

CHAPTER 1 | Saara

“A great English journalist has confessed that he does not know when the war will end. There used to be quite a number of men on the street who could tell, but they are not so numerous now.”—The Note Book, column in *Port Arthur Daily News*, 1915

“EXTRA! EXTRA!” barked John, slamming the front door and bursting into the kitchen. Switching to the language our family used—Finnish—he said, “Somebody tried to burn down the *Daily News* building!”

With a gasp, Mama dropped her wooden spoon in the porridge pot.

Hold on, Saara, I told myself. Was this another of my brother’s pranks? No, John actually reeked of smoke!

“What happened?” demanded Papa, lowering that morning’s *Port Arthur Daily News*.

“Fred and I were first to pick up our newspapers at the back this morning,” said John, still panting from running uphill, “and we saw flames leaping from a stack of papers.”

“Why would someone want to destroy the *Daily News* building?” I asked. “All the paper prints is boring

reports about the war.” There were days while helping Aunt Marja at the farm the last three months that I’d forgotten there was even a war on. But after four days back in Port Arthur, I was reminded constantly.

“Maybe it was a German spy,” said John, “who doesn’t want us to win the war.”

A spy? I doubted that could be true. I circled the table, setting out our bowls.

“Was anyone hurt?” asked Mama.

“No—they put out the fire while it was small. So we still had plenty of papers to sell.”

“And today’s paper finally has some good war news,” said Papa. “Canadians fought marvellously, according to Carrick.”

I stared at the front page. The war between our Allied forces—mainly Russia, France, and the British Empire, including Canada—and Germany had already lasted eleven months. *GRIPPING STORY OF WAR OPERATIONS ... STUPENDOUS CONFLICTS ARE BREWING ... GREAT GALLANTRY OF CANADIAN OFFICERS GETS RECOGNITION ...* these were only a few of the war-related headlines.

“Jussi,” said Mama, wrinkling her nose at my brother, “I can’t believe you sold newspapers in those vile clothes. Go upstairs and get yourself out of them now.” She returned to stirring the porridge. “Then add them to what’s soaking in the boiler so Saara can wash them.”

My jaw dropped. “But I have to see Principal Graham at nine o’clock—”

“Now that you’re back home,” said Papa, “we expect you to help with chores.”

“You must be in BIG trouble with Mr. Graham,” taunted John.

“I am *not* in trouble.”

“Isn’t school over, Saara?” asked Mama.

“Yes—I only need to pick up my report card. With me away the past few months, and Mr. Graham having two classes to look after, he just forgot to write mine, that’s all.” My Junior Fourth teacher, Miss Rodgers, had left for Toronto in mid-June to care for her brother. He was wounded in France fighting at Ypres. Mr. Graham thought I’d left school entirely, not just until Auntie was well.

“Jussi, where is your report card?” asked Papa. “I didn’t see it here on the table when I got home from my meeting last night.”

I scoffed, “It must be so bad you’re ashamed to show it.”

“It’s in the parlour and it’s fine,” said John, sticking his tongue out at me. As he went to fetch his report card he muttered, “But I bet you failed ’cause you missed the examinations.”

No, Mr. Graham wouldn’t fail me. My grades were excellent ... until March, that is. I hadn’t attended school since then. And the examinations *were* important. What if Mr. Graham would not allow me to advance into Senior Fourth come September? My pulse quickened at that horrible thought. Now I had to wait until nine o’clock to find out his decision.

“Seeing Mr. Graham won’t take all day,” said Mama. “You can do the washing and ironing when you come home so I can get my sewing work done.”

John handed his report card to Papa, then headed upstairs to change. I carried on with brewing my Red Rose tea and setting the breakfast table, fully expecting Papa to scowl over John’s report. Instead he nodded, saying, “Some improvement. Good for Jussi.”

Was my little brother finally starting to take school seriously?

“SAARA!” hollered John as he flew down the stairs. In English he yelled, “A dog chased Sipu up a tree!” Rounding the corner into the kitchen, he blurted, “She’s stuck in the poplar meowing and hissing!”

I plunked the milk bottle on the table.

“It’s only a cat,” grumbled Papa.

“Quick, Saara—she needs your help!” urged my brother.

“*Mitä ihmettä?*” asked Mama, glancing up from spooning the porridge into our bowls.

There was no time for me to translate for her. Papa would have to explain what had happened. Down the hallway I sprinted, my dress flapping against my bare legs.

I raced through the enclosed porch, out the door, and into a head-on collision with the letter carrier. He kept his grip on the stack of envelopes in his hand, but his cap toppled to the ground.

“Hall-o! Have a fire in there, miss?”

“I have to rescue my cat,” I said, pointing to the treetop.

The letter carrier looked upward to the branches and chuckled. “Well, I’ll be jiggered!” He retrieved his cap and slapped off the dust. “Since when does a wee kitty chatter like a squirrel?”

My cheeks felt on fire. Sure enough, the only tail up that tree was three times as bushy as Sipu’s.

