

The Hiding Place

Part 3



by Corrie ten Boom

9 The Raid

At the sound of someone in my room, I opened my eyes painfully. It was Eusie, carrying up his bedding and night clothes to store in the secret room. Behind him came Mary and Thea with their bundles.

I shut my eyes again. It was the morning of February 28, 1944. For two days I had been in bed with influenza. My head throbbed, my joints were on fire. Every little sound, Mary's wheeze, the scrape of the secret panel, made me want to shriek. I heard Henk and Meta come in, then Eusie's laugh as he handed the day things out to the others through the low door.

Go away all of you! Leave me alone! I bit my lip to keep from saying it.

At last they collected their clothes and belongings and trooped out, closing the door behind them. *Where was Leendert? Why hadn't he come up?* Then I remembered that Leendert was away for a few days setting up electrical warning systems like ours in several of our host homes. I drifted back into a feverish sleep.

The next thing I knew, Betsie was standing at the foot of the bed, a steaming cup of herb tea in her hand. "I'm sorry to wake you, Corrie. But there's a man down in the shop who insists he will talk only to you."

"Who is he?"

"He says he's from Ermelo. I've never seen him before."

I sat up shakily. "That's all right. I have to get up anyway. Tomorrow the new ration cards come."

I sipped the scalding tea, then struggled to my feet. There by the bed lay my prison bag, packed and ready as it had been since the summons from the chief of police. In fact I'd been adding to it. Besides the Bible, clothing, and toilet things, it now held vitamins, aspirins, iron pills for Betsie's anemia, and much else. It had

become a kind of talisman for me, a safeguard against the terrors of prison.

I got slowly into my clothes and stepped out onto the landing. The house seemed to reel around me. I crept down, clinging to the handrail. At the door to Tante Jans's rooms, I was surprised to hear voices. I looked in. Of course, I'd forgotten. It was Wednesday morning, people were gathering for Willem's weekly service. I saw Nollie passing around "occupation coffee" as we called the current brew of roots and dried figs. Peter was already at the piano, as he was most weeks, to provide the music. I continued down around the stairs, passing new arrivals streaming up.

As I arrived, wobble-kneed, in the shop, a small sandy-haired man sprang forward to meet me. "Miss ten Boom!"

"Yes?" There was an old Dutch expression: you can tell a man by the way he meets your eyes. This man seemed to concentrate somewhere between my nose and my chin. "Is it about a watch?" I asked.

"No, Miss ten Boom, something far more serious!" His eyes seemed to make a circle around my face. "My wife has just been arrested. We've been hiding Jews, you see. If she is questioned, all of our lives are in danger."

"I don't know how I can help," I said.

"I need six hundred guilders. There's a policeman at the station in Ermelo who can be bribed for that amount. I'm a poor man—and I've been told you have certain contacts."

"Contacts?"

"Miss ten Boom! It's a matter of life and death! If I don't get it right away, she'll be taken to Amsterdam and then it will be too late."

Something about the man's behavior made me hesitate. And yet how could I risk being wrong? "Come back in half an hour. I'll have the money," I said.

For the first time the man's eyes met mine.

"I'll never forget this," he said.

The amount was more than we had at the Beje so I sent Toos to the bank with instructions to hand the man the money, but not to volunteer any information.

Then I struggled back up the stairs. Where ten minutes earlier I'd been burning with fever, now I was shaking with cold. I stopped at Tante Jans's rooms just long enough to take a briefcase of papers from the desk. Then with apologies to Willem and the others, I continued to my room. I undressed again, refilled the vaporizer where it was hissing on its small spirit-stove, and climbed back into bed. For a while I tried to concentrate on the names and addresses in the briefcase. *Five cards needed this month in Zandvoort. None in Overveen. We would need eighteen in . . .* The flu roared behind my eyes, the papers swam in front of me. The briefcase slipped from my hand and I was asleep.

IN MY FEVERED dream a buzzer kept ringing. On and on it went. Why wouldn't it stop? Feet were running, voices whispering. "Hurry! Hurry!"

