

Abduction in Harderwijk

Harderwijk 1467

Clara

'Watch where you're going, idiot!' I heard my brother shout from afar. With a deep sigh, I ran towards the loud voice. What had Johannes done now? When I ran up to the scaffolding in front of the Lage Bruggepoort, I saw Johannes arguing with a big man.

'You were the one who bumped into me, you little rascal!' the muscular man said to my "self-confident" brother.

'Oh, I thought I could give you a hand with that heavy barrel of fish, it must be far too heavy for you,' Johannes said mockingly. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up the wooden barrel. I saw his head turn completely red, and drops of sweat formed on his forehead. I saw the sparkle of his self-confidence fade in his eyes. He dropped the barrel, not just on the stone floor, but on the sailor's toe! He looked at him furiously as if he could tear him to pieces. In my imagination, I even saw steam coming out of his ears. 'My little toe!!' The big man jumped up and down while holding his foot. Out of anger, he even kicked the same barrel again.

I saw him hobble over to my brother with a furious look in his eyes: 'Do you know what else I can lift?!' He picked Johannes up and threw him into the water of the Zuiderzee. I saw the sailor walk towards me after he had thrown my brother into the water. The man grumpily growled at me, 'What are you standing there for, you little girl!' I stood rooted to the spot. When I was sure he had gone, I saw my brother floundering to stay above water; I had to save him! So I rushed over to him. He took my outstretched hand and I helped him out of the water. After Johannes was back on the jetty, he stormed off without looking at me, muttering to himself. I saw a coin lying on the ground and decided to pick it up. When I looked closer, I saw a knight on horseback with a sword in his hands. I glanced at the sailor. He was digging in his pockets and looking around anxiously, as if he were searching for something. We made eye contact. I quickly walked away, hiding the coin in my jacket pocket. I picked up my pace to catch up with Johannes.

Johannes

When my sister Clara and I got home, dinner was already ready and on our plates. I could already smell the slightly burnt potatoes before I even entered the house. Mother was not the best cook. As soon as we sat down at the table, Mother immediately asked why I was so wet.

'I saved a drowned child from the water,' I said. A white lie, surely that's allowed? But of course Clara had to ruin my "hero moment" again.

'He was thrown into the water,' she shouted through the commotion.

Father and mother started to laugh and I felt my cheeks glow.

'Let's eat,' I said, mashing my gravy into my potatoes.

'Has anyone else had any adventures?' asked mother. There was silence. Father took a few bites of his potatoes before he said anything. 'I heard that the Lords of Kuinre are bothering many traders these days. Yesterday when I was at the fish market, I was even told that Cornelius' valuable cargo of herring was confiscated by those rascals! If that starts to affect trade, we'll have a problem. Harderwijk will miss out on a lot of important products. Before you know it, they'll have control of all the trade in Harderwijk!'

'Then fight them,' said mum. "I'll be in the front line!"

Clara and I burst out laughing. That was a great comment for mum. Mum was always up for an adventure and whenever there was something going on, mum was in the front line.

Dad, who is calmer, shook his head. 'It's impossible. It's too dangerous.'

'They're not coming to Harderwijk, are they, those pirates?' Clara tried to sound tough, but I could tell she was tense.

'Of course not. You don't have to worry. You're safe here, Clara,' father reassured her.

'And if anything happens, I'll come and save you!' mother added.

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Clara

My eyes opened slowly after the loud shouting that had come from downstairs. Outside, I heard the church bell toll three times. It was three o'clock in the morning. Why were people still arguing at this time of night? I looked into the cage next to my bed and saw that my little rat Henk had also woken up. He looked at me drowsily with his small circle eyes. It was a cute sight. Henk was the great-grandchild of the rat my mother had had. He had also been along on their great adventure. That rat had also been named Henk. Mother had never been very creative with names. After Henk's offspring Piet, Koos, Pieter and Willem, she had named this little rat Henk again. Sometimes I appreciated being called Clara instead of Johanna, although that was mainly because of father, who didn't want Johannes and Johanna.

Henk squeaked and immediately afterwards I heard another scream from downstairs. I got out of bed. I wanted to investigate this further. I tried to sneak downstairs as quietly as possible, but as always I forgot that the middle step creaks. I stood still, frozen with fear. Had my parents heard me? The voices stopped for a moment. My heart was in my mouth, but as soon as the shouting started up again, I took a deep breath. All was safe. I walked on and hid behind the door. I heard my mother's loud voice.

'Kees, you really have to do something about it now! Get those rascals!'

'But that's dangerous!' father shouted back. He spoke more softly than mother, but still louder than normal. Father was normally very withdrawn, what was going on?

'So what? What's more important, the safety of your people or saving yourself?'

'But I'm important too!'

'You're not the good mayor's boy you used to be, are you? This disappoints me, Kees.'

'Okay, okay. I'll do something about it.' There was a moment of silence. 'Do I really have to fight with those—'

Oh dear! I felt a tickle in my throat. I tried my best to hold it back, but it was no use. I coughed. I didn't hear my mother's last words and my heart began to pound even harder. Had they heard me? I couldn't rely on fate twice and ran back upstairs as fast as I could. This time I did remember to avoid the middle step. Fortunately, because I think my parents would have heard me. I could hear my mother's footsteps on the stairs and the stairs creaking. I pulled my duvet over my head just before the door opened.

'Are you asleep, Clara?'

I could not answer my mother's sweet voice and tried to breathe as calmly as possible.

'Sleep well, sweetheart. I love you.' The door closed. I heard her walk to Johannes's room and ask him the same question.

I lay awake for a long time that night, with a lot to think about. Who is father going to have to fight? Why are they arguing? And dangerous? What is dangerous?

The church bell at half past four was the last I heard before I was woken in the morning by Johannes, who came noisily into my room. Brothers...

Johannes

The next morning I walked with Clara to the back garden, as we do every day. There was a pen with Wankeltje, our lamb. I fed him while Clara cuddled him. I gave him a little grass and freshly picked herbs. We found Wankeltje tangled in ropes six months ago. He was injured and could no longer walk. We took him home and Clara and I have been taking very good care of him ever since. Our parents were a bit hesitant at first, but these days they are completely won over.

Wankeltje has truly become part of our family.

I look at Clara as she plays with the lamb. 'Tomorrow is the beer festival, right sis? Are you looking forward to it?' I asked her. "Be careful not to drink too much beer at the party, Johannes. I heard that a lot of bad things have happened there in previous years!" she replied. I told her not to worry, that I am a grown man who can control himself. She burst out laughing.

Clara

On the way to school, Johannes couldn't stop talking about the beer festival: Maria Lichtmis. Every year on 2 January in Harderwijk, the older children at our school have dinner together and a barrel of beer is served. Johannes couldn't stop talking about it: 'I can't wait for all that delicious food and drink.'

Once we arrived at the school, our entire class was already waiting for us. We were going to walk together to Brouwerssteeg. 'Well, well, we almost left without you,' said our teacher. Johannes and I quickly joined the group. The closer we got to Brouwerssteeg, the better the atmosphere became. Everyone was in the mood. There were rows of tables full of pancakes, soup and meat. Music was playing softly and lights were shining brightly. I couldn't believe my eyes. Johannes immediately ran towards the beer barrels. I followed him, shaking my head. He immediately stood at the front of the line. He triumphantly turned to me with a full beer mug in his hand. 'No thank you sir, I don't drink beer,' I said when a man offered me a glass. All the food that was there was enough for me.

As the day progressed, I no longer recognised Johannes. He became grumpy and aggressive. 'Clara, try for once! Don't be so boring!!' he said to me, holding his glass in front of my face. "You've already had far too much to drink, Johannes. And I don't want it, is that so hard to understand? All you can think about is yourself," I replied. He didn't like that very much. He looked at me blearily for a few more seconds and then staggered away, defeated.

I was a bit confused, but I decided to make the best of it. Then, as I took a bite of my pancake, I suddenly heard shouting. I recognised Johannes's voice. I got up and looked around. Then I saw Johannes arguing with our teacher! Johannes was shouting all sorts of things, most of which I didn't understand. I was shocked by what happened next. Johannes had hit the teacher! How could he do such a thing? I ran up to him and grabbed his arm. 'What are you doing? Why can't you ever behave normally?' I said angrily. Johannes burst into tears. 'I didn't mean to, honest,' he said through his tears. I apologised profusely to the teacher: 'I'm really sorry, my brother drank too much beer. I'm sure he didn't mean to.' Then I took Johannes home, but that wasn't so easy. He staggered and almost fell over a few times.

Johannes

The teacher threw the letter on the table in front of me with a bang. 'Be glad I didn't take the unlucky sod to Candlemas, otherwise I would have thrown him into your deformed mug of a face long ago! And a lump would only improve your face!' Feeling guilty, I looked at my feet, afraid to see the teacher's actual gaze. Why on earth had I done that? If people found out that I had hit my own teacher, it would be a disaster for my parents' reputation. Even more importantly, my greatest fear was how my parents would react. What would they think? Would they throw me out of the house? Too many questions were wandering around in my head, the world around me was silent from the intense thinking.

'WILL YOU PLEASE PAY ATTENTION, YOU IDIOT! I'm trying to explain something to you here,

but you're daydreaming! We don't have time to think about your true love right now, especially when I look at you with a black eye!' I was startled from my thoughts by my screaming teacher. 'Sorry, sir! We can have a tea party later and talk about my true dream woman, can't we? I grinned. But unfortunately the teacher was not amused and he started to look at me even more angrily than before. His head turned bright red. 'Be careful, young man, or you'll be getting a pile of detention work from me in the near future! I will keep your parents informed of the mischief you dare to get up to here and a conversation will certainly be held. Don't you dare not to do this punishment work, otherwise you will have to deal with someone you would never want to have known. Now get out of here! I quickly picked up the letter that was lying on the teacher's wooden desk. I quickly walked out of the school.

The moment I took a step onto the Heerweg, I felt a cold breeze against my warm cheeks; as if winter was warning my guilty figure that spring would not last long if I continued to behave like this. I got chills all over my body, I wanted to get away from the cold. My pace quickened even more than before. There I went, on my way home, where the warmth of the fireplace felt like a family embrace. But was that warmth even there?

'Be more like your sister,' someone called out to me. But wasn't my name Clara? Wasn't I Johannes? I knew that I was not always the brightest with my actions, I had to work on that, but sometimes my thoughts became black and hazy. I did not think things through, so I just followed the path of these thoughts that brought me here; a path full of remorse and pain. The motives of my actions were rather unclear, not only to others, but also to myself. Regret was something I often felt, but could not express to my parents. They did not want to hear about it, because it was always Clara this, Clara that, never Johannes. My plan was therefore to show that I was worth it and that I could still do good for others. That time had yet to come.

