

Victorious Island

By
Henrietta Van Der Haas

To the children all over the world who
love freedom and respect the rights of
others.

- Henrietta Van Der Haas

Other Books

Orange On Top

Cover Image is the official Coat of Arms seal of
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VICTORIOUS ISLAND

By
Henrietta Van Der Haas



DRAWINGS BY GERARD HORDYK

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Note from the Publisher:

Victorious Island is an exciting book about the days of the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands during World War II. The book is out of print but the author's granddaughters, Kathryn and Diana, have graciously given me permission to reprint it and thus let another generation of children enjoy it.

Victorious island is the second book by Henrietta Van Der Haas, this time telling a story about the Nazi occupation on Walcheren Island, Zeeland in The Netherlands. Read it aloud to your children and discuss many of the topics that are sure to arise.

“Luctor Et Emergo” (literally, “I struggle and emerge”, i.e. “I struggle and emerge victorious”), is the Latin motto of the province of Zeeland, located in the southwest in the Netherlands, on the North Sea.



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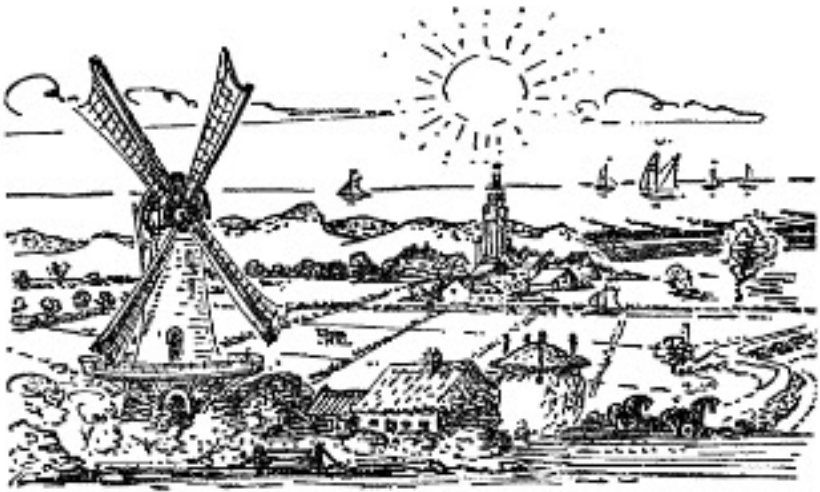
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CHAPTER I

JAN AND JANUS

Evening settled over Walcheren. Like a fiery ball the sun hung low above the North Sea and threw a rosy glow over the white sand dunes. Behind the dunes lay fertile fields, orchards, and farmhouses with red-tiled roofs showing through the trees.

Apparently there was nothing amiss on the de Vries farm. The contented munching of the cows in their stalls, the thud of a hoof, the swish of a tail, and the sweep of a broom were the only sounds in the quiet barn. Through the open door of the barn a broad beam of light fell on a boy who was sweeping up the straw with rhythmic strokes. He was tall and thin, but sinewy, and he worked with unhurried steadiness.

When the last bit of straw was swept up, he hung the broom on the wall, flung back his red-blond hair and looked up and down the barn. It was all as it should be and yet it wasn't. Uncle Koos wasn't there.

Jan de Vries sighed deeply. He should not feel so downhearted. Many people disappeared these days to work secretly for the good of their country. His own father had never been heard of since the bombing of Vlissingen in 1940. Uncle van Steen, Aunt Margriet's husband, had been killed in that raid. During the following invasion many people just disappeared. Jan Tersloot and Teun de Visser had not been heard of in two years. A week ago Wim van Vlucht had vanished. And now Uncle Koos, Father's youngest brother, had gone, leaving the care of the farm to Jan, a heavy burden for a boy of fourteen. Of course, there was Granny.

Jan went to the barn door and looked out. His heart felt like lead. Had something happened to Uncle? Had he been killed or taken prisoner? Not likely. Granny would not have been so calm, so matter-of-fact.

But where was Uncle Koos? Why had he gone away when he was so sorely needed at home? Aunt Margriet could not get along without him either. Since Uncle van Steen had been killed, Uncle Koos had been the stand-by of Aunt Margriet and her five children. And why had Uncle gone just now when the Germans were reinforcing their already formidable strength on the Island, when everyone felt that a crisis was at hand?

Tears rose to Jan's eyes as he watched the sea gulls against the sky. The gulls rose and then suddenly swooped down at some prey behind the dike. A rook¹ flew overhead. With loud cawing it settled in its nest. Then it was quiet again; no sound but the wind rustling through a clump of willows, and the faint clicking of the rotating arms of the windmill in the distance.

The boom of a gun scattered the peacefulness of the evening; another burst of cannon fire shook the air.

Jan's hands knotted to fists. "They can't do this to Walcheren," he whispered. But he knew that the Germans did far worse.

Jan bent his head low and rubbed his sleeve over his eyes, so he did not see his grandmother coming.