I sat bolt upright. People were running past my bed. I turned just in time to see Thea's heels disappear through the low door. Meta was behind her, then Henk.

But—I hadn't planned a drill for today! Who in the world—unless—unless it wasn't a drill. Eusie dashed past me, white-faced, his pipe rattling in the ashtray that he carried in shaking hands.

And at last it penetrated my numbed brain that the emergency had come. One, two, three people already in the secret room; four as Eusie's black shoes and scarlet socks disappeared. *But Mary—where was Mary?* The old woman appeared in the bedroom door, mouth open, gasping for air. I sprang from my bed and half-pulled, half-shoved her across the room.

I was sliding the secret panel down behind her when a slim whitehaired man burst into the room. I recognized him from Pickwick's, someone high in the national Resistance. I'd had no idea he was in the house. He dived after Mary. *Five, six. Yes, that was right with Leendert away.*

The man's legs vanished and I dropped the panel down and lept back into bed. Below I heard doors slamming, heavy footsteps on the stairs. But it was another sound that turned my blood to water: the strangling, grating rasp of Mary's breathing.

"Lord Jesus!" I prayed. "You have the power to heal! Heal Mary now!"

And then my eye fell on the briefcase, stuffed with names and addresses. I snatched it up, yanked up the sliding door again, flung the case inside, shoved the door down, and pushed my prison bag up against it. I had just reached the bed again when the bedroom door flew open.

"What's your name?"

I sat up slowly and—I hoped—sleepily.

"What?"

"Your name!"

"Cornelia ten Boom." The man was tall and heavy-set with a strange, pale face. He wore an ordinary blue business suit. He turned and shouted down the stairs, "We've got one more up here, —Willemse." He turned back to me. "Get up! Get dressed!"

As I crawled out from under the covers, the man took a slip of paper from his pocket and consulted it. "So you're the ring leader!" He looked at me with new interest. "Tell me now, where are you hiding the Jews?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The man laughed. "And you don't know anything about an underground ring, either. We'll see about that!"

He had not taken his eyes off me, so I began to pull on my clothes over my pajamas, ears straining for a sound from the secret room.

"Let me see your papers!"

I pulled out the little sack that I wore around my neck. When I took out my identification folder, a roll of bills fell out with it. The man stooped, snatched up the money from the floor, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he took my papers and looked at them. For a moment the room was silent. Mary Itallie's wheeze—why wasn't I hearing it?

The man threw the papers back at me. "Hurry up!"

But he was not in half the hurry I was to get away from that room. I buttoned my sweater all wrong in my haste and stuffed my feet into my shoes without bothering to tie them. Then I was about to reach for my prison bag.

Wait.

It stood where I had shoved it in my panic: directly in front of the secret panel. If I were to reach down under the shelf to get it now, with this man watching my every move, might not his attention be attracted to the last place on earth I wanted him to look?

It was the hardest thing I had ever done to turn and walk out of that room, leaving the bag behind.

I stumbled down the stairs, my knees shaking as much from fear as from flu. A uniformed soldier was stationed in front of Tante Jans's rooms; the door was shut. I wondered if the prayer meeting had ended, if Willem and Nollie and Peter had gotten away. Or were they all still in there? How many innocent people might be involved?

The man behind me gave me a little push and I hurried on down the stairs to the dining room. Father, Betsie, and Toos were sitting on chairs pulled back against the wall. Beside them sat three underground workers who must have arrived since I had gone

upstairs. On the floor beneath the window, broken in three pieces, lay the alpina sign. Someone had managed to knock it from the sill.

A second Gestapo agent in plain clothes was pawing eagerly through a pile of silver rijksdaalders and jewelry heaped on the dining room table. It was the cache from the space behind the corner cupboard: it had been indeed the first place they looked.

"Here's the other one listed at the address," said the man who had brought me down. "My information says she's the leader of the whole outfit."

The man at the table, the one called Willemse, glanced at me, then turned back to the loot in front of him. "You know what to do, Kapteyn."