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Shivering with cold, I sat down to do my punishment work on the floor of the warm house. How would mum and dad react when they saw the letter? The closer I got to the living room, the harder it became to tell them what had happened. Suddenly my rapidly beating heart was silenced by my mother's scream from the room next door. 'JOHANNES, I HEAR YOU'RE HERE, COME HERE RIGHT NOW, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SOME EXPLANATION TO GIVE ME, BOY!' Oh no, did they already know? How could the teacher have spread the news so quickly? No, that was not possible at all. Or had it been the neighbours? Had they noticed my actions and immediately told on me? Reluctantly, I walked to the living room, afraid of the consequences of my actions. When I looked up, I saw not only a frustrated mother, but also Clara. Clara. Had she told on me? I should have had the right to present my perspective as well, but no, Clara is always right, isn't she? 'I heard from Clara what you have been up to, young man. This can't go on any longer, I am completely done with all this mischief. I didn't raise you to be this way, did I? What did I do wrong to raise such a sweet son into a brat? What would father think of this? What will the town think? Johannes, think about it! Be like your su-' Anger came over me, mainly because I had a feeling she would say the same thing to me again. 'MA, I AM NOT CLARA, DON'T YOU STILL KNOW THAT? I know that I don't always think as clearly as she does and that I'm not as perfect as your daughter, mother. But could you listen to me for once? I haven't even been able to explain how the whole situation came about and what was going through my mind at the time. Those are things that Clara cannot explain. Is it really so hard to listen to your so-called stupid son for once? You know, it doesn't matter, because you're not going to listen to what I have to say anyway. Be the hero your child needs you to be, the hero you were when you brought peace to Harderwijk with the letter, or is that too much to ask?' Tears began to well up in my eyes. 'Mother, I-I-I just want you to listen and know that my name is Johannes. I am only human, too.' Salty drops rolled gently down my warm

cheeks. I couldn't take it anymore. Without thinking, I ran upstairs to my bed. There I hid under the sheets. Even my bed couldn't take away the cold I felt at that moment, snow kept piling up in my head until I couldn't see the lights anymore.

Clara

The smell of fish filled my nostrils. Yum! Luckily, mother had already finished setting the table, so I didn't have to help anymore. I went straight to the table. Johannes was already there. He had finally come down from his room. His eyes were red. Father and mother were still annoyed. I focused on the fish – so that I wouldn't swallow another fish bone like last time – while they argued with their eyes, using unspoken words. I felt uncomfortable and looked to Johannes for support, but he didn't realise anything was wrong. He was still looking at his plate, without saying a word. Even if he had realised how uncomfortable I felt, he might not have helped me. I wouldn't even be angry. I shouldn't have ratted on him. I hope he will forgive me soon... While I was thinking about our own argument, the silent argument between father and mother turned into one you could hear. 'Kees, that ship... You really have to do something.' Mother sounded angry.

'We don't even know if it's really harmful!'

'That's why you have to investigate it!'

Which ship? And what could be harmful about it?

Suddenly mother fell silent. Then she looked at father angrily. If she had been a cat, she would have bared her claws and scratched him. 'If you don't start an investigation tomorrow, I will go on that ship myself.'

Father gave in. 'Okay. I'll start tomorrow.'

Mother looked relieved, which made me happy, but I was still nervous. What was going on? Should I be worried?

We continued eating. When all the food was gone, Johannes and I cleared the table while mum and dad walked outside with their glasses of jenever.

Johannes

Bang, bang, bang 'Huaagh.' The banging woke me up. *Bang, bang, bang* I ran downstairs in my pyjamas.

Bang, bang, bang

'Yes, yes...' I opened the door and saw only a donkey with a letter on its back. The letter said: *For the Schippers family*. In my mind I quietly thought: 'Why so mysterious?' My parents were not at home. 'Maybe I should show it to Clara.' I went upstairs and walked through the hall towards Clara's room. I opened the door and saw an empty bed. 'Maybe she's out and about.' I went back downstairs to get some food, but saw Clara's coat on the coat rack. 'She never leaves without her coat, otherwise she'll catch a cold.' I paced back and forth. 'What does the letter say?' Where is Clara? 'Why is there a donkey peeing in front of my house?'

My mind is made up... I'm going to open the letter!

The letter said:

Dear Schippers family,

We have kidnapped your daughter.

If you want your daughter back, you must hand over the map of the hiding place of the cogue with spices.

Best regards,

The Lords of Kuinre

My first reaction was one of shock. Clara kidnapped? My sister? Clara was so tough, she wouldn't let herself be kidnapped just like that. Maybe she had been beaten up? Breathing suddenly became very difficult. There was no time to lose. I had to go now!

Clara

In the distance I heard birds singing. I slowly opened my eyes. Bright rays of light caused my head to start pounding. The wooden floor I was lying on was gently rocking me back and forth. I tried to sit up, but stopped halfway through due to a wave of nausea that washed over me. After a few seconds I sat up and tried to take in my surroundings. When I looked to my left, I saw a pair of long legs. 'Take it easy, we have all the time in the world,' a sarcastic voice said above me. I stood up as quickly as my body would allow. In front of me stood a tall boy with brown curls. As I looked at him, his crooked nose was the first thing I noticed. It must have been broken, but it had not been healed very nicely. The boy took just a little too long and before I knew it I was back on my knees with a burning sensation on my cheek. He had hit me. I was angry inside, HOW DARE HE?! I quickly got back up, ready to hit him back. But just before my hand touched his cheek I saw him look expectantly at a huge man standing next to us. The man nodded approvingly to the boy before walking past us, over a gangway that led him off the boat. I frowned a little, weird, went through my head.

After walking about 10 minutes from the boat, we arrived at a large country house. The group of men I had been following entered the building one by one. I looked around in amazement. I had no idea what to do. The boy behind me, the one with the crooked nose, poked me in the back while he sighed. 'Hurry isn't really your strong suit, is it?' I quickly ran after the men into the house. What a loser, I thought, rolling my eyes. Just before I crossed the threshold, my eyes fell on the logo on the door. I stopped walking abruptly and stared at the logo. I've seen it before... When the teacher at school talked about the Lords of Kuinre, he had shown the exact same logo. I felt the boy push me into the house while he scolded under his breath. Stumbling over the threshold, I tried to gather my thoughts. The Lords of Kuinre... I'm in a real fix...

Johannes

I knew I had no time to lose, but where should I go? I decided to go to the jetty on the Zuiderzee. Maybe I could find a boat there and use it to go look for Clara. But... I couldn't sail a boat on my own, I would need a crew. I would have to find mercenaries. I went down a small, narrow alley towards the rough bar I was never allowed to go to.

I walked in proudly and called out: 'Who wants to join me, the great Johannes, on an unforgettable journey!'

Someone replied: 'For what price?'

I panicked. Why would I pay for a loyal crew?

I said: '2 guilders per person!'

Everyone laughed at me. I had to raise my offer, because this was only half of what a worker normally earns in a day.

'I raise my offer to 100 guilders per person!'

Everyone came up to me and started to lift me up, as if I were the saviour of their suffering! I was happy, until I realised how on earth I would come up with 100 guilders per crew member.

One of the mercenaries was still grumbling. He didn't want to be away from home for so long, but I thought about it and there was only one thing to say: 'There's beer on board!'

I had my crew wait by the ship and ran home to get money from my parents' safe, but where was the key? I thought frantically and then I remembered. Mother always kept the key in Father's desk. I searched for the key and opened the safe. I quickly took out ... gold coins for the crew and ... coins for the barrels of beer I had promised.

After taking the money, I ran to the ship, which I had borrowed without permission – I had a good reason of course – and greeted my crew. But when I gave them their money, they ran away! Why!? I panicked even more and thought about it. Should I look for a new crew or go it alone?

After a while of pacing back and forth, I saw an unmanned ship. I had already spent enough money, so I decided to borrow the ship temporarily and without prior arrangement. I didn't think the captain would mind.

Clara

It was almost evening. The seconds passed terribly slowly. How long would I have to stay here? Suddenly a boy walked up to me, the boy with the crooked nose who had brought me here earlier. He was holding a plate with a dirty mess on it. He put the plate in front of me. The boy leaned against the wall and looked at me. I looked at the food, which appeared to contain rotten fish. It stank terribly and I had to restrain myself from retching. Did this stupid kid expect me to eat this disgusting food? 'What do you want?' I asked. The boy said nothing and still looked at me with the same stupid look. 'Do you expect me to eat this slop?' He smiled and came closer, my heart began to beat faster. 'Tough luck, girl, this is the only thing you'll get. Shall I take it away again?' I looked at him. Up close, I could see that he had a few scars on his face. He looked about my age. The boy had deep brown eyes. I had to think of something to distract him and get him away from me. I got an idea and was disgusted by it even as I thought it through. I took a deep breath and said: 'You're pretty cute for a boy with a crooked nose.' He first looked at me, dumbfounded, and then began to look away uncomfortably. When he looked away, I had a chance to try to escape. I pushed the boy aside and ran for the door, hoping to escape. I tried to open the door, but it wouldn't open. Oh no, this is not good! I pushed, kicked and pulled on the door. Nothing, the door is locked. The boy I had pushed stood up and grabbed me by the arm. He pushed me back with all his might, causing me to hit the ground hard. 'OW, THAT HURTS, STUPID JOCHI!' He laughed and looked at me for a long time. 'I assume you won't be eating, but don't think I'll bring you something to eat next time. My patience won't last forever. If you don't want to listen, you'll just have to suffer.' The boy picked up the plate and threw the dirty mess on the floor. He walked away, grinning. I was alone again, in the deep darkness of the room. I started to sob and tears rolled down my cheeks. I have been kidnapped and have no food. What do I have to do to get myself out of this mess?

Duco

'It's not true, it's not true, it's not true.' I forced myself to keep repeating this in my head. "It's not true, it's not true," I thought as I opened the door to the dining room. "It's not true, it's not true," echoed through my head. Meanwhile, I saw my father get up and walk towards me. My father. The brains behind the whole operation. The boss of the Lords of Kuinre. No one was smarter, stronger or better than him. At least... that's what he thought. 'It's not like that.' Before I realise it, I say it out loud. I saw the frown appear on my father's forehead. 'What's not like that? Everything went well, hopefully, or can't you even bring a child his food?' The men at the table started to laugh. He always did this, making me out to be stupid, making me look like a fool. Deep down I knew he was disappointed in me, that I wasn't the son he wanted. Not strong enough, not brave enough, not good enough. "Yes, everything went fine." I sighed softly. My father took two large steps and then stood right in front of me. 'You're acting strange, is something wrong?' he asked with a doubtful voice. 'Nothing,' I said irritably, 'just tired, I guess.' 'Stupid kid,' my father shouted out of the blue

across the dining hall. "What a weakling you are, you should never give in to your weaknesses." His face turned red. "Get the hell back to your room, I don't want to see your face tonight!"

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And that's how my day ended nine times out of ten. Without eating, locked in my room. Not literally, the door is unlocked, but the last time I tried to sneak out... Shivers ran down my spine. My room was not that big. There was barely enough room for a narrow bed, a cupboard and a small desk. As soon as I closed the door to my room behind me, I saw that my bed had not been made. I sighed, thank goodness my father didn't see that, he would have had another reason to yell at me. I plopped down on my unmade bed and stared at the ceiling. But all the while, only one thought was going through my head, which I tried to convince myself of: 'It's not like that... I don't like her...'

Johannes

I have been at sea for hours now. It was almost impossible to control a boat on the Zuiderzee on my own. I was soaked to the bone by the waves rolling across the deck. The creaking wood sounded as if the ship could break at any moment. Soon I would sink! But... I did it for my sister Clara. I had to save her, no matter what. So I continued to struggle to get the little ship safely to shore.

Clara

I opened my eyes and looked around. I had slept terribly, it was freezing. I looked around and was shocked. I was not in my own room at all! I was locked in a cold room. I tried to open the door. It was locked. Suddenly I remembered everything that had happened. I had been taken to a country house belonging to the lords of Kuinre. And now here I was... locked up and hungry. I had insulted the captain's son, had cried all night and had barely slept a wink. The pirates would wake up one by one as the sun rose. Maybe I could persuade one of the pirates to bring me food? I immediately dismissed that idea. All pirates are heartless and would never give me food. They would laugh at me and make me suffer even more if I begged them for food.

