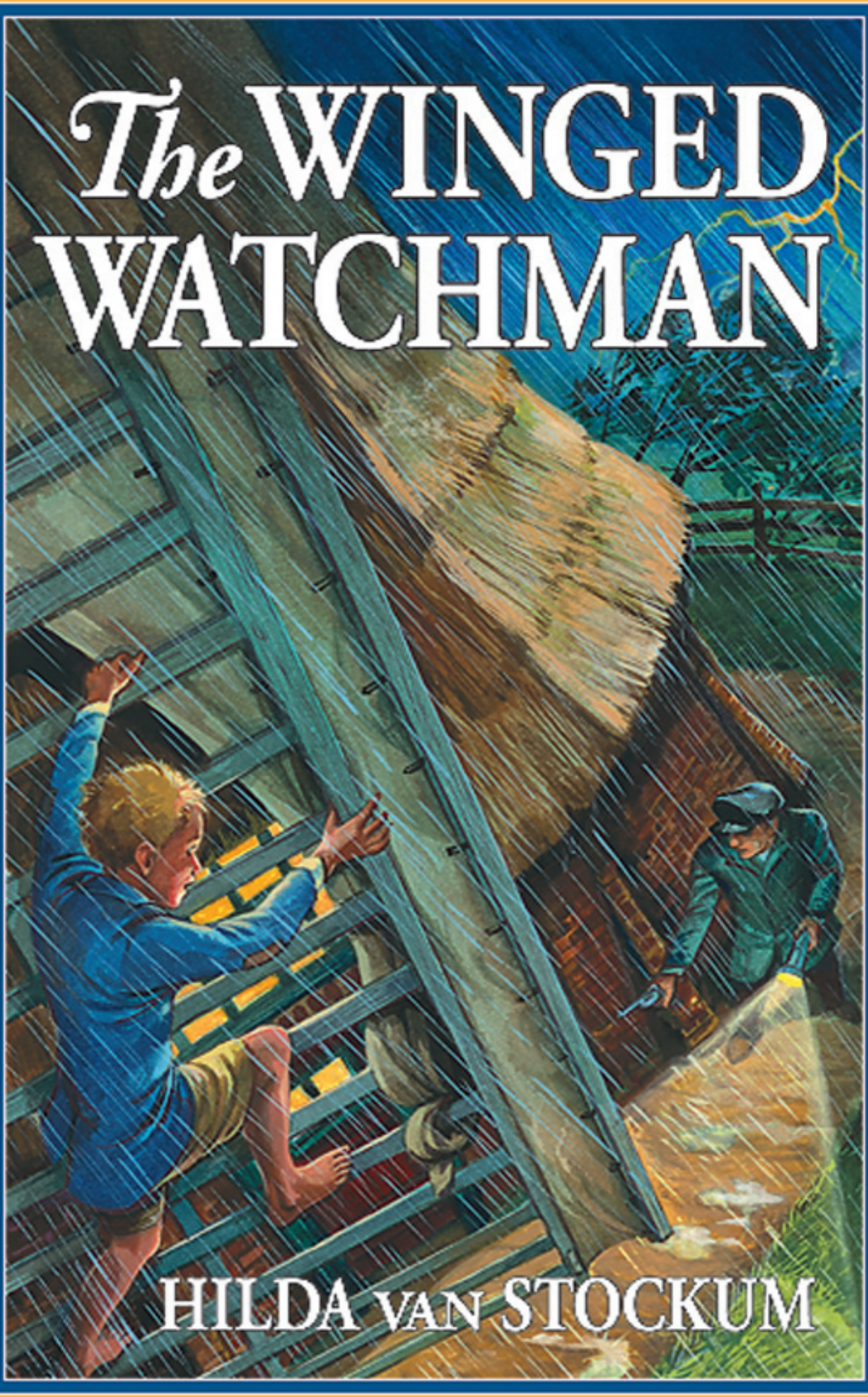
The WINGED WATCHMAN



HILDA VAN STOCKUM

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This book is dedicated to St. Victor
patron saint of mills—
and to my cousin, Jan den Tex
and my uncle, Han de Booy
for the help they have given me.
I also extend grateful thanks to
Mr. and Mrs. P. de Winter
Mrs. E. Voorhoeve-de Beus
and Sheila and Elisabeth Marlin.