“Here’s your mail, miss.” He repositioned his mailbag, slung crosswise from his right shoulder.

“Thank you. I ... I’m sorry for crashing into you.”

“No harm done, miss.” The letter carrier smiled and touched the brim of his cap in farewell. “Good morning to you.”

My brother was watching through the porch window. “Honest, Saara,” he said, seeming genuine, “Sipu was up there meowing. She must have got down herself.”

I needed that tea to settle me. In the kitchen, I handed the two envelopes to Mama, then poured myself a cup of steaming orange pekoe.

“More bills to pay,” said Mama, frowning. “Why such a hurry to get the mail, Saara?”

Before I could get a word out, John piped up. “She’s hoping to hear from Mikko.” He batted his eyelashes and pretended to swoon.

Brothers! He was right, but I would never admit it out loud. Mikko lived in North Branch. His cousin Lila, who lived near my aunt and uncle, had introduced us. Mikko and I had become friends during my stay at the farm.

I took my place at the table. Before I even reached for the sugar bowl, John handed it to me. Why was he being

kind to me? What did he want? *Never mind.* I smiled at him. Perhaps he'd changed while I'd been away. I added a heaping spoonful of sugar to my tea, topped it up with milk, and stirred it well.

"I'll be out longer tomorrow morning," said John, grinning. "I've got a delivery route now!"

"How did you manage that?" said Papa. "You've been asking for one for months."

"Yesterday the carrier boy fell off the playground sliding board. He busted both his wrists. So they asked me to take over his route."

"The poor boy," said Mama. "It will be weeks before he's healed."

"Maybe I'll have his route all summer!" exclaimed John. When Mama gave him a disapproving look, he changed his tune. "It *is* too bad for him, all right."

"Where is your route, Jussi?" asked Mama.

"Up near Prospect School and the government wireless station."

"What about hawking papers on the street corner?" said Papa.

"I'll still be able to do that first thing. Then I'll deliver papers to the houses on my route."

Picking up my cup of tea, I blew across the surface. Then I took a sip ... and gagged! Instead of sweet, my tea was salty—*extremely* salty. I spewed it clear across the table. Milky tea sprayed Papa's newspaper. John grinned at me. Yes, he'd changed—for the worse! He had obviously filled the sugar bowl with salt.

Papa flung the newspaper to the floor and bellowed,

“Saara, that was inexcusable. Go to your bedroom.”

I hadn’t eaten even one mouthful of my porridge. On my way past John, he gloated and whispered, “April Fool’s times two!”

Why times two? Did he mean Sipu? So my cat hadn’t been in trouble after all. What a little actor John had become. I clenched my fists to keep from smacking his head. “You’re three months late,” I hissed.

“You were away then, so you missed out on the fun. Lighten up!”

“Don’t be so immature, John.”

“Saara, upstairs, now!” ordered Papa.

I stomped off, wishing I’d already put on my shoes. Stomping in one’s bare feet was most unsatisfying.

At the door to my bedroom I stopped. A furry grey ball was curled beside my pillow. “Sipu, here you were asleep all along when I was coming to your rescue.” She stood, arched her back, and stretched her front legs.

I plopped onto my yellow patchwork quilt beside my cat. “John is such a pest! A nuisance! A TRIAL! That’s what a brother is.” I punched my pillow. Sipu twitched the tip of her tail and scurried out of my bedroom. She knew when it was best to leave me alone. Too bad John didn’t have her sense.

I couldn’t believe I’d actually missed my brother while I was living at the farm. How could I have forgotten his annoying habits and incessant pranks? He’d never been more irritating than since I’d come back home. He had a knack for bringing out my worst behaviour even when I was determined not to let him affect me.

Papa left for work. Down the hall from my bedroom, Mama was treading her sewing machine.

“Mama, I’m going to Fred’s house,” yelled John from the bottom of the stairs.

“All right, but I’ll be calling you home in an hour,” she replied.

John banged the porch door on his way out. Fred’s family was Ukrainian, and since they’d moved in next door three years ago, he and John had been friends.

After rebraiding my hair for the day, I returned to the kitchen. It was quarter past eight. There was still time to have breakfast, yet I didn’t feel like eating a lot. My stomach was in a flutter over what Mr. Graham would say.

What a relief that Mama hadn’t saved my porridge for me—or my ruined tea. She never threw out leftover food, even with Papa working full-time, so someone else must have eaten it. Instead I sliced the rye bread—expertly, after all my homemaking experience at the farm—and buttered a piece. Better than everyday porridge, especially when it’s gone cold. Thankfully, Mama had left the teapot on the wood stove to keep warm. I poured a fresh cup, sweetened it with a lump of Papa’s sugar, and added milk.

I sat down to my meal and reached for the newspaper to distract me. It was now missing the tea-splattered front page. I turned to page four, past all the war news, to find the editor’s quips in *The Note Book*. They were usually matter-of-fact or thoughtful, and some gems made me laugh. Unfortunately there were no funny ones today.

“SAARA!” shouted John from the porch.