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It was almost noon and my hunger was so great that I could faint at any moment. I had been locked up all day, when would they bring me food? A number of pirates came with the same question: 'What do you know about the secret map?' Each time they got the same answer from me: 'I don't know what you're talking about. I know nothing about a secret map.' Eventually they gave up asking me questions and no one came to me anymore. No one had brought me food that day. Every few hours, my little rat Henk would steal food from the pirates. Henk couldn't carry much with his small body, but at least it was enough to satisfy our hunger a little. Hopefully someone would bring me food sooner or later. Henk and I couldn't keep this up much longer.

Duco

I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling. Today had been a terrible day. I had never had such a bad day in my life. I had ruined all the chores by dropping things, bumping into walls and messing up the chores in other ways. I kept thinking about the girl the whole time. How could I be so stupid as to like a girl I only knew for one day? I don't think she likes me very much either, given what happened recently. She probably hadn't been given any food and had nowhere to sleep but a freezing cold spot. I took a deep breath and almost automatically my legs took me to where the girl was. I had brought a blanket and some food for the girl. I had arrived at her place and she was staring out of the window at the sky full of stars. She looked so loving as she stared at the stars. I immediately felt guilty because the plans my father had for this girl were cruel. I walked towards her carefully because I didn't want to scare her. The girl looked up at me and stared back with a

lifeless gaze. My heart began to beat faster and I stammered like crazy. 'I uh... I... I brought you a blanket and some food.' The girl looked at me for a moment, stunned, but then she smiled. She started eating as soon as I handed her the plate and almost seemed to forget that I was standing there. I sat down next to her. Sitting next to her made me feel safe and warm. 'What's your name?' I asked. She hesitated as to whether she should tell me her name. Finally she replied: 'My name is Clara, thank you for bringing me food and a blanket. And what is your name, pirate boy?' 'I'm Duco.' She finally looked away from the sky and looked at me gratefully. I looked out the window at the sky. I froze when I saw that it had already gotten dark. My father had instructed me to be with him before dark. He wanted to talk to me about how things were going with the girl. I got up in a flash and walked away. Clara was all alone again and I could feel her gaze on me as I walked away. It hurt to leave her alone. Why did I always feel so warm inside when I was with her? I couldn't like her... I just couldn't.

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'Where on earth have you come from?' My father was standing in the doorway of his room, waiting. My father thought I had been gone far too long and before I knew it, I had a fist in my face.

Clara

I heard a thud on the door. Duco walked in. I had slept very badly on a straw mattress. He had a bowl of porridge and a wooden cup. Duco looked terrible. He had a black eye and a large scratch on his arm and he was walking with a limp. I asked what had happened. 'I was beaten by my father because I was with you too long.' 'Why is that a problem?' I asked. 'My father thinks I don't work hard enough. I have to clean everything in such a big country house and everything is dusty and full of cobwebs. How am I ever supposed to do it? I am mistreated here for everything I do. I have been given the task of keeping things clean here, but nobody cares, so I have a plan: what if I steal the key for once? Then we'll run out of the mansion and into the marshy land and we'll see what happens from there,' said Duco, 'But I really have to go now, otherwise I'll get another beating.'

Johannes

I got off the boat and started walking in the direction of the country house. I could not moor the boat at the country house because otherwise I would be seen immediately. After about two hours of walking, the sun had just set. It was not far, but because the swamp was very marshy, it took a long time. I was very tired and wet, but I saw the filthy walled country house. The manor had a large staircase in the centre and two large square towers on either side. I saw guards all around the house. I tried to hide, but a small, thin boy had just seen me. I tried to go back as quickly as possible, but the swamp didn't make it easy for me. The boy who saw me didn't tell his friends - ha, ha, what a loser. I ran away but he was faster. I had no choice but to fight, but he was bigger and stronger. I tried to grab a stick from a tree but I was too late. He gave me a full blow behind my ear. I tried to hit him back but he dodged. He made a feint and hit me from a completely unexpected angle. I was furious and I punched him square in the stomach, which made him even angrier. I dodged his punch and jumped up and punched him square in the nose. Blood spurted from his nose. I ran to the nearest tree and climbed up. The boy tried to climb after me, but I was faster. I climbed to the top and sat on a branch, but he pulled a branch from the tree and tried to hit me with it. I grabbed the branch and threw it straight at his head, then stomped on his hand. He fell at least 3 metres with a big thud. He got up and ran half-hopping straight back to the big house. I remained in the tree, afraid, and could see less and less as darkness fell. I hoped I could sleep here for a few hours, because tomorrow when it was light I would go and rescue Clara.

Duco

I brought Clara food twice a day. Each time I got butterflies in my stomach when I saw Clara sitting there. I couldn't bear another day with my father. Every time I had been to see Clara, he had punished me severely. I had never got on well with my father, and it was time I escaped from his evil plans. I had to come up with an escape plan, and fast. I could take Clara with me. I could run away with her. She would be useful in helping me escape. I stood up and Clara looked up from her plate of food that I had brought her. 'Clara, we are going to escape from this terrible place together. I won't last another day here and you are coming with me. I have been thinking about it lately and I am now certain. I have to get out of here and because you are very clever, you have to help me escape.' All this time, Clara had been staring at me, stunned. I was afraid she might think it was an absurd idea. I was coming up with absurd things, things that would never happen. I looked away from Clara. It was a stupid idea. I stammered that she should forget it and was about to walk away. She called out to me: 'If you're planning to escape, I'll come with you. Do you have any ideas about how we can escape?'
...

Johannes

The next day I drew up a plan as I continued walking towards the country house. Step 1: I distract the robbers. 2: I attack from behind.
...

After walking for a long time, I saw something huge. For a moment I thought they were grey trees, but no. The country house was gigantic. I had misjudged it. It was unbelievable. I had to come up with a new and better plan. Step 1: I will wait until nightfall. Step 2: I will take out the robbers from behind so that there are fewer guards and I can then go inside. Step 3: find Clara and then return with a ship. How do I get a ship again? I will look for a small fishing boat on my way to Clara. After I have successfully completed the plan, I will be the hero of the day!

I had to wait until nightfall. To pass the time, I played a fun game: the first to find a certain colour wins! I was playing by myself, so I asked myself questions. 'Where is the colour pink?' And I searched and searched and slept. It was the middle of the night when I woke up. That sleepless night had still had an effect. At night I got ready and saw that there were guards, but they were asleep too. 'Hey, I'm better than them.' So I didn't have to eliminate anyone. I kept watch for a while: 'Who knows, maybe Clara will come out one day?' Then I climbed back up a tree, maybe I was still tired after all. I wasn't lazy, but I still needed to get more energy to defeat my enemies!

Clara

'Clara, I have the key,' said Duco. 'Come on, we have to go now, but you have to disguise yourself, otherwise everyone will recognise you. Put this on.' He gave me some fabric trousers, a cap and a cloak. I put them on and we slipped out of the mansion. The house is huge. There were stairs up and down on the left and right. It was a real maze. I was afraid he was luring me into a trap. I was afraid I would be murdered at every corner. Then I finally saw the large oak door to the outside. We walked a little further, but unfortunately we had already been seen. 'RUN!' Duco shouted. I took off running, but men came running from all directions, some of them waving their knives or swords. Sometimes a man with a sword came dangerously close, but luckily we were just in time. After running for a while, we jumped into a hole. It was full of mud, but it was the only way to avoid being caught. I quickly became completely cold. It became very tense once, when one of the pirates was only a few metres away from the hole. After a few hours, we thought they had gone. We trotted on, but no! They hadn't gone. We heard them shouting again. I heard Duco scream; he had tripped. 'Run, Clara!' he shouted. 'Save yourself!' It was difficult, but I had to. I ran on. A moment later he was running alongside me again, thank goodness! The pursuers had given up

by then. We continued running, but then suddenly someone appeared out of a tree and jumped on top of Duco. I was terrified and hit the man as hard as I could. But then I heard it was Johannes' voice. Johannes? What is he doing here?

'Johannes! Is that you?' Never mind that, we'll talk later. RUN!

Duco

After a long, sleepless night on the banks of the Zuiderzee, I decided to wake the others. Last night the three of us had been discussing things at length. Johannes had seen an unmanned kogge (a traditional Dutch sailing boat) further along. We would steal that boat early in the morning and try to sail it back to Harderwijk. It was a big boat for the three of us to steer, but we would give it a try. At first, Johannes had been stubborn and distant, but after I had told him what I had experienced with the Lords of Kuinre, Johannes allowed me to come with him in his boat. I walked over to Clara, bent down and whispered in her ear: 'Hey, wake up.' She did not respond. I whispered again and gently shook her. 'Hey hey, wake up. WAKE UP!' Clara woke with a start and looked at me with a sleepy face. Johannes was also startled awake by my shouting. He jumped up. 'Why are you shouting like that? What if they hear us?' 'They won't hear us, they're too far away,' I replied. 'Come quickly, we have to get to the boat!' We ran to the boat. When we arrived, we quickly climbed aboard. Johannes was the last to board the boat and cast off the mooring lines. He crawled behind the helm and began to sail. The boat rocked. Lazy waves lapped against the side of the boat. A wave of tranquillity washed over us as the wind felt ever so slightly less strong. The silence and tranquillity became deafening as we found ourselves in a sea of emptiness and blue. We calmly bobbed along on the blue sea. Johannes at the helm, Clara and I on the deck. Side by side, looking at the blue, slightly cloudy sky above our heads.

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After sailing for a while, the sea became more restless. The waves grew higher, the wind picked up. It woke me up, but Clara didn't notice. She needed the peace and quiet, so I let her sleep. I walked over to Johannes. He seemed to be having trouble steering the boat. No matter what he did, he couldn't win the battle against the water. Johannes made an abrupt movement with the rudder, causing the boat to almost capsize. Johannes fell to the ground. So did I, landing hard on the wooden surface. A painful sensation shot through my arm. I immediately got up to check on Clara. To make sure she wasn't in any pain. To be with her now that the sea had become so rough. To comfort her if she needed it. Or simply to be there. For the peace and quiet, with Clara.

### **Clara**

I was startled awake by an arm wrapped around me. Sleepily, I looked around. There lay Duco, with his arm around me. I thought this would never happen, maybe I was just hoping it would. Duco pretended to be asleep. My moving body told him I was awake. He opened his eyes again. All I saw in his beautiful eyes was fear. That scared me. Very scared. 'What's wrong?' I asked. 'Stay calm, Clara,' Duco replied. 'What is it, Duco?' I asked again, now much more nervous. Thousands of questions raced through my head, all fuelled by fear. Was there something wrong with Johannes? Was there something wrong with Duco? And why is that damn boat rocking so much? 'There is a big problem, Clara.' 'What is it?' My voice sounded frustrated, more frustrated than I wanted to be. 'The sea is very rough. The boat is rocking and Johannes is not winning the fight against the water. We have to leave, Clara,' was Duco's answer. 'So you just lay down next to me, calmly?' 'I thought you might need some comfort' 'I can do that just fine myself, Duco!' 'Clara, we have to help Johannes, NOW!' Duco looked startled, even more than before. He pointed behind me. In one motion I turned around. Water was seeping into our boat from all sides through small holes or cracks in the wood. I screamed out of fear. In a blur I ran towards Johannes. I dragged Duco with me, causing us both to almost fall over. The water was now almost up to my ankles. I

tried to stand up, but I was stuck. I had fallen through a plank. 'DUCO!' I shouted. He turned around. His face paled with fear. He ran towards me, fighting against the water.

