

## Chapter 13

### Find and Return

#### It's Urgent

**TITEL VAN HFD—"IT'S URGENT" –ALS DIT DE TITEL WORDT, IS HET DE ENIGSTE HFDSTUK TITEL DAT EEN COMPLETE ZIN IS.**

**SOCCKER v FOOTBALL. –Ik heb meest de Canadeze cum Engelse spelling gebruikt maar misschien in een Canadeze cum Amerikaanse style? Soccer is Noord Amerikaans; football is engels. Jij moet kiezen.**

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**It looks as if everyone was waiting for this moment, for it immediately becomes deathly quiet in the room. Everybody hangs on Titus' lips as he tells the story about the etching of the playing boys, the finding of the first etch impression and their search for it in Amsterdam. After he finishes the story, it remains quiet for a short time.**

**Then a grey-haired man asks, "Where did you actually find that etch? Isn't that like looking for a needle in a haystack in such a large city? Can you tell us more about that?" Titus shakes his head. "No, I won't go there. We're talking about a secret place that is nobody's business. That much I can tell you." The man looks a bit critical. "It wouldn't have anything to do with something like an underground church, would it? That wouldn't surprise me one bit. There is so much intolerance around these days, even though the Republic is famous for its hospitality and tolerance. The Regents of the Seven Provinces should really devote themselves more to the safety of all their citizens, if you ask me."**

The man gives the impression he loves to hear himself talk. In any case, he evokes reactions. Everyone joins the discussion. An old man, who until now just sat there dozing off, tells about visitors to an underground church in his neighbourhood. "They often do not feel at ease," he mutters. "I can well imagine that. They are at best only put up with."

The man with the dark hair who is upset over the art robbers, nods in agreement, but says, "This is all good and well, people, but let us just conclude that right now Rembrandt's son does not want to name any further first or last names in connection with this theft. That is his right. The point here is that that etch plate be retrieved. That's it. Whether it is about copper thieves or about villains who want to make the life of others difficult, is irrelevant right now."

Quiet returns to the room. The woman with the bread gathers the leftovers and packs them up. The old man takes a swig of whiskey from his carafe. The woman with the ruddy hair adds nothing further to her story. She just sits there looking dreamily ahead of herself. The blue clouds of smoke increasingly make seeing the other passengers more difficult. Alessa and Maita hold their hands to their noses to avoid as much as possible breathing in the smoke-filled air. How long will this journey still last?

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Alessa looks aside to Nellie, who seems to be daydreaming. "Hey, Nellie, are you still awake? Listen to this: When we travel from Amsterdam to Purmerend, that takes us no more than twenty minutes. This trip takes a lot longer, for we haven't even reached the hamlet Schouw!" Nellie wakes up fast and opens her eyes wide. "How can you do that in twenty minutes? You guys seem to be able to do so many more things than we can in our time!"

Alessa begins to tell her about the bus on the HOV lane along the freeway, but she notices that Nellie finds this all too unbelievable. "This trail is for the horses that pull the tow barges. A large vehicle on four wheels that reaches Purmerend in twenty minutes without horses? Wow, that seems like a dream!"

Alessa realizes that in the meantime their own century has also become a dream for her and Maita. Will she ever again sit in that fast bus? Or will she perhaps stay in the Golden Age for good? She feels tears welling up-- and they are not the result of the smoke in the room....

At that moment the skipper comes down the stairs. "Attention, please, good people! We are about to stop shortly at Schouw. Passengers for Purmerend can stay put, just like those for Beemster and Oosthuizen. They will be pulled further from Purmerend along the Beemster Ring Canal. Travelers with destination Broek and Monnickendam have to disembark here and walk past the farm and the inn. They can wait for the barge to their destination on the right side of the dyke. According to the schedule, that should take about a half hour. For those who need to eat or drink, this is available at the inn. Alright, people, those who want to disembark should now get up and move. If you only want to stretch your legs, you have five minutes to get some fresh air on the dock."

