

The Hiding Place

PART 2



by Corrie ten Boom

5 Invasion

The slender hands of the clock on the stair wall pointed to 9:25 as we left the dining room that night. That in itself was unusual in our orderly lives. Father was eighty years old now, and promptly at 8:45 each evening—an hour sooner than formerly—he would open the Bible, the signal for prayers, read one chapter, ask God’s blessing on us through the night, and by 9:15 be climbing the stairs to his bedroom. Tonight, however, the Prime Minister was to address the nation at 9:30. One question ached through all of Holland like a long-held breath: would there be war?

We circled up the steps to Tante Jans’s rooms and Father went to warm up the big table radio. We did not so often spend the evenings up here listening to music now. England, France, and Germany were at war; their stations carried mostly war reports or code messages and many frequencies were jammed. Even Dutch stations carried mostly war news, and that we could hear just as well on the small portable radio we kept now in the dining room, a gift from Pickwick the Christmas before.

This, though, was to be a major broadcast; somehow we all felt it merited the large old set with its elaborate speaker. We sat now, waiting for 9:30, tense and upright in the high-backed wooden chairs, avoiding as if by a kind of premonition the cushioned and comfortable seats.

Then the Prime Minister’s voice was speaking to us, sonorous and soothing. There would be no war. He had had assurances from high sources on both sides. Holland’s neutrality would be respected. It would be the Great War all over again. There was nothing to fear. Dutchmen were urged to remain calm and to—

The voice stopped. Betsie and I looked up, astonished. Father had snapped off the set and in his blue eyes was a fire we had never seen before.

“It is wrong to give people hope when there is no hope,” he said. “It is wrong to base faith upon wishes. There will be war. The Germans will attack and we will fall.”

He stamped on his cigar stub in the ashtray beside the radio and with it, it seemed, the anger too, for his voice grew gentle again. “Oh, my dears, I am sorry for all Dutchmen now who do not know the power of God. For we will be beaten. But He will not.” He kissed us both goodnight and in a moment we heard the steps of an old man climbing the stairs to bed.

Betsie and I sat rooted to our chairs. Father, so skilled at finding good in every situation, so slow to believe evil. If Father saw war and defeat, then there was no other possibility at all.

I SAT BOLT upright in my bed. *What was that? There! There it was again!* A brilliant flash followed a second later by an explosion that shook the bed. I scrambled over the covers to the window and leaned out. The patch of sky above the chimney tops glowed orange-red.

I felt for my bathrobe and thrust my arms through the sleeves as I whirled down the stairs. At Father’s room I pressed my ear against the door. Between bomb bursts I heard the regular rhythm of his breathing.

I dived down a few more steps and into Tante Jans’s rooms. Betsie had long since moved into Tante Jans’s little sleeping cubicle where she would be nearer the kitchen and the doorbell. She was sitting up in the bed. I groped toward her in the darkness and we threw our arms around each other.

Together we said it aloud:
“War.”

It was five hours after the Prime Minister’s speech. How long we clung together, listening, I do not know. The bombing seemed mostly to be coming from the direction of the airport. At last we tiptoed uncertainly out to Tante Jans’s front room. The glowing sky lit the room with a strange brilliance. The chairs, the mahogany bookcase, the old upright piano, all pulsed with an eerie light.

Betsie and I knelt down by the piano bench. For what seemed hours we prayed for our country, for the dead and injured tonight, for the Queen. And then, incredibly, Betsie began to pray for the Germans, up there in the planes, caught in the fist of the giant evil loose in Germany. I looked at my sister kneeling beside me in the light of burning Holland. “Oh Lord,” I whispered, “listen to Betsie, not me, because I cannot pray for those men at all.”

And it was then that I had the dream. It couldn’t have been a real dream because I was not asleep. But a scene was suddenly and unreasonably in my mind. I saw the Grote Markt, half a block away, as clearly as though I were standing there, saw the town hall and St. Bavo’s and the fish mart with its stair-stepped facade.

Then as I watched, a kind of odd, old farm wagon—old fashioned and out of place in the middle of a city—came lumbering across the square pulled by four enormous black horses. To my surprise I saw that I myself was sitting in the wagon. And Father too! And Betsie! There were many others, some strangers, some friends. I recognized Pickwick and Toos, Willem and young Peter. All together we were slowly being drawn across the square behind those horses. We couldn’t get off the wagon, that was the terrible thing. It was taking us away—far away, I felt—but we didn’t want to go. . . .

“Betsie!” I cried, jumping up, pressing my hands to my eyes. “Betsie, I’ve had such an awful dream!”

I felt her arm around my shoulder. “We’ll go down to the kitchen where the light won’t show, and we’ll make a pot of coffee.”

The booming of the bombs was less frequent and farther away as Betsie put on the water. Closer by was the wail of fire alarms and the beep of the hose trucks. Over coffee, standing at the stove, I told Betsie what I had seen.

“Am I imagining things because I’m frightened? But it wasn’t like that! It was real. Oh Betsie, was it a kind of vision?”

Betsie’s finger traced a pattern on the wooden sink worn smooth by generations of ten Booms. “I don’t know,” she said softly. “But if God has shown us bad times ahead, it’s enough for me that He knows about them. That’s why He sometimes shows us things, you know—to tell us that this too is in His hands.”

FOR FIVE DAYS Holland held out against the invader. We kept the shop open, not because anyone was interested in watches, but because people wanted to see Father. Some wanted him to pray for husbands and sons stationed at the borders of the country. Others, it seemed to me, came just to see him sitting there behind his workbench as he had for sixty years and to hear in the ticking clocks a world of order and reason.

I never opened my workbench at all but joined Betsie making coffee and carrying it down. We brought down the portable radio, too, and set it up on the display case. Radio was Haarlem’s eyes and ears and very pulse-rate, for after that first night, although we often heard planes overhead, the bombing never came so close again.

The first morning over the radio came instructions that ground-floor windows must be taped. Up and down the Barteljorisstraat, shop owners were out on the sidewalk; there was an unaccustomed neighborhood feel as advice, rolls of adhesive, and tales of the night’s terror passed from door to door. One store owner, an outspoken anti-Semite, was helping Weil the Jewish furrier put up boards where a pane of glass had shaken loose. The optician next

door to us, a silent, withdrawn individual, came over and taped the top of our display window where Betsie and I could not reach.

A few nights later the radio carried the news we dreaded: the Queen had left. I had not cried the night of the invasion but I cried now, for our country was lost. In the morning the radio announced tanks advancing over the border.

And suddenly all of Haarlem was in the streets. Even Father, whose daily stroll was as predictable as his own clock chimes, broke his routine to go walking at the unheard-of hour of 10:00 a.m. It was as though we wanted to face what was coming together, the whole city united, as though each would draw strength from each other Hollander.

And so the three of us walked, jostled by the crowd, over the bridge on the Spaarne, all the way to the great wild cherry tree whose blossoms each spring formed such a white glory that it was called the Bride of Haarlem. A few faded petals clung now to the new-leaved branches, but most of the Bride’s flowers had fallen, forming a wilted carpet beneath us.

A window down the street flew open.

“We’ve surrendered!”

The procession in the street stopped short. Each told his neighbor what we had all heard for ourselves. A boy of maybe fifteen turned to us with tears rolling down his cheeks. “I would have fought! I wouldn’t ever have given up!” Father stooped down to pick up a small bruised petal from the brick pavement; tenderly he inserted it in his buttonhole.

“That is good, my son,” he told the youngster. “For Holland’s battle has just begun.”

BUT DURING THE first months of occupation, life was not so very unbearable. The hardest thing to get used to was the German uniform everywhere, German trucks and tanks in the street,

German spoken in the shops. Soldiers frequently visited our store, for they were getting good wages and watches were among the first things they bought. Toward us they took a superior tone as though we were not-quite-bright children. But among themselves, as I listened to them excitedly discussing their purchases, they seemed like young men anywhere off on a holiday. Most of them selected women's watches for mothers and sweethearts back home.

Indeed, the shop never made so much money as during that first year of the war. With no new shipments coming in, people bought up everything we had in stock, even the *winkelochters*, the "shopdaughters," merchandise that had lain around so long it seemed part of the furniture. We even sold the green marble mantle clock with the twin brass cupids.

The curfew too, at first, was no hardship for us, since it was originally set at 10:00 P.M., long after we were indoors in any case. What we did object to were the identity cards each citizen was issued. These small folders containing photograph and fingerprints had to be produced on demand. A soldier or a policeman—the Haarlem police were now under the direct control of the German Commandant—might stop a citizen at any time and ask to see his card; it had to be carried in a pouch about the neck. We were issued ration cards too, but at least that first year, the coupons represented food and merchandise actually available in the stores. Each week the newspapers announced what the current coupons could be exchanged for.

That was another thing it was hard to adjust to—newspapers that no longer carried news. Long glowing reports of the successes of the German army on its various fronts. Eulogies of German leaders, denunciations of traitors and saboteurs, appeals for the unity of the "Nordic peoples." But not news that we could trust.

And so we depended again on the radio. Early in the occupation, Haarlemers were ordered to turn in all private sets. Realizing it

would look strange if our household produced none at all, we decided to turn in the portable and hide the larger, more powerful instrument in one of the many hollow spaces beneath the old twisting staircase.

Both suggestions were Peter's. He was sixteen at the time of the invasion and shared with other Dutch teenagers the restless energy of anger and impotence. Peter installed the table radio beneath a curve in the stairs just above Father's room and expertly replaced the old boards, while I carried the smaller one down to the big Vroom en Dreesman department store where the radio collection was being made. The army clerk looked at me across the counter. "Is this the only radio you own?"

"Yes."

He consulted a list in front of him. "Ten Boom, Casper, Ten Boom, Elisabeth, at the same address. Do either of them own a radio?"

I had known from childhood that the earth opened and the heavens rained fire upon liars, but I met his gaze.

"No."

Only as I walked out of the building did I begin to tremble. Not because for the first time in my life I had told a conscious lie. But because it had been so dreadfully easy.

But we had saved our radio. Every night Betsie or I would remove the stair tread and crouch over the radio, the volume barely audible, while the other one thumped the piano in Tante Jans's room as hard as she could, to hear the news from England. And at first the news over the radio and the news in our captive press was much the same. The German offensive was everywhere victorious. Month after month the Free Dutch broadcasts could only urge us to wait, to have courage, to believe in the counter-offensive which must surely some day be mounted.

The Germans had repaired the bomb damage to the airport and were using it now as a base for air raids against England. Night after night we lay in bed listening to the growl of engines heading west. Occasionally English planes retaliated and then the German fighters might intercept them right over Haarlem.

One night I tossed for an hour while dogfights raged overhead, streaking my patch of sky with fire. At last I heard Betsie stirring in the kitchen and ran down to join her.

She was making tea. She brought it into the dining room where we had covered the windows with heavy black paper and set out the best cups. Somewhere in the night there was an explosion; the dishes in the cupboard rattled. For an hour we sipped our tea and talked, until the sound of planes died away and the sky was silent. I said goodnight to Betsie at the door to Tante Jans's rooms and groped my way up the dark stairs to my own. The fiery light was gone from the sky. I felt for my bed:

there was the pillow. Then in the darkness my hand closed over something hard. Sharp too! I felt blood trickle along a finger.

It was a jagged piece of metal, ten inches long.

"Betsie!"

I raced down the stairs with the shrapnel shard in my hand. We went back to the dining room and stared at it in the light while Betsie bandaged my hand. "On your pillow," she kept saying.

"Betsie, if I hadn't heard you in the kitchen—"

But Betsie put a finger on my mouth. "Don't say it, Corrie! There are no 'ifs' in God's world. And no places that are safer than other places.

The center of His will is our only safety—Oh Corrie, let us pray that we may always know it!"

THE TRUE HORROR of occupation came over us only slowly. During the first year of German rule, there were only minor attacks on Jews in Holland. A rock through the window of a Jewish-owned store. An ugly word scrawled on the wall of a synagogue. It was as though they were trying us, testing the temper of the country. How many Dutchmen would go along with them?

And the answer, to our shame, was many. The National Socialist Bond, the quisling organization of Holland, grew larger and bolder with each month of occupation. Some joined the NSB simply for the benefits: more food, more clothing coupons, the best jobs and housing. But others became NSBers out of conviction. Nazism was a disease to which the Dutch, too, were susceptible, and those with an anti-Semitic bias fell sick of it first.

