

Shattered Crystals

SHATTERED CRYSTALS

Mia Amalia Kanner

&

Eve Rosenzweig Kugler

In *Shattered Crystals*, Mia Amalia Kanner recounts the true story of her desperate struggle to save her family from annihilation in Nazi Germany and war-torn France. Yet this is much more than a Holocaust history. It is about a courageous Jewish woman who, on finding herself destitute, becomes a cook in a home for war-displaced Jewish children. She faces an agonizing choice. Is giving up her three young daughters necessary to save their lives?

Mia's odyssey is also a love story of a remarkable woman who secures her husband's release from Buchenwald concentration camp. Then, during the darkest days of the war, he is arrested in France. Now she must find a way to save him from deportation to the death camps.

Before Hitler, they had been an ordinary family. As Mia and her husband face ever increasing danger and persecution, readers find themselves asking, "What would I have done?"

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<http://shatteredcrystals.net/>

This is a text-only version of Shattered Crystals and lacks the maps and photographs mentioned in the text. To download the free illustrated PDF, visit the author's website.

Dedication

This is dedicated to the memory of the fathers:

Salomon David Kanner,

who loved and lived for his family;

His father Markus Kanner,

who learned and revered Torah

and succeeded in the world without effort;

And Mia's father, Moses Azderbal,

who saw all his children out of Nazi Germany

but was himself murdered at Auschwitz in 1942.

It is also in memory of the children:

Edith Rifka Azderbal,

who never grew up;

The beautiful, spirited children of the OSE

who could not be saved;

And the more than one million other innocent Jewish

children who perished in the Holocaust.

PREFACE

Among Holocaust survivors, there are some who have no memory of their suffering. Survivors do not choose to remember or not remember. This is beyond their control. In our family, the parents, Mia and Sal, and the oldest daughter, Ruth, remember. Lea and I, the two younger children, recall nothing. It is as if we began our lives as ten-year-olds.

Survivors who remember recall the horrors they endured in excruciating detail. They remember unimaginable deprivations, endless hunger and constant cold. They recall carefully planned and sadistically executed cruelties. They cannot forget the looting and loss of their homes and the disappearance and deaths of dear ones. They shudder at memories of assaults on their yiddishkeit (Jewishness) the desecration of siddurim, sifrei Torah, and cemeteries.

Their memories haunt their dreams. But they do not talk readily about such experiences or even about being survivors. Thus, friends, neighbors and acquaintances, even the person who sits next to them in shul, are surprised if it accidentally comes out.

Many who recollect nothing do not think it remarkable that they have no memories. They ask: Who wants to remember such things? Often they offer the explanation that they were just children, although they may have been ten, eleven or twelve years old.

For years and years, my sister Lea did not want to know. But I always felt some part of my life was missing. I hated the Nazis because they had robbed me of my childhood, and then felt ashamed and guilty for being unhappy, because so many children I had known had lost their lives, when all I lost was memory. I could not stop myself from mourning for my lost childhood. All I knew was that I had been part of a small children's transport sent to America. Coming to New York, I left behind not only my parents and my little sister but hundreds of other Jewish children who also deserved life.

Many years passed before I went to my mother and asked her to help me. "Tell me what happened to me, to you, to all of us!" I pleaded. My father said, "It's over. Forget about it. Why do you want to rake it all up again?" But mother answered, "If she wants to know, I will tell her."

So the three of us sat in mother's kitchen in Brooklyn, New York; I switched on a tape recorder, and she began.

Mother talked first about growing up in a warm, vibrant Jewish home in Leipzig, Germany, to make clear what the Nazis had destroyed. My grandparents, who until then had been just faces in black and white photographs, came to life. Then she described the rise of Nazism, Kristallnacht and the six terrible years that followed.

Every week, for one, two or three hours, as long as she could bear at one time, mother talked. After the first week, Ruth came, listened, and sometimes added details, even though for her, too, it meant reliving old traumas. Soon Lea joined us also.

The history that our mother, Mia, shared with us, her daughters, formed the basis for this book. Later, when we began to write this account, she added many details and produced family letters and photographs that had somehow been hidden from the Nazis.

We thank God for the gift of our family's survival, continuation and growth. We are grateful that in December, 1995, on his 97th birthday, on Shabbos Chanukah, Sal was able to say, "I am happy Mia and I are here to welcome the birth of our great-grandson, Jacob. Baruch Hashem and Mazel Tov."

Displaying great strength and courage, our cherished father Salomon David Kanner survived the Holocaust together with his beloved wife, our dear mother Mia, to live a full life, well into his 98th year until his passing on November 14, 1996.

Special thanks must go to many friends and family who insisted that this story must be written and published and would not let me give up when I was discouraged. In particular, my husband, Simon Kugler, my children Vicki and Mark Rosenzweig and my attorney and friend for forty years, Fred I. Sonnenfeld.

Eve Rosenzweig Kugler

London, England

December, 1996

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For this electronic version, I have made some changes to the originally published text. Also, in addition to this author's note, to document and enhance the historical experience, a number of photographs and a map of France have been added. The map shows the various locations relevant to Sal and Mia's years in that country, including the camps where they were incarcerated.

A great deal of new research about the Holocaust has taken place since Mia's story was first published a dozen years ago. Moreover, we now have access to documents not publicly available then, including the Arolson files. This new material gives us answers to questions about the fate of some though not all of the members of Mia's and Sal's families. The information that sets out what happened to them is detailed in an afterword that has been added for this electronic version.

I have previously written extensively about my life as a foster child in America during the Second World War for the Shattered Crystals website. These recollections have been included in this electronic version of Shattered Crystals and follow the Afterword.

Finally, the glossary has been edited and expanded. I thank Ken Walton, and Christine of <http://finding-free-ebooks.blogspot.com>, for their help in preparing this text.

The publication of Shattered Crystals gave my mother, Mia, enormous satisfaction. In common with other Holocaust survivors, she believed every effort must be made to prevent another onslaught against the Jewish people with the purpose of their total extermination. She believed that documenting her and her family's experiences so that people would know all that happened was one step in that direction.

Mia Amalia Kanner died peacefully at her home in New York City during the night of January 10, 2001 at the age of 96, with her daughter, Lea, beside her.

ERK, May 2009

Book One

1905-1938

Life as a German Jew

CHAPTER 1

A FUTURE IN GERMANY

“It was an old axiom never to question goyishe officials.”

A few days after my birth in 1904 in the Galician village of Budzanow, my father walked to the town hall to record the event. My parents wanted everything in order before they emigrated to the German city of Leipzig with me, their first child. They had decided to leave our small village before I was born. There were not enough good opportunities then, nor in the future, for my father to provide for his family.

My father was known to the government official in charge of record keeping and the issuance of documents.

“So, Moishe, what is it this time?” the official asked.

“Very good news,” my father said. “I wish to report and record the birth of my first child. It is a girl, and she is to be called Minka.” Minka was the Polish version of my Hebrew name, Miriam.

“Minka?” asked the official. “Minka is no good.”

My father had not anticipated any objection to the name he and my mother had chosen. But it was an old axiom of the Jews of Budzanow, and I suppose in all the other villages in Galicia, never to question goyishe officials without understanding the problem. My father remained silent and waited.

The official said, “You are going to emigrate to Germany, right?” There were no secrets in our village. Naturally, the Jews knew everything about each other. But the goyim, too, always seemed to know about the business of the Jews.

“So there is no sense in burdening the child with a Polish name. Amalia. That’s a proper Germanic name and will give her a good start in Germany. Yes, Amalia. The child will be better off,” he said. Then he presented my father with the document certifying that Jetti, wife of Moses Azderbal, had given birth to a daughter, Amalia Azderbal, on October 30, 1904.

Before my first birthday, following the example of many of my mother's relatives, we left Budzanow for Leipzig, Germany. By then, Minka evolved into Mia, the name that my parents, uncles, aunts and cousins and my friends called me, ignoring the "Amalia" edict of the village functionary.

The story of my name became part of our family lore. When I grew older, I took it as an enduring example and lesson of how Jews behaved in the face of officialdom. It is best if Jews do not argue or question civil authority, especially when the issue is unimportant.

CHAPTER 2

LEIPZIG: GROWING UP WITH EXPECTATIONS

“We sang songs and talked about living in Eretz Yisrael.”

My father became a peddler and jobber in Leipzig. He traveled around the countryside to farmers who did not have access to the goods they needed. His wares, included kitchen knives, pots and pans, towels, clothespins, and socks of all sizes. If my father did not have a required item in stock, he would take a small deposit and write down the order in a little notebook he carried in his vest pocket. At first he took orders for shoes in a particular size or cloth of a certain color; later he accepted orders for furniture - tables, chairs and chests.

Much of his trade was conducted on installment credit. He gave credit not only for furniture but also for cloth and kitchen utensils. He would call on his customers once or twice a month to collect small installments of the money. Often during the collection calls, he would sell a small item from his stock; or a farmer's wife might place a new order with him. Because he did not press his customers when they were short, they tried to make payments on schedule.

All this I learned later. What I knew when I was young was that my father was away all week long, leaving home early Sunday morning, not returning until Friday afternoon. He would disappear almost as soon as he returned from his wanderings to bathe and shave. We waited for him in the dining room until he reappeared in his white shirt, black tie, and dark suit. Mama lit two white candles set in the silver candelabra, covered her face with her hands, bentedched light, and it was Shabbos. Then my father would daven, and return to the table to make Kiddush, and soon it was time for Mama's wonderful chicken soup with noodles and kneidlach.

I loved my father deeply. It was always a special time when he was around. My father was with us only on Shabbos and Yomim Tovim, so those days became doubly special for me.

Because Papa was away so much of the time, my mother was the dominant influence in my life. Mama was fair, heavyset and short; she was also strong-willed, energetic, ambitious and intelligent. She was fluent in Yiddish, Polish,

German, and could read Russian and French. She read widely in these languages, burning her candle deep into the night as the rest of us slept soundly.

Since I was her first child, and her only one for some time, Mama had great hopes for me. I was to become a doctor, like many of her male cousins. She did not consider it a hindrance that I was a girl and saw no reason for me not to succeed. There was no Jewish school for girls, so I learned about yiddishkeit and how to read and write Hebrew at our little shul. For the study of German, mathematics, history, and science, Mama enrolled me in a state school. I was the only Jewish girl there, and I experienced anti-Semitism for the first time. The children talked behind my back and excluded me from their circles.

My sister Hannah, who was four years younger than I, was more fortunate. Mama also had ambitions for her; she would train as a nurse. But by the time Hannah was ready to start school, Rabbi Ephraim Carlebach had established a school where Jewish children took Jewish and secular courses. Hannah was thus spared the taunts and cruelties I suffered.

We lived on the third floor in a six-room, corner apartment on the Nordstrasse, one of the nicer streets in Leipzig's Jewish section. Apartment houses lined the street, many of which had retail stores on the ground floor, all of them owned by Jews.

The extra bedroom in our apartment was occupied as often as not. It was rare that we did not have people staying with us. If all the beds were filled, there was always the living room sofa. Mama's first and second cousins would come either on holidays or to stay for weeks while on a project of study. Cousins were treated as favorite members of the family. Mama was orphaned when she was a child and was taken in, looked after and loved by her five aunts, and raised along with a large brood of cousins. As a married woman, Mama welcomed her cousins into her own home; this was not a gesture of obligatory reciprocation, but a free act of love, performed with pleasure. She knew no other way.

Sometimes friends of friends or children of friends boarded with us. All of them were young men who needed a place to stay during a course of study or a holiday in Leipzig. Everyone was made welcome. Hospitality was a part of daily life.

Mama planned and cooked all the meals in our large kitchen. When I came home

from school in time and had no homework, I might help by mixing cake batter. But Mama alone mixed and shaped kneidlach. The measurement of eggs, water, matzah meal, seasoning, and the handling of the mixture required such precision that she trusted no one with that particular task.

Sometimes Mama let me do some light housework, but cleaning ladies came regularly to help her prepare meals and clean the house. On one occasion, however, I had a taste of heavy labor. It was Friday, the day of the week when I arrived home from school early. I ran into the kitchen to see what Mama was preparing for our Shabbos meal, and she said, "Later, later. First you are to scrub the kitchen floor."

I protested vehemently. "But Mama, it's a dirty, messy job."

"Yes, that's true," she agreed.

"Why can't the cleaning woman do it?" I asked.

"I sent her home early today," Mama said. "Some day, you will marry and be on your own; you must learn how to run a home. You can't ask someone to do a chore and know it has been done well unless you know what it's like to do that job for yourself. Only then can you have good servants. Now, you know where the soap is. Hot water works best. I think you must heat some."

I scrubbed the kitchen floor that Friday, and rose with sore knees, aching shoulders, and red, rough hands. I never forgot the lesson Mama taught me. I must understand and respect those who might work for me.

Around that time, Mama entered into a business partnership with Meyer Weinrauch. Meyer's line of business was shoes, and he was opening a new store. While Meyer obtained merchandise from various wholesalers, Mama was to be in charge of the store.

The store was one the Eisenbadstrasse, outside the main Jewish district. Mama ran the business as smoothly and efficiently as she did her home. None of my friends had mothers who worked, but I accepted that my mother was different. I always believed Mama was a genius and could do whatever she set her mind to.

My friends were Jewish children who lived in our building and girls from clubs to which I belonged. I joined youth groups and we met on Shabbos afternoons to

sing Hebrew songs and discuss religion and debate Jewish concerns. On Sundays, we went on outings and talked about living in Eretz Yisrael.

I was already fifteen years old, when my sister Edith was born in 1920. Everything changed then. Edith could not have been more than a few weeks old when Mama announced she was going to stay home to take care of the new baby.

“You are the oldest,” she told me late one Sunday afternoon. “You must leave school and take my place in the store. Now, you will learn the stock very quickly. I have no doubt that you can operate the register. You will take care of the money, supervise the two sales clerks, and keep an eye on the stock. You’ll also have to inform Meyer if we run low before he expects it.”

I was stunned, but did not dispute Mama’s decision. She was lying in bed, holding the sleeping baby in her arms. I had learned to recognize when Mama had made up her mind. Clearly, Mama would stand firm in her resolution on the future. That future included her business. I don’t believe she ever considered giving up the store. She had been a businesswoman, and I would follow her. She would have one, not two, daughters with a medical career. There was still Hannah to enter the field of medicine. She would become a nurse as Mama had planned.

My sister, Edith, developed into the most beautiful little girl any of us knew. Tragically, she was mentally slow. I don’t know if that affected Mama’s decision not to hire a nursemaid for Edith. Looking back, I think Mama knew from the beginning that something was wrong. The birth had taken place at home, and it was quick. The story told was that the baby was delivered unexpectedly fast and hit her head against the headboard of the bed.

When I was seventeen, Mama began looking for a husband for me, but I had no interest in marriage. I could not imagine myself living with any of the candidates based on what I heard or saw of them. Some of Mama’s stubbornness had rubbed off on me. I insisted I was content with my life. During the day I was busy in the store; evenings and Sundays, my friends and I would attend lectures and classical music concerts. In good weather, we would go on outings in the country, always looking forward to what life would bring in the future.

I don’t know how many young men Mama showed me or how many times I

disappointed her in the next six years. Hannah was well along in her nursing studies and already committed to marry Herman Felber, a childhood friend who lived in our building on Nordstrasse. Just when Mama's friends said I was on the way to becoming an old maid, she came up with another suitor.

On a fine summer Sunday in 1928, Salomon Kanner, a young man from another city, called at Nordstrasse. He suggested that we go for a coffee and Viennese pastry in a cafe in one of our parks. We rode the trolley to the cafe with Mama as chaperon. Sal told us about his life in Halle an der Saale, a town an hour's ride from Leipzig. He had four sisters and one brother, all of whom were married. The youngest of six children, Sal lived with his widowed father and owned a clothing and dry goods store.

After Sal escorted us home and left for the train station, Mama asked me what I thought of him. This time I did not reply that I wished she and her friends would stop their attempts at matchmaking. Before I knew it I was engaged and the wedding date was set four months after our first meeting. Relatives and friends came to Leipzig from Vienna, Berlin, Halle and Belgium. With two hundred witnesses, the chuppah took place on January 20, 1929. I did not think I could be any happier.

CHAPTER 3

A FOUR-YEAR HONEYMOON

“I felt blessed to make a Jewish Home.”

The Reilstrasse was a major avenue in a pleasant, residential area of Halle. Sal’s store occupied the front of a modern apartment house at Number 18. Our home was a small two-bedroom apartment behind the store. It was in the building that Sal had shared with his father, Markus, since Mrs. Kanner’s death a few years before our marriage.

Markus, the seventy-two-year-old patriarch of the Kanner family, was born in Mielec, a village in Galicia before it became part of Poland. He was educated in the cheder, taught by the Orthodox Jewish elders of the village. Soon after his bar mitzvah, he began earning small sums of money peddling miscellany. It did not take him long to see that he would have to trade beyond the small world of his shtetl to make a living.

He taught himself to read and write German and Polish, using daily newspapers as his only textbooks. With this additional knowledge, he succeeded in expanding his business out of the local, Yiddish-speaking neighborhood and could afford to marry and support a family of his own.

By the time he emigrated to Germany in the eighteen-nineties, he had three children. Three more children were born in Halle; Fanny, Lene, and Sal. Markus gave up his pushcart and opened his first dry goods store. At the turn of the century, he had a chain of dry goods stores around the German city.

When Markus came to Halle, the city had only one shul, with a minyan that was not sufficiently Orthodox for him. The davening was different from the way he had been taught, and he did not feel comfortable there. He located recent immigrants from Eastern Europe who felt as he did and became a founder of a separate minyan. The men met in an area set aside in the Gemeindehaus, the building that housed Halle’s main synagogue and other Jewish activities. That minyan flourished and continued operating until Kristallnacht.

At the close of the First World War, Markus retired from business to devote

himself to the study of the Torah. He deeded his original store to his elder son Moritz, but a dozen years later it was still known as “Old Kanner’s place.”

The six Kanner children all ran retail stores. Markus had given each of his four daughters a dry goods store as a dowry. Elke and Lene had moved to Leipzig when they married, while Malia and Fanny had found husbands in Halle.

Markus visited each of his married children in Halle daily, walking from one store to the other, eating his midday meal with Malia, Fanny or Moritz.

I don’t know when Markus ceased eating meat, but it was before I came to Halle. He was a strict vegetarian and continued to prepare his own evening meals, as he had done before Sal married. His supper was likely to consist of rice or other cereal with boiled milk.

“I am used to taking my evening meal alone, and I do not wish to make additional work for you, dear Mia,” he said. Often, he would join us at our dinner with a glass of tea.

All his children loved and honored him, and I gladly devoted myself to this kind and gentle man. In many ways he was like my own dear father. I respected my father-in-law because he did not flaunt his wide knowledge but sought to teach by example.

Sal encouraged me to buy new furniture and redecorate the apartment to my taste. Still adjusting to my new surroundings, I discovered that I was pregnant. Sal was overjoyed, and said that we should not delay the move to a larger apartment. A seven-room apartment on the third floor of Number 18 was available. It was airy and spacious and even nicer than my home in Leipzig had been. I made many trips to Halle’s shopping district for drapes, carpets, and a new sofa. I also bought a new sideboard in which I arranged the sets of china, silver and monogrammed linens we had received as wedding gifts.

When we moved to the large apartment on the third floor, we hired Lisbeth. She was just fourteen years old, and was the daughter of Fred Wetzel. A building janitor and an occasional customer at the store, he had asked Sal to take his daughter into service when he heard of our marriage.

Ruth was born on October 29, the day before I turned twenty-five. Fifteen months later, our daughter Eva was born. I felt so blessed to make a Jewish

home for my husband and my children. What more could anyone want? I had a beautiful home, two darling babies, and a wonderful husband. With him, I shared a life that embraced our shul, family and friends, his business, and our love of music. I gave thanks to Hashem for everything; I was supremely happy.

My years in Mama's shoe store came to good use now. Sal's store was rarely without customers; it required my presence several hours an afternoon to help with sales of table linens, baby clothing, and sewing supplies. All the items that one might look for in a well-stocked dry goods store comprised our inventory. Though Sal employed a saleswoman, there was enough business to keep all three of us occupied.

Our social circle consisted of young couples from the Jewish community and Sal's cousins, the Padaver and Geminder families, and his sisters and nieces. We entertained them frequently at "coffees" on Shabbos afternoons and Sunday evenings.

Apart from entertaining our friends and relatives, Sal and I had our secret holidays in Berlin. Four or five times a year, we would travel to the capital just for the day. We wanted a day to ourselves, to explore the city on our own. We would tiptoe out of our apartment before daylight, leaving our two little girls with my father-in-law. He had Lisbeth to help him care for Ruth and Eva.

Dear, kind Markus was the only person who ever knew of our excursions. We did not tell Sal's siblings because we were worried that they might become jealous. We could easily afford the cost of the day's travel and entertainment. Sal's brothers and sisters could not. They did not seem to have a knack for business and just managed on the income their stores produced. Of the six Kanner children, Sal, the youngest, was the most prosperous, perhaps the only one who could be said to be prosperous.

Nor did I tell Mama. I imagined her saying, "So frivolous, so extravagant," and I could hear her tone of disapproval. Although I had my own home and family now in another city, I was not prepared to risk Mama's criticism. All my worries that others would not think well of us vanished as soon as we settled into the first-class compartment of the Berlin Express. Sal and I were together, happy with each other.

It was on one of those special days that the unrest and trouble began, the first

sign of the upheaval and turmoil that were to follow.

CHAPTER 4

RIOTING IN BERLIN'S JEWISH QUARTER

“Hitler will put a stop to this.”

It was the last Sunday of January, 1933. Sal and I were in a wonderful mood, as always on one of our secret holiday outings in the German capital. The journey from Halle an der Saale to Berlin had taken more than three hours, but we were young and thought nothing of the long ride, nor of the long walk to our first destination.

We arrived just in time for brunch at Kraentzler's, an elegant restaurant in the fashionable center of Berlin. Waiters in black jackets trod softly on the carpeted floor, confidently balancing laden trays. One poured steaming black coffee for us from a silver urn as we studied the day's entertainment bulletin. I cannot forget the date. It was January 29, 1933.

As always on these secret excursions, we scoured the listings during our late morning meal to select a concert or symphony performance for the day. We would select our afternoon program, then stroll in the park or along the capital's beautiful avenues until the performance began. If the weather was bad, Sal might agree to a museum visit or a lecture. I knew he did not enjoy them so much, and I did not ask often.

I was luxuriating in the warm, graceful surroundings of the restaurant when Sal found an announcement in the newspaper that a noted Jewish singer was to begin a week-long engagement that evening. The premier performance! I agreed at once. I could not think of a better way to celebrate our fourth wedding anniversary.

After we had bought our tickets, we walked along Unter den Linden, the best known and perhaps most beautiful avenue in Berlin. Sal and I fitted in perfectly with the well-dressed crowd on the Avenue, my black coat highlighting the fox stole wrapped around my shoulders and the pale lavender satin trimming my dark hat. Sal liked me to dress fashionably, and I enjoyed fine clothes.

As we strolled along, a thin, stooped man in a long, threadbare black coat

suddenly rushed past us. From under the wide brim of his black felt hat, his payos bobbed against his tangled gray beard.

“He is a chassid. He must come from Grenadierstrasse,” Sal speculated. “His clothes are not warm enough for January. I wonder what he’s doing in this section?”

“Grenadierstrasse? That’s the Jewish quarter isn’t it?” I said. “I’ve never seen it.”

“It’s not very different from the Jewish quarter in Leipzig,” Sal said.

“Still, I’d like to see it. These avenues are beautiful, but I want to walk where our people live,” I said. “Why don’t we go there?”

“Why not?” he asked. “I know the way. I went there once with Padaver when we came to Berlin for a soccer game.” Of course he would know the way. Sal explored every city he ever visited and prided himself on his knowledge of diverse urban neighborhoods.

“We’ll take the underground,” he said, leading me through the crowd of Sunday strollers.

The subway ride was pleasant and brief. In twenty minutes, we reached our station. As we neared the staircase leading to Grenadierstrasse in Berlin’s Jewish quarter, I heard people yelling. The shouts of anger became louder as we began to mount the steps. Sal and I continued up the steps leading to the street, climbing until we reached the top of the stairs. A German policeman stood at the head and barred our way.

“Back, back! You must turn back. It is forbidden to go!”

Peering past the policeman, I saw a double column of Nazi storm troopers marching in the center of the cobblestone street. Their huge red banners, black swastikas on white circles glared against the drab stone houses of Grenadierstrasse. Agitated men in work clothes rushed at the Nazi marchers in a frantic attempt to break up the column. They pushed them on, using their fists and rolled-up newspapers. A lanky youth in a torn jacket dragged a long, wooden plank towards a column of Nazis. Over the shouts of the workers, I distinguished the rhythmic chant of the strutting Nazis: “Hitler, power, Hitler,

power, Hitler, power.”

The violent scene with its din of the competing camps overwhelmed me. I was filled with horror and fear. Someone was going to be hurt.

“What’s the trouble?” Sal asked the policeman, his tone totally calm. “We were just going to have lunch.”

A brick flew past. The policeman flinched as it clattered to the sidewalk beside him. “Back! Back!” he shouted. “You must turn back. It is forbidden to go. Grenadierstrasse is closed.”

Then, lowering his voice, he addressed Sal directly: “You would not wish to go there today, sir. Take the lady away from here. Communists and Socialists are fighting with the Nazis.” Lowering his voice still more, he said in a conspiratorial tone, “Jews are behind all this. Hitler will put a stop to it.”

There were more people on the stairs behind us now, and the policeman resumed shouting, “Back! Back!”

Something did not sound right to me. I turned to Sal and asked, “What does he mean, ‘Jews are behind this?’” Then I stopped short. “He doesn’t realize that we are Jewish.”

I could not get my legs to move. I began to shiver and pulled my fox stole more tightly round my coat. My husband began urging me to follow him down the subway steps. We could still hear the angry roar of the rioting men when we reached the station platform.

We rode on the subway back to the part of Berlin that was familiar to me. Sal led me to a cafe. We needed to sit and calm ourselves with a pot of tea. I became aware of a tiny stage, occupied by a stand-up comic. Like many of Berlin’s cabaret entertainers, he was a Jew. In a high-pitched voice, he poured forth barbed, satirical lines, castigating Nazis, Communists and Socialists alike, likening the fighting of the various political parties to a barnyard brawl. I did not find it amusing. The Nazis with their huge banners, and the frenzied, screaming masses of men trying to halt the Nazi column in their neighborhood were too vivid in my mind.

Early in the evening, we returned to the concert hall. A large crowd had gathered

under the poster of the Jewish diva. The word “canceled” was scrawled in uneven, black letters across the figure of the celebrated musician.

Well-dressed men and women were trading theories excitedly about the reason for the cancellation. “Such a great artist but Jewish... not allowed to perform... Hitler... No, no... it’s due to illness... Probably already on the train to Budapest... Hitler... a scandal... Hitler....”

It was getting dark. Again, Sal edged us through the confused crowd to the box office, where we secured a refund for our tickets.

“I think we should go home to Halle now,” he said.

“Yes, yes, let’s,” I agreed, desperate to get away from the city, from the auditorium, from everything I had witnessed that day.

Sitting comfortably in the first-class compartment of the early evening express, I could not relax. I felt profoundly uneasy, and my head throbbed. Sal tried to be optimistic. “Let’s see. Let’s wait. Maybe the musician really was ill.”

“But the fighting!” I countered.

“There are always demonstrations in Berlin.”

The next morning, Sal opened our store as usual. After making lunch for the children, I joined my husband behind the glass display of children’s outfits. A little later I was showing linen towels to a customer when Lisbeth’s father came in.

“Good afternoon, Herr Kanner, Frau Kanner.” I heard an edginess in his tone. “I need a pair of brown laces for my work shoes. Hitler - it just came over the radio, Herr Kanner - Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor this afternoon.”

CHAPTER 5

ARREST OF INTELLECTUALS

“The Nazis are not interested in people like us.”

Sal was surprised when Hindenburg named Hitler the Chancellor of Germany. “Listen,” he said. “The Nazi Party lost ground in the elections last year. I’m not so pleased about this new Hitler government, but all these political moves won’t affect me personally.”

“I hope you’re right,” I said.

“Remember, Halle is different from other major German cities. It’s not like Berlin, or Frankfurt, or even your Leipzig.”

Halle was different because of its minuscule Jewish population. It was a city of two hundred thousand inhabitants, but only eight hundred were Jews. We did not have a Jewish quarter, or even an exclusively Jewish street such as Nordstrasse. We had our shochet, our shul, our cheder, but Jewish homes were scattered throughout the city. There were not too many Ostjuden, immigrant Jews from the Pale of Eastern Europe, in Halle; mostly, the Jews seemed to blend into the life of the city. The Protestant majority in the city had always been indifferent to our religion. I had never noticed any anti-Semitism in Halle.

Jewish businesses were boycotted for a time in other German cities during the spring of 1933, but not in Halle. In Leipzig, notices with the words Juden Unerwünscht, Jews Not Wanted, had been posted in some store windows. Hannah told us this when she came to visit. I did not see such signs in Halle. None of Sal’s customers or suppliers left him, and our store continued to prosper.

It is true that people were arrested. But they were not people we knew, not members of our shul. They were socialists and intellectuals, union leaders and political activists, people who were outspoken in their opposition to the government. They were not ordinary businessmen like Sal.

“We will be all right,” he said. “The Nazis are not interested in people like me.”

But for the first time, Sal's gentile acquaintances took note of his religion even if only to reassure him: When the landlord came to collect his monthly rent he said, "I hope you're not thinking of leaving Halle like some other Jews. Your business is an asset to the neighborhood." When Sal went to the bank to deposit the weekly receipts, the manager said, "This nonsense over the Jews means nothing. I see things go as well as ever, eh Kanner? Good, good."

Even Kaese, the local chief of police, came into our store one afternoon. It was natural for us to be acquainted, because the police headquarters was on the Reilstrasse, across from our store. Luckily, I was not waiting on a customer when Kaese walked in. I surely would not have been able to continue with a sale, my hands were shaking so.

Yet Kaese was his usual, affable self. "Spring must be on the way. It's getting somewhat warmer," he said.

I grasped the counter to stop my hands from shaking, wondering; What did he want? Unperturbed, Sal nodded at the chief's pleasantries. Kaese said, "Don't worry, Kanner. Don't pay any attention to rumors. There will be no trouble here."

That was it. Kaese walked out, but left me shaken.

Observing my reaction, Sal asked, "Why do you become so upset? Go upstairs and rest. I can manage without you."

In the evening, Sal said, "You see, Mia, they all tell me the same thing—Kaese, the bankers, everybody here. Nobody is bothering with people in business. I see to my store, serve my customers. I know what they want. My merchandise is good, my prices are fair, and my customers stay with me. I do well because I know how to run my business, and I stick to running my business. I stay away from politics, and it will stay away from me."

It did not stay away from the city. Black swastikas appeared everywhere, on billboards, on banners carried in almost daily street parades, on the armbands of the ever-growing number of S.A., the brown-shirted storm troopers of the Nazi party. Uniformed men swarmed through downtown streets and department stores. Their presence was felt in parks and social halls. They made Sal uncomfortable, but nobody interfered with his life.

Newspapers reported the arrest of trade union leaders and changes in organization of government. Some of our friends insisted that Jews were not safe in Hitler's Germany, but Sal thought they were exaggerating. He remained confident, but I was apprehensive. Even though I did not personally know anyone who had been arrested, that was not a guarantee that the Nazis would not come for us. In spite of Kaese's assurance, I continued to fear the knock on the door.

It happened for the first time on a summer Sunday in 1933. I know it was a Sunday because Sal was sitting in the living room reading the newspaper when the doorbell rang. It was late morning, not a time for our friends to stop by. Perhaps our cousin Geminder who lived around the corner from the Reilstrasse needed something from Sal. With Sal at home, I did not think twice about opening the door on a Sunday morning.

Afterwards, I could never remember if the first thing I noticed was that the man was a total stranger, or that he wore the uniform of the Party. Before I had a chance to collect my thoughts, he clicked his heels; his right arm shot up and he bellowed "Heil Hitler!" My heart was pounding. No one had ever shouted "Heil Hitler" at me. I stood motionless, unable to take my eyes off the glaring white armband with its black swastika.

"Eintopfgericht," he announced. The word filtered through my mind. I recalled a Jewish acquaintance telling me about a new Nazi rule that compelled all families to make a weekly cash donation to the Party. According to the decree, every German could probably afford the donation to the Nazi Party if he cut back on food expenditure. Cutting back was easily accomplished: One merely replaced the traditional elaborate Sunday dinner with a simple repast. Ein Topf, one pot. Keep the meal simple. Put it all in one pot. Thus, the assessment would not be a hardship. "Healthy eating; help the Nazis," he said.

My shoulders sagged in relief. Yes, the stranger was a Nazi, but his presence on my doorstep had nothing to do with our being Jewish.

Sal came to the door. He spoke calmly. "Certainly. My wife is cooking the stew right now." Sal reached for his wallet as the Nazi nodded and consulted a list. "Three adults, Salomon, Amalia, and Markus Kanner. Two children, Ruth and Eva Kanner. Five family members. Five marks."

The stranger took the bills from Sal and made a notation on his list. “Heil Hitler!” he barked. Then he turned smartly on his heel and left. The entire episode took three minutes.

He came every Sunday after that. He never stepped past the front door into the apartment, had no interest in checking the pots on the stove. He showed no sign that he recognized me. But I knew every feature of his face, the thin mouth, the pale cheeks, and the large earlobes sticking out under his cap. He accepted the money we had ready for him and made a check mark on his list.

The routine was always the same. He saluted, produced his list, took five marks from us, made his notations, saluted again, and left. He was unerringly polite, yet I was afraid. How could I be sure that the party would not send a different official who would make demands we could not meet?

When I cooked on Sundays, I felt that my kitchen was not my own. Gone was the pleasure of cooking the roast goose that Sal liked, and the fruit soups. Gone was the fun of baking my linzertorte and nut cakes, experimenting with new recipes and varying old ones Mama had given me. I cooked only the most ordinary Sunday meals, beef and potatoes, boiled chicken and noodles, always everything in one pot, and never dessert. I still had the joy of preparing meals for Shabbos and of anticipating the warmth when we were together around the table. But Sundays, no matter what I put into the one pot, I could never enjoy the meal. Though I did not use it in front of Lisbeth or the children, I coined a name for it. I called it “Hitler Stew.” How could it have Geschmack, a good taste?

Lisbeth, our eighteen-year-old nursemaid, also became a cause for worry. She was very good with the children and I was very confident she loved them. But her boyfriend was a Nazi. She boasted to me about it. It unnerved me that she took pride in his membership in the nefarious Nazi Party, but I worried more that Lisbeth might talk against us—though I could not imagine what she could report.

There were no more secret outings to Berlin for Sal and me. On Sunday afternoons that summer, we picnicked along the banks of the river Saale, to the delight of our two girls. Sal and I found that we did not really miss the excitement of Berlin; good entertainment was available in Halle, too.

Although several Jewish families were leaving Halle and emigrating, our circle

of friends remained intact through 1933. The men still talked about business and politics, but, now, political comments peppered their conversations to a greater extent than during the pre-Hitler regime. And we still had our Sunday evening “coffees” with friends and Sal’s large family.

Once during the autumn, Sal and I entered a downtown social hall to see the newsreel that always preceded a film. As the curtain rose, Hitler appeared on the screen. Throughout the hall, men in uniform rose to their feet and cheered. All of them flaunted swastika armbands on brown shirts, black shirts, or gray jackets. All of them bellowed for their Fuhrer. Slowly, one after another, the rest of the audience stood up and shouted “Heil Hitler.”

I was glued to my seat, trapped by the furor that enveloped me. Sal pulled me to my feet. I was the last to rise. “Heil, Heil! Heil Hitler!” Frenzied screams reverberated through the hall for what seemed like many long minutes. We were afraid to walk out, afraid to even move. True, no one knew us in this section of Halle, yet we were afraid to call attention to ourselves. Finally, the demonstration subsided.

I sat mutely through the film that followed the newsreel, with no idea of what was happening on the screen. Nor do I remember leaving the hall or going home on the trolley. That night, I barely slept.

The next day, we began to talk about leaving Germany.

CHAPTER 6

THE VISA QUEST BEGINS

“It is not comfortable for a Jew in Germany anymore.”

Emigrating would not be so simple: it would mean leaving my parents and sisters in Germany; it would mean parting from Sal’s family; it would mean leaving the shul community which had welcomed me and made me one of its own; it would mean giving up the home I had created for my husband, my children and Markus.

Where could we go? We would have to start over in a new country and a new community where we might not know anyone. How would we live? Sal would have to abandon his thriving business and build a new one. These were concerns we discussed between ourselves, with Markus, and with my parents on visits to Leipzig. We also talked about it with friends on the way home from shul and over coffee in their homes and in ours.

As usual, Sal was methodical and meticulous in acquainting himself with rules and regulations so that everything would be done correctly. “There is no point getting into trouble before we start,” he said. “I need to familiarize myself with the regulations.”

After collecting information about emigrating, Sal summarized the process. First we had to find a country that would take us, then obtain a visa from that country. With the visa secure in our passports, we could go.

Then there was the problem of money. Strict laws existed about taking money out of Germany, and we would have to leave most of our funds in Germany. While the Nazis were eager to rid the country of the Jews, they went to great pains to prevent the flight of their wealth.

Sal was worth close to one hundred thousand marks, including his savings, the value of his business and stocks he had purchased over the years. Sal was meticulous about keeping records. He declared all his assets, without exception, at his bank and on his tax returns. Moreover, he had the documents that verified all his transactions.

“We could leave if we accepted spermarks,” Sal explained. “But I would get three pfennigs, just three percent on each mark. I can’t take such a financial loss. If we settle in another country, I will need capital to go into business. I have to be able to take care of my family.”

Jews had begun smuggling money out of Germany almost immediately after Hitler became Chancellor. We knew this from the beginning. People hinted, and people whispered. Some talked openly, so we knew what was done. They carried sums of cash when they went on holidays and business trips to foreign countries. They deposited the money in banks in Paris, Switzerland, London, Brussels and Amsterdam. They shipped merchandise to foreign countries but took only partial payment in Germany. The balance stayed in those countries, in the names of relatives or associates, with fabricated bills backing up the spurious transactions.

Yes, we were aware in 1933 and 1934 that many Jews already smuggled money out of Germany. We knew some of them. We also knew that sometimes people were caught. The penalty for smuggling money out of Germany was death. If we knew anything, we knew the Nazis enforced the death penalty.

“I am not prepared to take the risk,” Sal said vehemently. We were finishing our evening meal in the dining room. Markus was with us, sipping tea from his glass, listening without comment. He seldom interfered, unless Sal asked for specific advice.

“Don’t talk to me about smuggling. I have seen death in 1918 during the war. It would be insane. Insane to risk my life smuggling money out of Germany. I will not do it.”

I knew that force in his voice, the tone of finality with which I could not argue. In truth, I agreed with my husband.

One afternoon in 1934, a manufacturer’s representative for children’s clothing came into the store. Sal had dealt with him since before our marriage and gave him orders four or five times a year. Heinz was his name, and he was Jewish.

“I have a little extra time today,” he said. “I wondered if we might have a coffee?”

Sal glanced at our sales clerk and at me and said “Why not come up to my house? Ella will look after the customers.”

Heinz was not looking for a casual cup of coffee. I had just begun pouring when he told Sal how he was converting all his assets into cash.

“I’ve been holding back money from my bank for a while,” he said. “And I draw a little money from my account each week. I want it to look as if business is falling off. That would be natural in these times. It’s known that I’m a Jew and that I had many non-Jewish customers. There should be no suspicion.”

He leaned forward intently. “I have a plan, a very good plan, Sal. What I intend to do is to stuff all the money into the tires of my car. Then I’ll drive to Holland.”

I was wondering why Heinz was unburdening himself, telling us everything, when he came out with it.

“Come with me, Sal,” he said. “Come with me,” he repeated, as if to emphasize that he truly meant what he said.

For a moment I visualized Sal climbing into Heinz’s old, black car with a billfold full of money in his breast pocket and more in the lid of his suitcase. Or would it be better between his shirts? It occurred to me that it did not matter where he put the money if he were stopped. If someone searched him before he transferred the money to the tires, they would find the cache in either place.

Sal’s face was flushed. He was struggling to control himself. “You’re crazy, Heinz. Don’t you know there’s a death penalty for smuggling?”

“No, no, I’ll make it, and you’ll be free, too,” he said. “I’ve considered all this very carefully, Sal. You go away every year, don’t you? So tell people you’re going on a vacation. Put your wife and girls on a train to Amsterdam, and we’ll meet them there at the station.”

Sal shook his head, but Heinz kept talking. “We’ve done business together for a long time, Sal. You are my best customer. I trust you. Come with me.”

Sal did not even take time to think about the offer. He shook his head and said, “It’s different for you, Heinz. You’re single. I have my family to think of. How will they manage if something happens to me? And it’s normal for you to drive all over the country. But I own a store, and I’m well known. If I’m seen in the car with you, it will arouse suspicion. That will only endanger both of us. I

appreciate that you trust me with this proposal. Bless you for trying to help us. But we will emigrate legally, my friend. It will take longer, but I'm afraid of your way."

The two men shook hands. It was the last we ever saw of Heinz.

It was 1934, and Hitler had been at the helm for less than two years. It was a time when we believed that we had choices about when to go and where to go. Palestine was the logical place for us to settle because Sal's niece, Hanni, and several of my cousins lived there. We would not be totally alone. Also, my great-grandfather had made aliya as an old man in 1910 and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

I had been a Zionist since I was thirteen. My old dream of living in Palestine had never really left me. I believed in a Jewish homeland. Settling in Palestine would ease the pain of parting from my parents and giving up the home Sal and I had built in Halle. We would take part in the building of the new land of Eretz Yisrael.

We soon discovered it was not so simple to settle in Palestine either. Palestine had strict immigration controls, accepting mainly three groups of Jews. One desirable group comprised chalutzim, young men and women under the age of thirty-five. After a six-month period of instruction, the young were assigned to work in kibbutzim. They either worked on cooperative farms in the desert or in the cities as construction crews.

Jews who possessed skills needed in Palestine—trained electricians, plumbers and mechanics—formed the second group of preferred immigrants.

The third category was made up of capitalists, people with a minimum of twenty thousand marks or one thousand British pounds. Sal decided that this was the way for us and made an appointment at his bank in October 1934.

As always, the bank manager cordially ushered Sal into his office. As always, Sal cordially refused a cigar and waited while the manager lit one for himself. He listened patiently as the manager launched into an analysis of the stock market and speculated about several recently-formed companies. Finally, the manager asked how he could be of assistance, and Sal told him of our plan to emigrate to Palestine.

The manager tried to discourage him. “Nothing will happen to you here, Kanner. Your business is going well. Look at your deposits. You’re doing even better than ever.”

“A man has to look ahead,” Sal responded. “Who knows how it will be in Germany?”

“But you’re a pillar of this community,” the manager protested sincerely.

Sal had been in his office for half an hour, and the cigar smoke was beginning to irritate him. He conceded that the profits were continuing to come in. Then he ended the conversation by saying “It is not so comfortable to live as a Jew in Germany anymore.”

The manager made the arrangements.

Part of Sal’s capital was now segregated. With a bank statement certifying that twenty thousand marks had been set aside for the purpose of qualifying him as a capitalist immigrant to Palestine, Sal went on to the next step of the process. He traveled to the Zionist Bureau for the Resettlement of German Jews in Berlin. There he filled out a number of forms and submitted the bank document. The Zionist bureau entered his name on the list of capitalist applicants for a visa to Palestine and assigned a number to our family.

As soon as Sal’s number was reached, government authorities would use his money to purchase goods from Germany. Then, the government in Jerusalem would open a bank account in Sal’s name, deposit the equivalent of the twenty thousand marks it had spent in Germany for heavy machinery, and issue a visa for our family. Thus, on arrival in Palestine, we would have the equivalent of twenty thousand marks to set up a home and business.

This procedure made it possible for the Nazis to keep Jewish money in Germany and for Palestine to receive settlers with money to invest in the struggling country.

We were still trying to reach a decision about emigrating when my sister Hannah was married and became the first of our near relatives to leave Germany. Who would have thought she was serious when she first announced that she and her childhood friend would be married? I thought it was one of her games because she and Herman were only ten years old at the time. But those two never

wavered from their decision; by the time they were sixteen, it was an agreed and accepted fact.

Herman joined the preeminent business of Leipzig Jews, the fur trade. He was trained as a sorter, while Hannah studied nursing. When I was married, however, she took my place in Mama's shoe store and remained there until the 1933 boycott of Jewish businesses. The shoe store was on the Eisenbadstrasse, outside the Jewish quarter. It was hard hit by the boycott and not a pleasant place to be. Mama did not argue with her partner when he decided to close the store. Hannah then returned to her career as a baby nurse.

She continued in nursing until Herman received an offer of work from a Parisian furrier. That made it possible for them to marry and move to France. The chuppah was in my parents' apartment, with Ruth and Eva as flower girls. Mama and Papa and "Die Alte Frau Felber," as Herman's mother was called, had such naches. I think every woman living in our apartment house on the Nordstrasse cooked something for the wedding meal. There was a joyous week with sheva berachos made in a different home each night, and then they were gone.

When Hannah and Herman moved to Paris, Sal was still not sure that leaving Germany was the right move. That is why he decided to declare less than a quarter of his assets for the Palestine capitalist scheme. He was hedging his bets.

Sal believed in Eretz Yisrael, but had difficulty conceiving what our life would be like in Palestine. It was not like him to plunge into an unknown world, so we agreed on a way to resolve his uncertainty. Sal would travel to Palestine to see what his prospects might be. He was hesitant at first. In more than five years of marriage, we had never been apart. I urged him to go. I felt sure that Palestine was the answer for us and wanted my husband to share my certainty. Even if life in Germany did not grow any worse and we could continue our present comfortable life in Halle, the underlying anti-Semitism spread by the Nazis riled me. The prospect of intimidation was there every time I went out, whether to go to the shop, to take the children to the park, or to go to the railroad station for a trip to Leipzig.

Early in 1935, Sal booked his passage on a ship scheduled to sail from Trieste to Tel Aviv in the summer. On the day the arrangements for the journey were completed, a postcard arrived from Holland.

“Greetings from beautiful Amsterdam,” read the message. “My trip was pleasant and uneventful. I had no problem with my tires. As ever, Heinz.”

“I’m happy he made it, but he was just lucky,” Sal said. “It is not the right way to do things.”

CHAPTER 7

THE NUREMBERG LAWS

“We will go, but there is still time.”

I was confident that I would manage perfectly well by myself overseeing the business while Sal was away in Palestine, and I did. But it was a nerve-wracking time because of the unexpected new restrictions against the Jews. The Nuremberg Laws were promulgated on September 15, 1935.

The prohibitions were precise. Marriage and all social association between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden. True, that did not affect us personally, but any law against Jews was serious and could be merely the forerunner of further restrictions. The Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of German citizenship. I felt degraded, without being sure what loss of citizenship would mean.

There was no doubt about the meaning of the fourth provision; it affected me personally and immediately. The Nuremberg Laws prohibited Jews from employing non-Jewish women under the age of forty five as servants. The Nazis did not want young, gentile women to be in the homes of Jews. When Sal’s cousin Padaver came to the house to tell me, I knew at once it meant Lisbeth would have to go.

I wondered what to do, what to say to her. I need not have worried about her feelings. That evening, she went directly to her room, without a word to me. Less than an hour later, she came out, pushing her bulging suitcase in front of her. Holding her head high, and looking past me, she said “I will not be working for you any more.”

That was all, nothing else. She did not address me by name, did not offer a single word of regret. I was too shocked by her aloof manner and arrogance of bearing to say anything.

Lisbeth picked up the suitcase and walked out. I felt angrier and angrier. I accepted that she could not stay with us, but how could she just go, so unfeelingly? I had trusted her and treated her well, and I know she learned from me. She had grown up in our house during the six years under our roof. How

could she just turn her back on me?

I watched her thump down the staircase until she disappeared from view. Then something drew me to the front window. A Nazi storm trooper was marching back and forth in front of our house. I recognized Lisbeth's boyfriend. She must have gotten in touch with him that afternoon, when she took Ruth and Eva to the park. Lisbeth emerged; he took the suitcase and they disappeared.

Ruth came out of the girls' room. "Mama, where is Lisbeth?"

"She went out," I said.

"But she didn't say goodbye," Ruth complained.

I thought about that after I put the girls to bed; Lisbeth had been their nursemaid since the day they were born, had cuddled them, fed them, played with them, and now, she had gone without even saying goodbye.

The next day, her father came to see me. "You were not in the store today. Please excuse me for coming up to your home."

"Yes, please step in," I said.

"No," he said. "It is not proper, but I must speak with you, Frau Kanner. You treated my daughter well all these years. I know she could not have found a better place."

He paused. His eyes were moist. I urged him again to come in, but he refused.

"I don't know what will become of any of us. My wife and I are Seventh-Day Adventists. I think I will lose my job as janitor. You don't hear so much about it, but to the Nazis, we Adventists are as hateful as the Jews."

Wechsel was normally a man of few words. I had never heard him speak at such length. "Lisbeth will marry her SS man who is constantly rude to my wife. My sons are in the Nazi Party. They talk against our religion and they threaten to denounce us if we don't give up our beliefs and join the Party." With unexpected force, he said, "I won't do it. It is against God."

"My dear Herr Wechsel," I said, "I hardly know—"

“Don’t say anything, please, Frau Kanner. I shall pray for all of us. I wish you a good day, Frau Kanner. Please give greetings to your husband.”

He turned and went, a pathetic figure in a threadbare jacket. Poor man, so filled with pain, I thought. He is without hope. When Lisbeth left, I was angry. When her father left, I wanted to weep.

A week later, Sal returned from Palestine. Though he was worn out from the journey, we talked late into the night. It did not surprise me that he traveled up and down Palestine. He wanted to get a feeling for what it was like, how people lived, so he talked to the settlers, and he listened and observed. Their energy and vitality inspired him. Men and women worked long hours. They constructed roads and buildings that were to be schools, hospitals and homes, ignoring the heat he found oppressive.

“I visited a kibbutz. Mia, in the middle of the desert, I saw vegetables and fruit grow. It was unbelievable.”

He went to visit his niece, Hanni, in Tel Aviv. She and the rest of the city dwellers lived in incredibly primitive conditions. He had not expected to find electricity on the kibbutzim. But electricity was scarce even in the city, and many Jews lived in crowded shacks without indoor plumbing.

“I was with Hanni when I heard about the Nuremberg laws. She was appalled. She told me to send for you and the girls and not to go back to Germany. When I said it was impossible, she thought I didn’t want you to travel alone, so she urged me to go back to Halle and get you. ‘Bring them now,’ she said.

“I told her I had no skills or profession and I could not manage the work on a construction crew. How would I support a family in Tel Aviv? I explained to her my only option was to go back to Germany and wait for a capitalist visa. She came to the ship with me, still begging me to change my mind.”

Before we went to sleep, Sal showed me three solid silver bracelets he had brought back as souvenirs from Palestine, two plain bangles for Ruth and Eva, and the third, inlaid with filigree, for me.

He waited until the next day to tell me about the train trip through Austria to Germany. The cars were filled with men in Nazi uniform. They spouted Nazi slogans, sang patriotic songs about the purity of Aryan blood, and laughed at

anti-Semitic jokes. Sal did not say one word during the entire journey. He prayed that Hashem bring him safely to Halle in time for Rosh Hashanah and that by the following year the family would be able to celebrate the High Holidays in Jerusalem.

At the Austro-German border, the customs inspector looked at the green cover of Sal's German passport with indifference. "Gute Reise, have a pleasant journey," he said. He stamped Sal's passport, appearing not to notice that he was returning from Palestine.

As the train continued through Germany, the Nazis continued their boisterous joking. Sal pretended to be asleep and prayed silently for deliverance from the peril for himself and his fellow Jews in Germany. When the train pulled into the Halle station, Sal stood up and reached for his suitcase. His coat was over his other arm.

"Ah, Halle," one of the Nazis said. "Is it your home?"

Sal nodded, making his way down the aisle of the train.

"Beautiful city," said the Nazi. "Heil Hitler."

Sal's eyes clouded over as he recalled the journey. "I thanked God that both my arms were full so that I could not return the salute."

Markus joined us, and Sal talked again about the rigorous life in Palestine. "We could leave now, but we would have to leave all our money. If we went now, there would be no servants, no hot water, no toilets. All of us would have to live in one room. I cannot ask you to live like that."

"Sal, we could adjust—" I began.

He shook his head. "It was very bad on the way home. Nazis were all around me. But they didn't take me for a Jew. Here in Halle it is like this; I am a Jew, and Hitler screams that Jews are not human, but the Germans who know us treat us the same as before.

"No, I think it is better to wait and emigrate as a capitalist. What I learned on my trip to Palestine and on the train home convinced me of two things. We will go, but there is time. All this talk against the Jews and these new laws disturb me.

It's terrible and irrational, but I don't think we are in danger."

Markus said "Hashem will guide you, and you will know what to do."

"With His help, we will go," Sal said. "But I believe there is still time."

CHAPTER 8

JUDEN VERBOTEN

“The man in Nazi uniform swooped Eva off the ground.”

“Juden Verboten!” I cringed every time I saw a notice that specified “No Jews” or “Forbidden to Jews.” The signs were posted all over Halle after the Nuremberg Laws were passed.

“But that means us,” said my shocked older daughter when she read the sign at the entrance to a children’s show. Ruth was six now, a very smart girl and in her first year of public school.

“A girl in my class saw the show and said it wasn’t very good anyway,” Ruth said good-naturedly. She attended Hebrew classes at the Orthodox shul and accepted the fact that she was different from the other children in her secular school.

But when she learned she could no longer go to the town swimming pool, she cried and all I could do was hug her and say “That’s the way it is now. I can’t help it. When we get to Palestine it will be better.”

Early in 1936, not long after Hilda Frankl came to us, I found I was pregnant again. Hilda was a friend of Hanni Koppel, Sal’s niece. She was fifteen years old when we took her on to replace Lisbeth, and we could not have made a better choice. She was a kind and cheerful girl who loved to sing and play with Ruth and Eva. What a relief it was to have a girl in the house who was at home in our kosher kitchen and shared our joy at the coming of each Shabbos. She sang old Yiddish songs and helped five-year-old Eva form her Hebrew letters.

Her presence in our household was a great help to me, especially since it had become necessary for me to make frequent trips to Leipzig. A stroke had confined Mama to a wheelchair, and she was getting worse. Papa nursed her with great devotion and patience, catering to all her needs and demands. Mama hated being unable to move freely and having to depend on others for help with most of her ordinary needs. I went every week and stayed overnight to spend time with Mama and to give Papa some relief.

Mama died in the spring, unaware of the increasing hardships the Nazis were inflicting on the Jews in Leipzig where anti-Semitism was much more blatant than in Halle. Now, only Papa was left to care for Edith. My sister suffered from a thyroid deficiency that led to her having a tremendous appetite. She ate voraciously yet remained slender. She was a lovely girl of sixteen, but her intelligence was at most that of a ten-year-old child. Every month or two, I brought her to Halle for a few days. It gave Papa some rest and brought pleasure to my children and me.

More than a year after our application, we were still waiting for our visa to Palestine. I did not think we could or should have a holiday that summer, but Sal insisted some time in Marienbad would do me good. The long winter of worrying and rushing back and forth between Leipzig and Halle, of grieving for my mother, and of living in Nazi Germany exhausted me physically and emotionally. My doctor concurred with the advice that I must think more of the coming baby. We had been to the beautiful Czech spa once, and now we made reservations for a short holiday. To be away from Germany and its strutting Nazis and Juden Verboten notices was very appealing.

The doctor urged me not to overexert myself, so we took Hilda to Marienbad to help with the children. Ruth and Eva were overjoyed when they realized they could swim every day. They splashed in the pool while I soaked in the soothing waters of the ancient spa. We also strolled along the graceful avenues and parks of the elegant mountain resort. Our kosher hotel was spotlessly clean, our rooms were airy, and our meals were excellent. What a pleasure to be among Jews, free from constant tension or fear of being singled out.

One day halfway through our vacation, Sal and I were sitting on lounge chairs in the park while the children played quietly next to us. How well they looked and so pretty—Ruth with her brown hair, delicate features, and inquisitive look and Eva, red-haired, blue-eyed, smiling to herself.

Suddenly, a Sudeten-German in a Nazi uniform with the Nazi insignia emblazoned upon it swooped Eva off the ground. He swung the child back and forth in front of me perhaps three or four times. I was gripped by fear, aware of nothing except this single fact: The Nazi was holding my daughter.

He sat next to us and began bouncing a smiling Eva on his knee. “An exquisite child. Absolutely perfect Aryan features. A child of the Fatherland. Dear lady,

you are to be congratulated.”

He rose and returned my child. Standing directly in front of me, he raised his arm in a salute and said “Heil Hitler!” Then he walked out of the park. I continued to hug Eva, who was still smiling quietly.

Sal took Ruth by the hand and said “We are going back to the hotel now.” When she began to protest, he repeated what he had just said, and Ruth complied.

Hilda, who had gone shopping for a souvenir to take back to her mother, was waiting for us when we came back to our hotel. She took the children into the garden, and Sal steered me to the veranda where coffee was being served. From my chair, I saw Hilda playing cat’s cradle in turn, first with one girl and then with the other. I reached for a cube of sugar to put in my coffee and noticed that my hand was shaking. Until then, I had not been aware that I was trembling.

“What a stupid mistake. The joke is definitely on the Nazi,” Sal said.

I knew that he was trying to make me see the humor of the incident, but I found it difficult to recapture the mood of relaxation we had enjoyed since our arrival at the resort. We might as well have gone back to Halle. The incident tainted the remainder of our vacation at Marienbad.

Back in Halle, our friends were eager to hear about our trip and see the photos Sal had taken with his Leica. Social life was almost totally limited to visiting with family and friends, and I could not blame those who seemed to want to recapture the days before Hitler. But the Nazis had ruined my trip, and I took no pleasure gossiping about our holiday adventures.

I needed a new coat and decided to shop at Huth’s Department Store in the center of the city. Walking the few blocks to the store after my trolley ride, I found the streets crowded with shoppers and strollers. I was just about to cross the street when I saw several dozen Nazis. They were carrying party banners and moving towards the corner where I stood. Traffic halted and all the pedestrians lined up against the curb, two or three deep. With the crowd pressing around me, I grasped the awful truth. I was trapped in a demonstration. All around me people raised their arms and began to cheer the approaching column. For an instant, I did not know what to do. Then I realized that if I did not join in, I would be assaulted and very likely be thrown to the ground. I felt the child stirring within me and forced up my arm, holding it straight, even as it stiffened

with pain. As the goose-stepping cavalcade thundered past me, I clenched my fist to hold it steady. I wondered how many others in the crowd saluted and cheered from fear.

The crowd dispersed. I breathed deeply and told myself I could not let myself fall apart each time I encountered threatening Nazis. Then I continued on to Huth's and found a gray wool coat.

Back home that night, Sal agreed I had done the right thing. "You always know how to behave and what to do. I admire you for it."

Our third daughter was born on November 9, 1936. The hospital where Ruth and Eva had been born no longer admitted Jews, so I gave birth at home, without any difficulty. As we had done with the two older girls, we chose a biblical name, and one in remembrance of dear Mama.