It looks like most passengers are only too happy to stretch their legs for a few moments. The two men are still deeply involved in their conversation, but by the time almost everybody has gotten ready to leave the barge, they also stand up. The bread peddler neatly folds a towel over her basket before she climbs the stairs with difficulty. The old man takes one more swig of whiskey before he puts away his flask in a deep pocket in his long coat. Then he, too, climbs up to the deck. The farmer with his rooster and chickens speaks to his animals in the hope they will keep quiet for a while. "We are now almost at farmer Jansen, you cacklers. Go ahead and drive that man crazy with your noise but please spare me!" The children and Titus follow

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him along the gangplank. "Wow, fresh air!" Alessa calls out, relieved when they stand on the dock.

They observe a few passengers walking quickly to the inn. The inn keeper stands in the doorway and welcomes the travelers with a broad grin. "Had a

good sailing? I bet you did, for the skippers of these barges and their horsemen are the best. But now, rest a while! Welcome to The Ruddy Horse Inn. Hey, you young people, do you also want something to drink?" Titus shakes his head. "No, inn keeper, we don't have time. In just a minute we'll move on with the barge to Purmerend."

Five minutes is not long, but the boys need to go to the toilet badly. They look for a tree behind the inn. Alessa also has to go, but she absolutely does not want to go to the loo of the inn which all the travelers will use. The story of dysentery is still too fresh for her. "What should I do?" she whispers to Nellie, who laughs mysteriously. "Follow me, quick, to the rear of the inn. From there, there's a narrow path to the farm. Behind the haystack there, no one will see you when you lift up your skirt. I have done that myself in the past." Nellie runs fast ahead of Alessa. Gasping, she squats behind the haystack. "Now, quickly, straighten out your skirt and run!" says Nellie. Together they run back to the barge.

The boys and Maita are already on the gangplank, for the Purmerend horse and its rider are ready to go. "Hurry up, all aboard, young people!" the skipper calls out impatiently. Just before he pulls in the gangplank, a man comes running who wants to come along. "You should come earlier, sir!" the skipper calls to him, but he nevertheless allows the man to board before he pulls in the gangplank.

The barge rolls a bit as the horse begins to move and with that, the light cadence on the water begins again. The latecomer is still panting in the corner of the bench where he managed to secure a seat. He wipes his forehead with a colourful handkerchief and then closes his eyes as he catches his breath. Maita looks at him from aside. It strikes her that the man keeps his coat tightly closed, even though it is warm in the room. The man gives a surly impression, so that she does not ask him anything. The conversations start up again, but this man does not take part. Neither did he accept a pipe from the skipper. It looks as if he is sleeping. He probably came from somewhere afar. The blond and the dark men are back, sitting in the same places.

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**The woman with the basket has also taken her former spot, whereas the ruddy woman who knew of the theft from Rembrandt's studio now sits next to the two men.**

**Maita and Alessa become sleepy from the rocking of the barge. Before they realize it, they fall into a light sleep. Maita is dreaming of a wild chase in the streets of Purmerend during which she is pursuing a man who tries to hide a packet under his coat.**

**She wakes up with a shock. The man next to her still has his eyes closed. Would he really be sleeping? Alessa is still sleeping with her head leaning against the back wall of the room. Titus and the boys are playing a card game in which they compete fiercely. "No, you are cheating!" Jan accuses Hendrik, but the latter ignores the anger of his brother. "Take a good look at your own cards," he says calmly, "then you'll see who is playing an honest game." Jan plays on, sulking.**

**They suddenly hear the call from the deck: "Purmerend, Amsterdam Gate, Purmerend!" "Hey, we've arrived already!" says Titus. "Let's stop with the game and count the points." A quick count shows Jan to have the highest score. He is so happy with his victory, he almost dances as he disembarks. "And now to the market! I am ready for it. We will show those thieves that we have arrived!" he yells. Hendrik gives him a prod in his back. "Not so loud, man! The other people do not need to hear this. You don't know whether we will succeed. Besides, you should not give the thieves the idea that they should hide the etch somewhere. Then we're even further from our goal!" Jan holds his mouth from here on.**

**Alessa laughs, relieved now that they are back on land and looks around cheerfully. "Heh, heh, we're finally closer to home. Here's where we live, in Purmerend! This is ours!" She stretches her arms wide as if the whole world is hers.**

Maita also turns around in every direction, but she reacts very differently. “Yes, okay, Alessa, I do see meadows with cattle over there across the road... and those houses there, but everything is really different. You see that, don’t you? Take a look at that gate over there and that wall—they don’t exist at all in our time!”