On our daily walk, Father and I saw the symptoms spread. A sign in a shop window: jews will not be served. At the entrance to a public park: no jews. On the door of the library. In front of restaurants, theaters, even the concert hall whose alley we knew so much better than its seats.

A synagogue burned down and the fire trucks came. But only to keep the flames from spreading to the buildings on either side.

One noon as Father and I followed our familiar route, the sidewalks were bright with yellow stars sewn to coats and jacket fronts. Men, women, and children wore the six-pointed star with the word *Jood* (Jew) in the center. We were surprised, as we walked, at how many of the people we had passed each day were Jews. The man who read the *World Shipping News* in the Grote Markt wore a star on his neatly pressed business suit. So did The Bulldog, his jowly face more deeply lined than ever, his voice as he fussed at his dogs, sharp with strain.

Worst were the disappearances. A watch, repaired and ready, hanging on its hook in the back of the shop, month after month. A house in Nollie's block mysteriously deserted, grass growing in the

rose garden. One day Mr. Kan's shop up the street did not open. Father knocked on his door as we passed that noon, to see if someone were ill, but there was no answer. The shop remained shuttered, the windows above dark and silent for several weeks. Then, although the shop stayed closed, an NSB family moved into the apartment above.

We never knew whether these people had been spirited away by the Gestapo or gone into hiding before this could happen. Certainly public arrests, with no attempt to conceal what was happening, were becoming more frequent. One day as Father and I were returning from our walk we found the Grote Markt cordoned off by a double ring of police and soldiers. A truck was parked in front of the fish mart; into the back were climbing men, women, and children, all wearing the yellow star. There was no reason we could see why this particular place at this particular time had been chosen.

"Father! Those poor people!" I cried.

The police line opened, the truck moved through. We watched till it turned the corner.

"Those poor people," Father echoed. But to my surprise I saw that he was looking at the soldiers now forming into ranks to march away. "I pity the poor Germans, Corrie. They have touched the apple of God's eye."

WE TALKED OFTEN, Father, Betsie, and I, about what we could do if a chance should come to help some of our Jewish friends. We knew that Willem had found hiding places at the beginning of the occupation for the German Jews who had been living in his house. Lately he had also moved some of the younger Dutch Jews away from the nursing home. "Not my old people," he would say. "Surely they will not touch my old people."

Willem had addresses. He knew of farms in rural areas where there were few occupying troops. Willem would be the one to ask.

It was a drizzly November morning in 1941, a year and a half after the invasion, as I stepped outside to fold back the shutters, that I saw a group of four German soldiers coming down the Barteljorisstraat. They were wearing combat helmets low over their ears, rifles strapped to their shoulders. I shrank back into the doorway and watched. They were checking shop numbers as they walked. At Weil's Furriers, directly across the street, the group stopped. One of the soldiers unstrapped his gun and with the butt banged on the door. He was drawing it back for another blow when the door opened and all four pushed inside.

I dashed back through our shop and up to the dining room where Betsie was setting out three places. "Betsie! Hurry! Something awful is happening at Weil's!" We reached the front door again in time to see Mr. Weil backing out of his shop, the muzzle of a gun pressed against his stomach. When he had prodded Mr. Weil a short way down the sidewalk, the soldier went back into the store and slammed the door. Not an arrest, then.

Inside, we could hear glass breaking. Soldiers began carrying out armloads of furs. A crowd was gathering in spite of the early morning hour. Mr. Weil had not moved from the spot on the sidewalk where the soldier had left him.

A window over his head opened and a small shower of clothes rained down on him—pajamas, shirts, underwear. Slowly, mechanically, the old furrier stopped and began to gather up his clothing. Betsie and I ran across the street to help him.

"Your wife!" Betsie whispered urgently. "Where is Mrs. Weil?" The man only blinked at her.

"You must come inside!" I said, snatching socks and handkerchiefs from the sidewalk. "Quick, with us!"

And we propelled the bewildered old man across to the Beje. Father was in the dining room when we reached it and greeted Mr. Weil without the slightest sign of surprise. His natural manner seemed to relax the furrier a bit. His wife, he said, was visiting a sister in Amsterdam.

“We must find a telephone and warn her not to come home!” Betsie said.

Like most private telephones ours had been disconnected early in the occupation. There were public phones at several places in the city, but of course messages went to a public reception center at the other end. Was it right to connect a family in Amsterdam with the trouble here? And if Mrs. Weil could not come home, where was she to go? Where were the Weils to live? Certainly not with the sister where they could so easily be traced. Father and Betsie and I exchanged glances. Almost with a single breath we said, “Willem.”

Again it was not the kind of matter that could be relayed through the public phone system. Someone had to go, and I was the obvious choice. Dutch trains were dirty and overcrowded under the occupation; the trip that should have taken under an hour took nearly three. Willem was not there when I finally reached the big nursing home just after noon, but Tine and their twenty-two-year-old son Kik were. I told them what had happened on the Barteljorisstraat and gave them the Amsterdam address.

“Tell Mr. Weil to be ready as soon as it’s dark,” Kik said.

But it was nearly 9:00 p.m.—the new curfew hour—before Kik rapped at the alley door. Tucking Mr. Weil’s clothing bundle beneath his arm, he led the man away into the night.

It was more than two weeks before I saw Kik again to ask him what had happened. He smiled at me, the broad, slow smile I had loved since he was a child.

“If you’re going to work with the underground, Tante Corrie, you must learn not to ask questions.”

That was all we ever learned of the Weils. But Kik’s words went round and round in my head. *The underground. . . . If you’re going to work with the underground.* Was Kik working with this secret and illegal group? Was Willem?

We knew, of course, that there was an underground in Holland—or suspected it. Most cases of sabotage were not reported in our controlled press, but rumors abounded. A factory had been blown up. A train carrying political prisoners had been stopped and seven, or seventeen, or seventy, had made it away. The rumors tended to get more spectacular with each repetition. But always they featured things we believed were wrong in the sight of God. Stealing, lying, murder. Was this what God wanted in times like these? How should a Christian act when evil was in power?

IT WAS ABOUT a month after the raid on the fur shop that Father and I, on our usual walk, saw something so very unusual that we both stopped in mid-stride. Walking toward us along the sidewalk, as so many hundreds of times before, came The Bulldog with his rolling short-legged gait. The bright yellow star had by now ceased to look extraordinary, so what—and then I knew what was wrong. The dogs. The dogs were not with him!

He passed without seeming to see us. With one accord Father and I turned around and walked after him. He turned a number of corners while we grew more and more embarrassed at following him without any real excuse. Although Father and he had tipped their hats to each other for years, we had never spoken and did not even know his name.

At last the man stopped in front of a small secondhand shop, took out a ring of keys, and let himself in. We looked through the window at the cluttered interior. Only a glance showed us that this

was more than the usual hodgepodge of bric-a-brac and hollow-seated chairs. Someone who loved beautiful things had chosen everything here. “We must bring Betsie!” I said.

A little bell over the door jingled as we stepped in. Astonishing to see The Bulldog hatless and indoors, unlocking a cash drawer at the rear of the store.

“Permit an introduction, sir,” Father began. “I am Casper ten Boom and this is my daughter, Cornelia.”

The Bulldog shook hands and again I noticed the deep creases in the sagging cheeks. “Harry de Vries,” he said.

“Mr. de Vries, we’ve so often admired your—er—affection for your bulldogs. We hope they are well?”

The squat little man stared from one of us to the other. Slowly the heavy-rimmed eyes filled with tears. “Are they well?” he repeated. “I believe they are well. I hope that they are well. They are dead.” “Dead!” we said together.

“I put the medicine in their bowl with my own hands and I petted them to sleep. My babies. My little ones. If you could only have seen them eat! I waited, you know, till we had enough coupons for meat. They used to have meat all the time.”

We stared at him dumbly. “Was it,” I ventured at last, “was it because of the rationing?”

With a gesture of his hands the little man invited us into a small room in back of the shop and gave us chairs. “Miss ten Boom, I am a Jew. Who knows when they will come to take me away? My wife too—although she is a Gentile—is in danger because of her marriage.”

The Bulldog raised his chin so high his jowls stretched taut. “It is not for ourselves we mind. We are Christians, Cato and I. When we die we will see Jesus, and this is all that matters.

“But I said to Cato, ‘What about the dogs? If we are taken away who will feed them? Who will remember their water and their walk? They will wait and we will not come and they will not understand.’ No! This way my mind is at ease.”

“My dear friend!” Father grasped The Bulldog’s hand in both of his. “Now that these dear companions may no longer walk with you, will you not do my daughter and me the great honor of accompanying us?”

But this The Bulldog would not do. “It would put you in danger,” he kept saying. He did, however, accept an invitation to come to visit us. “After dark, after dark,” he said.

And so one evening the following week, Mr. de Vries came to the alley door of the Beje bringing his sweet, shy wife, Cato, and soon she and Harry were almost nightly visitors in Tante Jans’s front room.

The Bulldog’s chief delight at the Beje, after talking with Father, were the tomes of Jewish theology now housed in Tante Jans’s big mahogany case. For he had become a Christian, some forty years earlier, without ceasing in the least to be a loyal Jew. “A completed Jew” he would tell us smilingly. “A follower of the one perfect Jew.”

The books belonged to the rabbi of Haarlem. He had brought them to Father more than a year before: “Just in case I should not be able to care for them—ah—indefinitely.” He had waved a bit apologetically at the procession of small boys behind him, each staggering under the weight of several huge volumes. “My little hobby. Book collecting. And yet, old friend, books do not age as you and I do. They will speak still when we are gone, to generations we will never see. Yes, the books must survive.” The rabbi had been one of the first to vanish from Haarlem.

How often it is a small, almost unconscious event that marks a turning point. As arrests of Jews in the street became more frequent, I had begun picking up and delivering work for our Jewish

customers myself so that they would not have to venture into the center of town. And so one evening in the early spring of 1942, I was in the home of a doctor and his wife. They were a very old Dutch family: the portraits on the walls could have been a textbook of Holland's history.

The Heemstras and I were talking about the things that were discussed whenever a group of people got together in those days, rationing and the news from England, when down the stairs piped a childish voice.

"Daddy! You didn't tuck us in!"

Dr. Heemstra was on his feet in an instant. With an apology to his wife and me, he hurried upstairs and in a minute we heard a game of hide-and-seek going and the shrill laughter of two children.

That was all. Nothing had changed. Mrs. Heemstra continued with her recipe for stretching the tea ration with rose leaves. And yet everything was changed. For in that instant, reality broke through the numbness that had grown in me since the invasion. At any minute there might be a rap on this door. These children, this mother and father, might be ordered to the back of a truck.

Dr. Heemstra came back to the living room and the conversation rambled on. But under the words, a prayer was forming in my heart.

Lord Jesus, I offer myself for Your people. In any way. Any place. Any time.

And then an extraordinary thing happened.

Even as I prayed, that waking dream passed again before my eyes. I saw again those four black horses and the Grote Markt. As I had on the night of the invasion, I scanned the passengers drawn so unwillingly behind them. Father, Betsie, Willem, myself—leaving Haarlem, leaving all that was sure and safe—going where?

6 The Secret Room

It was Sunday, May 10, 1942, exactly two years after the fall of Holland.

The sunny spring skies, the flowers in the lamppost boxes, did not at all reflect the city's mood. German soldiers wandered aimlessly through the streets, some looking as if they had not yet recovered from a hard Saturday night, some already on the lookout for girls, a few hunting for a place to worship.

Each month the occupation seemed to grow harsher, restrictions more numerous. The latest heartache for Dutchmen was an edict making it a crime to sing the "Wilhelmus," our national anthem.

Father, Betsie, and I were on our way to the Dutch Reformed church in Velsen, a small town not far from Haarlem, where Peter had won the post of organist in competition against forty older and more experienced musicians. The organ at Velsen was one of the finest in the country; though the train seemed slower each time, we went frequently.

Peter was already playing, invisible in the tall organ loft, when we squeezed into the crowded pew. That was one thing the occupation had done for Holland; churches were packed.

After hymns and prayers came the sermon, a good one today, I thought. I wished Peter would pay closer attention. He regarded sermons as interesting only to venerable relics like his mother and me. I had reached fifty that spring, to Peter the age at which life had definitely passed by. I would beg him to remember that death and ultimate issues could come for any of us at any age—especially these days—but he would reply charmingly that he was too fine a musician to die young.

