

Orange On Top

By
Henrietta Van Der Haas

ILLUSTRATED BY LUCILLE WALLOWER

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Note from the Publisher:

Orange On Top is an exciting book about the days of the Nazi occupation of The Netherlands during World War II. The book is out of print but the author's granddaughters, Kathryn and Diana, have graciously given me permission to reprint it and thus let another generation of children enjoy it. *Orange On Top* was one of my favorite books as a young girl, particularly since my heritage is one of Dutch immigrants. Read it aloud to your children and discuss many of the topics that are sure to arise.

Orange is the color of the Dutch Royal Family dating back to Willem van Oranje (William of Orange). While the color orange has royal roots in the Netherlands, today it symbolizes a broader pride in the country and in being Dutch.

On royal birthdays the Dutch tricolor is flown with an orange pennant above it. Each year on April 30, Amsterdam, and indeed the entire country, turns orange. Revelers can be heard to sing, "*Oranje boven, orange boven, leve the Koningin!*" (Orange on top, Orange on top. Long live the Queen!)

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

-Henrietta Van Der Haas

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CHAPTER I

BRAM'S STRATEGY

It was noon. Through Prince Street, a busy thoroughfare of The Hague in the Netherlands, sounded the tramp of marching feet. Some people on the sidewalks hastily turned their backs to the street and looked in the shop windows; others hurried on faster. Children stopped aroused Bram Jansen to action.

“Nazis! I’d like to make donkey ears at them,” he said, dashing to the curb.

Gerrit Jansen grasped his younger brother’s arm just in time. “You stay right here,” he ordered.

Adri, Bram’s sister, took hold of his other arm. “Don’t even look,” she cautioned.

Bram tried to free himself. “Let me go!” he said angrily but in a low tone. “You needn’t hold me.”

But Gerrit and Adri walked on holding Bram between them. “Behave yourself,” Gerrit threatened as the marching feet came closer.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp! A group of German soldiers goose-stepped along the street.

No one turned to look at the soldiers. Even the children ignored them. Only one man stepped to the curb, stretched out his arm, and shouted, “Heil Hitler!” Then he glanced about and shouted again, “Heil Hitler!”

Not one of the passersby joined him. Bram struggled to get free. “Let me go. He’s a ...” But Gerrit pressed his hand over Bram’s mouth, and the word was smothered.

The soldiers passed by. Gerrit let go of his brother’s arm, saying angrily, “Haven’t you any sense, Bram?”

“You act just like a Nazi,” Bram retorted in disgust. Bram pointed at the man who had shouted. “He is a Nazi. You know it but you’re afraid to say so. I bet you’ll be one yourself some day.”

“A Nazi! !” Gerrit burst out. “I’ll hit you if you say that again!”

Adri glanced about nervously. “Not so loud, Gerrit,” she warned.

Gerrit threw a furtive glance up and down the street, nodded to his sister, and walked on with a show of carelessness.

“You’re going to tell on me?” Bram inquired uncomfortably, looking up at his brother.

“No,” Gerrit answered shortly. “Dad has enough trouble as it is. I’ll take care of you.”

“You!” Bram muttered. He could take care of himself. But he walked on briskly with the others. They were all hungry and eager to get home.

Of the three children Gerrit was the oldest. He was fourteen but seemed older because he was tall and had a quiet thoughtful face. Adriana, or Adri, was a pretty girl of almost thirteen, with curly auburn hair and dark blue eyes. She too seemed older because of the wary expression that often settled on her face now.

Abram, or Bram, was small for his age. He had big brown eyes, bright red hair, and a face full of freckles.

From Prince Street the children turned into Ferry Street. At the house where a sign read, Dr. Karel Jansen, M. D., they mounted the steps leading up to the front door. Alida, the maid, answered the bell.

“Brammetje,” Alida said, taking hold of Bram’s arm, “wipe your feet on the mat. I’ve just finished scrubbing the hall.”

Bram stopped, not to wipe his feet but to look at Alida in disgust. “Brammetje!” he mimicked. “How often have I told you to call me Bram! I’m nine years old. I’m not Brammetje any more.”

“Of course, Brammetje,” Alida said soothingly. “I’ll call you Bram when I think of it. If you like,” she laughed, “I could call you the young master---when I think of it, Brammetje.”