Lea Jenta's birthday was recorded at our Halle hall of records. Her name was inscribed in our official family record book with the same fine calligraphic strokes as on the previous pages that listed our marriage and the births of the two older girls in the years 1929 and 1931. The difference was in the official stamp—a circle surrounding a hideous swastika.

CHAPTER 9

THE EXODUS GROWS

“The Zionist Bureau gave our visa to another family.”

Sal’s oldest sister Elke came to Halle from Leipzig to say goodbye to Markus. Her daughter Hanni had sent her a visa to Tel Aviv. It was the same Hanni who had urged Sal almost two years earlier not to delay emigration.

The whole family, almost twenty people, came one day to wish her well. They exchanged reminiscences going back the time the family had settled in Halle. Elke and Moritz were children then, and Sal had not yet been born. More than forty years had gone by, and they recalled them as an innocent time. Germany had seemed a haven back then, and they had not thought that Jews would become unwanted there as they had been unwanted in so many parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

“Wherever you are, you must live according to the Torah. You must keep Shabbos and perform all the mitzvos,” Markus said. He called for Hashem’s blessing for his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“What will be, Papa?” Moritz asked.

“It is all in the hands of Hashem, my son,” Markus said. “Moshiach will come. I believe in Moshiach.”

I think my father-in-law knew it was the last time he would sit with all his children.

Lene, Sal’s youngest sister, and her husband did not remain much longer in Germany after Elke’s departure. Because of the boycott on Jewish-owned businesses and the departure of Leipzig Jews, the store’s earnings dwindled to such an extent that Sal had been subsidizing the family with money for food and rent.

Shortly after Elke left, Sal withdrew one thousand marks from his bank and gave the money to Lene. She paid the sum to a middleman who opened up an account

of twenty thousand marks in her name in a bank in Jerusalem. With this spurious bankbook, my sister-in-law secured a visa for herself, her husband and her two young daughters. As soon as they arrived in Palestine, the fraudulent account, bearing Lene's name, but not her money, was closed. The middleman promptly used the same twenty thousand marks for his next customer, who paid him another thousand marks. Lene and her family would not have much money in Palestine, but they would be no worse off in Tel Aviv than they had been in Leipzig.

"It is likely that life will be better for them," Sal said. "That is my hope."

Sal would have bought visas for us, but he did not want us to live in poverty. "We will wait for the capitalist visa to which we are entitled."

We waited for our visa all through 1937. That year, Sal joined a small group of Jewish men who had formed a bowling team that met once a week. For Jewish men whose businesses and social lives had become increasingly limited under the Nazis, the night out was a boon. Wednesday night bowling was their only source of recreation. On those evenings, the wives met in one of our homes. We gossiped and served home-baked cakes, trying to maintain a sense of normalcy. I counted on this time together with friends. It strengthened us and drew us closer to one another.

Throughout that year, all the talk was of emigration. Halle Jews were taking steps they would not have dreamed of only two years earlier. Friends were going to live in Cuba and South America. None could speak Spanish, and they knew nothing of life in Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia. Some women had never heard of the places they were moving to. "Mon-te-vee-de-o," one of them said. "It has a nice ring..."

Sal's friend, Rosenberg, paid two hundred fifty marks for a visa to Australia. "No, I don't think it's too far away. The further from Hitler the better," he said. "With God's help, we shall cope." He would not have much money to make a new start. He was taking his capital out in spermarks.

When my father brought Edith to Halle for one of her periodic visits, he urged Sal to take some kind of step to get out of Germany. "Listen to me, Sal. You're waiting too long. You can smuggle the money out of Germany. Other Jews are doing it. It's not so hard. Come to Leipzig and talk to the furriers and jewelers.

They will tell you how to do it.”

“It is not right,” Sal said.

“Right. What is right?” Papa asked with uncanny exasperation. “Everybody is smuggling. Why do you have to be different? You’re too insulated and isolated here in Halle. You ought to hear what’s being said in Leipzig. Listen to men you know, men who can still travel, who have contacts. Then you will understand that time is running out.”

Sal took his advice and went to Leipzig. When he came home, he was more adamant than ever. “I heard everything, all about how they maneuver. They conceal, distort, misrepresent. I’m afraid to take these illegal steps.”

Doggedly, Sal continued in his efforts. He wrote to the Zionist Bureau, called Berlin, and visited the Bureau office, clinging to the hope that our number on the list for Palestine visas would be reached soon.

Sal’s customers started ringing the bell in the evening after he had closed the store. “We want to buy from you, but you see how it is,” they confided. “If all the Jews were like you, we would not have these difficulties.”

I did not see. I was incensed when Sal told me what his old customers said. “What do they mean, ‘If all the Jews were like you,’” I screamed. “Everyone is like you and like me. We are all the same. Why are they so blind? Why don’t they see that?”

“Mia, please, don’t shout. I suppose they can’t help it. They don’t agree with the Nazis. That’s all they are telling me.”

I was not mollified, and refused to answer the door in the evenings. “If people think they have to sneak around to speak to us, if they feel they can’t talk to me out in the open, I don’t want to see them.”

Early in 1938, the owner of the bowling alley received threats from the Nazis for accommodating Jews. The bowling group was disbanded. Then Halle’s Jewish department store owners were forced out of business with threats and intimidation. Sal’s profits declined, but individual stores like ours, Moritz’s, and those of our cousins, Padaver and Geminder, were left alone.

On the record of the Zionist Bureau for the Resettlement of German Jews, we had become number one to receive a capitalist visa to enter Palestine. We reached the top of the list, but we did not get a visa. The Bureau gave our visa to another family. And they kept doing it, again and again. By the summer, Sal was going to Berlin almost every week.

The Bureau officials always had the same answer. “Don’t worry. Your turn will come. We had to give preference to—” and they named a doctor or business executive in imminent danger. “It was a matter of life or death. Please understand. Really, it won’t be long, Herr Kanner. In the meantime, you are safe as long as you still have your store.”

We were worried and discouraged, but what recourse did we have? To whom could we protest?

“There is nothing to do but wait,” Sal said, “All the way back from Berlin during the three hour train ride, I wondered if waiting was the right thing. I weighed our options. If I were poor, like my brother-in-law, I would have gone. I’d have had nothing to lose. Or if I were rich, like the Leipzig furriers with their London customers, I could deposit money abroad. I’m not poor, and I’m not rich. And I have to plan ahead and follow the rules. That’s how I’ve always lived and prospered. I still believe in that. I just never thought when I filed the application at the end of 1934 that it would take so long.”

Our congregation was shrinking rapidly. Every week, we said goodbye to someone else. There were some lucky people with relatives in America who agreed to take financial responsibility for them. Such a guarantee was essential before the United States would grant a visa. Some went across the world in the other direction to Shanghai. To me, it was unimaginable that Jews could live in China, in a culture so alien to us. True, Shanghai was a free port with no visa requirements or bars to entry, but the long journey was risky. Many of the ships undertaking the long voyage were not seaworthy.

Jews were leaving Germany illegally in increasing numbers, without visas or passports. For a fee, they were smuggled across the border to Holland, Belgium or France. The smuggler always made it clear that he could not guarantee success, and some were caught. Of those who made it, some remained in Europe. Others headed for Mediterranean ports. They boarded all types of vessels, many not meant for anything but cruising down a quiet river or fishing

in an inlet. A mile from the shores of Palestine, the passengers jumped or were lowered into the water. They had to wade ashore to avoid capture by British officials, who were always on the lookout for illegal immigrants.

I was more anxious than ever to get to the Holy Land. I wanted to participate with my family in building a homeland where Jews could live and pray together, in our ancient land given to us by God. But we would have to undertake a dangerous trek across fields to reach the German border. Then an even more dangerous ordeal awaited us: crossing that border. That ordeal would be followed by the effort to survive the sea after the ship discharged its illegal load a mile from shore. How could we even contemplate such a perilous journey with our three small children?

Markus shook his head sadly as Sal and I worried about reaching Palestine. The old man had found his answer. He immersed himself in his Gemara. The more oppressive the Nazi threats and restrictions became, the more he studied Torah and the more he prayed.

Book Two

October 1938-July 1939

Kristallnacht

CHAPTER 10

DEPORTATION OF THE POLISH JEWS

“We’ve come for the old man.”

By all rights, we should have been celebrating Ruth’s birthday in Tel Aviv. But on October 28, 1938, the day before her ninth birthday, I was still standing in my kitchen in Halle. Eva and Ruth were at Hebrew school, and I was mixing cake batter for a party the next day. Sal’s brother and his two sisters and their families would be coming to the party. The Padavers and the Geminders would attend. But not too many members of my family were left in Germany. Both my sisters were in Paris. My father had taken Edith to Paris and left her with Hannah.

I was glad we had decided to hold the birthday party. It would help take our minds off the continued Nazi harassment of the Jews. For a few hours we would stop wondering whether friends who had braved illegal border crossings were safe. For a little while, we could stop wondering about our own uncertain future. And our daughter would be accorded the special attention she desperately needed to counteract the loneliness of being the only Jewish child in her class.

Sal maintained that children did not understand about the Nazis and their hatred. Yet how could my girls not have been aware of the blatant anti-Semitism? They could read. They must have heard epithets. Ruth surely remembered being excluded from the Halle swimming club.

I was thinking about how well the girls were doing under such conditions when the intercom from the store buzzed. I picked up the receiver and heard Sal say, “You have to come down.”

“Not now,” I said, “I’m in the middle of mixing the batter. You know the party is tomorrow.”

Sal was adamant. “You have to come down. Now.”

Irritated, I washed my hands and took off my apron. The half-mixed batter would be useless. What was the matter with Sal, giving that kind of order? It was not like him. On my way out, I glanced into the children’s room. Lea had pushed

her blanket to the edge of the crib, but she was napping peacefully. She would be safe while I found out what Sal wanted.

As I stepped through the front door, I saw Markus walking down the Reilstrasse. He was returning from his daily visit to Moritz, Fanny and Malia. He was eighty years old, yet he still covered the distance between his children's stores on foot though the trolley was readily available. Small, bearded, clad in black, he exuded an air of quiet dignity as he walked steadily along the city street.

Glancing toward the entrance to the store, I saw two Gestapo officers standing with Sal. Markus also spotted the two Gestapo men and quickened his pace. How do you control fear? My heart was going so fast. I held my arms tightly against the sides of my body to hide my shaking hands.

"What is it, Sal?" I asked. "What is it?" I could not keep the alarm out of my voice.

"We've come for the old man," the tall, young officer explained. "He has to come down to the police station."

"Down? Why down?" I demanded. "The police station is across the street."

"Downtown, to headquarters," the officer answered. "Don't worry. He'll be back in an hour."

"Papa, the Gestapo wants you to go with them," Sal told his father, who had just reached us. "They say it's only for an hour."

The old man put a hand into his coat pocket and took out the fresh roll he had brought for his supper, as he did every day. "Well, I won't need the bread. I'll be back in an hour."

"Oh, take it." The second Gestapo officer spoke for the first time. "Maybe it will take a little longer, and you might get hungry."

Markus looked at him oddly. "All right," he said. Then he put the roll back in his coat pocket.

I watched him walking back down the Reilstrasse. He seemed so small between his escorts. The brim of his black hat just reached the black swastika on the

white armbands of the tall, polite Nazi policemen.

I watched the three men until they disappeared. When I couldn't see them any more, I went into the store. "All his papers are in order, Sal. His passport is good. Could there be some new regulations we haven't heard about?"

Sal was visibly alarmed. "I don't like it," he said. "There is no reason for the police to take him."

"Sal, I have to go up. I left Lea alone," I said.

I climbed the three flights of stairs, counting the steps to avoid thinking. Back in the kitchen, I tried to beat the lumps out of the cake batter. Too much time had passed since I had added the flour. I poured the spoiled mixture down the sink and scrubbed the bowl and the greased cake pans.

Lea was awake and thumping her little feet against the crib. I lifted her out and let her play. She placed two dolls next to her on the floor, found a book, and pretended to read it to them.

It was not yet six o'clock when Sal came home. "I closed early," he said.

"Where is Opa?" Eva asked. "I learned how to write another Hebrew letter."

"He will be here in a little while," I said. "You set the table for supper."

We finished our meal at six-thirty, and Markus had still not come home.

"Opa's not here. Where is Opa?" Eva wanted to know.

"Go play in your room. Ruth, you go with her."

Sal kept pulling his gold watch out of his vest pocket to check the time. "It's been over three hours. Why would they want a retired eighty-year-old man?"

I tried to picture Markus at the police headquarters. Then it occurred to me that Moritz lived near the main police building. "Maybe he went to Moritz," I said.

"Yes, that may be it," said Sal, with hope in his voice. "One of the Gestapo hinted that the business might take a little longer than an hour. My father might

have become too tired to make the trip back to the Reilstrasse. I'm going to ride over to my brother's house to see."

Two hours later, Sal returned, distressed and alone.

He had clung to the hope of finding Markus until he reached his brother's home. Moritz opened the door and said one word. "Papa?"

"Isn't he here?" Sal asked, even though he already knew the answer.

Moritz's small apartment was crowded with anxious Jews, talking in hushed tones. Sal heard snatches of comments. "Goldberg was arrested in the lobby of his building... They took my sister... The Friedmans, all of them, even the old mother."

Sal learned that Jews were making hurried, furtive visits to each other's homes. The few who had telephones exchanged news with friends and relatives in Leipzig, Berlin, and Hamburg. The message passed among Jews was the same all over Germany: "Hide."

Young and old, men, women and children, shopkeepers and teachers had been arrested. Someone came to tell Moritz that his sisters, Fanny and Malia, and their children were among those rounded up that afternoon.

"I'm sorry I left you alone so long," Sal said to me. "But we were trying to find a reason for the arrests. The common denominator was that all the Jews who were arrested had Polish passports. It means not only Jews born in Poland but also Jews of Polish descent. Anyone who did not become a German citizen."

I understood the implication at once. Sal and I had been left alone because we were naturalized German citizens. This we had done years before Hitler came into power. My father had taken steps with us. But Sal and Moritz were the only Kanners who had become naturalized citizens.

What would happen to Markus and all the others? There seemed nothing that we could do, absolutely nothing. I felt utterly helpless.

At eleven o'clock that night, a voice calling "Sal!" drew us to the front door. When we opened it, Heinrich Padaver stumbled into my apartment and fell into my husband's arms. Sal led his cousin into the living room. Heinrich was

shaking, and the color had drained from his face.

“They took my wife and the children while I was away,” he said. “The Gestapo came for them fifteen minutes before I came home. A neighbor told me when I got to the lobby. I was afraid to go up to our apartment. I’ve been to Geminder’s house, and they’re gone, too. Thank God I found you. I don’t know what to do.”

Sal answered at once. “Stay with us, Heinrich. The Nazis are only after Polish Jews, so they won’t come here.”

“No, no, I think I should be with my family.” He covered his eyes and wept, his hoarse, gasping sobs sending shivers through my body.

“If you’re free, maybe you can do something for them, but you must calm yourself,” Sal argued. “Please, go wash up. Mia will bring you some hot tea.”

Heinrich did quiet down. He even ate a little. “Thank you,” he said. “I haven’t eaten anything since noon. My head is clear now, and I’ve decided. Whatever happens, I have to be with my family.”

We pleaded with him, but he barely listened to us. At midnight, he embraced his cousin. “God will be with us. We are His people,” he said. Then he left for police headquarters and gave himself up to the Gestapo.

Early on the morning of our eldest daughter’s ninth birthday, I packed Markus’ tallis and tefillin, his siddurim, his medicine, and warm clothes. Sal took the box downtown, to police headquarters. He returned an hour later, still carrying the box.

“It was too late,” Sal said. “A guard stopped me at the entrance and asked me where I was going. I told him I had a package for my father who was very old. I told the guard to open the box to prove it held only clothes, medicine and his tallis. He said, ‘Your father is not here anymore. We sent the Jews back to Poland on a pre-dawn train, all two hundred of them.’”

News of the deportations spread rapidly among the four hundred Jews left in Halle. We learned that none of the Jews had been permitted to take anything along. The police sealed their apartments, and everything remained as it had been at the instant when the Gestapo had knocked on the doors. Schoolbooks were left open on the table. Half-mended socks lay on top of the sewing basket.

Heinrich Padaver's wife had been preparing fish for Shabbos when the police came to her home. The raw carp remained on the cutting board in her kitchen. After a while, the fish began to smell. We found out when neighbors complained of the stink from the Jew's apartment, and the police sent someone to remove the rotting fish.

The arrests continued throughout Germany for three days. The roundup was a step in the effort to make the nation Judenrein. Fifty thousand Jews were seized and deported to the German-Polish border. At the border, they were ordered out of the trains. They were separated according to their area of origins so that they could be returned to the cities and villages of their parents' or ancestors' birth.

On the second day, the Polish government protested the return of thousands of people for whom there was no work, housing and insufficient food. On the third day, the Poles closed their border. Hitler's government was unprepared for Warsaw's action, but Poland stood firm. In March of 1938, Poland had passed a decree, stripping citizenship from any Pole who had lived outside the country for more than five years. The only way to circumvent this action had been to secure a special passport stamp from the Polish Consulate. Few Jews living in Germany had bothered, and those who did seek the stamp were often turned away by the Polish Consuls in Germany.

After the third day, as the Poles stood by their refusal to take the Jews, Germany permitted those who had not crossed over to return to their homes.

Sal's sister Fanny and her younger daughter Hanni were among those who came back. They arrived at our apartment late in the afternoon, exhausted from their harrowing journey, and told how it had been at the border. There was chaos as officials tried to separate Jews and route them to different parts of Poland.

"It was terrible," Hanni said. "It was cold. There was no food. There was no water. There were no toilets."

Fanny said, "I never saw Papa after we left the Halle station. We were put on different trains. We looked and looked, but the crowd was huge at the border. People were pushing and shoving, and we couldn't find him. And then we lost Roschen."

Fanny wept as she recounted how she had become separated from her twenty-five-year-old daughter. "Roschen had kept repeating, 'I want to go. I don't want

to be on German soil.' When Roschen heard the name of her father's birthplace over the loudspeaker, she ran for the train. She must have thought Hanni and I were right behind her. I don't know how she ever made it through the mob. I couldn't. I kept calling her name. Then I saw her for a moment at a half-open window as the train pulled away."

Fanny and her daughter spent the night at our apartment. I urged them to remain, but they asked Sal to take them home.

In the days that followed, we clung desperately to our daily routine: I cooked and kept the house in order; the children went to school; and Sal sat in the store, waiting for customers. We hoped for news that did not come. No other member of Sal's family came back from Poland. We wondered if Markus had reached Mielec, the Galician village where his stepsister still lived. Sal found her address among his father's papers and sent a letter and money.

"I should have insisted that Papa become a German citizen," Sal said in the days that followed the deportation. "When I did it in 1920, I told him that Germany was my home and my country. He said 'Yes, yes, mine too, but I don't need a piece of paper to prove it.'"

On November 8, 1938, the German radio reported an alarming story that involved a seventeen-year-old Jewish student named Herschl Grynszpan, whose parents had been sent back to Poland. The previous day, Grynszpan had walked into the German Embassy in Paris and shot Embassy third Secretary Ernst Von Rath. On our radio, we heard a barrage of anti-Semitic abuse. Newspapers joined in, railing against the Jews.

It no longer required a Nazi demonstration to make me nervous when I went outside. I was tense when I left the apartment that day and the next. I constantly looked over my shoulder. I was nervous in the street even if I did not see a single Nazi. Then, on November 9, Von Rath died.

CHAPTER 11

KRISTALLNACHT

“Two Gestapo led Sal out of the apartment.”

At 2:30am on November 10, 1938, we were awakened by a discordant banging. Sal opened the door a few inches, and six or seven stormtroopers pushed into the apartment. Police Chief Kaese was one of them. Yes, Kaese, whom we had known for years and years.

“Get dressed, Kanner,” Kaese said. “You’re under arrest.” He spoke without inflections, his eyes denying past friendship.

I had pulled on my robe and was standing in the hall just outside the bedroom. Kaese was behind Sal, following him down the corridor.

“Go, go, Kanner,” he said, “You have nothing to worry about.”

Nothing to worry about! The Gestapo was in our house in the middle of the night, but there was nothing to worry about. Did he think Sal was an idiot?

I leaned against the wall, unable to move, conscious of the stormtroopers tramping all over my apartment. They were opening drawers, pushing furniture about, and ripping papers. Mostly, I was aware of the pounding of their footsteps and the echo—the pounding in my head. It was as if a battalion had invaded my home.

The hamper where we kept our dirty laundry stood at the end of the corridor. I had hidden five thousand marks in it. The previous summer, we had worried that an emergency might arise when the bank was closed or that we might be blocked from going to the bank. It was imperative that we have cash in hand, at home.

One of the stormtroopers picked up the round, peach-colored container and spilled the dirty clothes on the parquet floor. He kicked the laundry with his boot, scattering underwear and dresses. I wanted to shut out the sight of his boots on garments that had been on my body, but I could not close my eyes. Socks fell to the edge of the pile, and the Nazi spied the money. He picked up the bills and

stuffed the five thousand marks into his coat pocket. “Thief, thief,” I cried silently.

I turned and saw Ruth and Eva standing barefoot in the doorway of their room, staring wide-eyed at Kaese. He was walking toward them. I moved toward the children, but he reached them first.

“Shush, shush,” he muttered and pushed the girls back into their room. He slammed the door and blocked the doorway. “Better that they don’t see,” he said to me.

See what? I wanted to know but could not ask. Sal—where was my husband? I found him in our bedroom with two SS officers. One of them stood watch as he dressed. The second was on his knees next to the bed, lifting the mattress. So that is how it would be. I shuddered, remembering the story Papa had told me that summer. The police had broken into a Jewish neighbor’s apartment and planted a gun under his bed. Then they arrested the Jew who had never owned a weapon, charging him with concealing a pistol.

Sal was buttoning his shirt. The Gestapo officer straightened up, rubbing his empty hands together. I wanted to tell him, “Your friend already found the money.”

Sal’s eyes were lidded in concentration. Good, he was awake and aware. I wondered if the Gestapo would mistake his half-closed eyes for drowsiness. I wanted to go to my husband, but my legs would not move until he brushed past me. I followed him into the hallway and watched him put on his dark, gray winter coat.

“No, no,” I tried to cry out as two Gestapo officers led Sal out of the apartment; but no sound came from my throat. Four other troopers followed. They were indistinguishable in their identical, belted olive-green coats, their stiff, peaked caps and their high, brown boots. One of them paused and turned to Kaese. With a malevolent sneer, he asked, “What about the woman. What shall we do with her?”

“Oh, let her be,” Kaese answered. “She has those three little girls.”

Kaese lingered in the doorway until he and I were alone. “I don’t wish you any harm,” he said. “But let this be a warning to you. Listen to me and get out of

Germany. Take your children and go. Leave as quickly as you can.” He paused for a moment. “I tell you this for your own good. See that you get out.” Just before he closed the door, he turned to me and repeated, “See that you get out.”

I went to the children’s room. Lea was half asleep, but the two older girls were sitting on their beds, wide awake. Ruth was unconsciously cracking her knuckles. Eva had wrapped herself in her blanket and was listening to the sounds made by her sister’s fingers. I hugged and kissed them both. “It’s alright,” I said. “Go back to sleep.” I covered them and repeated over and over, “It’s all right.” After a while, they slept.

I found my way to the living room and sat on the couch, shivering in the darkness, unable to move, feeling nothing.

CHAPTER 12

SHATTERED GLASS AND SHUL ASHES

“The Jews were sent to Buchenwald.

I sat on the sofa for the remainder of the night, staring into nothing. Light began to seep through the draperies, bringing with it the rhythm of the day. I rose and walked into the hallway. At once, I became very busy. I gathered the dirty laundry and returned it to the hamper. For the first time, I saw that my clean linens were also strewn about the floor. I folded sheets and table linens and piled them back into the closet. I straightened the furniture, picking up dining room chairs and pushing them under the table. I returned lamps that had been removed from their proper spots. I moved mechanically. I had always kept a neat and spotless home. Overlooking the cause of the disarray, I wanted order. I wanted things back as they had been, to erase what had happened.

The door to Markus’ room was ajar. Had they entered his room? I looked and saw the floor littered with books and papers and realized I was holding papers torn out of his Gemara and his siddurim. The shelves that held his machzorim and tomes were empty. “Sacrilege,” I moaned. How was such desecration possible?

“Mama, Mama,” Ruth was calling. Markus’s old clock still hung on the wall. It was eight o’clock. I breathed deeply and went to my daughter.

“No school today. You will both stay home.” I bent down and put my arms around Ruth. I had been too distraught to give any thought to what to say to the children. What was there to do but tell her? “Papa was arrested during the night. But he will be back.”

Ruth nodded and said nothing.

“You’re a big girl. You have to help me.” As the words came out, I realized they were not merely words to comfort my daughter. I needed her now. “Get some breakfast for your sisters, sweetheart,” I said. “You can make cocoa.”

The doorbell rang. I stood still, my heart pounding painfully in my chest. Again,

it buzzed. I heard a muffled female voice. A woman calling my name. I walked down the corridor, supporting myself against the wall. With shaking hands, I turned the knob and opened the door.

It was Ella, our saleswoman. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Frau Kanner, you have to come down to the store. Oh, it’s dreadful. I’m so afraid! The Gestapo said you were to come right away. Please, right away!”

I dressed in two minutes. It was best to obey. I could not have the Gestapo back in the apartment. In the street, things did not look right. I closed my eyes, feeling dizzy. A man’s voice shouted, “Clean up this mess, at once.”

“Mess?” I stared at the SS officer standing at the store entrance, arms folded across his chest.

Then I saw. I saw flat, jagged pieces of glass everywhere. The sidewalk was covered with broken glass. Our store’s three large plate glass windows had been shattered. Inside, the store was a shambles. The glass display counters had been smashed. Merchandise was strewn on the floor and over the broken counters. Cartons had been emptied of socks, dresses, towels. I was immobilized by the disorder.

“Didn’t you hear me?” the officer shouted. “Vandals broke into your store in the night. Clean up. I do not want to tell you again. And another thing. Get these windows repaired. Today.”

In the stockroom, I found a broom. I dragged an empty carton into the street and began to sweep up the broken panes. The butcher came out of his shop across the street, watched for a moment and went back inside. Shoppers crossed to the other side of the street. Trolleys rumbled by. The guard watched. I swept.

Vandals? The Nazis were the vandals. Bitterness and anger engulfed me as I swept. Gangsters, criminals, beasts, I raged silently and continued to sweep. I found more empty cartons and filled them with shards of glass from the sidewalk. The Gestapo guard watched every move I made.

When I finally finished sweeping up the glass on the sidewalk, I mumbled the word “Glazier.” The guard nodded, and I walked the short distance to the glass shop. The glass cutter’s wife was polishing a mirror when I entered.

“Our windows—” I stopped helplessly. I could not find the words to explain, but it wasn’t necessary. The woman knew.

“My husband will be there in the afternoon,” she said.

I nodded.

“Frau Kanner?” she said hesitantly.

“Yes?”

“Frau Kanner, I’m sorry.”

The Gestapo guard was still there when I returned. The children had been alone for more than two hours. I started for the apartment lobby, but the Nazi shook his head, pointing to the store premises. I collected the broken counter glass. I looked at the Gestapo. He shook his head, and for the rest of the morning, I sorted and folded merchandise, separating dry goods from clothes, separating large sizes from small, making a mental inventory. Blankets, shirts and baby clothes were missing. Of course, they stole. Beasts, savages, thieves, I raged.

At one o’clock, the guard let me go upstairs. The children ran to me. My darling girls. They had looked after themselves and each other. “I made breakfast. Then I made lunch,” Ruth said.

“I helped,” Eva said.

The door rang constantly as Jewish women from all over the city sought news or delivered terrible reports. By mid-afternoon, we knew that every Jewish man between the age of sixteen and sixty had been taken. All the Jewish businesses had been looted.

Then a woman brought news of still worse destruction. “The shul is lost.”

“How, how?” Fanny asked.

“Burned to the ground. Nothing is left. All the sifrei Torah, all the books, everything is gone.”

For the first time since my father-in-law had been deported, I was glad the old

man was gone. I hoped he would never hear of the desecration of the Sifrei Torah, the holy scrolls he had tended, read and revered.

The glazier came to inform me the store windows had been replaced, and I paid him.

Moritz's wife Rosa came. She was at least fifteen years older than I was, and we shared few common interests. It was the first time I could ever remember Rosa traveling alone from her house to ours. She slumped in a chair and moaned, "They took my husband. They took my son. I don't know what to do."

What to do? What to do? The words echoed in my mind. All my life someone had been there to tell me what to do—first my parents, then my husband. Now I was alone, facing what had been unimaginable. I looked at my sister-in-law, a good woman who had never done anything but look after her husband and her son, and I knew that she would be helpless to act. It was up to me.

"Rosa, the children were alone the whole morning." I said. "Please, will you stay and keep an eye on them? I'll go across the street to the police. Maybe I can find out something there."

In the police station, I walked up to the desk, trying not to show my apprehension. I faced the officer. "My husband was arrested last night. Salomon Kanner."

The officer said nothing.

"Why did you arrest him? He broke no law."

Still no answer came from him. I had wanted to stay calm, but now I demanded, "Where is he?"

Another policeman came to the desk. "The Jews were sent to Buchenwald," he said. "If you want to get him out, get him a visa so that he can get out of our country. We don't want Jews in the Fatherland. Germany is to be Judenrein."

"I expect to receive a visa for Palestine shortly," I said. "You can easily verify that we have made the proper application."

"Applications mean nothing," he said. "Produce the visa. Come back and show

it, and we will see.”

At least I knew what was required. I had to get the visa. But what to do now? I knew I needed help.

The family. Always family was there to help. I walked to the post office to use the telephone and call Hannah in Paris. “They say he is in Buchenwald,” I told her. “I don’t even know where that is, but you have to do something. I have to have a visa, Hannah. That’s what they said.”

“I’ll try, Mia, I’ll try,” Hannah said. “Call me tomorrow.” I was about to hang up when Hannah said, “Wait,” and asked, “What about Papa? I haven’t heard from him.”

“Thank God, he is too old,” I answered. “They took no one over sixty.”

“At least there’s some good news. Get some rest, Mia. We’ll speak tomorrow.”

For years, I had dreamed of the knock on the door in the middle of the night. The nightmare always ended with the banging on the door. I had never dreamed or thought beyond that terrible moment, never imagined myself alone. I had never dreamed it would come to pass. Sal and I had worked hard, obeyed all the rules, broken no laws. We had applied to emigrate legally and declared all our assets. But it was all for nothing. How naive we had been to think there was time. Even as we saw Jews being stripped of their rights, ousted from their jobs, and deprived of their businesses, Sal and I still believed we would get out of Germany in time. Our gentile acquaintances had reassured us, “Nothing will happen to you.”

Some of them came that evening. Standing at the entrance of my home, my neighbors shook their heads and said, “We are sorry for what has happened. We don’t approve of what they are doing. We want you to know we don’t condone what happened.”

What hypocrites they were! They were trying to make themselves feel better, not me. “Don’t condone!” Of what use were their whispered protestations? How did it help me that they stood in the darkened hallway and whispered, “We don’t condone?”

That night, I hardly slept. I imagined I heard constant banging on the door. Early

the next morning, I heard someone knocking again. A pale, frightened boy stood at the door. The charwoman had sent her pimply thirteen-year-old son to tell me that she would not be coming any more. “My mother is afraid to be in a Jewish house,” the boy whispered before bolting down the stairs.

CHAPTER 13

BRIBING THE GESTAPO

“I handed the bills to the Gestapo.”

My first priority was to get a visa for Sal. My sister-in-law Fanny stayed with the children so that I could go to Berlin and make a personal appeal for the Palestine visa that was rightfully ours. Two days after the nightmare of Sal’s arrest, I was on the early morning train to the capital. I left before daylight so that I could finish the business in one day and return home in time for Shabbos.

The waiting room of the Zionist office was crowded with agitated women and old men. It took two hours before my name was called. In the inner office I found a balding official, sitting behind a desk littered with papers. I declined his invitation to be seated. I had done nothing but sit for five hours, first on the train and then in the waiting room. Besides, I felt I could make my point better on my feet.

“You promised us a visa. You skipped our turn on the list, and now my husband is in Buchenwald. Where is our visa? Where is it?” I had not intended to shout, but my self-control vanished. I screamed at this stranger who had given our visa away to another family. I poured out all the rage that I had pent up for the past three days.

“Please, please, calm down. We will get it for you, I promise. We did not expect this. You must give us a little time.”

“Time!” I shouted. “There is no time left.”

“I can do nothing today,” the official said. “You have to come back next week. I am very sorry.”

On the train home, I found a seat and hung up my coat. I was just warm enough in my wool suit and felt hat. No one looked at me. The conductor punched my ticket politely. I realized he had no reason to assume such a well-dressed woman was Jewish. I had forgotten what it was like not to feel different.

I became lightheaded, and it dawned on me that I had not eaten since Sal's arrest. I would have to try to get some food down when I returned home. I had to keep up my strength, there was no one to help me now.

Fanny stayed for a simple Shabbos meal. We lit candles, and for the first time in my life, I recited the Kiddush. There would be no services the next day. The shul was rubble. Yet I felt stronger than I had on any day since the pogrom. On Shabbos, as I prayed at home, I knew God was with me and would help me in what I had to do.

My efforts to secure a visa for Sal absorbed me totally. I hounded foreign consulates in Halle and Leipzig, had frequent phone conferences with my sister, and checked weekly with the Zionist Bureau in Berlin. It seemed to me that I spent all my days riding trains and trolleys and sitting in crowded reception rooms, waiting my turn to plead my case. When life had followed orderly procedures, I would have been ashamed of the way I acted now. As it was now, I faced strange officials, pleaded, cajoled, and lost my temper without a shred of shame.

I followed up the flimsiest rumors that I overheard in consular waiting rooms. When a chic, perfumed woman whispered that the French Consul could be bribed, I rushed to a telephone and begged Hannah to go back to the foreign office. "A woman at the French consulate said there are ways if you are willing to pay," I said desperately.

Fanny or Rosa usually stayed with the three girls when I was away. Ruth and Eva no longer went to school. A few days after Sal's arrest, Eva's teacher had come to the apartment. I expected another self-serving apology for the arrests, the looting and the burning, but she came to urge me to send the children back to school.

"They are good and diligent pupils. They belong in school," the young teacher said. "Nothing will happen to them, Frau Kanner. I promise you I will look after them."

I was amazed that this gentile woman had come openly to visit a Jewish home, and I was deeply moved by her concern for my children. She was so certain that she could protect my children that I agreed to let them go back to school. But I felt uneasy every minute they were gone. I watched the clock, anxiously

counting the minutes until they returned. How could my teacher prevent other students from abusing my girls? Youngsters mimicked their elders, learned their cruelty.

An even more awful thought came to me. Supposing the Nazis in Halle decided to expel Jewish children as they had done in schools in other cities? True, the teacher had been kind, and Eva was fond of her. But what would the teacher do if a Nazi entered the classroom and asked my daughter to step forward?

I shuddered as I pictured the scene. What could have possessed me to listen to the teacher? After weighing it for three days, I knew for certain that Ruth and Eva would be safer at home.

There were days when neither Fanny nor Rosa was available to be with them when I had a lead to follow. On those days, I left the girls alone, warning them to let no one into the house. When I was growing up, Mama had made me responsible for my sisters. Now I did the same. "Ruth, you are the oldest, so you are in charge," I said. She took her responsibility for her sisters very seriously. Usually, she managed very well.

But there was the day when I did not arrive home from an all-day trip to Berlin until eight-thirty at night. Ruth burst into tears as soon as she saw me.

"What is it, Ruth? Tell me what happened."

"Lea's bed is all dirty. She called, and I didn't get there fast enough to get her to the bathroom. I washed her, but the bed is a big mess. Oh, Mama, I'm so sorry."

Relief washed over me. "You washed her? You did that? You are a good girl; you did right. Don't cry anymore."

What wonderful children I had. How they loved each other and looked after each other. No mother could be more fortunate than I. Since Sal was taken, I had not had one moment of trouble from any of them.

An official of the Arbeitsfront, the Nazi labor office, appeared at the house one day with Carl Helmut. The previous summer Helmut had agreed to purchase our business for ten thousand marks, less than one third of its value. The transfer was to have occurred as soon as the date of our emigration was set. Now the official said, "Jews are not permitted to own or operate any business in Germany

anymore. You are extremely lucky that we have a customer for your store.” He smiled, handed me a printed document and a pen, and said “Sign your name.”

In two or three seconds, as long as it took to sign my name, I transferred our store, all the merchandise and the goodwill that Sal had built over the years, to Carl Helmut, in return for one thousand marks. The Arbeitsfront official ceremoniously handed me a copy of the contract he had forced me to sign. What chutzpah! I wanted to tear up my copy of the “contract” and throw it in the Nazi’s face. But I was so afraid that I could not even protest politely.

Before he opened the store the next morning, Helmut told me he had paid the one thousand marks to the Arbeitsfront, and I believed him. He also told me that the Nazis would turn the money over to me. Halle’s gentiles just did not comprehend the venality of the Nazis. Of course, I never got the money, not a single mark. That was no surprise to me at all.

On my third trip to the Zionist Bureau, the official greeted me with a smile. The document he handed me stated that a permit was on file in Brussels for Salomon D. Kanner to enter Belgium. On the train back to Halle, I was surrounded by Nazis, but it did not matter. My prayers had been answered. Sal would be free.

I ran to the police directly from the Halle railroad station. A Gestapo officer studied my precious paper for only a few seconds. “No, no good. This piece of paper is not an exit visa.”

Flabbergasted at his pronouncement, I said, “I don’t understand. What is it you require?”

“Get a real exit visa and bring that,” he said.

“Oh, thank you for your explanation,” I said.

I do not know how I managed to keep my composure. Nor can I explain why I reached into my wallet and pulled out fifty marks. Without a word, I handed the bills to the Gestapo and left the station house.

My disappointment was enormous. Berlin had assured me that the document would bring Sal’s release. I had been sure that he would be with me before the end of the week.

At the Zionist Bureau in Berlin the following day, the director told me, “They change the rules almost daily. These documents were acceptable until the end of November. I can do nothing further for you, Frau Kanner, but there are still ways. I’m giving you a name and address. He is a middleman, you understand. You are an intelligent woman. Go and see this man. Take five thousand marks with you when you go. I wish you good luck.”

I had some cash on hand, and managed to get the rest of the required sum out of our bank account in Halle. Then I took my third trip to Berlin in a week. Again, I prayed during the entire train journey.

I found the middleman in a tiny ground-floor apartment in the Jewish ghetto of Berlin. The meeting lasted less than ten minutes. In the shuttered living room that reeked of garlic and unwashed laundry, I handed five thousand marks to the go-between, a fat man with a gray complexion and watchful eyes, who wore neither jacket nor tie. I did not expect any niceties, and there were none. He wrote down Sal’s full name, his birth date, home address and noted that he was an inmate at Buchenwald. “Come back in three days,” he said. I was surprised to hear him add, “Don’t worry,” as he ushered me out of the dingy apartment.

Three days later, I returned to the Halle police station with two documents. The first was a French transit visa that would allow Sal to enter France. The second document bore the stamp of the Jewish agency. It certified that the entry visa for Salomon David Kanner, born December 12, 1898, had been granted, and was waiting for him at the consulate in Paris.

Trembling, I handed the precious papers over the counter. “Better, better,” said the Gestapo officer whom I had impulsively bribed a few days earlier.

There was nothing more to be done, no more running, traveling, or pleading. Three seemingly endless days passed. I alternated between hope and despair. The police officer’s eyes had said yes. The middleman had said, “With these papers, your husband will be freed from Buchenwald.” But when? Why was there no word?

Late in the afternoon of December 10, 1938, one day before his fortieth birthday, Sal came home. He was thin and pale. A stubby beard covered his chin and his clothes were wrinkled and dirty, and I didn’t care. For the first time since the nightmare had begun one month before, I cried.

CHAPTER 14

HALLE AFTER BUCHENWALD

“We’ve caught another smuggler, this Jew with a large box.”

In the first few days after Sal came back from Buchenwald, he slept long hours. When he got up, I served him thick, nourishing soups made with fresh vegetables. He ate slowly, a damask napkin on his lap, savoring the rich broth, luxuriating in the calm, civilized surroundings of our dining room.

Word of Sal’s release spread rapidly. Again, as on the day after his arrest, women came to our apartment for news; for a few days there was a steady stream of visitors seeking firsthand information about husbands, fathers, sons and friends.

Sal assured them that the men were well. “The food wasn’t good, but we got by. The first day, we didn’t get anything to eat and drink. The second day, each man received a salted herring.”

“Is that all?” The women stared at him, not immediately comprehending, thinking only, as I had when Sal told me, that it was so little.

“There was no water,” he said, “and we were desperately thirsty after the salted fish. But Hashem heard our cries. It began to rain. We found rusty tin cans in the barracks and caught the rainwater. The water was so precious we did not rinse the dust from the cans. The third day, they began to give us three meals a day. Bread, coffee, soup, occasionally with bits of meat.”

It was not coffee, but a dark, bitter liquid that the men received with the single piece of dry bread each morning. They received a second piece in the afternoon, with the thin, awful-tasting liquid called soup. The soup was ladled from a huge cauldron into a half-dozen tin cans. Standing, the men drank the fluid and passed the container to those waiting their turn.

Buchenwald had a forced labor contingent. The men in the labor squad were awakened at five o’clock each morning. After a breakfast of bread and “coffee”, they faced a workday that continued until sunset. They were forced to carry heavy rocks on their backs. Men died from exhaustion, malnutrition and disease.

Some tried to escape. Those who reached the barrier were electrocuted by the deadly cables twisted around the fence. Those caught before they reached the barrier were hanged in broad daylight, an event all the inmates were forced to see.

Sal saw no point in telling these women what their husbands were going through. “When they come out, it will be time enough for them to hear about it,” he told me privately. What good would it do the women to know how their men ate and suffered in Buchenwald. Instead, Sal urged the women to secure visas to get their men out, that anywhere in the world was better than Buchenwald and Germany. “Everyone sits and waits. You answer the roll call, eat, take a turn at cleaning the barracks, and that is a day.”

The women began discussing the Judenrat, the commission the Nazis had created to handle the day-to-day affairs of the Jews. Every city in Germany had one, and the Nazis designated a Jew as its head. A lawyer named Neman was made head of the Halle Judenrat.

Sipping coffee, one woman complained, “Neman does nothing but hand out money to the poor.”

“It hasn’t been easy, Herr Kanner,” Frau Birnbaum explained. “The Nazis made a rule that we have to pay a tax to support the poor Jews. But our bank accounts are frozen, and we are limited to withdrawing only four hundred marks a month.”

“The poor have to eat,” I said. “And I can give you a little trick to use with the bank. I use it all the time, and I always manage to withdraw more money. I claim special needs. Every week while my husband was away, I went to the bank with a new story. I told the officials I had to support my father in Leipzig. I pretended that I needed a new coat, winter clothes for the three children, money to repair my stove. I was never refused. You should try it, Frau Birnbaum. What have you to lose?”

“It’s all so dreadful,” Frau Birnbaum said. “I’m afraid that anything I do will bring me problems. My husband always saw to everything.”

I was not concerned about money. I was concerned about losing my home. Every Jew in Halle was deeply worried about the Nazi decree that no Jewish family was entitled to an apartment of its own. One room was deemed sufficient for a

Jewish family. The decree was to go into effect early in 1939. The government was drawing up a list of residences for Jews. The occupants were ordered to take in the Jewish families who were not on the list and who would be forced out of their homes.

While Sal was in Buchenwald, I had concentrated my efforts on securing a visa for him. I had given little thought to any of the new decrees. Now I faced the fact that my home was to be taken from me. Reilstrasse 18 was not on the list of approved Jewish residences. My first reaction was disbelief. That did not last long. Was not all our effort focused on leaving Germany?

Sal needed a few days to regain his strength and his focus. Then we talked about the future and quickly agreed to accept my father's proposal for the girls to go to Leipzig. Papa's apartment on the Nordstrasse was on the Nazis' list. It had been chosen as a designated Jewish apartment. The girls would be in familiar surroundings with Papa. They would be among other Jews. Another advantage to Leipzig was that the Jewish school was still in operation. Ruth and Eva would be able to attend. I had to stay in Halle, but Leipzig was the best place for the children now.

Sal had to leave Germany by mid-January, and he wanted to be with the children when they went to Leipzig. Eva sat on her father's lap throughout the trip and kept insisting she wanted to go to Paris with him. She cried until Sal quieted her with the promise, "We're all going to Paris soon."

When we returned to Halle, I commented on how quiet the apartment was without the girls.

"They will be all right," Sal said. "Children listen and accept things."

Moritz and his son were freed from Buchenwald the last day of December. Rosa's sister, who had lived in Holland since 1937, secured visas to Bolivia for the two men and Rosa. They left Halle three days after Moritz and his son were released. They took only clothing, as much as would fit into three suitcases, one for each of them. They abandoned all their other possessions and fled with ten marks each. That was all the Nazis permitted.

At the railroad station, Rosa and I stood apart from the two brothers. During the month Sal was away, she had come almost every day to help with the children. "Only the best, Rosa," I said. "I wish you health and strength, only the best."

Moritz walked a few paces toward me to say goodbye. “You and your family will live in Palestine,” he said. “I should have applied years ago, as you did. I might have had a chance to go there. Now, I am lucky I can go anywhere. You know, I had to get a map of South America to see where Bolivia was. I am fifty-three years old. God knows what future I have there.”

Because it was not wise for Sal to travel out of Halle, I was the one who made the trips to the Zionist Bureau in Berlin. Even though I kept coming home empty-handed, we still expected our visas to be issued to us shortly. We decided to ship our possessions to Tel Aviv. We sorted our belongings for shipment and packed them in crates provided by a moving company.

The Nazis insisted on a complete record of everything a Jew planned to export. A tax, double the original purchase price, had to be paid on all items acquired after 1932. Sal had an innate sense of order and would have kept a detailed list even if this had not been demanded by government rules.

We packed sheets, towels, hand-embroidered tablecloths with matching monogrammed napkins, draperies, curtains and blankets. I had sets of milchtig and fleishig dishes for Pesach, Shabbos and Yom Tov, and for everyday use. Piece by piece, we wrapped cups, plates, serving dishes, six sets in all. Sets of silver service, including fish forks, cake forks, and demitasse spoons went into cartons with cut crystal vases, silver platters, the menorah, and my two candlesticks. We packed lamps, framed paintings, and studio portraits of our parents.

We made an appointment with the movers to crate our furniture. Because so many Jewish families were sending their household belongings out of the country, there was a long wait. The last week in January was the earliest date available. By then, Sal would have left for France.

Sal packed Markus’s clothes in a heavy carton and tied a rope securely round the box. Then, he carefully printed his father’s name and address in Mielec, Poland on each panel of the box, and left for the post office.

While he was gone, I rested in a chair with my newspaper. Unaccustomed to such midday leisure, I dozed off. When I awoke and looked at my watch, I realized at once that Sal had been gone for three hours. It should not have taken that long at the post office. Something was wrong.

I began to pace, wondering if I should go after him. I was not certain of the route Sal had taken. If I missed him, he might return and not find me. Why had I not gone with him? I went downstairs and looked up and down the street. Seeing nothing, I decided to go upstairs and wait a little longer. The relief I felt when Sal returned an hour later was almost as great as when he came home from Buchenwald.

“I had a little trouble,” he said.

The line at the post office had not been particularly long. Within ten minutes it was Sal’s turn. He put the carton on the counter and the clerk checked the address. Then he said, “One moment,” and disappeared into an inner office.

Sal felt a hand grip his shoulder and a uniformed man at his side said, “Come with me. You are under arrest.” Sal protested that he had done nothing, but the officer said, “Pick up the box. We will see at police headquarters.”

At the police station, the arresting officer announced, “We’ve caught another smuggler. The Jew was in the post office with this very large box. Will these swine never learn that they cannot get away with this kind of thing?”

Sal had protested that his package had only clothing for his father in Poland. “Go ahead, open it,” he had pleaded.

At that moment Police Chief Kaese had appeared. “What, you again, Kanner?”

“This Jew has a huge carton, and pretends it is clothing for his father,” the policeman told his superior.

“Listen, Kanner,” Kaese had said. “Your people spend all their time trying to get valuables out of the country illegally. Of course the police were suspicious. Give the officer some money and he will forget about the matter.”

Kaese rubber-stamped and initialed the package. “Now go and send the old man his things. Tell the postal clerk I approved it. Go.”

Sal had to make one more stop at the police station to give official notice of his departure. He was told what he already knew: He could take with him only personal clothing and ten marks. What he had not expected and did not understand was the command he purchase three first-class train tickets to the

border.

“More extortion,” I said when I heard the order. “You are paying for a free trip to the mountains for two Nazis.”

At eight o’clock on January 14, 1939, Sal and I sat down to our last breakfast together at the Reilstrasse apartment. He ate hurriedly. “I want to be at the station a half hour before the train goes, Mia. Drink your coffee, please.”

“It’s only a few minutes after eight, Sal,” I said.

“Is my suitcase ready? Did you remember to pack my slippers?”

“Yes, Sal. Have another roll. It will be a long train ride,” I said.

When we stepped out of the apartment building, Sal carefully turned to the right and crossed the street. He had done this each time he left the apartment since his return. The store occupied the space to the left of the building entrance, and Sal strenuously avoided looking at the gentile standing behind the counter of his store.

On the train platform in the station, Sal and I were joined by two young officers of the Gestapo. “Give me your tickets, Kanner,” one said. “We are traveling with you to make sure you get to the border.”

“Say goodbye to your wife, and let’s move,” ordered the second.

Twenty-five minutes remained before the train was due to depart. I thought there would be more time before Sal had to board the train. With the Gestapo men standing by, Sal looked into my eyes and whispered farewell. Then he picked up his suitcase and said, “I’m ready.”

“Heil Hitler,” said the Gestapo man and climbed onto the train behind Sal.

CHAPTER 15

ESCAPE WITH SMUGGLERS' HELP

“There wasn’t supposed to be a patrol.”

Winter and spring of 1939 seemed an unending trip between Leipzig, Halle and Berlin. I traveled between these cities so often that the conductors began to greet me when they punched my ticket. If they knew I was Jewish, they never gave any indication of it. I would gaze at the passing landscape and take comfort from the fact that I was just like everyone else in the car. For the length of the journeys, my primary identity was a passenger on a train, not a Jew without a home.

My legal residence was now at a dressmaker’s apartment. Immediately after Sal’s departure for France, I had gone to the Judenrat. Herr Neman had shown me a list of available homes and said, “The room you rent is your official address. You must sign the register at least once a week. Be sure to be there at least that often.”

“Yes, I know the rules. It is the same in Leipzig. My father’s apartment has been designated a Jewish residence. You know, Herr Neman, the girls are staying with him, so I need only a small room for myself. But I would like it to be near the railroad station.”

The first home I looked at was that of a middle-aged dressmaker. Frau Feldman was a sad, gray-haired woman with straight pins stuck in a neat row on the lapel of her faded smock. Her sewing machine stood in the living room, where she now also slept.

The seamstress led me through the narrow hall of the apartment. “My bedroom is occupied by two aged spinsters who have been driven out of their home. They keep to themselves and come out only to prepare meals three times a day. Of course, I keep a kosher kitchen.” She opened a door at the end of the hall. “The room faces the street. It is my son’s bedroom. He is twenty-three years old. He is in Buchenwald.”

The single bed was covered with a blue and tan striped spread that matched the

wallpaper in the narrow room. The other pieces of furniture were a desk and chair and a dresser. A globe stood on the desk, and a framed diploma from Halle University hung on the wall. These were the sole reminders of the boy who had occupied the room. It was to be my new home.

“I shall be coming in a few days, as soon as I finish closing my home,” I said.

The seamstress nodded impassively and handed me a key. I walked out wondering which would be worse: boarding in someone else’s home, or having strangers occupy my dining room and bedrooms and sharing my kitchen?

Four large trunks with clothing, linen and bedding, and the crates filled with dishes and silver were lined up against the walls ready for the movers. One project remained before they came. I still had books to pack, almost three hundred volumes that Sal and I had accumulated. These included biographies of great Jewish thinkers, books about Jewish history and Eretz Yisrael and bound editions of Jewish classics.

By far, the most valuable and venerated set of books in our house had been Markus’s Gemara, hand-bound in leather. It was a 1789 edition and had been handed down from father to son for generations. As I was looking at my bound editions of Goethe, Schiller, Heine and Schopenhauer, I thought of the beautiful, priceless holy volumes that the Nazis had ripped to shreds. The torn, crumpled pages and strips of leather had been scattered all over the floor. It occurred to me now that the Nazis must have used knives to cut up the holy books, and I felt the stab of the knives in my heart.

I was overcome again by that same grief and anguish that had enveloped me when I first faced the dreadful disorder perpetrated by the filthy Nazis in Markus’s sanctuary. Rage overcame my pain. In an explosive movement of sheer violence, I swept the German classics from the shelves onto the bare floor. One by one, I picked them up and methodically destroyed them. All that remained from my extensive German collection were a dozen books written by Jews—Heinrich Heine, Sholom Aleichem and Franz Werfel. These I dusted and packed.

Hot and exhausted, I sank into an upholstered chair, surrounded by boxes filled with torn-up books. I realized that when the janitor came to carry out the cartons, he would see that I had “desecrated” the German books. So I trampled the shredded pages in the cartons to flatten them. Then I covered the remnants of the

books with cleaning rags and old newspapers.

That evening I telephoned my sister in Paris and found Sal was at my sister's house. I told him he was not to worry. I had finished packing, and I had found a new home near the railroad station.

A few days later, five men from the moving company arrived. Piece by piece, they crated my furniture, the foreman calling out each item and checking it off on the list Sal had prepared. The men loaded the crates on wooden dollies and trucked them down the flights of stairs to the waiting van.

"These crates will be stored in our warehouse," the foreman said. "I cannot tell you when they will be shipped abroad. It may be several months. You will be advised. Heil Hitler."

Politely, I said, "Thank you." I no longer trembled when men said "Heil Hitler." As long as the tone and the speaker were not threatening, the words did not matter any more, hateful though they were.

In my coat, I walked through the empty rooms, turning out the lights, hearing the echoes of my heels on the bare floor. Without the draperies and the furniture, my paintings and china plates on the wall, without my family filling the rooms, the apartment no longer felt like my home. I had expected to be distressed to leave my home of almost ten years, but nothing remained except my suitcase. I shrugged, picked up the valise, and closed the door behind me.

That night, I passed the first of many lonely hours in the young man's room at the dressmaker's house.

I spent as much time in Leipzig as I deemed safe. Thirteen strangers, members of five Jewish families, lived in my father's apartment. They ranged in age from a couple in their eighties who occupied my old room, to a one-month-old infant, born while his father was in Buchenwald.

Soon after I was forced to vacate my Halle apartment, the young mother secured approval to return to her parents in Hungary. "They are leaving next week, Mia," my father told me. "I have persuaded our Judenrat not to send anyone else. The girls will be able to sleep in the den." He led me into the living room, which he had kept for himself. "I am trying to train Lea to stay out of the bedroom," he said, "but she wants to run everywhere. It is very crowded, but we manage. Each

family has its time in the kitchen. Everyone keeps to the schedule I made up.”

In the dining room, the wife of a bank clerk had set up two canvas cots for her two sons. Suitcases and trunks lined all the available wall space. My father’s boarders had either stored or abandoned their furniture. But all had brought clothing and linen, radios, framed photographs of beloved family members, favorite objects. The old couple came with three potted cactus plants. The apartment was congested and noisy. There was a constant coming and going, to the kitchen, to the bathroom, to the street, and back after a walk or a trip to the grocery store. Each family tried to maintain its privacy, but even when the doors were closed, I could hear the residents talking or playing their radios.

“The bathroom is actually a bigger problem than the kitchen,” my father said. “Each boarder is allowed one bath a week and gets half an hour in the bathroom for it. The trouble is that as soon as he steps into the tub, someone needs the toilet. So now we announce, ‘bath time in fifteen minutes.’” Lea jumped up and down, chanting, “Bath time, bath time.” Papa picked her up and bounced her on his knee. “Soon you will do this job without me.”

Short and slim, my father was already in his sixties, and I knew that he was physically weakened by an intestinal ailment. I marveled at his acceptance of all these strangers into his home. How well he had organized everyone. I had not given any thought to his problems when I had sent my children to him. I certainly lacked his equanimity. Sitting in the living room, I resented not being able to make a cup of tea because Frau Muller was preparing supper in the kitchen, my mother’s kitchen, the warm, comfortable room, where I had learned to cook and bake.

One day, when Ruth came home from school, she said excitedly, “Mama, guess what! We had a contest to see who had the most people living in her apartment. Rivkah shares her house with twenty-one other people. Imagine!” Thus, it was my oldest daughter who made me see how self-centered my attitude was.

I learned from Sal that scheming and subterfuge had become an accepted tool of survival everywhere. Soon after his arrival in Paris, Sal visited the Zionist Bureau in Paris for the visa I bought from the middleman. They were amazed at his request and told him, “There is no visa for you, Kanner. It does not exist.”

Sal thought he had heard wrong and said, “I don’t understand.”

The French Zionist explained how things were done now. “The document we issued was a ruse, just to get you out of Buchenwald, nothing more. You applied in Germany, and a true visa for you and your family will have to be issued by the Berlin office. Meanwhile, we are glad that you arrived safely in Paris.”

I kept up my journeys to the Zionist Bureau in Berlin, reminding the officials that I expected them to issue our five visas for Palestine. By now, I hated the Berlin Zionist officials, but I continued to pester them. I was afraid that if I ceased going there, I would be overlooked or forgotten. As it was, they told me more than once of Jews who had to leave Germany immediately or face certain death. “But your name is on our list, Frau Kanner, and you have to be patient just a little longer.” Sometimes on the long train trip back to Halle or Leipzig, I wondered why I bothered. Yet there seemed to be no other safe way to get out of Germany.

In Halle, I was lonely for my husband, and I missed the girls, but I could not spend all my time in Leipzig. I was required to be in my official residence. Every week, I signed the register at the dressmaker’s to prove that I actually stayed there. I was afraid that merely signing the book might not be enough. I did not know if I was being watched and decided it would be best to sleep at my official residence several times a week. Each time, I exchanged polite greetings with Frau Feldman. She was a good woman, but I never felt comfortable in her home.

Once a week, I went to our Halle bank to withdraw money for living expenses. Nazi regulations now allowed me one hundred marks, but many times I wheedled additional sums out of the bank officials. I continued to invent tales of special needs, and reinforced my pleas with occasional bribes.

I called on Herr Neman at the Judenrat to pay my assessment to the fund used to support the destitute Jews remaining in the city. I reported to him my lack of progress in my quest for our visas and obtained news of the dwindling number of Jews in Halle.

Neman was always courteous and pleasant. Forced into the position of heading the Judenrat, he doled out money to the needy and provided names of smugglers to those with funds who were willing to risk crossing the German border without any documents. It was Neman who arranged for Fanny’s daughter to emigrate to England. There Hanni would work as a chambermaid for a wealthy family in a London suburb. The indenture agreement stipulated that she remain in service

for a minimum of one year.

Once more, I went to the railroad station to bid farewell to one of our family. I stood back as Fanny held her daughter until we heard the platform conductor shout, "Last call." Afterwards, I helped Fanny pack her possessions, and she moved to Berlin to live with her sister-in-law.