The closing prayers were said. And then, electrically, the whole church sat at attention. Without preamble, every stop pulled out to full volume, Peter was playing the "Wilhelmus"!

Father, at eight-two, was the first one on his feet. Now everyone was standing. From somewhere in back of us a voice sang out the

words. Another joined in, and another. Then we were all singing together, the full voice of Holland singing her forbidden anthem. We sang at the top of our lungs, sang our oneness, our hope, our love for Queen and country. On this anniversary of defeat it seemed almost for a moment that we were victors.

Afterward we waited for Peter at the small side door of the church. It was a long time before he was free to come away with us, so many people wanted to embrace him, to shake his hand and thump his back. Clearly he was enormously pleased with himself.

But now that the moment had passed I was, as usual, angry with him. The Gestapo was certain to hear about it, perhaps already had: their eyes and ears were everywhere. I thought of Nollie, home fixing Sunday dinner for us all. I thought of Peter's brothers and sisters. And Flip— what if he lost the principalship of the school for this? And for what had Peter risked so much? Not for people's lives but for a gesture. For a moment's meaningless defiance.

At Bos en Hoven Straat, however, Peter was a hero as one by one his family made us describe again what had happened. The only members of the household who felt as I did were the two Jewish women staying at Nollie's. One of these was an elderly Austrian lady whom Willem had sent into hiding here. "Katrien," as the family had rechristened her, was posing as the von Woerden's housemaid— although Nollie confided to me that she had yet so much as to make her own bed. Probably she did not know how, as she came from a wealthy and aristocratic family.

The other woman was a young, blonde, blue-eyed Dutch Jew with flawless false identity papers supplied by the Dutch national underground itself. The papers were so good and Annaliese looked so unlike the Nazi stereotype of a Jew, that she went freely in and out of the house, shopping and helping out at the school, giving herself out to be a friend

of the family whose husband had died in the bombing of Rotterdam. Katrien and Annaliese could not understand any more than I could Peter's deliberately doing something that would attract the attention of the authorities.

I spent an anxious afternoon, tensing at the sound of every motor, for only the police, Germans, and NSBers had automobiles nowadays. But the time came to go home to the Beje and still nothing had happened.

I worried two more days, then decided either Peter had not been reported or that the Gestapo had more important things to occupy them. It was Wednesday morning just as Father and I were unlocking our workbenches that Peter's little sister Cocky burst into the shop.

"Opa! Tante Corrie! They came for Peter! They took him away!"

"Who? Where?"

But she didn't know and it was three days before the family learned that he had been taken to the federal prison in Amsterdam.

IT WAS 7:55 in the evening, just a few minutes before the new curfew hour of 8:00. Peter had been in prison for two weeks. Father and Betsie and I were seated around the dining room table, Father replacing watches in their pockets and Betsie doing needlework, our big, black, slightly Persian cat curled contentedly in her lap. A knock on the alley door made me glance in the window mirror. There in the bright spring twilight stood a woman. She carried a small suitcase and—odd for the time of year— wore a fur coat, gloves, and a heavy veil.

I ran down and opened the door. "Can I come in?" she asked. Her voice was high-pitched in fear.

"Of course." I stepped back. The woman looked over her shoulder before moving into the little hallway.

“My name is Kleermaker. I’m a Jew.”

“How do you do?” I reached out to take her bag, but she held onto it. “Won’t you come upstairs?”

Father and Betsie stood up as we entered the dining room. “Mrs. Kleermaker, my father and my sister.”

“I was about to make some tea!” cried Betsie. “You’re just in time to join us!”

Father drew out a chair from the table and Mrs. Kleermaker sat down, still gripping the suitcase. The “tea” consisted of old leaves which had been crushed and reused so often they did little more than color the water. But Mrs. Kleermaker accepted it gratefully, plunging into the story of how her husband had been arrested some months before, her son gone into hiding. Yesterday the S.D.—the political police who worked under the Gestapo—had ordered her to close the family clothing store. She was afraid now to go back to the apartment above it. She had heard that we had befriended a man on this street. . . .

“In this household,” Father said, “God’s people are always welcome.” “We have four empty beds upstairs,” said Betsie. “Your problem will be choosing which one to sleep in!” Then to my astonishment she added, “First though, give me a hand with the tea things.”

I could hardly believe my ears. Betsie never let anyone help in her kitchen: “I’m just a fussy old maid,” she’d say.

But Mrs. Kleermaker had jumped to her feet with pathetic eagerness and was already stacking plates and cups. . . .

JUST TWO NIGHTS later the same scene was repeated. The time was again just before 8:00 on another bright May evening. Again there was a furtive knock at the side door. This time an elderly couple was standing outside.

“Come in!”

It was the same story: the same tight-clutched possessions, the same fearful glance and tentative tread. The story of neighbors arrested, the fear that tomorrow their turn would come.

That night after prayer-time the six of us faced our dilemma. “This location is too dangerous,” I told our three guests. “We’re half a block from the main police headquarters. And yet I don’t know where else to suggest.”

Clearly it was time to visit Willem again. So the next day I repeated the difficult trip to Hilversum. “Willem,” I said, “we have three Jews staying right at the Beje. Can you get places for them in the country?”

Willem pressed his fingers to his eyes and I noticed suddenly how much white was in his beard. “It’s getting harder,” he said. “Harder every month. They’re feeling the food shortage now even on the farms. I still have addresses, yes, a few. But they won’t take anyone without a ration card.”

“Without a ration card! But, Jews aren’t issued ration cards!”

“I know.” Willem turned to stare out the window. For the first time I wondered how he and Tine were feeding the elderly men and women in their care.

“I know,” he repeated. “And ration cards can’t be counterfeited. They’re changed too often and they’re too easy to spot. Identity cards are different. I know several printers who do them. Of course you need a photographer.”

A photographer? Printers? What was Willem talking about? “Willem, if people need ration cards and there aren’t any counterfeit ones, what do they do?”

Willem turned slowly from the window. He seemed to have forgotten me and my particular problem. “Ration cards?” He gestured vaguely.

“You steal them.”

I stared at this Dutch Reformed clergyman. “Then, Willem, could you steal . . . I mean . . . could you get three stolen cards?”

“No, Corrie! I’m watched! Don’t you understand that? Every move I make is watched!”

He put an arm around my shoulder and went on more kindly, “Even if I can continue working for a while, it will be far better for you to develop your own sources. The less connection with me—the less connection with anyone else—the better.”

Juggling home on the crowded train I turned Willem’s words over and over in my mind. *Your own sources*. That sounded so—so professional. How was I going to find a source of stolen ration cards?

Who in the world did I know . . .

And at that moment a name appeared in my mind.

Fred Koornstra.

Fred was the man who used to read the electric meter at the Beje.

The

Koornstras had a retarded daughter, now a grown woman, who attend the “church” I had been conducting for the feeble-minded for some twenty years. And now Fred had a new job working for the Food Office. Wasn’t it in the department where ration books were issued?

That evening after supper I bumped over the brick streets to the Koornstra house. The tires on my faithful old bicycle had finally given out and I had joined the hundreds clattering about town on metal wheel rims. Each bump reminded me jarringly of my fifty years.

Fred, a bald man with a military bearing, came to the door and stared at me blankly when I said I wanted to talk to him about the

Sunday service. He invited me in, closed the door, and said, “Now Corrie, what is it you really came to see me about?”

Lord, I prayed silently, *if it is not safe to confide in Fred, stop this conversation now before it is too late.*

“I must first tell you that we’ve had some unexpected company at the Beje. First it was a single woman, then a couple, when I got back this afternoon, another couple.” I paused for just an instant. “They are Jews.” Fred’s expression did not change.

“We can provide safe places for these people but they must provide something too. Ration cards.”

Fred’s eyes smiled. “So. Now I know why you came here.”

“Fred, is there any way you can give out extra cards? More than you report?”

“None at all, Corrie. Those cards have to be accounted for a dozen ways. They’re checked and double-checked.”

The hope that had begun to mount in me tumbled. But Fred was frowning.

“Unless—” he began.

“Unless?”

“Unless there should be a hold-up. The Food Office in Utrecht was robbed last month—but the men were caught.”

He was silent a while. “If it happened at noon,” he said slowly, “when just the record clerk and I are there . . . and if they found us tied and gagged . . .” He snapped his fingers. “And I know just the man who might do it! Do you remember the—”

“Don’t!” I said, remembering Willem’s warning. “Don’t tell me who. And don’t tell me how. Just get the cards if you possibly can.”

Fred stared at me a moment. “How many do you need?”

I opened my mouth to say, “Five.” But the number that unexpectedly and astonishingly came out instead was, “One hundred.”

WHEN FRED OPENED the door to me just a week later, I gasped at the sight of him. Both eyes were a greenish purple, his lower lip cut and swollen.

“My friend took very naturally to the part,” was all he would say.

But he had the cards. On the table in a brown manila envelope were one hundred passports to safety. Fred had already torn the “continuing coupon” from each one. This final coupon was presented at the Food Office the last day of each month in exchange for the next month’s card. With these coupons Fred could “legally” continue to issue us one hundred cards.

We agreed that it would be risky for me to keep coming to his house each month. What if he were to come to the Beje instead, dressed in his old meterman uniform?

The meter in the Beje was in the back hall at the foot of the stairs. When I got home that afternoon, I pried up the tread of the bottom step, as Peter had done higher to hide the radio, and found a hollow space inside. *Peter would be proud of me*, I thought as I worked—and was flooded by a wave of lonesomeness for that brave and cocksure boy. *But even he would have to admit*, I concluded as I stepped back at last to admire the completed hideaway, *that a watchmaker’s hand and eye were worth something*. The hinge was hidden deep in the wood, the ancient riser undisturbed. I was ridiculously pleased with it.

We had our first test of the system on July 1. Fred was to come in through the shop as he always had, carrying the cards beneath his shirt.

He would come at 5:30, when Betsie would have the back hall free of callers. To my horror at 5:25 the shop door opened and in stepped a policeman.

He was a tall man with close-cropped orange-red hair whom I knew by name—Rolf van Vliet—but little else. He had come to the Hundredth Birthday Party, but so had half the force. Certainly he was not one of Betsie’s “regulars” for winter morning coffee.

Rolf had brought in a watch that needed cleaning, and he seemed in a mood to talk. My throat had gone dry, but Father chatted cheerfully as he took off the back of Rolf’s watch and examined it. What were we going to do? There was no way to warn Fred Koornstra. Promptly at 5:30 the door of the shop opened and in he walked, dressed in his blue workclothes. It seemed to me that his chest was too thick by a foot at least.

With magnificent aplomb Fred nodded to Father, the policeman, and me. “Good evening.” Courteous but a little bored.

He strode through the door at the rear of the shop and shut it behind him. My ears strained to hear him lift the secret lid. *There! Surely Rolf must have heard it too.*

The door behind us opened again. So great was Fred’s control that he had not ducked out the alleyway exit, but came strolling back through the shop.

“Good evening,” he said again.

“Evening.”

He reached the street door and was gone. We had got away with it this time, but somehow, somehow, we were going to have to work out a warning system.

For meanwhile, in the weeks since Mrs. Kleermaker’s unexpected visit, a great deal had happened at the Beje. Supplied with ration cards, Mrs. Kleermaker and the elderly couple and the next arrivals and the next had found homes in safer locations. But still the

hunted people kept coming, and the needs were often more complicated than rations cards and addresses. If a Jewish woman became pregnant, where could she go to have her baby? If a Jew in hiding died, how could he be buried? “Develop your own sources,” Willem had said. And from the moment Fred Koornstra’s name had popped into my mind, an uncanny realization had been growing in me. We were friends with half of Haarlem! We knew nurses in the maternity hospital. We knew clerks in the Records Office. We knew someone in every business and service in the city.

We didn’t know, of course, the political views of all these people. But —and here I felt a strange leaping of my heart—God did! My job was simply to follow His leading one step at a time, holding every decision up to Him in prayer. I knew I was not clever or subtle or sophisticated; if the Beje was becoming a meeting place for need and supply, it was through some strategy far higher than mine.

A few nights after Fred’s first “meterman” visit the alley bell rang long after curfew. I sped downstairs expecting another sad and stammering refugee. Betsie and I had already made up beds for four new overnight guests that evening: a Jewish woman and her three small children.

But to my surprise, close against the wall of the dark alley, stood Kik. “Get your bicycle,” he ordered with his usual young abruptness. “And put on a sweater. I have some people I want you to meet.”

