

Gentle Assassins
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CAST: 4 (3 female, 1 male)*

*ages can be played with as long as the age gap remains similar; Willem should be the oldest and can be anywhere from 20-40

Amalia (female), age 18-20 – resistance worker

Ilse (female), age 16-18. – resistance worker

Eleanora (female), age 14-16 – resistance worker

Willem Bakker (male), 20+ - resistance worker

Time: Spring 1945

Place: a sparse room in Amsterdam

Synopsis: Based on the young Oversteegen sisters in the Netherlands and their friend Hannie Schaft who were active in the Resistance in World War Two, the play examines the one assignment they unanimously turned down.

Gentle Assassins

(Lights up in a sparse room in Amsterdam.)

AMALIA

Meneer Bakker, to what do we owe the honor of your visit? It is unusual.

WILLEM

Willem, please.

AMALIA

Willem.....?

WILLEM

There is talk of a new assignment. One that the three of you are especially suited for.

ILSE

I think we are done riding our bicycles in the city while my sister shoots at soldiers. We are nearing the end of the war and the soldiers are not as careless as they have been.

WILLEM

This assignment requires a bit more finesse. No more luring drunk soldiers out of bars only to shoot them outside. Although, you have done an exemplary job in that area. How many have you shot?

ELEONORA

We don't "kiss and tell."

WILLEM

It would be helpful to know – for later – for posterity – for when we win the war.

ILSE

I stand with my sister. No numbers will be given.

ELEONORA

It's steals something from your soul – these murders. Saying the actual number out loud could be the breaking point.

WILLEM

But surely you know.

ILSE

Yes, we know.

AMALIA

You didn't come to find out about our exploits. Come clean.

WILLEM

I do have a new assignment. It's tricky. And dangerous.

AMALIA

I would need to be in the background. The Nazis have me as "a person of interest." I don't know why I was let go last month, but I am sure it was so that the Nazis could follow me. Anyone I come in contact with will be marked as suspicious. I don't want to endanger you. I've been hiding here for a week.

WILLEM

That explains your new hair color.

AMALIA

The red hair was fetching and attracted soldiers but it's not a good look for a spy trying to stay incognito. If I am caught again, they won't let me go. Or any of you.

ILSE

The assignment?

WILLEM

Let's just say it's well-suited to your talents of enticing men.

ELEANORA

And murdering them?

WILLEM

Someone else will do the killing.

AMALIA

Shall we have some tea then? Talk of murder is more civilized over a cup of tea.

WILLEM

We'll do the tea party when the war ends. The assignment could help with that.

ELEANORA

We're listening.

WILLEM

The Commissioner is executing prisoners without any due process.

AMALIA

He is a Nazi, after all.

WILLEM

Yes, but agreements have been reached to stop executions because even the Germans know that the war is coming to an end and they will lose. But the Commissioner has sped them up. We would like to “take him out.” But it’s not easy. He doesn’t drink. He doesn’t look at other women – he actually seems devoted to his wife which is surprising since he doesn’t appear to have any empathy coursing through his veins. But there is one place where he is vulnerable and that is with his children. He leaves his office precisely at closing time, goes home and can be seen playing with them. He won’t leave his home without bodyguards but we think he might if he had to rescue his children. Are you following?

ILSE

We won’t be enticing the Commissioner. You want us to ... entice the children?

WILLEM

Precisely. They are young and with promises of sweets or carousel rides or whatever you think would work, I think they would be easy to kidnap. They walk home from school together. Their mother meets them at the bridge so there is one block where they are unsupervised. The three of you are not so removed from childhood – especially Eleonora and would not be threatening to them. My people will be waiting in a car. We will take them to a safe place. There will be a ransom note and promise of safe return if he leaves an undisclosed amount of money somewhere in the woods out of town.

ILSE

Where you plan to murder him.

WILLEM

It will save many lives. Dutch lives.

ILSE

And the children?

WILLEM

They will be kept in a safe place and eventually returned to their mother.

AMALIA

And if things go wrong?

WILLEM

Nothing will go wrong. As long as the Commissioner comes alone, we will get him.

ELEONORA

The children will be able to identify us.

WILLEM

We won’t let that happen.

ILSE

This is war. Things go wrong. We blow up a bridge only to find out later that the Nazis have already selected an alternate route. We kill a commander and ten others take his place. I want to know exactly what plans you have for these children if things go wrong.

WILLEM

I ... cannot say.

(Beat.)

AMALIA

Three years ago, I came across a Nazi soldier throwing a baby against a brick wall – over and over. The baby’s family was nearby in a cart – screaming and crying and the soldier just laughed. The scenario made me sick. I sequestered myself in a doorway, pulled out a gun and shot him in the head. It was a nice clean shot. Nobody knew where it came from and I was just far enough away to make a speedy exit on my bicycle. (Beat.) I have no regrets. He was a brute.

WILLEM

So you understand the mission.

AMALIA

I do. And my answer is, I do not wish to be a brute.

WILLEM

Saving lives will make you a heroine.

AMALIA

Killing a child will make me one of them.

WILLEM

What about you two? Do you feel the same way?

ILSE

I have been proud to be part of the Resistance. I have done things – I wish did not have to be done and I acknowledge that it was always my choice. I even tried to be kind in the killing. When Eleonora and I worked together, we always tried to kill our victim from the back so he wouldn’t know it was coming – he wouldn’t be frightened. And it was always one clean shot. It’s hard to believe how efficient we were as a team. We were brought up to resist but not to kill. And still, we killed.

ELEONORA

When we started this phase of resistance – this luring of the soldiers, the assassinations – we told our mother what we were doing. I remember how quiet she was for a moment and then there was acceptance. But the last thing she said about it was, “Always stay human, my daughters.

ELEONORA (cont'd)

Remember you are human.” That is our answer. We won’t be brutes. We won’t involve children and we will stay as human as possible.

(WILLEM accepts. Perhaps the young women help him with his hat and coat.
WILLEM exits. The three look at each other, come together and hold hands, and nod at each other – they made the right decision.)

END OF PLAY

NOTE: The character of AMALIA is based on Hannie Schaft. She was on a mission in April when things did go wrong and she was caught. She was executed ten days before the Allies liberated The Netherlands – even though a moratorium on executions was in place.

Ilse and Eleonora are based on the Oversteegen sisters who survived the war and lived long lives. They never spoke of the number of Nazis they killed and their wartime efforts haunted them their entire lives.