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Introduction

Hilda van Stockum wrote *The Winged Watchman* in 1962, eighteen years after the period this novel portrays. Long enough for a new generation to have grown up, or nearly so, without memory of World War II; long enough for time to have given some perspective to the author's personal viewpoint; but short enough for her living memory to serve her pen with an outpouring of vivid details, and still very much ardent emotion.

In our *Living History Library*, we include books which make some period of the past come alive. *The Winged Watchman* stands at that interesting point where the present has so recently become the past, that one person's lifespan can hold them together. This is the point where the grandfather can surprise a grandson made suddenly aware of the significance of the long, determined seige against Hitler's dominance of Europe, by saying, "I was there."

Hilda van Stockum wasn't there, in Holland, during the years of 1944 and 1945, which is the timeframe of *The Winged Watchman*. Yet, as a girl who grew up in Holland, and left as a teenager, and returned for a while as an art student, she knew Holland as a native. Many of her Dutch relatives did live through its darkest days. Her brother, of the Royal Dutch Airforce, died as a pilot in a bombing raid over France. To his memory *The Winged Watchman* was dedicated. These words, from "A Soldier's Creed," printed in a 1944 issue of *The Horn Book*, and written by him before his death, ring with the same spirit of indignant resolve that *The Winged Watchman* portrays in the Resistance workers: "I could stand idly by and see every painting by Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo thrown into a bonfire and feel no more than a deep regret, but throw one small, insignificant Polish urchin on the same bonfire and, by God, I'd pull him out or else. I fight quite simply for that. . . . It is as simple as St. George and the Dragon."

Holland oppressed by the German military occupation, like Poland, deservedly elicited that black-and-white urgency of cause. Children can identify with such issues readily. (This book is fiction, but set in fact; readers who lived through the time and place

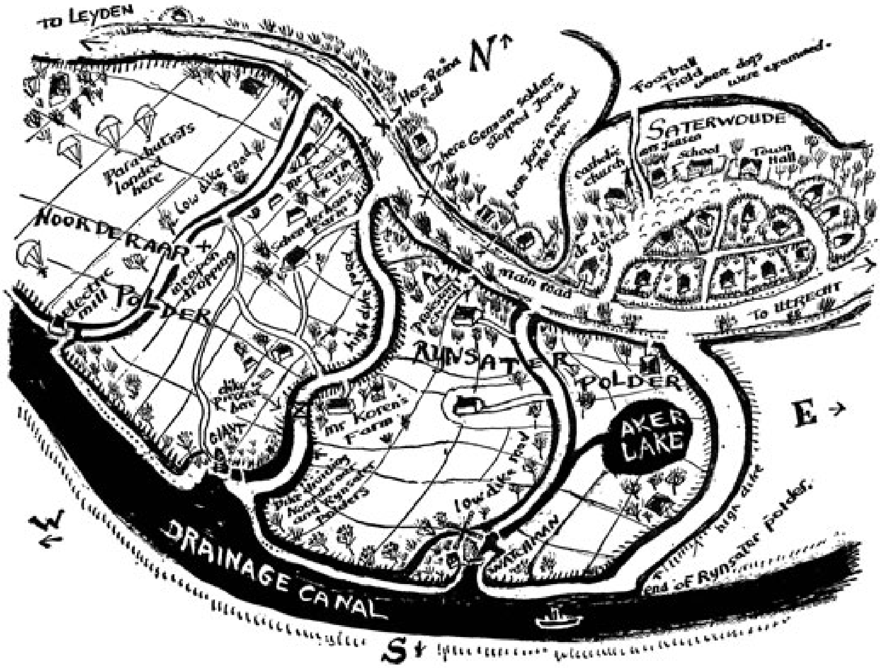
themselves have commented on the accuracy of the portrait of the period.) Hilda van Stockum gives us a child's viewpoint, Joris Verhagen's and his brother, Dirk Jan's. With Joris we feel outrage at wrongs done. Cruel laws, hunted people, misery, on one side, together with the utter villainy of an informer like the character Leendert; but a burning determination to resist and to help one another, often at great cost, on the other side. Escaping false sentimentality, *The Winged Watchman* faces these dreadful realities of war: "The Germans are dangerous," Dirk Jan, in our story, warns a downed English pilot, "they have all the weapons. We have nothing." But the pilot retorts quietly, "Yes, you have. You have right on your side."