“Now? After curfew?” But I knew it was useless to ask questions. Kik’s bicycle was tireless too, the wheel rims swathed in cloth. He wrapped mine also to keep down the clatter, and soon we were pedaling through the blacked-out streets of Haarlem at a speed that would have scared me even in daylight.

“Put a hand on my shoulder,” Kik whispered. “I know the way.”

We crossed dark side streets, crested bridges, wheeled round invisible corners. At last we crossed a broad canal and I knew we had reached the fashionable suburb of Aerdenhout.

We turned into a driveway beneath shadowy trees. To my astonishment, Kik picked up my bicycle and carried both his and mine up the front steps. A serving girl with starched white apron and ruffled cap opened the door. The entrance hall was jammed with bicycles.

Then I saw him. One eye smiling at me, the other at the door, his vast stomach hastening ahead of him. Pickwick!

He led Kik and me into the drawing room where, sipping coffee and chatting in small groups, was the most distinguished-looking group of men and women I had ever seen. But all my attention, that first moment, was on the inexpressibly fragrant aroma in that room. Surely, was it possible, they were drinking real coffee?

Pickwick drew me a cup from the silver urn on the sideboard. It was coffee. After two years, rich, black, pungent Dutch coffee. He poured himself a cup too, dropping in his usual five lumps of sugar as though rationing had never been invented. Another starched and ruffled maid was passing a tray heaped high with cakes.

Gobbling and gulping I trailed about the room after Pickwick, shaking the hands of the people he singled out. They were strange introductions for no names were mentioned, only, occasionally, an address, and “Ask for Mrs. Smit.” When I had met my fourth Smit, Kik explained with a grin, “It’s the only last name in the underground.”

So this was really and truly the underground! But—where were these people from? I had never laid eyes on any of them. A second later I realized with a shiver down my spine that I was meeting the national group.

Their chief work, I learned from bits of conversation, was liaison with England and the Free Dutch forces fighting elsewhere on the continent. They also maintained the underground route through which downed Allied plane crews reached the North Sea coast.

But they were instantly sympathetic with my efforts to help Haarlem's Jews. I blushed to my hair roots to hear Pickwick describe me as "the head of an operation here in this city." A hollow space under the stairs and some haphazard friendships were not an operation. The others here were obviously competent, disciplined, and professional.

But they greeted me with grave courtesy, murmuring what they had to offer as we shook hands. False identity papers. The use of a car with official government plates. Signature forgery.

In a far corner of the room Pickwick introduced me to a frail-appearing little man with a wispy goatee. "Our host informs me," the little man began formally, "that your headquarters building lacks a secret room.

This is a danger for all, those you are helping as well as yourselves and those who work with you. With your permission I will pay you a visit in the coming week. . . ."

Years later I learned that he was one of the most famous architects in Europe. I knew him only as Mr. Smit.

Just before Kik and I started our dash back to the Beje, Pickwick slipped an arm through mine. "My dear, I have good news. I understand that Peter is about to be released."

SO HE WAS, three days later, thinner, paler, and not a whit daunted by his two months in a concrete cell. Nollie, Tine, and Betsie used up a month's sugar ration baking cakes for his welcome-home party. And one morning soon afterward the first customer in the shop was a small thin-bearded man named Smit. Father took his jeweler's glass from his eye. If there was one thing he loved better than making a new acquaintance, it was discovering a link with an old one.

"Smit," he said eagerly. "I know several Smits in Amsterdam. Are you by any chance related to the family who—"

"Father," I interrupted, "this is the man I told you about. He's come to, ah, inspect the house."

"A building inspector? Then you must be the Smit with offices in the Grote Hout Straat. I wonder that I haven't—"

"Father!" I pleaded, "he's not a building inspector, and his name is not Smit."

"Not Smit?"

Together Mr. Smit and I attempted to explain, but Father simply could not understand a person's being called by a name not his own. As I led Mr. Smit into the back hall, we heard him musing to himself, "I once knew a Smit on Koning Straat. . . ."

Mr. Smit examined and approved the hiding place for ration cards beneath the bottom step. He also pronounced acceptable the warning system we had worked out. This was a triangle-shaped wooden sign advertising alpina watches that I had placed in the dining room window.

As long as the sign was in place, it was safe to enter.

But when I showed him a cubby hole behind the corner cupboard in the dining room, he shook his head. Some ancient redesigning of the house had left a crawl space in that corner and we'd been secreting jewelry, silver coins, and other valuables there since the start of the occupation. Not only the rabbi had brought us his library but other Jewish families had brought their treasures to the Beje for safekeeping. The space was large enough that we had believed a person could crawl in there if necessary, but Mr. Smit dismissed it without a second glance.

"First place they'd look. Don't bother to change it though. It's only silver. We're interested in saving people, not things."

He started up the narrow corkscrew stairs, and as he mounted so did his spirits. He paused in delight at the odd-placed landings,

pounded on the crooked walls, and laughed aloud as the floor levels of the two old houses continued out of phase.

“What an impossibility!” he said in an awestruck voice. “What an improbably, unbelievable, unpredictable impossibility! Miss ten Boom, if all houses were constructed like this one, you would see before you a less worried man.”

At last, at the very top of the stairs, he entered my room and gave a little cry of delight. “This is it!” he exclaimed.

“You want your hiding place as high as possible,” he went on eagerly. “Gives you the best chance to reach it while the search is on below.” He leaned out the window, craning his thin neck, the little faun’s beard pointed this way and that.

“But . . . this is my bedroom. . . .”

Mr. Smit paid no attention. He was already measuring. He moved the heavy, wobbly old wardrobe away from the wall with surprising ease and pulled my bed into the center of the room. “This is where the false wall will go!” Excitedly he drew out a pencil and drew a line along the floor thirty inches from the back wall. He stood up and gazed at it moodily.

“That’s as big as I dare,” he said. “It will take a cot mattress, though.

Oh yes. Easily!”

I tried again to protest, but Mr. Smit had forgotten I existed. Over the next few days he and his workmen were in and out of our house constantly. They never knocked. At each visit each man carried in something. Tools in a folded newspaper. A few bricks in a briefcase. “Wood!” he exclaimed when I ventured to wonder if a wooden wall would not be easier to build. “Wood sounds hollow. Hear it in a minute.

No, no. Brick’s the only thing for false walls.”

After the wall was up, the plasterer came, then the carpenter, finally the painter. Six days after he had begun, Mr. Smit called Father, Betsie, and me to see.

We stood in the doorway and gaped. The smell of fresh paint was everywhere. But surely nothing in this room was newly painted! All four walls had that streaked and grimy look that old rooms got in coal-burning Haarlem. The ancient molding ran unbroken around the ceiling, chipped and peeling here and there, obviously undisturbed for a hundred and fifty years. Old water stains streaked the back wall, a wall that even I who had lived half a century in this room, could scarcely believe was not the original, but set back a precious two-and-a-half feet from the true wall of the building.

Built-in bookshelves ran along this false wall, old, sagging shelves whose blistered wood bore the same water stains as the wall behind them. Down in the far lefthand corner, beneath the bottom shelf, a sliding panel, two feet high and two wide, opened into the secret room.

Mr. Smit stooped and silently pulled this panel up. On hands and knees Betsie and I crawled into the narrow room behind it. Once inside we could stand up, sit, or even stretch out one at a time on the single mattress. A concealed vent, cunningly let into the real wall, allowed air to enter from outside.

“Keep a water jug there,” said Mr. Smit, crawling in behind us.

“Change the water once a week. Hardtack and vitamins keep indefinitely. Anytime there is anyone in the house whose presence is unofficial, all possessions except the clothes actually on his back must be stored in here.”

Dropping to our knees again, we crawled single file out into my bedroom. “Move back into this room,” he told me. “Everything exactly as before.”

With his fist he struck the wall above the bookshelves.

“The Gestapo could search for a year,” he said. “They’ll never find this one.”

7 Eusie

Peter was home, yet he was not safe, any more than any healthy young male was safe. In Germany the munitions factories were desperate for workers. Without warning, soldiers would suddenly surround a block of buildings and sweep through them, herding every male between sixteen and thirty into trucks for transport. This method of lightning search and seizure was called *the razzia*, and every family with young men lived in dread of it.

Flip and Nollie had rearranged their kitchen to give them an emergency hiding place as soon as the razzias started. There was a small potato cellar beneath the kitchen floor: they enlarged the trapdoor letting into it, put a large rug on top of it, and moved the kitchen table to stand on this spot.

Since Mr. Smit’s work at the Beje I realized that this hole under the kitchen floor was a totally inadequate hiding place. Too low in the house for one thing, and probably as Mr. Smit would say, “the first place they’d look.” However, it was not a sustained search by trained people it was intended for, but a swoop by soldiers, a place to get out of sight for half an hour. And for that, I thought, it was probably sufficient. . . .

It was Flip’s birthday when the razzia came to that quiet residential street of identical attached homes. Father, Betsie, and I had come early with a quarter-pound of real English tea from Pickwick.

Nollie, Annaliese, and the two older girls were not yet back when we arrived. A shipment of men’s shoes had been announced by one of the department stores, and Nollie had determined to get Flip a pair “if I have to stand in line all day.”

We were chatting in the kitchen with Cocky and Katrien when all at once Peter and his older brother, Bob, raced into the room, their faces white. “Soldiers! Quick! They’re two doors down and coming this way!”

They jerked the table back, snatched away the rug, and tugged open the trapdoor. Bob lowered himself first, lying down flat, and Peter tumbled in on top of him. We dropped the door shut, yanked the rug over it, and pulled the table back in place. With trembling hands, Betsie, Cocky, and I threw a long tablecloth over it and started laying five places for tea.

There was a crash in the hall as the front door burst open and a smaller crash close by as Cocky dropped a teacup. Two uniformed Germans ran into the kitchen, rifles leveled.

“Stay where you are. Do not move.”

We heard boots storming up the stairs. The soldiers glanced around disgustedly at this room filled with women and one old man. If they had looked closer at Katrien, she would surely have given herself away: her face was a mask of terror. But they had other things on their minds.

“Where are your men?” the shorter soldier asked Cocky in clumsy, thick-accented Dutch.

“These are my aunts,” she said, “and this is my grandfather. My father is at his school, and my mother is shopping, and—”

“I didn’t ask about the whole tribe!” the man exploded in German. Then in Dutch: “Where are your brothers?”

Cocky stared at him a second, then dropped her eyes. My heart stood still. I knew how Nollie had trained her children—but surely, surely now of all times a lie was permissible!

“Do you have brothers?” the officer asked again.

“Yes,” Cocky said softly. “We have three.”

“How old are they?”

“Twenty-one, nineteen, and eighteen.”

Upstairs we heard the sounds of doors opening and shutting, the scrape of furniture dragged from walls.

“Where are they now?” the soldier persisted.

Cocky leaned down and began gathering up the broken bits of cup.

The man jerked her upright. “Where are your brothers?”

“The oldest one is at the Theological College. He doesn’t get home most nights because—” “What about the other two?”

Cocky did not miss a breath.

“Why, they’re under the table.”

Motioning us all away from it with his gun, the soldier seized a corner of the cloth. At a nod from him, the taller man crouched with his rifle cocked. Then he flung back the cloth.

At last the pent-up tension exploded: Cocky burst into spasms of high hysterical laughter. The soldiers whirled around. Was this girl laughing at them?

“Don’t take us for fools!” the short one snarled. Furiously he strode from the room and minutes later the entire squad trooped out—not, unfortunately, before the silent soldier had spied and pocketed our precious packet of tea.

It was a strange dinner party that evening, veering as it did from heartfelt thanksgiving to the nearest thing to a bitter argument our closeknit family had ever had. Nollie stuck by Cocky, insisting she would have answered the same way. “God honors truth-telling with perfect protection!”

Peter and Bob, from the viewpoint of the trapdoor, weren’t so sure. And neither was I. I had never had Nollie’s bravery—no, nor her faith either. But I could spot illogic. “And it isn’t logical to say the truth and *do* a lie! What about Annaliese’s false papers—and that maid’s uniform on Katrien?”

““Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth,”” Nollie quoted. ““Keep the door of my lips.’ Psalm 141!” she finished triumphantly.

“All right, what about the radio? I had to lie with my lips to keep that!” “And yet whatever came from your lips, Corrie, I am sure it was spoken in love!” Father’s kindly voice reproached my flushed face.