Hanni sent me a photograph of herself wearing a black uniform with a stiff, white half-apron and white eyelet cap. "I dust and make beds all day," she wrote. "There are eighteen rooms in the mansion. The mistress seems satisfied with me."

Sal's last remaining relative in Halle came to my room one evening. She was gaunt and harried and obviously not looking after herself. Her white blouse was wrinkled, and the black scarf was frayed. Her husband Mendel was in Belgium, released from Buchenwald with a forged document. Like Sal, Mendel had no choice but to flee and leave his family behind.

"Where are you staying, Marthe?" I asked.

"We have a room near the Judenrat office. Four of us sleep in two single beds. I share one with my little daughter Elsa, and the twins have the other. The boys fought constantly, until we came up with the idea of taking the bed apart at night. Now they take it in turns to sleep on the box spring."

"Children get used to new surroundings," I said. "The only thing my girls complain about is that I'm not with them all the time. I wish I could offer you some coffee, Marthe, but it's not my turn in the kitchen."

"It's all right. I couldn't swallow anything anyhow. Tante Mia, I located a smuggler who will take us to Belgium. It took a long time to find a man who was willing to take three children." Marthe was rubbing her wedding band with her thumb. "He wants one thousand marks," she said.

"He will take all four of you for that sum?" I asked.

"Yes, but I only have two hundred marks. I don't know what to do."

What would Sal have done if he were here? I knew everyone in his family had always counted on him, and I decided. "I will give it to you," I said. "Now, don't

cry, Marthe. Don't say anything. I have ways of getting extra money from the bank, and you know I can't take it out of Germany. What else shall I do with it? You are family."

"Tante Mia, I don't know how to thank you. We can leave the day after tomorrow. Oh, I've lived in Halle all my life, and now I can't wait to get away."

A week later, I was brooding about being the only member of the Kanner family left in Halle when Marthe came again to my room. For just a moment, I thought I was imagining things, but there she stood, more distraught than on her last visit.

"Marthe! I thought you'd left. What happened?"

"We didn't make it." She dropped her pocket on the floor and sank down on the bed. "Thursday morning we took the train to the last stop in Germany. We reached the border village in the evening. The smuggler took us to a cafe. We sat there for two hours. The proprietor let us stay long after we finished our sandwiches. The boys thought the coming journey was an adventure and were eager to start. At eleven o'clock we began to walk. The smuggler led us out of the village onto a dirt road. Then we crossed a wheat field. The smuggler told us to wear good walking shoes, but the grain was high and hard to walk through, especially for Elsa. She's only eight. We pushed through the stalks for two hours. I have no idea when we left Germany and crossed into Belgium. It was dark and it all looked the same.

"Finally we reached a dirt path, hardly wide enough for one person. The smuggler said, 'You are in Belgium. Walk on this path and in half an hour you will see railroad tracks next to the road on the right. Follow the tracks for about fifteen minutes and you will reach the Belgian village. The train for Brussels stops there at two-forty. You will have plenty of time to make it. Here are your tickets.'

"It was just as the smuggler had said. We reached the village and were in sight of the station. It was no more than a small wooden building on one cement platform. A Belgian policeman appeared unexpectedly and asked for our papers. Of course, we had no legal permits to be in Belgium. The policeman put us on a train back to Germany. We arrived back in Halle late the next afternoon."

We sat in silence for a few minutes.

Marthe rose from the bed and prepared to go. "I've got to get back to the children. I just wanted you to know."

I bent down and picked up Marthe's handbag. "I'm sorry, Marthe. You were brave to go. I wish it had worked out."

"It's not your fault, Tante Mia," Marthe said.

A few days later, I met Marthe at the Judenrat. She was smiling. "Guess what! I found another smuggler who will take children. The man said there are no guarantees, but I must try again. We have to get to Mendel in Brussels, and I need you to give me another thousand marks."

Marthe had changed, I thought. She was no longer asking for money. She was demanding it. "Marthe, it is up to you to decide what is best. Come to me tomorrow. I will have the money for you."

Sitting on the train after another fruitless trip to Berlin, I wondered about Marthe. I thought of her often. She had taken a terrible risk with her children. I had heard of Jews caught while trying to escape and being sent to concentration camps. Such reports were not unusual. I had heard such a story in the Zionist office just that day. Jews vanished, and no one could say if they had been arrested by the Nazis or had surreptitiously escaped.

There seemed to be so many arrests. How much longer would we be safe in Germany? If I hired a smuggler, I would have to carry Lea all the way. Was there any truth to the latest promise of the Zionist official? "Your visa might come through in three weeks."

As the train approached Halle, I reached the answer I always did during these discussions I had with myself. I decided once more that it was better to wait than to take the risk of hiring a smuggler.

In the railway terminal a stranger bumped into me. "Marthe is in Brussels," he whispered and disappeared into the crowd of travelers.

CHAPTER 16

SUMMONS TO A NAZI COURT

“The Nazis know where every Jew is all the time.”

In my father’s house, the kitchen schedule was set aside for Pesach. The bank clerk’s family folded up the cots and moved its belongings out of the dining room. Each family packed its dishes, pots, and utensils and found space for the cartons in various closets. Women who had been strangers last Pesach worked together like sisters to scrub the kitchen of all traces of chametz. Together, we moved my father’s Pesach dishes and pots onto the newly-lined shelves. With these preparations complete, the boarders pooled their food and prepared the seder feast.

The delicious smell of Frau Stein’s chicken soup wafting through the house and the extra leaves in the dining room table reminded me of Mama’s seder long ago. In those days, at least a dozen people joined us. Hannah and I would set the table with Mama’s gold-rimmed Pesach china, just as Ruth and Eva were doing now.

Frau Miller was chopping nuts on the cutting board for charoses. Someone else was grinding horseradish for marror, and Papa was roasting the bone to represent the seder lamb and arranging it on the seder plate.

Dressed in their best clothes, the boarders entered the festive dining room at sundown. Papa greeted all of them as if they had been specially invited, not arbitrarily thrown together by the Nazis. With everyone present, Papa raised the silver becher and chanted the Yom Tov Kiddush and the berachah over the first cup of wine.

Presiding over the Seder in his black broadcloth suit, he looked handsome and self-assured. Yet he had aged. His jacket hung loosely over his hips when he stood at the head of the table; I realized he had lost weight in the past year. Wisps of white strayed over his lined forehead as he nodded to seven-year-old Herschel Muller. Haltingly, the young boy began to recite the Ma Nishtanah: “Wherefore is this night different from any other night?” My father answered the age-old question in a weak voice, recounting the exodus from Egypt.

When the seudah was over, the children ran to open the door for the prophet Elijah. They joined in the singing, managing to stay at the table until Chad Gadyah. All of us ignored the Nazis patrolling the streets below.

“Next year in Jerusalem” Papa intoned.

Fervently, we echoed his words.

Jerusalem! Would I ever get there? Just before Pesach, I had been to Berlin again. The director had appeared tense.

“Frau Kanner,” he said wearily. “It is imperative that we get three men out of Matthausen.”

“But you assured me—”

“Don’t you see? Those men would have been murdered. No one here will harm a woman with three little girls. Please, I beg you to have a little more patience.”

At night, in my small room, I had trouble sleeping. I could not find a comfortable position in the bed of a boy who had been incarcerated in a concentration camp. He should be here. And I should be in my own bed, in my own house, with my own family.

The linden trees were budding. Three months had gone by since Sal left Germany. I was afraid I would never see Sal again, never get out of Germany, never again have a home for my children. I shifted from side to side under the young man’s quilt. I heard the clatter of fire bells. The fire trucks seemed much too close. I jumped out of bed, ran barefoot to the single window.

The street below was deserted except for a mongrel dog sleeping in a stoop across the way. I realized I had been dreaming. Back in bed, I pulled the quilt over my head and heard the fire bells ringing again.

During the day, a Nazi patrol swaggered past me, four young men in brown uniforms with swastika armbands and swastika insignia on their peaked caps. I heard the scream of the fire engines, yet people in the street continued their stroll in the midday spring sun, oblivious to any danger. Didn’t they hear the alarm?

I felt dizzy. I breathed in the spring air to steady myself. I was able to walk on,

but I could not stop the ringing in my head.

I went to see Herr Neman. “I have terrible headaches,” I told him. “And something is wrong with my ears. I hear ringing all the time.”

“I know a doctor in Leipzig,” he said. “She is Jewish, so she can’t practice, of course. But go to her the next time you’re there. Maybe she can help you. Send her my greetings. Let me know what she says.”

Two days later, I located the building in which the doctor lived, a five-story apartment house decorated with hideous gargoyles. I climbed to the second floor and knocked on the door. A tall woman with formal bearing and iron gray hair opened it.

I spoke first. “I wish to see Dr. Milstein.”

The woman looked at me for a few seconds, and my head began pounding under her scrutiny.

“Herr Neman sent me.”

At the mention of Neman’s name, the woman’s eyes softened. “Come in. I am Dr. Milstein.”

She led me into a living room, furnished with a deep green sofa and matching easy chairs. The russet draperies blended with the splendid Persian rug. The luxuriant furnishings contrasted with the severity of Dr. Milstein’s gray suit.

“Herr Neman sends his warmest regards,” I said.

“Thank you. Please sit down. How may I help you?”

“It’s my ears, doctor. I hear ringing all the time, and I have terrible headaches.”

“The Nazis closed my office, but I am still a doctor. I salvaged some of my equipment and small instruments. Sit in the straight chair, and let me examine you.”

When Dr. Milstein finished her physical examination, she led me to the sofa and said, “You are in perfect health. I find no physical cause for your problem.”

“But the headaches are unbearable.”

“Tell me about yourself. How old are you? Where is your husband? Are your children with you?”

After I had answered her questions, she said, “Your headaches and the ringing in your ears are brought on by tension. It is not uncommon in these times.”

I began to tremble. The doctor took my hands and stroked them gently. With this simple act of concern, I gave in to the feeling of helplessness I had been fighting all winter. She put her arms around me and let me weep. After a while, she placed a soft white handkerchief in my lap and left the room. When she returned, she was carrying a teapot and cups on a silver tray.

“It’s understandable that you are distressed,” she said as she poured tea. “Now, you must get a hold of yourself. I cannot write a prescription. You would have trouble finding a pharmacist who would risk filling it.”

The hot tea had relaxed me, but her reference to the strictures against Jewish physicians made me anxious again.

“Fortunately, I have some medicine left from my office,” Dr. Milstein said. She placed an envelope, filled with pills, into my hands. “Take one of these in the morning and one before you go to bed. And you must stop worrying so much. Worrying will not get you a visa.”

What will give me a visa? I wondered that night, and on many other nights afterwards.

In May, 1939, the Nazis announced a new regulation. Jews were prohibited from exporting silver. Silverware was the only exception, but the number of settings was limited to the number of persons in the immediate family. I received an order to appear at the warehouse where our crates were stored.

Sal and I had packed not only sets of silverware but also silver vases, platters and serving bowls. The crates also held my tall, antique leichter, three kiddush cups, our besomim halter, and menorah. I was incensed that the Nazis’ “regulations” would affect us even into the future, to the time when we arrived in Palestine. Whenever I would bench light, and whenever Sal would make Havdalah or light the menorah, we would remember the Nazis. But though they

would take these holy items, they could not take my faith. I would place candles on an ordinary plate and usher in Shabbos, as Sal would place his candles to commemorate Chanukah. We could drink Kiddush wine from glass goblets, and store besomim in glass bowls. The Nazis could not keep us from our mitzvos.

In the huge, drafty storage room, an SS officer stood by as a clerk pried open the boxes containing our household possessions. The clerk removed the cloth cover from the first crate and picked up a small velvet jewelry box. With a bored expression, he opened it and held up three silver bracelets, the gifts Sal had brought back from his trip to Palestine in 1935. The SS man looked at the list I had submitted with the shipment.

“You claim you are exporting household silver only,” he said. “What about this jewelry? I don’t see it on your list.”

“But these are just trinkets,” I protested. “At the last minute we decided not to wear them and tossed them in the crate. These plain silver bands belong to my children; they are worth almost nothing.”

“They are silver. They are not on the list.” His tone was ominous, and my exasperation turned into alarm.

“Now,” the SS man asked, “Is there anything else?”

“No, no, of course not.”

“We shall see.”

They spent the rest of the day emptying crates and trunks and checking each item we had packed against our list. Every single item was listed except the bracelets. I knew they would find nothing else; Sal was too meticulous a record-keeper. I stood for hours, and my feet ached, but I refused to sit on one of the dusty trunks. I was not going to appear weak.

Two days later, in Leipzig, a policeman came to the door of my father’s house, announcing he had a summons for Amalia Kanner. My hands shook when I heard my full name. Why had the police come here to Nordstrasse when my official residence was in Halle?

My father took the document and closed the door without uttering a word. “This

orders you to appear at the Magistrate's Court in Magdeburg the day after tomorrow," he said.

"Papa," I whispered. "They are watching me. How did they know I was in Leipzig? I register in Halle every week. I thought if I slept in my room once or twice a week, it would be enough. Now, I've put you and the children in danger."

"You have to hide, Mia," Papa said. "We must find a place."

"There is no place to hide anymore. They're watching us, all of us, all the time. They know where we're supposed to stay, where I sleep, where I go, where you live. They know where every Jew is all the time."

"You can't go to Magdeburg," he argued.

"If I don't go, it will be worse. They will come and arrest me. I'm afraid for you and the children."

"No, Mia, no!" he cried.

Once before I had heard my father wail with this same anguish—when the doctor told him Mama had suffered a stroke and would be confined to a wheelchair.

"Papa, you must get the children out of Germany. Get them out any way you can. You must find a way."

CHAPTER 17

ON TRIAL

“I felt separated from all the people I loved.”

“What’s wrong?” Ruth asked me the next morning.

I hesitated. The two big ones knew something was wrong, but how could I explain the summons to them? Papa would have to see to it. “Nothing,” I lied, smoothing her shining brown hair. “I have to go to Magdeburg, but I’ll be back in a few days, the same as always. Be good and listen to Opa.”

Lea pulled at the sleeve of my spring suit. “Bring me chocolate, Mama,” she pleaded.

“All right, but you must be a good girl.”

“We’ll all be good while you’re gone,” Eva promised solemnly.

On the train to Magdeburg, I was convinced I was going to prison, yet I could not imagine myself incarcerated. I kept picturing my arrival at the courthouse, but I could not think beyond that. I felt totally alone. I was separated from my father and children in Leipzig, from Sal in Paris, from all the people I loved. I felt separated from things, from our home on the Reilstrasse, from all my belongings still crated in that dreadful warehouse in Halle.

I no longer have a home, I thought. For the first time since I had left the Reilstrasse, I wondered who was living in my apartment. Did the new tenants like the rooms as I had them rebuilt before moving in? Had they repaired the noisy motor in the icebox?

At the courthouse, I presented my summons and was directed to a waiting room where I joined eight or ten men. They were silent and apprehensive, their faces grim. The silence was broken periodically when a door opened and a guard called out a name.

I longed to ask, “How long will I have to wait?” But no one else spoke. I stared

uneasily at the Roman numerals of the wall clock. The second hand circled around and around, stroking the black numbers. At eleven o'clock when the door opened once more, I heard my name. Moving past a line of seated people, an old man smiled gently at me. The unexpected support steadied me as I followed the guard out of the waiting room.

The courtroom had windows on three sides. I blinked, trying to adjust my eyes to the bright sunlight streaming into the chamber. A large photograph of Hitler filled the wall between the windows. It hung directly behind the magistrate. The bench was elevated, and the judge towered over me. The shining mahogany desk, formed a forbidding wall between him and me.

I cursed my four-foot eleven-inch frame. My neck hurt as I forced myself to look up at the judge, a huge man, enveloped in a black robe. I was amazed at how large his forehead was, but then I realized he was completely bald. His head was a ball of gleaming skin. I felt the glare of his spectacles, the glare of the many window panes, the glare of the glass covering the photograph of Hitler.

“Amalia Kanner.” My name echoed harshly through the courtroom, and I cringed. “Amalia Kanner, you are accused of attempting to smuggle silver out of Germany. Answer the charge.”

“No, no, Your Honor, everything was declared. You talk of three bracelets. They had only sentimental value.”

“The silver bracelets were found in your crate and not declared,” the judge said.

“I intended to wear them sir, but at the last moment tossed them into the carton. In the rush to finish packing, I forgot to write them down.”

“Forgot!” the magistrate thundered.

“It was not intentional,” I whispered.

“Speak up,” he ordered.

“It was not intentional.”

The magistrate plucked his pen from the inkwell and wrote. The ringing in my head was incredibly loud. I felt myself swaying in front of the bench. I heard the

firm voice of Dr. Milstein tell me, “You must get hold of yourself.” I breathed deeply.

“Two thousand marks,” I heard the magistrate say. “Pay within two days.”

I stood unsteadily, waiting for the sentence.

“Pay the fine,” the judge bellowed. “Go, go, go! Next case.”

The guard led me out of the courtroom to the clerk. He sat behind a barred window, and recorded my fine. And that was it. I was free.

Outside the courthouse, I took deep breaths of the spring air, clutching the priceless paper that said I was free. Then I started to run and did not stop running until I reached the railroad station. I jumped onto the blessedly-waiting train and fell asleep. I slept until the conductor woke me as the train pulled into Leipzig.

My eyes filled with tears just walking through that familiar station, passing the schedule boards, the waiting room, the information booth. Then I was out of the station, ready to return to my children. Before I boarded the trolley back to the Nordstrasse, I remembered Lea’s request. I stopped in a candy shop and bought the three largest bars of milk chocolate in the store.

CHAPTER 18

FLYING OUT

“Halle will be Judenrein.”

By June of 1939, the number of Jews in Halle had dwindled to less than fifty. With so few Jews remaining, the Nazis closed the Halle Judenrat and ordered Neman to join the office in Leipzig.

At the same time, I was ordered by government officials to pay the export tax on my household belongings. I paid the tax, and our crates were finally shipped to Tel Aviv. This step was very important. To me, it was tangible evidence that we would get out. If the Germans let me ship the crates, they would let me and my family go. I visualized all our possessions in Palestine. Perhaps the old dream that we might be together and contribute to the building of the Jewish homeland, the dream that I had all but abandoned in these last weeks, would yet become reality.

In Halle, I felt isolated and alone. When I was with my father and my children in Leipzig, I felt more secure. I took comfort from the Jewish community that still existed there. The children still went daily to the Jewish school. Old men still came together for a minyan, and Jewish families were still together both in my father's home and in the other designated apartments on the Nordstrasse.

Although I had little business left in Halle, I knew it was imprudent not to be there and sign Frau Feldman's register. So I shuttled back and forth between Halle and Leipzig. I also continued making fruitless journeys to Berlin each week. My hope that the girls and I would escape from Germany alternated with my fear that I would be arrested again. If I were caught again, I would not escape with a mere fine. Of that I was sure. But I was equally certain that I could not take the kind of risk that Marthe had taken, no matter how strenuously Sal argued that I should.

When I telephoned Sal after my trial to tell him I was safe, he said, “Thank God. I was a hundred times more frightened when I knew you were in Magdeburg than when the Gestapo took me away during the pogrom. This is the best news I could have heard.”

“For me, also, Sal.”

“We can no longer wait and count on the Zionist Bureau. We must look for another way.”

“What way?”

“I will go to Karfiol.”

Karfiol was Markus’s cousin. When Karfiol’s business collapsed during World War I, Markus had taken him into his home. Karfiol stayed there for months until he reestablished himself in Belgium. Then, for no particular reason, the men lost contact with each other.

When Sal discovered that Karfiol owned a lingerie shop in an exclusive section of Paris, he decided to visit. My sister tried to discourage him. “A rich man like Karfiol will want nothing to do with a poor refugee like you,” Hannah said. “He will throw you out of his store.”

Hannah was wrong. Karfiol had been delighted to see Sal and took him to his opulent home for lunch. He urged Sal to visit regularly. Sal accepted this hospitality, but he refused Karfiol’s offers of cash, asking him to send the money to Markus in Poland.

All this Sal had told me during our frequent telephone calls. Now Sal described a plan Karfiol had devised. Karfiol would send his limousine to a designated point, just inside France. I was to find a smuggler who would lead us to that spot across the Franco-German border. A chauffeur would meet us there and drive us to Paris. Sal thought it was a generous offer and a good plan, but in my view it was too risky.

I thought of Marthe struggling across the wheat fields. What if Ruth or Eva became too tired to go on in the middle of the night? What then? And Lea was a baby, not even three years old. She would have to be carried much of the way. Suppose she cried out? How far were the Gestapo patrols from the smuggler’s route? What if we were picked up?

Sal and I talked for a long time on two separate evenings. I knew he was afraid for us and wanted us to leave immediately, but he did not fully comprehend how hard it would be with children, even children as good and responsible as our

girls. It was just too dangerous. I would not undertake such a dangerous journey.

“You and Karfiol must find another, safer way,” I insisted.

The next time I spoke to Sal, he gave me a cryptic message. “Go to the French Consul in Leipzig tomorrow morning. Give him your name, and tell him to check the diplomatic pouch.”

“Yes, and...?”

“I can’t say any more, Mia. It will be all right. I know it.”

At the consular office, I identified myself to the receptionist and said, “Please ask the Consul to check the diplomatic mail.”

I saw a momentary flicker of suspicion in the woman’s eyes. Then she pushed back her chair and got up. “Stay here, Madame.”

I waited, my mind a blank. The minutes passed.

I did not hear the receptionist return to the waiting room and was startled by the sound of her voice. “The Consul will see you. Please follow me.”

I entered a small room dominated by the broad blue, white and red stripes of the tricolor hanging on a flagpole behind his desk. The Consul rose when I entered his office.

“Please sit down, Madame. You have identification?”

I sat on the edge of the seat and handed the Frenchman my passport.

“Yes, yes, very good,” he said with a smile. “I have a letter from our Banque Nationale that you have an account totaling one million francs. On the strength of these assets, the French government is pleased to issue an entry visa for you and your three children. It will take me a few minutes to fill out the forms.”

Now I understood the ploy. I leaned back in the chair while he wrote. It was Karfiol’s money. That was how they did it. Karfiol opened an account in my name and put one million francs in it.

“Voila, Madame,” the Consul said. “Here are the visas. It is my pleasure to give them to you. I trust you will have a good journey to our country and a safe stay there.”

I rushed back to my father’s house. “We’re getting out,” I shouted. “Papa, Papa! A genuine exit visa! Look at this wonderful document. It’s real. The Consul himself filled it out and signed it while I was there. No smugglers or scheming or middlemen. We can go!”

The joy on my father’s face made him look young in spite of the wrinkles on his forehead.

“Papa, you know what I’ve decided to do? We’ll go by airplane. I’ve had enough of German trains.”

During my last week in Germany, I purchased five first class boat tickets for passage from Marseilles to Tel Aviv. Then I went to Huth’s Department Store in Halle for the last time. I chose a summer suit of blue silk with a hat to match. For the girls I selected pastel cotton dresses with short puffed sleeves edged with white lace. I was going to travel to Paris in style.

I had one last encounter with Nazi officialdom in Halle. A few days before our departure, I was summoned to the police station. This was about the life insurance policy Sal had taken out after our marriage, and on which he had been paying regular premiums. As always with the Nazis, I had no say in the matter. I was handed a fully completed form, agreeing to give up all our rights in the policy; but the payments he had made were to be kept by the insurance company. The official handed me a pen and said “Your name here. Amalia Sara Kanner, nee Azderbal.” I signed as directed, including the addition of Sara to my name as the Nazis required. With this signature, I legalized another theft by Hitler’s henchmen. But what did it matter? I hardly cared. I was getting out.

Three thousand marks remained in the bank account. I had spent a huge sum of money in eight months, almost fifty thousand marks. I had paid for Marthe’s smugglers, for the documents that freed Sal from Buchenwald, for the telephone calls. There was my fine and taxes. The export tax on our shipment was set at double the purchase value of everything acquired since 1932. Since ten marks was the limit each person was permitted to take out of Germany, I withdrew a final forty marks from the account and put the bills in my purse. All the rest of

the money I signed over to my father, amazed that the Nazis permitted it.

Coming out of the bank, I met Kaese. "So, you are going to Paris," he said.

"Yes, the day after tomorrow." It no longer mattered to me that the police knew my every move.

"Only a handful of you are left in Halle now," he said. "We will clear the remaining Jews out of the city soon. Yes, Halle will be Judenrein."

I said nothing. After Kaese finished spouting the official Nazi line, he said as pleasantly as always, "Well, give my greetings to your husband. I congratulate you."

I ran to my room at the seamstresses house to pack the few clothes I kept there. The sewing machine was whirring in the living room when I knocked on the door. "Frau Feldman, I am leaving. We have a visa for France."

"You are fortunate," Frau Feldman said. "The room shall remain empty. I do not believe my son will get out of Buchenwald. You did not disturb his things. I am grateful for that."

"Frau Feldman, thank you for sharing your home," I said. "I pray that God will help you and your son. Goodbye. I wish you well."

"Thank you," she said, and returned to her sewing.

In the time that I had lived with her, I had never seen her smile. I wondered what would become of Frau Feldman. She seemed to have no one and no place to go. Please God, don't let the Nazis take away her sewing machine.

At the warm, windy airport, I embraced my father, my tears mixing with his. My only regret was leaving him. He looked old and frail, his wispy, white hair blown unruly by the strong breeze. Until this moment, selfishly, I had counted on him without really worrying about him. He had taken in my children, an old man caring for three little girls. I realized that my father had never asked anything of me. It was my mother who had shaped my early years, had told me how to behave and what I could expect in life; but it was my father who was there for me.

“Go, daughter. Have a safe trip. Don’t worry about me. I’ll get out.”

I thought, “I shall never see him again.” I don’t know where this feeling came from; nor can I explain my conviction that our parting was final, but I was certain it was true, and I was filled with immeasurable sorrow.

I entered the small, one-engine plane that would take us to Cologne. There, we were to transfer to a flight for Paris. Single seats lined the two sides of the narrow plane. “Lea, you have to sit,” I said over the roar of the engine.

We moved along the airstrip. There was a sudden bounce, like a car hitting a rut on a country road, and we were off the ground.

“My ears feel funny,” I heard Ruth say.

“Look, look at the little houses,” Eva shouted. “It looks like a toy village down there. Oh, it’s all spinning around. I feel sick.”

“Here, in the paper bag,” I told her.

The stench of vomit filled the plane. All of the twenty-nine passengers on the plane were sick except for Lea. The child skipped gleefully up and down the aisle. I felt too ill to stop her.

When the plane landed at Cologne, the Jewish travelers, identified by the “J” stamped in their passports, were led to a low stone building. Immediately, the men were separated from the women. A steely-eyed matron wearing a man’s uniform ordered all of us to undress. Lea giggled; the two older girls obeyed quietly. Wide-eyed, we watched the matron turn pockets out and shake each item of clothing.

I stood in the warm room, holding Lea by the hand and shivered helplessly. After an eternity, the matron allowed us to get dressed. She folded her arms across her chest and stared at us. Her eyes filled with hate. I buttoned Lea’s dress and tied the bow at the back. I stroked her hair and hoped she did not feel the malice that emanated from that woman.

In a small outer office, an official stamped our passports and pointed to the French plane. The seats of the first class compartment were upholstered and so wide that two children could sit comfortably together if they wanted. A steward

offered me wine. I shook my head. I was afraid I would be sick again. The children ate little triangular sandwiches without the crust and drank milk out of wine glasses, chatting happily.

The plane circled over Paris. The landing was so smooth, I was not aware of the plane touching the ground. Walking down the ramp, surrounded by my children, I thought the girls looked just lovely in their new frocks. I felt glamorous in my stylish silk suit and gloriously happy.

“There’s Papa,” Eva shouted. “I see him. I see him.”

I looked toward the crowd behind the rope and saw my husband standing next to Hannah and Herman. I went toward them, the children running ahead of me. I felt elated. This is how it should be, I thought. I felt alive. For the first time in many months, I felt that I was a human being.

Book Three

July 1939-June 1940

Paris

CHAPTER 19

REUNITED IN PARIS

“We were swept up in an immense joyous celebration.”

We arrived in Paris in the middle of July, just in time to celebrate Bastille Day. Paris was the most beautiful city in the world. What was so marvelous about it was that after a separation of six months, Sal and I were together again. To be reunited in a land where Jews could stroll without encountering *Juden Verboten* signs, where Jews could sleep without fear of arrest in the night, where we could walk to shul openly, where kosher meats were readily available—all these made Paris wonderful.

For the first few days after our arrival, we stayed with Hannah and Herman in their apartment in Montmorency, a village some eighteen miles outside the capital. In her carpeted bedroom, my sister untied the short, pink silk cape that had protected her dress while she was applying makeup. We were getting ready to go to Paris.

She pushed away from the dressing table and scrutinized me carefully. “You should wear lipstick, Mia. All the women here do.”

“I don’t know, Hannah. In Halle, only actresses wore makeup.”

“You’re in France now, Mia. Come on, use mine.”

Hesitatingly, I obeyed. I sat in front of the mirror and rubbed the creamy, red lipstick along my lips. It smelled of lily-of-the-valley cologne.

“You’ll soon become so used to wearing lipstick, you won’t go out without it,” Hannah said. “The only other thing you have to do is move your wedding band to your left hand. Then you’ll look like any other French woman. If you wear your ring on your right hand, everyone will know you’re from Germany.”

On the 14th of July, everyone in the family, except Herman’s mother, Die Alte Felber, was going to Paris to join the Bastille Day celebrations: Hannah and Herman and their three-year-old daughter Rachel; my sister Edith; and Sal and I

and our three children.

Sitting in the train next to Sal, I felt self-conscious. Under my white gloves, the gold wedding band was pressing against my left ring finger. Sal assured me that I looked “nice” but I felt certain people were staring at me.

All my discomfort vanished by mid-afternoon when we arrived in the center of Paris. We were swept up in the immense, joyous celebration. The sidewalks were mobbed with exuberant men, women, and children. Everyone was shouting, singing, and dancing. Two young men marched side by side, playing harmonicas. Seconds later, an impromptu parade formed behind them, a dozen people cavorting gaily in time to the music. I couldn't help thinking of the contrast between this happy cavalcade and the ominous Nazi processions that had become so familiar to me.

We reached the Champs Elysees, where the tricolor and fleur de lis flags hung from the windows of the stately buildings. Herman bought ice cream for everyone, and my three daughters learned their first French word, *glacé*, ice cream.

Later in the afternoon, we found an empty bench in a small park. We ate the sandwiches Hannah had packed and waited for sunset. When it was dark, the fireworks began. Burst after burst of spectacular colors exploded against the dark sky: green, yellow, pink and white streaks of patterned lights. And still, there was music as bands played and people sang and danced.

It was almost midnight when we boarded the train back to Montmorency. Herman reversed one of the double seats so that he and Hannah could face Sal and me. On the ride home, all the children slept, Rachel on Hannah's lap, Lea on mine, and Ruth and Eva propped up against Edith, across the aisle.

“I've never seen anything like it,” said Sal.

“That was the biggest crowd I've ever seen at Bastille Day,” Herman said. “Everyone came because they don't think there'll be a celebration next year. There is a feeling that France and England will be at war with Germany.”

“War? Do you mean it?” I asked.

“Why do you seem so surprised?”

“I am surprised. In Germany, I never heard talk about war. We only knew what Hitler wanted us to know.”

“Just today, there was an article in the newspaper—”

“Not now, Herman,” I begged. “Don’t spoil the memory of this day. I want to remember the freedom and the excitement, the music and the fireworks, the feeling of camaraderie. Can you understand?”

“We’re almost at our station,” Hannah said. “I think we’ll have to carry our little ones back to the house.”

Although we stayed at Hannah’s the first few days, we could not remain with her indefinitely. After searching about, Sal rented a room in an ancient hotel in Montmorency. It was meant to sleep only four, but we pushed two single beds together to make room for a cot for Lea. Our clothes hung in a small wooden wardrobe with doors so warped, they were impossible to shut. The mattresses were infected with bedbugs, and I could find no disinfectant to get rid of them. The children scratched themselves incessantly while they slept.

In the mornings, they jumped off their beds and rushed out into the hotel hallway to line up for the communal toilet on the fourth floor. The first child out of the room grabbed the roll of toilet paper I stored on the floor of the wardrobe, so she would not have to use the torn newspapers supplied by the hotel.

Back in the room, the girls would sit cross-legged on their beds, watching Sal place the leather circlet of his tefillin onto his head and wrap the leather bands around his forearms. Then, Ruth and Eva took turns at the stained, porcelain sink, washing with the cold water that trickled from the single faucet. I dressed Lea, and Sal went out to buy milk and sweet, moist croissants for our breakfast.

In front of the single window stood a table. On it stood the old kerosene burner Hannah had found for us. Cooking was not permitted in the hotel, but Hannah assured us that the rule would not be enforced. I tried preparing meals in the hotel, but the burner did not work properly. I had to give up the effort and took my family to Hannah’s for our main meals.

The sooner this arrangement came to an end, the better. Sal spent his days in Paris trying to arrange passage to Palestine. It was still possible that the elusive legal visas would be issued to us, but during our first week together Sal and I

decided to chance going as illegal immigrants. If he could find a seaworthy ship to transport us across the Mediterranean, we would go. We would fund the trip by cashing the five first-class tickets from Marseilles to Tel Aviv I had purchased in Germany. If the refund did not cover the fee, Sal would ask Karfiol for the balance.

For five weeks, Sal followed every rumor bandied about by Jewish refugees. Still he did not manage to find passage for the family. Most of the vessels were small fishing boats that Sal judged unsafe for the long voyage. There was also a problem that had nothing to do with the size of the vessel. Without legal papers of passage, captains could not risk docking. The best they could do was lay anchor half a mile offshore. To reach land, passengers had to jump into the sea and swim or wade ashore. And there was still another problem, one that seemed insurmountable: Captains of the few large ships making the journey to Palestine refused to take children. They feared that the young ones would become ill during the voyage, or would be incapable of wading half a mile to dry land.

The children and I spent most of our time at Hannah's apartment. Old Frau Felber thought her son was being taken advantage of by his wife's family. He had taken one sister-in-law under his roof, and now a second one and her children were all over the house. I did my best to make myself useful by helping with the cleaning and food shopping, but no matter what I did, I was unable to shake that woman's resentment. All I could do was to be respectful and bear her silent disapproval.

Mama had taught us that as long as there was bread on the table, you did not turn away mishpachah. It had been my table in the past, and I had given gladly. Now, on the receiving end in my sister's house, I felt humiliated by the old woman's displeasure at our presence. Often at the crowded dinner table, the choking feeling that I had first experienced after Sal's arrest returned. Some evenings, I actually looked forward to returning to our dingy hotel room.

Strolling back to the hotel one warm August evening, Sal pointed to our girls skipping down the walkway. Ruth and Eva were holding Lea's hands and swinging her over the cracks in the sidewalk. All three were laughing.

"Remember what I said to you when I came back from Palestine in 1935?" he asked. "I said we couldn't all live in one room. Now I'm just glad to have my family with me. I thank God for that."

“I remember. How things change. When I took the girls out for a walk this afternoon, I thought it was marvelous just to be able to walk the streets again without being afraid.” Right then, even Frau Felber’s resentment didn’t bother me.

“Look how happy the children are,” Sal said. “They must have become used to cramped quarters, living in Leipzig with your father.”

“Sal,” I asked impulsively. “Can we afford the train fare to Paris? Just you and the big girls? They could travel for half price. You could take them to the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. Oh, let’s give them a treat!”

I thought it would be an outstanding experience for them to visit the most famous museum in the world, but the outing was not a success. In the Louvre, Sal pointed out the Mona Lisa and Winged Victory. But the children begged to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower. Sal could not bring himself to tell them that he did not have the money to pay for the elevator ride to the top of the monument. Instead, he told them the elevator was not running.

That night, when I asked the girls if they had liked the museum, Ruth said, “There was this big, dirty statue of a woman without arms. Mama, why does such a famous museum keep a broken statue?”

It was their last outing in Paris. Less than a week after the trip to the Louvre, Hitler’s troops invaded Poland, and France and England were at war with Germany.

CHAPTER 20

WAR BEGINS

“Jewish does not count; you are German, the enemy of France.”

On September 1, 1939, Hitler’s armies marched into Poland. I was standing in Hannah’s kitchen with the Alte Frau Felber peeling carrots and cleaning a chicken for Shabbos when I heard the news on the radio. The invasion had begun at daybreak.

I put down the paring knife and tried to absorb the news. “Is that good or bad, Frau Felber? What do you think?”

“First things first,” she replied sternly. “Shabbos will come in less than three hours. Finish peeling.”

All during Shabbos, I thought about Nazi armies on the march, wondering what would happen to Markus and other members of Sal’s family. They were still in Poland after the forced deportation that preceded Kristallnacht. The suspense ended Sunday, September 3. England and France were officially at war with Germany. It was a great relief that two major nations opposed Hitler and took a military stand against him.

The morning after war was declared, Sal went to buy milk and rolls for our breakfast at the hotel. A young French Jew stopped him along the way to tell him he had heard that all German nationals were to be interned. The decree included all Germans, even Jews.

We hurried through breakfast and rushed over to Hannah’s house. She confirmed the rumor.

“It’s true,” she said. “I heard the broadcast.”

I reacted in terror. “Sal! You have to go into hiding! Immediately! We have to find a place. Hannah, please. Help us.”

“No,” Sal said. “Forget about hiding. I have no money. I have no papers, except

for the monthly permit, and that identifies me as a German as well as a Jew. Where would I go?"

"I don't know. I don't care. You can't just wait until they take you," I cried.

"Calm down," Hannah said. "Maybe I can do something. It may not be hopeless. I'll call some people. Someone is bound to have some advice on hiding places, or something. But you have to calm down, Mia."

She need not have told me that. I knew I needed a clear head, but it was so difficult. Here I was in France, out of Germany, and we were being hounded again. It was no different in Paris than it had been in Halle. I had not escaped the turmoil and the fear.

Subdued but still distressed, we left the children with Hannah and went back to the hotel.

Before we had time to decide on a course of action, two gendarmes appeared at the door of our rundown room. "Salomon Kanner? You are under arrest. Come with us."

I stared at them in disbelief.

"I have done nothing. Why are you doing this? My papers are in order," Sal protested. He handed the gendarme his identity card.

"You are German; you are the enemy of France," one of them said. Then he produced the warrant. It was an order for Salomon Kanner, male, German citizen between the age of eighteen and fifty-five, to be immediately interned.

"But I am a Jew," Sal protested.

"That does not count. You are a German. Germans are the enemy of France. Get your clothes together and say goodbye to your wife. We shall wait for you downstairs."

I packed Sal's suitcase. What else was there to do?

"We should have found a place for you to hide," I said.

“It wouldn’t have mattered, Mia. They would have found me sooner or later, and then it would have been worse. I would have been charged with evading arrest.”

“Why is this happening? How can I lose you again?” I cried. “We were supposed to be safe here. They will take you to a camp.”

Sal handed me his tallis and tefillin and siddur. “Pack these, please. I’m sure they’ll let us daven openly. It won’t be another Buchenwald. The French are not the Nazis.”

“Here, you’d better take your winter coat.”

“Yes, thank you. Now, I had better go. They gave us time alone together, but they are waiting.”

We walked downstairs. The air of the small lobby was stale. The gendarmes were waiting outside the hotel, and we were alone.

“Mia, I believe this war is the best thing that could have happened because Hitler will be defeated. In the meantime, you have Hannah and Herman to help you with the children.”

I nodded mutely.

“Goodbye, my wife,” he said. “Tell the children I will be back.”

When? When would he be back?

I watched him go, carrying his winter coat over his arm in the French September sunshine.

I went back to Hannah’s house. During the afternoon, I played with the children, imagining Sal was in Paris searching for passage to Palestine. I continued on with the fantasy until evening. Only when Herman came home and I told him about Sal’s arrest did the full horror of the situation strike me.

“It doesn’t make any sense, Herman.” I ignored the chicken and tzimmes on my plate and twisted the white napkin in my hands. “The gendarme told Sal he was an enemy now. Six months ago, France offered him refuge from the Nazis. Yesterday, Germany and France declared war. Today, the French arrest him. It’s

insane.”

“It will be all right, Mia,” Herman said.

Hannah rose from the table and closed the dining room draperies. The Alte Frau Felber piled the dinner dishes on a tray and carried them out. I heard the clatter of dishes from the kitchen. The Alte Frau Felber was washing up. I knew I should get up and help, but I was exhausted from the piercing headache that had begun when they arrested Sal.

“Sit down and drink your tea, Mia,” Hannah said. “Don’t go back to the hotel tonight. Stay with us. I’ll put Lea to bed.”

Herman pushed his napkin into the silver napkin ring. “It will be alright, Mia,” he said once more.

“How?” I demanded. “I don’t understand the French. They saw what was happening to the Jews in Germany. They let us in. They granted temporary residence status, even to those Jews who came to their country illegally. Month after month, they bent their regulations and extended the temporary permits for the Jews. Then war is declared and everything changes.”

I threw my napkin on the floor and pounded the table. “Everything changes,” I shouted. “All of a sudden they tell the Jewish men, ‘You are a German. You are the enemy. Religion does not count. That you fled Nazi Germany in danger of your life does not count.’ How could they arrest Jews? How?”

“The French are not the Nazis,” he said, echoing Sal’s words. “The French despise the Germans.”

Most of the next morning, I sat immobilized in the living room. My sister Edith played with Lea and Rachel; Ruth and Eva read; and Hannah talked on the telephone. She had many contacts in Montmorency, Jews and non-Jews. From them, Hannah learned that the Jews and German nationals were being sent to Maison La Fitte, an internment camp in Northwestern France.

The children and I stayed another night with Herman and Hannah. The following morning I realized that we could not remain with them indefinitely. But what could I do? Money was just one of my pressing problems. The Jewish Committee had awarded Sal a monthly allowance when he arrived in Paris, but

there was not much left after paying for the hotel room. Herman gave me some money and told me not to worry. But I was very worried when I learned that Sal's subsidy by the Jewish Committee ended with his arrest.

Even if Herman paid the rent, how long could the girls go on, idling away their days in Hannah's house and sleeping in the dilapidated hotel at night? The outbreak of the war would extend our stay in Paris, and we were classified as temporary visitors. As long as we retained this status, the children could not attend school.

Hannah and I discussed all the problems except one that troubled me immensely; the increasing strain of the work and the expense of feeding five extra—only four now.

“The wife of the Montmorency mayor is Jewish,” Hannah said. “When I told her about Sal's arrest and how hard it would be now, she suggested you think about the OSE.”

The OSE, Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants, was founded at St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1912 to look after the health and welfare of needy Jews. The organization moved to Berlin in 1923, and in 1933 with the rise of Nazism, it was transferred to Paris. As Nazi persecution displaced more and more Jewish children in Germany, Austria, and Poland, separating them from their parents, orphaning some, the OSE established homes for Jewish children around Paris. Several were located in Montmorency.

I did not respond immediately when Hannah made the suggestion.

“It would be good for Ruth and Eva to be among other children and go to school again,” she said.

That was true, but she was also proposing that I give up the children. The thought filled me with anguish, but I knew she was right about the needs of my girls. The OSE would bring a sense of order back into the lives of my girls. But how would they feel about it? They had not complained when I sent them to Leipzig, but they were with their grandfather whom they loved, not in an orphanage with strangers. I remembered how happy they had been to go to the Jewish school in Leipzig after being home in the Halle apartment for two months. Still, I was worried they would not understand that I had to send them away, that I really had no choice.

The situation was critical enough to seek out Karfiol. He was kind and cordial, and I did not need to tell him what had happened. He knew about the arrest of German Jews and had assumed that Sal was among them. When I brought up the question of the OSE, he said the children in the homes all came from good Jewish families. The homes were held in high esteem and would be suitable for Ruth and Eva. He thought the OSE would accept the girls into one of their homes. Not surprisingly, Karfiol was a contributor to the OSE, and he promised to talk to some people in the organization.

Hannah and I went to appeal to the wife of Montmorency's mayor. She referred us to an official of the Villa Helvetia, whom we also visited. Altogether it took a week until I heard from the OSE. Then the letter arrived, welcoming Ruth and Eva to the home. They were expected to arrive in the next two days.

"Tante Hannah can't keep all of us any more," I said. "It's too much for her to keep feeding us and having us in her house all the time. And while we live in this old hotel, you're not allowed to go to school. But once you're in the home, you can study again."

I hugged them both to me. Then I rose and pulled two suitcases out from under the bed. "I have been to the Villa Helvetia. It is a beautiful place, big and airy and very clean. There are lots of children there. And I met the director's wife. Her name is Dr. Lene Papanek, and she and the teachers are all very nice."

"But we won't be with you, Mama," Ruth said.

"It's only half an hour's walk from here, and I'll come and see you every Sunday. Now, watch what I'm packing for you. Underwear, pajamas on the bottom, socks in the corner, comb and toothbrush in the side pocket."

"It's not so bad here," Eva said. "I wish we didn't have to go."

"I wish the same, but it can't be helped," I said and breathed deeply to keep from crying. "I wish I had brought more warm clothes from Germany," I said. "I didn't think we'd be in France very long. It's very warm in Palestine. When we reach Palestine, we'll have sunny days."

On the way to supper at Hannah's late that afternoon, we passed a sweet shop. On impulse, I pulled the girls into the store. "Any flavor you like," I said to the girls. "Ruth, you speak French already. Glacé is the first word you learned, so

you order.”

I imagined there would be many rules at the OSE home. Watching the children lick their chocolate ice cream cones, I was inordinately pleased that I had broken my rule against treats before supper.

Early the next morning, Ruth and Eva passed through the iron fence that surrounded the Villa Helvetia. Barely two months after I had triumphantly emerged from the small plane at the Paris airport, our family was separated, split up, to sleep that night under three different roofs.

CHAPTER 21

REFUGEES WITHOUT MEANS

“I am a beggar. I can’t bear it.”

Once more I was surrounded by Jews seeking to move to avoid the Nazis. In the minds of Montmorency Jews, neither Paris nor its surrounding communities were safe after war was declared. Fearing a Nazi attack on the French capital, many decided to flee to the French coast. Herman was of that mind, too.

“The OSE has enough influence to look after all the children. They won’t come to harm,” Herman assured me. “But it would be sensible for individual Jews like us to leave Montmorency.”

Near the end of September, we left for Brittany. The Alte Frau Felber and Edith rode in Herman’s car, so he had no room for Lea and me. He arranged for us to travel with a friend, whose ancient vehicle held four other passengers. Lea and I squeezed into the back seat next to the door. I did not discover until later that the door-latch did not function.

Throughout the journey, I stared out the window at the French countryside of farms and fields, periodically boosting Lea on my lap to give her a view. Every half hour or so, we passed through a small village. I paid no mind to the conversation in the car; I thought about Sal. He had written every week and assured me he was well and comfortable. The barracks were warm, he had a mattress and blanket, and the food was adequate. The best part was that Jews and German gentiles were housed separately and rarely had any contact. The men in his barracks were cultured, congenial and included other Orthodox Jews who davened together.

Lost in thought, I suddenly felt a draft. The passenger door next to me was bouncing gently. Lea was not sitting next to me.

“Stop, stop!”

The driver turned around. “What?”

At the same moment, the two people sitting in the back with me realized Lea was missing.

“The girl, the girl,” the woman passenger shouted.

The car slowed down, but I think I was out before it came to a full stop. Four of us were racing toward the sound of Lea’s cries at the spot where the door had become loose. She was sitting on a grassy mound just off the road. I took her in my arms and said, “It’s all right. Just show me where it hurts.”

She pointed to her cheek which was scraped and bloody. We found she had a cut on one of her knees as well, but nothing was broken. Miraculously, she was scraped no worse than she would have been if she had a fall playing on the sidewalk.

We resumed our drive, and I offered a fervent prayer of thanks to God for His care of my child. He was with us on our journey, as He was with us in Brittany.

In the countryside, my brother-in-law had rented an apartment for his family and a summer house for me and Lea. It was just a one-room wooden shack, without running water or an indoor toilet. Just the same, I called it a summer house and cherished it because it was a place all my own. Lea played for hours in the sand, using an old wooden spoon as a shovel. I loved being in charge of my own kitchen, cooking my own meals once more, making my own decisions on even so small a matter as choosing the hour to eat lunch.

Kosher meat was scarce and costly, but mackerel was cheap and plentiful. I had never tasted this fish that was so abundant on the French coast, but it has remained one of my favorite foods, forever associated with that brief period in France when I was my own mistress.

It was the end of October, and Brittany turned cold. Hitler had made no major moves against Paris. The French armies were holding their own against the Nazis. Not willing to admit that their flight had been unjustified, even panicky, the Jews returned to their homes in and around Paris. They looked upon their sojourn as an autumn holiday at the seashore.

When I returned with Lea to the old hotel in Montmorency, I believed nothing would change for a long time. Sal would stay in the camp, Ruth and Eva would grow up without me in the OSE home, and I would remain totally dependent on

Herman. Unable to rid myself of this feeling of despondency, I became more and more anxious.

One morning, I woke up thinking, "I am a beggar. I can't bear it." I did not long for the fine furniture, the china and silver, my elegant wardrobe, nor any of the possessions that had been mine in Germany. I longed only for enough francs to pay for food, rent, and clothes for my children.

In rebellion against my poverty, I thought about the "very fair" Parisian pawnshop Hannah had once mentioned, and I fingered my father's gold pocket-watch and chain. He had insisted I take the watch. Dear Papa was still in Leipzig. I wondered if the outbreak of war had widened the distance between us so much as to make the gap unbridgeable.

For a moment, I saw Papa pulling the watch out of his pocket and snapping it open to see if it was time to light Shabbos candles. I shut my mind against that memory in order to do what I had to do. I pushed the watch and chain to the bottom of my handbag, carefully drew my fox stole around my shoulders, and headed for the railroad station.

The pawnbroker was courteous and businesslike. He made a fair offer, and I accepted. When I walked out of the pawnshop, I felt genuinely happy for the first time in many days.

"Mia, dear, how nice you look today," Hannah said, when I returned from Paris.

"I did very well," I said. "I received fourteen hundred francs for my stole and Papa's watch. I'm going to take Ruth and Eva out of Helvetia for a day and take all three girls shopping. The big ones have outgrown their shoes, and Lea needs a coat for the winter."

"Of course, the children need clothes, Mia," Hanna said. "But I don't understand you. Soon, you'll have nothing left. Why won't you take money from the Jewish Committee? Everyone else does. There's no shame to it. Why do you have to be different?"

"Because it's charity!" I shouted. "I don't need it!"

She ignored my outburst and merely looked at me quizzically.

I bought the children shoes and clothing. They now had everything they needed for the coming winter, and I felt content. I knew I could never make Hannah understand how I felt. She had never been in my situation.

By December, however, I acceded to Hannah's urging. I went to the Jewish Committee Office in Paris for financial help. I did not want to impose further on Herman, and I had no more money.

The waiting room was filled with women, some in fur coats and expensive hats. I wondered why they were standing there.

"The cost of bread is up again," said one of them.

"The prices are shameful," answered a woman wearing a diamond ring. "I sent my husband some sausage yesterday. He wrote that the food at the camp is barely edible."

I wondered about that. Sal hadn't complained in his letters about the food. My head was beginning to pound. The waiting room was hot, and I took my coat off. Even without my coat, beads of sweat formed on my forehead. I pressed my fingertips against my temples and heard someone call my name. My turn had come.

I entered an inner room and sat on the edge of the straight-backed chair next to the desk. The woman behind the desk seemed very young, not much over twenty.

"You haven't been here before," she said to me. "When did you arrive in Paris?"

I showed her my passport, answered questions, provided names and dates. The young woman wrote and wrote, her pen scratching over the yellow form.

When she reached the bottom of the page, she said, "You are entitled to assistance, Frau Kanner."

"I would prefer to work," I said.

"We have no jobs. Besides, you don't have a work permit. You can't work without one. As a temporary resident, you can't get one."

I had harbored some hope that I would be able to contribute to my support. This new information was unequivocally clear and totally demoralized me.

“Because you’ve been here for some weeks, I can write the first check right away,” the young woman said. “You are entitled to checks for yourself and your child. But for us to continue the stipends, you have to report here once a month.”

I took the check without looking at it. I tried to say “Thank you,” but there was a bitter taste in my mouth and no words came.

“Are you unwell?” the young woman asked.

I shook my head.

“Perhaps you will need the bathroom before you leave? You will find it at the end of the hallway outside the reception room. I’ll look for you next month, Frau Kanner.”

I walked unsteadily down the hallway to the bathroom. I felt nauseated, wondering what I had come to, taking charity from strangers. “There’s no shame in it,” Hannah had insisted, but I felt myself to be a beggar and a thief.

In the bathroom, the white porcelain sink spun crazily in front of me. As I reached out to stop it from moving, my handbag slipped out of my arms, spilling the check onto the tiled floor. My chest felt as if it were being pushed up into my throat; my stomach churned. I ran to the toilet bowl and knelt on the hard tiles. Tears streamed down my face as my stomach heaved. I reached for the chain to flush the toilet and heaved again.

Finally, I stood up. I cupped my hands under the cold water and rinsed my mouth. I washed my face and hands and then drank some water. A sour odor filled the bathroom. I needed some fresh air. I picked up the check, put it in my handbag, and left the building.

CHAPTER 22

JOINING THE OSE

“You were not raised to cook for a hundred people.”

The Villa Helvetia sat on top of a hill, the highest point in the village. There was no public transport within the village of Montmorency, so when I went to visit Ruth and Eva Sunday afternoons, I went on foot. Walking from Hannah’s apartment, it should have taken no more than half an hour to reach the Villa. But on the last Sunday in December, the streets were icy and hard to negotiate. It took me twice as long as usual. Everyone who ventured outside had trouble walking along the hilly roads. The villagers coped by tying rags over their shoes to give them needed traction on the frozen roads. The Montmorency residents agreed the winter of 1939-40 was the coldest France had witnessed for many years.

The visitors’ room at the Villa was also cold. Dozens of relatives were assembled, all in coats and scarves. We stood about for a while until Lene Papanek, the staff physician and the director’s wife, entered. She was in her forties, had short, faded blond hair and red cheeks.

“I am so pleased that you all came in spite of the terrible cold,” Lene said. “The children will be so happy to see you. But first, I must speak to you about a problem that has arisen.”

I tensed and leaned forward, awaiting the worst.

“The pipes leading to our kitchen are frozen,” she said.

I smiled in relief, but all around I heard women moaning, “Oh, no.”

Lene held up a hand and continued. “We have overcome the problem of lack of water. The children collect snow, and we melt it.”

Now the visitors murmured, “Amazing... how resourceful... Then, what is the problem?”

“Our kitchen workers have not come for the past two days. They live on farms, and have been unable to get here because of the icy roads. So we need help with washing pots. The children wash dishes, but they cannot handle our restaurant-sized pots.”

Lene looked around expectantly.

“I will miss my train back to Paris,” said one of the visitors.

“I am not strong enough,” said another.

There was no doubt in my mind. I stood up and said, “I will help.”

“Frau Kanner, thank you,” Lene said. “Come to my office after visiting hours. Ruth knows where it is.”

It was turning dark when Lene introduced me to a young Czech woman, working in the kitchen. She taught music and was helping out in the kitchen since the personnel shortage. Four girls were making sandwiches, while the boys poured heated water from a kettle. I put on a heavy cotton apron and began scrubbing. I had difficulty reaching the bottom of the two-and-a-half gallon pot, and one of the boys put it on the stone floor. I knelt, concentrating on scouring the huge iron pot. Soon I was sweating.

At six o’clock, Lene came into the kitchen. “Frau Kanner, you must have supper with us before you leave,” she said.

In the large, noisy dining room, I sat at one of the long tables with nine boisterous boys reliving their afternoon snowball fight. After two hours of unaccustomed hard work, I felt relaxed and happy. I was surprised at how hungry I was. Lene walked over to our table as I was drinking a second cup of tea. “All of us greatly appreciate your help today,” she said. “Please be careful walking home. It is very dark because of the blackout.”

The following Sunday, Elena, the music teacher, came to greet me in the visiting room. “Hello, how are you?” she said. “Dr. Papanek would like to speak with you. Can you come now?”

“I’ll be glad to help again,” I told Lene when I entered her office.

“No, it is not necessary today, but I understand from your daughters that they were raised in a kosher home.”

“Yes, of course,” I nodded.

Lene said, “Do you know about Eaubonne? It is a home where all the children are strictly Orthodox. Most of them are from an orphanage in Frankfurt. The woman we employ as the cook in Eaubonne has received a visa for America. Would you like to take her place when she leaves?”

“A job? Do you mean it?” I asked.

“We would show you how to work in an industrial kitchen. I think you could do it. You would start after the first of the year.”

I was ecstatic. “You can’t imagine what it would mean to me to be able to work, Dr. Papanek. Right now, I have no money except charity from the Jewish Committee.”

Lene smiled gently at my excitement.

Then I remembered. “I can’t,” I said. “I have no permit. I’m not allowed to work.”

Lene nodded. “That makes it difficult, but we have two to three weeks to overcome the problem. Our OSE Board of Directors are not without influence. I think we’ll find a way to get your papers. Now go to your children. They must be getting impatient to see you.”

The cold spell continued into January, 1940. Food became more scarce. The fighting went on, and somehow, someone arranged the impossible for me. At the end of the month, the Montmorency police issued a *carte d’indente* that made me a legal resident alien and permitted me to work within the boundaries of the prefecture.

There was a personal price to pay, and it was very high. I had to give up Lea. At Eaubonne, a room had been set aside for me with space enough for a single cot. But as I was busy much of the day, I could not have her with me. She could not join the Eaubonne community because the children were all of school age. Lene arranged for Lea to be admitted to La Petite Colonie, an OSE home in

Montmorency that cared for children aged three to six.

I was so distraught that I was almost ready to decline the position. How could I part with my baby and place her in the hands of strangers? Lea cried every night for her sisters. She would suffer if she were separated from her mother. I thought about my little Lea from the moment my permit came until I was due to bring her to La Petite Colonie. Twice, I was halfway up the hill to Villa Helvetia to tell Lene I could not do it. Each time, I turned back, knowing I could not take from Herman and the Jewish Committee when I had an opportunity to earn money. With Sal in detention, the responsibility of the family fell to me. As a charity case, there was no possibility to save for emergencies; as a worker, I could save a little for the next one.

In the end, I accepted Lene's offer. I did not know at the time that the decision I made probably saved us.

When I left Lea at La Petite Colonie, I don't think she understood that I would not be there in the morning when she woke up, that I would see her only once a week. What could I tell my three-year-old except that I loved her and would come often?

For myself, it was good that I was so busy. I had little time to brood about the separation. When I thought of Lea, I reminded myself that, like Ruth and Eva, she was in good hands, in a Jewish home and with other children.

Die Alte Frau Felber had been skeptical about my ability to cook meals for more than one hundred people. She had been our neighbor when I was growing up in Leipzig. She knew we had had servants. She had insisted, "You were not raised for this." She was wrong. From the beginning, my cooking was a success with the children.

"It's simple," I explained to Hannah when I visited the family at the end of the first week. "It's just a matter of arithmetic. I merely multiply the amounts of the ingredients in the recipes that I know."

The problem with the new arrangement turned out to be Lea. To my dismay, on a Sunday afternoon visit, the Colonie director informed me that my daughter wet her bed at night.

"I don't understand. She was trained before she was two," I said. "She's always

been so clean about herself.”