Kapteyn seized me by the elbow and shoved me ahead of him down the remaining five steps and into the rear of the shop. Another soldier in uniform stood guard just inside this door. Kapteyn prodded me through to the front room and pushed me against the wall.

"Where are the Jews?"

"There aren't any Jews here."

The man struck me hard across the face.

"Where do you hide the ration cards?"

"I don't know what you're—"

Kapteyn hit me again. I staggered up against the astronomical clock. Before I could recover he slapped me again, then again, and again, stinging blows that jerked my head backward.

"Where are the Jews?"

Another blow.

"Where is your secret room?"

I tasted blood in my mouth. My head spun, my ears rang—I was losing consciousness. "Lord Jesus," I cried out, "protect me!" Kapteyn's hand stopped in midair.

"If you say that name again I'll kill you!"

But instead his arm slowly dropped to his side. "If you won't talk, that skinny one will."

I stumbled ahead of him up the stairs. He pushed me into one of the chairs against the dining room wall. Through a blur, I saw him lead Betsie from the room.

Above us hammer blows and splintering wood showed where a squad of trained searchers was probing for the secret room. Then down in the alley the doorbell rang. But the sign! Didn't they see the alpina sign was gone and . . . ? I glanced at the window and caught my breath. There on the sill, the broken pieces fitted carefully together, sat the wooden triangle.

Too late I looked up to see Willemse staring intently at me. "I thought so!" he said. "It was a signal, wasn't it?"

He ran down the stairs. Above us the hammering and the tramp of boots had stopped. I heard the alley door open and Willemse's voice, smooth and ingratiating.

"Come in, won't you?"

"Have you heard!" A woman's voice. "They've got Oom Herman!" *Pickwick? Not Pickwick!*

"Oh?" I heard Willemse say. "Who was with him?" He pumped her as hard as he could, then placed her under arrest. Blinking with fright and confusion, the woman was seated with us along the wall. I recognized her only as a person who occasionally took messages for us about the city. I stared in anguish at the sign in the window announcing to the world that all was as usual at the Beje. Our home had been turned into a trap: how many more would fall into it

before this day was over? And Pickwick! Had they really caught Pickwick?

Kapteyn appeared with Betsie in the dining room door. Her lips were swollen and puffy, a bruise was darkening on her cheek. She half fell into the chair next to mine.

“Oh Betsie! He hurt you!”

“Yes.” She dabbed at the blood on her mouth. “I feel so sorry for him.”

Kapteyn whirled, his white face even paler. “Prisoners will remain silent!” he shrieked. Two men were clumping down the stairs and into the dining room carrying something between them. They had discovered the old radio beneath the stairs.

“Law-abiding citizens, are you?” Kapteyn went on. “You! The old man there. I see you believe in the Bible.” He jerked his thumb at the wellworn book on its shelf. “Tell me, what does it say in there about obeying the government?”

“‘Fear God,’” Father quoted, and on his lips in that room the words came as blessing and reassurance. “‘Fear God and honor the queen.’”

Kapteyn stared at him. “It doesn’t say that. The Bible doesn’t say that.”

“No.” Father admitted. “It says, ‘Fear God, honor the king.’ But in our case, that is the queen.”

“It’s not king or queen!” roared Kapteyn. “We’re the legal government now, and you’re all lawbreakers!”

The doorbell rang again. Again there were the questions and the arrest. The young man—one of our workers—had barely been assigned a chair when again the bell sounded. It seemed to me that we had never had so many callers: the dining room was getting crowded. I felt sorriest for those who had come simply on social visits. An elderly retired missionary was brought in, jaw quivering

with fear. At least, from the banging and thumping above, they had not yet discovered the secret room.

A new sound made me jump. The phone down in the hall was ringing.

“That’s a telephone!” cried Willemse.

He glared around the room, then, grabbing me by the wrist, yanked me down the stairs behind him. He thrust the receiver up against my ear but kept his own hand on it.

“Answer!” he said with his lips.

“This is the ten Boom residence and shop,” I said as stiffly as I dared.

But the person on the other end did not catch the strangeness.