Love. How did one show it? How could God Himself show truth and love at the same time in a world like this?

By dying. The answer stood out for me sharper and chillier than it ever had before that night: the shape of a Cross etched on the history of the world.

IT WAS GETTING harder and harder to find safe homes in the country for the scores of Jews who were passing through our underground station by early 1943. Even with ration cards and forged papers there were not enough places for them all. Sooner or later we knew we were going to have to start hiding people here in the city. How sad that the very first should have been the dearest of all.

It was in the middle of a busy morning in the shop when Betsie slipped through the workshop door. “Harry and Cato are here!” she said.

We were surprised. Harry had never come to the Beje in the daytime because he feared his yellow star would cause awkwardness for us. Father and I hurried behind Betsie up the stairs.

Harry de Vries related the familiar story. The visit the evening before from an NSB quisling. The announcement that the shop was confiscated. Who cared if Harry were a Christian? Any Jew can convert to avoid trouble, the NSBer said. This morning the appearance of a uniformed German to make it official: the shop was closed “in the interest of national security.”

“But—if I am a security risk,” said poor Harry, “surely they will not stop with taking my store.”

Doubtless they would not. But just then there was absolutely no available place outside the city. In fact the only underground address we had at the moment was the home of a woman named De Boer, not four blocks from the Beje.

That afternoon I knocked on Mrs. De Boer’s door. She was a dumpy woman dressed in a blue cotton smock and bedroom slippers. We supplied Mrs. De Boer with ration cards and had arranged an emergency appendectomy from there. She showed me the living quarters in her attic. Eighteen Jews were staying there, most of them in their early twenties. “They’ve been cooped up too long,” she said. “They sing and dance and make all sorts of noise.”

“If you think one more couple is too much . . .”

“No. No . . . how can I turn them away? Bring them tonight. We’ll manage.”

And so Harry and Cato began their life at Mrs. De Boer’s, living in one of the narrow dormers in the attic. Betsie went every day to take them some homemade bread, a bit of tea, a slice of sausage. But Betsie’s main concern was not for the morale of Harry and Cato, it was for their very lives.

“They’re in danger, you know,” she told Father and me. “It’s true that these young people are at the bursting point. This afternoon they were making such a commotion I could hear them down on the street.”

There were other concerns, that bitter gray winter. Though there was little snow, the cold came early and stayed late, and fuel was scarce. Here and there in the parks and along the canals trees began to disappear as people cut them down to heat cookstoves and fireplaces. The damp unheated rooms were hardest on the very young and the very old. One morning Christoffels did not appear for

Bible reading in the dining room, nor later in the workshop. His landlady found him dead in his bed, the water in his washbasin frozen solid. We buried the old clockmaker in the splendid suit and vest he had worn to the Hundredth Birthday Party, six years and another lifetime ago.

Spring came slowly. We celebrated my fifty-first birthday with a little party in the de Vrieses’ alcove home.

It was one week later, April 22, that Cato arrived alone at the Beje. Inside the door she burst into tears. “Those foolish young people went crazy! Last night eight of them left the house. Naturally they were stopped and arrested—the boys hadn’t even bothered to cut their sideburns. The Gestapo didn’t have any trouble getting information out of them.”

The house had been raided, she said, at 4:00 that morning. Cato was released when they discovered she was not Jewish. “But everyone else—

Harry, Mrs. De Boer, too—oh what will become of them?”

For the next three days Cato was at the Haarlem police station from early morning until curfew, pestering Dutch and Germans alike to let her see her husband. When they sent her away, she stepped across the street and waited silently on the sidewalk.

Friday just before the noon closing when the shop was crowded, a policeman pushed open the street door, hesitated, then continued back into the rear room. It was Rolf van Vliet, the officer who had been here when our ration cards were first delivered. He took off his cap and I noticed again that startling orange-red hair.

“This watch is still not keeping time,” Rolf said. He took off his wristwatch, placed it on my workbench, and leaned forward. Was he saying something? It was all I could do to hear. “Harry de Vries will be taken to Amsterdam tomorrow. If you want to see him, come promptly at three this afternoon.” And then, “Do you see? The second hand still hesitates at the top of the dial.”

At three that afternoon Cato and I stepped through the tall double doors of the police station. The policeman on duty at the guard post was Rolf himself.

“Come with me,” he said gruffly. He led us through a door and along a high-ceilinged corridor. At a locked metal gate he stopped. “Wait here,” Rolf said.

Someone on the other side opened the gate and Rolf passed through. He was gone several minutes. Then the door opened again and we were face to face with Harry. Rolf stood back as Harry took Cato into his arms.

“You have only a few seconds,” whispered Rolf.

They drew apart, looking into each other’s eyes.

“I’m sorry,” said Rolf. “He’ll have to go back.”

Harry kissed his wife. Then he took my hand and shook it solemnly.

Tears filled our eyes. For the first time Harry spoke. “I shall use this place—wherever they’re taking us,” he said. “It will be my witness stand for Jesus.”

Rolf took Harry by the elbow.

“We will pray for you many times every day, Harry!” I cried as the gate swung shut.

An instinct which I shared with no one told me that this was the last time I would ever see our friend The Bulldog.

THAT NIGHT WE held a meeting about Rolf: Betsie and I and the dozen or so teenage boys and girls who acted as messengers for this work. If Rolf had risked his own safety to tell us about Harry’s transport, perhaps he should work with us.

“Lord Jesus,” I said aloud, “this could be a danger for all of us and for Rolf, too.” But even with the words came a flood of assurance

about this man. How long, I wondered, would we be led by this Gift of Knowledge.

I assigned one of our younger boys to follow Rolf home from work the next day and learn where he lived. The older boys, the ones susceptible to the factory draft, we sent out only after dark now, and then most often dressed as girls.

The following week I visited Rolf at home. “You have no idea how much it meant to see Harry,” I said when I was safe inside. “How can we repay this kindness?”

Rolf ran his hands through his bright hair. “Well, there is a way. The cleaning woman at the jail has a teenage son and they’ve almost picked him up twice. She’s desperate to find another place for him to live.”

“Perhaps I can help,” I said. “Do you think she could find that her watch needs repairing?”

The next day Toos came to the door of Tante Jans’s room where I was talking with two new volunteers for our work. More and more, I was leaving the watch shop to her and Father as our underground “operation” required more time. “There’s a funny looking little woman downstairs,” Toos said. “She says her name is Mietje. She says to tell you ‘Rolf sent her.’”

I met Mietje in the dining room. The hand that I shook was ridged and leathery from years of scrubbing floors. A tuft of hair grew from her chin. “I understand,” I said, “that you have a son you’re very proud of.” “Oh yes!” Mietje’s face lit up at the mention of him.

I took the bulky old alarm clock she had brought with her. “Come for your clock tomorrow afternoon and I’ll hope to have good news.”

That night we listened to our messengers’ reports. The long, cruel winter had opened up places at several addresses. There was a place on a nearby tulip farm, but the farmer had decided he must

be paid for the risk he was taking. We would have to provide a fee—in silver rijksdaalders, not paper money—plus an additional ration card. It didn't happen often that a "host" would require money for his services; when one did we paid gladly.

When Mietje appeared the following morning, I took a small banknote from my purse and tore off a corner. "This is for your son," I said. "Tonight he is to go to the Gravenstenenbrug. There is a tree stump right next to the bridge—they cut down the tree last winter. He is to wait beside it, looking into the canal. A man will come up and ask if he has change for a bank bill. Your son is to match the missing corner, and then follow this man without asking questions."

Betsie came into the dining room as Mietje was grasping my hand in her two sandpaper ones. "I'll make it up to you! Somehow, some day, I'll find a way to repay you!"

Betsie and I exchanged smiles. How could this simple little soul help with the kind of need we faced?

AND SO THE work grew. As each new need arose, a new answer was found, too. Through Pickwick, for example, we met the man at the central telephone exchange whose department handled orders to connect and disconnect lines. With a little rewiring and juggling of numbers, he soon had our instrument in operation.

What a day it was when the old wall phone in the rear hall jangled joyously for the first time in three years! And how we needed it! For by now there were eighty Dutchmen—elderly women and middle-aged men along with our teenagers—working in "God's underground" as we sometimes laughingly called ourselves. Most of these people never saw one another; we kept face-to-face contacts as few as possible. But all knew the Beje. It was headquarters, the center of a spreading web: the knot where all threads crossed.

But if the telephone was a boon, it was also a fresh risk—as was each added worker and connection. We set the phone's ring as low as we could and still hear it; but who might happen to be passing through the hall when it rang?

For that matter how long would curious eyes up and down the street continue to believe that one small watch shop was quite as busy as it appeared? It was true that repair work was in demand: plenty of legitimate customers still passed in and out. But there was altogether too much coming and going, especially in the early evening. The curfew was now 7:00 p.m., which in spring and summer left no nighttime hours at all in which workers could move legally through the streets.

It was an hour and a half before that time on the first of June, 1943, and I was thinking of all this as I sat impatiently behind my workbench.

Six workers still not back and so many loose ends to tie up before 7:00. For one thing, being the first of the month, Fred Koornstra should be arriving with the new ration cards. The hundred cards which had seemed such an extravagant request a year ago were now far too few for our needs, and Fred was only one of our suppliers, some of the stolen cards coming from as far away as Delft. *How long can we go on this way?* I wondered. *How long can we continue to count on this strange protection?*

My thoughts were interrupted by the side entrance bell. Betsie and I reached it at the same instant. In the alley stood a young Jewish woman cradling a tiny blanketed bundle in her arms. Behind her I recognized an intern from the maternity hospital.

The baby, he told us in the hallway, had come prematurely. He had kept mother and child in the hospital longer than permitted already because she had nowhere else to go.

Betsie held out her arms for the baby and at that moment Fred Koornstra opened the door from the shop. He blinked a moment at

seeing people in the hall, then turned with great deliberation to the meter on the wall. The young doctor, seeing what he took to be an actual meterman, turned as white as his own collar. I longed to reassure both him and Fred, but knew that the fewer of the group who knew one another, the safer it was for all. The poor intern gulped a hasty good-bye while Betsie and I got mother and baby up to the dining room and closed the door on Fred and his work.

Betsie poured a bowl of the soup she had cooked for supper from a much-boiled bone. The baby began a thin high wail; I rocked it while the mother ate. Here was a new danger, a tiny fugitive too young to know the folly of making a noise. We had had many Jewish children over a night or several nights at the Beje and even the youngest had developed the uncanny silence of small hunted things. But at two weeks this one had yet to discover how unwelcoming was its world: we would need a place for them far removed from other houses.

And the very next morning into the shop walked the perfect solution. He was a clergyman friend of ours, pastor in a small town outside of Haarlem, and his home was set back from the street in a large wooded park.

“Good morning, Pastor,” I said, the pieces of the puzzle falling together in my mind. “Can we help you?”

I looked at the watch he had brought in for repair. It required a very hard-to-find spare part. “But for you, Pastor, we will do our very best. And now I have something I want to confess.”

The pastor’s eyes clouded. “Confess?”

I drew him out of the back door of the shop and up the stairs to the dining room.

“I confess that I too am searching for something.” The pastor’s face was now wrinkled with a frown. “Would you be willing to take a Jewish mother and her baby into your home? They will almost certainly be arrested otherwise.”

Color drained from the man’s face. He took a step back from me.

“Miss ten Boom! I do hope you’re not involved with any of this illegal concealment and undercover business. It’s just not safe! Think of your father! And your sister—she’s never been strong!”

On impulse I told the pastor to wait and ran upstairs. Betsie had put the newcomers in Willem’s old room, the farthest from windows on the street. I asked the mother’s permission to borrow the infant: the little thing weighed hardly anything in my arms.

Back in the dining room, I pulled back the coverlet from the baby’s face.

There was a long silence. The man bent forward, his hand in spite of himself reaching for the tiny fist curled around the blanket. For a moment I saw compassion and fear struggle in his face. Then he straightened.

“No. Definitely not. We could lose our lives for that Jewish child!”

Unseen by either of us, Father had appeared in the doorway. “Give the child to me, Corrie,” he said.

Father held the baby close, his white beard brushed its cheek, looking into the little face with eyes as blue and innocent as the baby’s own. At last he looked up at the pastor. “You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family.”

The pastor turned sharply on his heels and walked out of the room.

