

Mary Mapes DODGE

HANS BRINKER  
OR THE SILVER SKATES

Kyiv  
"ZNANNIA"

*To my father James J. Mapes  
this book is dedicated  
in gratitude and love*

## **PREFACE**

The story of Hans Brinker, or of any boy born and bred in Holland, cannot be fitly told without including something of the story of Holland itself, of its history, its oddities, and the leading characteristics of its heroic and thrifty people. All these must be borne in mind, for some of the traits peculiar to his race are ingrained in every Hollander, young or old, and Holland is as different from Elsewhere as can be imagined.

Therefore, necessary and careful descriptions of Dutch life and customs have been given in the narrative, and many of the incidents are drawn directly from life. Even the wonderful experiences of Raff Brinker are founded strictly upon fact.

While acknowledging my obligations to many well-known writers on Dutch history, literature and art, I turn with especial gratitude to two kind friends, natives of Holland, who, after their marriage, had taken up their abode in this country. With generous zeal, they patiently answered questions, and took many a backward glance at their country for my sake, seeing it as it looked, years ago, when the humble home of the Brink-

ers crouched by the sheltering dike in sunlight and shadow.

It was my tardy good fortune to visit Holland not long after this book was written, and see with my own eyes the land I had tried to picture for my readers. The Brinker cottage was empty, and many things in Holland had changed since the days when Hans and his little sister skated on the frozen "Y." But, to my joy, every detail of the earlier picture of the country was verified. Holland was still wonderful, in fact, more wonderful; for time only increased the marvel of its not being washed away by the sea.

Its cities have grown, and, in some of them, national costumes have given place to the conventional European dress of the day. A few of its peculiarities have been brushed away by contact with other nations; but it is Holland still, and always will be; full of oddity, courage and industry, the pluckiest little country on earth.

*Mary Mapes Dodge*

## Chapter I

### HANS AND GRETEL

On a bright December morning long ago, two thinly-clad children were kneeling upon the bank of a frozen canal in Holland.

The sun had not yet appeared; but the gray sky was parted near the horizon, and its edges shone crimson with the coming day. Most of the good Hollanders were enjoying a placid morning nap; even Mynheer<sup>1</sup> von Stoppelnoze, that worthy old Dutchman, was still slumbering “in beautiful repose”.

Now and then some peasant woman, poising a well-filled basket upon her head, came skimming over the glassy surface of the canal; or a lusty boy, skating to his day’s work in the town, cast a good-natured grimace toward the shivering pair as he flew along.

Meanwhile, with many a vigorous puff and pull, the brother and sister, for such they were, seemed to be fastening something upon their feet, — not skates, certainly, but clumsy pieces of wood narrowed and smoothed at their lower edge, and pierced with holes, through which were threaded strings of rawhide.

These queer-looking affairs had been made by the boy Hans. His mother was a poor peasant woman, too poor to even think of such a thing as buying skates for her little ones. Rough as these were, they had afforded the children many a happy hour upon the ice; and now,

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<sup>1</sup> *Mingeer* — in Holland, a polite form of address; mister. (Editor’s note.)

as with cold, red fingers, our young Hollanders tugged at the strings, their solemn faces bending closely over their knees, no vision of impossible iron runners came to dull the satisfaction glowing within.

In a moment the boy arose, and with a pompous swing of the arms, and a careless “Come on, Gretel!” glided easily across the canal.

“Ah, Hans!” called his sister, plaintively, “this foot is not well yet. The strings hurt me on last market day; and now I cannot bear them tied in the same place.”

“Tie them higher up, then,” answered Hans, as, without looking at her, he performed a wonderful cat’s cradle step on the ice.

“How can I? The string is too short.”

Giving vent to a good-natured Dutch whistle, the English of which was, that girls were troublesome creatures, he steered towards her.

“You are foolish to wear such shoes, Gretel, when you have a stout leather pair. Your *klompen*<sup>1</sup> would be better than these.”

“Why, Hans! Do you forget? The father threw my beautiful new shoes in the fire. Before I knew what he had done, they were all curled up in the midst of the burning peat. I can skate with these, but not with my wooden ones. Be careful now —”

Hans had taken a string from his pocket. Humming a tune as he knelt beside her, he proceeded to fasten Gretel’s skate with all the force of his strong young arm.

“Oh, oh!” she cried, in real pain.

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<sup>1</sup> *Klompen* — wooden shoes. (*Here and further on — the author’s notes.*)

With an impatient jerk, Hans unwound the string. He would have cast it upon the ground in true big-brother style, had he not just then spied a tear trickling down his sister's cheek.