“You’d never think of it,” Bram retorted, turning on his heel.

“Now, Brammetje,” Alida teased, poking him with the end of her scrubbing brush.

With a quick movement Bram grabbed the brush from her hands. “See,” he cried triumphantly, running through the hall, “if you had said Bram, I wouldn’t have taken your brush!”

At the noise Mrs. Jansen came to the door of the dining room. Laughing, Bram handed Alida the brush. She took it, but over her shoulder she winked at Bram. “Wearing your cap in the house? Why, Brammetje! No young master would do that.”

Bram laughed, tore off his cap, and aimed it at the clothes stand. He hit it, turned proudly to his mother, and gave her a quick hug. Smiling, she stroked his red hair.

Gerrit and Adri were already in the dining room. Bram's face fell when he looked at the table where luncheon was ready.

"Black bread, margarine, skimmed milk, and no jam," he grumbled. "I'll bet the Nazis have white bread and plenty of butter and jam."

"I don't know," Mrs. Jansen said quietly. "I know that we had enough of everything until they came. I tried to get fish at the market this morning but there wasn't any." Cheerfully she added, "But we have rice pudding for dessert."

"Rice pudding without milk or raisins or sugar! Who wants to eat that?" Bram muttered when his mother had left the room.

Adri asked reproachfully, "Why do you complain so much about the food, Bram? It makes Mother feel badly, and doesn't make the food any better. Mother is trying so hard to make things a little as they used to be."

"They aren't though. You know it." Sudden tears rose to Bram's eyes. "I'm often hungry. I wouldn't tell her that. But why doesn't she ever complain?"

He stopped when Mrs. Jansen came in. She carried the steaming pudding on a platter. It was molded in the form of a clover leaf, and some precious cinnamon was sprinkled over the top.

"Doesn't that look good!" Adri cried out. "It smells good too. Let's see who gets the first piece of pudding!" She buttered a slice of bread and said

cheerfully, “Margarine is not so bad once you get used to it.”

Across the table Mrs. Jansen looked at her daughter. “I’m proud of you, Adri,” she said softly.

“Huh!” Bram wrinkled up his nose. “She’s just pretending.”

“Will you keep quiet!” Gerrit shouted. “Why don’t you do a little pretending too?”

“No,” Mrs. Jansen said quickly. She put her hand on Bram’s “I don’t want Bram to pretend. He’s as he always was. I’d rather have him like that.”

“But, Mother,” Gerrit protested.

“I know. But it’s hard to see a little boy deprived of everything. It’s harder than eating that,” she said, motioning to the meager fare on the table.

Gerrit shot his brother an angry glance across the table, but he colored with pleasure when his mother added, “I’m proud of you too, Gerrit.”

Puzzled, Bram looked from his mother to his brother and sister. After a few moments, he inquired, “Aren’t you proud of me, Mother?”

Mrs. Jansen smiled at him. “Not exactly proud. You’re my sunshine, my little Brammetje.” Bram groaned audibly, and his mother added hastily, “But some day I’ll be proud of you too.”

“You will!” Bram promised. “Just wait and see!”

“Oh, Mother!” Gerrit cried out. “I hate to think what Bram will do to make you proud.”

In alarm Mrs. Jansen looked at Gerrit but did not answer because just then Dr. Jansen entered the room. He greeted his wife and children and sat down at the head of the table. "Anything left for me?" he asked.

Mrs. Jansen filled his cup with ersatz coffee and added a little skimmed milk. As he took the cup he said, "You'd better tell Alida to be careful with the gas in the kitchen, Lena. Jan Vermeer had to appear in court because his wife used too much gas."

"Were they fined?" Mrs. Jansen asked anxiously.

Dr. Jansen nodded. "Vermeer was in my office. He wanted a certificate of ill health for his son. The boy is not strong."

"Is he wanted for labor service, Karel?" Mrs. Jansen's face grew pale.

"Yes. He's sixteen, and the Nazis now want boys of fifteen and sixteen to volunteer for a three-year course in Germany." His face grim, Dr. Jansen looked at Gerrit, only fourteen but tall for his age. "They say they want to give suitable boys this opportunity. But that is only a sweet coating for a very bitter pill. If the boys don't volunteer they will be taken by force."

"Dad!" There was horror in Gerrit's gray eyes. "They can't take me for labor service!"