There are many people walking along the narrow cobble-stone street through the Amsterdam Gate. Horses are pulling loaded wagons behind them. The children have to walk carefully behind each other along the side of the road to avoid the high rattling wheels and to get through the gate into the city

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safely. Once inside the gate, the girls stand still and look around in amazement. They see a wide moat that seems to encircle the entire city. Along the canal stand small houses, much lower and simpler than the canal houses in Amsterdam.

“How lovely; it looks like Edam,” says Maita, after they’ve stood there looking around for some time. “And look that way to the left,” Alessa calls out, “there’s a castle! Why, I didn’t know that there was such a large castle in Purmerend!” Jan is skillfully jumping from one crooked boulder to another, but now he looks back at Alessa: “What do you mean that there used to be a castle here? There’s still one. Don’t you see that? And didn’t we tell you that already?”

In the meantime, Hendrik is walking ahead with Titus. He turns around and reminds her, “Yes, I already told you that this castle’s name is ‘Slot Purmersteyn,’ ‘slot’ being just another word for ‘castle.’” “What?” cries Alessa, “Purmersteyn? That’s a soccer club!” A soccer club? No, there is no such thing in the seventeenth century, is what the girls get to hear. “Surely a ball team cannot be associated with a distinguished castle? Here’s where the Regents of Purmerend live. They will be too rigid and harsh,” says Hendrik. “I would like to visit the place once, even though they may be rigid!” Alessa remarks with curiosity. But there is no time for such a visit. Titus is in a hurry.

As they walk on, Maita does recognize the streets of Purmerend somewhat. Alessa also gets the notion that they are walking from the Hoog Street to the Cheese Market just as they have done before. And sure enough, a bit later they find themselves at the well-known market, the heart of Purmerend! They take a good look around themselves. "Hey, look, there's a City Hall and a church just like in our time!" exclaims Maita. "Yes, but they don't look the same as those in our time," reacts Alessa. "In reality, the church is much higher. But look, some houses on that narrow street resemble the shops of our time a bit, don't you think?" Maita nods and laughs, "Look here... they just held a cheese market, just like in Edam! You see all these cheeses lying there?" Alessa feels around a large, flat cheese. "I would love to have a little piece!" A cheese carrier in white clothes grins at her. "Do you know how much such a cheese weighs, young lady? Feel free to take a whole cheese

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along. Then you will all enjoy eating it together with delight." Alessa shakes her head. "No, thank you. We've come here for something totally different." The carrier is about to ask her about it, but Hendrik pulls her along.

Meanwhile Jan is asking, "And what do you think now of the castle?" When they look to the left, it seems pretty close to them. The high brick walls of Purmersteyn stick out above the low houses. "You know," says Maita to Nellie, "I believe my Dad often parks his car there when he wants to go to town. It's called 'Castle Square.'" Of course, cars do not park here in the Golden Age, but Nellie does find it humorous that her new friends now recognize a few things. But Alessa and Maita feel more like strangers in their own city. Everyone, naturally, is dressed in the fashion of the seventeenth century and here that looks different from that in Amsterdam. "Have you noticed that all men here wear a cap and not a hat?" asks Alessa. "Yes, I have noticed," responds Maita. "I think they are not as rich here. They are more like peasants."

Titus is becoming a bit impatient. "We are already well into the afternoon," he says. "We have to move along if we want enough time to check out the art booths." Hendrik agrees. He says, "You guys just walk behind me. I

know the way here pretty well. I tried to pay close attention the last time we were staying with Uncle Cornelis.”