“Miss ten Boom, you’re in terrible danger! They’ve arrested Herman Sluring! They know everything! You’ve got to be careful!” On and on the woman’s voice babbled, the man at my side hearing everything.

She had scarcely hung up when the phone rang again. A man’s voice, and again the message, “Oom Herman’s been taken to the police station.

That means they’re on to everything. . . .”

At last, the third time I repeated my formal and untypical little greeting, there was a click on the other end. Willemse snatched the earpiece from my hand.

“Hello! Hello!” he shouted. He jiggled the cradle on the wall. The line had gone dead. He shoved me back up the stairs and into my chair again. “Our friends wised up,” he told Kapteyn. “But I heard enough.” Apparently Betsie had received permission to leave her chair: she was slicing bread at the sideboard. I was surprised to realize it was already lunchtime. Betsie passed the bread around the room but I shook my head. The fever was raging again. My throat ached and my head throbbed.

A man appeared in the doorway. "We've searched the whole place, Willemse," he said. "If there's a secret room here, the devil himself built it."

Willemse looked from Betsie to Father to me. "There's a secret room," he said quietly. "And people are using it or they would have admitted it. All right. We'll set a guard around the house till they've turned to mummies."

In the hush of horror that followed, there was a gentle pressure on my knees. Maher Shalal Hashbaz had jumped up into my lap to rub against me. I stroked the shining black fur. What would become of him now? I would not let myself think about the six people upstairs. It had been half an hour since the doorbell had rung last. Whoever had caught my message over the phone must have spread the alarm. Word was out: no one else would walk into the trap at the Beje.

Apparently Willemse had come to the same conclusion because abruptly he ordered us on our feet and down to the hallway with our coats and hats. Father, Betsie, and me he held in the dining room till last. In front of us down the stairs came the people from Tante Jans's rooms. I held my breath scanning them. Apparently most of those at the prayer service had left before the raid. But by no means all. Here came Nollie, behind her, Peter. Last in the line came Willem.

The whole family then. Father, all four of his children, one grandchild. Kapteyn gave me a shove.

"Get moving."

Father took his tall hat from the wall peg. Outside the dining room door, he paused to pull up the weights on the old Frisian clock.

"We mustn't let the clock run down," he said.

Father! Did you really think we would be back home when next the chain ran out?

The snow had gone from the streets; puddles of dirty water stood in the gutters as we marched through the alley and into the Smedestraat. The walk took only a minute, but by the time we got inside the double doors of the police station, I was shaking with cold. I looked anxiously around the foyer for Rolf and the others we knew, but saw no one. A contingent of German soldiers seemed to be supplementing the regular police force.

We were herded along a corridor and through the heavy metal door where I had last seen Harry de Vries. At the end of this hall was a large room that had obviously been a gymnasium. Windows high in the walls were covered with wire mesh; rings and basketball hoops were roped to the ceiling. Now a desk stood in the center of the room with a German army officer seated behind it. Tumbling mats had been spread out to cover part of the floor and I collapsed onto one of them.

For two hours the officer took down names, addresses, and other statistics. I counted those who had been arrested with us: 35 people from the raid on the Beje.

People from previous arrests were sitting or lying about on the mats, too, some of them faces we knew. I looked for Pickwick but he was not among them. One of them, a fellow watchmaker who often came to the Beje on business, seemed especially distressed at what had happened to us. He came and sat down beside Father and me.

At last the officer left. For the first time since the alarm buzzer sounded, we could talk among ourselves. I struggled to sit up. "Quick!" I croaked. "We've got to agree on what to say! Most of us can simply tell the truth but—" My voice died in my throat. It seemed to my flu-addled brain that Peter was giving me the most ferocious frown I had ever seen.

“But if they learn that Uncle Willem was teaching this morning from the Old Testament, it could make trouble for him,” Peter finished for me.

He jerked his head to one side, and I clamored unsteadily to my feet. “Tante Corrie!” he hissed when we were on the other side of the room. “That man, the watchmaker! He’s a Gestapo plant.” He patted my head as though I were a sick child. “Lie down again, Tante Corrie. Just for heaven’s sake don’t do any talking.”