I sat Lea on my lap and said, “You’re such a big girl. Why do you wet your bed at night?” Lea played with my brooch, running her fingers round the edge of the metal flower.

“Why do you do that, sweetheart?” I asked again.

“I don’t know, Mama,” Lea answered.

A few days later, the children from La Petite Colonie were brought to Eaubonne for a dance recital. Afterwards, they played outside. I glanced out of the window and watched Lea. She wandered away from the group and found her way to the kitchen window, the bottom of which was just a yard off the ground. She pressed her face against the glass and shouted “Mama, Mama.” I wanted to run to her but could not abandon the steaming pots on the stove. I watched her cry until a teacher picked her up and carried her away.

CHAPTER 23

THE NAZIS NEAR PARIS

“Say goodbye to your children.”

Gradually, my little daughter Lea acquiesced in the separation from me. Her teachers reported she had become pleasant and cooperative. One of the youngest children in the home, she was loved by staff and children alike. Although Lea never stopped asking at the end of my weekly Sunday visits, “Can I come with you, Mama?” she accepted the inevitable. “No,” I had to answer.

The children at Villa Helvetia and Eaubonne followed a set routine. They made their own beds, tidied their own rooms, ate together, and attended classes. Jewish teachers who had fled Germany and Austria held classes in mathematics, writing, literature and science.

Some of the OSE children, mainly girls over the age of ten, were enrolled at the village school. Ruth was among those chosen, and she was quickly becoming fluent in French. She had no difficulty with the lessons, quickly grasping French geography and history to which she had no previous exposure. Sewing was another matter, however.

“It’s very hard to do, Mama, but I’m trying,” she said. “I made this doily, but I had to do it three times. The teacher said my stitches were too big and made me take them out. It takes so long to make the tiny stitches.”

“It looks fine to me,” I said. “You are doing very well.” I was proud of her success in grasping all the unfamiliar subjects taught in a new language.

Her achievements were all the more remarkable as all our children missed a full day of lessons every week. French schools held lessons on Saturday, and our children would not attend school on Shabbos.

Not all the children were happy in the French school. One of the Eaubonne girls complained every Monday she had to bring a note explaining why she was not in school on the previous Saturday. “They do it on purpose,” Friedl said. “They don’t like Jewish children and want to make us feel really bad.”

“How does your teacher make you feel bad? I asked the child.

“She makes fun of me. She waves my note in front of the class and says, “These children should be in school on Saturday, but they come up with a different excuse every week.” She hates us because we’re shomer Shabbos.”

After weeks of scapegoating, the girl escaped from her anti-Semitic teacher, but not without one final humiliation. During recess, she spotted a friend from her hometown of Saarbrücken. The girl, a year younger than Friedl, said her teacher was nice. Friedl made an abrupt decision to seek a transfer to her friend’s class. She walked over to the principal and said, “Please, I would very much like to be in a class with my friend.” The principal pointed out it was a lower grade and would be a demotion, but Friedl said she didn’t care as long as she could be with her friend.

The principal blew her whistle. The children stopped playing and became quiet. The principal spoke. “Listen, everybody, I have to tell you something strange. Here, look at this girl. She is a foreign girl, and do you know what she wants? She wants to be put back into a lower grade.”

Friedl’s eyebrows drew together in a frown. “Everybody stared at me and laughed, everybody in the school yard, and felt so terrible. I am with my friend now, but why are they so mean?”

Who would have thought that anti-Semitism would follow these children from Germany and Austria? I should not have been surprised when the French interned Jews who happened to be German nationals.

Because I spent Sundays with the girls, I saw very little of Hannah and Herman, but I kept in touch by telephone. Sal and I wrote to each other weekly. He also wrote to his father in Poland, but Markus’s replies were brief and uninformative. Sal felt well though restless with his confinement. He wrote that some meladim established study groups in the camps, and Jewish musicians formed a symphony orchestra. They gave weekly concerts “...as good as anything we used to hear in Halle and Berlin. So there are some worthwhile ways to pass our time.”

The routine we all settled into did not last. In the spring of 1940, the German armies moved south and west. On the 10th May, they invaded Holland and Belgium. A week later, as Hitler’s troops entered Northern France, the Nazis

intensified their air attacks on the areas surrounding Paris. At the OSE homes, hardly a night went by now that children and adults did not crowd into damp basement air raid shelters. Cots were set up in basement shelters so the children could get some rest. Many were very frightened, but somehow they knew not to cry. We wrapped them in blankets, but still they shivered from the cold and the fear of the din of the bombs. During the day, we carried on.

Eva said that she was always cold in the shelter at Villa Helvetia. “Sometimes we sing songs and tell each other stories to try to shut out the cold and the sound of the bombs.”

The children were issued gas masks that they kept next to their beds and brought to the shelter. Those who attended the village school carried their masks along with their schoolbooks. If the sirens went off on their way to school, they ran into one of the shelters the French had built in the village.

The Jews who lived in and around the French capital now believed it would not be too much longer before Nazi armies marched down Paris’s renowned Champs Elysees. The fall of Belgium to the Nazis on May 28th was the signal for a mass exodus, not only by the large number of Jewish refugees, but also by many French Jews. They fled south, some with definite plans, many uncertain of their destination. Hannah and Herman withdrew their money from the bank and prepared for departure to Villeneuve-sur-Lot, a small mountain town in South-Central France with a modest Jewish community.

The OSE also had plans. At the outbreak of war, the organization had begun to purchase estates in Central and Southern France anticipating an increase in the number of homeless Jewish children who would be placed in their care. With the German armies advancing into France, OSE officials decided to evacuate the children of the Montmorency homes to one of their estates in the region of Haute Vienne.

Everyone took part in the preparations. In the kitchen, we packed dishes, silverware, pots and pans. Teachers packed linens and blankets as well as books. Children packed their personal belongings. The OSE officials’ job was to negotiate with railroad and government officials for several hundred seats on the packed trains that now left Paris day and night.

Late in the afternoon on June 4th, I was standing in the Eaubonne kitchen

mixing raw vegetables and eggs for a sandwich spread. The sandwiches would be our meals on the journey. The evacuation of the children, postponed twice when the promised train reservations failed to materialize, was definitely taking place next morning.

One of my three young assistants asked, “Madame Amalia, do you really think we’ll go tomorrow?”

At Eaubonne, no one used the diminutive “Mia.” When Lene introduced me as Madame Amalia the first day, I did not contradict her. Madame Amalia was the cook at an orphanage, Mia was the person I had been before Hitler and fervently prayed to be again one day. It was a name reserved for family and friends.

“I think it’s certain this time,” I said. “After supper tonight, we’ll wrap these sandwiches for the journey.”

Lene came into the kitchen then. “Amalia, take the afternoon off and say goodbye to your children,” she said.

She was not making sense. “Goodbye? I don’t understand.”

“You can’t come with us, Amalia. You have no papers.”

“But you got me papers,” I said.

“No, Amalia. Those documents are valid only in Montmorency. You have no rights or legal standing in any other section of France.”

I was flabbergasted. This was not possible.

Lene seemed not to have time to discuss matters of great personal import diplomatically or privately. Continuing to ignore the presence of the three young girls now resolutely concentrating on the sandwich spread, she said, “You are not the only one. Three others on our staff are in the same position. There is nothing I can do. We are not known outside this area. If the police stop us and discover you have no papers, you will endanger us all. We just can’t risk it.”

Lene spoke with even greater authority than usual. It was clear to me that neither reasoning nor pleading would alter her decision. I would not be traveling with the group. The children would go to the new home in Central France without me.

Lene's voice softened. "We will take all three girls, Ruth, Eva and Lea, to Montintin. We will take care of your children and keep them safe. That I promise you, Amalia." At the kitchen door, Lene turned and said, "Oh, by the way, a letter came for you. Here, I brought it for you."

I put the letter in my pocket and began to walk to Helvetia. At the Villa, I could feel the excitement and tension of the children. They either rushed past me or shuffled along, peering out windows, looking into corners, at furnishings, seeming to strain their eyes to store everything they saw in their memories.

I found Ruth and Eva and took them for a walk on the grounds. We reached a giant shade tree and sat on the grass beneath it. "You must listen to me very carefully, now," I said. "You know that you are going away from here tomorrow." I took a deep breath and said the words out loud for the first time. "I am not going with you."

Ruth, always the direct and practical one, immediately asked, "Why not?"

"There is a problem with my papers."

"Then I don't want to go," Eva said.

"The Germans are almost in Paris," I said. "You have to go."

Tears began to roll down Eva's cheeks. I took Eva's and Ruth's hands in mine and said, "You must stay together. You must watch out for Lea, see that she does not get into difficulties, that she does not get lost. Ruth, you are the oldest. You are responsible for your sisters."

Ruth's eyes were solemn behind her steel-rimmed glasses. She pulled her hands away from me and began cracking her knuckles.

Eva began to cry. "I'm afraid," she said.

"Crying will not help now," I said. "You must be brave and grown-up and I will come to you when I can. I promise." I hugged and kissed my children, first Ruth, then Eva, and then Ruth again and Eva again. "Remember. Stay together. Listen to the teachers. Be good big girls. Make sure Lea is all right at all times."

At the entrance to the home, I hugged them once more. "I love you. Make sure

all your clothes are packed. Take care of your things.” Then I left them. I did not want them to see that I was crying. When I was partly down the hill, I turned once and saw them staring after me.

Early the next morning, the young orphans of Frankfurt marched out of Eaubonne to meet the children of Helvetia and La Petite Colonie for the train journey south. I stood on the steps with the three young teachers who also lacked the documents that would permit them to travel legally through France. I imagined Ruth and Eva holding hands in a line of anxious children. I imagined children holding hands in the terminal, climbing onto the train, scrambling for window seats. All children loved trains. Would the excitement of the trip drive away the fear I had seen in their eyes? I prayed that Lea was not dragging along solemnly, but skipping happily, even if that made it difficult for the teacher.

“Dear God, please take care of them,” I prayed.

When the last child disappeared down the road, I turned to the three teachers and said, “I have some coffee left in the kitchen.”

We sat in the corner of the empty dining hall. “It’s so quiet in here,” Hilda said. A short, slender young woman, she might have been able to pass as one of the teenagers, now boarding the railroad car. “Until the last moment, I thought I would be able to go with the children. I even packed all my belongings.”

Peter pounded the table with his fist. “It’s that stupid, that ridiculous Germany mentality Lene and Ernst have!” he said. “Papers, always papers. Thousands and thousands of people traveling out of Paris, and they are worried about documents.”

“It is stupid,” Eugene said. “There are three hundred children in the group. Who’s going to examine the papers of the adults supervising them?”

“I don’t know what to do now,” Hilda said. “I have no family in France.”

I had been so preoccupied with preparations for the journey and so concerned about parting from my own girls that I had given no thought for my own future. Hilda reminded me that I was not alone. “My sister lives here in Montmorency,” I said. “She and her family are going to a mountain village in the south. Villeneuve-sur-Lot. I think I could go with them.”

“How lucky for you,” Hilda said.

“I’ll leave after lunch,” I said and began to carry the cups to the sink.

“We’ll clean up here,” Peter offered. “Why don’t you get ready?”

A cover of gray clouds hung over the deserted streets of Montmorency. Shells were exploding in the distance. They were getting closer, I thought, and walked faster. But the effort was too great. I was tired. I had risen early and had not slept well. I never did when a momentous day lay ahead. The shelling continued. A few minutes would not make any difference, I decided, and resumed my normal pace.

Late in the afternoon, I entered Hannah’s familiar brick building and climbed the stairs to the third floor. No one answered the doorbell. I rang again. The house was strangely quiet, no radios playing, no children crying. I rang a neighbor’s bell. No one came to the door. Frantic now, I tried every apartment on the third floor and then on the floor below. There was no sound except for my footsteps on the stone floor. “Hello, hello,” I called. No answer came. “They’ve left, they’re gone, every one of them,” I said to myself and walked down the last flight of stairs.

I sat on the bench in front of the house. I was sweating and felt my heart pounding against my chest. Perhaps they are in the shops around the corner, I thought. But the patisserie was closed, and the tailor could tell me nothing. “Mme. Felber has not been here for several days.”

Hannah and Herman must have assumed I would go south with the OSE. They had no reason to expect otherwise. I wandered aimlessly in the empty streets, feeling totally alone. Sal must already be in Bordeaux, where the French government had transferred internees. Hannah and Herman were in Villeneuve-sur-Lot. The children must be on the train by now. I’m the only one left here, I thought. No, that wasn’t true. Eugene and Peter and Hilda were not gone.

I started walking back to Eaubonne, worrying that perhaps the three teachers had already left. I was tired from the earlier hour-long walk, and my feet hurt. The way back was uphill, and it would take me close to two hours to climb the steep streets. Along the way, the houses were dark. Not a single light shone from a window. Was it the blackout, or had everyone fled? Trudging up the darkening roads, I felt my breathing become more rapid. I should not have stopped and

asked questions in the stores. The familiar, awful feeling of terror that had plagued me during my final weeks in Germany was with me again.

It was already night when I reached Eaubonne. The house was pitch black and appeared deserted. Were all the blackout shades pulled down? I was not sure, and was afraid to turn on a light. I walked through familiar rooms and corridors, all empty now. The silence was oppressive. In the past, there had always been another human being I could turn to. Now I was totally alone. I felt numb, unable to make plans, although I realized that the Nazis must be advancing. I had not eaten since noon, but it was not food I wanted. Standing in the middle of Lene's office, I felt overwhelmingly tired. I moved slowly toward the couch I knew stood against the wall, with my arms in front of me to avoid bumping into the desk.

Suddenly, I heard footsteps. Someone was walking in one of the classrooms. I sank to the floor, convinced that German soldiers had entered the building. I crawled under the desk on my hands and knees and listened. Had I imagined the footsteps? No, there they were again.

"Hallo?" A man's voice.

I squeezed my eyes closed.

"Hallo. Is that you, Amalia? Are you there?"

Eugene! It was Eugene calling me.

"Here, in the office," I shouted and crawled out of my hiding place. "I heard you walking and thought it was the Nazis. Oh, Eugene!"

Now the young teacher was silhouetted in the doorway. "The three of us were in the attic," he said. "We decided to hide there for the night and take turns as lookout. Peter thought it was you walking up to the house, but he wasn't sure. We waited a while, and then decided to come down here and see."

Slowly, Eugene and I climbed to the top floor. There was no furniture in the attic. It was little more than a crawl space, with a small window. The moon provided our only light. Hilda sat on a blanket spread out on the floor, her back against the wall. "Sit down, Amalia, and tell us what happened."

“Everyone is gone,” I said. “Not just the Jews, the French too. The shops are closed, except for the tailor, and he was planning to leave by six o’clock. He said it was his last day there, and he was going to his brother’s farm.”

“Montmorency is on the main route to Paris,” Eugene said. “The armies will come through here. That’s why everyone’s fled.”

“We can’t stay here,” Peter said. “We should head for Paris. If we start early in the morning, we have a chance of staying ahead of the Germans. I have a friend there, a fellow named Phillipe. If I can find him, maybe he’ll help us.”

“It gets light by six,” Hilda said. “If we’re going to leave early tomorrow, we should get some sleep.”

Early the next morning, we ate a breakfast of day-old bread with marmalade and coffee. I had no idea what would happen to Eaubonne, but I refused to leave a mess in what had been my kitchen. Hilda and I washed cups and plates, dried them and put them in the cupboard. Then we packed a change of underwear, toothbrush and toothpaste, and shirts in musettes, canvas knapsacks. The three young teachers rolled up blankets and strapped them to their musette. I took my wool coat with a gold piece in its lining. After I had pawned my fox stole and my father’s watch in Paris, Herman urged me to let him convert part of the cash into gold. “Paper is paper,” he said. “But gold will always have value.”

For a moment, the four of us stood silently on the same steps where we had stood the day before as we watched the children leave. Then Peter slammed the door. Eaubonne was abandoned.

CHAPTER 24

KEEPING AHEAD OF THE ENEMY

“People walked along the road, an endless stream.”

The local railroad station was deserted. A crude sign tacked on the stationmaster’s door said, “No trains today.”

“That’s it,” Eugene said. “We walk.”

“It looks like it’s going to rain,” Hilda said.

“It hasn’t been sunny since the Nazis neared Paris. Maybe the French take the sunshine with them when they flee.”

We reached the main road leading to Paris and began to walk rapidly. The city was twenty miles to the southeast. I had driven along this road with Sal and Hannah’s friend Frischer a month after I came to France. Rich farmlands had spread back from both sides of the highway. Trucks and automobiles had whizzed along. Frischer said that early in the morning, horse and mule-drawn carts, brimming with fresh produce had crowded the roads. Now the open carts contained human cargo. The animals plodded slowly on the macadam road, pulling women and children riding precariously on top of their bundles. Men pushed heavily-laden wheelbarrows. Young and middle-aged men and women pedaled bicycles with straw or wire baskets in front, racks in back, loaded with bags and boxes. It was as though we were repeating the exodus from Egypt of thousands of years ago. I felt buoyed. We would survive, with God’s help, as our forebears had done.

People walked along the road, an endless stream of men, women and children, knapsacks strapped on their backs, carrying suitcases, cardboard cartons and blankets. Some sat on the ground to rest and eat, pulling out loaves of bread and thermoses from their knapsacks. Then they moved on.

I saw a young woman, a slight figure in her dark skirt and sweater, a kerchief tied under her chin. She was walking alone, pushing a perambulator with a suitcase on top. When we caught up to her, we heard an infant crying. I could not

see the baby, but I heard the mother humming softly, her pace slow so she could rock the carriage back and forth as she walked.

A young boy with dusty shoes and bare knees pulled a toy wagon. A box was anchored to it with string and a stuffed bear sat on top, in imitation of the farmer driving to market.

Every ten or fifteen minutes, a horn would blare insistently, and the animal-drawn wagons would be steered to the side, while cyclists and those on foot veered left and right to let a row of motorized vehicles pass. Some watched with envy, others with resignation as the vehicles disappeared into the distance. The movement was all in one direction. At every crossroad, more people entered the highway. They all paused for a moment as though they had not expected to see so many others in the same act of flight upon which they were embarking.

It became warmer as the day wore on, but the skies remained overcast. Looking up, Eugene said, "I remember now why it's so gray all the time. I heard that the French use a chemical spray to prevent the German planes from seeing their target. This must be an artificial cloud cover."

"Probably right," Peter said. "The air doesn't even feel damp. It's rare for the sky to be so dark for so long without rain. I grew up on a farm in Poland. I can feel rain before it comes."

"I don't think we'll be able to make it to Paris in one day," Hilda said. "We'll have to sleep outdoors tonight."

In the evening, we found space in a crowded field off the road and became part of a vast camp-out. No one bothered to seek out the owner of the land to ask for permission to make camp. I did not realize how tired I was until I sat down on the ground and unbuckled my shoes. My shoulders ached when I bent forward to massage my aching feet. I remembered the days long ago when I had camped out in the German countryside with the Blauweiss, as a young Zionist. We had tents, and an open fire over which we cooked. Now we had neither shelter, nor food, nor fire. We had some money, but there was no place to buy food.

Eugene went off to find water. When he came back with the filled canteens, we ate the last of the dry bread we had carried. Hilda produced a bar of chocolate that we shared. "I have another," she said. "It can be breakfast tomorrow morning."

I looked for the first time at the letter Lene had handed me when she informed me that I could not accompany the children. It was from the Zionist Organization in Germany. I read the typed paragraphs, and began to laugh.

“Our number has been reached. Can you believe it? Do you know how long ago my husband applied for visas to Palestine? Five years. We paid 20,000 marks. I’ve lost count of the number of times my husband went to Berlin. After a while, our name was at the head of the list, but the Zionist Organization kept coming up with people who were in greater danger. Those people couldn’t wait and were pushed ahead of us. I used to go to the organization when Sal was in Buchenwald. I told them we were in terrible danger then, but it was like arguing with a stone wall. Now the Paris office has a document for me. I’m to pick it up and present it in London where the visas are waiting for my family.”

“How wonderful,” Hilda said.


“Wonderful? It’s ludicrous. How am I going to get to London? Why does everything come a little too late? Just the same, my friends, I’d like to have that document in my hand. When I pick up my papers, I’ll see if they can help us get out of Paris.”

“We must be at least two thirds of the way to the city,” Peter said. “Maybe when we get to Paris, I’ll locate Phillipe.”

“Good idea,” Hilda said. “Let’s each search out the people we know and see what help we can get. You look for Phillipe. Amalia will see if the Zionist organization can help us. And I know a woman from my home town. I got in touch with her when I first came from Austria. Eugene, you said you had a friend in Paris, too.”

When we reached Paris mid-morning, we separated and agreed to meet at four-thirty in the afternoon near a bistro a mile from the railroad station.

When I entered the building where the Zionist Organization Office was located, a concierge rose slowly from a scratched wooden chair and faced me. “The Zionist Office, please,” I said.

“Ah, they left, Madame. I am alone here. All the offices in the building have been abandoned. I would leave, too, but I am too old, and I have no place to go.” She fingered the fringes of the black shawl draped over her shoulders. “a va,

Madame. So it goes.”

I raced out of the building. What on earth had possessed me to go there? If somehow I managed to get to London, surely the letter should be sufficient for the visas. And after all my futile dealings with the Zionists, the mere idea of any help from them now was preposterous. Why hadn't I stayed with Hilda? This was the second time I had separated from my Montmorency friends, the only people I knew in this vast city where everyone was rushing.

I rushed, too. The trip to the bistro seemed to last forever. My feet hurt again. It seemed as though my feet had been hurting for days. The wool coat over my arm, a useful blanket during the cool night in the field, was a burden on the sticky June afternoon. Passing an open cafe, I longed for a cool drink, but was afraid to take time to sit in the bistro.

A half block from the meeting place, I saw the familiar blond head above the crowd. Thank God, Peter was so tall. “Wait, I'm coming! Wait!” I shouted. I pushed through the crowd and saw Eugene coming from the opposite direction.

“My friend's apartment was deserted,” he said.

“I didn't find Phillipe either,” Peter said.

Hilda arrived five minutes later. “Frau Fuller gave me half a pound of cheese. I didn't want to take it, but she insisted. She said the only thing to do is try to catch a train to the south. The Germans are expected to reach Paris in a day or two at most. It was on the news. There is fighting in the streets of Montmorency, right where we were yesterday morning.”

The crowds on the route to the railroad station were huge. Hilda stumbled over a valise, apparently lost or abandoned by its owner. We passed a woman sitting on a suitcase in front of a dress shop, her arms encircling three small children. It occurred to me that there was no way anyone could get through that mob with small children. It was then that I whispered to myself, “Thank you, Lene, for taking my children.”

Inside the terminal, we found every available train was traveling south. Even freight cars were carrying fleeing Frenchmen. There were no ticket-sellers on duty. People simply boarded any train they could. As soon as the cars were filled, the train pulled out. No one asked where the trains were heading.

Everyone knew that the trains were south-bound, away from Paris and the rapidly approaching German armies. That was all that mattered.

We came to a freight train, already packed with travelers. Peter and Eugene grabbed the edge of the open car and hoisted themselves up. Hilda and I followed, but the train began to move. The edge of the car dug painfully into my waist, my legs dangling out of the moving train. Hands grasped my shoulders, pushing me down.

“No more room, no more room!” a man bellowed above me. His blood-shot eyes were filled with rage. A fierce pain seared through my shoulders, and I fell back on the platform.

Suddenly two people lifted me up, one of them screaming in outrage: “How could you? She was already on the train!”

In seconds, I was slung over someone’s shoulder. I felt myself being shoved against the moving train. From above, hands grabbed me and hoisted me onto the open freight car.

“Thank you, thank you forever,” I managed to shout toward the receding figures who had helped me.

The overfilled freight train gathered speed and pulled out of the station. The crowd left behind on the platform waved and cheered, forgetting for a moment that they were still waiting for their own deliverance.

CHAPTER 25

FLIGHT TO FREE FRANCE

“We tossed dishes out of train windows.”

We rode standing on the open freight car. Space was so tight that I was jammed between Hilda and an old woman in a threadbare cloth coat. I wanted to look ahead at the two shimmering rails in the distance that were the straight line to freedom and to the place where my children were. But it was impossible to face forward. The motion of the train created an unending draft and produced great billows of dust that blew into my eyes, so that I was forced to turn around and could only stare back toward the stretch of land that I knew was being overrun by the enemy.

Some passengers said the train was headed to the south-western port city of Bordeaux. Others thought we were traveling in a southeasterly direction toward Lyon near the Swiss border or on to the Mediterranean seaport of Marseilles. Many travelers hoped that the train would stop at Dijon. From that railroad center, lines fanned out to all parts of France. Some talked excitedly of making rail connections that would enable them to join relatives or friends who lived away from Nazi-occupied parts of their country.

“We shall swim in the Riviera,” joked one old woman.

“The further from the Boche, the better,” said an upright young man. “I shall make my way far away from the Germans, to Africa if I can.”

Seven hours later in the dark night, the engineer pulled into a village station so small that the last three cars rested beyond the end of the single platform. Word spread rapidly that he had run out of fuel. A local railroad worker walked back and forth along the platform, ordering everyone off the train. People who had rushed to fill the cars that afternoon now clambered off slowly. The village welcomed the travelers. Weary passengers filled the churches and the school, and when there were still more refugees needing accommodations, the townspeople took them into their homes.

Afterwards, I was never able to remember the name of the village, but I have

retained a vivid picture of the room at the edge of town to which Hilda and I were taken before dawn. It was clean and airy, with two mattresses on the linoleum-covered floor. When I awoke the next day, the sunshine we had longed for in Montmorency streamed into the room.

A light sleeper at the best of times, I was shocked when I saw it was eleven o'clock. I had slept for seven hours, without waking once.

Peter and Eugene were sitting at a large oblong table when I walked into the bright kitchen of the farmhouse. A motherly woman, gray hair braided into a bun at the nape of her neck, welcomed me into her home. Though it was summer, she wore a long-sleeved, high-necked cotton print dress, its full skirt ending just above her ankles.

“Meet Madame Laurette,” Peter said as the woman piled eggs and cooked vegetables on a plate for me. She bustled over me as though I were a loved daughter who returned home after a long absence. I sipped coffee with boiled milk from a thick, ceramic mug, feeling as if I had been spirited out of France to another country.

“I’ve been to the station,” Peter said. “No one knows when we can board another train. They go through without stopping.”

Paris fell on our second day in the village. Madame Laurette was kind and solicitous, but I became increasingly restless. My head told me the children had arrived safely in Montintin, but in my heart I was worried. I needed to see for myself. I wanted to know where they ate and slept and studied and played. I had never let them go before without personally seeing exactly where they would be. If I could just see them in their new surroundings, I would be less uneasy about them.

Sitting with my friends from Montmorency, on an old wooden bench in the town square, I said, “Ah, Hilda, if only we were on our way to Montintin.”

“You’ll have to walk there,” Hilda said, nodding toward clusters of women and men wandering aimlessly past us. All of them had been on the freight train with us.

It was the push I needed. “All right,” I said, suddenly full of determination. “I will.”

“I’ll go with you, Amalia,” Hilda said. “How about it, Peter? Eugene?”

Together, the men answered, “Yes.”

I think we had known all along, walking was the only way.

In the morning, Madame Laurette fed us a huge breakfast. Her husband came into the kitchen and gave us directions, while she packed a basket with bread, cheese and fruit. We tried to pay her, but she refused. “What we have, we share with our friends.”

We walked all day. At night, we spread blankets in a field, slept outdoors, and when the sun rose we went on, sleeping once more in a field when night came. In sharp contrast to the roads outside of Paris a week before, we saw no refugees on these roads, only local people. Late on the third afternoon, a farmer on his way home from a market town gave us a ride in his empty wagon. That night we slept in his barn, and in the morning walked on.

In every town and village we reached, we stopped at the railroad station and asked about the trains, but there were no schedules. On the fifth day, a village stationmaster told us a train en route to Limoges might arrive at noon. Miraculously, it did. When we boarded, we found the passenger compartments full, and were happy to sit on the floor in the corridor.

A half hour outside of Limoges, Eugene said, “I’m not getting off. I’ve decided. I don’t owe the OSE anything. I’ll go to Spain. I’ll ride as far as I can, and then, if I have to, I’ll walk again.”

“Spain is neutral territory,” Peter said. “I think I’ll go with you.”

I did not attempt to sway them. Unlike me, they had no ties to the OSE, so why shouldn’t they try to get out of France altogether?

“I understand,” Hilda said. “I wish you luck, both of you.”

My eyes filled with tears. “I would never have made it without you,” I said.

“Yes, you would, Amalia,” Peter said. “You’re dauntless.”

The train pulled into Limoges. “Goodbye, my friends. Who knows if we will

meet again. May God guide and inspire you and keep you from harm,” I said.

On the platform, Hilda and I watched until the train was out of sight. Then, we sought directions to Montintin, “where the Jewish children are staying.” It was forty miles away, in the countryside. There was no public transportation, and again we walked and sought rides on carts. A friendly farmer dropped us off a half mile from the estate.

“It’s straight ahead of you,” he said. “You can’t miss the castle.”

We had made it to Montintin. A castle it was, a large three-storied stone structure with turrets, a building from a bygone era. Lene stood at the entrance and showed no surprise at seeing us. Here we were, two weary, dust-covered women she had abandoned at Montmorency two weeks earlier and all she said was, “More and more people are arriving. The teenage boys who could not get on our train came yesterday.”

She led us into a large, dark foyer. “Your girls are fine, Amalia. You’ll want to see them before you go to the kitchen. We need you there. And Hilda, we’re trying to organize lessons.” She stopped a boy who was running along and said, “Ben, run and find the Kanner girls, quickly, all three of them. Their mother has arrived.”

Speechless, I smiled at her.

“So,” she said, finally giving her first sign of welcome. “It’s good that you’re here.”

The girls came running, Ruth holding Lea by the hand.

“Mama,” Lea shrieked and pulled loose from her sister.

Then all three children were clambering all over me, and we were hugging and kissing each other.

“Mama, I knew you would come,” Ruth said, “But what took you so long?”

“We ate on the floor when we got here,” Lea said.

“We tossed the cartons with our dishes out the train windows to make room for

people,” Ruth explained.

Once more she threw her arms around me. “Oh, I knew you would get here, Mama. See, Eva? You were a silly goose. Didn’t I tell you?”

“It was the longest ride ever,” Lea said. “I don’t like trains anymore.”

I saw Eva’s tears, and knew they were my middle daughter’s expression of relief. Ruth and Lea were talking together, over each other. How often had I told these two it was rude to interrupt, and now I was barely aware of their breach of manners. Nor did I feel the blister on my foot or the soreness of my weary legs. I was reunited with my children. Nothing else was of any importance at all.

Book Four

July 1940-July 1942

Children's Homes

in Haute Vienne

CHAPTER 26

COOKING WITH SHORTAGES

“The kitchen did not have a stove.”

On a hill next to Chateau Montintin stood an old house that had once slept servants. Called La Chevrette, it became the new home for the children of Eaubonne. The building had never been intended as anything other than sleeping quarters for servants. Naturally enough, it did not have a proper kitchen suitable for preparing food for one hundred children and adults. The room designated as a kitchen did not even have a stove. It did, however, have an enormous fireplace, and that was where I did my cooking.

I had to work much harder at La Chevrette than at Eaubonne. I was up and dressed at six o'clock in the morning to build a fire. A forest surrounded the Chateau, so there was never a shortage of fuel. But it was not easy to get a fire going. I needed paper to ignite twigs, and I had to make sure the flames spread to thin strips of kindling before the paper turned to ash. Paper was scarce, and I dared not waste any of it. I worked carefully to make sure the logs caught fire quickly.

When the fire was ready, I cooked a farina-based soup made with watered-down milk. That was breakfast. After cleaning up, I immediately began preparing and cooking two more meals.

We relied heavily on produce for our meals. Potatoes, carrots, and cabbage came from markets or directly from surrounding farms, which also supplied us with fresh milk. When there was a shortage of vegetables, I had to fall back on tobinambour, a tough tuber, grown as pigfeed. Under normal conditions, it was scarcely considered fit for human consumption.

Trees on the grounds of the estate provided us with apples and chestnuts in season. The road leading up to the estate was lined with cherry trees, and though we did not own the land on which the trees stood, we appropriated the fruit. The forest was the source of blackberries and other wild berries.

I prepared everything in the kitchen manually, without adequate utensils. Peeling

and cleaning vegetables, potatoes and fruit for one hundred people was an exhausting task, even with the help of some children. By the time my kitchen duties were finished at seven o'clock in the evening, I was bone tired. My exhaustion gave way to delight for a few minutes when my children and I were together. Ruth and Eva came to my room to tell me about their day, and Frau Mandel returned Lea to me. Frau Mandel, who had a little boy of her own, looked after Lea during the day. Lea slept in my room in a box filled with straw until a cot became available. Ruth and Eva were more comfortably quartered in the castle of Montintin.

After the girls left and I put Lea to sleep, I spent evenings by myself, too tired to be with others. In truth, I would not have made good company because I dwelt on the subjects of Hitler and the Nazis and the war. Except for my children, I had lost contact with all the people who were dear to me. Most especially, I had no idea what had happened to my husband or my father. Sometimes, I wished the morning would rise quickly. I would be back at my hard tasks and have no time to brood.

Soon after I arrived, there was a change of administration at Montintin as Lene and Ernst Papanek left for the United States in the summer of 1940. The Papaneks had a long and well-known history of anti-Fascist activities. Friendly French officials warned them that their names were on a list of undesirable Jews and they were likely to be arrested at any time. Lene and Ernst were not safe in Montintin nor any place in France. How fortunate that they had American visas.

My main quarrel with Madame Krakowski, when she took charge, was that she forbade Ruth and Eva to see or talk to me except for half an hour in the evening. Yes, forbade. She was totally rigid on this point. "Your children are the only ones who have a mother here," she said. "If the other children see that Ruth and Eva can run to their mother any time they wish, they will become jealous, and that will affect discipline. I cannot allow it."

Ironically, while other children stopped in the kitchen to chat, show me a new stamp or beg an extra morsel, the kitchen became forbidden territory for my own children. Now the only time Ruth and Eva could spend with me was after the evening meal for a brief thirty minutes.

Eva learned in classes held at Chateau Montintin, but Ruth, who was ten years old, was assigned to the school in the village, along with the other older girls.

They had lessons in mathematics, French geography and French history. “You would think France was the center of the world,” Ruth said. “The teacher never talks about any place else.”

Politics intruded into the village classroom. Under the Armistice signed between Germany and France, the Nazis occupied and had direct control of the northern half of the country and the strip of land that ran all along the Atlantic coast. The rest of the country was designated the Unoccupied Zone and was administered by French officials who were expected to cooperate with the Nazis. Marshal Petain, the hero of First World War campaigns, became head of the French government in the Unoccupied Zone when Paris fell and the Armistice was signed with Hitler. I was not surprised when Ruth reported that the children stood up every morning and afternoon to say “Vive, Marshal Petain.” She shrugged and said, “I stand up with the French children. It doesn’t mean anything. I just go along.”

What she did not want to go along with was the edict that she could not see me except for the brief time in the evening. She complained about how unfair it was. It was hard for me to pacify her when I was equally angry. I was convinced that Madame Krakowski was being unreasonable. To show partiality to my own children would be wrong, and I would never do it. Anyone who knew me would have told the new directress this. Thus I might break the rules and find a bite of carrot or a piece of wormy apple for another child who came begging in the kitchen, but never for Ruth or Eva.

In this dispute I knew I was right, but I was powerless to change the rule. In the end, all I could say to Ruth was, “I can’t help it. You have to accept this. It’s the war.”

A year of war had resulted in a shortage of almost everything. To deal with the scarcity of clothing, OSE hired Madame Weissman. She arrived at La Chevrette with her husband and five-year-old daughter, Monique, who became Lea’s playmate. Madame Weissman had been a seamstress in Warsaw before the war and her job was to teach the girls to make their own clothes. OSE officials, skilled by now at begging for everything, somehow secured donations of fabric. Madame Weissman was an adept organizer and so sympathetic a teacher that the girls told me they did not mind the extra task.

I was worried that I did not have clothes for myself for the winter ahead. All I

owned was what I had been able to carry in my musette when I fled Montmorency. And after the many long days out walking to reach the Chateau Montintin, my shoes were worn out.

One summer day, I managed some time off from the kitchen and arranged for a ride with Mandel. He was the person on our staff who had the important responsibility of procuring food, be it buying, bargaining, or begging. We drove to the local village market, which was open once a week. I had a little money. As cook in the OSE home I was entitled to a small salary. Often, the OSE needed all its funds to buy food, so the staff was not paid. But I had been able to save a little money from the pay I did receive.

I was lucky to be able to go to market with Mandel when I did because a strict system of rationing went into force soon after our outing. That day, I managed to find a warm dress and underwear, but finding “good” shoes was not so easy.

Because my mother’s shoe store in Leipzig offered the finest shoes, I had always worn top quality footwear. The good leather shoes I was used to did not exist in the village market. Only wooden-soled shoes were available, and this is what I bought. Once I became used to them, I found these clogs surprisingly comfortable.

So we became settled in Chateau Montintin. The boys and staff had completed building tables and benches for the dining room and the school rooms. The OSE had succeeded in establishing good relations with the police and other local authorities. Chateau Montintin and the other homes run by the OSE around Limoges were accepted by the French populace.

Madame Krakowski’s husband, the melamed, led our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. The boys in the carpentry class put their training to use building a large Succah.

It was October of 1940. I was alone in the kitchen after the midday meal, worrying about the winter ahead, when I heard the door bang open and saw Eva shouting, “Mama, Mama, look!”

What was the child doing here? Why was she breaking Madame Krakowski’s rule and coming to the kitchen in the middle of the day? I turned and for an instant I was immobilized, not believing what I saw. Eva was holding onto Sal’s hand, her face transfixed with joy. Was it possible? Only when I heard my name

in the voice more familiar to me than any other did I know that my husband had come back.

In the thirteen months since Sal's arrest by the French gendarmes in the ancient Montmorency hotel, I had prayed every day to God. I prayed first for my husband's safety and well-being; then I added my plea to bring him back to us. I had not heard from Sal nor had any word of him for five months, not since the day Paris had fallen to the Nazis in June, 1940. From that time on, I had no idea where he was; nor could I imagine how Sal would learn where to find us. So I prayed for a miracle.

God is good. He has heard and answered my prayers. He has reunited me with my husband and my children with their father. How else but through His intervention could this great good fortune be ours now?

CHAPTER 27

TO SPAIN AND BACK

“I was one of the thousands of nobodies.”

I saw at once that Sal had lost weight. I wondered whether he had worked outdoors, because his face and neck were uncharacteristically dark, as happens from long exposure to sun and wind. His smile was warm and loving. “Dearest, Mia,” he said.

“Sal, are you all right? How did you know where we were? How did you get here? Are you hungry?” There was so much I wanted to know, the questions tumbled out. Before he could answer, I realized others had to know Sal had come. “I must tell the director you are here. And Eva, find Ruth and bring her to the kitchen. I will make coffee for us. It’s not real coffee, Sal; it’s ersatz. The substitute is all we can get now, but it’s not so bad once you get used to it.”

“Yes, I know,” Sal said, “That’s what I’ve been drinking.”

Word spread through Chateau Montintin and members of the staff came to the kitchen to meet Sal and congratulate me. In the excitement of that first afternoon, all that Sal was able to tell me was, “I saw Hannah. Both your sisters and Herman are all fine and send their love.”

“Thank God,” I said. “But when?”

“Later, Mia,” he said. “It is a very long story.”

I looked at my watch and realized I had to prepare the evening meal. I took Sal up to my room, where he could rest for a while. He did not wake up until the next morning.

It was so wonderful to have Sal with me again that I minded nothing, not the small room with its rickety furniture that was our home, not the scarcity of food, not the worn out clothing on our backs, not the hard work in the kitchen day after day. I felt none of these inconveniences. What I felt was Hashem’s loving-kindness. My husband was well. Our children were with us and we were cared

for.

I asked the OSE officials if Sal could stay at Montintin and share my room with me. In return for his room and board, he would help me in the kitchen and function as a general handyman. They readily agreed but made it clear that his stay was unofficial. It did not matter to us that they could not pay him for his work. What was worrying, however, was that Sal's presence at Chateau Montintin was not legal. The OSE was not able to secure papers from Vichy government officials. The important thing was that the OSE agreed to shelter him and that we were together.

In our room in the evenings after we had finished work and after our time with the children, Sal told me all that had happened in the months we had been apart.

The first and saddest fact he told me was that his father had passed away. Mail deliveries had continued during those last chaotic days before the French surrender to the Nazis in June, 1940, and Sal's aunt sent word to him from Poland.

Early in June when it became clear that the Germans would sweep through the northwest on their way to Paris, the French authorities decided to close Maison La Fitte in Damini, the camp where Sal was interned. When they announced they would move all the prisoners to Bordeaux, Sal had gone on the train willingly. What would have been the point in escaping from his guards when they were taking him further away from Germany?

For several weeks the men were housed in military barracks where they waited uneasily and followed the progress of the advancing Nazi armies. It was there that Sal was handed a letter from his old aunt in Mielec, Poland. Sal showed me the letter, written in pencil on copy paper. It said Markus had not been well most of the winter. There had been no doctor and not enough food or medicine. Everything was in short supply. Markus grew weaker and weaker until he died in the night in his sleep.

While Sal was still sitting shivah, France and Germany signed the Armistice. That gave Germany Northern France from the Rhine to the Atlantic. It also stipulated that the Nazis would occupy the narrow strip of land along the western coast to the Spanish border. Bordeaux was the leading harbor for the Atlantic coast.

Immediately after the Armistice, the French guards told their German prisoners, “You are free to go.”

The German gentiles, most of them businessmen who had lived in France for some years, remained in Bordeaux to await their compatriots. The Jews realized that if they stayed, they would soon be at the mercy of the Nazis again. They packed everything they could carry and began to walk south.

With some twenty other Jewish men, Sal hiked along the coastal road, sleeping at night in open fields. The men pooled their funds to buy food, but the French farmers, like the ones I had encountered on my own trek to reach Montintin, often refused payment. It took just over a week for the men to reach Bayonne, a seaside resort one hundred and twenty miles south of Bordeaux. Bayonne had once been home to a substantial Jewish population, and the leader of the Jewish community still resided there. He was an elderly but efficient man who arranged for them to stay in a local guest house. His only advice to the men was, “Try to get yourselves on a ship.”

It was their first night in a proper bed for many months, but the men woke each other early in the morning. They were all anxious for passage out of France. Following the Jewish leader’s directions, they reached the waterfront.

The waterfront was mobbed with desperate men, clamoring for places on a battered troop ship that was to sail northwest to Cornwall. Men were pushing and shoving, yelling in French, Polish, Czech and Flemish. The crowd was immense and Sal became separated from the men in his group. He pressed forward, always listening to the rumors swirling about, in order to learn what he had to do to get on the ship. It became clear that only soldiers who had fought in the French or Allied armies could get transport to England.

“You see, Mia,” Sal said to me, “I was not important enough. I was just an ordinary person, one of thousands of nobodies.”

For days, Sal had trudged along the ocean with a group of men who counted on crossing the sea to safety. He had covered one hundred and twenty miles on foot, bolstered by the knowledge that the end of the taxing journey would be a boat to England and to safety. The waterfront at Bayonne turned out to be just the beginning because Sal knew he had to get away from the Nazis, and that meant he had to get out of France.

He went back to the Jewish community leader to tell him what he had learned.

“Go to Spain,” the leader said, and gave him fifty francs.

Back on the coastal road, Sal bartered his valise for a musette. He put his winter coat over his arm and continued walking south. It took more than a week before he came to the foothills of the Pyrenees, the mountains that divided Spain and France. His goal was the border crossing in the mountain village of Hendaye. He reached it on a hot, sunny day at the end of June. A narrow, wooden bridge in Hendaye separated France from Spain. On the bridge, the traffic was all one way, out of France. Black automobiles inched along the narrow road, with an occasional mule-drawn wagon lumbering forward between the cars, while throngs of people trudged along on either side of the vehicles.

On the French side, in the village of Hendaye, a booth had been erected to shield the border guards from the wind and sun. From a distance, Sal noticed that the guards reached out of their booth to collect identification cards. They hardly looked at the documents and casually replaced them with exit permits. They impeded no one from walking across the border out of France.

Sal gave up the temporary identity card he had received when he arrived in France in January 1939 and walked slowly into Spain.

He knew he would not be safe in Spain until he was at least three miles from the border. The roads might have been patrolled. If he were picked up near the border, he could be returned to France. Briefly, Sal considered cutting through the fields, but he was afraid he would lose his way. He knew no one in Spain. It was different when he had come to France from Germany; Hannah and Herman were in Paris, and he knew he could find them.

Now he was in Spain, and it suddenly occurred to him that the girls and I were in France. He felt as if he were abandoning us. “What am I doing?” he cried. “I must be mad.” Resolutely, he tightened the strap on the musette, changed directions, and walked back to Hendaye.

At the frontier booth at the end of the bridge, Sal told the guard, “Give me back the French card.”

“Stand aside and wait,” the guard said. He completed exit permits for a large family then said to Sal, “You want to go back? Are you sure? You must be

crazy.”

Sal returned the permit he had been issued earlier in the day, and held out his hand for the rumpled identification card. Then he walked back to France.

Crossing the border into France, he turned east, hoping to reach Nice. The Mediterranean city on the Italian border had been designated a free zone under the June, 1940 Armistice between France and Germany. From Nice, Sal intended to begin a search to find his family. Coming to the main road, he encountered a group of Polish and Austrian refugees. There was one German Jew among them. “I would not go to Spain,” the man said, “they are anti-Semites.”

Because it was hot, they walked slowly, moving aside when they heard an occasional vehicle coming up behind them. Soon they heard the louder engine of a truck and moved to the side of the road. The truck stopped. Three French policemen climbed out.

“Papers, papers,” said one of them.

One by one, the refugees handed over their identification cards, explaining they were Jews and were going to Nice.

“These papers that you hold are not valid in our province,” the policeman said. “Get on the truck.”

“But we are Jews,” they protested.

“You have no legal status,” the policeman said. “You cannot wander the countryside at will.”

Sal was the one who asked, “Where are you taking us?”

“To the camp at Gurs,” answered the uniformed man. “I am sorry.”

When Sal arrived at Gurs, he did what he always did. He walked about the camp seeking information. One of the first things he discovered was that Gurs was an open camp. However enticing this piece of information, Sal saw little point in walking out. He was without identification papers. It was inevitable that he would be picked up again.

The French had constructed Gurs in the mid-nineteen-thirties to accommodate Spaniards fleeing the dictatorship of General Franco. The camp was huge and Sal wandered on dusty dirt roads, past block upon block of barracks, past stores and laundries housed in wooden shacks, past water pumps and outhouses, searching for acquaintances among the inmates and learning camp procedures.

He learned that if an inmate had a place and people to go to, camp authorities would approve his release and issue travel documents. But he had no idea where the children and I were. Then he saw my sister, Edith. She was thin and irritable and had a vacant look in her eyes. Sal asked her what she was doing in Gurs, but the only answer he could get out of her was, "I came on the train with the others."

Sal went to Edith's barracks and explained to the barracks leader that Edith was his sister-in-law and that due to a birth defect she had a mental age of no more than 10 or 11. The young woman replied that they had wondered what the problem was, explaining that the only thing Edith had ever said was, "They made me leave Hannah."

Each afternoon Sal brought Edith part of his bread ration. She constantly craved food because of her thyroid deficiency. Sal took her for walks around the camp, hoping to distract her from her ravenous appetite that could not be satisfied in Gurs.

One afternoon in September, Edith said, "They are in Villeneuve. They are in Villeneuve-sur-Lot."

"Who? Who is in Villeneuve-sur-Lot?" Sal had asked, and Edith replied, "Hannah and Herman."

When Sal asked her if she was sure, she replied, "Yes, of course, I'm sure, Sal. I told you already. Didn't I tell you yesterday?"

After that, it was simple. In the stone building that was the camp headquarters, Sal waited two hours to make his request to the camp commander. Without a word, the official stamped and initialed two travel permits to Villeneuve-sur-Lot. The next morning, Sal packed his musette, picked up Edith from her barracks, and led her out of Gurs.

Sal had become used to walking, and could have covered the ninety miles to

Villeneuve in a week or ten days, but Edith was not strong and slowed him down. “Stop now,” she would say when she was weary, and nothing could move her.

When they finally reached the mountain village, they met Hannah’s friend, Madame Manyaka on the main street. Sal was so covered with dust and dirt that she almost did not recognize him. Edith responded to the woman’s hugs and kisses by breaking into tears, and Madame Manyaka said, “Come. I’ll take you to Hannah and Herman. They live on top of the hill.”

Now that he was within minutes of his destination, Sal was overwhelmed with weariness so that when Hannah opened the door, he uttered three sentences: “Here, I’ve brought Edith back to you. Where is my wife? Where are my children?” And, of course, Hannah told him.

I pictured the three of them, Sal unshaven and covered with dust, Edith beautiful in spite of her fatigue and hunger, and Hannah the welcoming hostess, pulling her guests into her home, sitting them in comfortable chairs, bringing cool drinks.

“I stayed in Villeneuve-sur-Lot just one night,” Sal said. “I had at least a hundred miles of walking in front of me to reach you. And every step of the way, I thanked God for guiding me in Hendaye, for making me see that if I did not flee to Spain but turned back, we would be reunited.”

CHAPTER 28

CHILDREN COME, CHILDREN GO

“You are asking me to give up my children.”

All through the winter of 1940-41 at Montintin, I watched children coming and going. Before departing, the children would come into the kitchen, some skipping excitedly, the girls kissing me, and the boys vigorously pumping my hand. A lucky few received visas for North or South America. Others returned to parents or relatives living in France.

I knew them all. There were the boys who filled buckets with apples from our orchard. There were the ones who picked berries in the forest and brought them to the kitchen for me to make jams and compotes. There were the youngsters who chatted as they carried dirty dishes from the dining room into the kitchen. They were the children who came into my kitchen seeking solace from their loneliness.

They were also the hungry boys and girls who sneaked into my kitchen between meals hoping for some crumbs of bread or an apple; “Never mind, Madame Amalia, if it is bruised or wormy,” they said. More often than not, I had to refuse them, not because it was against the rules, which it was, but because I had nothing I could give them.

Rarely was there much advance notice that a child was leaving unless it involved the fifteen-year-olds. We all knew the French Underground came for these teenagers within a few weeks of their sixteenth birthday. It was their response to the Vichy government’s decision of October 1940 to arrest and intern all adult Jews who lived in the Unoccupied Zone of France. The edict defined anyone who had reached the age of sixteen as an adult.

The decree confused and upset me. Where could we hide? Where could we flee? How would the girls manage? Leaving my children was out of the question. Then, incredibly, the local government officials, without the authority to do so, promised to protect the staff from arrest. Sal and I were safe. I was safe because I was a staff member, and Sal was safe because the authorities did not know that he existed. Or so we thought. But how could I be content when our OSE homes

received only a partial reprieve? For the village authorities did not, and could not, protect the Jewish children.

Fifteen-year-old girls and boys trod silently into the kitchen as though already in hiding. If I was busy, they would stand against the wall, waiting for me to notice them. Then I embraced them. What could I say to them except that they must trust God, that he would not abandon them. I told them I knew they would be brave. I promised to remember them, not forget who they really were. This last bit was important to the teenagers because the Underground was about to give them false identities—new names and new life histories—before placing them with sympathetic French families. Silently, I raged against the Nazis and their French collaborators. Each time a boy or a girl left, I cursed the authorities for the mindless cruelty inflicted on children by their anti-Semitic vendetta.

I longed for summer, for an end to the cold nights, for the season when the grounds and forest would yield something other than tobinambour that I still struggled to make palatable for children and staff. I wanted wild berries and prayed that the local farmers would put aside some of their spring vegetables for us before they loaded their wagons and headed for the market.

When the cherry trees had barely begun to flower, news of a different departure spread through Chateau Montintin. Some of our children were to emigrate to the United States on a special visa. The visa was for a total of two hundred children, selected from all the OSE homes around Limoges. The children would travel under the auspices of the American Quakers and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. The wife of the President of the United States had used her influence and intervened to get this visa to bring Jewish children out of war-torn Europe.

We were allocated fifty places. The most vulnerable were to be sent, so children who were orphaned, who had lost one or both parents, were chosen. The visa stipulated they were to be under the age of twelve. Exceptions were made if adherence to the stipulation separated siblings. Too many families had already been torn asunder.

There was great excitement among all the children. I noticed very little outward jealousy among those not going though they must have been disappointed. They seemed pleased at the good fortune of friends. The lives of all the children had already been disrupted so often, change and separation was accepted as normal.

Before the fortunate fifty left for America, we already knew there would be a second Kindertransport to America. A few youngsters had already been chosen before the first group left. Instead of solemn farewells, the fortunate ones told each other, "We'll see you in a few weeks, in America!"

Late in June, I was busy in the kitchen pitting cherries some boys had brought to me. Using just a small bit of our precious sugar ration, I thought I should be able to produce a tasty dessert. The children leaving for America on the second transport would soon be able to taste all the delicacies they could only dream about here. But I wanted them to remember me and the kitchen at La Chevrette for something other than the unpalatable tobinambour. I had tried mixing it with carrot and apple, and still, whenever I had to make it part of a meal, there were leftovers.

Madame Krakowski walked into the kitchen, an erect, upright figure. Even in summer, the directress continued to wear a dark, severe, high-necked frock. "Find your husband," she said, "And come into my office, both of you."

Her tone and manner were peremptory, so lacking in warmth it was easy for me to see why the children disliked the directress. "The fruit will spoil, Madame," I said. "Can it not wait?"

"No, it cannot. Come now!"

I found Sal sweeping the bare wooden floor in our dining room. He stood the broom in a corner and said, "I don't like it. Something is wrong."

But when we entered her office, the directress was smiling. It was the first time I had ever seen a look of pleasure on her face. I realized with surprise that she was a handsome woman.

"My dear," the Montintin administrator said now. "Your children can go on the transport to America. Ruth, Eva and little Lea, all three of them."

"Are you serious?" Sal asked.

But I thought: Give up my children? That was impossible. "I don't understand," I said.

"Two children have fallen ill and have been denied health clearance," Madame

Krakowski said. "That leaves two vacant spots. You know the policy is not to separate siblings, so all three of yours can go."

I was stunned. Send my children away? "No, Madame, it is not possible."

"Mia, what are you saying?" Sal protested. "In America, they will be safe."

When I continued to shake my head, Madame Krakowski said, "Go and talk it over between yourselves, and then let me know. But understand, I must have a decision tonight."

We walked to our room. Sal was exuberant. "What wonderful luck," he said.

"It's the other side of the world, Sal," I said. "I can't agree."

"Mia, we can all end up in Buchenwald," Sal said.

"It is impossibly far. If there are difficulties, if they need help, we will be too far away to do anything."

"There will be other adults to take responsibility," Sal said. "Besides, they are not infants."

"Lea is a baby, not even five yet," I said. "The youngest child in the group is seven."

"You're being unreasonable and foolish," Sal said. "Look at the girls here in La Chevrette and Chateau Montintin. They don't have mothers or fathers, and they are all right. People will take care of Ruth and Eva and Lea in America, just as we care for the children here. And they will have each other."

"You don't know what it's like to watch your children go. You weren't in Montmorency when they left without me. But at least they knew exactly where they were going, and I knew I could get to them. This is different. We'll never get to America. If they go now, we will never see them again. We will lose our children. There is an ocean between France and America."

"That's the whole point," Sal argued. "An ocean between France and America."

Could Sal not understand? "You are asking me to give up my children," I said.

“An ocean between the Nazis and the girls,” he insisted.

We argued back and forth, going over the same ground. He was asking me to part with my children. The girls would be children alone in a strange land, I argued. How could I protect them if they were so far away? An ocean away from the Nazis and danger, he retorted. Was Sal right? Was I being selfish to want my children near me?

“Maybe just Ruth. She’ll be twelve soon. She is very mature for her age. And maybe Eva. She is already ten years old. But Lea is so little.”

“Please, Mia, even Lea could be in danger.”

“Who would harm such a little girl?” I cried. “No, no, I can’t give up Lea.”

The door cracked open. Ruth was standing in the doorway. What was happening? She knew not to enter without knocking.

“Ruth, what is it?”

“Please, Mama,” my daughter said. “Don’t shout. Why are you shouting at each other?”

“This is not a fight,” Sal said. “We are trying to make a very important decision. Tell me, Ruth, would you like to go to New York with the other children?”

“Do you mean it? Could I? Could I really?”

“See how happy she is, Mia?”

I looked at my oldest. What was the right way? It was such a big decision we had to make, and it was all happening too fast. I closed my eyes and saw the fifteen-year-old girls being spirited away by members of the Underground. Would this happen to Ruth? She was growing up. Dear God, I love my children. Help me, help me to make the right decision.

“All right, then,” I said slowly. “Let the two big ones go.”

“Oh, Mama, Papa, thank you!” She hugged each of us in turn and ran out.

Two days of frenzied activity followed. I wanted the two girls with me all the time, but they had to be rushed to the village for the required medical examination and their certificates of health. Their clothes had to be sorted, cleaned, and packed. And I still had all my work.

Ruth and Eva were occupied as well, collecting information about America and accepting congratulations from the other children. They cut sheets of precious paper into three inch strips, found old cardboard, and hand-stitched autograph booklets. Now they went over their treasures and traded their American stamps and coins for French ones. Eva wandered in the meadow looking for wild flowers to enhance her dried flower collections.

Sal found an unused school notebook. In it, he printed his parents' full names and their dates and places of birth. Below that he wrote the names of his four sisters and brother and those of their children and the dates and places of their birth. He copied all the addresses as they appeared in his address book though he could not be certain if they were still correct. He was less sure about his sister Malia who the Nazis had deported to Poland in 1938.

Almost three years had passed since then. In the interim, Russia and Germany had signed the Nazi-Soviet pact dividing Poland between them. And just a few days ago, on the 22nd of June, 1941, the radio broadcast that Russia and Germany had declared war against each other. Now, there was fighting in Poland and no way to know exactly where Malia lived, if at all. Similarly, he had last heard from his sister Fanny in Berlin more than a year ago. We had no idea how Jews were surviving in Germany.

On a separate page, Sal wrote all the information we had about my family, Hannah and Edith's address in Villeneuve-sur-Lot and my father's address in Leipzig, but we had no firm information that he was there.

In a third section of the notebook, Sal copied the names and addresses of every single person he knew in the United States, even casual acquaintances.

The night before the departure, Sal presented the book to our oldest. "Ruth, this is a very, very important book." We were in my room, where the family was together for the last time. "Keep in touch with your aunts and uncles and cousins by mail. On this page are addresses in America. All these people in New York know me. You must write or telephone them, so that they will know you are in

America. Then if you need help with anything, they won't be surprised to hear from you. Do you understand what I am saying, Ruth?"

"Yes, Papa," she said.

"Our family is splitting up, scattering," I said. "You are the oldest, Ruth. You are responsible for your sister. You must always stay together."

Ruth nodded. Her mood was solemn. Perhaps she comprehended the magnitude of the journey for the first time. Until then, she had been caught up in a whirlwind of excitement, congratulated by everyone on her unexpected good fortune. Had she given much thought to the separation she faced? I had not brought it up. I believed she could cope, so why make her sad?

Ruth was already looking out for her sister. "Look," she said, "Eva is crying."