Hendrik zigzags expertly through the busyness of the Cheese Market. Titus walks next to him and the children follow. Nellie and the boys are glad that their big brother at least knows the way. Alessa and Maita could almost find their way from the Cheese Market to the Cattle Market blindfolded. And there’s Broadway already! “Hey, Titus, we know the way here!” Alessa calls enthusiastically now that she again recognizes something in her own city. “But strange, we don’t have a canal here in the middle of the street.” She skips amazed across the little bridge. Titus is not so much interested in talking. He wants to hurry up.

Before long, they are at the beginning of the Cattle Market. Maita and Alessa are now walking ahead. Quickly they look around. No cattle today. That’s right, of course, for it is not Tuesday. But there are no booths anywhere either! Well, yes, there, further on along the Cattle Street there are some. “Hello, in our time is this not the Willem Eggert Centre?” Maita asks as Titus and Hendrik decide to walk in that direction. Alessa laughs, “There is none of that to be seen in this century!” They walk along

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market booths displaying plants and seeds, while the girls are looking for where the art booths might be.

At that very moment they see the surly man from the barge walking just ahead of them. It looks like he knows exactly what he wants, for he walks quickly without paying attention to his surroundings. Under his right arm he clasps a packet. “A packet? Would he have hidden that underneath his coat all that time?” wonders Maita. She follows him with her eyes. At the corner the man stands still for just a moment, he squints his eyes against the setting sun and then walks down a narrow alley. Alessa beckons the boys and Nellie, who are somewhat behind. “Hurry up, follow me quickly into this alley...” The

strange man begins to walk faster. At the end of the alley he turns right without hesitation. He seems to know his way here very well.

“Look, here are the art booths!” Alessa calls out to the boys as she is the first to have reached the corner. Maita stands next to her and keeps her eyes on the man with the packet. Something about his posture seems to show that he is carrying a secret. “Watch that man,” she whispers to Titus and Hendrik who stand right behind her. Titus looks at the man thoughtfully and says, “Hey, it seems I have met him before. I could be mistaken, but in general I have a good memory....” Alessa laughs, “Why, man, he was with us on the barge. He almost missed it in Schouw. Didn’t you see that?” Then she turns more serious: “He seemed like a strange man right from the beginning. He said nothing and he kept his coat buttoned as if he had something to hide. “

Jan smells adventure. He wants to dash ahead to act as a detective, but Nellie holds him back at his sleeve in the nick of time. “First think it through, then act!” she cautions him sternly. “Heh, you’re not my mother!” Jan reacts irritated, while he tries to free himself. “Nellie, this is a chance to solve the theft and then you act as if you’re the boss!” He becomes really angry, but Hendrik intervenes right away. He calms Jan and whispers as softly as possible, “Let’s take it easy and first make a plan. If all of us together keep following this man, he may well become suspicious. It must not become noticeable that we’re keeping our eyes on him. It seems best to me that Titus and I first go look to see whether there really is something going on with this fellow. I will give you a signal when you need to come closer.”

The tension rises. While Titus and Hendrik walk further, the others stay hanging around the first art booths. But their

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attention is not with the paintings, sculptures or the chinaware that they see displayed. “Heh, interested ?” a vendor asks Nellie. He shows her a Japanese teapot. She shakes her head and goes on to the next booth. “Hey, young lady, “ a seller begins to talk to Alessa, “Are you from here? You look like you’re from the big city. You look very smart!”

Alessa smiles, "I really do come from Purmerend." The man looks her over with searching eyes. "But, girl, your speech is different. You can't fool me. If you ask me, you're not from here." Alessa shakes her head: "Mister, don't you think I would know that best?"

To avoid further questioning, she walks on to the next booth. This vendor followed the conversation next door a bit. He also looks at the girls with searching eyes and says, "Girls from the big city, that's exactly how you look. My neighbour is right. But for me it's all the same as long as you buy something. Or are your parents perhaps in the neighbourhood and they're looking to buy something nice for your home?"

The questions are turning too personal for Alessa. She quickly responds that their parents are on the other side of the market. They really cannot take too much further questioning! Fortunately, Hendrik rescues them by motioning from a distance to come closer. They walk fast to the other corner of the street where Titus and Hendrik are waiting for them. When they are close, Titus whispers they need a more quiet spot. So they hide behind the booth on the corner.