I was waked by the heavy door of the gym slamming open. In strode Rolf.

“Let’s have it quiet in here!” he shouted. He leaned close to Willem and said something I could not hear. “Toilets are out back,” he continued in a loud voice. “You can go one at a time under escort.”

Willem sat down beside me. “He says we can flush incriminating papers if we shred them fine enough.” I fumbled through my coat pockets. There were several scraps of papers and a billfold containing a few paper rijksdaalders. I went over each item, trying to think how I would explain it in a court process. Beside the row of outdoor toilets was a basin with a tin cup on a chain. Gratefully I took a long drink—the first since the tea Betsie had brought me that morning.

Toward evening a policeman carried into the gym a large basket of fresh hot rolls. I could not swallow mine. Only the water tasted good to me, though I grew embarrassed at asking again and again to be taken outside.

When I got back the last time, a group had gathered around Father for evening prayers. Every day of my life had ended like this: that deep steady voice, that sure and eager confiding of us all to the care of God. The Bible lay at home on its shelf, but much of it was stored in his heart. His blue eyes seemed to be seeing beyond the locked and crowded room, beyond Haarlem, beyond earth itself, as

he quoted from memory: “Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word. . . . Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. . . .”

None of us slept much. Each time someone left the room he had to step over a dozen others. At last light crept through the high, screened windows at the top of the room. The police again brought rolls. As the long morning wore on, I dozed with my back up against the wall; the worst pain now seemed to be in my chest. It was noon when soldiers entered the room and ordered us on our feet. Hastily we struggled into our coats and filed again through the cold corridors.

In the Smedestraat a wall of people pressed against police barricades set across the street. As Betsie and I stepped out with Father between us, a murmur of horror greeted the sight of “Haarlem’s Grand Old Man” being led to prison. In front of the door stood a green city bus with soldiers occupying the rear seats. People were climbing aboard while friends and relatives in the crowd wept or simply stared. Betsie and I gripped Father’s arms to start down the steps. Then we froze. Stumbling past us between two soldiers, hatless and coatless, came Pickwick. The top of his bald head was a welter of bruises, dried blood clung to the stubble on his chin. He did not look up as he was hauled onto the bus.

Father, Betsie, and I squeezed into a double seat near the front. Through the window I caught a glimpse of Tine standing in the crowd. It was one of those radiant winter days when the air seemed to shimmer with light. The bus shuddered and started up. Police cleared a path and we inched forward. I gazed hungrily out the window, holding onto Haarlem with my eyes. Now we were crossing the Grote Markt, the walls of the great cathedral glowing a thousand shades of gray in the crystal light. In a strange way it seemed to me that I had lived through this moment before.

Then I recalled.

The vision. The night of the invasion. I had seen it all. Willem, Nollie, Pickwick, Peter—all of us here—drawn against our wills across this square. It had all been in the dream—all of us leaving Haarlem, unable to turn back. Going where?

10 Scheveningen

Outside Haarlem the bus took the south road, paralleling the sea. On our right rose the low sandy hills of the dune country, soldiers silhouetted on the ridges. Clearly we were not being taken to Amsterdam.

A two-hour drive brought us instead into the streets of The Hague. The bus stopped in front of a new, functional building; word was whispered back that this was Gestapo headquarters for all of Holland. We were marched—all but Pickwick, who seemed unable to rise out of his seat— into a large room where the endless process of taking down names, addresses, and occupations began all over again.

On the other side of the high counter running the length of the room, I was startled to see both Willemse and Kapteyn. As each of the prisoners from Haarlem reached the desk, one or the other would lean forward and speak to a man seated at a typewriter and there would be a clatter of sound from the machine.

Suddenly the chief interrogator's eye fell on Father. "That old man!" he cried. "Did he have to be arrested? You, old man!"

Willem led Father up to the desk. The Gestapo chief leaned forward. "I'd like to send you home, old fellow," he said. "I'll take your word that you won't cause any more trouble."