### **Duco**

The water was getting higher and higher. I shouted to Clara, 'We still have a lifeboat!' The water was now up to our knees, luckily Johannes was with us now too. 'There's the lifeboat', Johannes shouted. I now dragged Clara along, who was struggling to stay on her feet due to the strong wind. The ship was now really starting to break apart. We had almost reached the rowboat when Clara suddenly let out a loud 'OUCH'. A sharp piece of wood had cut Clara's leg... It was bleeding. 'Help...' she moaned. I tried to help her, but suddenly she fainted. 'Johannes!!' I shouted. 'I will try to revive her, then you try to free the boat.' I lifted Clara so she wouldn't drown. She lay in my arms like a bride. By now the water had risen above our waists and larger pieces of the boat began to tear off. Fortunately, Johannes had managed to untie the boat and shouted at the small boat: 'Why did they tie that damn thing so tightly?' He also looked at Clara, who was still unconscious and lying safely in my arms. 'We'll put her in the boat in a minute, hopefully she'll be okay,' Johannes said to me. Johannes managed to push the small boat, paddles and all, into the water and carefully helped her into the boat. Behind me, the boat was starting to collapse. Johannes pulled me into the boat just in time, just before it fell apart even further and I ended up in the water.

### **Clara**

I regained consciousness in the small boat with Duco and Johannes, their faces turned towards me. 'Clara!' they both shouted at the same time. I could still feel everything spinning, and they helped me up. I began to feel the sharp pain from my wound again. When I looked at it, they had already bandaged the wound with Johannes' shirt. 'How do you feel?' Duco asked me. "Bad." "Cold." A piece of blown-off sail was in the boat, so Johannes said, "Maybe we should use this as a big blanket until we've warmed up a bit." "Good idea!" Duco replied. Johannes took the sail and put it over the three of them. The waves and the wind were still quite wild, but luckily the boat had not yet broken up.

### **Johannes**

Clara had fallen asleep on Duco's shoulder, not very surprising as she was tired from the pain of her leg wound and all the dangers she had gone through in the past few days... Duco looked to see which way we should go. 'We need to head southeast', Duco told me. He showed me, his compass had cracked in the incident with the other boat. 'Luckily my compass is still working', said Duco. 'Luckily, yes', I replied. Following Duco's directions, I started to row.

### **Duco**

Clara woke up calmly. She is so beautiful when she sleeps. 'I'll take over,' I said to Johannes. Johannes agreed. Johannes and I switched places. A minute later, Clara sat down next to me. 'Are you feeling any better, Clara?' 'Yes, I'm doing a bit better, but my leg wound still hurts.' 'It will be okay, I will look at the wound again when we are at your and Johannes's house,' I promised Clara. Clara then sat closer and closer to me until our legs touched. Johannes had fallen asleep. Suddenly Clara placed her hand on the top of my leg. 'Clara?' I said nervously. 'Thank you Duco, for everything you have done for me and Johannes.' 'Everything for you...' I said aloud, accidentally. "Duco..." Clara said. She looked me straight in the eye. I couldn't say anything more. I was lost in her eyes. She calmed me, but at the same time made me incredibly nervous. I wanted her. Only Clara.

### **Clara**

We looked into each other's eyes and then he touched my cheek and rubbed it gently. He pulled

me closer to him. 'Duco...' I said again, but this time nervously. He leaned closer to me. Our faces almost touched. Then Duco whispered greedily, 'I love you, Clara, and only you.' And he kissed me softly but passionately. For a moment, everything was quiet. My stomach was filled with butterflies and my attention was focused solely on him. He was the one for me. Duco had my heart.

### **Johannes**

I woke up. Still tired, but the nap had helped.

Duco and Clara were still sitting next to each other. Something had happened, but I had no idea what exactly.

'Look, I can see the tower of Harderwijk!' Clara suddenly shouted happily. The tall, blunt tower of the Church of Our Lady was sticking out into the sky. Father was always very proud that we had the highest church tower in the whole of Gelderland. 'And I can see the Hoge and Lage Bruggepoort looming up there too!' Clara and I sat down at the front of the boat, feeling relieved, to get a better view of the looming city. 'Clara, I'm so glad to be going home soon!' 'Yes, me too!' said Clara, leaning on my shoulder to relieve her aching leg.

I stood there for a moment, thinking about what had happened in the past week, about the kidnapping, about Duco's father, how hard the work on the boat had been and about how Duco wasn't really a bad person. And also about... 'OWW'

'Sorry for interrupting your daydreaming, but we really need to secure the boat to the jetty.' 'It would be nice if you could help,' said Duco. "You didn't have to punch me in the foot," I snapped back.

### **Duco**

Looking at the jetties that stretched out into the water from the two gates, I realised that I had never really been here myself. I saw figures standing at the side. They were people, doing normal human things. I had never realised before how beautiful some places could look. I had never paid attention to the beautiful details before. It was only when I met Clara that I began to see the world for the beautiful things it had to offer. How the water ripples, how the sun shines and how the clouds move in the wind.

We were getting closer and closer to the quay and I realised that Johannes was staring straight ahead. I let go of the rudder and walked over to Johannes. I gave him a pat on the foot to bring him back to reality. He was not very grateful.

### **Johannes**

We were getting closer and closer to the jetty in front of the Bruggepoort. Suddenly Clara shouted, 'Look, there's mum!!' Her enthusiasm spread to Duco and me. 'Yes, that's mum!' I said happily to Clara. We could see mum clearly now. I saw her waving and crying with joy. Clara called out to her mother again to see if she could hear her. We moored our boat to the jetty. Clara was the first to climb off the boat and stumbled towards our mother as fast as she could, tears rolling down her cheeks. Mother was waiting for us, tears rolling down her cheeks too. At first I calmly walked across the jetty, but when I got closer to mother, who was waiting under the gate, I couldn't help but run to her just like Clara. When I reached her, she put her arm around me. After a big hug, we let each other go. I was trembling, thinking about how I had ended up here. Duco was standing at a distance, watching, unsure if he should be at this reunion. He deserved to be. After all, he was the enemy. But it was still sad. He just stood there, alone. Now that we had let each other go, Duco slowly came towards us. Clara hugged him. We all walked back home through the city. In the meantime, we caught up, full of adrenaline after this return journey. We told everything that had happened. With each story, mother's eyes grew wider in amazement. 'Now that I hear this, I am only happier that you have returned unharmed,' she said. So was I. I wanted to get home as

quickly as possible, to leave all this behind.

### **Duco**

The door opened slowly. Clara and Johannes's mother let us in. Everyone gasped. My father! My father pulled Clara and Johannes's mother towards him and held a sharp knife to her neck. He dragged her inside, pushed her onto a chair and tied her hands to the back of the chair. Then he took a piece of cloth and tied it around her mouth.

'Oh, Duco...' he said to me. Then he said: 'The fact that you don't realise all the things I've done for you and how I've helped you.' 'My son, how can you not see my love for you?' 'How on earth can you decide to join these backward people?' I was at a loss for words and no one said anything.

'You know what I want, Duco, and I will make sure I get it.' 'No,' is my answer

'What did you say?' 'No,' I repeat, louder now.

'You're not killing anyone, father, and you're not going to get the loot you want.' 'This idea that you are superior will end today.'

My father let go of Clara's mother and walked over to me. He held his knife at my neck. Then Clara suddenly said calmly and at the same time urgently: 'Duco, please don't sacrifice yourself.'

### **Johannes**

Duco was standing there against the wall with his father right in front of his face. I knew I had to do something, but what? After Clara had said something to Duco, I whispered to her: 'Duco's father is only watching Duco now. You can untie mother from the chair.' Duco was now being dragged into the other room, his father was now shouting at him, then we heard the crack of a flat hand against a face. We heard Duco whimper. I ran outside to look for my father.

### **Duco**

I had never seen my father so angry. He had just hit me and now he was standing in my face, shouting. I said nothing. Not because I was afraid, but more because I just didn't know what to say. He should have been my father, not a barbarian. He should have taken care of me and loved me, given me a real childhood. A time when I felt good and everything was just normal. He ruined the life I wanted so badly.

My father and I were now looking at each other; he had stopped screaming. This is my chance, I thought. I punched my father hard in the face. Then I pushed him to the ground and grabbed the knife he had in his hands. I looked at him one more time and said to him, 'Sorry, father,' and I plunged his knife straight into his heart.

### **Clara**

I had already freed my mother. Suddenly everything was quiet. I looked around the corner of the room where Duco and his father were, only now Duco's father was on the floor. Dead. Duco was on the floor, this time really in tears for the first time. Mother and I walked over to Duco to comfort him. I sat down next to Duco and held him in my arms. Mother stayed with us for a while. Then she walked away to get Duco something to drink. 'It's okay, Duco,' I said to him after a while. Mother came back and handed him the glass. Duco sat up and drank the water. He looked at his father who was still lying there on the ground. I got up and looked at my mother, then at Duco and said: 'Mother and I will take the body away, father and Johannes will be here soon.'

### **Johannes**

I had found father. I fell into his arms. 'Johannes, my son!' He took me in his arms. 'Are you and Clara okay?' he asked after the moment with me in his arms. 'I will explain everything to you, we have to go back home as soon as possible.' On the way home I explained everything about the situation I, Clara and Duco had ended up in. We arrived home, the door was open. Father and I

went inside. Duco was sitting on a chair. I introduced Duco to father. Then I asked Duco where Clara and mother were. 'Out for a bit', said Duco. 'And your father?' I asked. 'Dead', said Duco softly. I sat down next to Duco, hoping that would help, I thought. Father also came to sit down. Suddenly we heard bleating. 'Wankeltje!' I said cheerfully. 'Wankeltje?' Duco asked, surprised. 'Our little lamb,' I replied. Wankeltje came walking in. Instead of walking towards me, he went straight to Duco. He moved his head against Duco's legs. 'What a sweet animal!' Duco said cheerfully. He stroked his head and back. Wankeltje stayed with Duco. I could see that Wankeltje really cheered Duco up, so I didn't dare to disturb the moment. Ten minutes passed, I heard footsteps. It was Clara and mum. They came and sat with us. We talked about the difficult days we had just been through. Wankeltje was still sitting with Duco, which helped him talk about the events more easily. It had been difficult for all of us and we all needed some peace and quiet. Duco suddenly said to Clara: 'We should really take a look at your leg wound and bandage it properly.' Mother suggested that she do it. She got up and took Clara with her to the other room to examine the leg wound. Duco now turned his attention to me and father and then said, 'I have to ask you something...'

### **Duco**

After the private conversation without Clara, I walked into the room where Clara's mother was now ready to reattach Clara's leg. 'Do you have a moment?' I asked Clara. Clara walked outside with me. 'Are you okay?' Clara asked me. 'Yes...' I said. 'Shall we take a walk?' I then asked. Clara agreed, and before long the two of us were standing on the Vischmarkt. We walked a little way towards the water. We stopped and I asked Clara if I could ask her something. 'Of course, always Duco,' she replied. I stood opposite her and took both her hands in mine. 'Dear Clara, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever met.' 'You are kind, helpful and have a huge heart.' 'It's no surprise that I fell deeply in love with you during that time.' Clara was now in tears. I looked deeply into Clara's eyes. 'Will you marry me?' 'Yes!' Clara said a little too loudly. 'But what will my family think?' Clara asked a little softer and more worriedly after her enthusiasm. 'I've already gotten their permission, so you don't have to worry about that,' I reassured Clara. We walked back home hand in hand. We went inside and sat down to continue talking about what had happened in the past few days and to share the news about Clara and me. **Kidnapping in Harderwijk**

Harderwijk 1467

### **Clara**

'Watch where you're going, you idiot!' I heard my brother shout from afar. With a deep sigh, I ran towards the loud voice. What had Johannes done now? When I ran up to the scaffolding in front of the Lage Bruggepoort, I saw Johannes arguing with a huge man.

