German.”

“*Kristallnacht* wasn’t an end; it was a beginning. You really don’t pay any attention to things you don’t want to understand, do you?”

Esther pulled the teacup up to her face and then banged it back down, tea spilling into the saucer. “Maybe I should have ordered Genever. This is not fun. In your note you promised me something special.”

He lifted the briefcase to the table and opened it. Instead of a brightly wrapped gift, he pulled out his envelope. “Esther, remember that bird in the attic?”

“Oh God, that was awful.” She looked at the packet. There was no bright paper or ribbon.

“The point is, we set it free.” Hans pushed the envelope to the side of his plate and covered it with his napkin.

“No, *you* got to be a hero and set it free. I had to stand on your shoulders and grab it from the rafter. It was disgusting – it screamed and it bit my hand. I almost killed it.” She looked down at a tiny scar on her finger.

“But you didn’t kill it. It hopped out onto the upstairs pulley and then flew up and sang from the gables.”

“So what does any of that have to do with my birthday? You sometimes speak in riddles that no one understands.”

He looked ahead quietly. “We need to free ourselves, and you can’t tell anyone what we’re going to do.” He ran his fingers through his hair, pushing a stray curl off of his forehead. A waiter approached them with the teapot. “It has to be like the attic, our secret. Little birds sometimes talk, and I couldn’t tell you what I was planning.”

He uncovered the envelope and pulled out a letter from inside. “Would you like to see your gift now? It took weeks to prepare it. I called on everyone for these. Immigration visas to the U.S., even though there is a tight quota on Jews. We’re going to New York!”

He expected her to be thrilled with his initiative. Her eyes widened, and she covered her mouth. He had gone mad.

Tea at the elegant café was an error. Everyone on the street could see into the large glass windows with their gold lettering. The pastel walls and mirrors displayed elegant clientele, but he didn’t wish to be displayed. He wanted to hide. He needed to remind her of who and what they were.

Her mouth gaped, closed, and then opened again, her lipstick mask torn and distorted. “There is no ‘we’ in this discussion. You don’t tell me what to do.” He shook his head curtly, shooing the waiter away. A whisper broke across the table. Even Esther realized that this was a dangerous conversation in a public place. “Are you crazy?” A perplexed smile crossed her face. “Is this one of your imaginary conspiracies? You shouldn’t worry about the Germans. Mother was born in Germany. We can apply for German citizenship if we need to.”

Hans lifted his face, and lowered his voice. “And then what? What makes you think that Holland will stand up against Hitler? My God, they just elected forty Nazis to our parliament.” He stared at her in disbelief.

“Why do you want to blame the Nazis?” Esther didn’t listen for an answer, but instead folded her napkin. Her foot was tapping under the table as she glowered at him. “You just want to escape.”

“Just how do you think you can leave Amsterdam? We don’t know anyone in America!”

Hans paused to think a moment about how their parents’ connections had helped them get anything they had ever wanted, including the visas.

Esther continued. “The only English I know is ‘Good Afternoon’ and, ‘Yes please, I would like some more tea.’ All you know how to do is to fill out invoices. That will not even get us a sandwich in New York.”

He opened the envelope and handed her the papers to examine. “Look, I have been able to get two visas.” She looked at the papers with her name and the seal of the United States, then idly smeared the chocolate on her plate, daring him to lose his temper.

“It is risky, but we can do this.”

“You don’t even have any money.”

“I have already gone to the camera shop. I’m selling all my box cameras, the Rollei, tripods, everything. I can’t carry them with me. Even my stamp albums are with a dealer. I’m starting new ones, all American stamps.”

Her gaze narrowed. “Visas! You can’t be serious. How did you manage to get two visas?”



“I called on Consul van den Arend, father’s old friend from the U.S. Consulate. Remember? They worked together on trade agreements for years. Anyway, everyone is nervous about the Nazis gaining too much power. Have you looked at the German films? My God, they are trying to recreate another Roman Empire. It would almost be funny to a Latin School boy if their cries of hate weren’t real.”

“I’m not going to America. I am Dutch and I live in Amsterdam.”

Her face rested on both hands as if she were using them to keep her jaw from dropping open and her gaze from wandering throughout the entire café. Hans’s blue eyes turned angry, a steely gray, like a storm brewing. “Esther, there is nothing here for us.”

“I can’t believe this. You don’t even want to be a businessman; you want to be a photographer.”

Knuckles showed white as he clenched his fist. “You are wasting time.” He looked around the restaurant, which thankfully was not as full as it was an hour ago. “We must act quickly. I need to book our passage.”

She shook her head. “I could never leave Peter.”

“Who in the heck is Peter? I’ve never heard of him. You haven’t introduced us.” Hans scraped at the whipped cream and crumbs on his plate, his silver fork clattering along the edge. “My God, what are you doing with yourself?” The air froze around him as he searched for his breath. “This is not the right way to get a husband. How long have you known this man?”

“You’re being nasty now. You’ve never approved of my boyfriends. Okay, I have shared some things with you that I shouldn’t have, but it’s not my fault that you’re a prude. Anyway, Peter’s an artist.”

“I don’t care if he’s painted you in the nude, even though it’s wrong.”

Esther's pursed her mouth in a tiny smooch. "He has."

"Marvelous! Great! I have a sister who became an artist and ended up a courtesan. What is your next role?"

"Hans, I do not want us to part with a fight. I am not going to New York. I will order a Genever and toast to your newest endeavor. We will drink the gin, and you will leave."

Hans took his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "Esther, Esther... I'm sorry." He took a deep breath. "No, I didn't confide in you. I couldn't. But my action is intended for the best. We can send for Peter later, but you and I must act now." He was talking to her back as she bent under the table in an effort to retrieve her shopping bags.

"You never listen. You're like mother; you only hear what you want to. Thanks a lot for your 'gift' but I'm not going without Peter. We're done here, and I have an appointment."

He sat perfectly still, cleared his throat and spoke very quietly. "I can't get a third visa. Don't be a fool. Just take this one, and we will talk again before I buy our tickets. We still have two weeks' time."

Esther took the visa in her hand, stared at it thoughtfully, and tore the papers in half.