So we had to accept a bad solution to our problem. On the edge of Haarlem was a truck farm that hid refugees for short periods of time. It was not a good location, since the Gestapo had been there already. But there was nowhere else available on short notice. Two workers took the woman and child there that afternoon.

A few weeks later we heard that the farm had been raided. When the Gestapo came to the barn where the woman was hidden, not

the baby but the mother began to shriek with hysteria. She, the baby, and her protectors were all taken.

We never learned what happened to them.

ALTHOUGH WE HAD a friend at the telephone exchange, we could never be sure that our line was not tapped. So we developed a system for coding our underground messages in terms of watches.

"We have a woman's watch here that needs repairing. But I can't find a mainspring. Do you know who might have one?" (We have a Jewish woman in need of a hiding place and we can't find one among our regular contacts.)

"I have a watch here with a face that's causing difficulty. One of the numbers has worked loose and it's holding back the hand. Do you know anyone who does this kind of repair work?" (We have a Jew here whose features are especially Semitic. Do you know anyone who would be willing to take an extra risk?)

"I'm sorry, but the child's watch you left with us is not repairable. Do you have the receipt?" (A Jewish child has died in one of our houses. We need a burial permit.)

One morning in the middle of June the telephone rang with this message. "We have a man's watch here that's giving us trouble. We can't find anyone to repair it. For one thing, the face is very old-fashioned. . . ."

So, a Jew whose features gave him away. This was the hardest kind of person to place. "Send the watch over and I'll see what we can do in our own shop," I said.

Promptly at 7:00 that evening the side doorbell rang. I glanced at the mirror in the window of the dining room where we were still sitting over tea of rose leaves and cherry stems. Even from the side of his head I could tell that this was our old-fashioned watch. His form, his clothes, his very stance were music-hall-comedy Jewish. I ran down to the door. "Do come in."

The smiling slender man in his early thirties, with his protruding ears, balding head, and minuscule glasses, gave an elaborate bow.

I liked him instantly.

Once the door was closed he took out a pipe. "The very first thing I must ask," he said, "is whether or not I should leave behind my good friend the pipe? Meyer Mossel and his pipe are not easily separated. But for you, kind lady, should the smell get into your drapes, I would gladly say good-bye to my friend nicotine."

I laughed. Of all the Jews who had come to our house this was the first to enter gaily and with a question about our own comfort.

"Of course you must keep your pipe!" I said. "My father smokes a cigar—when he can get one these days."

"Ah! These days!" Meyer Mossel raised arms and shoulders in an enormous shrug. "What do you expect, when the barbarians have overrun the camp?"

I took him up to the dining room. There were seven seated at the table, a Jewish couple waiting placement and three underground workers in addition to Father and Betsie. Meyer Mossel's eyes went straight to Father.

"But," he cried, "one of the Patriarchs!"

It was exactly the right thing to say to Father. "But," he returned with equal good humor, "a brother of the Chosen People!"

"Can you recite the 166th Psalm, Opa?" Meyer said.

Father beamed. Of course there is no Psalm 166; the Psalter stops with 150. It must be a joke, and nothing could please Father better than a scriptural joke. "The 166th Psalm?"

"Shall I recite it for you?" Meyer asked.

Father gave a bow of assent and Meyer plunged into verse.

"But that's Psalm 100!" Father interrupted. And then his face lit up. Of course! Psalm 66 started with the identical words. Meyer had

asked for the 100th *and* the 66th Psalm. For the rest of the evening I could hear

Father chuckling, "Psalm 166!"

At 8:45 Father took the old brass-bound Bible from its shelf. He opened to the reading in Jeremiah where we had left off the night before, then with sudden inspiration passed the Bible across the table to Meyer.

"I would consider it an honor if you would read for us tonight," Father said.

Lifting the Book lovingly, Meyer rose to his feet. From a pocket came a small prayer cap, and then, from deep in his throat, half-sung, half pleaded, came the words of the ancient prophet, so feelingly and aching that we seemed to hear the cry of the Exile itself.

Meyer Mossel, he told us afterward, had been cantor in the synagogue in Amsterdam. For all his lightheartedness he had suffered much. Most of his family had been arrested; his wife and children were in hiding on a farm in the north which had declined to accept Meyer—"for obvious reasons," he said with a grimace at his own unmistakable features.

And gradually it dawned on all of us that this endearing man was at the Beje to stay. It was certainly not an ideal place, but for Meyer nothing could be ideal right now.

"At least," I told him one evening, "your name doesn't have to give you away too." Ever since the days when Willem was studying church history, I had remembered the venerable fourth-century church father, Eusebius.

"I think we'll call you Eusebius," I decided. We were sitting in Tante Jans's front room with Kik and some other young men, who had made us a delivery of forged travel-permits too late to get home by curfew.

Meyer leaned back and stared at the ceiling pensively. He took his pipe out of his mouth. "Eusebius Mossel," he said, tasting the words.

"No, it doesn't sound quite right. Eusebius Gentile Mossel."

We all laughed. "Don't be a goose," Betsie said. "You must change both names!"

Kik looked slyly at Father. "Opa! How about Smit? That seems a popular name these days."

"It does seem so!" said Father, not catching the joke.

"Extraordinarily popular!"

And Eusebius Smit it became.

Changing Meyer's name was easy—at once he became "Eusie." But getting Eusie to eat non-kosher food was something else. The problem, of course, was that we were grateful for food of any kind: we stood in line for hours, this third year of the occupation, to get whatever was available.

One day the paper announced that coupon number four was good for pork sausage. It was the first meat we'd had in weeks. Lovingly Betsie prepared the feast, saving every drop of fat for flavoring other foods later.

"Eusie," Betsie said as she carried the steaming casserole of pork and potatoes to the table, "the day has come."

Eusie knocked the ashes out of his pipe and considered his plight out loud. He, who had always eaten kosher, he, the oldest son of an oldest son of a respected family, in fact, he Meyer Mossel Eusebius Smit, was seriously being asked to eat pork.

Betsie placed a helping of sausage and potato before him. "Bon appetit."

The tantalizing odor reached our meat-starved palates. Eusie wet his lips with his tongue. "Of course," he said, "there's a provision for this in the Talmud." He speared the meat with his fork, bit hungrily,

and rolled his eyes heavenward in pure pleasure. “And I’m going to start hunting for it, too,” he said, “just as soon as dinner’s over.”

As if Eusie’s arrival had broken down a last hesitation, within a week there were three new permanent additions to the household. First there was Jop, our current apprentice, whose daily trip from his parents’ home in the suburbs had twice nearly ended in seizure for the factory transport. The second time it happened his parents asked if he could stay at the Beje and we agreed. The other two were Henk, a young lawyer, and Leendert, a schoolteacher.

Leendert made an especially important contribution to the secret life of the Beje. He installed our electric warning system.

By now I had learned to make the nighttime trip out to Pickwick’s almost as skillfully as could Kik. One evening when I had gratefully accepted a cup of coffee, my wall-eyed friend sat me down for a lecture.

“Cornelia,” he said, settling his bulk on a velvet chair too small for him, “I understand you have no alarm system in your house. This is purest folly. Also I am given to believe that you are not carrying on regular drills for your guests.”

I was always amazed at how well Pickwick knew what went on at the Beje.

“You know that a raid may come any day,” Pickwick continued. “I don’t see how you can avoid one. Scores of people in and out—and an NSB agent living over Kan’s up the street.

“Your secret room is no good to you if people can’t get to it in time. I know this Leendert. He’s a good man and a very passable electrician. Get him to put a buzzer in every room with a door or a window on the street. Then hold practice drills until your people can disappear in that room without a trace in less than a minute. I’ll send someone to get you started.”

Leendert did the electrical work that weekend. He installed a buzzer near the top of the stairs—loud enough to be heard all over the house but not outside. Then he placed buttons to sound the buzzer at every vantage point where trouble might first be spotted. One button went beneath the dining room windowsill, just below the mirror which gave onto the side door. Another went in the downstairs hall just inside that door and a third inside the front door on the Barteljorisstraat. He also put a button behind the counter in the shop and one in each workbench as well as beneath the windows in Tante Jans’s rooms.

We were ready for our first trial run. The four unacknowledged members of our household were already climbing up to the secret room two times a day: in the morning to store their night clothes, bedding, and toilet articles, and in the evening to put away their day things. Members of our group, too, who had to spend the night, kept raincoats, hats, anything they had brought with them, in that room. Altogether that made a good deal of traffic in and out of my small bedroom—smaller now indeed by nearly a yard. Many nights my last waking sight would be Eusie in long robe and tasseled nightcap, handing his day clothes through the secret panel.

But the purpose of the drills was to see how rapidly people could reach the room at any hour of the day or night without prior notice. A tall sallow-faced young man arrived from Pickwick one morning to teach me how to conduct the drills.

“Smit!” Father exclaimed when the man introduced himself. “Truly it’s most astonishing! We’ve had one Smit after another here lately. Now you bear a great resemblance to . . .”

Mr. Smit disentangled himself gently from Father’s genealogical inquiries and followed me upstairs.

“Mealtimes,” he said. “That’s a favorite hour for a raid. Also the middle of the night.” He strode from room to room, pointing

everywhere to evidence that more than three people lived in the house. "Watch wastebaskets and ashtrays."

He paused in a bedroom door. "If the raid comes at night they must not only take their sheets and blankets but get the mattress turned. That's the S.D.'s favorite trick—feeling for a warm spot on a bed."

Mr. Smit stayed for lunch. There were eleven of us at the table that day, including a Jewish lady who had arrived the night before and a Gentile woman and her small daughter, members of our underground, who acted as "escorts." The three of them were leaving for a farm in Brabant right after lunch.

Betsie had just passed around a stew so artfully prepared you scarcely missed the meat when, without warning, Mr. Smit leaned back in his chair and pushed the button below the window.

Above us the buzzer sounded. People sprang to their feet, snatching up glasses and plates, scrambling for the stairs, while the cat clawed halfway up the curtain in consternation. Cries of "Faster!" "Not so loud!" and "You're spilling it!" reached us as Father, Betsie, and I hastily rearranged table and chairs to look like a lunch for three in progress.

"No, leave my place," Mr. Smit instructed. "Why shouldn't you have a guest for lunch? The lady and the little girl could have stayed, too." At last we were seated again and silence reigned upstairs.

The whole process had taken four minutes.

A little later we were all gathered again around the dining room table. Mr. Smit set out before him the incriminating evidence he had found: two spoons and a piece of carrot on the stairs, pipe ashes in an "unoccupied" bedroom. Everyone looked at Eusie who blushed to the tips of his large ears.

"Also those," he pointed to the hats of mother and daughter still dangling from the pegs on the dining room wall. "If you have to

hide, stop and think what you arrived with. Besides which, you're all simply too slow."

The next night I sounded the alarm again and this time we shaved a minute thirty-three seconds off our run. By our fifth trial we were down to two minutes. We never did achieve Pickwick's ideal of under a minute, but with practice we learned to jump up from whatever we were doing and get those who had to hide in the secret room in seventy seconds. Father, Toos, and I worked on "stalling techniques," which we would use if the Gestapo came through the shop door; Betsie invented a similar strategy for the side door. With those delaying tactics we hoped we could gain a life-saving seventy ticks of a second hand.

Because the drills struck so close to the fear that haunted each of our guests—never spoken, always present—we tried to keep these times from becoming altogether serious. "Like a game!" we'd tell each other: "a race to beat our own record!" One of our group owned the bakery in the next street. Early in the month I would deposit a supply of sugar coupons with him. Then when I decided it was time for a drill, I would go to him for a bag of cream puffs—an inexpressible treat in those sweetless days—to be secreted in my workbench and brought out as a reward for a successful practice.

Each time the order of cream puffs was larger. For by now, in addition to the workers whom we wanted to initiate into the system, we had three more permanent boarders: Thea Dacosta, Meta Monsanto, and Mary Itallie.

Mary Itallie, at seventy-six the oldest of our guests, was also the one who posed the greatest problem. The moment Mary stepped through our door I heard the asthmatic wheezing which had made other hosts unwilling to take her in.

Since her ailment compromised the safety of the others, we took up the problem in caucus. The seven most concerned—Eusie, Jop,

Henk, Leendert, Meta, Thea, and Mary herself—joined Father, Betsie, and me in Tante Jans’s front room.

“There is no sense in pretending,” I began. “Mary has a difficulty—especially after climbing stairs—that could put you all in danger.”

In the silence that followed, Mary’s labored breathing seemed especially loud.