'You were the one who bumped into me, you little rascal!' the muscular man said to my 'self-confident' brother.

'Oh, I thought I could give you a hand with that heavy barrel of fish, it must be far too heavy for you,' Johannes said mockingly. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up the wooden barrel. I saw his head turn completely red, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. I saw the sparkle of his self-confidence fade away in his eyes. He dropped the barrel, not just on the stone ground, but on the sailor's toe! He looked at him furiously as if he could tear him to pieces. In my imagination I even saw steam coming out of his ears. 'My little toe!!' The big man jumped up and down while holding his foot. Out of anger, he even kicked the same barrel again.

I saw him hobble over to my brother with a furious look in his eyes: 'Do you know what else I can lift?!' He picked Johannes up and threw him into the water of the Zuiderzee. I saw the sailor walk towards me after he had thrown my brother into the water. The man grumpily growled at me, 'What are you looking at, you little thing!'. I stood rooted to the spot, then when I was sure he had gone, I saw my brother floundering to stay above water; I had to save him! So I rushed over to him. He

took my outstretched hand and I helped him out of the water. After Johannes was back on the jetty, he stormed off without looking at me, muttering to himself. I saw a coin lying on the ground and decided to pick it up. When I looked closer, I saw a knight on horseback with a sword in his hands. I glanced at the sailor. He was digging in his pockets and looking around anxiously, as if he were searching for something. We made eye contact. I quickly walked away, hiding the coin in my jacket pocket. I picked up my pace to catch up with Johannes.

### **Johannes**

When my sister Clara and I got home, dinner was already ready and on our plates. I could already smell the slightly burnt potatoes before I even entered the house. Mother was not the best cook. As soon as we sat down at the table, Mother immediately asked why I was so wet.

'I saved a drowned child from the water,' I said. A white lie, surely that's allowed? But of course Clara had to ruin my "hero moment" again.

'He was thrown into the water,' she shouted through the commotion.

Father and mother started to laugh and I felt my cheeks glow.

'Let's eat,' I said, mashing my gravy into my potatoes.

'Has anyone else had any adventures?' asked mother. There was silence. Father took a few bites of his potatoes before he said anything. 'I heard that the Lords of Kuinre are bothering many traders these days. Yesterday when I was at the fish market, I was even told that Cornelius' valuable cargo of herring was confiscated by those rascals! If that starts to affect trade, we'll have a problem. Harderwijk will miss out on a lot of important products. Before you know it, they'll have control of all the trade in Harderwijk!'

'Then fight them,' said mum. "I'll be in the front line!"

Clara and I burst out laughing. That was a great comment for mum. Mum was always up for an adventure and whenever there was something going on, mum was in the front line.

Dad, who is calmer, shook his head. 'It's impossible. It's too dangerous.'

'They're not coming to Harderwijk, are they, those pirates?' Clara tried to sound tough, but I could tell she was tense.

'Of course not. You don't have to worry. You're safe here, Clara,' father reassured her.

'And if anything happens, I'll come and save you!' mother added.

...

### **Clara**

My eyes opened slowly after the loud shouting that had come from downstairs. Outside, I heard the church bell toll three times. It was three o'clock in the morning. Why were people still arguing at this time of night? I looked into the cage next to my bed and saw that my little rat Henk had also woken up. He looked at me drowsily with his small circle eyes. It was a cute sight. Henk was the great-grandchild of the rat my mother had had. He had also been along on their great adventure. That rat had also been named Henk. Mother had never been very creative with names. After Henk's offspring Piet, Koos, Pieter and Willem, she had named this little rat Henk again. Sometimes I appreciated being called Clara instead of Johanna, although that was mainly because of father, who didn't want Johannes and Johanna.

Henk squeaked and immediately afterwards I heard another scream from downstairs. I got out of bed. I wanted to investigate this further. I tried to sneak downstairs as quietly as possible, but as always I forgot that the middle step creaks. I stood still, frozen with fear. Had my parents heard me? The voices stopped for a moment. My heart was in my mouth, but as soon as the shouting started up again, I took a deep breath. All was safe. I walked on and hid behind the door. I heard my mother's loud voice.

'Kees, you really have to do something about it now! Get those rascals!'

'But that's dangerous!' father shouted back. He spoke more softly than mother, but still louder than



normal. Father was normally very withdrawn, what was going on?

'So what? What's more important, the safety of your people or saving yourself?'

'But I'm important too!'

'You're not the good mayor's boy you used to be, are you? This disappoints me, Kees.'

'Okay, okay. I'll do something about it.' There was a moment of silence. 'Do I really have to fight with those—'

Oh dear! I felt a tickle in my throat. I tried my best to hold it back, but it was no use. I coughed. I didn't hear my mother's last words and my heart began to pound even harder. Had they heard me? I couldn't rely on fate twice and ran back upstairs as fast as I could. This time I did remember to avoid the middle step. Fortunately, because I think my parents would have heard me. I could hear my mother's footsteps on the stairs and the stairs creaking. I pulled my duvet over my head just before the door opened.

'Are you asleep, Clara?'

I could not answer my mother's sweet voice and tried to breathe as calmly as possible.

'Sleep well, sweetheart. I love you.' The door closed. I heard her walk to Johannes's room and ask him the same question.

I lay awake for a long time that night, with a lot to think about. Who is father going to have to fight? Why are they arguing? And dangerous? What is dangerous?

The church bell at half past four was the last I heard before I was woken in the morning by Johannes, who came noisily into my room. Brothers...

## **Johannes**

The next morning I walked with Clara to the back garden, as we do every day. There was a pen with Wankeltje, our lamb. I fed him while Clara cuddled him. I gave him a little grass and freshly picked herbs. We found Wankeltje tangled in ropes six months ago. He was injured and could no longer walk. We took him home and Clara and I have been taking very good care of him ever since. Our parents were a bit hesitant at first, but these days they are completely won over. Wankeltje has truly become part of our family.

I look at Clara as she plays with the lamb. 'Tomorrow is the beer festival, right sis? Are you looking forward to it?' I asked her. 'Be careful not to drink too much beer at the party, Johannes. I heard that a lot of bad things have happened there in previous years!' she replied. I told her not to worry, that I am a grown man who can control himself. She burst out laughing.

## **Clara**

On the way to school, Johannes couldn't stop talking about the beer festival: Maria Lichtmis. Every year on 2 January in Harderwijk, the older children at our school have dinner together and a barrel of beer is served. Johannes couldn't stop talking about it: 'I can't wait for all that delicious food and drink.'

Once we arrived at the school, our entire class was already waiting for us. We were going to walk together to Brouwerssteeg. 'Well, well, we almost left without you,' said our teacher. Johannes and I quickly joined the group. The closer we got to Brouwerssteeg, the better the atmosphere became. Everyone was in the mood. There were rows of tables full of pancakes, soup and meat. Music was playing softly and lights were shining brightly. I couldn't believe my eyes. Johannes immediately ran towards the beer barrels. I followed him, shaking my head. He immediately stood at the front of the line. He triumphantly turned to me with a full beer mug in his hand. 'No thank you sir, I don't drink beer,' I said when a man offered me a glass. All the food that was there was enough for me.

As the day progressed, I no longer recognised Johannes. He became grumpy and aggressive. 'Clara, try for once! Don't be so boring!!' he said to me, holding his glass in front of my face. "You've already had far too much to drink, Johannes. And I don't want it, is that so hard to understand? All you can think about is yourself," I replied. He didn't like that very much. He looked at me blearily for a few more seconds and then staggered away, defeated.

I was a bit confused, but I decided to make the best of it. Then, as I took a bite of my pancake, I suddenly heard shouting. I recognised Johannes's voice. I got up and looked around. Then I saw Johannes arguing with our teacher! Johannes was shouting all sorts of things, most of which I didn't understand. I was shocked by what happened next. Johannes had hit the teacher! How could he do such a thing? I ran up to him and grabbed his arm. 'What are you doing? Why can't you ever behave normally?' I said angrily. Johannes burst into tears. 'I didn't mean to, honest,' he said through his tears. I apologised profusely to the teacher: 'I'm really sorry, my brother drank too much beer. I'm sure he didn't mean to.' Then I took Johannes home, but that wasn't so easy. He staggered and almost fell over a few times.

### **Johannes**

The teacher threw the letter on the table in front of me with a bang. 'Be glad I didn't take the unlucky sod to Candlemas, otherwise I would have thrown him into your deformed mug of a face long ago! And a lump would only improve your face!' Feeling guilty, I looked at my feet, afraid to see the teacher's actual gaze. Why on earth had I done that? If people found out that I had hit my own teacher, it would be a disaster for my parents' reputation. Even more importantly, my greatest fear was how my parents would react. What would they think? Would they throw me out of the house? Too many questions were wandering around in my head, the world around me was silent from the intense thinking.

'WILL YOU PLEASE PAY ATTENTION, YOU IDIOT! I'm trying to explain something to you here, but you're daydreaming! We don't have time to think about your true love right now, especially when I look at you with a black eye!' I was startled from my thoughts by my screaming teacher. 'Sorry, sir! We can have a tea party later and talk about my true dream woman, can't we?' I grinned. But unfortunately the teacher was not amused and he started to look at me even more angrily than before. His head turned bright red. 'Be careful, young man, or you'll be getting a pile of detention work from me in the near future! I will keep your parents informed of the mischief you dare to get up to here and a conversation will certainly be held. Don't you dare not to do this punishment work, otherwise you will have to deal with someone you would never want to have known. Now get out of here! I quickly picked up the letter that was lying on the teacher's wooden desk. I quickly walked out of the school.

The moment I took a step onto the Heerweg, I felt a cold breeze against my warm cheeks; as if winter was warning my guilty figure that spring would not last long if I continued to behave like this. I got chills all over my body, I wanted to get away from the cold. My pace quickened even more than before. There I went, on my way home, where the warmth of the fireplace felt like a family embrace. But was that warmth even there?

'Be more like your sister,' someone called out to me. But wasn't my name Clara? Wasn't I Johannes? I knew that I was not always the brightest with my actions, I had to work on that, but sometimes my thoughts became black and hazy. I did not think things through, so I just followed the path of these thoughts that brought me here; a path full of remorse and pain. The motives of my actions were rather unclear, not only to others, but also to myself. Regret was something I often felt, but could not express to my parents. They did not want to hear about it, because it was always

Clara this, Clara that, never Johannes. My plan was therefore to show that I was worth it and that I could still do good for others. That time had yet to come.