In a day, our day, when in-depth history is rarely taught children, and when its lessons are often regarded as ambiguous, *The Winged Watchman* speaks with piercing clarity about moral response. Joris and Dirk have their own strong reactions to what is happening; so does Father; and Mother. She is not ready to forgive the Germans. Moreover she defends a lie she told to protect a life. Joris' tidy moral categories are being shaken. And yet Fr. Kobus, the priest, gives thoughtful questions back to Joris, when Joris begins to ask "why?" Much of the story implicitly supports the one "answer" that Fr. Kobus offers Joris: "Evil is inside, and has to be conquered inside." Uncle Cor, who wants action, demonstrates his commitment; and Hildebrand, the family's philosophy student refugee, argues the necessity for thought and study—even in wartime. Joris and Dirk Jan participate and listen; their growth in wisdom is ours too.

And for all this, *The Winged Watchman* exudes cheer, not melancholy; family warmth, good fun. Over the Verhagen home the giant wings of the windmill visibly signify a guardian presence. Carved on the front of the windmill is a picture of a trumpeting angel. One night, escaping from his enemy Leendert, Joris races homeward. Approaching the mill, he pants, "The Watchman . . . Winged Watchman . . . guardian angel!" He flings himself upon one of the enormous moving wings, is flung upward, and—by skillful maneuvers—he manages to evade his pursuer. One feels that the sturdy winged "Watchman" is the sign of a far more powerful angelic guardian preserving and sustaining this family. And not only the family, but the nation with whom the family stands in

staunch solidarity. From that security comes the grace note of this delightful book—a note of good cheer that is not incommensurate with an honesty to history.

Lydia Reynolds,
Bethlehem Books


TO LEYDEN
N
Here Reina Fell
Parachutists landed here
low dike road
NOORDERAAR
POLDER
electric mill
high dike road
RYNSATER
POLDER
Mr Koren's Farm
GIANT
AKER LAKE
low dike road
Dike dividing Noorderaar and Rynsater Polders
DRAINAGE CANAL
W
S
E
high dike
end of Rynsater polder.
main road
To UTRECHT
SATERWOUDE
School
Town Hall
catholic church
Football Field where dogs were spanned.
Where German soldier stopped Joris

1. Freya

JORIS VERHAGEN was six years old when the Germans invaded Holland. At ten he could remember little of what it had been like before the war. Dirk Jan, his brother, who was four years older, could tell him more about it, but Joris suspected that he made things up. Surely there never could have been a time when people threw away potato parings and apple cores and fed their precious sugar beets to the pigs! But Dirk Jan said it was all true, and you did not have to walk to the farms to get your food either; people actually brought it to the door! And shops had shelves bulging with merchandise. "The most marvelous stuff!" said Dirk Jan. "For St. Nicholas there were animals made of sugar and great big spiced cakes, and chocolate letters."

"What does chocolate taste like?" asked Joris, but Dirk Jan didn't know how to explain a taste.

"Toys too," he said, "and clothes! You didn't need ration coupons then; you could buy anything you wanted and the shopkeeper bowed and said 'thank you' and asked you to come again!"

That made Joris laugh. Imagine Mrs. Jansen of the bare little grocery store in the village saying "Thank you!" She usually started to scream, "I'm all sold out!" before you could slip off your clogs and enter the store.

"I don't believe it," he cried.

But Dirk Jan nodded. "When I made my First Communion," he said, "Mother bought me new underclothes and a *whole new suit*, and Mr. Solomon, who had the clothing store before the Germans took him, kept smiling and showing her more."

"A whole new suit," whispered Joris enviously. For his own First Communion Mother had made him a new shirt out of an old sheet and had knitted stockings for him out of a black sweater of hers. He had been very proud of himself, too—but a whole suit! You could not get that now even if you saved your rations for years and years, he thought.

"You'll see. Once the war is over, those times will come back again," promised Dirk Jan.

Joris wondered. He could not even imagine what it would be like when the war was over. He'd got used to the regular drone of

English bombers on their way to Berlin, and to the exploding shells of antiaircraft guns. He'd got used to the feel of danger, always threatening. These things were part of his life, like hail and thunder. But he did not like them. He hated any kind of strife. He'd walk a long way round not to pass two women shouting at each other across the street, and he seldom took part in school quarrels.

