

Home Away from Home

Hendrick Van der Vee's disappearance from The Village brought to light the facility's shortcomings. How could an eighty-one-year-old man with a limp slip past several community staff members and hobble out the main gate at ten in the morning unnoticed?

Good-natured and unassuming, the retired history teacher had never before caused any trouble. In fact, he was one of The Village's more easy-to-care-for residents and a favourite amongst the staff. Whilst he spent most of his time in his private, ground floor room building model ships of the most intricate sort, he was just as keen to take part in organised group activities and engage with others at mealtimes. According to his personal carer, Pieter, he was well liked by his housemates too.

At least by those who could remember who he was from day to day.

Hendrick's disappearance went unnoticed until lunchtime. When he failed to take his place at the table in the communal dining room, his house manager immediately raised the alarm and a thorough, all-hands-on-deck search of the four-acre gated compound ensued. Their worst fears, however, were realised after the security team checked the CCTV footage and tracked his movements.

Hendrick had a three-hour head start. He could be anywhere.

Roland Van der Vee was discouraged to say the least. What was the point of shelling out 8,500 Euros a month for round-the-clock care if The Village couldn't guarantee his father's welfare? In truth, it wasn't about the cost. He would've happily paid double just for the peace of mind. After all, his father, who raised him all on his own after his mother's untimely death, deserved the best money could buy.

But this... this was unacceptable.

'We've contacted the local authorities,' Pieter said, opening the door to Hendrick's room.

Roland looked around the tidy, vacant room and shook his head. 'I should hope so.'

'We've also sent out a team to his previous residence, as well as to the schools where he'd taught. They'll be in touch the moment they hear or learn anything.'

'How could you allow this to happen? I was under the impression strict security measures were in place.' Roland moved to the window and looked out onto the neighbourhood, which had been built to resemble a typical Dutch community, complete with shops, a cafe, and other amenities.

Pieter cleared his throat. 'As you know, Mr Van der Vee...'

'Please, call me Roland.'

'Yes. Roland. As you know, the residents are free to roam wherever they wish—within the community, that is. All of our staff, including those who work in the supermarket and cinema, are fully qualified care-workers. It's what sets us apart from other dementia care facilities.'

Roland picked up one of several model ships and admired his father's craftsmanship and attention to detail before returning it to the top of the dresser. 'All that means very little now. My father is missing. He is vulnerable. He's left without his phone. We have no way of contacting him.'

'I assure you we're doing everything we can....' Pieter cleared his throat again. 'We were hoping you might have some leads. Perhaps you know of some place that holds a special memory? Somewhere we haven't been made aware of?'

'Have you tried the National Maritime Museum?'

'We've been in touch, yes, but unfortunately, he hasn't turned up there... yet.'

'He loved the sea, my father. Never lived on the coast, but always dreamt he would someday.'

Roland sauntered to his father's work desk and picked up Hendrick's latest project—a Dutch galleon in a bottle. Several thin wires hung out of the bottle's wide mouth; the ship's masts had yet to be raised.

'Your father... he worked on that for hours every day. It's been lovely to see the progress these past few months. We assumed that's what he'd been doing this morning... after he'd had his breakfast.'

'Well, you assumed wrong.' Roland sighed, then held the bottle up to the light and inspected the name carefully etched into either side of the ship's forward end. *Marijke*. A name he was familiar with, though it had been years since he'd last heard it spoken. He set the bottle down. 'It's a long shot, but I think I know where he might've gone.'

Sixty-three kilometres away in Bergen aan Zee, Hendrick Van der Vee sat on a bench outside an estate agent's office, the site where Marijke's Cafe once stood. It was here he'd met his darling wife Anja all those years ago, and where they'd dined during the summer holidays when Roland was a young boy. As Hendrick gazed out across the sea, pleasant memories of long ago played on a loop in his mind. For years, this had been his happy place.

His home away from home.