“Can I speak?” Eusie asked.

“Of course.”

“It seems to me that we’re all here in your house because of some difficulty or other. We’re the orphan children—the ones nobody else wanted. Any one of us is jeopardizing all the others. I vote that Mary stay.”

“Good,” said lawyer Henk, “let’s put it to the vote.”

Hands began rising but Mary was struggling to speak. “Secret ballots,” she brought out at last. “No one should be embarrassed.”

Henk brought a sheet of paper from the desk in the next room and tore it into nine small strips. “You too,” he said, handing ballots to Betsie, Father, and me. “If we’re discovered, you suffer the same as us.”

He handed around pencils. “Mark ‘No’ if it’s too great a risk, ‘Yes’ if you think she belongs here.”

For a moment pencils scratched, then Henk collected the folded ballots. He opened them in silence, then reached over and dropped them into Mary’s lap.

Nine little scraps of paper, nine times the word, “Yes.”

AND SO OUR “family” was formed. Others stayed with us a day or a week, but these seven remained, the nucleus of our happy household.

That it could have been happy, at such a time and in such circumstances, was largely a tribute to Betsie. Because our guests’

physical lives were so very restricted, evenings under Betsie’s direction became the door to the wide world. Sometimes we had concerts, with Leendert on the violin, and Thea, a truly accomplished musician, on the piano. Or Betsie would announce “an evening of Vondel” (the Dutch Shakespeare), with each of us reading a part. One night a week she talked Eusie into giving Hebrew lessons, another night Meta taught Italian.

The evening’s activity had to be kept brief because the city now had electricity only a short while each night, and candles had to be hoarded for emergencies. When the lamps flickered and dimmed, we would wind back down to the dining room where my bicycle was set up on its stand. One of us would climb onto it, and others taking chairs, and then while the rider pedaled furiously to make the headlight glow bright, someone would pick up the chapter from the night before. We changed cyclist and reader often as legs or voice grew tired, reading our way through histories, novels, plays. Father always went upstairs after prayers at 9:15, but the rest of us lingered, reluctant to break the circle, sorry to see the evening end. “Oh well,” Eusie would say hopefully as we started at last to our rooms. “Maybe there’ll be a drill tonight! I haven’t had a cream puff in nearly a week.”

8 Storm Clouds Gather

If evenings were pleasant, daytimes grew increasingly tense. We were too big; the group was too large, the web too widespread. For a year and a half now we had gotten away with our double lives. Ostensibly we were still an elderly watchmaker living with his two

spinster daughters above his tiny shop. In actuality the Beje was the center of an underground ring that spread now to the farthest corners of Holland. Here daily came dozens of workers, reports, appeals. Sooner or later we were going to make a mistake.

It was mealtimes especially when I worried. There were so many now for every meal that we had to set the chairs diagonally around the dining room table. The cat loved this arrangement. Eusie had given him the Hebrew name *Maher Shalal Hashbaz*, meaning appropriately enough, "hastening to the spoils, hurrying to the prey." With the chairs set so close, M. S. Hashbaz could circle the entire table on our shoulders, purring furiously, traveling round and round.

But I was uneasy at being so many. The dining room was only five steps above street-level; a tall passerby could see right in the window. We'd hung a white curtain across it providing a kind of screen while letting in light. Still, only when the heavy blackout shades were drawn at night did I feel truly private.

At lunch one day, looking through the thin curtain, I thought I saw a figure standing just outside in the alley. When I looked again a minute later it was still there. There was no reason for anyone to linger there unless he was curious about what went on in the Beje. I got up and parted the curtain an inch.

Standing a few feet away, seemingly immobilized by some terrible emotion, was old Katrien from Nollie's house!

I bolted down the stairs, threw open the door, and pulled her inside.

Although the August day was hot, the old lady's hands were cold as ice.

"Katrien! What are you doing here? Why were you just standing there?"

"She's gone mad!" she sobbed. "Your sister's gone mad!"

"Nollie? Oh, what's happened!"

"They came!" she said. "The S. D.! I don't know what they knew or who told them. Your sister and Annaliese were in the living room and I heard her!" The sobs broke out again. "I heard her!" "Heard what?" I nearly screamed.

"Heard what she told them! They pointed at Annaliese and said, 'Is this a Jew?' And your sister said, 'Yes.'"

I felt my knees go weak. Annaliese, blonde, beautiful young Annaliese with the perfect papers. And she'd trusted us! Oh Nollie, Nollie, what has your rigid honesty done! "And then?" I asked.

"I don't know. I ran out the back door. She's gone mad!"

I left Katrien in the dining room, wheeled my bicycle down the stairs, and bumped as fast as I could the mile and a half to Nollie's. Today the sky did not seem larger above the Wagenweg. At the corner of Bos en Hoven Straat, I leaned my bike against a lamppost and stood panting, my heart throbbing in my throat. Then, as casually as I was able, I strolled up the sidewalk toward the house. Except for a car parked at the street curb directly in front, everything looked deceptively normal. I walked past. Not a sound from behind the white curtains. Nothing to distinguish this house from the replicas of it on either side.

When I got to the corner I turned around. At that moment the door opened and Nollie came out. Behind her walked a man in a brown business suit. A minute later a second man appeared, half pulling, half supporting Annaliese. The young woman's face was white as chalk; twice before they reached the car, I thought she would faint. The car doors slammed, the motor roared, and they were gone.

I pedaled back to the Beje fighting back tears of anxiety. Nollie, we soon learned, had been taken to the police station around the corner, to one of the cells in back. But Annaliese had been sent to

the old Jewish theater in Amsterdam from which Jews were transported to extermination camps in Germany and Poland.

It was Mietje, stooped, care-worn little Mietje, whose offer of help we had discounted, who kept us in touch with Nollie. She was in wonderful spirits, Mietje said, singing hymns and songs in her high sweet soprano.

How could she sing when she had betrayed another human being! Mietje delivered the bread that Betsie baked for Nollie each morning, and the blue sweater Nollie asked for, her favorite, with flowers embroidered over the pocket.

Mietje relayed another message from Nollie, one especially for me: "No ill will happen to Annaliese. God will not let them take her to Germany. He will not let her suffer because I obeyed Him."

Six days after Nollie's arrest, the telephone rang. Pickwick's voice was on the other end. "I wonder, my dear, if I could trouble you to deliver that watch yourself?"

A message, then, that he could not relay over the phone. I biked at once out to Aerdenhout, taking along a man's watch for safe measure.

Pickwick waited until we were in the drawing room with the door shut. "The Jewish theater in Amsterdam was broken into last night. Forty Jews were rescued. One of them—a young woman—was most insistent that Nollie know: 'Annaliese is free.'"

He fixed me with one of his wide-set eyes. "Do you understand this message?"

I nodded, too overcome with relief and joy to speak. How had Nollie known? How had she been so sure?

AFTER TEN DAYS in the Haarlem jail, Nollie was transferred to the federal prison in Amsterdam.

Pickwick said that the German doctor in charge of the prison hospital was a humane man who occasionally arranged a medical discharge. I went at once to Amsterdam to see him. But what could I say, I wondered, as I waited in the entrance hall of his home. How could I get into the good graces of this man?

Lolling about the foyer, sniffing from time to time at my legs and hands, were three perfectly huge Doberman pinschers. I remembered the book we were reading aloud by bicycle lamp, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. One of the techniques advocated by Dale Carnegie was: find the man's hobby. *Hobby, dogs . . . I wonder . . .*

At last the maid returned and showed me into a small sitting room. "How smart of you, Doctor!" I said in German to the grizzle-haired man on the sofa.

"Smart?"

"Yes, to bring these lovely dogs with you. They must be good company when you have to be away from your family."

The doctor's face brightened. "You like dogs then?"

About the only dogs I had ever known were Harry de Vries' bulldogs.

"Bulls are my favorite. Do you like bulls?"

"People don't realize it," the doctor said eagerly, "but bulldogs are very affectionate."

For perhaps ten minutes, while I racked my brain for everything I had ever heard or read on the subject, we talked about dogs. Then abruptly the doctor stood up. "But I'm sure you haven't come here to talk about dogs. What's on your mind?"

I met his eyes. "I have a sister in prison here in Amsterdam. I was wondering if . . . I don't think she's well."

The doctor smiled. "So, you aren't interested in dogs at all."

"I'm interested now," I said, smiling, too. "But I'm far more interested in my sister."

"What's her name?"

"Nollie van Woerden."

The doctor went out of the room and came back with a brown notebook. "Yes. One of the recent arrivals. Tell me something about her.

What is she in prison for?"

Taking a chance, I told the doctor that Nollie's crime had been hiding a Jew. I also told him that she was the mother of six children, who if left without aid could become a burden to the State. (I did not mention that the youngest of these children was now seventeen.)

"Well, we'll see." He walked to the door of the sitting room. "You must excuse me now."

I was more encouraged than at any time since Nollie's arrest as I rode the train back to Haarlem. But days, then a week, then two weeks passed and there was no further news. I went back to Amsterdam. "I've come to see how those Dobermans are," I told the doctor.

He was not amused. "You mustn't bother me. I know that you have not come to talk about dogs. You must give me time." So there was nothing to do but wait.

It was a bright September noon when seventeen of us were squeezed around the dining room table. All of a sudden Nils, seated across from me, turned pale. Nils, one of our workers, had come to report old Katrien safely arrived at a farm north of Alkmaar. Now Nils spoke in a low normal voice.

"Do not turn around. Someone is looking over the curtain."

Over the curtain! But—that was impossible He'd have to be ten feet high. The table fell silent.

"He's on a ladder, washing the window," Nils said.

"I didn't order the windows washed," said Betsie.

Whoever it was, we mustn't sit here in this frozen, guilty silence! Eusie had an inspiration. "Happy Birthday!" he sang. "Happy Birthday to you!" We all got the idea and joined in lustily. "Happy Birthday, dear Opa . . .," the song was still echoing through the Beje when I went out the side door and stood next to the ladder, looking up at the man holding bucket and sponge.

"What are you doing? We didn't want the windows washed.

Especially not during the party!"

The man took a piece of paper from his hip pocket and consulted it.

"Isn't this Kuiper's?"

"They're across the street. But—anyhow, come in and help us celebrate." The man shook his head. He thanked me, but he had work to do. I watched him crossing the Barteljorisstraat with his ladder to Kuiper's candy store.

"Did it work?" a clamor of voices asked when I got back to the dining room. "Do you think he was spying?" I didn't answer. I didn't know.

THAT WAS the hardest. Never knowing. And one of the biggest unknowns was my own performance under questioning. As long as I was awake, I felt fairly sure of myself. But if they should come at night . . . Over and over again the group worked with me—Nils, Henk, Leendert—bursting into my room without warning, shaking me awake, hurling questions at me.

The first time it happened I was sure the real raid had come. There was a terrific pounding on my door, then the beam of a flashlight in my eyes. "Get up! On your feet!" I could not see the man who was speaking.

"Where are you hiding your nine Jews?"

“We only have six Jews now.”

There was an awful silence. The room light came on to show Rolf clutching his head with his hands. “Oh no. Oh no,” he kept saying. “It can’t be that bad.”

“Think now,” said Henk just behind him. “The Gestapo is trying to trap you. The answer is, ‘What Jews! We don’t have Jews here.’”

“Can I try again?”

“Not now,” said Rolf. “You’re wide-awake now.”

They tried again a few nights later. “The Jews you’re hiding, where do they come from?”

I sat up groggily. “I don’t know. They just come to the door.”

Rolf flung his hat to the floor. “No, no, no!” he shouted. “‘What Jews! There are no Jews!’ Can’t you learn?”

“I’ll learn,” I promised. “I’ll do better.”

And sure enough, the next time I woke a little more completely.

Half a dozen shadowy forms filled the room. “Where do you hide the ration cards?” a voice demanded.

Under the bottom stair, of course. But this time I would not be trapped into saying so. A crafty reply occurred to me: “In the Frisian clock on the stairwell!”

Kik sat down beside me on the bed and put an arm around me.

“That was better, Tante Corrie,” he said. “You tried, this time. But remember— you *have* no cards except the three for you, Opa, and Tante Betsie. There *is* no underground activity here, you don’t understand what they’re talking about. . . .”

Gradually, with repeated drills, I got better. Still, when the time actually came, when they were real Gestapo agents really trained in getting the truth from people, how would I perform?