I stroked Eva and wiped her damp cheeks. "Be a good girl, Eva, as you've always been, and everyone will love you. You've always managed. I know you will do well in America, and make Papa and me proud." There were tears in my eyes now too. "After the war is over, we will be together again. I promise that we will all be together again."

All this time Lea had been sitting quietly on the floor, turning a doll around again and again. "I want to go too," she said now. "Why can't I go with them to America?"

"After the war, we will go, too. Then the family will be together."

Sal took Eva and Ruth to their rooms in the Chateau, while I took down three more hems on the girls' dresses. They were not too short now, but they soon would be. Both girls had taken part in sewing classes at Montintin, and Ruth had been in a sewing class in the French school, but how neat a job could they do? Who would sew for them or help them in America? Who would watch over them?

I had agreed to let them go. Everyone said it was the right decision. I had to believe someone on the other side of the ocean in America would care for my daughters. I sewed late into the night, but it did not matter. When I finally got into bed, I was unable to fall asleep.

The next morning, two dozen children crowded onto the steps of La Chevrette. They all wore coats and hats though it was late July because it was easier to wear than carry their outerwear. Someone had a camera, and Ruth called, "Mama, come too." I stood at the edge of the group. Lea ran to the front, smiling impishly, and one of the boys snapped a photograph of the travelers. Then Sal was with me and Ruth and Eva and all the children were hugging us and their other teachers, until Madame Krakowski announced, "It is time to go, children. Go to the truck."

I watched them go, my beautiful daughters and the others whose mothers had sent their children away to safer places, as I was doing that day in July, 1941. Where were they now, these mothers? Some, I knew, had already perished.

My cheeks damp with tears, I shouted, "Goodbye, good luck!" and waved furiously not only to my own two children, but to all the others on behalf of their absent mothers.

CHAPTER 29

THE LONG JOURNEY

“They made a gift of their bread to their loved ones.”

The first day after the girls left, I wondered if I had done the right thing to send them so far away. I missed them and thought about them constantly, trying to imagine what was happening to them. While I cooked the milky breakfast soup, I thought of them. Watching girls stack the dirty plates, I wondered what my two were doing.

Both girls had promised to write when they arrived in Marseilles, the first stop of the journey. A week after their departure, I had their first letter. It was a year after the French surrender, and train service in the Unoccupied Zone governed by French collaborationists was no longer normal. It took two days for the group to reach their destination. Marseilles is southeast of Limoges, and though both were major rail terminals, there was no longer a direct link between the two cities. The train took the children to Toulouse, nearly two hundred miles south of Limoges. They arrived in the evening, after eight o'clock.

In the Toulouse terminal, the children were taken to the station restaurant. Eva described the meal in detail. “We had bread and butter, half a tomato, a plate of soup, an egg, a piece of cheese, a plum, a bonbon, and a glass of lemonade.” I thought it normal for a child to write about bonbons and lemonade, if not to itemize every item of the food on the menu. But Eva’s next sentence revealed what the war was doing to children. What she wanted us to know was: “We could have as much bread as we wanted.”

The stop over in Toulouse was to last three hours, so it was close to midnight when the children finally boarded the train for Marseilles. They scrambled for places and Ruth managed to secure a seat for herself and Eva who “slept well the whole night.” Ruth was already watching over her sister. Ruth herself hardly slept at all. There were not enough seats for all the children, but youngsters are inventive. They simply climbed up into the luggage racks overhanging the seats, and slept there. The train “crawled like a snail,” and they did not pull into Marseilles until mid-morning.

In Marseilles, their first stop was with representatives of the Quakers. They interviewed each child, confirming date and place of birth, nationality, parents' names and whereabouts. Then the children were taken to the OSE reception building for refugees. They remained in the reception center for two weeks waiting for their ship. Even before Ruth wrote again to tell about the delay, I learned from Madame Krakowski that the children had not left Marseilles as scheduled.

Ruth called the building where they stayed a "barrack." Children from other OSE homes traveling to America joined our group and the cots were moved closer and closer together. Eva added a line about boys and girls sleeping in one room with blankets hung in the middle to form a room divider. "I don't like it here, too much," she wrote. "It is not very clean." In her next letter, the child elaborated, revealing there were bedbugs and lice. I shuddered when I read it, but I was glad she told us. They were my children. If they had difficulties, I wanted to know about them.

The children were given still another medical examination and visited the American Consulate for a review of their documents. Everything was in order for my daughters and all our group from Montintin and La Chevrette, but six children were returned to an OSE home near Vichy. Consular officials discovered that other members of their families already had affidavits approving entry to America. That made them ineligible to travel on the affidavit the United States had issued for the group. "We have no problem, so don't worry about us," Ruth said.

There were only a few adults to supervise, so the children formed small groups and teenagers took responsibility for the younger ones. Aside from a walk to the harbor, there was little to occupy them. Then a diphtheria epidemic broke out in Marseilles, and children were confined to a small courtyard for play and exercise. They were bored and restless.

"We can't go to the stores," Ruth wrote, and immediately added, "Don't worry about us. There is nothing to worry about." Sensitive and grown-up in her concern about our reactions, she was still also a child who closed every letter with thousands of kisses.

Of course, I worried. What mother wouldn't? But then came good news. After two weeks, the children left Marseilles, though not by ship. Word came to us

from Limoges that the route on the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar had become too dangerous. The children would have to travel by train to their new embarkation point in Portugal.

Ten days later, I received a detailed letter from Ruth describing their train journey through France, Spain and Portugal. At the end of their stay in Marseilles, Madame Salomon, the woman in charge of the OSE children in Marseilles, made a souvenir album. She wrote the story of each chateau, and pasted photos of all the children in the book. This little detail reassured me. She must have been a caring woman to go to the trouble of creating a scrapbook. I was sure she was doing her best for our children while they were in her charge.

At six o'clock on a Wednesday morning, they boarded the train and rode back to Toulouse. This time the train did not travel at a snail's pace; nor was there time for a meal in the station restaurant. Instead, each child received a brown bag filled with food. The children found this peculiar. None of them had ever been given a meal in a paper bag, but they soon became accustomed to it. Paper bag meals were the norm for the rest of the journey.

From Toulouse, they traveled to Pau near the Franco-Spanish border. The trip should have taken just several hours, but the trains were plagued with delays. The group spent a night on benches in a railroad terminal. The atmosphere was oppressive, and they did not need to be told to be quiet and orderly. They were relieved to climb back on the train.

When they reached Pau, they were less than forty miles from the border. There, they spent a night, sleeping two to a bed.

They made one more unexpected stop in France. It was at the railroad siding of the concentration camp of Gurs, where relatives of some of the children were confined. Waiting for these children on the platform were inmates. Mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles of Gurs had come to the train to see their children with whom they had had no contact for months.

No one explained when or how these children knew their train would make this extra stop. Maybe someone told them. They were not permitted to get off the train, and the inmates were not allowed on. But when the train pulled into the camp, the children were jammed together in front of the windows. Even before the train came to a complete stop, the children reached their arms out of the

windows. Each little hand held a brown paper bag. They had not consumed the bread they had been given for their breakfast, but saved it. Now they made a gift of their bread, handing it out of the windows to their loved ones.

Who had arranged this unscheduled stop that made it possible for mothers and children to say goodbye to each other? Who was it? I wondered for a long time.

At the Franco-Spanish border, all the passengers had to disembark and walk across the border to Canfranc in Spain. They were held up for several hours before they were finally allowed on the Spanish trains. The wooden seats were hard and uncomfortable. Traveling through the mountains, Ruth found a compensation. "The Pyrenees were so beautiful," she wrote. "I have never seen anything like it. There was snow on some of the mountains."

When the train pulled into Madrid, it was close to midnight. Two buses were waiting for the children and took them to a convent for the night. Although it was their first chance to wash since Marseilles, the Spanish capital left them with bad memories. Madrid had been ravaged by bombs. Ruth wrote, "All we saw driving back to the station were bombed out buildings."

They confronted a new problem before they could cross the border into Portugal to reach Lisbon. "We had to ride on Shabbos," my daughter confessed. "But we couldn't help it." All the children understood the extraordinary circumstances and that they had to get out of Spain.

When they reached Lisbon in August, the children felt they were in paradise. School was out for summer vacation, and they were put up in a boys' boarding school where each child had his own room with a sink for washing. The greatest wonder was in the dining room where they could help themselves to an abundance of marvelous, mouth-watering food, "as much good bread and butter as we could eat!" and meat, cheese, fruits, so many items that they had not eaten in a long time. Eva discovered pineapple, filled herself on the sweet new fruit, and was sick.

Our children had survived two years of wartime shortages. Their bodies were no longer accustomed to quantities of rich food, and many became sick during the first days in Lisbon. But they recovered. The weather was warm and sunny, and they walked joyfully along the beach. They stayed in Lisbon for two weeks before boarding their ship.

Ruth's last message from Lisbon was, "Many million kisses."

Her next letter came with an American stamp and was postmarked New York. None of us had imagined that it would take six weeks from the time our children left La Chevrette until they would land in New York on Labor Day of 1941. Whatever the delays and difficulties of the long journey, at last they were safe in America.

CHAPTER 30

THE OSE HOME IN THE FOREST

“Children pleaded for extra scraps of food.”

“Don’t worry about us,” Ruth had written from Marseilles. “There is no reason to worry.”

But in Haute Vienne, there was ample reason to worry, reason that cast away any doubt I may have had about sending the girls to America. Soon after the children departed, the situation for Jews in France began to deteriorate once more.

From OSE officials, we heard reports of repressive measures against Jews in the Unoccupied Zone. Taking their orders from the Nazis, the Vichy officials of the Unoccupied Zone oversaw the July 1941 decree to “eliminate all Jewish influence from the national economy.” The takeover of Jewish-owned businesses escalated rapidly. A census of Jews ordered in June made available to the police details of the whereabouts of almost every Jew in the country. Thousands of German and Austrian Jews who had managed to make their way to the Unoccupied Zone were arrested and interned. Even French Jews were not immune from arrest.

As a precaution, the OSE directors in Limoges decided to close Chateau Mas Jambot, the OSE home near that city. They feared the children would not be safe in a home situated so close to an important city, a city that was itself not far from Vichy. The OSE acquired Le Couret, a large century-old house deep in the forests of Haute Vienne, away from the collaborationist French regime that controlled Limoges.

Madame Krakowski was put in charge of Le Couret, and I was asked to move there to become the cook. When the OSE agreed that I could take Lea with me and that Sal could also come, I was happy to go.

I knew some of the children from Eaubonne, but most were strangers to me, as Mas Jambot was their first OSE home. More than one hundred children lived in Le Couret, many of them over nine years old. As had been the case in La Chevrette, they found their way to my kitchen seeking an adult to talk to or

looking for extra morsels. Madame Krakowski frequently saw them “visiting” me, but she was less strict and rigid than she had been at our previous home. Perhaps her relaxed attitude stemmed from the fact that there were fewer children, or that Le Couret was farther away from authorities, both the Vichy government and the OSE headquarters in Limoges.

One of the first things she did was to rent a small summerhouse for Sal, Lea and me. It was owned by a Limoges railroad worker and was a fifteen minute walk from the home. It could hardly be called a house. It was just a one-room hut, but it was ours. It gave us the luxury of privacy.

The shortage of food was even more acute than it had been in Montintin, and we relied on the good will of French farmers. One was a friendly young man, the only neighbor we had within two miles. That man made a habit of delivering extra milk and butter to me in the kitchen. And Monsieur Schlachter, a member of our Le Couret staff, spent most of his time going to farms further afield begging for extra milk, eggs, and butter to supplement the limited amount of food to which the Vichy rationing system entitled us. He had little or no money to pay the Frenchmen. I marveled constantly at Schlachter’s great powers of persuasion. He never came back empty-handed.

Schlachter returned from his rounds in the countryside one day carrying a small potbellied stove for my little shack. It was just large enough to hold one pot, but it provided heat and made it possible for me to do a little cooking once in a while. Walking from Le Couret to the summerhouse in the evening, I would carry some wet grounds of ersatz coffee I saved from the Le Couret kitchen. Sal collected dry wood along the way and lit a fire in the stove. I reused the grounds to make a second, but still drinkable brew of ersatz. With it we would eat a piece of bread, our ration that I had put aside during the day.

Rationing entitled us to a small amount of meat. Limoges was the only place for miles around where kosher meat was still available. Through the intervention of the Jewish community, Le Couret was allocated a share of it. The Jewish community also had the meat delivered to our kitchen two or three times a month. Most often, I received chopped meat, and this I stretched as much as I could. I found that chopped meat stretched furthest when I molded it into meat loaves. I served the meat loaf cold with potato salad.

It was not enough. And even with Schlachter’s successful forays, the food

scarcely satisfied our growing children. Between meals, they came and pleaded for extra scraps. They would beg from Sal as well whenever they saw him, knowing he helped in the kitchen. They went to Schlachter and anyone else they thought had access to food. Relentlessly hungry, they scoured the forest for nuts and berries, until winter made it pointless.

I continued to struggle with tobinambour. Finally, I developed a recipe, cooking the vegetable with vinegar, oil, onion, sugar and salt. I had by no means made it into a delicacy, merely more edible to more people. Madame Weil, one of the OSE directors, tasted it when she visited our home and actually praised my tobinambour dish. She even asked for the recipe, so she could distribute it to the other OSE cooks.

They were all such good children and willingly helped with everything. Boys chopped wood for our stoves in the kitchen and the fireplaces. Among the vegetables available from local farms were carrots, so boys and girls would regularly sit at our long dining room tables, slicing carrots for one hundred people.

This building was probably more than one hundred years old. I knew it was at least seventy-five years old because I came upon a cache of magazines in the attic that dated back to the nineteenth century. There were beautiful drawings of clothes and furniture and houses from another era. How delightful to leaf through those magazines, to escape the life we were living: In wartime, in an old house, hidden away in the forest. How had those magazines come to be in the attic? Had they been carefully stored to save them, or carelessly tossed into the attic to get them out of the way? It did not matter. In the winter, when we ran out of toilet paper and paper for kindling our fires, we began burning the magazines. We needed the paper, and the record of nineteenth century life, preserved for more than seventy-five years in the attic of that isolated old house, disappeared.

Le Couret was so old that it had no indoor plumbing. A natural spring that ran past our home in the forest was our source of water for washing, cooking and drinking. The water was so sweet and refreshing that no one was ever thirsty for long. Still, it meant that the boys acquired yet another urgent task to be performed regularly—carrying water from the spring to the house. None of us, adults or children, had ever lived in such primitive conditions, but we accepted these circumstances without question or complaint.

Many times that winter, I thanked God that my friends from Leipzig had succeeded in emigrating to New York, for they took in my children. The two Graubart brothers each took one of the girls. Ruth went to live in Brooklyn with Fred, and Eva to Mount Vernon, New York, with Irving. Three months later, the girls were reunited when the Weinrauchs took both girls into their home in Washington Heights. Rosa and Meyer had lived across the street from us in Leipzig, and Meyer had been joint owner of my mother's shoe store. The girls could not have been in better hands.

I was grateful but also thought it only right. Years before, when they were single and just starting out, the Graubart brothers and Meyer had boarded with my mother in her apartment in Nordstrasse. Now when my family was in need, it was time to return my mother's generosity. It was only natural.

How great the difference between the lives of my Ruth and Eva and that of the children at Le Couret. In New York, after school my daughters read, studied, and played with friends. Here, the children were kept busy cutting wood, carrying water, picking fruit, helping in the kitchen, sewing, knitting and crocheting, keeping their rooms clean, and all these chores had to be performed before or after school.

Regular classes were held at Le Couret. Government officials responsible for supervising education sent several teachers to instruct the children in French, history, and geography. We also had our own OSE teachers. Madame Krakowski led several classes, and her husband, who like Sal, had no official standing at Le Couret, taught the children Hebrew and instructed them in davening.

One of the French teachers, Madame Paul, liked to take Lea aside and read her stories. Lea knew all the letters of her name and would look for L's and E's and A's, asking, "What's this one Madame Paul, what's that one?" The teacher decided to teach Lea to read, and found an apt and willing pupil.

Madame Paul took Lea to the school in the village of La Jonchere. When she tried to enroll Lea, the teacher protested, "This child is not yet six."

"Try her," Madame Paul said. "She reads and adds."

"No, bring her back next year," the teacher said. "She's too small and too young."

Madame Paul then made her proposal. “Let her come on Monday. I’ll stay the day. If she can’t do the work, I’ll take her home.”

Lea became the star pupil in the one-room school. When visitors came, the teacher would show her off. “See this tiny child? She is only five-and-a-half years old, and she reads as well as my eight-year-olds. She was born in a foreign country, and she speaks perfect French.”

In March of 1942, Ruth wrote that Hannah and her family were in New York. Ruth made no mention of Edith. My oldest daughters’ letters had been exact and detailed. If Edith had been in New York, she would have mentioned it. That she hadn’t could mean only one thing. The visa Herman had secured did not include Edith, and she had been left behind. I did not blame Herman. A man should not have to throw away safety for his wife, daughter and mother. I could only hope there were Jews left in Villeneuve and that they were looking after my sister.

I had not heard from Papa in many months. I did not even know if he had managed to get away from Leipzig and out of Germany. Even if he were in a place from where he could write, how would he know where to send the letter? I thought of the day almost three years ago when I had said goodbye to him at the airport in Leipzig. I had been struck by the premonition that I would not see him again. That dark certainty had come from nowhere, and I felt it again when I heard Hannah had arrived in America and many times after.

We all worried about family members with whom we had lost touch. Our own future was uncertain. We had been elated when America entered the war in December 1941, but Hitler’s armies continued to advance in Russia.

In spite of our difficulties and concerns, we took pride in maintaining a superb, warm Jewish atmosphere at La Couret. This was a truly Jewish home. It was a place where children learned and where our isolation made it easy to keep Shabbos. Monsieur Krakowski led our Friday evening services. I can still hear the clear, fervent voices of the children in the dining room, singing Shalom Aleichem.

Shabbos was my favorite time. More than any other time before, it was a day of rest for me, a day free from cooking or any other work. It was also a day when children ate their best meals. Whenever the Jewish community sent meat, I saved it for the Shabbos meal.

After the conclusion of our Friday evening meal, we bentched, beginning the prayers with the singing of Shir Hamalos. Even as we heard of repressions against Jews in surrounding sections, we took pleasure in keeping God's commandments. I believe it was what sustained us.

Book Five

August 1942-November 1942

Hiding

CHAPTER 31

ESCAPE BY AMBULANCE

“The first step is to save the child.”

The winter at Le Couret had been extraordinarily hard. We were always cold, and I looked forward to the summer, to warm weather and more plentiful vegetables and summer fruits. When it finally arrived, I could scarcely enjoy it. Reports from OSE officials and the French Underground were ominous. The Nazis had been putting pressure on the Vichy government to take stronger action against Jews. Happy to comply, the Vichy Council of Ministers stepped up its arrest of Jews in early July. Even more frightening was that the Vichy had turned over fifteen thousand Jews to the Nazis who interned them in camps in France. We feared those fifteen thousand included the mothers of those whom the OSE had sent to America.

The OSE continued its efforts on behalf of Jewish children. During the autumn and winter months, it had managed to bring dozens of children out of Gurs, some of whom came to Le Couret. At the beginning of the summer, eight more children came to us from Gurs.

Madame Krakowski brought one of them to me. She was Ruth’s age, a girl of twelve.

“My mother said I was to tell you she is a cousin of your brother-in-law, Herr Felber,” the girl said. “She wrote this letter for you.”

It was a short note, only two paragraphs.

I send you my two children, dear Frau Kanner. I don’t know what the future will hold or what will happen to us. The authorities told us we were going to Germany to work and gave us the choice of taking our children or leaving them behind.

I do not know where we are going, but I am afraid. I beg you to take care of my children. God will surely bless you.

I could not remember Herman mentioning this woman. I was positive I had never met her, but everyone now used even the most tenuous connections. Somehow, this woman must have learned that I was at Le Couret. I put my arms around the girl, and said, “You mustn’t worry. You and your brother are safe here. Come and talk to me when you like.”

On a warm July afternoon, Sal and I found time for a brief walk along the lake near Le Couret. When we came back, Madame Krakowski was waiting in the doorway. She took my arm and pulled me inside.

“Two village policemen came searching for you while you were out,” she said.

I wanted to ask what happened but was unable to make a sound. I felt myself swaying. Sal guided me to a bench in the vestibule.

“They said they were looking for Salomon and Amalia Kanner and their three daughters,” she said. “I said you weren’t here and that they were free to look through the house if that was their duty. But they said, ‘If they are not here, we cannot bring them in.’ They went away. I prayed that you would stay clear of the village road and come back through the path from the woods.”

“Do you think they will return?” Sal asked. “What do you advise us to do, Madame?”

“I already sent a message to the Underground,” she said. “We should hear soon.”

In the kitchen that evening, Sal heated water, and I scrubbed pots. Madame Krakowski had told me the children would clean up everything that night, but I had refused. I wanted to keep busy so that I would not panic. But it was impossible not to think of the danger that faced us.

“I thought we’d be safe, isolated in the country,” I said to Sal. “What if we had been here?”

“The Underground will help us, Mia,” he said.

“What can they do?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “We have to wait.”

“Why are the children on the list? Lea is only five years old.”

“Thank God at least Ruth and Eva are in America.”

Madame Krakowski came into the kitchen. “Our people say the first step is to save the child. They are coming for Lea early tomorrow morning.”

I was numb with shock. But how could I have known? How could I have known it would come to this when I had refused to let Lea go to America? “She is so small,” I argued. “Who would want to harm such a little child?”

Night came. I tucked Lea in, but I did not sleep. How could I give up my baby? I raged. I wept. I prayed. I found no help, no answer.

In the morning, an ambulance arrived at Le Couret. “This is the safest way to drive through the village,” the driver said. “The police never look inside. People get appendicitis even during war.”

I picked Lea up and kissed her cheeks, her forehead, her hair. “I love you, little one. I love you.”

Sal was beside me, urging me to let go of the child. “Come, Lea,” he said. I released her. “Come, Lea,” he said again. “We are going to ride in the white truck.”

The driver lifted Lea into his vehicle. Sal climbed in after her. It had been agreed that he should ride with her to her destination. The ambulance pulled away. Lea was waving to me from the one small window in the back of the ambulance. She was much too small to have reached the window. Sal must have lifted her up so that she could look out and so that I could get one last look at her.

When he came back, it was mid-afternoon, just twenty-four hours since we had returned from what had been a brief, carefree summer walk. “She never stopped crying in the ambulance. I told her she was going on a vacation to a nice place, but she shouted ‘Not true! Not true! I don’t believe you!’ I can’t remember when I ever felt so helpless.”

“What happened then? Where did you leave her?” I asked.

“The ambulance stopped on a deserted road, and Lea and I were transferred to a

car that was waiting there. We rode for an hour. Lea stared out of the window and didn't say a word. We came to a large house, very well kept. My guess is that it was in a Limoges suburb. A woman stood by the door. She was tall and had silver hair. I carried Lea up the stairs and told her she would have a good time. She shook her head and said, "I don't believe you, Papa."

There was not much else for him to tell me. The driver of the car made sure Sal had enough money to board a train and then directed him to the local railroad station. Afraid he might be recognized at the Le Couret station in the village of La Jonchere, Sal got off the train one stop before and walked on the road the ambulance had driven for almost two hours.

"Lea will stay in the house just for a few days," Sal said. "They told me it would be safer if we did not know where she was going."

I was beside myself that she was gone. I thought I would go mad. "I have to know where she is!"

"The Underground is going to hide her," Madame Krakowski said. "Be reasonable."

"I have to know," I insisted.

Madame Krakowski shook her head. She did not understand. She had custody of one hundred children and took her obligation very seriously. I could think of no one who could have handled that awesome responsibility under tremendously difficult circumstances any better, but she did not have children of her own. That was the difference. "I have to know," I insisted. "I have to know where she is."

"I don't think that's possible," she said.

I don't know how I got through the next two days. They are a blank. I can't say what I did. I imagine I took care of my work in the kitchen. All I know is that Schlachter came to me with a message from the Underground: if I would risk a trip to Limoges the following day, I could see Lea once more before she was taken to her permanent hiding place.

Risk? The word was meaningless, irrelevant, nothing to do with me. They were letting me go to her.

Schlachter drove me to a train station beyond La Jonchere. We sat in the car until we heard the train clattering into the station. He warned me to be careful and handed me a ticket. The Underground had secured it for me so that I would avoid contact with the station master. The less visible I was, the better.

The train journey passed quickly. In Limoges, I walked, boarded a bus, and walked again without concern for my safety. I paid attention to nothing, but it was as if my legs took me automatically to the right roads and made me turn at the correct corner. It was as if all my will was focussed on arriving at the house in which Lea lived. The directions, the address, the description of the house that Schlachter and Sal had given me to memorize must have guided me unconsciously. I do not know. But when I came to a large, white villa, I recognized it instantly and thought: this is where Lea is staying.

A maid opened the door before I rang and ushered me into a large foyer. A porcelain vase filled with fresh yellow roses stood on a side table in the hallway. I was taken to a richly furnished drawing room, and for an instant, I was carried back to my life in Germany before Hitler and before the war. Then I saw my little one sitting on a bench, facing a grand piano.

“Lea,” I said.

She jumped up and ran to me. “Oh, Mama,” she cried. “Can I go home now?”

“No, my darling, but you are going to a really nice place after this,” I said. “It will be like a vacation.”

She said nothing. She did not have to. The child had not learned to mask her feelings. The radiant joy in her eyes gave way to reproach, mistrust and betrayal. I should have known better than to try to mollify my five-year-old daughter with platitudes and untruths. She looked at me patiently, until my shame gave way to anguish, and I could pretend no longer.

I took a deep breath and said, “It is too dangerous for you now in Le Couret. You can’t go back there anymore. If you do, the Germans will take you away. Papa and I can’t let that happen.”

The maid entered with a tray of cakes and cocoa. “Chocolate for you, little one,” she said. Before Lea had drained the cup, a tall, silver-haired woman entered. “I am sorry, Madame,” she said. “It is time.”

I embraced Lea for the last time. “You have to be brave and grown up.”

Lea nodded. “I’ll try, Mama,” she said. “But it’s not a vacation.”

“No, it’s not a vacation. I shall come for you when it is over. Remember that I love you.”

CHAPTER 32

HIDING IN MOUNTAINS

“Gendarmes came at night. They took many children.”

It had been four days since I had been with Lea in Limoges. I thought about her constantly. There was no question in my mind or Sal’s that it had been right to give her to the care of the Underground. Still, I worried. How was she managing, wholly surrounded by strangers?

Marie Pouillard, a young French teacher with whom I had become friendly, was in the kitchen, sipping a cup of ersatz. “You must not think about her all the time,” she said. “You must find something to take your mind off this. She is among people who care for her. Try to concentrate on something else for a while.”

I sought refuge in the attic. I remembered the stack of nineteenth century magazines, and thought I might find another bundle of old journals, or perhaps some other artifacts to take my mind off Lea. I poked around for a while, found nothing, and went downstairs.

Madame Krakowski was waiting at the bottom of the stairs. “The police were here again,” she said. “They searched for you. It did not occur to them that we have an attic. Your husband was not in the house.”

She led me to the kitchen, where Schlachter was pouring ersatz for Sal.

“It’s no use,” Sal said. “We’ve been counted in the census. They know we are here and they will keep coming.”

“They are after foreign Jews,” Schlachter said. “I heard that in Paris only French Jews have a chance of avoiding arrest.”

Madame Krakowski said, “You’re Alsatian, Schlachter, so you are safe, for the time being at least. I think my Swiss passport will protect me.” She looked at Sal and at me and said, “But the two of you must leave and go into hiding.”

“How? Where?” I asked. “Nobody has a place for us!”

“Go up into the mountains,” the directress said. “It’s summer, and the nights are mild. Maybe we will find a place before the summer ends.”

Sal stood. “We have no choice. If we let ourselves be arrested, we’ll be returned to Germany. I will not be taken!” he shouted, and pounded the table. “I beg your pardon, Madame, but you know that in Germany they will kill us.”

“The gendarmes are not likely to come twice in one day,” Madame Krakowski said. “However, nothing is certain. It would be best if you left now.”

I walked to the summerhouse and gathered clothes for us, a change of underwear, shirts and some sweaters. I thought it would be cold, especially at night. I brought our things to the kitchen. Schlachter filled a musette with bread and fruit. Sal took the clothing and rolled it up in two wool blankets. Then we walked out toward the mountains that rose behind Le Couret.

We climbed along a narrow path that followed the stream. Each time we came to a clearing, we looked down to make sure the main road was in sight. At dusk, we spread one of the blankets on the ground. Sal brought water from the mountain stream, and we ate a bit of bread. Then he cleared sticks and pebbles from the ground, spread the second blanket, and promptly fell asleep. Since Kristallnacht, Sal had slept in so many places, indoors and out, on beds, planks, bare floor, grass and earth that he was now able to sleep wherever he was.

That first night in the mountains, I envied his ability to fall asleep so easily. I slept fitfully, waking to the light of the crescent moon, thankful for Sal’s rhythmic, reassuring snoring. At least, Lea must have a bed. Oh, if only I could have foreseen the future, I would have sent her to America with Ruth and Eva. If I had done that, if I had acted differently, Lea would not be alone now, without family or friends. I should have let her go, but how could I have known that the police would search for us in this secluded bit of France?

Wondering how long life could go on like this, I must have drifted into sleep. When I opened my eyes, it was light. My neck and shoulders ached. Sal brought me cool mountain water in a cup Schlachter had packed for us. Reaching for it, I was startled by a noise.

“Sal, I heard someone,” I whispered.

He froze and listened. “No, it is nothing, an animal,” he said. “Listen. It’s a whoosh, whoosh. Those are not footsteps, not the sound of soldiers. Soldiers won’t come after us here.” He unwrapped the leftover bread. “Eat something.”

During the morning, we explored the forest to become familiar with the terrain. In the afternoon, I slept for an hour until Sal woke me and said, “It’s time.”

It was four o’clock when we started down the mountain. One and a half hours later, we crouched behind bushes close to the dirt road leading toward the village of La Jonchere. It felt as if we waited for a long time, but we were there only fifteen minutes when we heard the clear, high-pitched voices of children. They were singing an old French folk song, “Sur le Pons, D’Avignon, Ils fait bon, fait bon, fait bon.”

It was the agreed upon signal. It had been worked out while I was collecting our clothes from the summerhouse. Sal moved to the other side of the bushes. Peering through the leaves, I saw four young girls, apparently out for a carefree afternoon stroll. In reality, they were from Le Couret and were bringing us food.

One of the girls stopped and toyed with some leaves on the bush. “Hello, Sal, how are you?” she asked.

“We’re all right, thank you,” he said. He took the parcel from her and slipped back into the woods. We watched the girl run to catch up with her companions and stood there until we could no longer hear them singing. Then we carried the parcel up the mountain and ate.

The girls came three or four times a week with food. Most days, they also brought brief messages, mainly about life at Le Couret. “No one has come to take your place... Everyone pitches in... We miss your blackberry puree...”

Toward the end of August, they came with appalling news. “Many OSE homes were raided. Gendarmes came at night to Montintin and Masgellier. They took girls and boys. Even little ones, as young as Lea. We are all afraid.”

The next time the girls came, the news was no better. “Two policemen came looking for you again, and for Monsieur Schlachter, too, but he wasn’t here when they came.”

“The first step is to save the child,” the Underground had said in their message to

us, and they had saved Lea. Now, a short while later, they were no longer able to save our Jewish children. I could not sleep, thinking of terrified children, suffering and dying of hunger and sickness. I remembered when the Underground began hiding our children who were nearing their sixteenth birthday. We heard then that some children were arrested and sent to Drancy, a transit camp near Paris. It was being used as a temporary collection site for Jews arrested all over France. That much we knew. We did not know where they went from there, but we knew they would never come back. The Nazis needed workers and probably took the young Jews to Germany for forced labor. We did not think they could survive in Germany. They would succumb to disease or starvation.

The mountain became our world. We learned every bend in its paths, the changing width of the stream, where I could rinse our clothes, where the air was calmest, where the ground was soft and we could sit. I became used to the sounds of the animals moving through the forest, although the noises continued to frighten me. There was always that split second before I realized it was not the footfalls of the gendarmes.

I was tired all the time. I could not get used to sleeping on the ground. I told Sal there must be alternatives, somewhere else to hide. There is always something that can be done. I remembered Le Couret's only neighbor, the kind farmer who used to bring extra milk to the kitchen. "Pour les Enfants," he always said. "For the children."

We decided to risk showing ourselves to him and walked to his farm. Waiting at the edge of his field, we watched him plow until he reached us.

"We are living in the forest," I said.

"If you could let us spend the nights in one of your old shacks, we would make sure not to come until after dark, and we would leave before dawn," Sal said.

He did not answer immediately, but gazed past us into the forest. Finally, he spoke. "I suppose it would be alright if you slept in my tool shed."

It made all the difference. I was not at all bothered by the hard floor of the shed. I had a roof over my head again. When we reached our shelter during a rainstorm two nights later, we found the farmer waiting for us. "You might as well sleep in the hayloft," he said. "It is warmer there, and dryer."

Then as the days stretched into weeks, as the leaves turned yellow, then brown, and fell from the trees, I became increasingly depressed.

“Look at us, Sal,” I said. “We live like animals, relieving ourselves in bushes, cleaning ourselves in the cold stream. Every day we hunt for berries and we know perfectly well that they are all gone. The farmer’s dog lives better than we do.”

The days became colder and each day the sun set earlier. “Until we can come up with something better,” Madame Krakowski had said when she suggested we hide in the mountains. She did not forget us, and continued to send food for us with Le Couret children. But they brought only food, and never any word that a place had been found for us.

I asked Sal how we could possibly survive in the mountains during the winter, and he had no answer for me. I felt our best chance was in Limoges. I imagined there must be some Jews left in the city who would help us. Was it not incumbent upon any Jew to welcome strangers?

“If they see us, Sal, if we appeal to them in person and tell them how we have been hiding, how desperate we are, they would not turn us out,” I said.

“What you say makes sense. We’ll go.”

Limoges was twenty miles away, a great distance for us to cover on foot. Yet there was no other way for us to get there. We considered covering the entire distance in one day but concluded it would be too taxing. The route was sparsely populated, and we would be sure to find a secluded spot where we could spend the night. We had a difficult journey ahead of us, but not as difficult as spending the winter in the forest.

We told the Le Couret children and the good farmer of our decision. On an October morning, we abandoned our two blankets in the hay loft. Sal crammed all our clothing into our musette and added a few pieces of bread. In my skirt pocket, I put six precious cubes of sugar that Madame Krakowski had sent after hearing about our plans. We could not risk carrying a package of food along the road. That would set us apart as refugees.

We were used to waking at dawn, and started out soon after the sun rose. We spoke little, concentrating on keeping a steady pace. Some youngsters skipped

past us on their way to school. In mid-morning at the edge of a deserted stretch of road, we found a place to sit and shared a piece of bread. We rested for a quarter of an hour and went on.

I concentrated on the road, the inclines, the curves, and the shadows thrown by the trees. Above all, I wanted not to brood about the roadblock through which we would have to pass just outside Limoges. We counted on not being asked to produce any identification papers. I expected to pass as a simple woman, living in the area. If someone stopped us, I intended to say, in an offhand manner, that my husband and I were on our way to visit an aunt in the city. My French was very good. In the two years I had been in France, I had become fluent. Even Mademoiselle Pouillard mistook me for an Alsatian.

“Mia, I hear a wagon,” Sal said. We turned and saw a farmer driving a horse-drawn cart. We stepped off the road so he could pass us. Instead, he slowed down and stopped.

“You are possibly a little weary,” he said. “Have you far to go?”

“To the city,” I said.

“I’m also going to the city,” he said. “You can ride with me if you like. Your husband will have to sit on the sacks of potatoes.”

“Oh, yes, thank you!” I said.

“Sit next to me then, Madame,” said the farmer, and moved over to make room for me.

“We are going to visit my aunt in Limoges,” I said and gave the name of the district I had prepared in my head.

“I’m on my way to the food warehouse to deliver my potatoes. That’s not too far from your destination.”

In less than two hours, we approached the checkpoint. It consisted of a wooden barricade across half the road. A soldier stood at each side. The farmer slowed the wagon. I felt myself stiffen when I saw the soldiers were armed. When we reached them, I was shocked to see how young they were. They were just schoolboys. They looked no older than our big boys at Le Couret.

The farmer held his horse at a steady pace. Clearly, they knew each other. Without taking any notice of me or Sal, the soldiers motioned the wagon through.

“We were in school together,” the farmer said as we entered the city of Limoges.

Fifteen minutes later, we thanked him and parted.

CHAPTER 33

PERILOUS DAYS IN LIMOGES

“It is too dangerous for me to harbor a German Jew.”

Our destination in Limoges was a distance from the section where the farmer had set us down. The person we wanted to see was Rabbi Deutsch, who resided in an altogether different part of the city. The Rabbi was the leader of the Jewish community in Limoges and the person most likely to do something for us.

He had been the head of the Jewish Community in the Alsatian capital of Strasbourg on the Franco-German border. When war broke out in 1939, he fled to Limoges, taking some of his students with him. Others followed on their own. Sal already knew the rabbi. They had met while he was still in Montintin when Sal had been sent to Limoges as a messenger for the OSE.

We walked at an even pace, not speaking much, but taking care to converse in French when we did. After all the weeks in the mountains, I was no longer used to the cacophony of the city traffic. The rumbling of trucks and the clatter of carts startled me, but I was happy to see so many people. Perhaps I should have been worried, but I felt so alive I did not want to remember that we were still fugitives.

In an hour, we came to the premises where Rabbi Deutsch had his shteibel. Services were in progress and we heard the men singing Hallel. We realized it was Succos. What was happening to us? How could we have lost track of the calendar?

Sal immediately entered the shul to join the men in prayer. I found a seat behind the mechitzah. The small section curtained-off for women was almost empty. During the weeks in the forest, it never occurred to me that when at last I would sit again on a chair and indoors under a roof, it would be in shul.

I had tears in my eyes as I followed the familiar prayers. “Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; His Loving kindness endureth forever.”

At the end of the service, we joined the line of congregants to greet the rabbi.

“Good yom tov, Rabbi, good yom tov,” Sal said.

Jews no longer appeared publicly where they did not belong, but Rabbi Deutsch showed no surprise at all at seeing us. “Go upstairs in the house to my study and wait for me,” he said. “We’ll talk there. I must make Kiddush; then I will come.”

Some of the Rabbi’s students lived in the house with him. Others learned and ate there and found sleeping quarters at the homes of French Jews around the city. I could not imagine how the rabbi managed to protect his students from arrest. By coming here, we were adding to the rabbi’s burden. We came, nevertheless, because we believed that if anyone could help us, it would be him.

“So you have come out,” Rabbi Deutsch said when he joined us in the study. “I had heard you were living in the forest. That must have been very difficult.”

“We were so worried about the coming cold, now that winter is near,” I said.

“Ah, yes,” the rabbi agreed. “So now you have to get yourselves readjusted to living with people. Tonight you can sleep here, but just tonight. You cannot stay longer because you would soon be noticed among the young men.”

I moaned, unable to stifle my disappointment. I had barely begun to absorb the rabbi’s sympathetic understanding, when he uttered the words, “just tonight.” My head began to throb.

The rabbi spoke reassuringly. “I can see you are worried, but please remember that there are Jews in the city here who will help you.”

I chided myself for my lack of faith. Three months of isolation had rendered me impatient; I had forgotten how to listen. “Forgive me, Rabbi.”

“Of course. Do you know Levy? He is one of the OSE directors. He may be able to do something for you. Also, here is a list of cafes where you can eat, and a list of homes where you can spend a few hours. It is very difficult to find any place where you can stay, but we shall make every effort. In the meantime, memorize the list. You will find Jews in all these places. Just don’t call attention to yourself by going to any one place too often. You’ll also need some money. Please come back after yom tov when I can see to it. I shall pray to Hashem for your safety.”

Then he rose and invited us to the seudah.

More than a dozen men sat silently at two oblong tables. They rose when Rabbi Deutsch walked in and remained standing until after Hamotzi. When I heard the berachah, all the fear and the privations of the forest faded from my mind. The blessing of bread was the first prayer I learned as a child. I had said it hundreds of times, but never did it have more meaning.

The students made room for Sal and me, and we ate a meal of bread, potato salad, vegetable salad and a single thin slice of sausage. A bowl of apples was offered around the table for dessert. To me, this simple repast was a great banquet. I was sitting at a table in the company of others for the first time in three months. I was eating with a knife and fork. It was not necessary to ration the amount I could eat. Offered a second helping of salads, I declined. "It is excellent, but I have had enough, thank you," I said. It was true. My body could not tolerate a normal-sized meal.

Rabbi Deutsch cautioned us not to delay seeing Levy, so we went that afternoon. We sought him out with some trepidation. I feared the OSE officials would not approve our unilateral decision to stop sheltering in the forest.

Thank God Levy was sympathetic. Like Rabbi Deutsch, he showed no surprise at all when he saw us.

"Welcome!" he said warmly. "I hear you have been hiding in the forest for three months. That's very courageous."

"It was difficult," Sal said.

"There are problems in the city as well. You must be careful. We do not know all our enemies. A bounty is paid to any person who recognizes you and reports you."

He must have noticed my anxiety. "Now, don't worry too much," he said. "Come and see me every three or four days. You are part of our OSE organization. We will do our best to work something out for you."

We lived precariously from one day to the next. Wary of the sound of footsteps, we learned to glance furtively around and behind. Perhaps we had been safer in the forest, but in the city we were less alone. With friends nearby, I felt less at the mercy of the police and the Nazis.

As he had promised, Rabbi Deutsch gave us some money. We had come to Limoges with the little I had earned as a cook for the OSE. Although we were careful about the money we spent in the cafes, it did not take us long to use up my savings.

Eating in cafes, we lingered over simple meals or a drink, warming to the sounds of voices like our own. Following Rabbi Deutsch's instructions, we carefully varied our choice of eating place. It was obvious to us that others were also making the rounds, and after two or three days, the faces of our fellow patrons became familiar to us. Still, we said little to anyone though we listened attentively for bits of news that might be helpful to us.

The name Simon Herbst came up one afternoon. "He has moved into a house at the edge of the city with his wife and daughter," a man near us was saying.

"Sal," I said. "That's Herman's cousin."

"Yes, yes, you're right," Sal said. "I met Simon Herbst and his wife soon after I arrived in Paris at the beginning of 1939."

We finished our ersatz coffee and began our walk to the Herbst residence. We arrived at the large single-family house in mid-afternoon.

It never occurred to me that we would not be welcomed. Everyone we had met in Limoges had been understanding and helpful to us. But when Sal knocked on the door, I began to have doubts. What made me think we could appear unannounced at the home of a person with whom we had only a tenuous relationship?

Simon's wife Gita recognized Sal at once and greeted him like an old friend. "Come in, come in. I was just sitting down. You must join me for tea."

Sal introduced me, and Gita said, "Actually, we are related in a way. Please, make yourselves comfortable while I take the baby out of the crib. I think she is awake. Then I'll make coffee and we can talk."

Gita was perhaps ten years younger than I was. She was tall and lively, with sparkling, large, brown eyes. It happens sometimes that two people feel immediately at ease with each other. So it was with Gita and me. We liked each other right away.

“Simon will be home about six-thirty,” she said. “Stay and eat dinner with us.”

“Thank you, but only if you will let me help you in the kitchen,” I said.

“Fine,” Gita said. “Then I can feed the baby. Oh, I have to stop calling Anni ‘baby!’ There’s going to be another one in the spring.” Gita picked up her daughter. Feeling uncharacteristically happy, I followed them into the kitchen.

“Why are you smiling?” Gita asked me.

I knew at once. “It’s been such a long time since I’ve been in a real home.”

“Good. If you like it, you can stay with us tonight. Maybe you can stay for a couple of days.”

I tried to speak but was overcome.

“Hush, now, Mia. The house is very large, and I shall be happy for your company. “

Simon came in at about seven o’clock. He wore a well-tailored suit and looked self-assured. As with Rabbi Deutsch and with Levy, Simon showed no surprise at our unexpected presence in his home. For the next hour, we found ourselves in a world I thought had disappeared—conversation with friends over a supper of boiled beef and fresh vegetables. The conversation turned to our travails, and Simon listened attentively as we related why we had come to Limoges. Sal talked briefly and somewhat vaguely about how we were living, presumably recalling the rabbi’s admonitions.

Simon broke in abruptly. “Look here, Sal, I cannot risk having you stay. I am watched. The house is watched. It’s too dangerous for me to harbor a German Jew.”

Gita’s eyes clouded with anger, but her voice was calm.

“We are Jews also, Simon.”

“All right,” he said. “You can sleep in my car tonight. It’s in the garage.”

Gita did not press him further.

In shul the next Shabbos, Rabbi Deutsch told Sal, “Go to Levy with your wife this afternoon. He has papers for you. Good Shabbos.”

The identification papers were for Salomon and Amelie Kaville, both born in Loudeac, Brittany. “We’ve found it best if people keep their own initials,” Levy said. “And I have something else for you, Madame Kaville. We have a place for you at Ponponiere. It is our children’s home about ten miles east of Limoges. You will work in the kitchen. There is only one cook, and she will be glad to have help.” He turned to Sal. “You will have to remain in Limoges for the moment. It is better that you separate in any event, since the police are looking for you both together.”

The next morning, Sal walked with me to the bus stop. Clutching the identification card of Amelie Kaville, I boarded the bus, found a seat, and waved goodbye to my husband.

CHAPTER 34

A SECOND UNSAFE OSE HOME

“I have packed your things. You have to leave right away.”

Ponponiere was my fourth OSE home. I was assigned a closet-sized room. The narrow bed took up more than half the width of the room, so there was hardly room to move about. Yet I was more than satisfied with my quarters. Each night I thanked God for that narrow bed and fell asleep and thanked Him again when I opened my eyes in the morning. For the time being, I awoke every morning knowing where I would sleep that night.

The cook was known simply as Madame B. She was a French woman from the area and she was kind and welcoming. Levy was right when he said she would be glad to have help, for there was plenty of work. And work was what I needed. That was what I was used to before we were forced into hiding. Hiding had brought with it enforced idleness. It made no difference whether I did nothing sitting on a patch of grass in the forest or in a chair in a small workers' cafe. Inactivity created time for worrying. The less I had to do, the more I worried. The work also gave me less time to be lonely. Sal and I had spent all our waking moments together since we had fled Le Couret, and I missed him terribly. So I threw myself into the work in the Ponponiere kitchen and counted it a blessing.

The shortage of food at Ponponiere was just as acute as it had been at Le Couret. There was not much that could be done to spice up the meals with what we had, but Madame B. had some tricks that helped. One was adding garlic when she cooked carrots. “It brings out a sweet flavor without using sugar. It is the French way, Madame Amelie.” In turn I passed on my little tricks of stretching food and making vegetables more palatable.

When I had been at Ponponiere for a week, the head of the home came to the kitchen with a message for me. I remember every word and exactly how she said, “Madame Amelie, I have received word for you that your little girl is well.”

“Where is she?” I asked. “Can I see her?”

“There is only this message, nothing more. It will be best for all to leave it so.”

Hearing someone speak about Lea, even uttering just once sentence, brought her near to me. That day, I missed her more than usual. Soon it would be her birthday. She would be six. How could I not be with her? Then I chided myself.

By the time Madame B. came back into the kitchen I was quite cheerful. “Amelie, someone has brought a smile to your face,” she said.

“A message from my daughter,” I said.

“I did not realize you had a daughter. That is very good.”

I almost said, “I have three daughters,” but it was better not to mention that, even at this OSE home. Perhaps I had already revealed too much. I would have to be more careful.

“Yes, my little one is fine. She is well cared-for while I work,” I said. “What are we doing with the cabbage today? Can we spare just a little sugar to add to it?”

One morning, Madame B. was unusually jolly. “Today will be a holiday. Here, look what I have, Amelie.” She refused to tell me how she had obtained the flour and set to work preparing a dough. The mere aroma in the kitchen as the confection was baking was a special delight. Later, Madame B. and I stood against the wall of the dining room as the dessert cakes were brought in. The children clapped their hands and squealed with joy, driving all our fears away for a brief hour.

At three o’clock in the afternoon two weeks later, I was scrubbing the soup pot when one of the teachers walked into the kitchen. “Madame Amelie, please, you must stop washing. The police are here.”

The dish cloth slipped from my hand.

“The are checking the identification cards of every person over the age of fourteen,” the teacher said. “Our director is not certain your false papers will pass inspection. She is afraid for you, for the children, too, if all is not in order here.”

I felt a weight pressing on my chest, a stone I could not move.

“I have packed your things,” she said. “I am sorry I had to go into your personal

belongings, but you have to leave right away.”

I stared at the young woman.

“Please, let me help you with your coat,” she said. “Go out the back door and take the path that leads into the woods. You’ll come to a fork. Turn left, and in about ten minutes you will reach the road to Limoges. Walk steadily on the main road, and don’t draw attention to yourself.”

Madame B. kissed me on both cheeks. “Au revoir, Madame,” I said. “I will not forget how happy you made the children with your marvelous pastries.”

From the back of the food cupboard, Madame B. extracted a sugar cube from the week’s ration and gave it to me. “Nourishment for the road, my dear,” she said.

My expulsion from Ponponiere was so sudden and so rapid that at first it lacked reality. My stay was terminated in under five minutes. In that little time, I had lost my sanctuary. It was the only OSE home in which I had not developed a closeness or a fondness for any of the children. In the past, the orphan children had gravitated to me, and I had responded by listening, talking, holding them to me. When I or the children moved on, I had to bear the sadness of parting. At least, I was spared that.

I was unfamiliar with the wooded path to which I had been directed, and even after all those weeks in the mountains, I was still not at ease outdoors in the country. I walked carefully, afraid I would miss the fork in the path. The dreadful feeling that I was being hunted overwhelmed me. It was a familiar feeling. I had experienced it every day that Sal and I hid in the mountains. There was a difference though. I was completely alone now. If I became ill, or if I were found by the police, no one would know what had happened to me.

The road seemed about to divide. I halted and studied the trees and the ground. Was this the fork where I was supposed to turn left? Ten minutes, the teacher had said. I checked my watch and walked to the left, concentrating on keeping a steady pace, looking about and listening for sounds of the main road as I walked. Where was the road? I checked my watch and saw that I had been on the left fork for only five minutes. Shivering with worry, I went on. Perhaps the woods were safer than the open road, but I found the loneliness of the forest oppressive. I was filled with relief when the path led into the road.

As I walked towards Limoges, it dawned on me that I had no destination other than the city. I did not know in what part of the city Sal was hiding, and I doubted word had spread about my ejection from Ponponiere. It would be dark by the time I arrived in the city, not time to go wandering about searching for him. I would find him tomorrow. Tonight, I would go to Gita. She would take me in, and no one would look for me there.

As soon as I made the decision and had a destination, I felt stronger. I kept my pace steady, lowering my head whenever I heard a vehicle approaching. After two hours on the main road, I carefully unwrapped and began to suck Madame B.'s cube of sugar. I could not have digested much else.

It took two more hours to reach Gita's house. It was dark by then. I rang once and waited. In two or three minutes, the door opened a crack. She recognized me and pulled me inside. "Mia, what a surprise!" Her hand was soft and warm. Mine was shaking. "Mia, my dear, you are cold," she said. I could not speak. At the touch of her hand, I began to sob and could not stop.

CHAPTER 35

HUNTED IN THE CITY

“We are chased like mongrel dogs that nobody wants.”

I spent my first night back in Limoges with Gita. “Of course, you shall stay here,” she had insisted. “One night can not possibly make a problem. And you certainly don’t look as if you could go any further.”

From Gita, I learned that Sal was staying with the son-in-law of Rabbi Deutsch for a day or so. I would not risk endangering the young man and went instead to the rabbi’s house. Within an hour, I was reunited with Sal.

We resumed the uncertain existence of our first days in Limoges, eating at small cafes, washing and warming ourselves for a few hours in Jewish homes throughout the city. Although it was dangerous, sometimes one of them might let us spend the night. We would sleep in our clothes and tiptoe out before the sun rose. Every Jew lived in fear of the police.

I had looked forward to Shabbos services at the rabbi’s shul, to the comfort of familiar prayers. We stayed away, however, because the police could be watching for anyone unfamiliar going in and out.

Each day seemed colder and shorter than the last. Night came earlier and earlier. Walking along the darkening streets, I watched the lights come on in the houses we passed. “People live in these homes, Sal, but we have no place. We are chased like the mongrel dog that nobody wants.”

I paused in front of a lit-up basement apartment. The windows were uncurtained, and I thought the inhabitant of that little room must be very poor. The only furniture I could see was an uncovered wooden table. On it stood a lamp without a shade, the bare bulb casting a harsh white light. In all my life I had never felt as envious of anyone as I did of that French woman who was too poor to afford curtains.

“Look, Sal, look,” I said. “Those people have a home, a bed to sleep in, the same bed every night. If only we had a little, little place where we could stay.”

We came to a rooming house. Someone we recognized from one of the cafes entered the building. “I think that place must be safe,” Sal said. “Come on.”

Sal showed the concierge the identification card Levy had given him. “Please, a room for me and my wife,” he said. “Just for one night.”

The concierge adjusted his glasses. A stubble of hair covered his cheeks and chin. “Two francs, Monsieur, the same as I’ve always charged,” he said. “But you must agree to leave by six o’clock tomorrow morning. Just use the back staircase. No, don’t bother to sign the register. You will be gone when the police come to check it.”

The room was clean. The floorboards were painted gray, and the dresser was scratched. The curtain was torn, but a wooden shutter covered the window. I was completely indifferent to the shabbiness of the room. We had a whole night of privacy to look forward to. How fine to sleep on a soft mattress, how pleasant the soft blanket covering me.

Pounding woke me. Quickly, I looked at my watch and made out the time—four o’clock. “Sal, the police,” I whispered. “Knocking outside. Don’t you hear it? Boom, boom! Boom, boom!”

We dressed hurriedly. Sal opened the door of our room and listened. Then he grabbed our musette, and we ran silently down the back staircase. The street was dead and deserted. We slipped into a doorway across from the boarding house and looked up at the window of our room. The wind was blowing the shutter of the window against its frame. Boom, boom! Boom, boom!

We huddled in the doorway until it was light. When people appeared on the street, we started to walk and continued until we came to a bistro that was on Rabbi Deutsch’s list. We ordered some rolls and coffee and accepted the substitute. Like everyone else, we continued to say coffee without meaning it. What counted now was that the drink was hot. I picked up the roll and put it down. I was too upset to eat. We lingered as long as it was safe and rose. Before leaving, Sal handed me the roll. I hid it in my coat pocket.

We went outside into the cold and walked. Living in the forest, I had imagined it would be better in Limoges, but the city had turned out to be more dangerous. All I had wanted was to be secure for one whole night. Now I saw there was no safe place for us. Walking past a shoe repair shop, a pharmacy, another bistro, I

tried to work out a way to get through the winter, but it was hopeless. I could find no answer.

We came to a store Nazis were using as a recruiting center. A poster in the window said, “Enroll now for work in Germany. Sign up for high pay.”

It would be a mindless routine. I could work from one day to the next—work, eat, sleep, work.

“That’s it, Sal. I’m going to sign up.”

“What! Go back to Germany?”

“Why not? They want people to work in their factories,” I said. “I’ve cooked. I’ve cleaned. I can do anything now. With the papers I have now, I shall pass.”

Sal stared at me. “You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Certainly I do. In Germany, I shall speak only French. I shall be Amelie Kaville from Loudeac.”

“Mia, those papers get you past a French policeman only if he gives them a quick glance. That’s all. Even the people at Chateau Ponponiere thought they looked phony. What makes you think the Germans won’t spot them as forgeries?”

“They’re too anxious for workers to notice,” I said. “I’m tired of wandering around this city when I know I may be arrested at any moment. I’m afraid all the time. I don’t trust anyone. I start each day without knowing where I will spend the night. I can’t continue like this. I am going in there.”

“My God, Mia, have you taken leave of your senses? Don’t you see that picture of Hitler inside?” He was steering me away from the recruiting store. “You’re still upset because we had to run out of the room in the middle of the night. This is the worst time we’ve had, but we can’t give up. We’ll get through this.”

That afternoon, we agreed that we could not remain in Limoges any longer and decided to return to Le Couret. Just a few days ago, a Jewish man had pointed out that the number of arrests was dwindling. We knew that the village of La Jonchere had only a small police force of local men. They had grown up on

nearby farms and were not very sophisticated. They would have forgotten about us by now.

We went to Levy and told him what we intended to do. “The OSE children’s home is deep in the country and is probably as safe as any place else,” he agreed. “It can be no worse for you than Limoges is now.”

We went to say goodbye to Gita. Simon was away, so we spent our last night at her house. We had a long, leisurely hot meal. Then came the wonderful luxury of a warm bath. Best of all, Gita led me to a clean bed. Suddenly, there was no Hitler. There was no war. I slept.

The next morning, we began our walk back to Le Couret. A farmer returning from market stopped and offered us a lift. We saw no reason not to accept and rode with him for five miles. We had been prepared to sleep outdoors for one night, but it was not necessary. Two other men offered to take us short distances, and we managed to complete the entire journey in one day.

We returned to Le Couret early in November. A few days later, on November 11, 1942, Hitler’s armies advanced into the Unoccupied Zone, and the Nazis seized control of all of France.

CHAPTER 36

ARREST

“A rat raced across the six-by-four-foot cell.”

As always when I arrived at an OSE home, I began work in the Le Couret kitchen almost at once. We came back late at night, slept in a room in the main house, and rose early to cook breakfast. It was as if we had never left. The only difference was that so many children were gone. They had been arrested in the August, 1942 roundup.

Madame Krakowski listed the names of those who had been saved by the Underground, but they were not many. “The raid was totally unexpected. They came in the middle of the night with their guns. They had a list with names. More than forty children were taken from us. Can you imagine so many, and so young? Some were not even ten years old. Those children were in my care and I could do nothing.” The directress stared into the distance. “I don’t know where they have been taken, but it can not go well.”

We sat in silence until she rose and said, “We must see to the children who still remain in our care.”

The calm lasted one month. The police came for Sal and me in January 1943. When it happened, I did not feel anything. The two officers came round the back of the house and found us both in the kitchen. They accompanied us to our summer house and stood by quietly while we packed a blanket and a change of clothing. They watched but did not rush us. The entire procedure was calm and orderly.

When we stepped outside, one of the policemen asked, “Do you have your ration cards?”

“No, the directress, Madame Krakowski, has them,” I said.

“Go back and get them, Madame,” he said. “We’ll be waiting for you on the road to La Jonchere.”

I walked back to the chateau and found Madame Krakowski sitting in her office. She rose quickly and took my hand. "What happened, my dear?"

"They sent me back to get our ration cards," I said. "Can I have them, please?"

Madame Krakowski shook her head. "They don't want your ration cards," she said.

"I don't understand," I said.

"Don't you see? The police are giving you a way out. They just want your husband."

"That's not what they told me," I said.

"It is exactly like it was when they came looking for you this summer. It is what happened when they didn't find you in the summer house in October. The police will report they found only Sal. It gives us a chance. We will hide you again."

"No, I am going," I said. "Give me the cards, Madame."

"What is the matter with you? They will take you to a concentration camp!"

"I'm tired of being separated from my husband. For three months after Paris fell, I had no idea if he was even alive. I won't go through that again. This time, I'm going with him."

"You are mad, out of your mind to throw away this chance," Madame Krakowski said.