“Go away! I’m not falling for your pranks anymore.”

“This ain’t a joke.”

“*Isn’t* a joke.”

“Quit the grammar lesson and come here!” he snapped.

He did sound worried. Either John was truly becoming a skilled actor, or this was truly urgent. I wasn’t ready to believe him yet. I picked up my bread and strolled to the porch.

“What now, pest?”

John looked stricken as he dragged me outside. Pointing next door, he said, “The police are at Fred’s house!”

CHAPTER 2 | John

“Germany now claims to have 1,000,000 prisoners of war.”—The Note Book, *Port Arthur Daily News*, 1915

Me and Fred was playing soldiers, digging a trench like they're doing in France. Then a big black police patrol wagon rolled into our side lane. It parked right in front of Fred's house. We dropped our shovels and ran over. I ain't never seen one so up close before. Bold white letters on the side spelled “POLICE PATROL.”

The officers jumped out. One of them said, “Which of you boys lives here?”

“I do,” said Fred.

“Is your father at home?”

“Yes, he is.” He gave me a puzzled look.

“We need to talk to him.”

Now Fred looked scared stiff. But he remembered how to move his legs and took the officers inside his house.

I ran to fetch Saara. She took a whole bunch of convincing to come outside.

Now she stared at the patrol wagon with wide eyes. “Why are they here?” she asked.

“I don't know,” I said with a shrug. My hands trembled.

I shoved them quick in my knickers pockets. "They've been inside a long time." I gulped a breath. My eyes watered. I fought back tears.

The front door of the house opened. We heard a high-pitched cry.

"Oy, no take him! He no do wrong," bawled Fred's mother. She was weeping.

Two policemen marched Fred's father to the back of the patrol wagon. They loaded him inside. One slammed the door and locked it tight. Then he pulled himself up onto the rear platform. The other officer started the engine. The black truck roared off along our short side lane toward Foley Street. Fred's mother picked up her skirts and ran after it. She was wailing the whole way. The cop clinging to the pole at the back never looked at her. She didn't stop chasing the patrol wagon until it turned onto Foley and drove downhill.

"Why'd they arrest him, Saara?" I asked. "What'll they do with him?"

"I have no idea," she said. "We'll tell Papa what happened and he'll find out."

Fred's mother was returning. Most of her hair was loose from her bun. She was sobbing and gulping air.

"We need to get Mama," said Saara.

We rushed inside our house.

Mama was watching from the parlour window. She must have heard the commotion. Her fingers twisted the hem of her apron. She said, "I was hoping the rumours had no truth."

"What rumours?" asked Saara.

Mama kept staring out the window, not answering.

"You might as well say it, Mama. John and I will find out soon enough."

Mama took a deep breath. "I heard that married men, not just single immigrant men, have been sent away to the 'internment camp.'" She used the English name.

"What *is* an 'internment camp'?" asked Saara. "Why are they sending people there?"

"Would they send Papa away, too?" I said.

"No, Jussi." Mama slipped her arm around me. "Only the foreigners they call 'enemy aliens.' Germans, Austro-Hungarians, including Ukrainians—"

"Like Fred's family," I said. "But Fred's my friend and his father is a good person. They're not our *enemies*."

"I know, Jussi," said Mama. "But in wartime, people are suspicious."

"Where is the camp?" asked Saara.

"Eastern Ontario, at Kapuskasing."

I brushed away a leaked tear with my sleeve. "How long will Fred's father be gone?"

"Only God and the government know. But my guess is for as long as the war lasts." Mama untied her apron and handed it to Saara. "I'll see what help I can be next door."

I had lots more questions, but they'd have to wait till later. Mama wasted no time getting over there. I wondered if Fred's mother'd quit crying yet.

Saara nibbled her bread. I started playing solitaire. It wasn't enough to take my mind off what'd happened. I kept thinking about Fred's father. Stacking the cards, I asked, "What's 'interment' mean?"

“Internment.”

Why did Saara *always* have to correct me? She knew what I was trying to say. “Fine, *teacher*—but what does it mean?”

“I don’t know. Look it up.”

I fetched the dictionary from the parlour and set it on the kitchen table. Flipping the pages back and forth, I looked up the word. There was no *internment*, but I found *intern*. Underlining the words with my finger, I read aloud, “‘Intern: to confine or impound.’”

“I guess they just want to keep the enemy aliens in one place,” said Saara.

We heard the front door open. Then Mama showed up in the kitchen doorway.

“Is Fred’s father really going to the ‘internment camp’?” I asked, again using English for those frightening two words. My heart was drumming a tattoo inside my chest.

“Yes, that’s what I understand from Fred’s mother,” said Mama. She sounded sad. “I’ll ask Papa to make sure her name is added to the list to get relief funds from the government. Well, I must get back to my sewing now.”

“And I better go find Fred.” I made my way outside. *What do you say to a fellow who just had his father hauled away by the cops?* For sure he needed cheering up. *A good wrestling match and a few jokes should do the trick.*