Yet once he started a fight himself. It was early in the summer vacation of 1944, and Joris was on his way to the village on an errand for his mother. He was crossing the highway when he saw two boys, wearing threadbare city clothes and patched leather shoes. They had hitched a collie pup, no more than three months old, to a homemade cart. One of the boys knelt in the cart and shouted to the pup to pull him. The pup tried hard, tongue out, eyes popping. It pulled the cart for a few paces and then sat down, whimpering. It looked around with pleading eyes, thumping its tail.

"Go on, stupid mutt!" the boys cried, and the one in the cart began to hit the pup over the head with a stick.

Joris never could remember afterwards exactly what happened. He only knew that he flew into a wild fury and charged at those boys, head down. It was two against one, but perhaps his head was harder than most, or perhaps anger gave him unusual strength. His wooden shoes were also excellent weapons which the boys could not match. At any rate, he chased them off long enough to be able to unhitch the pup. He grabbed the furry, squirming animal in his arms and ran—for the boys had recovered from their surprise and were after him. They threw stones at him. One hit his head, and he staggered for a moment but kept running.

"Thief!" the boys shouted. "Give us back our pup!" But their voices grew fainter. The stones stopped falling, and after a while Joris slackened his speed. His head throbbed and his nose bled. He wiped it with his sleeve and shifted the heavy pup, who was licking his ear.

It was quiet on the dike road between the lush green fields of the diked-in "polders." In the distance loomed the thatched body and whirling wings of the "Watchman," his father's windmill.

His mother gasped when she saw him come in. He had a big lump on his head where the stone had hit him. One eye was black and his clothes were spattered with blood.

"Whatever happened?" she cried. "Don't tell me you've been fighting!"

"I had to rescue this pup," said Joris, putting it on the floor, where it started to sniff around curiously.

"Merciful St. Joseph!" cried Mother. "And what about my message?"

"Oh, the buttons! I forgot—" stammered Joris.

"Well, you will have to wait for your jacket then," said Mother. "Never mind. Come to the pump and I'll clean you up, you poor child!" She bustled about, tending to her wounded warrior, while she listened to his tale.

"Many's the time I've had to do this for Dirk Jan," she said, placing a cold, wet cloth on Joris' swollen eye. "I never thought I'd have to do it for you! Still, you did right to defend a helpless creature, but you'll have to find out where it belongs and bring it back."

"*Mother!*" cried Joris in anguish, "I *can't* bring it back. Those boys will *kill* it!"

When Mother insisted, he began to sob wildly. Mother felt sorry for him.

"We'll ask Father," she said.

The Verhagen family discussed the pup during supper. Three-year-old Trixie, a tiny child with a headful of red curls, sat in her high chair, rubbing spinach over her face. Mother told Father what had happened while Joris stared at his plate. He was praying inside: "Dear God, please let me keep the pup! I'll never do anything wrong again . . . I *promise*. Please, God."

"I know where the pup belongs," said Dirk Jan. "It's the de Wits' pup. Hans and Habel de Wit showed it to me. They're from Amsterdam and they're staying at the Schenderhans' farm for the summer. I never thought Joris would dare take on anyone that big!"

"Yes, it is quite a feat for our Joris," said Father. When he smiled, little lines ran from the corners of his eyes in all directions like the rays of the sun. Father's face was broad and strong and peaceful.

"Well Joris," he said, "if I try to get this pup for you, will you pay me back in chores?"

"Oh, yes, Father, yes! I'll weed the garden, I'll chop wood, I'll mind Trixie—" Joris was stammering with happiness.

After dinner Father, Dirk Jan and Joris went together to the Schenderhans' farm. Joris carried the pup.

It was wonderful to be out with Father. It did not happen often, for he was a busy man. He was responsible for keeping the Rynsater polder dry. Each polder, a piece of reclaimed land, has its own mill to pump away the excess water that gathers between its dikes. When the mill wasn't working, Father was fishing or helping on a farm.

Farmer Schenderhans lived in the Noorderaar polder. Father and the boys took the short way: along the broad drainage canal which was cupped between two dikes, as it was much higher than the fields on either side. Cattle grazed below them, swishing their tails at dancing midges; frogs croaked in the ditches and birds twittered in the willow trees that lined the road. The Noorderaar polder was a large one. It had had two windmills. One, the far one at the other end of the polder, had been pulled down and replaced by an electric pump. This did the work of two, and the other windmill, the "Giant," stood wingless and idle. Father and the boys passed it on their way to the Schenderhans farm. Joris felt sorry for it, and Father seemed sad, too.