I could not see Father's face, only the erect carriage of his shoulders and the halo of white hair above them. But I heard his answer.

"If I go home today," he said evenly and clearly, "tomorrow I will open my door again to any man in need who knocks."

The amiability drained from the other man's face. "Get back in line!" he shouted. "*Schnell!* This court will tolerate no more delays!"

But delays seemed all that this court existed for. As we inched along the counter, there were endless repetitions of questions, endless consulting of papers, endless coming and going of officials. Outside the windows the short winter day was fading. We had not eaten since the rolls and water at dawn.

Ahead of me in line, Betsie answered, "Unmarried," for the twentieth time that day.

"Number of children?" droned the interrogator.

"I'm unmarried," Betsie repeated.

The man did not even look up from his papers. "Number of children!" he snapped.

"No children," said Betsie resignedly.

Toward nightfall a stout little man wearing the yellow star was led past us to the far end of the room. A sound of scuffling made us all look up. The wretched man was attempting to hold onto something clutched in his hands.

"It's mine!" he kept shouting. "You can't take it! You can't take my purse!"

What madness possessed him? What good did he imagine money would do him now? But he continued to struggle, to the obvious glee of the men around him.

"Here, Jew!" I heard one of them say. He lifted his booted foot and kicked the small man in the back of his knees. "This is how we take things from a Jew."

It made so much noise. That was all I could think as they continued to kick him. I clutched the counter to keep from falling myself as the sounds continued. Wildly, unreasonably, I hated the man being kicked, hated him for being so helpless and so hurt. At last I heard them drag him out.

Then all at once I was standing in front of the chief questioner. I looked up and met Kapteyn's eyes, just behind him.

"This woman was the ringleader," he said.

Through the turmoil inside me, I realized it was important for the other man to believe him. "What Mr. Kapteyn says is true," I said.

"These others—they know nothing about it. It was all my—"

"Name?" the interrogator inquired imperturbably.

"Cornelia ten Boom, and I'm the—"

"Age?"

"Fifty-two. The rest of these people had nothing to do—"

"Occupation?"

"But I've told you a dozen times!" I burst out in desperation.

"Occupation?" he repeated.

It was dark night when we were marched at last out of the building. The green bus was gone. Instead we made out the bulk of a large canvas-roofed army truck. Two soldiers had to lift Father over the tailgate. There was no sign of Pickwick. Father, Betsie, and I found places to sit on a narrow bench that ran around the sides.

The truck had no springs and bounced roughly over the bomb-pitted streets of The Hague. I slipped my arm behind Father's back to keep him from striking the edge. Willem, standing near the back, whispered back what he could see of the blacked-out city. We had left the downtown section and seemed to be headed west toward the suburb of Scheveningen. That was our destination then, the federal penitentiary named after this seaside town.

The truck jerked to a halt; we heard a screech of iron. We bumped forward a few feet and stopped again. Behind us massive gates clanged shut.

We climbed down to find ourselves in an enormous courtyard surrounded by a high brick wall. The truck had backed up to a long low building; soldiers prodded us inside. I blinked in the white glare of bright ceiling lights.

"Nasen gegen Mauer!" (Noses to the wall!)

I felt a shove from behind and found myself staring at cracked plaster. I turned my eyes as far as I could, first left and then right.

There was

Willem. Two places away from him, Betsie. Next to me on the other side was Toos. All like me standing with their faces to the wall. Where was Father?

There was an endless wait while the scars on the wall before my eyes became faces, landscapes, animal shapes. Then somewhere to the right a door opened.

"Women prisoners follow me!"

The matron's voice sounded as metallic as the squealing door.

As I stepped away from the wall, I glanced swiftly around the room for Father. There he was—a few feet out from the wall, seated in a straight-backed chair. One of the guards must have brought it for him.

Already the matron was starting down the long corridor that I could see through the door. But I hung back, gazing desperately at Father, Willem, Peter, all our brave underground workers.

"Father!" I cried suddenly. "God be with you!"

His head turned toward me. The harsh overhead light flashed from his glasses.