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Shivering with cold, I sat down to do my punishment work on the floor of the warm house. How would mum and dad react when they saw the letter? The closer I got to the living room, the harder it became to tell them what had happened. Suddenly my rapidly beating heart was silenced by my mother's scream from the room next door. 'JOHANNES, I HEAR YOU'RE HERE, COME HERE RIGHT NOW, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SOME EXPLANATION TO GIVE ME, BOY!' Oh no, did they already know? How could the teacher have spread the news so quickly? No, that was not possible at all. Or had it been the neighbours? Had they noticed my actions and immediately told on me? Reluctantly, I walked to the living room, afraid of the consequences of my actions. When I looked up, I saw not only a frustrated mother, but also Clara. Clara. Had she told on me? I should have had the right to present my perspective as well, but no, Clara is always right, isn't she? 'I heard from Clara what you have been up to, young man. This can't go on any longer, I am completely done with all this mischief. I didn't raise you to be this way, did I? What did I do wrong to raise such a sweet son into a brat? What would father think of this? What will the town think? Johannes, think about it! Be like your su-' Anger came over me, mainly because I had a feeling she would say the same thing to me again. 'MA, I AM NOT CLARA, DON'T YOU STILL KNOW THAT? I know that I don't always think as clearly as she does and that I'm not as perfect as your daughter, mother. But could you listen to me for once? I haven't even been able to explain how the whole situation came about and what was going through my mind at the time. Those are things that Clara cannot explain. Is it really so hard to listen to your so-called stupid son for once? You know, it doesn't matter, because you're not going to listen to what I have to say anyway. Be the hero your child needs you to be, the hero you were when you brought peace to Harderwijk with the letter, or is that too much to ask?' Tears began to well up in my eyes. 'Mother, I-I-I just want you to listen and know that my name is Johannes. I am only human, too.' Salty drops rolled gently down my warm cheeks. I couldn't take it anymore. Without thinking, I ran upstairs to my bed. There I hid under the sheets. Even my bed couldn't take away the cold I felt at that moment, snow kept piling up in my head until I couldn't see the lights anymore.

## Clara

The smell of fish filled my nostrils. Yum! Luckily, mother had already finished setting the table, so I didn't have to help anymore. I went straight to the table. Johannes was already there. He had finally come down from his room. His eyes were red. Father and mother were still annoyed. I focused on the fish – so that I wouldn't swallow another fish bone like last time – while they argued with their eyes, using unspoken words. I felt uncomfortable and looked to Johannes for support, but he didn't realise anything was wrong. He was still looking at his plate, without saying a word. Even if he had realised how uncomfortable I felt, he might not have helped me. I wouldn't even be angry. I shouldn't have ratted on him. I hope he will forgive me soon... While I was thinking about our own argument, the silent argument between father and mother turned into one you could hear. 'Kees, that ship... You really have to do something.' Mother sounded angry.

'We don't even know if it's really harmful!'

'That's why you have to investigate it!'

Which ship? And what could be harmful about it?

Suddenly mother fell silent. Then she looked at father angrily. If she had been a cat, she would have bared her claws and scratched him. 'If you don't start an investigation tomorrow, I will go on that ship myself.'

Father gave in. 'Okay. I'll start tomorrow.'

Mother looked relieved, which made me happy, but I was still nervous. What was going on? Should I be worried?

We continued eating. When all the food was gone, Johannes and I cleared the table while mum and dad walked outside with their glasses of jenever.

### **Johannes**

*Bang, bang, bang* 'Huaagh.' The banging woke me up. *Bang, bang, bang* I ran downstairs in my pyjamas.

*Bang, bang, bang*

'Yes, yes...' I opened the door and saw only a donkey with a letter on its back. The letter said: *For the Schippers family*. In my mind I quietly thought: 'Why so mysterious?' My parents were not at home. 'Maybe I should show it to Clara.' I went upstairs and walked through the hall towards Clara's room. I opened the door and saw an empty bed. 'Maybe she's out and about.' I went back downstairs to get some food, but saw Clara's coat on the coat rack. 'She never leaves without her coat, otherwise she'll catch a cold.' I paced back and forth. 'What does the letter say?' Where is Clara? 'Why is there a donkey peeing in front of my house?'

My mind is made up... I'm going to open the letter!

The letter said:

**Dear Schippers family,**

**We have kidnapped your daughter.**

**If you want your daughter back, you must hand over the map of the hiding place of the cogue with spices.**

**Best regards,**

**The Lords of Kuinre**

My first reaction was one of shock. Clara kidnapped? My sister? Clara was so tough, she wouldn't let herself be kidnapped that easily. Maybe she had been beaten up? Breathing suddenly became very difficult. There was no time to lose. I had to go now!

### **Clara**

In the distance I heard birds singing. I slowly opened my eyes. Bright rays of light made my head start to pound. The wooden floor I was lying on was gently rocking me back and forth. I tried to sit up, but stopped halfway through due to a wave of nausea that washed over me. After a few seconds I sat upright and tried to take in my surroundings. When I looked to the left, I saw a pair of long legs. 'Take it easy, we have all the time in the world,' I heard sarcastically above me. I stood up as quickly as my body would allow. In front of me stood a tall boy with brown curls. As I looked at him, his crooked nose was the first thing I noticed. It must have been broken, but it had not been healed very nicely. The boy took just a little too long and before I knew it, I was back on my knees with a burning sensation on my cheek. He had hit me. Inside, I became angry. HOW DARE HE?! I quickly got up again, ready to hit him back. But just before my hand touched his cheek, I saw his expectant gaze directed at a huge man standing next to us. The man nodded approvingly at the boy before walking past us, over a gangway that led him off the boat. I frowned a little, weird, went through my head.

After walking for about 10 minutes from the boat, we arrived at a large country house. The group of

men I had been following entered the building one by one. I looked around in amazement. I had no idea what to do. The boy behind me, the one with the crooked nose, poked me in the back while he sighed. 'Hurry isn't really your strong suit, is it?' I quickly followed the men into the house. What a loser, I thought, rolling my eyes. Just before I crossed the threshold, my eyes fell on the logo on the door. I stopped walking abruptly and stared at the logo. I had seen it before... When the teacher at school talked about the Lords of Kuinre, he had shown exactly the same logo. I could feel the boy pushing me into the house while he scolded under his breath. Stumbling over the threshold, I tried to collect my thoughts. The Lords of Kuinre... I'm in deep trouble...

### **Johannes**

I knew I had no time to lose, but where should I go? I decided to go to the jetty on the Zuiderzee. Maybe I could find a boat there and use it to go look for Clara. But... I couldn't sail a boat on my own, I would need a crew. I would just have to find mercenaries. I went down a small, narrow alley towards the rough bar I was never allowed to go to.

I walked in proudly and called out: 'Who wants to join me, the great Johannes, on an unforgettable journey!'

Someone replied: 'For what price?'

I panicked. Why would I pay for a loyal crew?

I said: '2 guilders per person!'

Everyone laughed at me. I had to raise my offer, because this was only half of what a labourer normally earns in a day.

'I raise my offer to 100 guilders per person!'

Everyone came up to me and started to lift me up, as if I were the saviour of their suffering! I was happy, until I realised how on earth I would come up with 100 guilders per crew member.

One of the mercenaries was still grumbling. He didn't want to be away from home for so long, but I thought about it and there was only one thing to say: 'There's beer on board!'

I had my crew wait by the ship and ran home to get money from my parents' safe, but where was the key? I thought frantically and then I remembered. Mother always kept the key in Father's desk. I searched for the key and opened the safe. I quickly took out ... gold coins for the crew and ... coins for the barrels of beer I had promised.

After taking the money, I ran to the ship, which I had borrowed without permission – I had a good reason of course – and greeted my crew. But when I gave them their money, they ran away! Why!? I panicked even more and thought about it. Should I look for a new crew or go it alone?

After a while of pacing back and forth, I saw an unmanned ship. I had already spent enough money, so I decided to borrow the ship temporarily and without prior arrangement. I didn't think the captain would mind.

### **Clara**

It was almost evening. The seconds passed terribly slowly. How long would I have to stay here? Suddenly a boy walked up to me, the boy with the crooked nose who had brought me here earlier. He was holding a plate with a dirty mess on it. He put the plate in front of me. The boy leaned against the wall and looked at me. I looked at the food, which appeared to contain rotten fish. It stank terribly and I had to restrain myself from retching. Did this stupid kid expect me to eat this disgusting food? 'What do you want?' I asked. The boy said nothing and still looked at me with the same stupid look. 'Do you expect me to eat this slop?' He smiled and came closer, my heart began to beat faster. 'Tough luck, girl, this is the only thing you'll get. Shall I take it away again?' I looked

at him. Up close, I could see that he had a few scars on his face. He looked about my age. The boy had deep brown eyes. I had to think of something to distract him and get him away from me. I got an idea and was disgusted by it even as I thought it through. I took a deep breath and said: 'You're pretty cute for a boy with a crooked nose.' He first looked at me, dumbfounded, and then began to look away uncomfortably. When he looked away, I had a chance to try to escape. I pushed the boy aside and ran for the door, hoping to escape. I tried to open the door, but it wouldn't open. Oh no, this is not good! I pushed, kicked and pulled on the door. Nothing, the door is locked. The boy I had pushed stood up and grabbed me by the arm. He pushed me back with all his might, causing me to hit the ground hard. 'OW, THAT HURTS, STUPID JOCHI!' He laughed and looked at me for a long time. 'I assume you won't be eating, but don't think I'll bring you something to eat next time. My patience won't last forever. If you don't want to listen, you'll just have to suffer.' The boy picked up the plate and threw the dirty mess on the floor. He walked away, grinning. I was alone again, in the deep darkness of the room. I started to sob and tears rolled down my cheeks. I have been kidnapped and have no food. What do I have to do to get myself out of this mess?

### **Duco**

'It's not true, it's not true, it's not true.' I forced myself to keep repeating this in my head. "It's not true, it's not true," I thought as I opened the door to the dining room. "It's not true, it's not true," echoed through my head. Meanwhile, I saw my father get up and walk towards me. My father. The brains behind the whole operation. The boss of the Lords of Kuinre. No one was smarter, stronger or better than him. At least... that's what he thought. 'It's not like that.' Before I realise it, I say it out loud. I saw the frown appear on my father's forehead. 'What's not like that? Everything went well, hopefully, or can't you even bring a child his food?' The men at the table started to laugh. He always did this, making me out to be stupid, making me look like a fool. Deep down I knew he was disappointed in me, that I wasn't the son he wanted. Not strong enough, not brave enough, not good enough. "Yes, everything went fine." I sighed softly. My father took two large steps and then stood right in front of me. 'You're acting strange, is something wrong?' he asked with a doubtful voice. 'Nothing,' I said irritably, 'just tired, I guess.' 'Stupid kid,' my father shouted out of the blue across the dining hall. "What a weakling you are, you should never give in to your weaknesses." His face turned red. "Get the hell back to your room, I don't want to see your face tonight!"

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And that's how my day ended nine times out of ten. Without eating, locked in my room. Not literally, the door is unlocked, but the last time I tried to sneak out... Shivers ran down my spine. My room was not that big. There was barely enough room for a narrow bed, a cupboard and a small desk. As soon as I closed the door to my room behind me, I saw that my bed had not been made. I sighed, thank goodness my father didn't see that, he would have had another reason to yell at me. I plopped down on my unmade bed and stared at the ceiling. But all the while, only one thought was going through my head, which I tried to convince myself of: 'It's not like that... I don't like her...'

### **Johannes**

I have been at sea for hours now. It was almost impossible to control a boat on the Zuiderzee on my own. I was soaked to the bone by the waves rolling across the deck. The creaking wood sounded as if the ship could break at any moment. Soon I would sink! But... I did it for my sister Clara. I had to save her, no matter what. So I continued to struggle to get the little ship safely to shore.

### **Clara**

I opened my eyes and looked around. I had slept terribly, it was freezing. I looked around and was

shocked. I was not in my own room at all! I was locked in a cold room. I tried to open the door. It did not work, the door was locked. Suddenly I remembered everything that had happened. I had been taken to a country house belonging to the lords of Kuinre. And now here I was... locked up and hungry. I had insulted the captain's son, had cried all night and hardly slept a wink. The pirates would wake up one by one as the sun rose. Maybe I could persuade one of the pirates to bring me food? I immediately dismissed that idea. All pirates are heartless and would never give me food. They would laugh at me and make me suffer even more if I begged them for food.