"Give me the cards," I said again.

"Think," she pleaded.

I knew she meant well, but there was nothing for me to think about. My place was with my husband, wherever that would be. "I thank you, Madame, but I have decided. I am going with my husband."

Wearily, she reached into the drawer and pulled out the ration cards. I took them and hurried down the path. The policeman had said they would wait on the road

to La Jonchere. They were not at the junction. I looked in the direction of the village. The three men were already walking along the main road. I had to run to catch up with them.

Now Sal and I were in the middle between two armed policemen. I was tense but remained alert. Where were they taking us? That was the main question in my mind.

It took an hour to reach the prison in La Jonchere. We were led down a musty flight of stone steps. At the bottom was a heavy wooden door. Then Sal and I were inside the cell. There was the heavy clank of metal, and we were locked in.

The place appeared to have been built during the middle ages. The only word for it was dungeon. During the first minutes, a sliver of daylight filtered through the single small window, twenty feet above the floor. The six-by-four cell was empty except for a stone bench against the wall.

A rat raced across the floor. The cell was cold and dank. Water trickled down the old, stone walls. Sal and I sat huddled on the bench all night, listening to the water dripping and the rodents prowling.

It must have been morning when they came for us, although it was still dark outside. I had only a moment to inhale fresh air before we were ordered into a closed truck. We could see nothing during the two hour ride. Finally, the vehicle halted, and a guard unlocked the door.

“Out, move, quick, quick,” he shouted.

I stumbled out of the truck. The daylight hurt my eyes. My bones ached, and I was cold, terribly cold. Another shout: “Walk.” At first I hardly noticed my surroundings. Then I saw the barbed wire surrounding us.

Book Six

November 1942-January 1944

The Camps

CHAPTER 37

TRANSIT CAMP

“The odor of excrement permeated the grounds.”

The path on which Sal and I were walking led to a low concrete building. He stayed close to me, but we did not talk. I wanted to say something to him but instinct told me it would be unwise. I forced myself to take in my surroundings, noting the high barbed wire fences and the watch towers. Then the gendarme ordered us into the building.

Even inside, I continued to shiver. My wool scarf was tied around my head and neck, my coat collar was turned up, and still I shivered. A Nazi sat behind a desk. On the wall behind him was a map. Sal squinted surreptitiously at it, and I followed his gaze. My eyes were drawn to a blue circle around a five-letter word that spelled Nexon. The Nazi looked over the papers the gendarme had handed him. “Barracks 54 for him,” he said curtly. “77 for her.” He was addressing a thin young man I had not noticed before. He spoke in German, which I found unsettling.

“Follow me,” the thin one said.

Outside again, I felt my knees wobble; I could not say why. Was it the cold, was it exhaustion, or was it fear? Fifty-four. I repeated the number to myself. I had to be certain I would remember where my husband was being taken. I followed the thin man, walking on frozen ground, passing flat-roofed wooden barracks, each like the other. My guard stopped before one and opened the door. “In there,” he said.

I was in a long narrow building with about thirty cots along each wall. In the middle of the room stood a stove. I hugged the blanket around myself, thankful that I had been permitted to bring it with me from Le Couret. For several minutes I stared at the women occupying the beds. Not one of them paid any attention to me.

Eventually, a middle-aged woman rose from one of the cots near the center of the room. She had short, gray hair and a scab on her left cheek. A button was

missing from her cardigan, and the hem of her wrinkled skirt was uneven. Yet an air of authority emanated from her as she beckoned me to approach. I made my way down the narrow aisle between the cots and stood in front of her.

“Hennie is my name,” she said in German. “I am the barracks chairman. There is an empty cot near the door. Come.” We walked down the aisle, skirting the stove in the center. “We eat at four,” Hennie said. “What’s your name?”

“Amalia Kanner,” I answered, speaking for the first time since I had come to the camp of Nexon.

We reached a narrow canvas cot next to the far door of the barracks. “You are tired, no?” Hennie said. “Lie down for a while and perhaps you will feel better.”

I looked around, trying to see where I could put my few things. There was no storage space, so I stuck my comb and piece of soap in my coat pocket and pushed my musette under the cot. I took off my coat and my shoes and stretched out on my new bed. The barracks was cold and drafty, so I pulled my coat and blanket over myself. It had been twenty-four hours since my arrest, and I had been awake as long. My head pounded and pain radiated from my neck down to my back. Did the pain come from weariness, I wondered, or from spending the night in the ancient dungeon that the rulers from Vichy had revived as a prison?

I rubbed my eyes, opened them and saw that the women were filling the aisle, walking toward the stove that now had a pot sitting on top. I rose, put my shoes on and joined the slow-moving line. It was warmer toward the center of the barracks.

Hennie stood next to the stove, while another woman dipped a ladle into the pot.

“Did you bring a cup, Frau Kanner?” Hennie asked.

“No.”

Hennie found a dented, metal cup in a box next to the stove. I held it out and watched the server ladle in some sort of liquid.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Cabbage soup,” Hennie said, handing me a chunk of bread. “It’s not much, but

we won't get anything else until morning."

The inmates ate their food sitting on their bunks, so I followed suit. When I reached my cot, my neighbor asked, "Where did you come from?"

"From a home for Jewish children. I was the cook there."

"Oh, then you've been free. Everyone here came from the camp at Gurs. I was there for two years."

Another woman down the aisle joined the conversation. "Gurs was a paradise compared to this place," she said. "I never thought I would long to be back in Gurs. We had three meals a day and an enclosed toilet. And we could heat water for washing."

"We won't stay here much longer," the first woman said. "We will be sent to Germany soon."

I had begun to feel warm from the soup, but now I was shivering again. I remembered Sal's words: "If we are returned to Germany, we will die."

"Germany, ah, Germany," sighed another nearby inmate. "In Frankfurt, I had a seven-room house. You see this wool coat? It was my everyday coat. For the theater, I had a gray Persian jacket and a hat to match."

"Do you know the Opera House in Berlin?" my neighbor asked. "My husband and I attended regularly. We had a subscription. We had such beautiful times."

The woman from Frankfurt excused herself to go to the toilet. I slipped on my coat and followed her outside. As we neared a large pit, the smell of human waste reached my nostrils. I felt ill, but I followed my companion to the edge of a depression in the ground. Overwhelmed by the horrendous odor, I staggered back toward the barracks. I could not rid myself of the awful stench and discovered I had fouled my shoes. I had been terrified, exhausted, and in pain. Now all those feelings evaporated into fury. I stamped my feet and rubbed my shoe against the rough, hard ground. When the sole of my shoe was clean, I went back to the barracks. An hour later, I returned to the pit and used it. Tears streaming down my face, I made my way back to my cot and fell into an exhausted sleep.

Our existence was worse than anything I could have imagined. A bowl of soup, two lumps of stale bread and a cup of warm liquid that was neither tea nor coffee, but brewed from some sort of grass—that was the sum of our daily ration. The soup gave me diarrhea and forced me constantly to the pit. I developed a horror of stepping into excrement, the odor of which permeated the grounds.

No one stopped us from walking around the camp. It was cold, and few people ventured out, but I walked along the paths every day to look for Barracks 54. The search gave me something to do. I was sure that before long I would find Sal, and that gave me hope. On my fourth day at the camp, I stepped out of my barracks and saw Sal walking towards me.

He stared at me for a few moments and said, “I have been out every day, looking for you.”

“And I, you.”

Oh, it was good to see him. We walked next to each other, and I assured Sal I was managing.

“The food is not so good,” he said.

“The food is awful. I wouldn’t feed that slop to a pig,” I said.

“Tell me, Mia, is it true that the women have cots?” Sal asked.

I nodded.

“Good,” he said. “We sleep on wooden planks, two levels, one on top of the other, like a shelf in the wall. I guess it’s better than sleeping on the floor.” He wanted to know everything. “How are the other women?” he asked next.

“Some of them sit on their cots, staring at the wall, and never speak a word,” I said. “Others talk constantly about the good life they had before the war, about their clothes, their houses, and their maids. What good does that do?”

He moved closer and whispered, “I found out that there is a special section in Nexon. It’s for black marketeers and criminals and for people in the Resistance. They’re locked up and tortured. I tell you this because I don’t want you to do

anything to merit punishment. I want to make sure you don't go to that special area. And don't walk near the fence, under any circumstances. It's not safe."

"Yes, Sal, I understand. But maybe we've been together too long now and had better go back."

We agreed to meet the following day. "About one o'clock would be best. That's the warmest part of the day."

I returned to the barracks and sat on my cot. Each time the door was opened, I felt a cold draft. My place next to the door was the worst spot in the long building. I imagined that if a bed became available closer to the center, the women closest to the door would take it; or perhaps everyone moved over one place, like children playing musical chairs in slow motion.

I wondered what my children were doing, while I was locked up in this hell-hole. Ruth and Eva had each other. I worried most about Lea, because she was alone. I was sure the Underground was right in being excessively secretive, but I hated not knowing where my little one was.

The conversations of the women around me annoyed me. Complaining or boasting, they lived in the past. What good did it do to dwell on that? I did not talk about Leipzig or Halle. It was history. I thought instead of the past year. How naive we had been. We should have known after the first time the police came looking for us at Le Couret that we would be arrested sooner or later. We should have demanded the Resistance help us and hide us. I prayed that I would not lose hope and become filled with bitterness.

During the second week at Nexon, a visitor came to Barracks 77. The most notable thing about this middle-aged woman was the Red Cross insignia sewn on her coat and her hat. Her name was Meder, and she was the camp nurse. She conferred quietly with Hennie for a few minutes. Then she spoke to all of us.

"Ladies, good day. I hear that none of you is seriously ill. Please continue to do the best to take care of yourselves. I urge you to keep as warm as you can. I wish I could do more for you, but I myself have a problem. I think you are aware that I am the only nurse for this entire camp. There is no doctor with me. What I need is someone to assist me."

"I am not trained," a woman said.

“You do not need a medical background, only a willingness to help,” she said.

I listened to the answers. “I am too weak myself... Sick people upset me... I wouldn’t be capable.”

She looked around desperately and pleaded, “Isn’t there one woman among you who will help me?”

They had all given up, but I would not. I could help. I could do something if she would have me. I rose from my cot and from the far-most corner of the barracks, I called out, “I will help you, nurse.”

“Thank you,” she said and began walking toward me. When she reached me, she said, “I am so pleased you spoke up. What is your name?”

“Amalia Kanner,” I said.

“But I have been looking for you, Amalia!” the nurse said. “The OSE asked me to see how you were. My dear, I am so glad I have found you. You must come with me now.”

I felt her arm around my shoulder. Aside from Sal’s support, it was the first expression of warmth since my arrival at Nexon. I had not been abandoned and forgotten.

CHAPTER 38

DEATH AT NEXON

“The rabbi held up the Sefer Torah for all to see.”

If I had not stepped forward and volunteered to work for the Red Cross nurse, I would not have survived the winter at Nexon. Until I began to go with Frau Meder on her rounds, I was unaware of how depressed and demoralized I had become in just two weeks in the camp.

From the day Sal and I were brought there, I suffered from the cold. I was plagued by constant diarrhea, my discomfort increased by the lack of toilets and inadequate washing facilities. I might have endured it better, but the enforced idleness focussed all my attention on every discomfort. Lining up at the outdoor pump with its single stream of ice cold water, lining up in the barracks for meals once in the morning and once in the afternoon, trips to the pit—that was all the women did, day after day. At least, I had reason to venture outside the barracks for a few minutes a day when I joined Sal every afternoon for a brief walk. But none of the women stepped outside to seek respite of even a few minutes from the crushing boredom. It was no wonder that we brooded.

Accompanying Frau Meder brought an end to my self-absorption. I now spent very little time in the barracks. As soon as I received my drink and piece of bread in the morning, I put on my coat, wrapped my scarf around my head and joined Frau Meder on her rounds of the barracks. The barracks stretched before us in endless rows. There were more than one hundred, and they were packed with six thousand prisoners. Most were foreign Jews who had sought refuge in France.

I carried her supply of bandages, camphor and disinfectant and handed her what she needed to treat wounds and sores. I stood by, ready to follow her instructions, sometimes holding patients or helping them sit up. Often she did no more than wash their faces and soothe them with her soft voice. She had very few medicines, and there was little else she could do for the sick. But she carried on her visits, at least to show them she cared.

As a representative of the Red Cross, Frau Meder resided in the building that

housed the camp's official staff. She had her own room and a private bath. As her helper, it was also my job to clean her quarters. Every day, I washed the sink and the toilet bowl, dusted her desk and night-stand, and swept her floor. Then I made her bed, a bed with a quilt, a pillow and sheets, precious items from a world I no longer inhabited. I felt I would never again have linens of my own. I took the greatest care with the sheets, handling them as though they were precious diamonds. That is what they were to me.

Although I cleaned for Frau Meder, she never demeaned me. She talked to me as her equal and expressed an interest in my work with the OSE and my life before the war. She listened with sympathy when I told her how much I worried about Lea.

At the end of each day, Frau Meder presented me with the used grounds of her ersatz coffee. I took the priceless gift to my barracks in time to line up for the afternoon meal. When the soup pot was empty, and the stove became available, I boiled water in a small container and poured it on the used grounds. Then looking neither right nor left, I carried the brew with great care along the barracks aisle and took it outside, where Sal was waiting to share it with me.

Frau Meder was about my age but unmarried. I learned that she came from Switzerland. She was not Jewish, but was not in the least anti-Semitic. She had the greatest concern and compassion for her Jewish patients and made it clear to me that she found Nazism and anti-Semitism despicable.

She confirmed what Sal suspected, that Nexon was a transit camp, a temporary site where Jews were brought before being sent to their permanent prison. Where we were to be sent, or when, she could not say. She did not know.

When I asked her once why she had given up the comfort of Zurich to work at Nexon, she said simply, "One must have an open hand for all who have less than we do."

Even with her help, people died every day. Rebbetzin Kremer, assigned to my barracks, was in charge of taharah, the preparing of the dead for burial according to Jewish law. She and her husband were very frum. When she used the water pump to wash herself, her husband made a tent out of a blanket to shield her from view, so she could adhere to the laws of modesty.

Rabbi Kremer held a regular minyan in his barracks. He was forced to

discourage attendance, fearing that large crowds would draw attention and bring retribution to the participants. Instead, he urged the men to daven alone. "If you pray to Hashem, He will hear you. He does not require a minyan to hear you," he said. "The important thing is to recite the prayers every day."

The Rebbetzin's work became more and more difficult. "It is too much for one person," she said to me one day. "Please, Frau Kanner," she pleaded. "Please come and help me."

The next day, when Frau Meder's rounds were finished, I walked to the section of the camp set aside for burial of the dead. Rebbetzin Kremer worked in a small hut, washing and preparing the bodies according to halachah. The Rebbetzin explained the procedure, and I lifted the hand of the corpse to clean the nails and wash between the fingers. I had never touched or even seen a dead person before. Touching the limb, I felt dizzy. I rushed outside and vomited in back of the hut. I returned, worked for an hour, all the while biting my lip, swallowing dank air, my mouth becoming more and more dry, until I could no longer fight my nausea and had to rush outside again.

Two days later, I returned to the morgue. Minutes after I began my task, I felt nauseated and was forced once more to rush out of the building.

When I was able to go back inside, I said, "Rebbetzin Kremer, I cannot do it. I am not strong enough."

"But, my dear, it is a mitzvah."

"I know, I know," I moaned. "I want to help. I am a religious woman, but this I cannot do."

She gazed at me with sorrow. I spoke with difficulty. "Don't you see, Rebbetzin? Every time I work with you, I get sick. It is not good for you, it is not good for me, and it is not good for the holy dead. I will try to find someone else to help you. Maybe I'll find someone when I go on my rounds with Frau Meder." Sadly, I never did.

Outside Barracks 77 on a cold evening in February, 1943 Sal told me he had seen Simon Herbst that afternoon. "He was surrounded by four Nazis. They were taking him to the section reserved for special prisoners. When I saw him, I ran to the edge of the restricted area, but by the time I reached it, they were pushing

Simon through the doorway of a building there. I don't think he saw me." Sal shook his head and said, "I can't imagine why he was picked up."

"Simon has been trading on the black market," I said. "Gita told me when it became too hard to keep the secret to herself. He's been at it since the fall of Paris. That's the reason they lived so well."

"I thought he got his money out before the Nazis took over," Sal said.

"Oh, Sal, you're so naive and trusting when it concerns friends. If he weren't involved, would you have had meat for dinner at Gita's table? And how do you suppose he always managed petrol for his car?"

One week later, I saw Gita being led toward the dreaded special compound, little four-year-old Anni clinging to her hand. Ignoring the Nazi guard, I ran over to her, disregarding the dangers of entering a restricted area or of associating with the wife of a black marketeer.

Gita was in the last stages of pregnancy. Her walk was heavy, but she held her head high. She squeezed my hand and said, "They are letting me visit Simon."

"No farther," the Nazi said.

I stopped and watched Gita and Anni until they disappeared into the forbidden barracks. I stood in that spot until they came out half an hour later.

"Simon knows who betrayed him," Gita said. "But what difference does it make now?"

"He still has friends, Gita," I said. "Otherwise it would not have been possible for you to come here."

Gita's teeth were chattering. "Simon's face is all bruised. They've been beating him. Why do they have to hurt him like that?"

I could think of no answer. Instead, I asked, "How much longer before the baby is due?"

"Three weeks," Gita said. "It moves around all the time. Simon felt the baby kicking, and it made him smile. As soon as Anni saw him laugh, she said 'Papa,

come home.' Simon shook his head, and we all started to cry. Then the guard came. There was so little time."

We had come to the fork in the path beyond which I knew I could not go.

"Mia, what am I going to do?" Gita cried. "I'll never see him again!"

"Take care of yourself, Gita dearest," I said. "I love you."

The homemade calendar Hennie kept in the barracks indicated we had reached the end of February, and still we remained in the transit camp. Then suddenly, in mid-March, rumors spread that the camp would be cleared out. Frau Meder said she had heard nothing of it, but as winter ended, the announcement came that all prisoners would be transported north two days later.

Some of the inmates were glad to be going. They said Nexon was a stinking hell-hole and any other place would be better. Others did not want to leave because they were certain that any change would be for the worse. Saddest were those who no longer cared what happened to them.

"It is the worst news possible," Sal said. "I will not go north."

"Everyone has to go," I said.

"I'll go and see the camp commandant. He is a Frenchman. That's better than a Nazi."

His friends warned Sal against drawing attention to himself, but he insisted he had nothing to lose. I did not think Sal would be endangering himself because I did not believe he could get to see the commandant. His plan gave him hope, so I did not discourage him.

Sal was admitted to the commandant's office by default. The man standing guard simply did nothing to prevent him from entering the office.

The French commandant sat behind his desk, making notes on a form. He did not look up when Sal walked in.

Sal addressed him in French. "Listen, Monsieur Le Commandant. You cannot send me to Germany. My wife and I are employees of OSE, an organization

under the auspices of the French government.” The official continued to write. “As a matter of fact, the OSE needs me, and I have to return to my job. My arrest, and that of my wife, was improper and illegal. You could get into trouble if you send us on the train.”

The commandant did not respond.

“You have our name, Kanner, K-A-N-N-E-R.” After he gave the spelling of our name, he could think of nothing else to add, so he said, “Thank you, sir,” and left.

The morning of our scheduled departure, I packed my few possessions in the musette, and put on my coat. I joined the women who were congregating outside the barracks. None of us knew what to do next or what would happen to us.

“Form a line, move,” a guard shouted.

We formed a long line. I couldn’t see if men and women were being separated.

“When you hear your name, get into the next line. Ginsberg, Goodman, Kanner...”

I shuddered and joined the next line. I looked around and saw Frau Meder talking with the commandant.

She was pointing to me. “No, Monsieur Le Commandant, you cannot take Amalia Kanner. You cannot put her on your trains. She works for me, and I need her with me. She and her husband are with the OSE, so you have a good reason for leaving them behind.”

The commandant said nothing.

Frau Meder said, “Come Amalia,” and I went to her.

The commandant never said a word, just nodded and crossed two names off his list, mine and Sal’s. Then he added them to a list of twenty-one others who were staying behind—a dozen French nationals and a few Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian dictator, Horthy, had told Hitler he would take care of his Jews himself.

The groups from the many barracks had become a long column that wound itself through the camp toward the railroad sidings where the trains were standing. I saw Rebbetzin Kremer supporting two feeble, elderly women.

“I am staying, Rebbetzin. I don’t have to go on the train.” I said. “Frau Meder intervened for me and my husband.”

“It is Hashem’s will. Give thanks. He is good.”

“And you are good, Rebbetzin. Hashem will honor you for all you do for others.”

When Sal and I had arrived at Nexon on January 9, 1943, six thousand Jews were held in the camp. Only five thousand marched in a column heading toward the train. One thousand had died during the harsh winter of 1942-43. Many of the survivors appeared confused, as they dragged their emaciated bodies forward to the train.

Then I heard an unexpected sound, a chant that I had not heard in a long time. I looked up and saw Rabbi Kremer. I would remember this always. He had a sefer Torah, and he was holding it up high for all to see. His voice was clear and firm. “God is walking with us,” he said.

The tears came, and I could not stop weeping. When had we last heard those holy words the rabbi was chanting, “Shema Yisrael.”

The Nazis did not interfere. On the contrary, they were gratified that the rabbi was keeping order, leading their Jewish prisoners forward.

After the Shema, the rabbi prayed, singing in a strong voice:

Thou hast chosen us from all people.

Thou hast loved us.

Thou hast sanctified us by Thy commandments.

Blessed be thy name.

The Nazis did not understand that even if they were being sent to their death, for

those few minutes, five thousand Jews were not prisoners: Rabbi Kremer had formed them into a congregation that belonged to God.

CHAPTER 39

A FRENCH CAMP

“I did not recognize my image in the mirror.”

We were twenty-three out of five thousand. Such a minuscule number. The French commandant of Nexon sent the twenty-three Jews he had kept back from the Nazis to Gurs, the same camp near the Spanish border where Sal had been interned in the autumn of 1940.

I spent my first days at Gurs lying on a cot, in the manner of the women of Nexon that I had found so difficult to comprehend or accept. After three appalling months of incarceration, I had little strength left. I was weak and emotionally exhausted.

Again, I had trouble sleeping. In my dreams, I found myself standing over a mound of dead bodies with Rebbetzin Kremer buried at the bottom of the naked pile crying, “Help me! It will be a mitzvah.” Distraught, I reached for the Rebbetzin’s hand and vomited. I turned away and found myself sinking into an open cesspool. I woke gagging and weeping until I slumped back into an exhausted sleep during which the shattering nightmare repeated itself.

In the afternoons, Sal came to my barracks and tried to entice me to leave the bed for the cool spring mountain air. “Let me show you the stream,” he begged.

I did not have the strength left to answer and waved my hand listlessly.

“If you don’t feel strong enough to walk, at least step outside and look at the mountains. You’ve always loved the mountains.”

When I finally responded to his coaxing and joined him in a short walk, I asked how long we had been at Gurs.

“Two weeks,” he answered.

I was astounded. “That long?” I asked. “I must stop lying around. It is no good at all. When I’m able to fall asleep, I have dreadful dreams. I wake up more tired

than before.”

Two and a half years ago, Sal had walked along the same paths upon which we now strolled. Though the walkways and buildings were familiar to him, there were changes, mean changes that he found he must describe: armed guards patrolled the entrance gates and the camp perimeters, and barbed wire surrounded the camp.

The camp was only half full. We guessed it was because the Vichy government agreed to the Nazi demands and handed over Gurs's Austrian, Polish and German Jewish inmates, along with its ill and aged French Jews. We had seen them at Nexon. They were the women in the cots next to mine in Barracks 77.

The next day as Sal and I walked along the barracks, he told me more about the camp. Two distinct groups made up the population that remained at Gurs in the spring of 1943. Jewish prisoners spared deportation through connections and bribes, good health or just luck, were one group. Among them was a contingent from Mannheim and Karlsruhe. No one knew why these Orthodox Jews had initially been consigned to Gurs rather than one of the camps in the east. Eventually, many were deported there. A few members of the OSE were also in this group.

The second group at Gurs were Spaniards and Gypsies who lived in the camp by choice. They had fled Spain when General Francisco Franco, an ally of Hitler, came to power, and they refused to return to that country while he ruled. Free to leave Gurs during the day, they became the Jews' link between the camp and the outside world.

The Gypsies operated a small black market, selling bread and fruit to the Jews. French authorities both in and out of the camp were aware of this underground trade but made no attempt to stop it. The Spaniards brought the Jews news of the progress of the war and delivered French Underground mail. The authorities also knew about these activities, but ignored them, as long as they did not interfere with the smooth operation of the camp.

It took Sal less than a week to find the inmate leaders. The official head of the Mannheim group was Dr. Neder. He and the Jews associated with the OSE became inmate leaders. With the approval of the camp's administration, they took responsibility for such operations as staffing the kitchens and ensuring that

the barracks and grounds were kept clean.

After the hardships of Nexon, Sal found the comparative freedom of Gurs rejuvenating. As I became stronger and more alert, I also grasped the difference between the two camps. We were able to walk together in the afternoons without fear. The dreadful pits existed only in my dreams. Gurs had enclosed privies, and the food was at least edible. All I needed was something to do, something to fill the time. Sitting idly, I could not stop thinking about Nexon or the selfless Rebbetzin Kremer or those five thousand Jews marching slowly towards the train.

When I began to chafe at being idle, Sal suggested we see Dr. Neder. We found him outside the kosher kitchen.

“I’m very glad to meet you, Frau Kanner,” he said. “Your husband has spoken so glowingly of you. He told me you were not too well. I hope you are feeling better now.”

“I need something to do, so I won’t be able to think,” I said. “You know I was cook in the OSE homes. Do you think you could get me into one of the kitchens here?”

He thought for a minute and said, “Everybody wants to be in the kitchen. We have all the people we need on the kitchen staffs. Would you be willing to work in the camp laundry?”

I replied without hesitation, “Yes, anything.”

“Good,” he said. “We need a laundry manager.”

“Manager?” I wasn’t looking for such important work. “Do you think I can do it?”

“You can do it,” Sal said.

“Yes,” said Dr. Neder. “I don’t see why not. You take laundry bundles from the inmates in the morning, tag them and hand out receipts. Then you distribute the bundles to the laundry workers and make sure the washing gets done properly. You see to it that the clothes are not mixed up, and return them to their owners.”

“That doesn’t sound too difficult,” I said.

“Good, it’s settled,” he said. “And there is a bonus. It happens there is an extra room in the laundry house. It’s behind the office. You and Sal can live there.”

“I never expected such a privilege, Dr. Neder.”

“It’s yours,” he said cheerfully. “Come, I’ll show you.”

Along the way, Dr. Neder told us how Gurs came to have a laundry. At one time, soap had been rationed at Gurs, a minute amount of precious powder measured out and distributed weekly to each inmate. The inmates fought constantly over the best spots to do the washing in the stream and argued over space on the wash lines. Then the Jews proposed the creation of a camp laundry. They pointed out that by establishing a laundry, all the strife would be eliminated, and along with it, the existing black market in soap.

Camp authorities agreed, and even found a sum of money with which to pay each washerwoman a small cash wage. The women worked outdoors in all seasons, first boiling the hard water in huge vats, then scrubbing the laundry on washboards, rinsing it and hanging it. Part-time work did not exist. Once they joined the laundry force, women worked from sun-up to sundown. Even though they would be paid, few people wanted such hard work, except for the Gypsies who were glad to do it.

Unlike the washerwomen, I received no cash payment for managing the laundry, but our private room was a far more valuable reward.

The next day, we moved to our own quarters, and they were wonderful. The room had a table, four chairs and a small potbelly stove on which I thought I would be able to do a little cooking. At least I should be able to make a hot drink for us in the evening. We could drink it inside. No more standing and drinking in the cold outdoors as we had done at Nexon. It was more like it had been a Le Couret when Schlachter had brought me my first potbelly stove.

On a low shelf in our room, I found a mirror. I picked it up and stared at the image it reflected. Something was wrong. I did not recognize the woman in the glass. Quickly I put it back. Then I retrieved it and held it to my face again. The haggard, white-haired old woman I saw was me. I was thirty-eight years old. The last time I had looked in a mirror at Le Couret, my wavy hair was auburn. In the

three months I had been confined at Nexon, my hair had turned completely white.

CHAPTER 40

PESACH IN CAPTIVITY

“Packages of Matzoh arrived at the camp.”

In the spring of 1943, after three years of war and occupation, food shortages were acute, but the people at Gurs were not starving, as at Nexon. At Gurs, we ate three times a day. And the two separate kitchens in the camp made it possible for us to eat kosher. Meat, chicken, and eggs were scarce, but there was sufficient bread, potatoes, beans and cabbage. We were rarely truly hungry.

The washerwomen had strength to carry, wash, wring, and hang the laundry. If they struggled, it was because their load was heavy, not because their bodies were weak. I also regained my strength and began to feel like my old self again.

My work was less physically demanding, but my task required organization, time and attention. I threw myself into my new work. Collecting bundles from inmates, tagging and recording them, and handing work to the washerwomen, I quickly came to know a large number of women and men at the camp. No one resented my assignment or even thought it strange that the laundry manager was a newcomer.

When I looked in the mirror again, I no longer saw the aged stranger. The image I saw was more like the person I knew. I recognized myself again. It was not only that I became accustomed to my white hair; I also felt alive again.

Now there was a hint of normality in our lives. One evening when Sal was making ersatz coffee on our potbelly stove, he said, “Remember what I said when I came back from Jerusalem in 1935? I said that after we left Germany, we would establish ourselves by operating a laundry and a cleaners. Well, here we are running a laundry. It’s not what I had in mind, but it will have to do for now.”

I agreed. “We are together, we have friends, and I think we are safe, at least for now.”

Dr. Neder appointed Sal to be director of the laundry. It was an invented title, for the director had no duties to delegate nor work to oversee. The job was devised

in order to justify his living with me outside the barracks. Sal was idle until just before Pesach, and then, his assignment had nothing at all to do with the laundry. It dealt with preparations for the holiday.

When I first heard from a woman that there would be matzoh for Pesach, I did not believe her. I assumed she could not face the holiday without matzoh and was pretending to herself. Soon others told the same story, and then boxes of matzoh began arriving at Gurs. They were sent by French Jews to their friends and relatives in the camp.

Dr. Neder came to the laundry in the evening a week before Pesach and surprised me by handing me a box of matzoh. "You have friends everywhere," he said.

I made out the name of the sender written on the wrapper. It was from the brother of a school friend. "It's from Paula's brother," I said to Sal. "We were friends in Leipzig when we were children. Paula's been in Palestine for years, but her brother lives in Lyons. I wonder how he discovered I was in Gurs."

"He must work with the Underground," Sal said. "They know we are here."

I was elated. "We're not forgotten. It's so marvelous that someone outside has gone to the trouble to send us matzoh."

"Now all we need is wine and we can have a seder."

"Oh, we'll have wine," Dr. Neder said. "The camp director promised to get us some. Even in wartime, there is no shortage of wine in France."

"This is remarkable," I said.

"I didn't just come to deliver your matzoh," Dr. Neder said. "My Mannheim people say their dishes have to be kashered."

Each inmate owned his own cup, knife, fork, spoon and gamella, the round metal bowl used as an all-purpose plate. Metal utensils were distributed to inmates because they were cheap and unbreakable. Now it became apparent that metal offered another benefit. It was a material that could be kashered.

"Sal, will you help us set up so that everything can be properly kashered and

keep order?” Dr. Neder asked.

“You know I will be glad to help,” Sal said.

Dr. Neder said the kashering would have to be done outdoors, and could become hectic as each piece had to be dipped and submerged three times in boiling water. Dr. Neder had been a pediatrician in Mannheim, but he was also a learned man, and Orthodox Jews relied on his extensive knowledge.

Lola and Bertha, two washerwomen in their mid-thirties had become my friends. I admired them because they had agreed to work even though the task was alien to them. They were optimistic and believed that one day they would be free again. Bertha, a widow, came from Mannheim; Lola was Hungarian and had worked for the OSE before her arrest.

When they came into my room one night, I said, “You’re invited to a Seder here. I received some matzoh, and the doctor has promised wine.”

Everyone looked forward to Pesach. Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews alike became excited about the rapidly approaching yom tov. Word that there was a place to kasher utensils spread rapidly through the camp. On the chosen day, the site of the kashering teemed with women, eager to partake in the mitzvah. In their enthusiasm, none would have guessed that the day would end in disaster.

Dr. Neder told me what happened afterwards.

While two men were still engaged in filling the enormous vat with boiling water, women crowded around the steaming basin. They had tied string around their utensils, leaving a long piece by which to hold their bowls and cups as they repeatedly submerged them into the steaming water.

“Stand back,” Sal shouted. “Form a line, please.”

“Hurry up!” women on the edge of the crowd shouted. “What’s taking so long?”

“Calm down. Take it easy,” Sal answered. “There’s plenty of time.”

The complaints in the rear of the line became more strident, and Sal was becoming hoarse from shouting, “Stay in line; take it easy, you must stay in line, please!”

A gray-haired woman with a double chin reached the front of the line and placed two faded cotton sacks on the ground. She took a bowl out of the first sack, lowered it three times into the boiling water, shook it dry and placed it into the second sack. She reached into the first sack and took out another bowl. The line had stopped moving while she continued to repeat the performance.

“What is she up to?” Someone shouted. “Whose gamella is she dipping now?”

“Everyone is supposed to do her own,” another cried out. “Just your own, not the entire barracks!”

Women muttered angrily, “She’s taking too long. This is not right. Set a limit!”

His back toward the vat, facing the angry crowd who demanded “limits,” Sal shouted, “Ladies, please, there is plenty of time. Everyone will get a turn.”

Not to be appeased, the women moved forward. Alarmed now, arms outstretched as the crowd surged toward him, Sal yelled, “Stand back,” but they continued to move toward the tub, pushing and pressing against him, until he lost his balance and tumbled into the steaming tub. His face showed shock briefly, then showed the excruciating pain of the assault on his flesh.

The men who had been standing on the side unconcerned over the increasing tension, rushed forward to pull Sal out of the water. They carried him to the camp hospital. When he arrived, Sal was unconscious.

At the vat, the preparation of utensils resumed and continued for the rest of the day. The women, chastened by the accident, stood patiently until their turn came at the boiling water.

Thank God for the infirmary. There were burns on Sal’s legs and buttocks, and they were severe. It took two weeks before he could stand up.

My husband recovered, but there was no Seder in our room in the laundry.

CHAPTER 41

TRUNKS OF THE DEPARTED

“Let’s just take old clothes, things that we really need.”

Three weeks after Sal’s accident, he was able to walk with assistance. He thought he was well enough to return to our room in the laundry and asked the nurse for his clothes so he could get dressed.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “The doctor had to cut your pants off your legs when you were brought in.”

“But that was my only pair,” Sal protested.

“Really, you shouldn’t be complaining,” the nurse said. “You sustained no permanent damage and are extremely fortunate that you’re healing so rapidly. Dr. Neder will find something for you.”

A few days after that, I went with Dr. Neder to bring Sal back to our room. Supported by the doctor, Sal walked out of the infirmary wearing a pair of gray slacks, the cuffs rolled up at his ankles.

“Except for the length, they fit you quite well,” Dr. Neder said. “Unfortunately, we don’t have a tailor at Gurs anymore. He was taken away last November. Well, Mia, you will have to shorten the pants for your husband.”

It was Bertha who told me where Dr. Neder got Sal’s slacks. We were sitting together sewing one evening. I was struggling to patch a threadbare undergarment. “Look at my slip, Bertha,” I said. “I don’t see how I can repair it any more. It’s been washed hundreds of times, and after four years, it’s just too worn.”

“You’re right,” Bertha said. “It won’t survive another washing.”

“I should throw it away,” I said. “But how am I going to replace it?”

“You can, you know. I will show you,” Bertha said.

Late the next afternoon, Bertha led me to a store house in the far corner of the camp. Entering the building without windows, I had to squint until my eyes adjusted to the darkness. Then I saw large suitcases stacked everywhere. Many were of good quality.

“There must be hundreds,” I said. “And look, there are even a few trunks. Where did they come from? Whose are they?”

“They’re ours,” Bertha said. “We were allowed only one suitcase when we left Mannheim, so we took our largest suitcases and crammed as much as we could into them. But the people who were sent back to Germany last autumn and winter were permitted nothing. They had to leave everything behind.”

I watched Bertha go from one suitcase to another, examining the luggage tags. “Here’s a familiar name, Mia. I remember the woman well. A dear, sweet person, and she was small like you.”

Bertha poked and pressed the lock until the lid opened. She untied the satin ribbons that held the clothes down. A scent of perfume drifted past me. Bertha pulled out a long-sleeved green dress. “I think this would suit you quite well, Mia,” she said.

“Oh, Bertha, I couldn’t. It would be stealing.”

“She wouldn’t think so. She was kind and generous,” Bertha said. “If she were here, she would give you the dress. But she is not here. She was sent away months and months ago. She will never come back. None of them will.”

“I don’t feel right taking her clothes,” I said.

“Mia, she was ill when she left, and old, very old,” Bertha said. “I remember that when those people were ordered to go to the railroad siding, she had to be helped to the train. It would be a miracle if she survived the journey. Your underwear is in rags, Mia. Now take what you need, while I find some clothes for myself.”

A large woman with wide hips, Bertha was a head taller than I was. “Take what you need,” she said once more, and went off in search of a valise that had belonged to a woman who was her size.

Slowly and carefully, I removed the folded garments from the suitcase Bertha

had opened and placed them in a neat pile on a trunk. I tried to picture the old woman who had packed her belongings so neatly in this brown leather suitcase. The woman had packed exactly as I would have: Underwear on the bottom, handkerchiefs and stockings tucked in corners, no space left unused. In the folds of a pale pink silk nightgown, I found her sachet, the source of the perfume scent. I could see her now. I was watching the unknown woman in her bedroom in Mannheim. I imagined a thick gray carpet and drapery in pink and gray patterns. I imagined her preparing for an evening at a concert or a dinner party. Slowly, hampered by stiffness in her fingers, the old woman was closing the buttons at the neck of the green dress. Watching the frail, old woman dress, intruding into her most private actions, I cried out, “No, I won’t! I can’t!”

Bertha appeared at my side. “Mia, our clothes are in shreds. We have almost nothing left.”

“Bertha, I can’t,” I said. “They don’t belong to me.”

“Be sensible,” Bertha said.

“I will not take her dresses or skirts. I can see that they were especially altered for her. They would fit me, but I could never wear them.”

Bertha looked at me in disbelief.

“Don’t you see?” I asked. “I would be robbing the dead. What would be the difference between me and the Nazis?”

“All right,” Bertha said. “Let’s just take old clothes, and things that we really need.”

Reluctantly, I took a pair of stockings, some underwear, three handkerchiefs and the slip that I had come for. “That’s all,” I said, and carefully repacked the valise, replacing the garments in it as I had found them. I retied the satin ribbons and shut the lid.

In the far corner of the storeroom, I spotted a stack of blankets. I walked over to the pile and took one made of burgundy wool. “Here is our answer, Bertha. We will do what the French peasants do. I’ll show you.”

The next evening, working in my room, we cut the blanket in half and sewed

simple, identical shift dresses.

I saved my new dress for Shabbos. My mother had always said, “Don’t wear anything new for the first time on an ordinary day.” When Shabbos came, I wore the new burgundy shift. The coarse wool scratched my skin, but I could not bring myself to put on the slip. Nor did I wear it the following Shabbos. It remained folded and hidden under all my other things.

I became the owner of a second new dress from an even more unlikely source. A Red Cross truck pulled into Gurs, filled with clothing from America. Each woman inmate was permitted to select one dress and one pair of shoes. I selected an aqua cotton garment in a style popular before my marriage in 1929. Lola, my washerwoman friend, picked the same dress in yellow. The shoes I chose were made of kid leather and had pointed toes and Louis XIV heels. The last time I saw shoes in this style was in my mother’s shoe store in the early 1920s.

“I know about shoes, Lola,” I said. “These shoes must have been sitting in a warehouse for twenty years. They went out of style that long ago.”

“They are really quite nice,” Lola said.

“Yes, and they’re well-made and comfortable. I’m going to save them for special occasions.”

We were walking back to the laundry when a Gypsy woman tapped me on the shoulder. I stopped, and she handed me an envelope. It was completely blank. I opened it slowly. Inside was a note from the Mother Superior of Haute Vienne district.

Dear Madame,

Your little daughter is with us, and I write to tell you that she is well and well-cared for. She is very bright, a little angel. God is watching over her, and I pray for her every day.

Lea was all right! She was well! I ran after the Gypsy. “Please, I want to answer. Where did it come from? There is no address.”

“I know nothing,” said the Gypsy, and walked away.

It was the first word in almost a year. I was elated. “She is in a convent,” I said to Sal. “It never occurred to me that was where the Underground would hide her. I had imagined that she must be with a family somewhere. I have been trying to picture the house where she might be. Now I know.”

After that, several letters from Lea were delivered to me in the regular mail. The envelopes, addressed in delicate writing that matched the note the Gypsy had given to me, bore the stamp of the censor of Gurs.

Lea was six-and-a-half years old. She wrote in French, using script.

Dear Mama,

I am well. I am happy. I am first in my class, I hope the war will end and I can be together with my dear parents and sisters.

None of the letters bore a return address, so Sal and I never knew the name or location of the convent where Lea was hidden.

Lea’s handwriting was neat and legible, and the messages varied little, unlike the letters Ruth and Eva had written during the first months they were in America. Leaving almost no margin, they filled the page, describing the new coat Ruth had received for her birthday, how easy arithmetic was and how lenient the teachers were, and how strange the taste of peanut butter and watermelon was. I thought they must speak English quite well by now and was sure they must be first in their class. They had ended their letters with many kisses, their number increasing in each letter. Ruth’s last letter, which reached me when we were still at La Couret, had ended with a hundred million billion kisses. It was hard to believe that was just one year ago, because we had lived through so much since then.

Now in the spring of 1943, everything looked so much better. Through news passed on by the Gypsies, we had learned that the Nazis had been halted at Stalingrad, and the Russian armies were pushing back the enemy and reclaiming territories. Since the war began, we had dreamed that the Americans and their Allies would land in Europe and end the Nazi terror. We heard of Allied success in North Africa and thought the Allied invasion had to be near. We began to believe liberation would come soon.

Even so, the offer of release from the camp was totally unexpected. At the end of

May, 1943, the Gurs commandant informed the inmates that able-bodied men were needed to work on farms and factories in Occupied France. They would receive wages for their work, and they would be housed in a free camp. As further inducement, the wives of volunteers would be released from Gurs and transferred to the free camp of their choice.

Sal and I sat with a group of inmates discussing the offer. “What exactly is a free camp?” we asked.

“That means you have to report to the camp every night and sleep there,” Dr. Neder said. “But during the day, you are free to come and go without supervision.”

“Like the Gypsies here at Gurs,” Bertha said.

“What I like about this,” Sal said, “is that if I go, Mia will be released. She can go to a free camp.”

“You’re safe here,” Lola said. “Who knows what will be outside?”

“Lola, outside is always better,” Dr. Neder said. “If I were younger or if my wife were alive, I would go.”

Someone asked, “What’s to stop a man from disappearing altogether?”

“If the only identity card you have says you are a resident in a free camp, it would be a foolish risk to attempt that,” Sal said.

“What do you think, Dr. Neder?” A balding German asked. His name was Felix, and he shared Sal’s conviction that to be sent to Germany meant death.

I knew his story. When the deportation from Gurs began the year before, Felix’s name was on the list. “The French are not as meticulous as the Germans,” he had told Sal and me one night. “They didn’t seem to care about an ordinary man like me. I was not a black marketeer, or a political activist. When I found out I was on the list, I dug a hole in the floor of the barracks, crawled in, and covered myself. I suppose they called my name, and maybe they checked me off as going on the train. I really don’t know. What I know is that I didn’t eat for two days. When I figured the last train had left, I crept out of my hole and looked out of the door. I saw just a few French Jews among the Spaniards and the Gypsies. I

went to one of the barracks where some men remained and took a bed there. I immediately volunteered to do my share to keep the barracks clean, and that was that. No one reported me.”

Now Felix sought Dr. Neder’s advice. “I would like to get out, but the authorities don’t know I’m here. Gurs seems the safest place for me. Outside, I need documents. Here, in prison, I am free.”

Dr. Neder said, “With this offer, the camp population will be reduced again, and there will be no young men like you left, Felix. There aren’t more than thirty or forty now.”

“You’re right, I’ll stand out,” Felix said. “So I shall count on their inefficiency and volunteer.”

This time I did not insist on staying together with Sal as I had when the police came to arrest us at Le Couret. I knew where he would be, and he would know where I was. We could write to each other. Although our mail would be censored, we would be able to stay in touch.

Only two dozen volunteers appeared at the commandant’s office to sign up for work outside. When Felix gave his name, the clerk could find no record of him. The commandant drummed his fingers impatiently on his desk while the clerk searched through file cards and ledgers. Felix stood there, his face expressionless. After a while Dr. Neder, who was standing with the inmates, said, “It is odd that you have no record for him, but what difference does it make? He is here, is able-bodied, and he is volunteering.”

The Frenchman nodded at Dr. Neder’s logic. Under pressure from the Germans to produce as many workers as possible, he wrote out documents establishing Felix’s existence.

Two days later, twenty-four Jewish men boarded a train that took them from Gurs to Toulouse. Each man carried a document from the French commandant of Gurs, classifying him as a resident of the free camp at Muret, a former French army base.

I received a postcard which contained Sal’s address. He also wrote that the barracks were comfortable and that he was working in the cafeteria of the factory. The next week, he sent me money from his earnings.

I was given a choice of several free camps and selected La Maise because it was near Limoges. But another month passed before my release. During that interval, rules at Gurs were eased, permitting Jewish inmates to leave the grounds once a week. I pooled money Sal sent me with Dr. Neder's, Lola's, and Bertha's funds, and on a warm spring day, we walked out of Gurs heading for the nearby local village.

"Look around you, Bertha," I said. "In our blanket dresses, we look just like the local peasant women. We don't look at all like Jews from Gurs. No one will stop us or interfere with us."

We sat in a cafe and drank ersatz coffee that tasted almost real, and ate rolls that did not have the cardboard texture of the bread at the camp. What tasted best was the feeling of freedom. We enjoyed two more excursions to the village. Then the privilege was withdrawn, just as unaccountably as it had been granted.

The four of us continued to eat together on Friday evenings. We made a habit of saving our weekly ration of sugar for our Shabbos meal. With flour and oatmeal purchased from the Gypsies, I concocted a dessert. On my last Friday in Gurs, the Gypsies offered me figs, and I cooked a pudding.

"Mia, you have created ambrosia," Lola said, savoring the delicacy. "This is a really special Shabbos."

"We'll miss you, Mia," Bertha said.

"I'm not the same person I was when I came here," I said. "My only regret is leaving you, my friends, who have helped and encouraged me so much."

"The Allies are pushing the Germans back further in North Africa," Dr. Neder said. "We will all be free one day."

CHAPTER 42

FREE CAMPS

“French police burst into the barracks.”

The men who were in charge of Gurs were French collaborationists who cooperated with the Nazis to detain men, women and children solely because they were Jews. But they kept their word to the prisoners of Gurs who volunteered to work in French factories, and they gave me my freedom in June, 1943.

With a document of identification from the commandant of Gurs, I left the camp one month after Sal began working in a chemical plant in Toulouse. I had a pass to travel to Limoges, and I made the journey by train. Disruptions on the railroad were much greater than they had been when Ruth and Eva left for the first part of their journey to America in 1941.

The Maquis, the name adopted by the French Resistance workers, had succeeded in inflicting damage to the rail system, mainly by sabotaging the tracks. As a result, the journey required changing trains more than once and took several days. But I did not mind. I relished my freedom to travel, to climb on and off trains at will. My train arrived safely in Limoges, and I took a bus to the free camp of La Maise.

Compared to Gurs, La Maise was a small camp. The barracks to which I was assigned were sparse, but I expected nothing else and was satisfied. Neither sleeping on a cot nor sharing quarters with other women was a hardship. I had become accustomed to sleeping on cots long ago, and the women at La Maise were pleasant and kept the premises clean and neat. I readily did my share, taking my turn sweeping our barracks and washing the floor. There was no storage space in the barracks, but I hardly needed it, as I had so few possessions.

To me, the word “camp” for La Maise was really a misnomer, because I could come and go at will during the day. I could send and receive mail there, and I started a regular correspondence with Sal. Our letters were censored at both ends, but having my letters read was something else I did not object to at that time. We had no secrets to write to each other. I kept all complaints about the

current state of affairs in France out of my letters as Sal did in his to me. They were simple letters between a husband and wife forced apart by circumstances. What counted was I knew his whereabouts, he knew mine, and we were able to correspond.

Sal was paid a small salary for his work at the factory, and he sent a few francs with each letter. The money from Sal gave me further freedom and mobility. During the journey north from Gurs, I had planned three important trips to Limoges, all to find my friends and to reestablish links formed before my arrest.

My first trip out of the camp of La Maise was to visit Gita. I was anxious to know how my friend had been managing since she had been to Nexon to see Simon. I wanted her to see, firsthand, that I had survived the camps and was outside once more.

I found Gita still in her home on the edge of the city. As soon as she saw me, she dragged me into the house and threw her arms around me, hugging and embracing me.

But when I told her Sal was working in Toulouse, she started to weep. She did not need to tell me that her husband had been murdered at Nexon. His fate had been sealed the moment he was arrested and charged. Nothing could save a black market profiteer who ended up in the special compound at Nexon. We had both known this when we saw each other at the camp last winter.

“This is no way to greet you,” Gita said. She pulled a handkerchief from her skirt pocket and dried her eyes. “Seeing you here is the most marvelous surprise. You must tell me everything that happened. But first, you must see someone new.”

She took me to the nursery and showed me the infant. “It is a boy,” she said. “Anni has a brother, and I have a son.”

We sat at the dining room table and drank ersatz. The days of real coffee at Gita’s house were over. “Life is the same, just more difficult,” she said. “Food and fuel shortages are more severe and police repression has become worse. So even with your pass, promise me you will be careful.”

She also gave me the good news that Rabbi Deutsch was still free and in Limoges.

A few days later, I made a second trip to the city that I considered my home base. Though I possessed documents that made my presence legal in Limoges, I was on the lookout for gendarmes as Sal and I had done when we were fugitives here. It was not easy to rid myself of the old fear. But my spirits rose and my steps quickened when I saw the shteibel.

Rabbi Deutsch welcomed me cordially. He agreed with our decision to leave Gurs, reiterating Dr. Neder's words: Outside is always better. Then he told me that Toulouse had a beautiful old Sephardic shul. "There is no logic to those who govern in this country. But so far they do not interfere with the Toulouse Rabbi, and they permit him to hold services."

I was a legal person, free to call on the rabbi, and I was happy to take a meal with him and his students. There were not as many at the table as there had been the year before, but they still learned and davened together. Three years had passed since the French surrendered to the Nazis, and still they continued their Orthodox Jewish life under a regime that was not only anti-Semitic but also a dedicated hunter of Jews. I had never understood how the rabbi and his small group of students avoided arrest. God must have been keeping a special watch over them. The rabbi was known to all the Jews in the city and the surrounding areas, and his mere presence must have given people courage.

The rabbi was also an unofficial but accurate source of information about the whereabouts and welfare of Limoges Jews. He told me the OSE still maintained an office in the city and gave me its address.

A few days later, I made a third excursion to Limoges. When I arrived at the OSE office, I was fortunate to find Madame Weill, the woman who had been so intrigued by my tobinambour recipe while I was at La Chevrette and Le Couret. The OSE was aware that I had been released from Gurs and was now at La Maise, so Madame Weill was not surprised to see me. She told me that Frau Meder had returned to Switzerland, following the mass evacuation of the camp. I sent the nurse a letter the next day to let her know I was well and to thank her again for her intervention that had saved my life.

Letters were being delivered to Switzerland since it was a neutral nation. But it was not possible for me to write to Ruth and Eva in America. I had had no contact with my two oldest girls for close to three years. I asked about my youngest, but Madame Weill could not tell me where Lea was. "You must not

want too much,” she said. “Be satisfied that you know she is alive and cared for.”

I wanted something else from Madame Weill. I needed to go back to work for the OSE and thought she could help me. I went regularly to Limoges to see if anything was available for me. Two weeks after my first visit, Madame Weill offered me a place in the kitchen of the OSE orphanage in Brout Vernet, a village near Vichy.

Although Vichy was a long way from my friends, over one hundred miles east of Limoges, I took the job because I knew I needed to keep occupied. I had another reason for wanting work. I believed I was safer working than being idle. I believed my support from the OSE would be strengthened if I was employed by the organization. Most important, I foresaw the possibility that the free camp could become secured. I did not want to be there if that occurred, to be incarcerated again. I preferred to have no connection whatsoever with any camp.

I reported to the commandant at La Maise and showed him my OSE documents which certified that I had a job. Thus, I obtained my release. I thanked my barracks mates and took the train to Vichy.

Cooking at a kitchen in a children’s home no longer presented a problem to me. Cooking again for large numbers of people, I remembered the certainty with which Herman’s mother had said I would not be able to do it. The French cook with whom I worked at the home welcomed an extra pair of hands in the kitchen and treated me cordially.

We were in the kitchen twelve hours a day, starting before seven o’clock in the morning, and I was glad to go to the small room assigned to me, in the evening. There, I rested and wrote letters and dreamed of being reunited with my family.

Madame Weill came to the home occasionally. It was on one of these visits that she gave me the good news that the Allied Armies had landed in Sicily. I was elated that Allied troops were on the continent.

The summer of 1943 passed, and Rosh Hashanah came. The year before we had spent the High Holidays alone in the mountains. I imagined Sal davening in the Sephardic Synagogue of Toulouse that Rabbi Deutsch had described to me, and I was content.

Then I received a postcard from Sal with a strange and alarming message. “The train I will be on will pass through Limoges next Thursday at three o’clock. I hope to see you. Try your best.”

Why was he leaving Toulouse and the factory? Why did he not say where he was going? Why did he not explain himself?

Before midday, with two meals still to prepare, I said to the cook, “Madame, you must forgive me. I cannot delay even one minute. I must go to Limoges at once.”

Rushing to the Vichy train station, all my thoughts were focussed on the railroads. Would there be a train to Limoges that day? Would I be on time to catch it? Why was Sal’s train passing through Limoges? Most of all, what was he doing on that train? He was supposed to stay in Toulouse. That was what concerned me.

On the train to Limoges I was exhausted from worrying and yearned to sleep, but I knew I must not. Think! I told myself. Think!

What was the meaning of Sal’s cryptic message? There was no doubt that he was in trouble and needed help. That was obvious. Something had gone wrong in Toulouse. I had to find out what had happened. The people at the OSE usually had information, and they had ties to the Resistance movement. I would go to the OSE before rushing to the railroad platform in Limoges. Whatever needed to be done, it would be better not to handle it alone.

The journey seemed endless, but after I decided what to do, I was able to relax a little. I closed my eyes and prayed silently.

When I arrived at the OSE office, Madame Weill was there.

“I need help, Madame,” I said. “My husband is in trouble.”

“Yes, but how did you know?”

I showed her the postcard, and Madame Weill told me what she knew.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, the men from the free camp had gone to the Sephardic Synagogue for Kol Nidre. They had been welcomed by the rabbi and the congregation and returned the following day, remaining for the entire day-

long service. There was no indication of any problem, no hint at all.

Before daybreak the following morning, French police burst into their barracks and arrested all the men. “We don’t know yet if they were picked up because they went to the synagogue for Yom Kippur, or if it was an ordinary roundup,” Madame Weill said. “They are being held in a camp between here and Toulouse.”

With those few sentences, Madame Weill confirmed what I feared most. Sal had been arrested again.

She took me by the hand and said, “I cannot imagine how your husband managed to mail a postcard to you. It is remarkable. And useful. Now we know not only that these men are to be moved, but also what train they will be on.”

“What can we do?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but we have two days,” she said.

On Thursday morning Madame Weill told me that she had found no one who had any contacts on the train, but secured this promise: if Sal could get off the train, the Underground would hide him.

She agreed to accompany me to the station though we had no plan of action.

We arrived at the terminal at 2:30 and sat in the waiting room. The train was announced at five minutes to three. For once, there was no delay.

We heard the train, then watched it begin to pull into the station. As it slowed, I saw Sal at the window of the first passenger car. We ran towards his car. When we reached Sal, he was struggling with the window, but could open it only wide enough to put his hand through. “Mia! Madame Weill!” he called, as the train rolled to a stop. We hurried along the platform.

“We have no contacts on the train,” Madame Weill said to Sal. “If you can get off, we will hide you, but you have to get off the train.”

“How?” Sal asked. “There are guards everywhere.”

“I don’t know,” she answered. “You have to get yourself off—the bathrooms,

perhaps.”

“No good. The windows are locked,” Sal said.

The engine hissed, and the train began to move. “Oh, my God,” I whispered. “Be careful.”

The train gathered speed, and I started to run along the platform, trying to keep up with it. “Sal!” I cried. “Don’t let them take you!”

Then he was gone as the train disappeared into the distance.

Madame Weill led me out of the station. “Come. Nothing else can be done here. There was never more than the smallest possibility that anything could be managed. Don’t blame yourself.”

“What am I to do?”

“Go back to Vichy. There you have a roof, a bed, and work. We must wait. We must see what happens. If there is news, you will hear from us.”

I lay awake at night. Every night at the OSE home in Vichy was the same. No matter how I tried to divert my thoughts, the same question always intruded. Where was Sal?

I thought back to the times he had been interned—Buchenwald, Damini, Gurs, Nexon, Gurs again—five times in five years, starting with Kristallnacht. Forged documents I secured got him his freedom from Buchenwald; the French surrender resulted in his release from Damini; having relatives in the Unoccupied Zone brought his release from Gurs in the summer of 1940; Frau Meder saved us in Nexon; volunteering to work in Toulouse this past spring had brought about his latest release from Gurs. How would he get out now?

I waited for a message from the OSE, any word at all from Madame Weill. When news finally came, it was not from Limoges but on an unsigned postcard addressed to Amelie Kaville at the Vichy Orphanage. “I hope you are well, and I send best regards.” The handwriting was unmistakably Sal’s. When one of the OSE officials came to the home, I showed him the card. He deciphered the markings on the card as French and guessed it was posted in the northeast, near the coast of the Channel.

For a brief time, I was elated. Sal was still in France. Soon, questions formed in my mind. Why did he not say where he was? Evidently, he was confined. He did not say he was well, only that he hoped I was well. He must have used some kind of subterfuge to have the card mailed. Otherwise he would have signed the card and given his address or location. I tried to figure out what he was trying to tell me.

How long could I survive the uncertainty? I remained in a permanent state of agitation. Then miraculously, another postcard arrived. Again unsigned, it carried a cryptic message: "Gita is ill and needs you."

What was I to make of this message? What was wrong with Gita? How would Sal know anything about her? What was he trying to tell me? I became so distraught that I found it completely impossible to work. I took a train to Limoges and went directly to Gita, who was perfectly well and amazed to see me. Whether it was the message or my agitated state, she would not let me return to Vichy.

"You don't have to work there," she said to me. "Stay here with me, Mia. Really, I think it's quite safe, and I can use your help and company. You know it is not so easy for me to be alone with two small children."