Grandmother! Jan felt a little ashamed. She never complained. "We'll have to work a little harder, Jan," was all she said when they found that Uncle Koos had not slept in his bed last night.

There had been other times when Uncle Koos had stayed away during the night. Then he put something on his red hair so that it looked sandy. But he always had been back in time to help with the morning chores. Jan knew that Granny did not sleep much during those nights.

She hurried across the yard now. A plain woolen shawl was tied around her shoulders, but her gray

¹ a gregarious Eurasian crow with black plumage and a bare face, nesting in colonies in treetops.

hair, covered by a white cap with spiral gold ornaments at the temples, was as neat as when she went to church. She held the tip of her big apron gathered in one hand as if she carried something.

Her clear blue eyes grew misty when she looked at Jan. With her free hand she stroked his cheek. “Jannetje,” she said softly.

Jannetje! His pet name when a child. He bit his lip so that he would not cry.

“Jannetje! That’s all I am,” he replied bitterly.

“If you were just that, Uncle Koos wouldn’t have left.”

Doubting if he had heard right, Jan looked at her. “Granny, you know . . .”

“No, Jan,” she replied quickly. “I don’t know. The less we know the better. We cannot betray what we don’t know.” Jan nodded. “But I know Koos,” Vrouw² de Vries continued proudly, “and Karel, your father.”

Jan swallowed. His eyes did not leave those of the old woman. “Granny,” his voice was hoarse with excitement, “you think that Father is still alive?”

“Only God knows, Jan, but . . .” She glanced through the barn, looked back over her shoulder, then shook her head. “Let’s trust Him.”

² Dutch word meaning woman; wife; lady. Also used as a title before the name of a married woman; such as Mrs.

Trust Him! Did Granny know more than she was saying? Jan's eyes grew bright, the heaviness within him lifted as she went on, "The welfare of the whole country is more important than a farm. Your father knew that he served his family best when he placed his fatherland before anything else. And there were Koos and I to take care of the farm. You were only ten. Now you're a dependable boy, and there are two of us. Koos knew that you would not fail me."

Uncle knew that, Uncle trusted him. Jan felt ashamed of his discouragement. No, he would not fail Grandmother, Uncle Koos, and perhaps Father.

"What about Aunt Margriet?" he asked.

"She'll have to get along without her brother. With so many of the cattle gone, farming is not what it used to be. The children, too, have grown. Klaartje is now fifteen, Janus thirteen, and Maart at ten can help. They should get along and they would if Janus were a different boy. That boy is just too lazy."

That was true. Janus was terribly lazy. But he had not always been that way. Jan felt sure he would not be now if Granny were there to supervise and coax. But Aunt Margriet was so different since Uncle van Steen's death.

Jan glanced at his grandmother's face, a wrinkled but strong face lit up by the bluest eyes. Her eyes were like the North Sea. One loved and feared them. Even the German soldiers acted more politely when Granny looked at them.



Suddenly Jan looked up. High in the air flew a plane. Like a lonely sea gull it streaked across the sky. The anti-aircraft guns of the German coastal defenses attacked, but the plane zoomed away unharmed.

“British,” Jan muttered. “Could be Dutch,” he added proudly.

Grandmother smiled. “I found some eggs,” she said, opening her apron. “Take them to Aunt Margriet. She will need some after the German raid on the farm yesterday. Don’t tell her or anyone about Uncle Koos. It’s better to keep that to ourselves as long as we can.”

Jan promised. He wrapped the eggs in his big red handkerchief, put on his rough tweed coat, and was on his way, lighter of heart than he had been all day, determined to live up to Uncle Koos’ trust.

Deep in thought he walked along the road which was the dike. It was elevated, and had trees at each side. Grassy slopes led at one side to the canal, at the other side to fertile, reclaimed land know as the polder³.

Granny was right, Jan mused. The farms were not what they used to be. The Nazis had taken so many of the cattle and horses, so much of everything they could lay hands on. Now there was great lack of fodder, of machinery, of animals to help with the work. There was a lack of everything.

³ a tract of low land, especially in the Netherlands, reclaimed from the sea and protected by dikes.

Even the barbed wire surrounding the grazing lands had been confiscated by the Nazis.

About halfway between the de Vries farm and the village stood the windmill. Jan watched its moving rust-colored sails. He loved windmills almost as much as he loved the Schelde and the North Sea.

As Jan passed by, the miller called a greeting from the encircling balcony. Jan hurried on. He wanted to be back before the miller closed up for the night. He liked to help him, to watch the great arms with the big sails move slower, slower, still slower, then stop entirely. When the great sails were furled, sleep seemed to settle over the whole countryside.

Thinking about the mill, Jan made a fist in his pocket. The Nazis had taken much, but the windmills, the river, and the sea they could not take. They were Dutch and would remain Dutch. So would the people, no matter what the Nazis did.

Jan took a bypath and saw Klaartje, his cousin, run from the barn. "Have you seen Maart?" she called.