WILLEM’S UNDERGROUND WORK brought him frequently to

Haarlem. There was an expression of something like despair mingled now with the worry lines in his face. Twice soldiers had been to the nursing home, and although he had managed to deceive them about most of the Jews still in residence there, one sick blind old woman had been taken away.

“Ninety-one!” Willem kept saying. “She couldn’t even walk—they had to carry her to the car.”

So far, Willem’s position as a minister had prevented direct action against him and Tine, but he was watched, he said, more closely than ever. To provide an official reason for his visits to Haarlem, he started conducting a weekly prayer fellowship at the Beje each Wednesday morning.

But Willem could do nothing routinely—especially pray—and soon the meeting was attended by dozens of Haarlemers hungry for something to believe in, this fourth year of the occupation. Most of those coming to the services had no idea of the double life of the Beje. In a way they posed a fresh danger as they passed workers and couriers from other underground groups coming and going on the narrow stairs. But in another way, we thought, it might be an advantage to have these flocks of obviously innocent people in and out. That, at least, was our hope.

We were sitting around the supper table after curfew one night, three ten Booms, the seven “permanent guests,” and two Jews for whom we were seeking homes, when the shop doorbell chimed.

A customer after closing? And one bold enough to stand on the Barteljorisstraat after curfew? Taking the keys from my pocket, I hurried down to the hall, unlocked the workshop door, and felt my way through the dark store. At the front door I listened a moment.

“Who’s there?” I called.

“Do you remember me?”

A man's voice speaking German. "Who is it?" I asked in the same language.

"An old friend, come for a visit. Open the door!"

I fumbled with the lock and drew the door gingerly back. It was a German soldier in uniform. Before I could reach the alarm button behind the door, he had pushed his way inside. Then he took off his hat, and in the October twilight, I recognized the young German watchmaker whom Father had discharged four years ago.

"Otto!" I cried.

"Captain Altschuler," he corrected me. "Our positions are slightly reversed, Miss ten Boom, are they not?"

I glanced at his insignia. He was not a captain or anything close to it, but I said nothing. He looked around the shop.

"Same stuffy little place," he said. He reached for the wall switch, but I put my hand over it.

"No! We don't have blackout shades in the shop!"

"Well, let's go upstairs where we can talk over old times. That old clock cleaner still around?"

"Christoffels? He died in the fuel shortage last winter."

Otto shrugged. "Good riddance then! What about the pious old Bible reader?"

I was edging my way to the sales counter where another bell was located. "Father is very well, thank you."

"Well, aren't you going to invite me up to pay my respects?"

Why was he so eager to go upstairs? Had the wretched fellow come just to gloat, or did he suspect something? My finger found the button.

"What was that?" Otto whirled around suspiciously.

"What was what?"

"That sound! I heard a kind of buzzing."

"I didn't hear anything."

But Otto had started back through the workshop.

"Wait!" I shouted. "Let me get the front door locked and I'll go up with you! I—I want to see how long it takes them to recognize you."

I dawdled at the door as long as I dared: definitely his suspicions were aroused. Then I followed him through the rear door into the hall. Not a sound from the dining room or the stairs. I dashed past him up the steps and rapped on the door.

"Father! Betsie!" I cried in what I hoped was a playful voice. "I'll give you three—no, uh—six guesses who's standing here!"

"No guessing games!" Otto reached past me and flung open the door.

Father and Betsie looked up from their meal. The table was set for three, my unfinished plate on the other side. It was so perfect that even I, who had just seen twelve people eating here, could scarcely believe this was anything but an innocent old man dining with his daughters. The alpina sign stood on the sideboard: they had remembered everything.

Uninvited, Otto pulled out a chair. "Well!" he crowed. "Things happened just like I said, didn't they?"

"So it would seem," said Father mildly.

"Betsie," I said, "give Captain Altschuler some tea!"

Otto took a sip of the brew Betsie poured him and glared around the table at us. "Where did you get real tea! No one else in Holland has tea." How stupid of me. The tea had come from Pickwick.

"If you must know," I said, "it comes from a German officer. But you mustn't ask any further questions." I tried to imply clandestine dealings with a high occupation official.

Otto lingered another fifteen minutes. And then, feeling perhaps that he had underlined his victory sufficiently, sauntered out into the empty streets.

It was only after another half-hour that we dared give the all clear to nine cramped and shaky people.

THE SECOND WEEK in October, during a particularly hectic morning with underground problems, the secret telephone number rang downstairs in the hall. I hurried down to pick it up; only Father, Betsie, or I ever answered it.

“Well!” said a voice. “Aren’t you coming to pick me up?” It was Nollie.

“Nollie! When—How—Where are you?”

“At the train station in Amsterdam! Only I have no money for the trainfare.”

“Stay right there! Oh Nollie, we’re coming!”

I biked to Bos en Hoven Straat and then with Flip and the children who happened to be at home, hurried to the Haarlem station. We saw Nollie even before our train came to a stop in Amsterdam—her bright blue sweater like a patch of blue sky in the big dark shed.

Seven weeks in prison had left her pallid-faced, but as radiantly Nollie as ever. A prison doctor, she said, had pronounced her low blood pressure a serious condition, one that might leave her permanently disabled and her six children a burden to society. Her face wrinkled in puzzlement as she said it.

CHRISTMAS 1943 was approaching. The light snow that had fallen was the only festive quality of the season. Every family, it seemed, had someone in jail, in a work camp, or in hiding. For once the religious side of the holidays was uppermost in every mind.

At the Beje, we had not only Christmas to celebrate but also Hanukkah, the Jewish “Festival of Lights.” Betsie found a Hanukkah candlestand among the treasures stored with us behind the dining room cupboard and set it up on the upright piano. Each night we lighted one more candle as Eusie read the story of the Maccabees.

Then we would sing, haunting, melancholy desert music. We were all very Jewish those evenings.

About the fifth night of the Festival, as we were gathered round the piano, the doorbell in the alley rang. I opened it to find Mrs. Beukers, wife of the optician next door, standing in the snow. Mrs. Beukers was as round and placid as her husband was thin and worried, but tonight her plump face was twisted with anxiety.

“Do you think,” she whispered, “your Jews could sing a little more softly? We can hear them right through the walls and—well, there are all kinds of people on this street. . . .”

Back in Tante Jans’s rooms, we considered this news in consternation. If the Beukers family knew all about our affairs, how many other people in Haarlem did too?

It wasn’t long before we discovered that one who did was the chief of police himself. One dark January morning when it was trying to snow again, Toos burst into underground “headquarters” in Tante Jans’s rear room clutching a letter in her hand. The envelope bore the seal of the Haarlem police.

I tore it open. Inside, on the police chief’s stationery, was a handwritten note. I read it silently, then aloud.

“You will come to my office this afternoon at three o’clock.”

For twenty minutes we tried to analyze that note. Some felt it was not a prelude to arrest. Why would the police give you a chance to escape? Still, it was safest to prepare for search and imprisonment. Workers slipped out of the house, one at a time. Boarders emptied wastebaskets and picked up scraps of sewing in preparation for a quick flight to the secret room. I burned incriminating papers in the long-empty coal hearth in the dining room. The cat caught the tension in the air and sulked beneath the sideboard.

Then I took a bath, perhaps the last for months, and packed a prison bag according to what Nollie and others had learned: a Bible,

a pencil, needle and thread, soap—or what we called soap these days—toothbrush, and comb. I dressed in my warmest clothes with several sets of

underwear and a second sweater beneath the top one. Just before 3:00, I hugged Father and Betsie tight, and walked through the gray slush to the Smedestraat.

The policeman on duty was an old acquaintance. He looked at the letter, then at me with a curious expression. “This way,” he said.

He knocked at the door marked chief. The man who sat behind the desk had red-gray hair combed forward over a bald spot. A radio was playing. The chief reached over and twisted the volume knob not down but up.

“Miss ten Boom,” he said. “Welcome.”

“How do you do, sir.”

The chief had left his desk to shut the door behind me. “Do sit down,” he said. “I know all about you, you know. About your work.”

“The watchmaking you mean. You’re probably thinking more about my father’s work than my own.”

The chief smiled. “No, I mean your ‘other’ work.”

“Ah, then you’re referring to my work with retarded children? Yes. Let me tell you about that—”

“No, Miss ten Boom,” the chief lowered his voice. “I am not talking about your work with retarded children. I’m talking about still another work, and I want you to know that some of us here are in sympathy.”

The chief was smiling broadly now. Tentatively I smiled back. “Now, Miss ten Boom,” he went on, “I have a request.”

The chief sat down on the edge of his desk and looked at me steadily. He dropped his voice until it was just audible. He was, he said, working with the underground himself. But an informer in the

police department was leaking information to the Gestapo. “There’s no way for us to deal with this man but to kill him.”

A shudder went down my spine.

“What alternative have we?” the chief went on in a whisper. “We can’t arrest him—there are no prisons except those controlled by the Germans. But if he remains at large many others will die. That is why I wondered, Miss ten Boom, if in your work *you* might know of someone who could

—”

“Kill him?”

“Yes.”

I leaned back. Was this all a trap to trick me into admitting the existence of a group, into naming names?

“Sir,” I said at last, seeing the chief’s eyes flicker impatiently, “I have always believed that it was my role to save life, not destroy it. I understand your dilemma, however, and I have a suggestion. Are you a praying man?”

“Aren’t we all, these days?”

“Then let us pray together now that God will reach the heart of this man so that he does not continue to betray his countrymen.”

There was a long pause. Then the chief nodded. “That I would very much like to do.”

And so there in the heart of the police station, with the radio blaring out the latest news of the German advance, we prayed. We prayed that this Dutchman would come to realize his worth in the sight of God and the worth of every other human being on earth.

At the end of the prayer, the chief stood up. “Thank you, Miss ten Boom.” He shook my hand. “Thank you again. I know now that it was wrong to ask you.”

Still clutching my prison bag, I walked through the foyer and around the corner to the Beje.

Upstairs, people crowded around wanting to know everything. But I did not tell them. Not everything—I did not want Father and Betsie to know that we had been asked to kill. It would have been an unnecessary burden for them to bear.

THE EPISODE WITH the chief of police should have been encouraging. Apparently we had friends in high places. As a matter of fact, the news had the opposite effect upon us. Here was one more illustration of how our secret was no secret at all. All of Haarlem seemed to know what we were up to.

We knew we should stop the work, but how could we? Who would keep open the network of supplies and information on which the safety of hundreds depended? If a hideaway had to be abandoned, as happened all the time, who would coordinate the move to another address? We had to go on, but we knew that disaster could not be long in coming.

As a matter of fact, it came first to Jop, the seventeen-year-old apprentice who had sought a safe home at the Beje.

Late one afternoon near the end of January 1944, Rolf stepped stealthily into the workshop. He glanced at Jop. I nodded: Jop was party to everything that went on in the house.

“There’s an underground home in Ede that is going to be raided this evening. Do you have anyone who can go?”

But I did not. Not a single courier or escort person was at the Beje this late in the day.

“I’ll go,” Jop said.

I opened my mouth to protest that he was inexperienced, and liable to the factory transport himself if stopped on the street. Then I

thought of the unsuspecting people at Ede. We had a wardrobe of girls’ scarves and dresses upstairs. . . .

“Then quickly, boy,” Rolf said. “You must leave immediately.” He gave Jop the details and hurried away. In a few moments Jop reappeared, making a very pretty brunette in long coat and kerchief, a fur muff hiding his hands. Did the lad have some kind of premonition? To my astonishment he turned at the door and kissed me.

Jop was supposed to be back by the 7:00 p.m. curfew. Seven came and went. Perhaps he had been delayed and would return in the morning.

We did have a visitor early the next day but it was not Jop. I knew the minute Rolf stepped through the door that bad news was weighing him down.

“It’s Jop, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“What happened?”

Rolf had learned the story from the sergeant at the night desk. When Jop got to the address in Ede, the Gestapo was already there. Jop had rung the bell; the door opened. Pretending to be the owner of the house, the S.D. man had invited Jop in.

“And Corrie,” Rolf said, “we must face it. The Gestapo will get information out of Jop. They have already taken him to Amsterdam. How long will he be able to hold his tongue?”

Once again we considered stopping the work. Once again we discovered we could not.

That night Father and Betsie and I prayed long after the others had gone to bed. We knew that in spite of daily mounting risks we had no choice but to move forward. This was evil’s hour: we could not run away from it. Perhaps only when human effort had done its best and failed, would God’s power alone be free to work.