The OSE accepted my decision to leave Vichy. I called on Rabbi Deutsch to tell him I was again staying in Limoges. "Your husband is alive and in this country. Give thanks to the Almighty. Don't try so hard to search for hidden meanings, but accept the information given you," he said.

My decision to stay with Gita was the right one. The next postcard arrived at her house, and it told me where he was. Delivered in December and unsigned like the others, it contained just three words, "Greetings from Paris."

1943 came to an end. The very first sound I heard on January 1, 1944 was a commotion at four o'clock in the morning. It was still dark. I put on my robe and rushed to the front hall. Gita had opened the door. Sal was standing there, with another man behind him.

"I thought you'd never come," Sal said. "Quick, let us in. I need money, a thousand francs for my friend."

"What?" Gita said. "I don't understand."

Sal pointed to the stranger who was with him. “He helped me escape. I promised to pay him.”

Gita turned and went to her bedroom. In a minute she returned and handed Sal a pack of bills. The stranger put the money in his pocket without counting it.

“Do you want to stay for the rest of the night?” Sal asked him.

“No, I have no more time to waste. I must go on and get to Spain.”

“Good luck, good luck,” Sal said. The stranger walked into the blackness, and Sal turned to me.

CHAPTER 43

FORCED LABOR AT THE SEA WALL

“England is the promised land, but you will never get there.”

Sal’s story about his three-month ordeal was unimaginable. Hours after I left Sal at the depot in Limoges, his train pulled into Paris. After standing on a siding for an hour, the train began to move again. It circled the city for hours, and none of the men knew what was happening.

A German officer finally entered the car and began asking the prisoners questions about their families. Some of the men said they were bachelors. Others said they were married to non-Jews. The Germans had no ledgers or records with which to verify the men’s information. When Sal heard the words “Calais” and “Drancy,” he shuddered. He knew that Drancy was a transit camp outside Paris, the last stop in France from where Jews were sent to camps in Germany and Poland.

“My wife is a Gentile,” Sal said when his turn came. “She comes from Brittany. Her name is Amelie Kaville.”

“How come so many of you are married to non-Jews?” the German asked.

Sal laughed boldly. “When it comes to love, you don’t look into a woman’s religion.”

The German slapped Sal on the back. “All right,” he said. “Calais.”

Believing that Allied troops would sail across the Straits of Dover and invade France at the Pas de Calais, the Germans transported hundreds of men to build fortifications along the seawall there. Frenchmen, Greeks and Spaniards, working for pay, were quartered in one camp. Jewish and half-Jewish prisoners were kept in a different camp.

When Sal’s turn came to be registered, he gave my real name and address in Vichy, reasoning that the Nazis could easily find my whereabouts. After inscribing Sal’s name and vital statistics to register him in the work force, the

Nazi gave him a yellow Star of David and ordered him to sew it on his sleeve.

The Jews were assigned to work details, each group consisting of thirty men, with a German soldier in charge. Their day began at five o'clock in the morning. After a hurried breakfast of a chunk of stale bread and weak coffee, they walked through the countryside to the coast an hour away, skirting a small French village before sunrise.

Sal was in a group of cement carriers. A worker placed a hundred-pound sack of cement on his back. It took him and the other men of his detail five minutes to reach the cement mixer. They put down their sacks and returned to the starting place for another load. Mid-day there was a lunch break—a cup of soup. Then the men went back to their labor. Aside from the meal break work only stopped during air raids. When Allied planes came, the Germans rushed to a rock shelter, but the Jews were forced to remain in the open to endure the bombing. Work ended at sundown; Jewish men were forced to labor seven days a week. After the hour's walk back to camp, the men lay in the cold barracks, too exhausted to feel hunger.

Of course, there were black marketeers among the inmates, men who somehow managed to get to the village to buy bread and cold meats and mail cards. It was through these men that Sal was able to write to me. With money left over from the wages in Toulouse, Sal also bought food to supplement the midday meal.

I thought that nothing could be worse than what we had endured at Nexon until I heard Sal talk about forced labor in Calais. He survived by living one day at a time, trying to keep calm, and thinking of little other than conserving his strength. Not wasting an ounce of strength was so important that Sal rarely moved, walking measured steps unless he was hauling a cement sack. Whenever panic overrode his manufactured calmness, he reminded himself that he had gotten out of Buchenwald, out of Germany, out of Gurs twice and even out of Nexon, the worst camp of all. He clung to his belief that if he kept calm and avoided trouble, he would survive Calais as well.

Every morning before leaving the camp and again on their return at night, the Jews were counted. One evening, when Sal's cadre was counted, there were only twenty-seven men. The German soldier in charge called out all the names from his list and noted the names of the missing. In Buchenwald, when a man tried to escape, his entire group was punished, but in Calais the Germans were too

desperate for workers to retaliate.

One clear day, waiting for a sack of cement, Sal turned to look at the sea and made out Dover across the Channel. The soldier in charge of the cadre taunted Sal, "I know what you're looking at. You're looking at England. You think England is the promised land, but you will never get there. This is the closest you will ever be to England."

A week or so later, on the road back from the fortification site, Sal saw a man's legs buckle under him. Two Jews picked him up, placed his arms round their shoulders and dragged him back to the barracks. The next morning he could not stand up. When the twenty-nine Jews returned to the barracks that evening, he was gone.

"Stay healthy at all costs," a young French Jew told Sal. "If you get sick, you are of no use to the Nazis."

Remaining well was easier said than done. After hauling cement on his back for a month, Sal felt he could not survive the inhuman demands made on his body much longer. The only way to stay alive was to escape. Walking to and from the fortification site, Sal spoke softly to the men near him. "Those three from our group who got away... I wonder how they did it." None of them responded. Sal continued to throw out hints. "It would be interesting to know what happens to the men who disappear."

During an air raid a dark, slight young man lay on the ground next to Sal, muttering, "I've got to get away."

"Me too."

The young man said, "I have a plan, but I need money."

Sal said, "I have money."

"You do?"

"Yes, French francs," Sal said. "If you take me, I will pay."

"I've seen you," the man said. "You're in the barracks next to mine. What's your name?"

“Sal,” he replied. “And you?”

“They call me The Greek because my parents are from Greece, but I am a born Frenchman.”

Sirens sounded the all-clear. During the next few days, Sal and The Greek met for hurried, furtive conversations. The Greek proposed making their escape by traveling by train and swore he knew the railroad timetables and the train routes to Paris. When Sal asked if he had been a railroad worker, The Greek shrugged without answering. Sal had become so desperate to escape, he decided the young man had all the information required and that the plan would work.

“First we board the local train at the village,” The Greek said. “The war zone begins at the third stop and lasts to the eleventh station. That will be the most dangerous part of our trip. One stop later, at the end of the local run, we change trains. Then we ask to ride with the engineer. The Nazis never check the locomotive berths. But we can’t do this right away. While we’re close to Calais and the Nazi troops, we can’t risk being seen talking to the engineer.”

Sal listened with mounting excitement, as The Greek said, “We go next Wednesday. Have your money with you. Take nothing else.”

“What is there to take? I have only the clothes I’m wearing.”

In those final days, Sal no longer concentrated on the punishment his body was taking but only on his plan and its possible consequences. He sent me a postcard with the message that Gita needed me because he wanted me to get out of Vichy. He figured that the Nazis knew I worked at the Vichy home and might look for him there. I would be safe with Gita. He was also counting on her to give him the money he had promised The Greek.

The Greek counted on friends in Paris to provide him with forged identification papers and planned then to make his way to Spain.

The sun rose a little later every day now. Though they could not work until it was light, the men continued to be awakened at five o’clock. Most of the hour-long march to the fortification site took place in darkness. One the first Wednesday of December, 1943, Sal walked nervously with his cadre. The Greek’s group was in front of his. As soon as Sal saw The Greek drop out of formation, he asked the German soldier for permission to relieve himself. It was

routine for a man to head toward the roadside bushes during a march, and the soldier waved him on.

From behind a bush, Sal watched the men in his group pass him. The soldier in charge never looked back. When the last of the prisoners were out of sight, Sal walked warily along the edge of the road. He expected to meet no one, but if he were stopped, he intended to say he was catching up with his group. Sal found The Greek waiting in the spot where he had entered the woods.

Silently, the two men shook hands. Then they tore the six-pointed yellow stars off their coats and buried them under the damp, brown leaves of the forest floor. The village was a mile and a half away. Heads bent down, hands in the pockets of their worn coats, the two fugitives could have passed for local men hurrying to work. In twenty minutes, they reached the village where the black marketeers secured their wares and which Sal had skirted every morning and evening for over a month.

The clerk at the station did not look at The Greek when he purchased two train tickets. The train pulled in five minutes later. The windows of the car they boarded were clouded with soot. A narrow aisle divided the two rows of double seats. Sal sat motionless, his hands folded in his lap, his eyes fixed on the rumpled, gray hair covering the head of the man in front of him.

At the third stop, a German soldier entered the train. "Have your cards ready; control," he called out. They were in the war zone. The soldier stood over a middle-aged peasant while she rummaged through her handbag; the black cotton scarf that covered her head slid down onto her shoulders. Sal stood up, pretending to check his pockets. The woman found her identification card and showed it to the soldier. He walked on and bent over an elderly man. As the soldier studied the old man's documents, Sal went past him and slid into the empty seat next to the woman. She edged toward him and the coarse wool of her coat brushed his hand. He sank lower into the seat and saw The Greek pass in back of the soldier as he had done. The German was almost at the end of the car now.

The woman leaned towards Sal and said, "Ah, Henri, it's very cold this morning."

The soldier went into the next car.

“Don’t worry,” the woman said to Sal. The train started to move, and Sal returned to his seat.

Now the man sitting across the aisle tapped Sal on the shoulder. Sal’s body jerked involuntarily. The man said, “There is a toilet at each end of the car. When we get to a station, each of you go into one of the toilets. Leave the door slightly open. That way the ‘control’ will assume it is vacant. Stand against the wall facing the window, and he won’t be able to see you.”

Sal saw the woman watching them. “The toilet is dirty this morning,” she said in a loud voice. Sal realized the passengers, evidently all from the area, recognized that two strangers had joined them. They understood.

“They all know,” Sal whispered to The Greek, “and they’re helping us.”

“We are approaching the next stop,” said the man across the aisle.

Sal rose, headed for the toilet, and entered the tiny enclosure. From within, he heard the announcement, “War zone, have your documents ready. Control!” He pressed his body against the wall and waited. Long minutes passed before the train began to move again. When he finally returned to his seat, several new passengers nodded to him.

The routine was repeated seven more times before the train was inland and out of the war zone. When Sal returned to his seat for the final time, the woman who had initially befriended him handed him a small parcel. “You probably didn’t have time to eat before boarding the train,” she said. “I baked this bread myself just yesterday.” Sal accepted it and thanked her for her kindness. The bread was coarse but good.

The train arrived at its last stop. The woman buttoned her coat, tied her black scarf around her head and wished them a safe journey.

They were in a small village, and Sal worried that they would be spotted as strangers before they reached the Catholic church. The church spire was visible above the shops, so they did not have to ask for directions. They knocked at the side door of the church and the priest came.

“We have come from Calais,” Sal said. “We are Jews.”

The priest gave them a brief, disbelieving stare and crossed himself. Then he urged the two men inside, and Sal recounted their train journey. The priest said, "It is very dangerous for you, but it is dangerous for me also. You can stay only one night. It is all I dare do for you, that and share my table with you. Come, I will take you to your room."

"Imagine," The Greek said after the priest had left them. "Only one night."

"The sooner we reach Paris, the better," Sal replied.

The next morning, The Greek again purchased two train tickets, Their destination was a town farther inland on the railroad line. The name meant nothing to Sal. He knew only that they were getting closer to Paris. There were occasional checks for papers during their second day on the train. They hid in the toilets whenever they heard the increasingly familiar call, "Have your identification ready."

At one station when they noticed three soldiers board three different cars of the train, Sal said, "I don't like it. There are too many of them." They got off and sat in the waiting room until another Paris-bound train pulled in an hour later.

They encountered their first real problem at the junction where The Greek hoped to find a railroad engineer who would let them ride in the engine compartment. They spent three hours on the platform, pleading unsuccessfully with various engineers. It had seemed such a simple plan, but as refusal followed refusal, Sal realized The Greek had miscalculated. He knew about schedules, but not about train engineers, who said taking passengers in their cab against regulations was too risky.

Then Sal spotted a freight train pulling in on a far track and saw they had a chance to ride in one of the cars. "Come on," he urged. "Hurry, before the train pulls out."

Walking quickly around the engine to the far side of the freight train, they found an open car and hoisted themselves in. The car was filled with bundles of fresh beets. They buried themselves under the vegetables, remaining motionless though the beets dug into their flesh. They waited impatiently for the train to pull out, so they could shift positions. When at last the train began to move, the blanket of vegetables was scant protection against the cold winter weather.

It was dark when the train pulled into a freight yard outside Paris. The men made sure no one was about and jumped off the beet-filled car. The Greek was jubilant. "I know a local station nearby, and there is no control on those commuter trains. All we have to do is get off before we reach the terminal in Paris, and we should be safe." He was right. They boarded the local train and traveled to Paris without incident.

The plan was for Sal to stay in a small hotel until The Greek secured false papers. Then they would continue south. They reached the hotel after midnight. The proprietor appeared in his bathrobe. The Greek introduced Sal as his friend who needed a place to hide until he arranged for their papers. The proprietor nodded, and The Greek said, "I'm off to my cousin's house. Good night, my friends."

When the proprietor woke Sal in the Paris hotel room at a quarter to six on his first morning there, Sal thought the bed and the white sheet on which he was lying were part of a dream.

"You have to dress and leave," the proprietor said. "During the day it is not safe at the hotel because you have no papers."

Sal went to the small sink in the room and washed his hands and face with cold water.

The hotel keeper said, "The Greek told me you know Paris. You should be all right in the city. Just lose yourself among the crowds. Come back after dark, about seven o'clock.

Sal joined men and women hurrying along the streets on their way to work. At ten o'clock, he entered a department store. On the main floor, he inspected underwear and ties. He located the food department, bought some shelled hazelnuts, and melted into the crowd of shoppers. At one o'clock, he went outside and joined shopkeepers going home for their midday meal. He walked on main streets among others, always on the lookout for police and soldiers who might demand the identification papers he did not possess.

When he returned to the hotel after dark, the proprietor was waiting for him. "Come to my apartment," he said. "You must be hungry."

"I ate some nuts," Sal said. "I would be glad to have something to eat."

The proprietor brought thick, steaming potato soup to the table and said, “The Greek came with forged papers for you.”

Sal grabbed for it excitedly, but the Frenchman said, “It may do for a quick inspection, but it is not a good job at all. It will never do if the police check my register.”

“But then, what shall I do?” Sal asked.

“Every night, I prepare a registration under a false name. That’s just in case there’s a check during the night. They mostly appear during the day, but sometimes they come at night. Then they’re thorough and examine all the documents.” He leaned back in his chair. “Eat, or the soup will get cold, and don’t worry so much.”

The Greek came to the hotel once or twice a week. Each time, he assured Sal that his source was working on their false identity papers. “The next time I come, I’ll have them for sure,” he would promise, only to reappear a few days later without the necessary documents for traveling south. Sal worried that the promised documents would have validity. It was during the wait that Sal decided it was safe to communicate with me and sent me his unsigned greetings from Paris.

The department stores were boons to Sal. They sheltered him from the cold, and they were the only places he could purchase food without a ration card. Fruits and nuts sustained him until the evening when he returned to the hotel proprietor’s hot meal.

With each passing day, Sal became more anxious. He did not think he could stay at the hotel indefinitely. Because of the torment he suffered at Calais and because he had saved himself, he believed the hotel keeper had a duty to help him; at the same time he marveled that this Parisian would risk his life for a total stranger, provide food and shelter and take nothing in return. Early during his stay, Sal offered up most of the money he had left, but the hotel keeper had refused, saying simply, “You need it. I don’t.”

Sal’s greatest fear was that he would get caught in a raffle. Nazi soldiers roaming Paris streets regularly forced all the men on a block to unbuckle their belts and pull down their trousers. The orders came without warning, and not even the best identification card would help a circumcised Jew exposed in such a roundup.

Christmas was a cold and particularly trying day. All the stores were closed, and the streets were almost deserted. Sal passed the office of the Union Generale des Israelites de France, the Jewish organization the Nazis established in November 1941. After the dissolution of all existing groups in France, the UGIF became the only recognized Jewish organization in the country. It was headed by French Jews, and its ostensible purpose was to minister to the welfare needs of the Jewish population. In reality, it was now only a workshop for the Nazis and nothing more. In 1943, it employed skilled Jewish artisans who produced much needed boots and uniforms for the Germans. If not for their talents, they would have been arrested long ago.

Sal walked into the workshop where half a dozen Jewish men and women sat around a large table sewing. "I am a Jew. I have no papers," he told them. "Help me."

A woman with a pinched look on her face paused in her stitching. "There are no German Jews left in Paris," she said.

An old man with a tremor in his voice said, "I don't understand. Where did you come from?"

"From Calais. I escaped from the Nazi labor camp there. I have to get to Limoges, but I have no papers," Sal explained. "You must help me secure documents."

"We can not help you," the old man said.

"You were mad to come here," the woman said. "You will get us all murdered."

Sal was stupefied. A cobbler pulled his billfold out of his pocket. "Ten francs is all I have. Take it and go," he said urgently.

"No, it is not money I need," Sal said.

Four others rose, took money out of their pockets, shoved it into Sal's hand and pushed him towards the door. Jews, unwilling to help a fellow Jew—could that be? Stunned, Sal walked out, their terrified whispers following him. "Please, don't come back. Please, don't ever come back here."

He had walked only half a block when he spotted a raffle two corners away. He

backed into a doorway. As two cyclists pedaled by, he opened the door and slipped into a darkened hallway. There he stood immobile, his back pressed against the wall. The hotel keeper said the raffles were over in minutes, even when the Nazis uncovered Jews and arrested them; but Sal waited an hour before he stirred. When he was sure the street was empty, he began to walk back to the hotel.

That night, when The Greek came with promises to have the papers within a week, Sal was adamant. “No, I cannot stay in Paris. I realized it hiding in a hallway while a raffle was being conducted outside. But I had an idea there. We will take the train on New Year’s Eve. We’ll use the papers we have. The Nazis will be so busy celebrating, they won’t check very carefully.”

The proprietor thought it was a good plan.

“Traveling with the train engineer is safer,” The Greek said. “But if I can’t persuade him, I agree. We will take a chance in the train on New Year’s Eve.”

On the last day of 1943, over steaming cabbage soup, Sal bade goodbye to the hotel proprietor. “You saved my life,” he said. “I know you took risks to keep me for so long. I will never forget what you did.”

“We all do what we can,” he said. “Come and visit me after we win the war.”

Sal met The Greek a block from the railroad terminal. They entered the station and strolled through the waiting room toward the ticket booth. “Two to Limoges,” The Greek said.

The train was already on the track, its engineer nowhere in sight. They wandered along the platform to the front of the train as if they were searching for a companion.

“Forget about your engineer,” Sal whispered. “None of these guys will take a chance. Why should they? Come on, let’s board. We’re going to call attention to ourselves if we stay here.” He pulled open the door of the railroad car and walked in. The Greek followed.

They sat next to each other. The Greek checked his watch. “Six minutes,” he said.

Sal said, "I never would have dreamed a time would come when I would be desperate to leave Paris."

They heard a whistle blast, and the train moved out of the city.

Their car was less than half-filled, and they had a compartment to themselves. They heard raucous laughter and German songs. The Greek rose and walked out along the passageway. When he returned, he reported, "There are three of them, German soldiers. They're drunk."

A conductor opened the door of their compartment. They handed him their tickets; he punched them, said, "Happy New Year," and left.

"Let's take turns keeping watch," The Greek suggested.

"I'm much too excited to sleep," Sal said. "You go ahead if you want to. I'll act as lookout."

It wasn't necessary. Sal had guessed right. There was no check of identification papers at all during the six-hour ride.

Sal smiled at me and Gita. He had come to the end of his saga. "You see, the Germans took New Year's Day off to celebrate. The Nazis stopped hunting the Jews for a few hours, and I am here with you."

Book Seven

January 1944-June 1946

Release to Freedom

CHAPTER 44

THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT MUST HELP

“My identification papers were suspect.”

It was plain to me that Gita was endangering her life by letting Sal stay. The Nazis or French authorities would surely arrest her if they discovered that she was hiding a Jewish fugitive, a man who had escaped from a Nazi labor camp. Still, she insisted on sheltering Sal, at least until a more secure hiding place could be found for him.

We were afraid to risk using the identity card of Georges Keener, the badly forged document The Greek obtained in Paris. So Sal stayed hidden in the house most of the time. I spent my time searching for identity papers, for work, for a place to live. Each of these was necessary if Sal was to melt into the ordinary population of Limoges.

I sought out Rabbi Deutsch who was still the leader of the Jewish community of Limoges. I had turned to him often in the last two years, but this time he was unable to help. Trying not to be discouraged, I made my way to the OSE. The organization was of little help, counseling patience but making no promises.

Just as I thought I had exhausted all my contacts, I remembered Marie Pouillard, the young French teacher at Le Couret.

I had always had a hot cup of ersatz ready for the young woman after she finished classes in the afternoon. She would sit with me in the kitchen and help me improve my French before she left Le Couret. When the first snow fell, I said to her, “Won’t you write down your address for me? When the time comes, I shall send you a card for Christmas.” That was before our arrest in January, 1943. Somehow, through everything that had happened to me, I had kept her address. Now I decided I had nothing to lose by appealing to her.

On Sunday, a day when Marie was sure to be in, Sal and I walked the ten miles to the Pouillard home. The young woman looked at us with such astonishment that I thought I had made a mistake. Then she took my hand and begged us to come inside.

“I was sure I would never see you again,” she said, kissing me on both cheeks. “After the police took you from Le Couret, I assumed the worst. And now here you are. I’m so happy you’re back, and you too, Monsieur. Sit, please, and tell me what happened. Where have you been? How did you get away?”

Before I could answer, a man came into the room whom Marie introduced as her father. “This is the kind woman I told you about,” she explained to him. Turning to me, she said, “I can never repay your kindness to me at Le Couret.”

Marie served ersatz coffee and some biscuits. Then she and her father listened quietly while I described Nexon, Gurs, and my return to Limoges. Sal talked about Calais and his weeks in Paris. “And now I sit in your wonderful home,” he said. “But I am again in a bad situation. I have no house, no work, no papers. I am a non-person.”

It was then that Pouillard spoke. “I can help you. I no longer work, but for many years before my retirement, I was a railroad inspector. I know many people. One of them is now the Limoges depot inspector. Go to him, and tell him I sent you. Just show him the papers you have, and I’m sure he will find something for you to do.”

It was exactly as Pouillard said. The director of the Limoges railroad depot barely glanced at Sal’s papers. “We need workers, Monsieur Keener,” the man had said. “Since Pouillard recommended you, I shall be glad to employ you. A fine old gentleman. How did you become acquainted with him?”

“Through my wife,” Sal answered truthfully. “She worked at the same place as his daughter.”

“Very good,” the director said. “You can begin work next Thursday. Of course, before I sign you on, I must have a certificate of health. Just a routine examination, you understand, and then you can start.”

We knew it would not be routine at all, but Sal had no choice. Before the examination, the doctor took Sal’s identification card and did not return it. In the examining room, Sal prayed the doctor would not turn him in. We knew he was risking rearrest each time he had to show The Greek’s mediocre forgery. Those papers identified Georges Keener, born in Muehlhausen, Alsace in 1892, a French Catholic. Sal was prepared to back up his false identity with a home address and the name of the parish church he attended. But the card itself would

not stand up under scrutiny.

The doctor entered the room and began the examination. He told Sal to undress. That was what we had anticipated and worried about. Sal remembered the raffle in Paris. He lowered his trousers. Of course, the doctor noticed immediately.

“You are circumcised. How did that happen?” he asked.

“When I was a small child... I don’t really know... my mother died before I started school. I could never explain it.” All the while that Sal was fumbling for an explanation the doctor studied him thoughtfully. He completed the examination in silence and washed his hands.

“All right, Monsieur Keener, get dressed and I shall complete the health certificate. There is no reason for the railroad not to employ you.”

It was difficult to believe that the doctor truly accepted Sal’s preposterous protestations of ignorance. More likely the man was one of countless Frenchmen who stayed outside the Resistance Movement but acted quietly against the Nazis during the occupation. I was convinced of the latter, but I could not think of an adequate way to thank him.

Two priceless gifts came with Sal’s job. The first was the official recognition of the existence of Georges Keener, verified by an identity card from the French railway system. The second was a place to stay; as a certified employee of the railroad, Sal was entitled to sleep at the depot.

We were out of danger, or so I thought. I had just a few worry-free nights with Gita when a member of the Underground came to the house to warn her that she was being watched. “Go into hiding,” the Resistance fighter advised. “We will try to help, but don’t delay.”

The man did not know whether my stay in the house was the reason for the surveillance, but I knew I would have to leave Gita’s home in the morning. If anyone came to question her, my presence could only further endanger my dearest friend.

Gita left before I did, seeking a place for herself and her two small children. An hour later, I walked out the door. From the moment I set out, I was watchful. I walked warily to the offices of the Jewish Committee of Limoges. I scrutinized

each man who walked toward me and looked in all directions when I came to a street corner. The one thought running through my head was that my identification papers were suspect. I knew that German soldiers and French collaborationists roamed the dismal streets. What was I to say if one of them stopped me? How would I explain my presence in Limoges? According to the authorities, I was supposed to be working as a cook in Vichy's OSE home.

When I arrived at the Committee, I was overcome with exhaustion. I had been in grave danger in the past, in more threatening circumstances than I was that day, but I had no strength left. I felt completely depleted. I could not do any more. I wanted to live, but someone else had to take the responsibility.

In the office of the Jewish Committee, I stood in front of the two women working there and began shouting at them. "You must find me a place to hide. Right away. You must!"

"Calm yourself, please," the older of the two women said. "What you ask is very difficult, Madame."

"I know that," I answered. "But I can't stay with my friend any longer, and I can't go back to the home at Vichy. Look, I'm not asking for much. My husband is employed at the railroad. They have given him documents and are letting him sleep at the depot. All this we arranged by ourselves. But I have nowhere to go. Don't you think it's time I had help? You find me something."

I did not realize I was screaming. I would not have cared anyway. I knew that the people at Rabbi Deutsch's Committee had connections with the Resistance Movement. They had to help me! They were supposed to help Jews like me, but it was always others they saved. It was Berlin in 1938 all over again. A dozen times we had reached the head of the list of emigrants to Palestine, and a dozen times we lost that coveted spot. It always went to others, to those deemed in greater danger from the Nazis than the Kanner family.

"You help me now," I demanded. "It is my turn." I did not notice that someone had walked into the room. I was jabbing my index finger in the face of the startled woman behind the desk, shouting, "Find me a place to go. I beg you, on my hands and knees! I'll do anything. I'll scrub floors all day, if you ask me!"

I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned and saw a tall, handsome young man. "Do you really mean that?" he asked.

“Yes!” I shouted.

“Then pull yourself together, Madame. Go into the other room. It is possible that we can help each other.”

Shaking, I entered the inner office. A few minutes later, the young man followed. He closed the door of the inner office and pulled out a chair for me.

“Dreyfus is my name,” he said. “I’m a lieutenant in De Gaulle’s Free French Forces. There is a villa and farm in the country about an hour from here. My father-in-law and I own it together. Do you know him, Monsieur Meyer, the banker?”

I shook my head in panic. Dreyfus retained his friendly demeanor and I began to calm down. “I move about a great deal, but Monsieur Meyer lives at the farm with my wife and daughter. I heard you say you were a cook with the OSE. That is a good recommendation. We need someone to work as housekeeper and help with our baby. Do you think that would suit you?”

I nodded, and tears of gratitude spilled down my face.

“You understand, I am with the Underground,” Lieutenant Dreyfus said. “I can arrange proper identity papers for you. You won’t really need them. Nobody ever comes out from the city, and the locals know us well. My father-in-law has owned the property for over twenty years.”

Dreyfus was on his way to the farm and thought it would be wise for me to go with him directly. He promised he would get word to Sal and see to it that Gita would learn where I was going. I let myself be swept along by all these new arrangements, the answers to all my prayers.

CHAPTER 45

WAITING FOR INVASION

“The soldiers walked back and forth in front of me.”

Lieutenant Dreyfuss had called Monsieur Meyer’s home a farm. Along the way, I pictured a modest farmhouse. What confronted me on arriving, however, was a large country estate with a two-story, twelve-room house and a large kitchen. Shortly after my arrival, I was given a most astonishing gift: my first cup of real coffee in almost four years. This extraordinary treat was legitimate. Lieutenant Dreyfus did not deal on the black market, nor did his father-in-law. It was Monsieur Meyer’s wife who was responsible for the coffee and an abundant supply of foods that were practically unobtainable in France in the winter of 1944.

Madame Meyer fell in love with the estate in the 1920s while vacationing in the area. Before returning to their home in Alsace, Monsieur Meyer bought the estate for her. In 1938, Madame Meyer became alarmed by the possibility of war and began to stock the mansion with coffee, tea, canned meats, fish and vegetables, sugar, flour, soap. When the war broke out in 1939, the couple fled from Alsace to the farm with their seventeen-year-old daughter. Soon after, Madame Meyer died in her country hideaway. The hoard she built up had already lasted more than four years, and the larder was still well stocked when I came in January, 1944.

The farm was an anachronism. Equally strange was its young mistress who took for granted its incredible abundance. An only child, she had been spoiled by her parents. At twenty-three, Madame Dreyfuss was tall, slender and beautiful. Idolized by her husband, she was indifferent to the suffering and deprivation not many miles away from her isolated world. She viewed me as a servant and had no idea that I had led any other life or had children of my own. She remained unaware of my incarceration in the camps. Sometimes I wondered if she had any idea of the danger her husband was in when he was away from her.

I worked extremely hard at the farm, harder than I had in the OSE kitchens where I cooked for more than one hundred people every day. At the farm, besides cooking, I cleaned the twelve-room house and took care of the child

Michelle, who was not quite a year old.

What I found most difficult was the laundering. That was because there was a shortage of one essential item in that house—water. So I had to wash linens outdoors, using a washboard, kneeling on stones next to the stream. The wet tablecloths and sheets were heavy, and it took all my strength to wring them out and hang them on the line. It was not the hard work I minded. Hard work was a fair trade for my safety. What I minded was that Madame Dreyfus never showed any appreciation for my efforts. She was totally indifferent to the extreme difficulty of my task. For the first time since I had begun to work for other people, I felt degraded. I understood clearly why my mother had made me scrub our kitchen floor. She had wanted me to know how to direct our servants. More important, she had wanted me to know what it felt like to do these tasks. It was a lesson my young mistress had never learned.

In complete contrast to young Madame Dreyfus, her father treated me with unflinching courtesy and consideration. His kindness kept me going, that and Sal's weekly visits on his free days.

After a short time at the railroad, Sal was offered work as a cook at the depot. He accepted, knowing the meals he was now expected to produce would have to be more complex than his contributions at the chemical factory cafeteria. Sal asked for the night-shift because then he would not have to prepare hot meals. During the hours he was on duty, sandwiches were the rule.

One day, however, when he filled in the order for the day chef, three workers brought Sal some rabbits.

“A treat for you, Keener, a chance to cook real meat,” the workman said. “How do you prepare rabbit?”

Sal had no idea, but said, “Leave it to me.”

He skinned the rabbits and pondered what to do next. The men were drinking in the dining room. Hearing their laughter, he had an inspiration. Wine is the answer. He cut the animals up, soaking the pieces in wine. Then he placed the chunks of meat in a saucepan, poured two more bottles of wine over them, and let the concoction simmer.

“Marvelous,” one of the men exclaimed when he began to eat the meal Sal had

cooked.

“The best rabbit I ever had,” said the second.

When we heard the story, Monsieur Meyer and I could not stop laughing.

Another story Sal told was not so amusing. On his weekly visits to the farm, Sal always brought his dirty clothes for me to launder. He carried the laundry in a musette. Though he did not drink, he always had a bottle of wine in his bag, careful to leave the neck sticking out. He meant his satchel to look like those carried by other rail workers.

After a few weeks of going to and from the farm, he passed the Limoges checkpoint without fear. Upon reaching the bridge one day in February, he confidently pulled his railroad identification card from the musette and showed it to the two guards.

“Good, pass through,” one of them said.

He went blithely along until he heard a guard shout, “One moment, Monsieur, come back.”

Sal froze. He knew that the men were armed and that he would not be able to escape. Slowly, he made his way back toward the barricade. The guard was waving what looked like a dark strip of cloth. “Your sock,” he shouted. “When you opened your musette, you dropped your sock.”

With shaking hands, Sal stuffed the sock into his bag, too upset to thank the guard.

In truth, he should have, for he could not afford to lose the sock. I darned and re-darned Sal’s socks until there was more of my handiwork than of the original material.

I was myself desperately in need of clothes. When I left the OSE home in Vichy, I packed only one change of clothing. My underwear and stockings were worn out again. I had no clothing warm enough for a winter in the country. In the fifth year of the war, apparel was scarce in France. Even if I found something in the stores, it would have done me no good. Lieutenant Dreyfus had not supplied me with the ration card necessary to make any purchases in Limoges.

I began to think longingly of the clothes I had left in Vichy. When my slip tore one morning as I was pulling it over my head, I made my decision. I would travel to Vichy to retrieve my belongings. I could use the undergarments I had taken from the valise of the old woman from Mannheim. More than anything else, I wanted the warm burgundy dress I had fashioned out of the blanket.

Monsieur Meyer was doubtful about the undertaking. "I don't mind your taking time off, Amalia," he said. "But are you sure you want to take the seven hour-trip?"

I was sure. Wearing my old coat, I walked to Limoges one evening. Shabbily dressed and carrying a basket of bread and fruit, I looked no different from most of the women I saw in the station. Sal told me that the trains were crowded with women traveling to visit relatives. I expected to share a compartment with some of them. The patrol on the train rarely bothered asking local women for papers. Lieutenant Dreyfus assured me that the identification documents he gave me were perfect forgeries, but I did not want to have to prove that he was right.

I studied the schedules and purchased a round-trip ticket to Vichy. My train would not leave for another hour. The waiting room was crowded with civilian travelers and armed soldiers, but I found a seat on a wooden bench.

I watched the soldiers walking back and forth in front of me. I stared at their weapons and heard the sound of their boots pounding the stone floor. A rumbling voice over the loudspeaker confirmed that the Vichy train would depart at midnight, and still the soldiers marched back and forth, back and forth. I began to shake. Why were they in the station if not to arrest Resistance workers and Jews? Suppose one of them were to address me? My terror would show on my face and give me away before I had a chance to say one word.

It was insane for me to have come here, to sit exposed in the terminal, to undertake an all-night train trip, all for a few shabby pieces of clothing. On the farm I was never hungry, never saw guards or soldiers. How could I have forgotten Nexon and Gurs? It was madness to risk my life for a few bits to put on my back!

I waited for the patrol to pass me again. When I saw the backs of the soldiers, I rose from the bench and left the station. I walked along the city's back streets to avoid the night patrol. Finally, I found a road that led back to the farm. It was a

long walk, and it was dark, but I felt safe. God was with me.

It was past three o'clock in the morning when I reached the farm. As always at night, all the doors of the house were locked. I did not have a key. Unwilling to awaken the household, I decided to climb in through a window. The bathroom window was the only one not barred by an iron gate. It was the only way to get in.

An old log lay nearby. I rolled it toward the house, then steadied it against the wall. I stepped up on it and stretched my arms up. My hands reached the window ledge of the bathroom. I grasped the ledge and hoisted myself up. Suddenly, I felt a piercing pain in my back. Still, I clung to the sill with one hand and managed to push the window open with the other. Cold and exhausted, I climbed into the house and hobbled back to my room in the dark, every step renewing the piercing pain in my back.

By chance, a doctor came by the farm the next day. He was Dr. Levine, a cousin of Lieutenant Dreyfus, and no stranger to me. I knew him from the OSE homes. It was he who had sometimes cared for sick children. He examined me in my room and told me I had pulled a muscle in my back. "You should move as little as possible," he said. "I advise you to rest in bed for two weeks."

Monsieur Meyer insisted that I follow the doctor's advice.

I lay in bed, and Madame Dreyfus pouted because she had to help her father-in-law with the cooking. Despite her ill humor, it finally occurred to the young woman that she had many more clothes than she could use and that she could have some of them altered to fit me.

After my foolish excursion to Limoges, I did not leave the farm again. The only risk I took was to listen to forbidden radio broadcasts from England on Monsieur Meyer's short-wave radio. At night, Monsieur Mayer and I climbed up to the attic of the house. We crouched near the dimly glowing tubes of his radio, waiting anxiously for the start of the transmission. It always began with, "Ici Londres! Here is London!" magical words that always filled me with excitement and hope.

From the BBC, we learned that the Russians were pushing the Nazis back toward Germany and that the Allied armies were moving toward Italy. The news reports were interspersed with peculiar statements, unrelated to the war. "The

lentils must be well cooked,” listeners were advised. “The cabbage crop is endangered,” we heard on another night. Monsieur Meyer explained that these statements were messages to the Maquis, the French Resistance fighters, who were extremely active in the spring of 1944.

Anything British and American bombers could not hit, the resistance now tackled. They cut down trees along main routes so that the roads became impassable. They blew up railroad bridges and viaducts to disrupt enemy supply lines and troop movements.

We were not totally isolated. Monsieur Meyer had a tenant farmer on his land. One day, while Sal was visiting, the farmer’s wife rushed over to the house, burst into the kitchen, and shouted, “Three German soldiers are coming to your house.” I picked up little Michelle and dashed into the corn field with Monsieur Meyer and his daughter running after me. Sal remained behind, waiting at the main door of the house. Three soldiers came up the walkway. They wore Nazi uniforms and they were very young.

“What is it you want?” Sal asked them in French.

“Food,” the soldiers answered. “We are hungry.”

Sal nodded and the three young men followed him into the house. They appeared more frightened than he was. On the kitchen counter, he found a dozen eggs and a chicken that the farmer had brought that morning. He picked up the bird that I had already cleaned and handed it to one of the soldiers. He gave another the carton of eggs and found a loaf of bread for the third.

The soldiers spoke their thanks in German. “Danke, danke,” they said, and went away.

Sal came for us in the fields. “There was no danger; they just wanted food,” he told us. “These days, everyone is hungry.”

The next time Sal came to see us, he brought bad news. Rabbi Deutsch had been arrested along with the few Jewish men who had remained free during most of the German occupation. No explanation was given for the roundup. There was but one good aspect about these arrests. The destruction of the railroad network was now so extensive that trains could not go north from Limoges to Paris. The Nazis no longer had the means to send arrested Jews out of the city, and held

them in local jails.

On a clear, sunny afternoon at the end of May 1944, I stood looking down the blocked road leading from the farm to Limoges. The poplars were tall and old. The Maquis had cut down every second tree to make the road impassable. But if I kept my eyes off the ground and looked at the treetops, the avenue still maintained its beautiful majestic air.

I heard the now familiar sound of airplanes. Looking upward, I could make out the British and American markings. Help was coming from heaven. It seemed to me that hundreds of planes filled the sky that day. The massive fleet of bombers filled me with exultation.

Our travail was not yet over. At the beginning of June, news came to the farm that Lieutenant Dreyfus had been murdered by the Nazis. It happened in Lyons, a city not far from the Swiss border, where he had gone to organize a raid by Resistance workers. In the spring of 1944, the Nazis in France no longer had time for interrogation or torture. They spotted Dreyfus on the streets of the city and shot him down. Monsieur Meyer tried but was never able to find who had denounced his son-in-law to the enemy.

All of us at the farm were overwhelmed with grief. We tried to carry on with our normal activities, but we were not thinking clearly. On June 6 when Monsieur Meyer and I went to the attic, we did not take in the historic import of the words of General Dwight Eisenhower as he spoke.

“People of Western Europe,” he said. “A landing was made this morning on the coast of France by troops of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. This landing is but the opening phase of a campaign in Western Europe. Great battles lie ahead.

“I call upon all who love freedom to stand by us now. Keep your faith staunch. Our armies are resolute. Together we shall achieve victory.”

CHAPTER 46

HIDDEN CHILD

“People died inside that cave.”

Over the short-wave radio, we heard reports of fierce fighting on the beaches of Normandy and the struggle for control of villages near the coast. So many thoughts went through my mind. I remembered the beaches of St. Malo in Brittany, not far from where the Allied armies landed. I had found those beaches so peaceful. Now tens of thousands of soldiers were fighting on these French shores. What mattered was that the American and English soldiers were on French soil at last. I was sure now that we would win.

Hitler had expected the Allies to land at Calais and had ordered concrete fortifications built there. That was logical strategy because Calais was closer to England than any other port in France. Countless Jewish men had died during the construction of the seawall, and my husband would have been one of them if not for his extraordinary escape. How many more would die before it was over? How much longer?

The wealthy and beautiful young Madame Dreyfus was not as fortunate as I was. The Nazis had killed her husband. Watching her fatherless little girl toddle blissfully around the lawn on the side of the house, I thought of Lea with longing. Now that certain victory was only a matter of time, I found the wait almost unbearable. I snapped at the slightest provocation, unable to do such simple tasks as sewing an even hem on Michelle’s dress.

August, 1944 was a crucial time. The Allied Armies were getting closer to Paris. Allied troops had landed on the Mediterranean coast of France near Cannes on August 15 and began to fight their way north. Throughout the Occupied Zone, French Resistance fighters reclaimed towns and villages.

Even before the Allied Forces marched on Paris, Limoges was liberated. No doubt now remained that the Nazis would be defeated. There was no reason for me to lie awake at night, but I did. Exhausted after a sleepless night, I struggled with the laundry in the morning and let the potatoes burn in the afternoon. The conviction that one day I would be reunited with my three daughters had

sustained me during my worst times in France. Now I wanted my children back.

I had assumed Sal and I had only to make the request, and Lea would be returned to us within a day or two. Or if she were not brought to us, we would be told where to go to pick up our daughter. It was not so simple.

There was much good news. Rabbi Deutsch was free. When the Germans evacuated Limoges, French police simply opened the doors of the jail and everyone walked out. Sal visited the newly freed Rabbi Deutsch soon after.

“Thank God that we have lived to see this day, Rabbi,” Sal said. “Please forgive me; I know you just came out, but already I need your help. I want my daughter back.”

Working the night shift on the railroad freed Sal during the day, and he spent his time trying to locate the whereabouts of our daughter. Following a lead from the rabbi, Sal visited a member of the Resistance Movement in the city. The man referred him to someone else. Day after day, he was passed from one man to another, to a third and a fourth, always with the frustrating words, “It takes time; you must be patient.”

I passed the days waiting anxiously. Why was it so difficult? How many convents were there in Haute Vienne? What was wrong? It went that way for more than a month. And then, at last, they found her. A letter came instructing Sal to be at the Limoges railway station in two days to meet Lea.

I waited at the farm. Long before they were due, I was standing on the veranda. I looked past the approach to the estate toward the avenue. The road that had been blocked with trees felled by the Maquis was cleared now. The remaining trees, so tall and full, hid the destruction. The avenue looked as majestic as ever.

I spotted Lea and Sal, two small figures in the distance. I moved down the steps and quickened my pace as they came nearer. The child broke away, and we ran toward each other. Then I was holding my daughter in my arms, hugging, kissing, and stroking her, unable to form any words but murmuring joyful sounds, Lea squeaking happily, “Mama, Mama!”

Sal caught up with us, and we walked to the house, Lea between us, holding each of us by the hand. “Is that your house?” she asked. “It’s very big.”

“It is not mine, but you will stay here with me,” I said. “This is where I work.”

“It looks like a nice house,” she said.

I noticed that Lea was limping. “What happened to your leg, sweetheart?” I asked.

“It’s not my leg. It’s my foot,” Lea answered.

In the big kitchen, while Lea drank fresh milk and ate warm bread, spread thick with butter, the story came out.

“There was a nail in my shoe that dug into my heel,” Lea said. “Only I thought it was a stone, or maybe my sock wasn’t straight. But my foot kept hurting even after I pulled up my sock.” She licked the butter off a second slice of bread. “After a few days, my heel was all swollen, and I showed it to the nun. She found the nail and pulled it out. She said my foot was infected.” She looked up at me and said, “Can you fix it, Mama?”

“We’ll make it better,” I said. I got up and kissed Lea lightly on the top of her head. She was seven-and-a-half years old. My darling looked exactly the same as when she had been spirited away in the ambulance more than two years before, her face round, her skin pale, the dimple still erupting in her chin when she smiled.

Her face, her arms and her legs were streaked with dirt. “I’m going to give you a bath,” I said. “We have a big wooden tub. Papa will bring it outside and fill it with water. Then you can soak and splash as long as you like.”

Warmed by the afternoon sun, Lea stood on the grass, ready to climb into the round tub. It was then that I discovered that my child’s entire body was utterly filthy. I started to wash Lea’s short-cropped hair and made another discovery. The child’s head was infested with lice. I would get rid of them. She was back. How good it was to be able to take care of her!

I begged precious cans of petrol from Monsieur Meyer, and for the next two weeks, I washed Lea’s hair with it every day. I took Lea to the village doctor, who lanced the wound on her foot.

Over the next few weeks, as the wound slowly healed, Lea spoke sometimes of

the two years she had been away. “The nuns shaved my head,” she said, while I used a fine comb on her hair. “I don’t know why.”

Another day, while I darned Sal’s socks, Lea said, “The nuns taught us how to sew. She said, ‘When you hem, pretend you’re walking with one foot on the pavement, the other in the gutter. Stitch up and down, girls, up and down, up and down.’”

I took a needle from my sewing box and said, “How nice. Show me,” but Lea had become engrossed in her drawing. She would talk about something that happened only once, saying a few words, then become lost in thought, oblivious to her surroundings. It seemed as if by telling me what had happened, she was giving her memories away to me.

One rainy afternoon, when I thought Lea was totally engrossed in matching dominoes, she suddenly looked up and said, “Liselotte was bigger than me and older, but in the convent she was my friend.”

“Liselotte from Le Couret?” I asked.

Lea nodded. “She showed me how to pray. She showed me how to cross myself. She told me to watch her until I memorized when to kneel down during the mass.”

I stared at my daughter in shocked silence.

“Liselotte said it’s easy. I should do just what the others do. Kneel, pray, cross myself. But I had to remember it was just a game. We were only pretending because we are Jewish. She said we mustn’t forget.”

I said, “She was a good friend.”

Lea rubbed the white dots on the dominoes. “Liselotte explained about my name. She said it was another part of the secret that the nuns didn’t pronounce the ‘r’ at the end of my name. They called me Canne, not Kanner, to make me sound French. Liselotte told me I had to get used to it and to learn to write my name with a ‘C’ instead of a ‘K’. She said then no one will know who I am except her, and no one will guess that we are Jewish.”

Another day, while Lea was playing with a dog who lived on the farm, she said,

“This is a nice farm, Mama. Before I was on another farm.”

“I didn’t know that,” I said.

“The nuns sent me,” Lea said. “They told me the people would be very nice, but I didn’t like them, I didn’t like it there because the soldiers came all the time. Once, the soldiers threw a man into the well.”

Aghast, I reached for my daughter’s hand. Lea’s eyes were filled with tears, but she went on. “When the farmer saw soldiers coming, he pushed me out of the house and told me to hide in the fields. I hid behind a tree near a cave and watched the soldiers. They had guns, and once they pushed a lot of people into the cave, Then they blocked the entrance, so the people couldn’t get out. The cave was very dark, and the people didn’t have any food. None of them ever came out. Those people died inside the cave.”

I put my arms around Lea and held her, thinking of her cowering behind a tree, alone. All the time I had worried only about my daughter’s physical safety. It had never occurred to me that a little child would be witness to such inhuman, ruthless brutality.

Monsieur Meyer moved his radio down from the attic, and we followed the progress of the troops in comfortable surroundings. In the north, the Allies reached Belgium at the beginning of September. Other troops fought to reach the Rhine and cross into Germany. In Central France, the fighting was over.

Monsieur Meyer decided there was no need to spend another winter on the farm. Late in the fall of 1944, he moved his household back to Limoges. I agreed to act as housekeeper in his seven-room, city apartment.

The hoard of sugar, flour and coffee was still not exhausted. I packed the scarce staples, and Monsieur Meyer took the supply back to the city. I was to follow him a few days after closing the country house.

When I was ready to leave, the tenant farmer who had brought eggs and butter through all the months of the war came with his wagon and loaded my few possessions on it. Then Lea and I climbed up and sat next to him. The horse began to pull the wagon down the shaded avenue that led to Limoges; the dog chased the wagon, in frenzied excitement.

A car came down the road from the opposite direction. The dog continued to race after the wagon. The car passed us; an instant after I realized that the driver had not seen the dog, the animal disappeared under the wheels of the car.

In a worried tone, Lea said, "I don't see the dog anymore."

I saw him. The animal lay on the side of the road, its lifeless, black body blending into the shadows made by the tall evergreens. The child had already witnessed so much death. Thank God, she had not seen the accident.

"Mama, where is the dog?" Lea asked.

"The dog went back to the farm, Lea," I said. "He can't come to the city with us."

"Why not? Why can't he?"

I uttered the first words that came into my head. "He has to stay behind to go to the village school." The words made no sense to me, but Lea said nothing more. In the time she had been away, my inquisitive daughter had learned not to question bizarre explanations. At that moment, I gave thanks for that. In time, please God, she would return to her old self.

In Limoges, I enrolled Lea in the local public school. She was a diligent pupil, and before 1944 came to an end, she was at the head of her class.

As the winter of 1944-45 waned, the monstrous experiences of the two years Lea was hidden in the convent and on the farm faded from her memory. She liked books and games and got along well with the other children in her class. She seemed to be a happy, normal child, except that she could recall nothing of her life in France before the time when she came back to me.

CHAPTER 47

COFFEE, PAPER AND STRING

“Look at my beautiful, grown-up daughters.”

When I returned to Limoges in October, 1944, I found that the city was completely safe, and that was a wonderful feeling. It took time to become used to this sense of freedom. For a decade, it had been essential for me to be watchful and wary in the street. The danger started at Halle, but Limoges had been particularly perilous for Sal and me. Now the Nazis were gone from Limoges and most of France. French people who had collaborated with them were ousted from power, vilified, and ostracized.

In this free environment, I took up my duties as housekeeper for Monsieur Meyer and his family. Lea and I shared a small room in the fourth floor attic of the building. Wherever I went, whether it was to bring Lea to school, to shop, or to see friends, I could walk without looking about or behind me. I relished wandering in the stores and markets even though shortages of food were still acute. People were no longer starving, though meats, fruit, coffee and sugar remained scarce.

I set out to renew my contacts with the people who had befriended and supported me in Limoges. On one of the first Sundays I was free from work, I visited Rabbi Deutsch who had put himself at risk every day, quietly helping us and other Jews during the years of Occupation.

The other person I was eager to see was Gita. She was now living in a rented apartment, less than an hour's walk from Monsieur Meyer's home. I set out to visit her, unprepared to hear that she had endured another dreadful loss.

After the Underground had informed her that she was under surveillance and ought to flee, she had many offers of shelter for herself and the four-year-old Anni. But no one would let her bring the baby. Everybody was afraid the infant's crying would expose the presence of fugitives.

“What was I to do, Mia? I could not stay at our house, and I could not live in the street. I heard that one of the convents maintained an infant creche, and I took

my baby there. I had to give him up. I had no choice,” she cried. She knew I would understand. I had been in the same painful situation.

Because the Nazis were looking for her, she was advised it would be safer if she did not go to visit her little son. The nuns promised to care for him, and she had no reason not to believe them. But something went wrong. The details were vague. Perhaps the bottles were improperly sterilized or the baby food somehow became contaminated. No one could say with certainty, but inexplicably the babies in the convent became ill, and some of them died. Gita’s little boy was one of a dozen infants who did not survive. He was barely one year old.

Our children were safe, thank God. We were sure of that, though there had been no word from or about Ruth and Eva for three years. As soon as I came back to Limoges, I tried to contact our daughters in America. But the war was not yet over, and civilian communications had not been reestablished.

By the autumn of 1944, Hitler’s armies had been all but driven out of France, and the Allies had only to cross the Rhine into Germany to complete the liberation. In the winter, Allied forces encountered fierce opposition in Belgium and suffered thousands of casualties in the Battle of the Bulge.

So I was sad and disappointed but not surprised that we received no reply to any of the letters we wrote to the girls in New York. I did not believe mail was going through. Sal was convinced there was another reason. He thought he might not have remembered the addresses in New York correctly. He knew of only one way to check.

In February of 1945, he decided to go back to Le Couret to search for papers we had left behind in our room when we were arrested. Walking towards the summerhouse, he encountered the farmer in whose hayloft we had spent the nights while we were hiding in the forest.

“I am very happy to see you!” the Frenchman said. “I was sure you were killed!” He walked with Sal to our old quarters and said no one else had lived in the one-room summerhouse that had been ours. Cobwebs were everywhere in the room, but nothing had been moved. Sal found our old box and his worn leather case. All his papers were still there.

When he returned, we took the list of addresses to the International Red Cross and asked them not only to find Ruth and Eva in New York but also to search for

our missing relatives. In the spring of 1945, the Red Cross located and contacted Ruth and Eva in New York City.

A letter came from our girls. It was written in awkward, misspelled German. I wanted to know everything about them and found their letters much too brief. They were formal in an unexpected way. Had they forgotten most of their German, I wondered, or could they have forgotten us? They were well, they wrote, and were eager to be reunited with Mama, Papa and Lea.

The letters were accompanied by a black and white photograph of two smiling young ladies, standing in a park. I could not take my eyes off the shiny black and white photograph. They were my daughters, but I did not know them. These girls bore no resemblance to the children I had sent to America four years ago. I knew nothing about them. I tried to imagine how they lived, what kind of friends they had, what they did for pleasure. Seeking clues, I read and re-read the letters but found little that helped me identify these grown-up girls with the children I had sent to America. Yet they were mine.

I carried the photograph with me and proudly showed it to everyone I met, saying, "Look at my beautiful, grown-up daughters."

On April 30, Hitler committed suicide. The Nazi surrender came on May 8, 1945. It was universally called V.E. Day, which stood for Victory in Europe. In Limoges wild, spontaneous celebrations erupted in the streets, followed by a formal civic gala that culminated in a fabulous display of fireworks.

We were part of the celebrations because we had survived, yet we did not belong in this city, not with our daughters living on the other side of the Atlantic. Should we bring them back to France? Should we make our future in Palestine? Or should Sal and I try to emigrate to the United States?

Not long after V.E. Day, I received a package from New York. It was from my sister, Hannah, who sent useful items that were unobtainable in France. The box contained a pound of A & P brand coffee, three cans of condensed milk, powdered eggs, a large bar of Hershey's chocolate, a cake of Ivory soap, and a bottle of vitamins. The last had been contributed by my cousin, Leo, a physician who had fled from Vienna in 1938 and was now a general practitioner in Brooklyn. On the tissue paper around the glass bottle, he had written, "All three of you should take these pills! Best, Leo."

He did not need to sign his name. I recognized his angular script as I did that of my sister even before I saw Hannah's name and return address on the package. Seeing their handwriting was like touching them and was more important to me than the message and gifts they had sent.

These common foods were beautiful, marvelous gifts. I wondered if Hannah realized it. I opened the powdered egg and the canned milk and made real pancakes. What a party that was. I can still remember the delicious taste of that ordinary dish that we had not tasted for so long.

Hannah's familiar script pulled me back to the past and reminded me of the person I had been, a woman with a family and responsibilities, presiding over my own home, respected by my community. I contrasted my present existence in Limoges with my life in Halle before Hitler. Suddenly, what had been acceptable while the Nazis controlled France was now annoying, even unpleasant. For four years, I had cooked, cleaned and waited on others. Now I began to find these tasks increasingly irritating and demeaning.

The difference between Monsieur Meyer's farm and his home in Limoges added to my discomfort. There was considerably less space in the apartment than there had been in the country house. And space was not the major problem. Rather it was the young Madame Dreyfus who was becoming ever more haughty, going out of her way to emphasize my status as a servant. At the farm, it had been the custom for everyone to eat together at a large, oblong table in the kitchen. In Limoges, I was required to feed little Michelle separately, then to serve Madame Dreyfus and Monsieur Meyer in the dining room. Only after I cleared the dining room table could I reheat the food for Lea and me. It was also expected that Lea and I eat in the kitchen.

I told Sal I did not want to go on like this. "I did not survive the war to end up a servant in the home of a spoiled, selfish woman."

Sal agreed. "It is time to end our masquerade. I must put my own situation in order as well."

He went to the director of the Limoges station. I laughed when he told me about his encounter. "I have to tell you that Georges Keener is not my real name," Sal had said. "My name is Kanner, Salomon David Kanner. I am a Jew, a German Jew." The director's confusion turned to amazement when Sal recounted his

multiple arrests and escapes from camps and prisons in Germany and France.

“This is all hard to believe,” the railroad official said. “Why, you don’t even have a German accent.” Sal explained that learning French made it possible for him to pass as an Alsatian. The director chuckled and said, “Listen, Keener, I mean Kanner, none of this really matters. You are a good worker, and now I am doubly glad I hired you. Go down to the Prefecture, get a proper identification card, and I will arrange civil service status for you under your true name.”

When Sal said he would have to talk this over with his wife, the director threw up his hands. “I thought you were a bachelor. Next you’ll tell me you have children.”

“Three daughters.”

“Too much, too much,” said the official, and told Sal to take the night off and bring in his decision the next day.

That evening over a glass of hot tea at Gita’s we examined the advantages and problems that came with the offer from the railroad. “You see, Gita, if I join the civil service here, I will have security, but it would be making a commitment to remain in France.”

“And we don’t want to stay,” I said. Sal and I had not actually made any decision although lately we had spent all our time together talking about the future. It was when he uttered the words, “making a commitment” that I saw clearly our future was not in Limoges, or even in France at all.

“I don’t want to stay in Limoges either,” Gita said. “So many terrible things happened in this city that I want to leave and never come back.”

“We belong in the United States now,” I said. “Living in Palestine and working in the Jewish homeland was our dream for so long; I would still like to go, but it would be unfair to uproot Eva and Ruth again. I think that is the first consideration.”

Sal agreed. “America is a good country,” he said.

“You’ve decided, then?” Gita asked.

“Yes. We need visas, of course. I’m sure my brother-in-law will help us to emigrate.”

“My mother-in-law is also going to America,” Gita said. “Simon’s sister and brother-in-law in New Jersey are sponsoring her.” Gita poured fresh tea. “Now listen, Mia, we can help each other. This is my idea. You are unhappy living in that house with Madame Dreyfus, and you know I don’t get along with my mother-in-law. So if you moved in here and stayed with her, Anni and I could go to Paris now instead of waiting for her documents to be approved. If you came here, the old woman would not be alone. She would keep her room, and I would, of course, continue to pay the rent for the apartment.”

“That’s too much for you to do, Gita,” I said.

“No, no, you’d be doing me a favor. She could even travel to New York with you when you go.” Gita looked over her shoulder to make sure the door was closed. “We never got along, not even when Simon was alive. She thinks I’m flighty, but she respects you, Mia.” Gita rose and took my hands in hers. “I know this old place isn’t much, with the toilet outside, but please, will you do it?” She was pleading; I saw it would be a relief to her if we agreed.