"It's a shame to let that mill go," he said. "Who knows when it might be needed? Too many windmills are scrapped in Holland. There are fewer and fewer boys now who want to be millwrights. After a while we won't know how to build windmills any more."

"I want to be a millwright, Father," cried Dirk Jan.

Father nodded. "I know, son, and I'm glad, but we need more than one to keep our windmills in repair. The trouble is that people think electricity is foolproof and easy. It certainly does not require much skill to run an electric pump. What they forget is that you have no control over your power that way. You make yourself dependent on a supply which is generated miles away in some central spot. If that fails, you are helpless. And can we afford to be helpless when it may mean drowning?"

Father stared into the distance where the Saterwoude church spire lifted itself like an exclamation point out of the hazy blue of the trees.

A dreadful thought came to Joris. "They won't scrap the Watchman, will they?" he asked.

Father sighed. "There are farmers in our polder who are envious of the modern Noorderaar pump. They imagine it is more efficient and costs less. There is talk of electrifying the mill after the war."

"But what will happen to us then?" asked Joris.

"I suppose we'd have to look for another mill," said Father.

"And leave our home?" cried Joris.

"That wouldn't be *fair!*" protested Dirk Jan. "Grandfather and Great-grandfather lived in our mill. It *belongs* to us!"

"Not really," explained Father. "It belongs to the Rynsater polder committee and they will decide whether to keep it or scrap it."

The boys were silent the rest of the way. They had never realized the danger that threatened their home. The Schenderhans' farm was as wealthy as a farm could be in occupied territory. The Germans wanted a large share of the waving wheat and heavy cattle. All the same, Farmer Schenderhans lived comfortably enough in his long, rambling farmhouse with its thatched roof and small windows. Hay bulged high under a cap on stilts in the yard. Chickens scratched and clucked; pigs grunted in the shed. Nero, the Schenderhans' Alsatian, came bounding out of the house to greet the visitors. After him ran Hendrik, the younger son of the farmer and a classmate of Joris.

“I know what you’ve come for!” he shouted. “You’ve come to bring back the pup! Hans and Habel said you had stolen it, but I told them I knew you and you’d be sure to bring it back!” He sounded triumphant. “Hans and Habel aren’t here. They’ve gone fishing. Come, I’ll show you the farm. I’ve got to gather eggs for Mother,” he added, waving a basket. But Joris shook his head and ran after Father and Dirk Jan, who had already entered the house. The puppy hid its head under Joris’ arm as if it were scared. Joris felt scared too. He tightened his clasp on the dog and entered the house timidly.

The de Wit parents were at home, and so were Mr. and Mrs. Schenderhans. They were all sitting in the dark parlor with its heavy lace curtains, stiff red plush chairs and flowered wallpaper.

Mr. and Mrs. de Wit did not seem pleased to see the pup, and they were amazed that it was Joris who had attacked their sons.

“You’re sure it wasn’t this one?” they asked, pointing at Dirk Jan. But it was Joris who had the black eye, and that convinced them.

Father apologized for Joris’ having taken the pup, and offered to buy it. Mr. and Mrs. de Wit looked at each other.

“As a matter of fact,” said Mr. de Wit, “we don’t want a dog. It’s a nuisance in the city, and we’re hard put to feed ourselves, let alone animals.” Mrs. de Wit nodded at each word. She was a thin, nervous woman who looked underfed, in spite of the good farm food she had been getting.

“It was only because the boys begged for it that we bought the dog,” Mr. de Wit continued, “but they haven’t been kind to it, and I confess that I’ll be relieved to sell it to you.”

So Father got the pup for a few florins, and Mrs. Schenderhans, a thick-set patient woman, served freshly-made buttermilk and real wheat cookies to seal the bargain.

Joris and Dirk Jan were relishing every mouthful of this treat, Joris sharing his with the pup, and the grownups had started a polite conversation about the difficulties and scarcities of wartime, when a loud yelping outside startled them. The pup began to whimper and hid her head under Joris’ arm again.

“Leendert, don’t be *mean*. Nero wasn’t doing *anything*. Stop it!” they heard Hendrik cry.