"I'll fix it, never fear," he said, with sudden tenderness; "but we must be quick. The mother will need us soon."

Then he glanced inquiringly about him, first at the ground, next at some bare willow branches above his head, and finally at the sky, now gorgeous with streaks of blue, crimson, and gold.

Finding nothing in any of these localities to meet his need, his eye suddenly brightened, as, with the air of a fellow who knew what he was about, he took off his cap, and, removing the tattered lining, adjusted it in a smooth pad over the top of Gretel's worn-out shoe.

"Now," he cried triumphantly, at the same time arranging the strings as briskly as his benumbed fingers would allow, "can you bear some pulling?"

Gretel drew up her lips as if to say. "Hurt away," but made no further response.

In another moment they were laughing together, as, hand in hand, they flew along the canal, never thinking whether the ice would bear or not; for in Holland ice is generally an all-winter affair. It settles itself upon the water in a determined kind of way; and, so far from growing thin and uncertain every time the sun is a little severe upon it, it gathers its forces day by day, and flashes defiance to every beam.

Presently squeak, squeak! sounded something beneath Hans' feet. Next his strokes grew shorter, ending

oftimes with a jerk, and, finally, he lay sprawling upon the ice, kicking against the air with many a fantastic flourish.

“Ha, ha!” laughed Gretel, “that was a fine tumble!” But a tender heart was beating under her coarse blue jacket; and, even as she laughed, she came, with a graceful sweep, close to her prostrate brother.

“Are you hurt, Hans? Oh, you are laughing! Catch me now!” And she darted away, shivering no longer, but with cheeks all aglow, and eyes sparkling with fun.

Hans sprang to his feet, and started in brisk pursuit; but it was no easy thing to catch Gretel. Before she had travelled very far, her skates, too, began to squeak.

Believing that discretion was the better part of valor, she turned suddenly, and skated into her pursuer’s arms.

“Ha, ha! I’ve caught you!” cried Hans.

“Ha, ha! I caught *you*,” she retorted, struggling to free herself.

Just then a clear, quick voice was heard calling, “Hans! Gretel!”

“It’s the mother,” said Hans, looking solemn in an instant.

By this time the canal was gilded with sunlight. The pure morning air was very delightful, and skaters were gradually increasing in numbers. It was hard to obey the summons. But Gretel and Hans were good children. Without a thought of yielding to the temptation to linger, they pulled off their skates, leaving half the knots still tied. Hans, with his great square shoulders, and bushy yellow hair, towered high above his blue-eyed

little sister, as they trudged homeward. He was fifteen years old, and Gretel was only twelve. He was a solid, hearty-looking boy, with honest eyes, and a brow that seemed to bear a sign “goodness within,” just as the little Dutch *zomerhuis*<sup>1</sup> wears a motto over its portal. Gretel was lithe and quick. Her eyes had a dancing light in them; and, while you looked at her cheek, the color paled and deepened just as it does upon a bed of pink and white blossoms when the wind is blowing.

As soon as the children turned from the canal, they could see their parents’ cottage. Their mother’s tall form, arrayed in jacket and petticoat, and close-fitting cap, stood, like a picture, in the crooked frame of the doorway. Had the cottage been a mile away, it would still have seemed near. In that flat country, every object stands out plainly in the distance: the chickens show as distinctly as the windmills. Indeed, were it not for the dikes, and the high banks of the canals, one could stand almost anywhere in Middle Holland without seeing a mound or a ridge between the eye and the “jumping-off place.”

None had better cause to know the nature of these same dikes than Dame Brinker and the panting youngsters now running at her call. But, before stating *why*, let me ask you to take a rocking-chair trip with me to that far country, where you may see, perhaps for the first time, some curious things that Hans and Gretel saw every day.

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<sup>1</sup> *Zomerhuis* — summer house.

## Chapter II

### HOLLAND

Holland is one of the queerest countries under the sun. It should be called Odd-land or Contrary-land; for in nearly everything it is different from other parts of the world. In the first place, a large portion of the country is lower than the level of the sea. Great dikes, or bulwarks, have been erected, at a heavy cost of money and labor, to keep the ocean where it belongs. On certain parts of the coast, it sometimes leans with all its weight against the land; and it is as much as the poor country can do to stand the pressure. Sometimes the dikes give way, or spring a leak, and the most disastrous results ensue. They are high and wide; and the tops of some of them are covered with buildings and trees. They have even fine public roads upon them, from which horses may look down upon wayside cottages. Often the keels<sup>1</sup> of floating ships are higher than the roofs of the dwellings. The stork clattering to her young on the house peak may feel that her nest is lifted far out of danger; but the croaking frog in neighboring bulrushes is nearer the stars than she. Waterbugs dart backward and forward above the heads of the chimney swallows; and willow trees seem drooping with shame, because they cannot reach as high as the reeds near by.