"No, Gerrit. Not yet. You are too young, and before that time comes..." Glancing at Bram, who

was listening wide-eyed, he changed the subject, and asked, “How was school this morning, Bram?”

“Fine,” Bram answered. “Piet de Boer is a Young Storm Trooper now. He wears a badge. And did we show him what we thought of it! No one talked to him and he can’t play on our football team anymore.”

“Poor child!” Mrs. Jansen sighed.

“Poor child!” Bram repeated. “He doesn’t have to be a Young Storm Trooper if he doesn’t want to.”

Mrs. Jansen looked at her husband before she said, “If your father were a Dutch Nazi, you’d have to be one too.”

“Not I,” Bram denied vehemently.

Dr. Jansen seemed amused. “Why not, Bram?”

Bram stared at his father, then he exploded. “Look at all those Nazis have done to us! They killed our soldiers, they bombed Rotterdam, they took our country, they drove our Queen away. We can’t eat what we like. Everything has changed. Even Gerrit and Adri have changed.” He looked rebelliously at his brother and sister. “They act as if I were a baby. And I’m not. I’m a patriot!” Imploringly he looked at his father. “Dad, you’re not turning Nazi, are you? You wouldn’t, Dad, would you?”

“No Bram, never.”

With a sigh of satisfaction Bram nodded. “That’s what I told Henk de Groot. He said his father wouldn’t become a Nazi either. Dad, why don’t we

do something? There are many more of us than there are Nazis. We could fight them even if we have no guns. Henk said he'd take the hose and squirt water into a soldier's face. Then he couldn't shoot. And then I'd run quickly, and hit the soldier with..."

"Abram!" Dr. Jansen interrupted sharply.

Bram gulped and stopped short. Dad did not often say Abram, but when he did Bram knew he'd better pay attention. And the way Dad looked now scared him. "Yes, sir," he answered meekly.

"Never say things like that," Dad pronounced every word distinctly, "or I'll whip you."

"Oh," Bram blinked his eyes to keep the tears back. Dad never whipped him. He could not mean that. But he did. Bram saw it and felt it. "Yes, sir," he whispered.

It was so quiet in the room Bram could hear the clock tick. Why was Dad so angry? Bram hung his head.

Dr. Jansen's voice was less harsh when he asked, "Do you want to be a true Netherlander, Bram?"

Bram nodded his head vigorously.

"A good patriot," Dad went on, "keeps his mouth shut nowadays even though he doesn't feel like it. If the Nazis had heard what you said, they'd shoot me and send your mother to a concentration camp because we did not bring you up properly. They'd take you to Germany and make a Nazi out of you."

“No,” said Bram.

“Will you remember to be careful about what you say?”

“Yes, Dad.” Rubbing his fists into his eyes, Bram muttered, “They couldn’t take me to Germany and make a Nazi out of me.”

Exasperated, Dad said, “They could take your mother to a concentration camp.”

“No, they couldn’t. You wouldn’t let them. I wouldn’t either. I would...” He stopped and blinked at his father shamefacedly.

“That’s right,” Dad praised. “Keep your thoughts to yourself, Brammetje.”

Brammetje! And that from Dad! They all thought him a baby. But he wasn’t. He was a patriot, and a patriot should do more than just keep his mouth shut. He should help chase the Germans out of the country. He’d do it too. He’d show them all, Dad, and Mother, and Gerrit, and Adri, and the boys in school. Deep in thought, Bram ate the watery pudding.

“Dad,” Gerrit interrupted impatiently, “I could try to get out of the country. You could help me. You know, Uncle Mauritz...”

“No, Gerrit, I don’t know and you don’t know,” Dr. Jansen cut in sharply.

Gerrit looked down at his plate.

“I must hurry,” Dr. Jansen said, pushing his chair away from the table. He ran his hand over Gerrit’s

hair. “Keep out of mischief, son. That will help a lot.” Bending the boy’s head backward, he looked into his eyes. “Don’t forget that loyalty is a crime now, Gerrit. Those in actual danger must be helped first.”

“I know, but I’d like to fight, Dad.”

“You can do your fighting here. There’s no glory in it. But our government depends on us no less than on the soldiers at the front. Every loyal man, woman, and child is a soldier now. Don’t forget that.”