So Sal gave up his work on the railroad, and we moved into Gita’s apartment. What she did for us was to make it possible for me and Sal to be together. We were starting to be a family again. And it looked more and more possible that we would again be a family of five. I had always prayed and clung to this hope, even during the worst days of the war.

Lea remembered that her big sisters had gone to America. She thought it was a paradise and grew wildly excited, dancing round the new apartment, chanting, “I’m going to America. I’m going to America.”

Immigration to the United States was governed by a quota system. A complex formula established by Congress limited the number of people from each country allowed entry. Because we still held German passports, we tried to immigrate on the German quota. That was an advantage because it was much larger than quotas set for Eastern European countries.

The quota was only the first hurdle. Before an American visa was issued, every immigrant had to have a sponsor, an American resident who filed an affidavit taking financial responsibility for the new arrivals. I wrote to Herman and asked

him to file affidavits, sponsoring us. We also needed to secure exit visas and health certificates. Finally, we had to find passage on a ship. That was not going to be easy. Passenger berths were scarce.

We did not have much money, but Hannah unwittingly provided us with an excellent source of income: the coffee included in her packages to me. There was no coffee in the stores of Limoges in those first months after the war ended. A pound of coffee was worth a thousand francs, and a parcel came almost every week. It quickly became known that I was a source of this precious commodity. Women I barely knew stopped me in the street and asked: "When are you expecting another package?"

We did not want to depend on the proceeds of the sale of American coffee alone. As soon as he left the railroad, Sal looked for other work. In that first year after the war, there were more jobs than people to fill them. Often willingness to work was all a person needed to be hired. Sal found a job in a tannery, sliding skins back and forth across a press to clean them, work more strenuous than anything he had ever done, except the forced labor at Calais. He came home exhausted, the smell of hides clinging to his hands, his shoes, his clothing.

"Sal, I can't stand the awful smell, and I can't stand to see you so exhausted," I said. "Please, you must find something else."

So my husband, a man with little manual dexterity, became a mechanic in a garage that repaired and rebuilt engines. Sal had neither experience nor any aptitude for working with machinery, but he was prepared to try anything, and the chief mechanic was prepared to try any man who presented himself. The garage was another mistake. The mechanic did not mask his relief when Sal resigned after two weeks there.

Finally, he went to see Monsieur Meyer, who gave him a post in his bank as clerk in the stocks and bonds department. Sal had found his niche.

By the time the United States government opened a consular office in Bordeaux early in 1946, Sal and I had amassed savings of more than thirty-five hundred francs, the bulk of the money coming from the sale of coffee from America. By that time also, Herman had supplied the affidavits certifying he would take financial responsibility for the three of us.

Sal made the one hundred twenty-five mile train trip to Bordeaux to apply for

visas that would let us emigrate to New York. The Consul reviewed the documents and said there should be no problem.

How different it was. After Hitler came to power in 1933, thousands of German Jews applied for American visas, far more than the number the quota allowed. In the spring of 1946, we were assigned numbers three, four and five of the annual German quota. Only two other people with German citizenship had received visas before us that year. Sal grasped the terrible significance of these low numbers. "So few of us survived. There's almost no one left who can qualify for the German quota to emigrate to the United States."

Over a period of fifteen months, Hannah had sent sixty food parcels to Limoges. By selling sixty pounds of coffee, we had amassed 60,000 francs. It was enough to pay for our passage on the American troopship *Desiree*. As Gita had predicted, Madame Herbst also received her American visa, so Sal secured passage on the ship for her as well.

During my last week in Limoges, I said goodbye to my few remaining friends in the city, Monsieur Meyer and Marie Pouillard and her father. Rabbi Deutsch had already returned to Strasbourg. I packed, sold Gita's old furniture, and purchased some small pieces of Limoges china to bring as gifts for people in America.

No sensible person threw out anything in those days. Everything had value to someone. Our last act in Limoges was to bundle the paper and string we had saved from sixty packages. We sold the lot to a paper dealer and netted enough money to pay our train passage to Le Havre where we would board our ship to America.

We spent five days in Paris, stopping at Gita's apartment every day, missing her each time. We tried to get information about our relatives. The names Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt had become familiar to us. Horrendous stories of privation, torture and murder at Nazi camps were being confirmed daily. At Red Cross headquarters in Paris, they had no information about Papa, or about Sal's sisters and nieces. The number of inmates at the Nazi camps was so massive it took time to search them all and match requests for information.

To take our minds off what we feared, we became tourists. We went to the Louvre and marveled at the beauty of the paintings and sculptures, undamaged

during the years of the war. Paris escaped being bombed or shelled during and after the Nazi occupation. The city's buildings, boulevards and monuments were untouched by the war.

We spent an afternoon at the Eiffel Tower. It was a happy outing, far different from the time Sal took Ruth and Eva there in 1939 when he was a penniless refugee. This time, he had money not only to pay for the elevator ride to the top of the monument, but also to buy ices for Lea at a small restaurant midway up the structure.

The next morning, we boarded the train at Paris's Gare St. Lazarre. The conductors had already closed the doors when we saw Gita running along the platform. She reached our car, and I leaned out the window, touching my friend's hand as the train jolted forward. Tears streamed down Gita's face and mine as the train began to outdistance her.

"That girl was never on time for anything," Madame Herbst said. "I pray that Anni will take after her father."

At Le Havre, I saw extensive war damage to buildings for the first time. The city was almost totally demolished. The Nazis had destroyed the harbor and sunk all the ships before they retreated and surrendered the city to the Allied Forces. I learned they did the same at the Channel ports of Dieppe, Boulougne, and Calais. More than a year after the war ended, we saw evidence of the havoc inflicted on the strategic port city everywhere we looked. At the waterfront, bows of ships not completely sunk filled the harbor, too many for me to count.

No structure was intact, and the emigration "office" consisted of a folding table and a few chairs set up on the pier where the Desiree was docked. Several officials sat in the open air, examining travel documents and clearing travelers for departure.

Three quarters of the passengers were war brides. A group of Hungarian Jewish men who had survived two years in a concentration camp, a few American businessmen, and a small contingent of American servicemen made up the balance. We traveled dormitory-style with men and women assigned to separate quarters. Sal shared a room with four priests who had served as army chaplains in Germany, and one American Jew who was returning from a business trip to Belgium.

“America is a good country,” one of the priests told Sal. “If you work hard and are honest in all your dealings, you will succeed there.”

“Yes, you must be honest. Be sure to declare everything you are bringing to America,” advised the businessman.

On the second day out, the *Desiree* encountered a summer hurricane. By the third day, I was so seasick I was unable to rise from my cot. “Find someone to help you,” I said to Lea, when it was time for lunch.

The captain found the child at the entrance of the empty dining room, took her hand, and led her to the captain’s table. She had her meals there for the rest of the voyage.

The sea remained rough until the twelfth day of the voyage. On the fourteenth day, we sighted land. By the time the *Desiree* pulled into New York harbor, it was evening and too late for the ship to dock. The passengers filled the decks and lined the railings to stare at the land. The sight of the thousands of lights in the tall buildings overwhelmed me as much as they did Lea and the young French and German war brides. The ship’s sleeping quarters, that had been constantly occupied during the rough Atlantic crossing, were empty that night, the passengers too excited to think about sleep. We had reached America.

I tried to summon English words and phrases I had learned in school in Leipzig when I was about the age of my two older daughters. I fingered the photograph of the girls, but still in my mind they were young schoolgirls, like nine-year-old Lea was now.

In the morning, I lined up with Sal to pay the import duty on the set of Limoges china that Madame Herbst was bringing to her daughter in New Jersey. I saw a guard placing handcuffs on a man. Sal said it was his bunkmate who had advised him to declare everything. “What nerve he had to make himself out as an honest man. That man is a smuggler,” Sal said as he handed his customs declaration to the official who spoke to us in Yiddish! “Zei Gesunt! Be well,” he said. Our morning was full of surprises.

The gangplank was lowered. Making his way down the wooden walkway, Sal held Lea tightly by the hand to keep the child from running ahead. We searched the crowded pier for the placard with the letter K. People were shouting and pushing; many were crying. I was sweating in my gray coat and bent to loosen

the velvet bonnet on Lea's head.

Then I saw my sister, Hannah, just as I remembered her—short, stout, and still blond. I became aware again that my own hair had turned pure white during the ordeal at Nexon. Hannah was flanked by a tall striking brunette and a redhead in a chartreuse green dress.

The two trios reached each other. For a tiny moment, enveloped by an immense hubbub, we were silent, and nobody moved. Then as Hannah reached for my hand, I lifted up my head to kiss my daughter Ruth. “We are here, we are here,” Sal beamed. I tasted salty tears and did not know if they were mine or Eva's, who was embracing me. Then everybody smiled at Lea who hopped happily up and down on the hard gray concrete floor, shouting “Amerique, America!”

CHAPTER 48

TOGETHER IN AMERICA

“OSE children traveled to Los Angeles from all over the U.S.”

All these years later, we still laugh sometimes at my first impression of New York. Driving through the city from the pier to my sister’s home in Kew Gardens, Queens, I said, “Look, all the apartments have balconies. Everybody in New York must be very, very rich.”

Hannah roared with laughter. “No, no, Mia. Those are fire escapes.”

With my sister’s help, we found an apartment on Ocean Parkway in the Midwood section of Brooklyn. All five of us moved there in October 1946. Ruth and Eva had not been able to remain with our Leipzig friends and lived with American foster families for four years. They were good people, but we were eager to be a family again.

Sal and I communicated with the girls in a mixture of German and English, as Ruth and Eva relearned German and I struggled to learn English. We were too busy with the future to dwell on the years we had been separated.

The apartment was a long way from Hannah, an hour and a half on the subway, so we were really on our own. It didn’t matter because we lived in a truly Jewish neighborhood, with kosher butchers and grocers within walking distance and more than one shul, so Sal could choose where to daven. It seemed that everyone spoke some Yiddish, and I felt welcome in our new surroundings.

Our first few years in America were hard. We came with nothing, and we all worked. Ruth and Eva had part-time jobs after school. Herman, who was a skilled fur sorter, secured work for Sal bundling fur pelts. He wasn’t handy and not very good at it. After a few months, he went once more to his cousin Karfiol who owned Delbeau, a specialty store on Fifth Avenue, selling designer ladies’ wear and lingerie. Sal worked in the store until his retirement when he was seventy-two.

Before we even moved into our Brooklyn apartment, Meyer Weinrauch, our

friend from Leipzig, got me my first job. It was to sew linings into fur coats. I started in August, and it was very hot; the temperature in the shop must have been ninety degrees and working with furs made it worse. I wore a cotton housedress to work. Going home on the subway, a woman said to me, “Your dress is full of blood.” When I got home to Hannah’s apartment where we were still staying, I found my skin was chafed from sitting in the heat with the weight of the heavy fur coat on my lap.

Most of my co-workers were Jewish, and sad to say, all these women made fun of me. They laughed at my bad English and called me a greenhorn. “Greenie doesn’t know how to stitch, and she’ll never learn,” they taunted. When I was sixteen years old, I joined some friends in Leipzig for sewing lessons. I came home and told my mother, “If I ever have to earn my living from sewing I will starve.” I remember only one kind worker in that shop, a patient and understanding black woman who showed me how to do the work.

I begged Meyer to find something else, and he recommended me to a Jewish acquaintance who ran a shop where women worked by hand and on machines to make sweaters. It was on Willoughby Street in the Williamsburgh section of Brooklyn. I sewed buttonholes in sweaters for twenty-eight dollars a week and earned extra money from sewing I took home. After the girls went to sleep at eleven o’clock, I sat up in our apartment for another three hours stitching buttonholes. I was paid by the dozen and could finish three sweaters in an hour.

When the shop shut down, I wanted to look for other work. Ruth who was graduating from high school, said, “Enough. Stay home. It is my turn to work and help.” She took a job as a keeper, studied at City College in the evening, and became an accountant. When Eva graduated from high school the following year, she also took a full-time job and attended college at night. Later, when Lea entered Brandeis University, I went back to work as a saleswoman in Woolworth’s. They almost didn’t hire me, because I failed their first test. I said there were one hundred inches in a yard; then I realized I was thinking of one hundred centimeters in a meter. Eventually, I became a cashier at Klein’s, a discount department store, where the chief cashier was a Jew who had been a district attorney in Germany until the Nazis ousted him in 1933.

Eva and Lea earned post-graduate degrees. Lea is a geneticist and professor of biology at City University in New York. Eva is a writer and editor. I told her my story and she has written it in this book. All three girls are married, and we have

five beautiful, talented grandchildren.

Sal began corresponding with his brother in Bolivia and his two sisters in Tel Aviv before we left France. The crates we shipped from Germany to Palestine in 1939 were stored outdoors during the war. Furniture and paintings were ruined, but my sister-in-law sent my dishes, linens and silver. Some say they are material things. I treasure my set of meat dishes, because they had been my mother's. When I light my candles on Shabbos, I use the candlesticks I received as a wedding gift. They are my links to the past.

The Holocaust is also the past. The Red Cross found the answers to some of the questions we asked. The ledgers of Auschwitz's dead contains the names of Sal's sister, Malia; his sister Fanny and her daughter Roschen, first deported to Poland ten days before Kristallnacht; his sister Elke's son, Mendel, to whose wife Marthe, I gave money so the smuggler could lead her and her children out of Germany after Kristallnacht; the name of my father. He was arrested in Holland, so he did manage to escape from Germany. How long he remained in Holland or how he lived there, we will never know. There is a record only of his arrest and that he was sent to Auschwitz from there. He was murdered in the gas chambers. We know the exact date for his yahrzeit.

Of Sal's close family who had been unable to escape from Europe before the outbreak of the war, only one, Malia's daughter, Sadie, was located alive. She had survived Bergen-Belsen. His cousin Padaver survived, but his wife did not. His cousin Geminder was killed in Poland, but Geminder's wife and older daughter, Lore, were saved as Schindler Jews, and his younger daughter, Irene, was a hidden child. A Polish family hid her in a chicken coop in back of their house in Mielec.

The Red Cross found no record of my sister, Edith*, whom Sal led out of Gurs in the autumn of 1940. One day, he met an Auschwitz survivor, someone he had known in Paris in 1939. "I remember your wife's sister. Edith was with us on the train that took us to the camp, but she never made it that far. She died on the train. A lot of people died."

In 1959, after all three girls were married, Sal and I were able to make our first of half a dozen trips to Israel to be reunited with our remaining relatives and to see the Jewish State, much of it developed and built by the people whom Hitler persecuted. During the war, and later when we struggled to reestablish ourselves

in New York, I did not dare to hope it would be possible to go to Jerusalem. To visit and pray at the kotel was beyond my imagination but it became my privilege to worship there, when Sal and I traveled to Israel with Eva and her husband in 1992. It was our last visit to the Jewish homeland. Sal was 93 and I was 88 years old.

We continued to live in the same apartment we rented in Brooklyn in 1946, until Sal's death. Sal recently passed away, at home, in November 1996, just four weeks before his 98th birthday. Until he was ninety-six years old, he continued to walk the half mile to shul on Shabbos. We lived in a neighborhood surrounded by Yiddishkeit and were long-time members of Congregation Agudath Shalom. Our rabbi knew our story, but others in the congregation did not, so they were surprised when we were honored at a Holocaust memorial service and chosen to light one of six ceremonial candles.

More than half a century has passed since I came to New York. I am an old woman. I am ninety two years old. We rarely talk about what happened, but I do not forget. I remember the Nazis taking my father-in-law away, coming in the dark of Kristallnacht to arrest Sal, and forcing me to sweep up the shattered glass in the street the next morning. The nightmares about Nexon recur to this day. Yes, I remember everything. I remember the desperate years in France when the only important thing was to stay alive. I recall those who helped us, and those who did not. These are not things one forgets.

Fifty years after the first Jewish children found refuge from the Nazis in the OSE homes, a half dozen OSE "children," including Art Kern who used to try to wheedle morsels out of me in the kitchen at La Chevrette, organized a reunion in Los Angeles, California. Helped by notices the Simon Wiesenthal Center placed in Jewish newspapers throughout the United States, they received an enthusiastic response. When Eva wrote Art to say she was coming, she surprised him with a postscript that Sal and I were living in Brooklyn. Until then he did not know we had survived. He urged us to be guests at his home during the reunion and announced to everyone that we were his adopted parents.

Seventy OSE children traveled to Los Angeles from all over the United States. Childhood friends were reunited for the first time in fifty years. They brought the mementos they had salvaged from their childhood, a few photographs, the autograph books they made and the numbered baggage tags they wore round their necks on the journey and when they landed in New York.

The children were in their sixties and brought husbands, wives and children to the reunion. At a dinner at B'nai David Judean Congregation in March, 1989, Sal and I joined the sixty-nine OSE children on a stage where each spoke briefly, listing the OSE homes they had been in and citing the families and careers they built. They are teachers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, businessmen, engineers. One girl became mayor of a small California city.

When it was my turn to address the people, I stood up and said: "I am here with family. I will not forget those days at the OSE homes of Eubonne, Chateau Montintin, La Chevrette, Le Couret, and Chateau de Morelles. I am so proud of what you have accomplished. I love you all. You are all my children."

Afterword

Much research about the Holocaust has been undertaken in various European countries, the United States and Israel since Shattered Crystals was first published in 1997. Until recently the existence of some records about victims of the Holocaust was known but not available to the public. Other documentation was located by scholars, writers and surviving family members of those who perished.

The Nazis were totally lacking in compassion; respect for the life of the men, women and children they annihilated was altogether absent, but they nevertheless methodically recorded the names and dates of birth of their victims, along with the dates of deportation and locations of their murders.

Dutch law requires that country to document the fate of all Jews who spent time in the Netherlands during World War II. Therefore, the Dutch Red Cross was able to supply additional information about the final years of the life of Mia's father, Moses Azdebal. The records show that he came from Leipzig to Holland and was registered in Haarleaaam on August 13, 1940. On November 18, 1942 he was interned in the transit camp of Westerbork. While in the camp he sought permission to emigrate to Palestine. This is documented on his Jewish Council registration card, dated November 23, 1942 and an acknowledgment on December 9, 1942, from the Council's department that handles such requests. Approval for his immigration came in February of 1943, but sadly he had already been deported to Auschwitz on January 23, 1943 and murdered immediately upon his arrival there.

Even more information has come to light about Mia's youngest sister, Edith Azderbal. A request I made in the year 2000 to the International Red Cross Tracing Service resulted in my receipt of Edith's Arolsen file in September 2006. Documents received from the International Tracing Service, Bad Arolsen show that she was arrested on August 26, 1942, evidently as part of the major arrest of Jews in France that summer. She was interned in Camp Casseneuil, [Department] Lot et Garonne. She was transported to Drancy, the transit camp outside Paris on September 3, 1942.

After six days there, she was deported to Auschwitz as part of the 1,000 strong convoy number 30 on September 9, 1942. A typed list contains the names, dates of birth, nationality and French residence of all members of the convoy in alphabetical order. Edith Azderbal is listed as residing in Villeneuve and stateless. Chillingly, the Arolsen file also contains a letter addressed to Obersturmbahnführer Eichman in Berlin with copies to the concentration camp in Auschwitz that the transport left Drancy heading east in the direction of Auschwitz at 8:55 on 9.9.1942 with 1,000 Jews.

On arrival at Auschwitz only 69 of the women in convoy 30 were allowed to live. All the others including Edith were immediately gassed. Of the 1,000 men, women and children in the convoy, only 22 survived. The information about Edith's death in Auschwitz contradicts the unidentified man's report to Sal that "she died on the train." [Chapter 48]. There are no known witnesses to either version.

Information supplied by the French historian Alexandre Doulut indicates that when they left Camp Casseneuil for Drancy, none of the Jews in Edith's convoy were permitted to take any of their belongings with them. They were forced to leave their suitcases and everything in them behind at the camp. Four months after Edith's death, the Commissariat general aux questions juives, the agency in charge of Jewish questions, decided that the suitcases and their contents must be sold. Pro-Nazi officials had the same compulsion for keeping exacting records as their German overlords. Between January and March 1943 the suitcases were opened, and their contents itemized, sorted, valued and sold. The typed lists held in the archives of Lot-et-Garonne show that the sale of a dozen items belonging to Edith yielded 738 francs. "This didn't happen anywhere else in France during the war," M. Doulut said. "It's shameful."

Yad Vashem in Jerusalem maintains an archive of testimonies completed by

survivors and relatives of Holocaust victims.

Sal's niece, Sadie Israel Rosenbush, who survived as a slave laborer and settled in Israel after the war, completed testimony pages for her parents Hermann Israel and Amalia Kanner Israel, who was Sal's sister. All three were deported from our home town of Halle on October 28, 1939. They lived in the Polish town of Dembice until July 21, 1942 when Hermann and Amalia were murdered. After the war, Sadie moved to Israel where she married an attorney. She died in 2009, survived by her only daughter, three grandchildren and one great granddaughter.

Sadie also completed a testimony page for our first cousin Roschen [Rosalie] Koppel, also deported from Halle to Poland on 28 October 1938. Roschen had an opportunity to return to Halle as her mother did, but chose not to go back to Germany. Sadie reports that she perished in Poland on August 31, 1942 at the age of 24.

Fanny Koppel, Roschen's mother, who left Halle in December 1938 for Berlin to live with her late husband's family survived in the German capital for three years. Fanny's name is found on a list of Jews who were deported from Berlin to Minsk, then part of the Soviet Union, now Belarus, on November 14, 1941. She was on one of the first transports destined for Mali Trostinek, a little known death camp some six miles outside of Minsk to which thousands of Jews were deported, all shot or killed in mobile gas vans immediately on arrival.

In England, after completing her required time working as a maid, Fanny's younger daughter, Hanni, moved to London and spent the rest of the war engaged in war work in that city. Longing to be close to family, in 1947 she emigrated to New York and lived near Sal and Mia for the rest of her life. Since she never married she joined my parents for shabbos meals and all the Jewish holidays. As her mother, Fanny Koppel, had looked after Mia's children in the days after Kristallnacht, so, with Sal, Mia took Fanny's only surviving daughter under her wing. Hanni died suddenly but peacefully in her Brooklyn home in 1996, when she was in her mid-seventies.

None of Sal's surviving siblings equaled the longevity of their grandmother who lived to the great age of 99 in 19th century Poland. But all had a long life. Elka, Sal's oldest sister, died in Israel aged 89. His brother Moritz survived in Bolivia to the age of 94. Lene, the next youngest of Sal's siblings, who emigrated to Israel before Kristallnacht with forged documents paid for by Sal, lived to the

age of 97. Sal was the last of the six, when he died at almost 98.

A few years after the war Sal's cousin, Heinrich Padaver, married his cousin's wife, Helene Geminder in California, both having been widowed during the Holocaust. Irene Geminder Eber became Professor of East Asian Studies at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and is the author of a number of scholarly books on Hebrew China, as well as a Holocaust autobiography, *The Choice*.

Mia's friend, Gita, also remarried after the end of the war. She and her new husband, Andre, settled in Montreal, Canada where Gita gave birth to a second daughter, Françoise. Sal and Mia made a number of trips to Montreal to see them and were honored guests at Anni's wedding.

Mia and Sal met often with her surviving family in America, Hannah and Herman, Anna and her sister and brother-in-law, and cousins who had been able to leave Europe before World War II. They gathered at weddings and other happy occasions, or at each other homes for good food and conversation.

The long separation from my mother, Mia, during crucial years of my growing up created a gulf between us. As an adult, I sat with my mother for many hours, recording her life history and later listening as she willingly elaborated on her experiences when questions came up during the writing of this book. These times together did much to close this gap.

Shattered Crystals is used in various U.S. high schools and in a Midwestern university to teach the lessons of the Holocaust and the evils of anti-Semitism. In the hope that lessons are learned, I speak regularly to high school and younger students in New York and Great Britain about Mia's courageous life, as she wanted me to do.

Addendum

A Child Survivor in America

INTRODUCTION

I was 10 years old when I came to the United States in the fall of 1941, one of more than a hundred OSE children who sailed across the Atlantic from France that summer on a special U.S. State Department visa. The OSE [the initials stand for Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants or Organization for Helping Children] ran group homes for Jewish children, mostly German and Austrian, separated from their families by Nazism and the war. My sister Ruth and I entered the OSE home called Villa Helvetia on the outskirts of Paris in November 1939, some six months after it was opened. Just before Paris fell to the Nazis in June 1940, the OSE evacuated the children of Villa Helvetia and its other homes around Paris to Chateau Montintin, where we went, and to several other properties it had purchased in the countryside of Haute Vienne and near Vichy in central France.

The State Department visa on which we traveled was originally issued for Jewish children held in internment camps in France, but it proved difficult to get children released from the camps. To avoid the visas going to waste, slots on the visa were given to others caring for Jewish children, including the OSE.

All the children chosen to go to America were either orphans, or the whereabouts of their parents were then unknown, or their parents were trapped in Nazi controlled lands. Since my mother had become the cook at our OSE home and my father was a handyman there, my sisters and I were not eligible. The day before the second transport was to leave, two children from another OSE home fell ill and lost their health clearance. Ruth and I were the only children who could fill the precious, vacated slots. Our parents alone were on site, able to give instant approval and sign all necessary documents. Suddenly, instead of congratulating the fortunate children who were off to a safe but exciting new life in America, Ruth and I were being congratulated. Six weeks later we stood on American soil.

From the time the Portuguese ship Mouzinho docked in New York and I disembarked until I was reunited with my parents five years later, I lived in three different foster homes. My sister Ruth lived in four. We were together in only two of these homes. They were difficult and lonely years for me. Being thrust into the midst of strangers was only part of the problem. Unlike children who remembered and carried with them the love and security of their homes and families in Europe, I brought with me no such memories. I dealt with the trauma

of Kristallnacht and the confused, insecure and at times dangerous existence of the ensuing years by obliterating what happened. Unfortunately, amnesia is not precise. In excising terrors I could not grasp, I also obliterated my German-Jewish home life and surroundings and the love and support of friends, both adults and children, who made survival possible.

Emotionally damaged and traumatized by the Holocaust, I came to America with a hidden disability. With the best will in the world, the members of my foster families had no way of grasping the reasons for my deep unhappiness. How could they comprehend my feelings of isolation, my realization that I was different from other children. How could I explain to them my awful, never-ending feelings of guilt at having been saved at the expense of others, those unknown children who, the day before departure, became too ill to travel? And what of the many OSE children who had to remain in France who were equally worthy? It was enough that I had been saved; I believed I had no right to feel deprived or to want anything. I hid my unhappiness from everyone and cried into my pillow at night.

In 1989 five boys who had come to America with me tracked down 70 OSE children who had escaped to the United States or who survived the Holocaust in Europe. The 1989 reunion of OSE children in Los Angeles was an overpowering emotional experience for every one of us. I felt enveloped in friendship and love, perfectly at ease with people I did not remember or had never met. It was sufficient that we had been together during a crucial and hazardous time. Our life together and our shared experiences in the OSE homes created an unbreakable bond that held firm despite the passage of half a century during which we had had no contact with each other. That our reactions to being together again would be so alike did not surprise me.

What I did not expect was to discover that we had very similar reactions to our placements during our first years in America. For almost 50 years I believed that my unhappiness in my foster homes was unique. I was stunned to find that the American foster home life of so many OSE children mirrored my own. Moreover, although the reasons for our unhappiness varied, many were convinced that they alone had had a difficult time in their foster homes. Like me, they repressed their feelings about those first years in the United States and rarely spoke about them, if at all, until the gathering.

What follows are my recollections of my adjustment to America, how I coped

with my five years in the foster homes, and a report of how some other OSE children fared in the United States.

GETTING HERE

July - September 1941

The voyage from Chateau Montintin, in Haute Vienne, a department or county in central France, is recounted in Chapter 29 - The Long Journey, above; the account is based on my sister Ruth's recollections and letters she and I wrote to our Mother who remained behind. Briefly, we traveled by train to Marseilles. There, somehow many of us had become infected with head lice. We had our scalps scrubbed with a kerosene substance and walked around with white turbans wound around our heads. Cared for by Quakers, we spent two weeks waiting to board our ship. We waited in vain. The Mediterranean Sea had been closed to Transatlantic shipping, but liners were sailing from Portugal. We traveled by train to the Spanish border, stopping at the internment camp of Gurs, where relatives of some of the children were waiting on the platform. They could not get out so they handed the bread saved from their previous days' meals to their loved ones through the window.

At the border we changed trains. Some of the children slept on luggage racks. Eventually we reached Lisbon, where we were housed in a boarding school whose regular students were on vacation. It was our first taste of peace and plenty in three years. For years I blamed my stomach upset on indulging in a new fruit, pineapple, but probably I just became ill from overeating.

I remember nothing of the voyage and it became real for me only at the reunion in 1989, when one of the men said to me, "I don't remember anything about you in France, but I know you were on the ship with me."

We arrived in New York on Labor Day, 1941. Ruth remembers that the ship couldn't dock and we couldn't get off because it was a national holiday. She says we were moored in the Narrows, and I suppose I had my first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty, though my own first memory is standing on the wooden pier, a manila baggage tag around my neck. I still have the tag with the number 24 printed in thick black lettering. Most of the other children saved their tags too; many brought them to the reunion in 1989. These bits of cardboard were a connection with France and tangible proof that we had made the journey. They

were also a reminder of a place that was now full of danger but where, nevertheless, we lived in a spirit of camaraderie with friends whom we left behind.

On the pier at the request of a press photographer from the New York World Telegram the children were lined up in rows, the smallest in the front, the tallest on a bench in the rear, as youngsters are arranged for school photographs. I was in the front row. Then the photographer wanted the smallest children, and I found myself pulled forward with the youngest girl in our group, who was seven. Two little girls with short, straight, light hair wearing numbered cardboard tags, we made an appealing photo in the next day's newspaper. My foster parents got hold of the photo and to my deep but silent embarrassment would show it to their visitors.

Our first American home was a dark red brick building that looked like a 19th century New England factory but was the Hebrew Orphans Asylum on 137th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, located across the street from the elegant Gothic buildings that form the old campus of the City University's City College of New York. All I remember of that place is a large, poorly lit room filled with rows of cots on which we spent our days. My sister Ruth and some of the other children have told me more. In the name of sanitation and health, we were robbed of many of our possessions, things that were our tie with the past and the people we left behind. Some of the clothes we came in were taken away, and we were outfitted with new clothing. With the craftiness of children, we hid our small treasures. I still have the cloth covered, three-by-five inch book I sewed that contained autographs I collected from the Montintin children and teachers who stayed in France. And I treasure the dried yellow and purple pansies, buttercups and two rare four-leaf clovers found in the meadows of Montintin that I pressed between the pages of a slim copybook.

Within not many days we were dispersed, placed with people we did not know. A few boys were sent to an orphanage in California. But most of us went to foster homes. Some children had relatives willing to take them in. Others, like Ruth and me, went to live with friends or acquaintances of our parents. In no case did any of the children know these relatives or family friends. A third group of children was placed with families with whom they had no connection at all.

It had never occurred to me that Ruth and I would not be together, but we left the 137th Street building separately. In Germany my mother had known five

brothers who, at various times, were boarders in my grandmother's apartment. In the 1920's they emigrated to New York. Now Ruth went to Brooklyn with one of these brothers. I went to the New York City suburb of Mount Vernon with another. I have no recollection of saying good bye to my sister, leaving 137th Street or the trip to Mount Vernon. It was my defense against facing the unacceptable.

THE FIRST FOSTER HOME

September - November 1941

What I shall not forget is my first meal with Uncle Irving's family. Aunt Miriam was a short buxom woman with wavy brown hair, who mistakenly assumed that German and Yiddish are closely related and spoke to me in Yiddish that I did not understand. There were three children. In age I came between the oldest, a girl of 11 and nine-year-old Noel. The youngest was a lively boy of four. The family was Jewish, but Noel was the French word for Christmas. I was uneasy.

In a square cheerful dining room filled with colonial furniture, Aunt Miriam served rare roast beef on brightly painted dinner plates. Red meat juices that looked like blood to me spattered on mashed potatoes and green vegetables. This could not be kosher. My head said the meat must be tref. I could not bring it or any of the contaminated food to my mouth. I had no words in my vocabulary to explain, but even if I had, I could not have told them what I felt. I shook my head and tried to hold in my tears. Filled with nausea, I staggered away from the table. They let it go, and took me to my room. It was small, sparsely furnished and the only time in my life I had a room of my own. I knew I had to eat, so after that first meal I ate small portions of what I was given, declining only butter on meat sandwiches or any combination of dairy and meat.

Aunt Miriam took me to the local school, where my appearance presented a novel problem to the principal. Refugees did not move to this rich suburb. They settled New York City whose schools equated lack of English with overall academic deficiency and automatically placed refugee children one or two years below their age group, creating an immediate aura of failure for many of the newcomers.

My guess is that the Mount Vernon educator had not previously been faced with a non-English speaking child. He thought for a few moments, then handed me

pencil, paper and an arithmetic book. I started adding and subtracting, sailed through multiplication, long division and decimal problems, but was at a loss when it came to fractions, which were new to me. After a while, he took the paper from me, patted me on the shoulder and placed me in the fifth grade, where I belonged by age. I've always regretted that I never knew the name of that rare and sensible principal who did me the greatest of favors.

The fifth grade teacher gave me some texts in English that I did not understand and then basically ignored me. Sometimes I tried to follow the lesson. More often, from my seat next to the window I stared at the swaying treetops outside or studied the top border of the blackboard where the 26 letters of the alphabet were written in Roman script. In my few months of school in Germany before Kristallnacht, I had learned German script. In the OSE homes no particular effort was made to teach Latin script. The emphasis was on history, literature and mathematics. Now I copied these letters over and over. I wanted to write like other children. It would make me more like them. My happiest time was the daily music lesson. Even today, when I hear strains of Flow Gently Sweet Afton, my mind drifts back to that Mount Vernon schoolroom.

Once a week we went to the school library. I had never been to a library. The teacher took me to a shelf with picture books, and I took one. The next week when she guided me to that same shelf, I shook my head and tiptoed along the aisles, searching for an author with familiar names. When I found Charles Dickens, I walked timidly up to the librarian, afraid she would not let me have it, but she stamped the book without a glance at me. That I had already read it in French helped me with the English version.

Because I had no brothers, I was not used to boys and tried to avoid 9-year-old Noel. Surreptitiously, I watched his 11-year-old sister, thinking that from her I could learn to be an American girl. I wanted her to be my friend, but she seemed not to want anything to do with me. She did not want a shadow following her around, especially one she could not understand and who must have seemed like a baby to her. Though our age difference was less than a year, I was short and skinny and still looked like seven.

On Halloween, she was invited to a party. After almost two months, I thought I was part of the family and the invitation must include me. Excitement mounted as costumes were stitched together, and then I understood that the girl refused to take me. Instead I was to go trick-or-treating with Noel and his friend. The

costume I thought was for the party disappeared under my coat. I could barely keep up with the two boys as they raced from house to house. Often I never made it to the door to collect anything.

Back home Noel and I emptied our shopping bags. Except for three sourballs, I gave him all my meager pile. Through all the rest of my childhood, I hated Halloween.

The days passed in a haze. I spoke little, asked for nothing, read and played with the 4-year-old boy. Without my realizing it, the language barrier ceased to be the major problem it had been when I arrived. I don't remember learning English when I was ten anymore than I remember learning to read when I was five. Somehow, I absorbed it, though I was still far from fluent. Gradually the two older children must have realized I was not a threat to them, and they became more patient with me.

One evening toward the end of November, speaking in a German rusty from 20 years of disuse, Uncle Irving told me I would leave Mount Vernon at the end of the week. I was to live in New York City with Tante Rosa and Uncle Meyer, my mother's best friends in Leipzig who had arrived from Europe. They had settled in Washington Heights and were willing to have both Ruth and me. He would take me there on Saturday, he said.

I would have to try to make a place for myself all over again. It would be my seventh move since Kristallnacht two years before. I had no friends in the schoolroom and said nothing to anyone there. On Friday afternoon the principal came for me. In his office he gave me a record of my three months' schooling in America. It was an important paper that I must take to my new school. "Do you understand?" He asked. "I take the document to my new school," I said, pronouncing document the French way. He beamed, took my hand in both of his and said, "You are a fine girl. Good luck."

I packed my clothes, toothbrush, the slim souvenir books I had brought from France and a Mount Vernon school note. Except for underwear and socks, I had acquired few new possessions in Mount Vernon. What I acquired was my first taste of America, an upper middle class suburban America of well kept, detached houses with backyards and basements and well tended lawns, houses where children had their own rooms, where kitchens had gleaming white stoves and refrigerators filled with meat, cheese and fruit and where no-one ever went

hungry, houses that were homes with families where the father came home every night.

THE SECOND FOSTER HOME

November 1941 - July 1942

Tante Rosa and Uncle Meyer lived in a six-room apartment on 162nd Street in Washington Heights, a section of upper Manhattan full of German Jewish refugees. They were my mother's oldest friends from Leipzig. They and their teenage daughter were recent arrivals in America. Their son had come to New York three years before, so he was everybody's expert and guide on all things American.

Ruth came to Washington Heights about a week after I did. She had changed. Since coming to New York she had reached puberty. She had grown taller and gained 20 pounds. Her Brooklyn foster parents were childless and her "aunt" made a great fuss over Ruth. Helped by a clothing allowance from the Foster Home Bureau which was legally responsible for the OSE children, she took Ruth shopping to buy dresses, skirts and blouses, a pocket and, for her 12th birthday on October 29th, a new coat.

The Washington Heights apartment had a dining room with one door to the kitchen and a second to the living room. The family took its meals in that room; Ruth and I did our homework on the dining room table, and a cot was placed in that room for me. Ruth shared a room and bed with Tante Rosa's teenage daughter. Tante Rosa kept a kosher home, and her meals were more European than the ones in Mount Vernon.

Ruth and I were reasonably self-sufficient. We got up on time and left for school on time after folding our bedding and eating breakfast. We were integrated into the family, helping with chores, such as washing and drying dishes. I don't remember it as a demanding existence, although the teenage daughter told me years later about regular scenes brought on by my inability to use a needle properly. All young Jewish girls from Leipzig were taught how to sew by hand. Apparently, I was extremely clumsy, unable to manage tiny stitches, and Tante Rosa insisted I keep working to get it right, invariably bringing me to tears.

I now lived a bilingual existence, speaking German at home and English at school. Although there were many German refugee children at Public School

169, none were in my class. Classes were organized according to students' academic ability, and as Mount Vernon had given me a good report, I was placed in the top fifth grade class. Ruth, who had been assigned to the fifth grade in Brooklyn, received an immediate promotion to the top sixth grade class. School officials said since she was a year older than I was, we could not be in the same grade. Neither of us ever had any difficulty with our schoolwork there. In fact, rapidly overcoming the language barrier, we excelled from the start.

Often, when I finished my homework, I was urged to go outside, get some fresh air and play. Apartment houses, filled mainly by Jews, lined our side of the street. Opposite us were old brownstone houses occupied by Catholics whose children attended nearby Parochial schools and who did not play much with the few children on our side. It didn't help that I was a klutz. Occasionally I joined in, but I spent much of my time slowly bouncing a ball on the sidewalk silently chanting, "A, my name is Alice" or practicing hopscotch by myself. Later when I went to junior high school, I became aware of another divide. Amsterdam Avenue on the eastern end of the block was an invisible border between whites and blacks.

Less than two weeks after I came to Washington Heights, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. declared war against Germany, Italy and Japan. With patriotism at fever pitch, I decided that it was essential for me to disassociate myself from anything German. As soon as the French declared war against Germany, they had arrested my father as an enemy alien. So while I was extremely proud to be Jewish, I thought that New Yorkers might not differentiate between a German Jew and a German who was a Nazi any more than the French had.

The first step was to rid myself completely of any trace of a German accent. In school, on the street and in stores, I listened and copied not only words I heard, but their pronunciation. If asked where I had come from, I said France. To improve my English and expand my vocabulary as well as to occupy myself, I read voraciously, borrowing books every week from the local public library on St. Nicholas Avenue, less than a quarter mile from the house on 162nd Street.

In school we had air raid drills. We scrambled under our desks or lined up in inside hallways, when practice sirens sounded. I did not tell anyone I had lived through real air raids in France, nor that I thought these exercises silly. I was sure it would be impossible for Nazi planes to reach New York, but kept these views

to myself as well.

One day my teacher announced to our class that we must all make sacrifices for the war. “How many children have fathers who are in the army or navy, fighting for our country?” She asked. “Raise hands!” She commanded. Almost half the children raised their hands. “Brothers?” she asked. More hands went up. “Uncles?” Now all the children except me excitedly waved their arms. I sat motionless. My father had been in concentration camps. He was still in France; he might be arrested again at any time. But that was not the teacher’s question. Stunned and confused I began to tremble, unable to decide if I could or should raise my hand.

During our first months in New York, Ruth and I corresponded fairly regularly with our parents in France. Mama hid these letters with other papers and retrieved them after the war. Some time in 1942 their letters to us stopped. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that something terrible must have happened. I came to believe I no longer had parents, that they must have died, but I could not talk about this fear to anyone, not even to Ruth.

Like the other OSE children, Ruth and I were under the supervision of the Foster Home Bureau, and a social worker came to see us once a month. I would be alone with the social worker in the living room, sitting on the edge of Tante Rosa’s sofa. She would ask how I was, I would say fine, and after a few minutes, she left. The social worker assigned to us changed often. This did not matter to me. I was not prone to confiding in adults, certainly not in these women who were total strangers to me.

The Bureau was responsible for our clothing. Periodically, I traveled with a social worker to a warehouse somewhere in the city. Open iron shelves were filled with large cardboard boxes that held underwear, socks, white cotton blouses and shoes. A clerk at a counter asked what size I wore and returned shortly with items of clothing I was entitled to. The social worker held them up and nodded. Shoe styles were limited to brown oxfords, so that’s what I always wore. As the younger of two sisters, I also got hand-me-downs Ruth had outgrown. Oh, how I longed for clothing that was bought in a store just for me.

In school, I did not feel I was dressed any worse than my classmates, except in one respect. At the weekly school assemblies, girls wore sailor-like, white, V-necked cotton midi-blouses with a tab at the bottom of the “V” through which to

slip a red tie. Girls who did not have midi-blouses could wear plain white tops, and I became one of that small group, because midi-blouses were not on the Foster Home Bureau list of necessary clothing. It was an insignificant matter, but at the time I felt so poor and ashamed in my ordinary shirt.

In the summer of 1942, when Ruth and I had been in Washington Heights for eight months, a social worker told us we were to go to a different home. Tante Rosa was not well and could not continue to look after us. It hadn't occurred to me that we caused a great deal of extra work. But surely, I thought, we could help ease Tante Rosa's burden by taking on more responsibilities in the household. That might make it possible for us to stay on.

We didn't have that choice. Ruth says we did have a choice of a new foster home. She recalls the social worker offering places in two different families, one with children and one without, but I don't remember that. Years later, Ruth told me that at the time she thought I had already experienced a home where there were other children; she felt the likely competition wouldn't be a good thing.

Imagine not having any recollection whatsoever of such an important discussion! Nor do I remember anything about leaving the family or the home in which I had grown reasonably comfortable. I suppose that I didn't want to go, didn't want yet another change, another home, another family. So, in my distress, I reverted to my old defenses and blocked out the memory.

The one advantage of the move was that it would free me from the son of the family, who teased me unmercifully every day, at every opportunity and invariably brought me to tears. Decades later during a condolence visit after Tante Rosa's death, he surprised me with an unexpected confession. "You know, when you lived with us I wasn't very nice to you," he said. "I used to tease you all the time and make you the butt of my jokes. I used to make you cry." He was silent for a moment, and then he said, "I don't know why I did that, but I remember it to this day."

THE THIRD FOSTER HOME

July 1942 - October 1946

Led by the social worker, my sister and I left Tante Rosa's house on a sunny August day in 1942. Ruth was to start junior high school in September, but, our guide pointed out, as our new family lived just two blocks away, I was very

lucky; I wouldn't even have to change schools.

When we stepped off the curb on 162nd Street and Broadway, the woman said, "Look, look, there she is, your new foster mother." She began to wave, and I asked, "Where?" I didn't see anyone who could fit the role of mother. "There, across Broadway. See, she's waving back."

Something was wrong. The heavysset, white-haired woman in the faded, print housedress with its uneven hem was so old she could not possibly be a mother for us. But she was. We were to call her Auntie, not aunt anyone, just Auntie. Her husband, a taxi driver whom we met later that afternoon, was Uncle.

We walked the two blocks to their first floor apartment in a six-story building somewhat newer than Tante Rosa's. It had five rooms, a living room, kitchen and three bedrooms, one for Auntie and Uncle, a second for their two single adult daughters and the third for Ruth and me. Their oldest daughter, who was married, had an apartment in the same building. She and her two sons, aged 10 and 4, were waiting to welcome us.

Now we were with a truly American family. Auntie was born in the U.S. around 1880 and Uncle arrived in America as a teenager before the turn of the century. He was without family and had always made his own way. All seven of their children had been born in America. For many years the family had lived in a small city in Pennsylvania, a world away from Washington Heights with its Jewish refugees and a world away from Nazism. Unlike the fathers in my first two foster families who worked in the fur trade, which was dominated by Jewish immigrants, Uncle had been a baker before he became a taxi driver.

Auntie was a good, kind woman, who certainly saw to all my basic needs. Hardworking all her life, she had successfully raised seven children, including five daughters, and now had nine grandchildren. A tenth was to be born the year after we came. It was not her fault that I did not warm to her. The divide between us was more than that between a 65-year-old woman and a young girl. It was the difference between her American roots and living in safety in New York and my own uncertainty and displacement brought on by Nazism.

Being forced to leave Tante Rosa's home added to my uncertainty. The lesson from that enforced move was that no place was secure, that I could never count on having a permanent home. I concluded that the one thing I could do to lessen

the possibility of ending up without any home at all was to avoid creating any difficulties whatsoever. It was already my unconscious *modus operandi*. I was by nature a quiet child; now I worked hard to be helpful, obedient and agreeable and to avoid arguments at all costs. If ever there was a child who was seen and not heard, it was I.

I remember a great deal more about my third foster home than I do about the other two. I remained there longer, I was older, and except for occasional blips the language problem had disappeared.

Auntie was a great fan of radio soap operas. So when Ruth and I came home from school for lunch, we would all sit at the oilcloth covered kitchen table and listen to *Our Gal Sunday* and *Ma Perkins*, while we each ate a white bread sandwich and drank a glass of milk. Then we would say good bye and walk back to school.

The family had a dog, a toy pomeranian called Patti, so named because they had gotten him on St. Patrick's Day. I had never lived in a home with a dog before. Unlike many American children, I had never yearned for a dog, or any other pet for that matter. The concept was foreign to me. European Jews like my family just did not have pets.

Patti became very important to me. When I was told that walking the dog would be one of my chores, I agreed, as I did to everything that was asked of me. Soon I delighted in the responsibility and often kept her out longer than necessary. Walking the dog, I felt I was somebody; no one who saw us could know that I was different from other children. It pleased me to be stopped by people who commented about the adorable little dog and regularly pointed out that his coloring matched my own red hair.

I liked going to the bakery for fresh rolls and bagels on Sunday mornings for the same reason I liked walking Patti. The store was always crowded, and when I reached the counter and gave my order, I was no different from any of the Sunday morning shoppers. I had convinced myself that I would be safe if I only I was like everyone else.

The first time Auntie and Uncle introduced us to new people, they often explained that they decided to take a foster child when their youngest son joined the army, leaving his room empty and available. They had asked for a boy, they

said, but were told about these two refugee sisters who desperately needed a home. If they did not take both these girls in, the sisters would have to be separated, so how could they refuse? I put on my best smile. But it was not in appreciation of this elderly couple taking on twice the responsibility they had initially agreed to. What I heard in this story was that we had not been really wanted.

Often they and their daughters produced the newspaper photo of me and a little blond 7-year-old OSE girl, taken when our OSE group arrived in New York. They pointed out to their friends that it was nothing short of a miracle that we had escaped from the Nazis. They seemed really happy when they said this and assumed Ruth and I were too. The friends looked back and forth at me at the photo and at me again, totally ignoring Ruth who remembers feeling hurt and neglected as people fussed over me.

Little did my foster family realize that each time this scene was replayed, my feelings of guilt at surviving became stronger. I could not help thinking of the two children my sister and I had replaced when they had fallen ill and lost their places on the children's transport. The feeling that I had to be good and do well to be worthy of them was always with me.

In this foster home, I began to eat foods I had never tasted before. There was peanut butter, which I tried to avoid because it stuck to the roof of my mouth, and cold cereal, particularly corn flakes, which I disliked because they had no taste and turned soggy after the first spoonful. There was also Auntie's Friday specialty of chicken fricassee. This dish consisted of chicken giblets cooked in tomato sauce served with rice and preceded the Friday night main course of chicken.

Chicken was traditionally part of the Jewish Friday night dinner, and although we had it every week, Auntie did not keep a kosher home. She gave it up years before while living in the state of Georgia after discovering that a supposedly strictly kosher butcher cheated by selling non-kosher meats to his observant Jewish customers. What was the point, she said, if you couldn't trust the label. I no longer cared whether food was kosher or not. I had become altogether indifferent to Judaism.

Auntie and Uncle were not religious and did not celebrate Jewish holidays. Several months after we came to live with them, a social worker asked me if I

wanted to go to Hebrew school. Without a moment's hesitation, I said, "No." I had learned the Hebrew alphabet in Germany before Kristallnacht when I was six, and I knew a little about the major Jewish holidays. I had only the most basic knowledge of Jewish history and religion, but no interest in learning more.

Auntie's 10-year-old grandson went to Hebrew school. He had to be there right after regular classes and came home after dark. Giving up my free time was the last thing I wanted to do. The entire conversation with the social worker couldn't have taken more than 30 seconds. To her the issue appeared to be just another item to check off on her report, but the decision greatly influenced my later attitudes.

English was now the only language I spoke. After a year in New York, I was quite fluent. But I had not yet grasped many idiomatic expressions and once got into such awful trouble that I remember every detail to this day. It was after dinner, and I was in the kitchen with Auntie's daughter who asked, "Would you like to wash the dishes now?" I hadn't learned that this was a polite way of giving instructions, telling me what to do. I genuinely believed I was being given a choice, so I said, "No." My normally even-tempered foster sister became angry, shouting, "How dare you? Don't ever, ever talk back to me like that!"

I couldn't bring myself to explain that I had misunderstood, so I bit my lip, willed back the tears and did the dishes. It was the only fight I remember having with any of the adults in the household during my four years there.

When I was thirteen, a clothing allowance from the Foster Home Bureau replaced the trips to the warehouse. The daughters took me to a department store to choose a dress. I still remember the purchase. I set my heart on a dress with flowers on a white background, while they thought a subdued blue print dress was more suitable. In the end they bought and paid for both. I wore the two dresses happily; after a while I recognized that the blue was the more flattering and more elegant.

In those pre-TV days, Ruth and I received money to go to the movies on Saturday afternoons and we were treated to ice cream from the trucks that cruised the streets during the summer. I longed to buy some small things for myself, but could not bring myself to ask any member of my foster family for additional spending money.

Auntie's oldest daughter who worked in an exclusive Fifth Avenue store got me a summer job as an office clerk during my final year with the family. It was my first job, and my salary was \$22 a week, a lot of money at that time, especially for a young teenager who had never worked before. I had been desperate to have a little money of my own, but I didn't end up with very much. As soon as I went to work, the Foster Home Bureau, which had been making payments to Auntie and Uncle for my upkeep, demanded that I contribute \$15 a week to the Bureau. That took care of two thirds of my salary. Carfare was \$2 a week. Although Auntie packed lunch for me, there was the cost of a drink. Then a small amount went for taxes, so I wasn't left with very much.

For two months I punched a time clock and spent seven hours a day alphabetizing index cards bearing customers' names and addresses. The work was desperately dull, but I kept my sanity, knowing it was temporary; and I could save a few dollars.

When Ruth found a part-time job as a salesgirl in a Five & Ten Cents store, she too had to pay a major portion of her salary to the Foster Home Bureau. This always irked her. The social worker told her it was a good way for her to learn about thrift, a lesson my sister hardly felt she needed. She had wanted to put some money aside for college.

My mother's sister, Hannah, arrived in New York in 1942 with her husband, daughter and mother-in-law. Their route from France to America was via Dakar, Morocco and Curacao, Dutch West Indies. They settled in the Kew Gardens section of New York City. Every few weeks Ruth and I took the hour and a half subway and bus trip to spend Sundays with our relatives.

I do not remember that we talked about France, or our parents or our sister Lea. All contact had ceased in 1942, and I became convinced that I would not see my parents or sister again. Had I confided in Ruth, she probably would have told me not to be silly. After all, when we left France, our mother had promised her that when the war was over we would all be together again. Only while reminiscing decades later when I began to write *Shattered Crystals*, did I find out that my older sister clung unswervingly to the promise that our family would be reunited some day.

Before that happened, Ruth and I were separated. Early in 1946, soon after my 15th birthday, we learned that Auntie's son whose room Ruth and I occupied was

to be discharged from the army and would need his room back. There was space for a cot in the daughters' bedroom for just one of us girls, so the other would have to move. We would be separated once more. Ruth, who had started high school, was the one who went. Her fourth foster home was in Pelham, a town in suburban Westchester that took me two hours to reach for the occasional visits to my sister after she left Washington Heights.

The trauma of separation was lessened because of unexpected and to me quite extraordinary news. A few months earlier a letter had arrived from our parents. They had survived the Nazi occupation of France and were together in Limoges. I did not learn until much later about their years of hiding, the time spent in French camps and the constant danger in which they lived.

The letter, transmitted by the Red Cross, was in German, which I had largely forgotten during the years of separation. At the end there were a few sentences in French from our sister, Lea who was now almost nine years old. Although I got the sense of their message, I had to struggle to understand what they wrote, and even more to reply. Suddenly I encountered a new language barrier, the reverse of the one I faced when I came to New York four years earlier. It didn't matter that much because I really didn't know what to say to them. I felt they were strangers. We sent photographs.

I shared this family information with no one. In junior high school I got along well with everyone but had no friends to whom I felt close enough to talk about my news from France. What my classmates knew and talked about was that I had passed the citywide examination for admission to Hunter College High School for academically gifted girls. I was one of fewer than 100 ninth grade students throughout New York City to be accepted. In addition to math, we were tested on vocabulary, English comprehension, grammar and writing. Just four years earlier, I had been a non-English speaking refugee. Auntie, Uncle and all their family were very proud.

For me, entering Hunter at the beginning of 1946 was a ticket out of the restricted world of Washington Heights. That life would have come to an end in any event. My parents applied for and were granted visas to come to America. Hannah's husband became their sponsor. Ironically, they were eligible to enter the country on the German quota, which was wide open. It took until the summer to complete the necessary paper work and secure passage on the trans-Atlantic liner, Desiree.

It was hard for me to take in that our family was to be reunited. When I began living in foster homes, I used to dream and long for a real family, my real family, Gradually, I got used to being different, but I still had a picture of my mother and father in my mind. The day the Desiree docked was hot and sunny and I wore the blue dress. Ruth and I met Tante Hannah and her husband at the Hudson River pier. My aunt spotted them first. For a brief moment I didn't recognize them. They were so much smaller than I remembered, but the greater shock was my mother. Her beautiful wavy hair, that had been a deep auburn, was still wavy but had turned snow white.

It took a few more months before we were really reunited. Until an apartment became available in Brooklyn, my parents and Lea lived in Kew Gardens with Hannah, where I visited often. The day after we all moved to our own apartment, I went into my school's office and told the secretary I had moved. Barely looking up from her work, she gave me a card on which to write my new address,. After five years in America, this was the first time I wrote my address without the words "care of" after my name. School friends who knew nothing of my history accepted my move from Washington Heights to Brooklyn without question.

It took a while until we adjusted to each other. I relearned German but spoke it forever after not only ungrammatically, but with an American accent. My parents and Lea learned English even faster. So communication became easier and more relaxed as well, as we adjusted to each other as a family.

My sisters and I married, raised families and enjoyed success in our chosen professions. Five grandchildren and one great grandchild brought my parents great pleasure. My parents, sisters and I were a rare quintet, an entire nuclear family who survived the Holocaust intact. But the lost years during which we were apart, years that included vital time during which we were growing up, could never be retrieved. It is a loss that was felt not only by us children, but also by our mother and father.

Glossary

aliya: call to reading of Torah scroll in Synagogue

Appell: roll call of prisoners

bar mitzvah: coming of age (13) for Jewish boys

Baruch Hashem: “thank God”

becher: wine goblet

bentch: to bless

bentch licht: blessing over candles

berachah: blessing

besomim: sweet smelling spices

besomim halter: container for spices

Boche: derogatory term for Germans

chad gayah: song traditionally sung at Seder

chametz: leaven; bread

chalutzim: pioneers

charoses: paste of apples, nuts and wine for Seder

chasid: adherent to pious Jewish movement

cheder: Torah school for children

Chumash: five books of Moses

chuppah: bridal canopy

chutzpah: audacity

daven, davening: to pray

eretz Yisrael: land of Israel

ersatz: substitute

fleishig: food containing meat

frum: observant

gendarme: French policeman

Gemara: another word for Talmud

goy, goyim, goyish: non-Jew, non-Jewish

Gute Reise: good journey

halachah: Jewish law

Hallel: special prayer of praise

Hamotzi: blessing over bread at start of meal

Hashem: name of the Lord

Havdalah: concluding ritual of Sabbath

Juden Verboten: Jews forbidden

Judenrein: free of Jews

kasher: to make kosher

kibbutz: collective Israeli settlement

Kiddush: ceremonial wine blessing

ki leolam chasdo: His grace is forever

kneidlech: matzoh balls

Kol Nidre: opening Yom Kippur prayer

Kosher: permitted under Jewish law

Kotel: Western temple wall, Jerusalem, sacred to Jews

leichters: candlesticks

Ma Nishtanah: the Four Questions asked at the Pesach seder

machzor: prayer books for high holidays and festivals

make aliyah: immigrate to Israel

marror: bitter herbs

matzoh: unleavened bread

Mazel Tov: congratulations

mechitzah: partition in synagogue

melamed, meladim [pl.]: teacher

menorah: candelabra

milchig: dairy

minyan: quorum of ten men for prayers

mishpachah: family

mitzvah: commandment

Moshiach: Messiah

musette: knapsack

naches: gratification

Opa: grandfather

OSE: organization that saved Jewish children

payos: earlocks

Pesach: Jewish festival of Passover

Rebbetzin: wife of rabbi

Rosh Hashanah: New Year

Schule: school

Seder: Passover feast

Sefer Torah: Torah scroll

seudah: meal

Shabbos: the Sabbath

Shalom Aleichem: peace upon you, a greeting

Shas: works of the Talmud

Shema Yisrael: Hear, oh Israel

shevah berachos: the seven nuptial blessings

shir hamalos: song of praise after meal

shivah: seven-day period of mourning

shochet: ritual slaughterer

shomer Shabbos: Sabbath observers

shtiebel: Chasidic synagogue

shul: synagogue

siddur, siddurim [pl.]: prayer

shtetl: village in Eastern Europe

succah: booth

Succos: festival of booths, one of main Jewish festivals

taharah: purification of dead body

tallis: prayer shawl

Talmud: fundamental code of Jewish law, see also Gemara

tefillin: phylacteries

tzimmes: carrot dish

yahrzeit: anniversary of death

yeshivah: Torah school

Yiddishkeit: Jewishness

Yom Hashoah: Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust

Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement

Yom Tov: festival

Zei gesunt: be well