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<sup>1</sup> *Keel* — a steel or wooden bar running along the bottom of a boat that keeps it steady in the water. (*Editor's note.*)

Ditches, canals, ponds, rivers, and lakes are everywhere to be seen. High, but not dry, they shine in the sunlight, catching nearly all the bustle and the business, quite scorning the tame fields stretching damply beside them. One is tempted to ask, “Which is Holland, — the shores, or the water?” The very verdure that should be confined to the land has made a mistake, and settled upon the fish ponds. In fact, the entire country is a kind of saturated sponge, or, as the English poet Butler called it,—

*“A land that rides at anchor, and is moored;  
In which they do not live, but go aboard.”*

Persons are born, live, and die, and even have their gardens, on canal-boats. Farmhouses, with roofs like great slouched hats pulled over their eyes, stand on wooden legs with a tucked-up sort of air, as if to say, “We intend to keep dry if we can.” Even the horses wear a wide stool on each hoof to lift them out of the mire. In short, the landscape everywhere suggests a paradise for ducks. It is a glorious country in summer for bare-footed girls and boys. Such wadings! such mimic ship sailing! such rowing, fishing, and swimming! Only think of a chain of puddles, where one can launch chip boats all day long, and never make a return trip! But enough. A full recital would set all young America rushing in a body toward the Zuyder Zee<sup>1</sup>.

Dutch cities seem at first sight to be a bewildering jungle of houses, bridges, churches, and ships, sprout-

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<sup>1</sup> *Zuyder Zee* — a shallow bay of the North Sea in the north-west of the Netherlands. (*Editor's note.*)

ing into masts, steeples, and trees. In some cities, vessels are hitched, like horses, to their owners' doorposts, and receive their freight from the upper windows. Mothers scream to Lodewyk and Kassy not to swing on the garden gate, for fear they may be drowned. Water roads are more frequent there than common roads and railways. Water fences, in the form of lazy green ditches, enclose pleasure-ground, polder, and garden.

Sometimes fine green hedges are seen; but wooden fences, such as we have in America, are rarely met with in Holland. As for stone fences, a Dutchman would lift his hands with astonishment at the very idea. There is no stone there, excepting those great masses of rock that have been brought from other lands to strengthen and protect the coast. All the small stones or pebbles, if there ever were any, seem to be imprisoned in pavements, or quite melted away. Boys with strong, quick arms may grow from pinafores to full beards, without ever finding one to start the water rings, or set the rabbits flying. The water roads are nothing less than canals intersecting the country in every direction. These are of all sizes, from the great North Holland Ship Canal, which is the wonder of the world, to those which a boy can leap. Water-omnibuses, called *trekschuiten*<sup>1</sup>, con-

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<sup>1</sup> Canal-boats. Some of the first named are over thirty feet long. They look like greenhouses lodged on barges, and are drawn by horses walking along the bank of the canal. The *trekschuiten* are divided into two compartments, first and second class; and when not too crowded, the passengers make themselves quite at home in them; the men smoke, the women knit or sew, while children play upon the small outer deck. Many of

stantly ply up and down these roads for the conveyance of passengers; and water-drays, called *pakschuyten*, are used for carrying fuel and merchandise. Instead of green country lanes, green canals stretch from field to barn, and from barn to garden; and the farms, or polders, as they are termed, are merely great lakes pumped dry. Some of the busiest streets are water; while many of the country roads are paved with brick. The city boats with their rounded sterns, gilded prows, and gaily-painted sides, are unlike any others under the sun; and a Dutch wagon, with its funny little crooked pole, is a perfect mystery of mysteries.

“One thing is clear,” cries Master Brightside, “the inhabitants need never be thirsty.” But no, Odd-land is true to itself still. Notwithstanding the sea pushing to get in, and the lakes struggling to get out, and the overflowing canals, rivers, and ditches, in many districts there is no water fit to swallow: our poor Hollanders must go dry, or drink wine and beer, or send far into the inland, to Utrecht, and other favored localities, for that precious fluid older than Adam, yet young the morning dew. Sometimes, indeed, the inhabitants can swallow a shower, when they are provided with any means of catching it; but generally they are like the albatross-haunted sailors in Coleridge’s famous poem of “The Ancient Mariner:” they see

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the canal-boats have white, yellow, or chocolate-colored sails. This last color is caused by a preparation of tan, which is put on to preserve them.