"No!" he shouted, and Klaartje ran off in another direction.

Jan hastened to the house, left his klompen⁴ outside and went on stocking feet to the kitchen. The two youngest children, Thys and Mientje, sat huddled on a low bench. Their sober little faces brightened when Jan entered.

"What's the matter with Maart?" he asked his aunt.

⁴ wooden shoes; plural klomp, singular

She was crying into her apron with both elbows on the table. “He’s gone,” she sobbed. “The Germans must have taken him.”

“What would they do with a ten-year-old boy?” he asked impatiently. It was like Aunt Margriet to do nothing but cry in her apron.

“They took his dog,” she wailed. “I’m sure they took him too. They’re taking everything I have.”

If the Nazis took his dog, Maart was likely to do something very foolish because the boy was crazy about his dog. Jan rushed to the door, remembered the eggs and returned to put them on the table. “Granny thought you’d need the eggs.” Thinking of Granny, he added, “Isn’t it time for Thys and Mientje to go to bed?”

Vrouw van Steen sighed, wiped her eyes, dropped her apron, and got up. Jan wondered if Aunt Margriet ever did anything without being told. Poor Klaartje, she certainly had a hard time with her mother and with Janus who was so irresponsible.

Outside Janus was waiting. “What are we supposed to do?” he asked sullenly when Jan slipped into his klompen.

That was the trouble here. No one ever knew what to do. Uncle Koos always had to advise and help. Now Uncle was not here.

“Couldn’t you figure that out for yourself?” Jan asked crossly. “We must find Maart, of course. I’m afraid that he went after his dog. He might be at the German camp.”

Janus gave his cousin a shrewd glance. “It could be that the dog went after the boy and now both are hiding.”

“It could be,” said Jan, looking squarely at his cousin. “Now tell me where they are.”

Janus squashed a clump of earth under his klomp. In sullen rebellion, he mumbled, “You know that Maart is crazy about Kees. Why should the Nazis have him? Why should they have anything?”

“They shouldn’t have a thing,” Jan replied vehemently. “Your mother, though, is worried about Maart.”

“She’s always worried, always hush, hush, always giving the Nazis what they ask for. She doesn’t have to do that. We could hide some things. Others do that. But no, not she. And we have to go hungry. You should have seen what the Nazis took away yesterday!”

Jan could well imagine, but only said, “Your mother has five children to worry about.”

“I’d rather fight than worry all the time,” Janus said under his breath.

“We’ll fight when the time comes,” Jan replied, looking with renewed interest at his cousin. Janus, one year younger than Jan, was short and stockily built. His heavy sandy hair always stood on end. Heavy eyebrows of the same color met above his nose. This usually gave him a sullen expression. But now, his eyes kindled with some hidden fire, he looked like a fighter. Jan liked him better than ever

before, yet carefully he went on, “Maart can’t stay out after dark. You know that the Nazis shoot on sight everyone who is out after curfew. Help me to find him and I’ll help to hide Kees.”

Janus’ face lit up. “I thought you would.” Walking on a little, he said, “You know the clump of willows across the polder? It’s a good hiding place.”

“It’s too obvious for a hiding place,” Jan retorted.

“That’s what I told Maart, but I didn’t know of a better place right now. Mother and Klaartje are not supposed to know that we’re hiding Kees. They are too afraid of the Nazis to help Maart. But you’ll help him, won’t you?”

Jan promised. Janus lingered. “Uncle Koos is very angry with me, isn’t he?” he asked.

“Why should he be?” Jan shot back.

Janus hesitated. “Klaartje and I had to bring some stuff for the Nazis to Vlissingen. You know the fortifications at the dunes? I-well,” Janus looked around while Jan held his breath. “Never mind that,” Janus decided. “I told Uncle something. He seemed angry, said I should forget it and not tell a soul . . .”

“And now you’re telling me,” Jan interrupted.

Janus reddened up to his sandy hair. “Oh, no, I’m not. I just wanted to know if Uncle is very angry. I thought . . .” He hit a stone with his klomp. “Everyone thinks that I’m no good. You think so too, don’t you?”

Jan liked his cousin better every minute but he only said, "Haven't made up my mind yet. But don't worry that I'll tell. You shouldn't tell either, nothing at all even if it seems unimportant." Janus looked at him queerly, the old sullen expression on his face again.

"As for Uncle," Jan went on, "I don't think he was angry at you. Just yesterday he said to me, 'There's more to Janus than I thought there was'."

"He said that!" Janus beamed. He opened his mouth as if to say something more but did not. Then carelessly, he said, "Maart will show up when he's good and hungry. I'm not going to look for him any more."

Saying that he clattered noisily over the cobblestone walk to the house. Jan watched him go. There was something about Janus he could not understand.

With his father gone, Janus should take more responsibility. At first he had, but the last two years he had changed into a lazy, careless boy. Yet at times the old Janus cropped up, and Jan pondered which of the two was the real Janus.

