

## **Title: Shadows Over the City**

My name is David, and I am eleven years old. I live in Amsterdam, in a small house on a narrow street near the canal. Everything used to be nice here: my friends played outside, the market was always busy, and the smell of fresh bread came from the bakery. The world seemed simple and safe, but since the Germans came, everything feels different. It is like the sun is shining, but there is always a dark shadow over the city.

Every morning I wake up with a heavy feeling in my stomach. My mother is usually already in the kitchen, slicing bread and making tea. My father sits quietly by the window, looking at the street, as if he is trying to see what will happen. We hardly dare to talk about what we hear outside, because sometimes neighbors listen, and you never know who could be a traitor.

One morning, while I was eating my sandwich, I heard loud voices outside. Soldiers in uniform were at the neighbor's house, shouting, pushing people, and taking everyone they could find. My heart was beating fast, and I felt a knot in my stomach. My mother grabbed my hand and pulled me quickly to the corner of the kitchen. She whispered that we had to be quiet and hope they wouldn't find us. My father looked worried out the window, but he said nothing.

The days after that, everything changed. Every morning we listened to the sound of boots on the cobblestones and voices calling names. Sometimes I heard the crying of people being pushed into trucks. Then I would crawl into a corner of our house and try not to think about what would happen to them. My parents tried to stay strong, but I saw fear in their eyes, and I felt it too. I became afraid of a city that suddenly seemed full of danger.

My best friend, Ruben, who always lived next door, suddenly disappeared. Nobody knew where he had been taken. I felt an empty place in my heart, and I missed our games on the street. We didn't dare to play outside like before. Sometimes my mother whispered about hiding places, but it was dangerous to talk about it. My father said we had to wait and try to stay small and quiet.

Every evening, we sat quietly in our house, listening to the silence that was sometimes broken by the sound of boots or people shouting in the distance. I tried to sleep, but the images of people being taken stayed in my mind. A girl once fell during a raid, and the soldiers grabbed her roughly. I wanted to help, but I couldn't move because of fear. Since then, I never go outside alone.

Despite everything, my family tried to live our life as best we could. My father secretly taught me new words in Hebrew and told stories about our ancestors. My mother softly sang Jewish songs so the fear would disappear for a little while. On Friday evenings, we lit candles for Shabbat and prayed, as we always did, for peace and protection. It felt strange to pray while the world outside was so dangerous, but it gave us a little hope.

Sometimes I played small games with my older sister Sara in the living room, or I drew in a notebook what I saw from our window. I drew houses, canals, and trees, sometimes even the shadows of soldiers, but never the people being taken, because that was too sad. Drawing helped me escape the fear in my head, even if only for a short time.

One cold morning, before the sun was up, I heard the sound of boots closer than ever. My mother quickly pulled us away from the window and whispered that we had to hide in the closet. My heart was in my throat, and I tried not to breathe, but I felt like I couldn't. The soldiers went from door to door, and I could hear shouting through the walls. When they finally left, I only dared to move again. My hands shook for hours from fear.

After a week, we met a new neighbor, an older man named Mr. Cohen. He carefully told us about a hiding place. He had an old shed behind his house that was empty and hidden from curious eyes. My parents listened closely, their eyes full of hope and fear. That night, after talking a lot, we decided we needed a plan to protect ourselves and maybe Ruben.

The weeks after that were exciting and scary. My parents taught me how to be quiet, how to react quickly if someone knocked on the door, and what to say if someone asked if we lived alone. Sometimes we went at night to Mr. Cohen's shed, where we hid, and my heart beat fast with tension and fear. But there, I also felt a strange kind of freedom: we were away from the dangerous street, safe in a place where no one could find us.

Despite everything, I tried to keep hoping. Every day we lived was a victory over fear. I learned that courage doesn't mean you are not afraid, but that you go on even when you are. My parents taught me that hope is the most important weapon we have, and that even in the dark, a small light can chase away fear.

Slowly, very slowly, I began to understand that our world would never be the same, but we could still dream, laugh, and love, even if it was hard. The shadows over the city were always there, but I learned that it is important not to give in to fear.

One day, while I looked out the window and the sun slowly shone over the canal, I thought about Ruben, my friends, the people who disappeared, and everyone we had lost. A tear rolled down my cheek, but I also smiled a little, because I knew that as long as we had hope, there would come a day when the city would be full of life and sound again, and the shadows would slowly disappear.