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It was almost noon and my hunger was so great that I could faint at any moment. I had been locked up all day, when would they bring me food? A number of pirates came with the same question: 'What do you know about the secret map?' Each time they got the same answer from me: 'I don't know what you're talking about. I know nothing about a secret map.' Eventually they gave up asking me questions and no one came to me anymore. No one had brought me food that day. Every few hours, my little rat Henk would steal food from the pirates. Henk couldn't carry much with his small body, but at least it was enough to satisfy our hunger a little. Hopefully someone would bring me food sooner or later. Henk and I couldn't keep going like this much longer.

### **Duco**

I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling. Today had been a terrible day. I had never had such a bad day in my life. I had ruined all the chores by dropping things, bumping into walls and messing up the chores in other ways. I kept thinking about the girl. How could I be so stupid as to like a girl I only knew for one day? I don't think she likes me very much either, given what happened recently. She probably hadn't been given any food and had nowhere to sleep but a freezing cold spot. I took a deep breath and almost automatically my legs took me to where the girl was. I had brought a blanket and some food for the girl. I had arrived at her place and she was staring out of the window at the sky full of stars. She looked so loving as she stared at the stars. I immediately felt guilty because the plans my father had for this girl were cruel. I walked towards her carefully because I didn't want to scare her. The girl looked up at me and stared back with a lifeless gaze. My heart began to beat faster and I stammered like crazy. 'I uh... I... I brought you a blanket and some food.' The girl looked at me for a moment, stunned, but then she smiled. She started eating as soon as I handed her the plate and almost seemed to forget that I was standing there. I sat down next to her. Sitting next to her made me feel safe and warm. 'What's your name?' I asked. She hesitated as to whether she should tell me her name. Finally she replied: 'My name is Clara, thank you for bringing me food and a blanket. And what is your name, pirate boy?' 'I'm Duco.' She finally looked away from the sky and looked at me gratefully. I looked out the window at the sky. I froze when I saw that it had already gotten dark. My father had instructed me to be with him before dark. He wanted to talk to me about how things were going with the girl. I got up in a flash and walked away. Clara was all alone again and I could feel her gaze on me as I walked away. It hurt to leave her alone. Why did I always feel so warm inside when I was with her? I couldn't like her... I just couldn't.

...

'Where on earth have you come from?' My father was standing in the doorway of his room, waiting. My father thought I had been gone far too long and before I knew it, I had a fist in my face.

### **Clara**

I heard a thud on the door. Duco walked in. I had slept very badly on a straw mattress. He had a bowl of porridge and a wooden cup. Duco looked terrible. He had a black eye and a large scratch on his arm and he was walking with a limp. I asked what had happened. 'I was beaten by my father because I was with you too long.' 'Why is that a problem?' I asked. 'My father thinks I don't work hard enough. I have to clean everything in such a big country house and everything is dusty and

full of cobwebs. How am I ever supposed to do it? I am mistreated here for everything I do. I have been given the task of keeping things clean here, but nobody cares, so I have a plan: what if I steal the key for once? Then we'll run out of the mansion and into the marshy land and we'll see what happens from there,' said Duco, 'But I really have to go now, otherwise I'll get another beating.

### **Johannes**

I got off the boat and started walking in the direction of the country house. I could not moor the boat at the country house because otherwise I would be seen immediately. After about two hours of walking, the sun had just set. It was not far, but because the swamp was very marshy, it took a long time. I was very tired and wet, but I saw the filthy walled country house. The manor had a large staircase in the centre and two large square towers on either side. I saw guards all around the house. I tried to hide, but a small, thin boy had just seen me. I tried to go back as quickly as possible, but the swamp didn't make it easy for me. The boy who saw me didn't tell his friends - ha, ha, what a loser. I ran away but he was faster. I had no choice but to fight, but he was bigger and stronger. I tried to grab a stick from a tree but I was too late. He gave me a full blow behind my ear. I tried to hit him back but he dodged. He made a feint and hit me from a completely unexpected angle. I was furious and I punched him square in the stomach, which made him even angrier. I dodged his punch and jumped up and punched him square in the nose. Blood spurted from his nose. I ran to the nearest tree and climbed up. The boy tried to climb after me, but I was faster. I climbed to the top and sat on a branch, but he pulled a branch from the tree and tried to hit me with it. I grabbed the branch and threw it straight at his head, then stomped on his hand. He fell at least 3 metres with a big thud. He got up and ran half-hopping straight back to the big house. I remained in the tree, afraid, and could see less and less as darkness fell. I hoped I could sleep here for a few hours, because tomorrow when it was light I would go and rescue Clara.

### **Duco**

I brought Clara food twice a day. Each time I got butterflies in my stomach when I saw Clara sitting there. I couldn't bear another day with my father. Every time I had been to see Clara, he had punished me severely. I had never got on well with my father, and it was time I escaped from his evil plans. I had to come up with an escape plan, and fast. I could take Clara with me. I could run away with her. She would be useful in helping me escape. I stood up and Clara looked up from her plate of food that I had brought her. 'Clara, we are going to escape from this terrible place together. I won't last another day here and you are coming with me. I have been thinking about it lately and I am now certain. I have to get out of here and because you are very clever, you have to help me escape.' All this time, Clara had been staring at me, stunned. I was afraid she might think it was an absurd idea. I was coming up with absurd things, things that would never happen. I looked away from Clara. It was a stupid idea. I stammered that she should forget it and was about to walk away. She called out to me: 'If you're planning to escape, I'll come with you. Do you have any ideas about how we can escape?

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### **Johannes**

The next day I drew up a plan as I continued walking towards the country house. Step 1: I distract the robbers. 2: I attack from behind.

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After walking for a long time, I saw something big. For a moment I thought they were grey trees, but no. The country house was huge. I had misjudged it. It was unbelievable. I had to come up with a new and better plan. Step 1: I wait until nightfall. Step 2: I will take out the robbers from behind so that there are fewer guards and I can then go inside. Step 3: find Clara and then return with a ship.



How do I get a ship again? I will look for a small fishing boat on my way to Clara. After I have successfully completed the plan, I will be the hero of the day!

I had to wait until nightfall. To pass the time, I played a fun game: the first to find a certain colour wins! I was playing by myself, so I asked myself questions. 'Where is the colour pink?' And I searched and searched and slept. It was the middle of the night when I woke up. That sleepless night had still had an effect. At night I got ready and saw that there were guards, but they were asleep too. 'Hey, I'm better than them.' So I didn't have to eliminate anyone. I kept watch for a while: 'Who knows, maybe Clara will come out one day?' Then I climbed back up a tree, maybe I was still tired after all. I wasn't lazy, but I still needed to get more energy to defeat my enemies!

### **Clara**

'Clara, I've got the key,' said Duco. 'Come on, we have to go now, but you need to disguise yourself, otherwise everyone will recognise you. Put these on.' He gave me some fabric trousers, a cap and a cloak. I put them on and we crept out of the mansion. The house is huge. There were stairs up on the left and stairs down on the right. It was like a maze. I was afraid he was luring me into a trap. I feared I would be murdered at every corner. Then I finally saw the large oak door to the outside. We walked a short distance, but unfortunately we had already been seen. 'RUN!' Duco shouted. I started running, but men came running from all directions, some of them waving their knives or swords. Sometimes a man with a sword came dangerously close, but luckily we were just in time.

After running for a while, we jumped into a hole. It was full of mud, but it was the only way to avoid being caught. I quickly became completely cold. It became very tense once, when one of the pirates was only a few metres away from the hole.

After a few hours, we thought they had gone. We trotted on, but no! They hadn't gone. We heard them shouting again. I heard Duco scream; he had tripped.

'Run, Clara!' he shouted. 'Save yourself!' It was difficult, but I had to. I ran on.

A moment later he was running alongside me again, thank goodness! The pursuers had given up by then. We continued running, but then suddenly someone appeared out of a tree and jumped on top of Duco. I was terrified and hit the man as hard as I could. But then I realised it was Johannes' voice. Johannes? What is he doing here?

'Johannes! Is that you?' Never mind that, we'll talk later. RUN!

### **Duco**

After a long, sleepless night on the banks of the Zuiderzee, I decided to wake the others. Last night the three of us had been discussing things at length. Johannes had seen an unmanned kogge (a traditional Dutch sailing boat) further along. We would steal that boat early in the morning and try to sail it back to Harderwijk. It was a big boat for the three of us to steer, but we would give it a try. At first, Johannes had been stubborn and distant, but after I had told him what I had experienced with the Lords of Kuinre, Johannes allowed me to come with him in his boat. I walked over to Clara, bent down and whispered in her ear: 'Hey, wake up.' She did not respond. I whispered again and gently shook her. 'Hey hey, wake up. WAKE UP!' Clara woke with a start and looked at me with a sleepy face. Johannes also woke with a start after hearing me scream. He jumped up. 'Why are you screaming like that? What if they hear us?' 'They won't hear us, they're too far away,' I replied. 'Come on, we have to get to the boat!' We ran to the boat. Once we arrived, we quickly climbed aboard. Johannes was the last to board and cast off the lines. He crawled behind the helm and began to sail. The boat rocked. Languid waves lapped against the side of the boat. A wave of calm came over us as the wind felt ever so slightly less strong. The silence and calm became deafening as we found ourselves in a sea of emptiness and blue. We calmly bobbed along on the blue sea. Johannes at the helm, Clara and I were lying on the deck. Next to each other, looking at the blue,

slightly cloudy sky above our heads.

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After sailing for a while, the sea became more restless. The waves grew higher, the wind picked up. It woke me up, but Clara didn't notice anything. She needed the peace and quiet, so I let her sleep. I walked over to Johannes. He seemed to be having trouble steering the boat. No matter what he did, he could not win the battle against the water. Johannes made an abrupt movement with the rudder, causing the boat to almost capsize. Johannes fell to the ground. So did I, hard on the wooden surface. A painful sensation shot through my arm. I immediately got up to check on Clara. To make sure she wasn't in any pain. To be with her now that the sea had become so rough. To comfort her if she needed it. Basically just to be there. For the peace and quiet, with Clara.

Clara

I was woken by an arm wrapped around me. I was a little startled. Sleepily, I looked around. There was Duco. With his arm around me. I thought this would never happen, maybe I was just hoping it would. Duco pretended to be asleep. My moving body told him I was awake. He opened his eyes again. I saw nothing but fear in his beautiful eyes. That scared me. Very scared. 'What's wrong?' I asked. 'Stay calm, Clara,' Duco replied. 'What is it, Duco?' I asked again, feeling much more nervous now. Thousands of questions raced through my head, all fuelled by fear. Was there something wrong with Johannes? Was there something wrong with Duco? And why is the damn boat rocking like this? "There is a big problem, Clara." "What is it?" My voice sounded frustrated, more frustrated than I wanted to be. 'The sea is very rough. The boat is rocking and Johannes is not winning the fight against the water. We have to leave, Clara,' was Duco's reply. "So you just lay down next to me, calmly?" "I thought you might need some comfort" "I can do that just fine myself, Duco!" "Clara, we have to help Johannes, NOW!" Duco looked startled, even more than before. He pointed behind me. In one motion I turned around. Water was seeping into our boat from all sides through small holes or cracks in the wood. I screamed out of fear. In a blur I ran towards Johannes. I dragged Duco with me, causing us both to almost fall over. By now the water was almost up to my ankles. I tried to stand up, but I was stuck. I had fallen through a plank. 'DUCO!' I screamed. He turned around. His face paled with fear. He ran towards me, fighting against the water.