Hendriks breathes fast as he tells them softly what he has seen. "That surly man with the parcel went to that booth there on the other corner. He whispered a bit to the vendor and took him aside behind the booth."

Titus adds, "I could only see them at an angle from where I stood, but I could not see enough as to what took place. I suspect that the package was sold, for after a minute or so the vendor returned and laid a shining object down in the middle of the booth.

Jan almost jumps for nervousness. "You guys saw a flat thing?" Titus nods. "Yes, it is a flat shining plate. I think it could be an etching plate," Hendrik says, "But that does not tell us much. We now have to find out what's on the plate. To find that out

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you have to come very close to it. Who could do that without arousing suspicion?"

Maita and Alessa look at each other with sparkles in their eyes. Maita says, "You know something? Those vendors would not expect us to buy

anything from them, for we look to them like city girls who shouldn't be out shopping without their parents. We just heard someone say that to us. Titus, I can go and see. I will act very innocently!" Alessa joins her in her enthusiasm. "And I'll go as well. Alright, let's go right now!" Hendrik holds them back for just a moment. "Listen closely. Don't tell the man anything about the theft. Pretend you are just ordinary customers. Look simple and find out only whether that plate is an etching plate and what's on it. That's all. Then come back to us here!"

The girls nod and then saunter somewhat carefree towards the corner booth. The salesman is just writing something on a small piece of cardboard as they approach his place. He puts the little card down right next to the gleaming plate. The first thing Alessa reads is a word written in large cursive letters: "*REMBRANDT.*"

She trembles a bit as she comes closer. "Sir, is this a genuine Rembrandt?" she blurts out. "Yes, and much too expensive for you!" the vendor replies immediately. "Well, I'm not going to buy that plate," Alessa says as calmly as possible, "but my father likes etchings. This is an etching plate, isn't it?" When the man nods in agreement, her heart begins to beat faster. "May my sister and I take a look at what's on it?" she asks.

Maita looks at her in amazement, for the idea of shopping with a sister had not occurred to her. She hesitates briefly. Suddenly she remembers something. Hadn't the neighbour lady at the Kalk House told them that she has a brother who also sells etchings? "Sir, may I ask a question? Are you possibly the brother of a lady who lives in Amsterdam on the Lime Market? She told us that her brother is an expert when it comes to etchings!"

The vendor looks at her with surprise. "Yes, indeed. How special that you girls know that! My sister lives in the house next to the Kalk House. Do you live on that street? I didn't know that. I live here in Purmerend, but I often buy my stuff in Amsterdam. Sometimes people offer me works of art when I am at the market. Well, you know, one can trade anywhere. Do you guys know the work of Rembrandt? That would be possible, since you live close to the Rembrandt House."

He takes a good look at the girls and then says, "Okay, you may look at the etching from close up, but don't

touch it! This is not a child's toy. Tell your Dad that it shows boys playing with each other. Rembrandt has never drawn something like this before and certainly not as detailed. Is your Dad nearby? Then you really have to let him see it. It is highly unusual that there is an etching from the great master for sale here!"

Alessa and Maita understand that they must take a quick look, for the man wants their father to come shortly to look. Which children would be interested in an etching?

"I also love drawing very much," Maita says to stretch the time a bit. "I am interested in how Rembrandt does that on such a copper plate." She bends down over the plate and sees all sorts of scratches and lines dance before her eyes as she bends as closely as possible over the plate. She does not recognize the playing boys immediately in the crisscross of lines. "I don't clearly see the playing boys," she says to the seller. "Do you, Alessa?" They bend together over the plate.

At that moment it happens. The brilliance of lines, waves and scratches turns into a clear scene of the playing boys Jan and Hendrik, who are being bullied on the Old Fort by that miserable Rinus. This is the picture they already know from their history textbook! The time seems to stand still as the brilliance of the plate increases. It is as if the sun shines right through it. Then a wave of energy zooms from the plate to the two of them.

Are they still on their legs? They suddenly feel suspended by an unfamiliar suction force that is becoming stronger. The sounds around them fade away. In the distance they hear the voice of the vendor calling, "What's going on? Are you girls okay? Go get your father!"