Duco

The water was getting higher and higher. I shouted to Clara, 'We still have a lifeboat!' The water was now up to our knees, luckily Johannes had now joined us. 'There's the lifeboat,' Johannes shouted. I was now dragging Clara along, who was struggling to stay on her feet because of the strong wind. The ship was now really starting to break apart. We had almost reached the rowboat when Clara suddenly let out a loud 'OUCH'. A sharp piece of wood had cut Clara's leg... It was bleeding. 'Help...' she moaned. I tried to help her, but suddenly she fainted. 'Johannes!!' I shouted. 'I will try to revive her, then you try to get this boat free.' I lifted Clara so she wouldn't drown. She lay in my arms like a bride. By now the water had risen above our waists and even bigger pieces of the boat had started to tear off. Fortunately, Johannes had managed to free the boat and he scolded the little boat: 'Why did they tie that damn thing so tightly?' He also looked at Clara, who was still unconscious and safe in my arms. 'We'll put her in the boat in a minute, hopefully she'll be okay,' Johannes said to me. Johannes managed to push the small boat, paddles and all, into the water and carefully helped her into the boat. Behind me, the boat was starting to collapse. Johannes pulled me into the boat just in time, just before it fell apart even more and I ended up in the water.

Clara

I regained consciousness in the small boat with Duco and Johannes, their faces turned towards

me. 'Clara!!' they both shouted at the same time. Everything was still spinning, but they helped me up. I began to feel the sharp pain from my wound again. When I looked at it, they had already bandaged it with Johannes' shirt. "How do you feel?" Duco asked me. "Bad." 'Cold.' A piece of blown-off sail was in the boat, so Johannes said: 'Maybe we should use this as a big blanket until we've warmed up a bit.' 'Good idea!' Duco replied. Johannes took the sail and put it over the three of them. The waves and the wind were still pretty wild, but luckily the boat hadn't broken yet.

Johannes

Clara had fallen asleep on Duco's shoulder, not very surprising as she is tired from the pain of her leg wound and all the dangers she has gone through in recent days... Duco looked to see which way we should go. 'We have to head southeast', Duco said to me. He showed me, there was a crack in his compass from the incident with the other boat. 'Luckily my compass still works,' said Duco. "Luckily, yes," I replied. I started rowing after Duco's instructions.

Duco

Clara woke up calmly. She is so beautiful when she sleeps. "I'll take over," I said to Johannes. Johannes agreed. Johannes and I switched places. A minute later Clara came and sat next to me. 'Are you feeling any better, Clara?' 'Yes, I'm doing a bit better, but my leg wound still hurts.' 'It'll be okay, I'll take another look at the wound when we get home to you and Johannes,' I promised Clara. Clara then sat closer and closer to me until our legs touched. Johannes had fallen asleep. Suddenly Clara placed her hand on the top of my leg. 'Clara?' I said nervously. 'Thank you, Duco, for everything you have done for me and Johannes.' 'Everything for you...' I said accidentally out loud. 'Duco...' Clara said. She looked me straight in the eye. I could not say anything more. I sank into her eyes. She calmed me, but at the same time made me incredibly nervous. I wanted her. Only Clara.

Clara

We looked into each other's eyes and then he touched my cheek and rubbed it gently. He pulled me closer to him. 'Duco...' I said again, but this time nervously. He leaned closer to me. Our faces were almost touching. Then Duco whispered greedily, 'I love you, Clara, and only you.' And he kissed me softly but passionately. For a moment, everything was quiet. My stomach was filled with butterflies and my attention was focused solely on him. He was the one for me. Duco had my heart.

Johannes

I woke up. Still tired, but the nap had helped.

Duco and Clara were still sitting next to each other. Something had happened, but I had no idea what exactly.

'Look, I can already see the Harderwijk tower!' Clara suddenly shouted happily. The tall, blunt tower of the Church of Our Lady stuck out into the sky. Father was always so proud that we had the highest church tower in the whole of Gelderland. 'And I can see the Hoge and Lage Bruggepoort looming up too!' Clara and I sat down at the front of the boat, feeling a sense of relief, to get a better view of the looming city. 'Clara, I'm so glad to be going home soon!' 'Yes, me too!' said Clara, leaning on my shoulder to relieve her aching leg.

I stood there for a moment, thinking about what had happened in the past week, about the kidnapping, about Duco's father, how hard the work on the boat had been and about how Duco wasn't really a bad person. And also about... 'OWW'

'Sorry for interrupting your daydreaming, but we really need to secure the boat to the jetty.' "It would be nice if you could help," said Duco. "You didn't have to punch me in the foot," I snapped back.

Duco

Looking at the jetties that stretched out into the water from the two gates, I realised that I had never really been here myself. I saw figures standing at the side. They were people, doing normal human things. I had never realised before how beautiful some places could look. I had never paid attention to the beautiful details before. It was only when I met Clara that I began to see the world for the beautiful things it had to offer. How the water ripples, how the sun shines and how the clouds move in the wind.

We were getting closer and closer to the quay and I realised that Johannes was staring straight ahead. I let go of the rudder and walked over to Johannes. I gave him a pat on the foot to bring him back to reality. He was not very grateful.

Johannes

We were getting closer and closer to the jetty in front of the Bruggespoort. Suddenly Clara shouted, 'Look, there's mum!!' Her enthusiasm spread to Duco and me. 'Yes, that's mum!' I said happily to Clara. We could see mum clearly now. I saw her waving and crying with joy. Clara called out to her mother again to see if she could hear her. We moored our boat to the jetty. Clara was the first to climb off the boat and stumbled towards our mother as fast as she could, tears rolling down her cheeks. Mother was waiting for us, tears rolling down her cheeks too. At first I calmly walked across the jetty, but when I got closer to mother, who was waiting under the gate, I couldn't help but run to her just like Clara. When I reached her, she put her arm around me. After a big hug, we let each other go. I was trembling, thinking about how I had ended up here. Duco was standing at a distance, watching, unsure if he should be at this reunion. He deserved to be. After all, he was the enemy. But it was still sad. He just stood there, alone. Now that we had let each other go, Duco slowly came towards us. Clara hugged him. We all walked back home through the city. In the meantime, we caught up, full of adrenaline after this return journey. We told everything that had happened. With each story, mother's eyes grew wider in amazement. 'Now that I hear this, I am only happier that you have returned unharmed,' she said. So was I. I wanted to get home as quickly as possible, to leave all this behind.

Duco

The door opened slowly. Clara and Johannes's mother let us in. Everyone gasped. My father! My father pulled Clara and Johannes's mother towards him and held a sharp knife to her neck. He dragged her inside, pushed her onto a chair and tied her hands to the back of the chair. Then he took a piece of cloth and tied it around her mouth.

'Oh, Duco...' he said to me. Then he said: 'The fact that you don't realise all the things I've done for you and how I've helped you.' 'My son, how can you not see my love for you?' 'How on earth can you decide to join these backward people?' I was at a loss for words and no one said anything.

'You know what I want, Duco, and I will make sure I get it.' 'No,' is my answer

'What did you say?' 'No,' I repeat, louder now.

'You're not killing anyone, father, and you're not going to get the loot you want.' 'This idea that you are superior will end today.'

My father let go of Clara's mother and walked over to me. He held his knife at my neck. Then Clara suddenly said calmly and at the same time urgently: 'Duco, please don't sacrifice yourself.'

Johannes

Duco was standing there against the wall with his father right in front of his face. I knew I had to do something, but what? After Clara had said something to Duco, I whispered to her: 'Duco's father is only watching Duco now. You can untie mother from the chair.' Duco was now being dragged into

the other room, his father was now shouting at him, then we heard the crack of a flat hand against a face. We heard Duco whimper. I ran outside to look for my father.

Duco

I had never seen my father so angry. He had just hit me and now he was standing in my face, shouting. I said nothing. Not because I was afraid, but more because I just didn't know what to say. He should have been my father, not a barbarian. He should have taken care of me and loved me, given me a real childhood. A time when I felt good and everything was just normal. He ruined the life I wanted so badly.

My father and I were now looking at each other; he had stopped screaming. This is my chance, I thought. I punched my father hard in the face. Then I pushed him to the ground and grabbed the knife he had in his hands. I looked at him one more time and said to him, 'Sorry, father,' and I plunged his knife straight into his heart.

Clara

I had already freed my mother. Suddenly everything was quiet. I looked around the corner of the room where Duco and his father were, only now Duco's father was on the floor. Dead. Duco was on the floor, this time really in tears for the first time. Mother and I walked over to Duco to comfort him. I sat down next to Duco and held him in my arms. Mother stayed with us for a while. Then she walked away to get Duco something to drink. 'It's okay, Duco,' I said to him after a while. Mother came back and handed him the glass. Duco sat up and drank the water. He looked at his father who was still lying there on the ground. I got up and looked at my mother, then at Duco and said: 'Mother and I will take the body away, father and Johannes will be here soon.'

Johannes

I had found father. I fell into his arms. 'Johannes, my son!' He took me in his arms. 'Are you and Clara okay?' he asked after the moment with me in his arms. 'I will explain everything to you, we have to go back home as soon as possible.' On the way home I explained everything about the situation I, Clara and Duco had ended up in. We arrived home, the door was open. Father and I went inside. Duco was sitting on a chair. I introduced Duco to father. Then I asked Duco where Clara and mother were. 'Out for a bit', said Duco. 'And your father?' I asked. 'Dead', said Duco softly. I sat down next to Duco, hoping that would help, I thought. Father also came to sit down. Suddenly we heard bleating. 'Wankeltje!' I said cheerfully. 'Wankeltje?' Duco asked, surprised. 'Our little lamb,' I replied. Wankeltje came walking in. Instead of walking towards me, he went straight to Duco. He moved his head against Duco's legs. 'What a sweet animal!' Duco said cheerfully. He stroked his head and back. Wankeltje stayed with Duco. I could see that Wankeltje really cheered Duco up, so I didn't dare to disturb the moment. Ten minutes passed, I heard footsteps. It was Clara and mum. They came and sat with us. We talked about the difficult days we had just been through. Wankeltje was still sitting with Duco, which helped him talk about the events more easily. It had been difficult for all of us and we all needed some peace and quiet. Duco suddenly said to Clara: 'We should really take a look at your leg wound and bandage it properly.' Mother suggested that she do it. She got up and took Clara with her to the other room to examine the leg wound. Duco now turned his attention to me and father and then said, 'I have to ask you something...'

Duco

After the private conversation without Clara, I walked into the room where Clara's mother was now ready to reattach Clara's leg. 'Do you have a moment?' I asked Clara. Clara walked with me outside. 'Are you okay?' Clara asked me. 'Yes...' I said. 'Shall we take a walk?' I then asked. Clara agreed, and before long the two of us were standing on the Vischmarkt. We walked a little further towards the water. We stopped and I asked Clara if I could ask her something. 'Of course, always

Duco,' she replied. I stood in front of her and took both her hands in mine. 'Dear Clara, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever met.' 'You are kind, helpful and you have a huge heart.' 'It is no surprise that I have fallen deeply in love with you.' Clara was now in tears. I looked deeply into Clara's eyes. 'Will you marry me?' 'Yes!' Clara said a little too loudly. 'But what will my family think?' Clara asked a little softer and more worriedly after the enthusiasm. 'I've already gotten their permission, so you don't have to worry about that,' I reassured Clara. We walked back home hand in hand. We went inside and sat down to continue talking about everything that had happened in the past few days and to share the news about Clara and me.

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