"And with you, my daughters," he said.

I turned and followed the others. Behind me the door slammed closed. *And with you! And with you! Oh Father, when will I see you next?*

Betsie's hand slipped around mine. A strip of coconut-palm matting ran down the center of the wide hall. We stepped onto it off the damp concrete.

"Prisoners walk to the side." It was the bored voice of the guard behind us. "Prisoners must not step on the matting." Guiltily we stepped off the privileged path.

Ahead of us in the corridor was a desk, behind it a woman in uniform. As each prisoner reached this point, she gave her name for the thousandth time that day and placed on the desk whatever she was wearing of value. Nollie, Betsie, and I unstrapped our beautiful wristwatches. As I handed mine to the officer, she pointed to the simple gold ring that had belonged to Mama. I wriggled it from my finger and laid it on the desk along with my wallet and paper guilders.

The procession down the corridor continued. The walls on both sides of us were lined with narrow metal doors. Now the column of women halted: the matron was fitting a key into one of the doors. We heard the thud of a bolt drawn back, the screech of hinges. The matron consulted a list in her hand, then called the name of a lady I didn't even know, one of those who had been at Willem's prayer meeting.

Was it possible that that had been only yesterday? Was this only Thursday night? Already the events at the Beje seemed part of another lifetime. The door banged shut; the column moved on. Another door unlocked, another human being closed behind it. No two from Haarlem in the same cell.

Among the very first names read from the list was Betsie's. She stepped through the door; before she could turn or say good-bye, it

had closed. Two cells farther on, Nollie left me. The clang of those two doors rang in my ears as the slow march continued.

Now the corridor branched and we turned left. Then right, then left again, an endless world of steel and concrete.

"Ten Boom, Cornelia."

Another door rasped open. The cell was deep and narrow, scarcely wider than the door. A woman lay on the single cot, three others on straw ticks on the floor. "Give this one the cot," the matron said. "She's sick."

And indeed, even as the door slammed behind me, a spasm of coughing seized my chest and throat.

"We don't want a sick woman in here!" someone shouted. They were stumbling to their feet, backing as far from me as the narrow cubicle would allow.

"I'm . . . I'm so very sorry—" I began, but another voice interrupted me.

"Don't be. It isn't your fault. Come on, Frau Mikes, give her the cot." The young woman turned to me. "Let me hang up your hat and coat."

Gratefully I handed her my hat, which she added to a row of clothes hanging from hooks along one wall. But I kept my coat wrapped tight around me. The cot had been vacated and I moved shakily toward it, trying not to sneeze or breathe as I squeezed past my cellmates. I sank down on the narrow bed, then went into a fresh paroxysm of coughs as a cloud of choking black dust rose from the filthy straw mattress. At last the attack passed and I lay down. The sour straw smell filled my nostrils. I felt each slat of wood through the thin pallet.

I will never be able to sleep on such a bed, I thought, and the next thing I knew it was morning and there was a clattering at the door. "Food call," my cellmates told me. I struggled to my feet. A square

of metal had dropped open in the door, forming a small shelf. Onto this someone in the hall was placing tin plates filled with a steaming gruel.

“There’s a new one here!” the woman called Frau Mikes called through the aperture. “We get five portions!” Another tin plate was slammed onto the shelf. “If you’re not hungry,” Frau Mikes added, “I’ll help you with it.”

I picked up my plate, stared at the watery gray porridge, and handed it silently to her. In a little while the plates were collected and the passthrough in the door slammed shut.

Later in the morning a key grated in the lock, the bolt banged, and the door opened long enough for the sanitary bucket to be passed out. The wash basin was also emptied and returned with clean water. The women picked up their straw pallets from the floor and piled them in a corner, raising a fresh storm of dust which started me coughing helplessly again.

Then a prison boredom—which I soon learned to fear above all else—settled over the cell. At first I attempted to relieve it by talking with the others, but though they were as courteous as people can be who are living literally on top of one another, they turned aside my questions and I never learned much about them.

The young woman who had spoken kindly to me the night before, I did discover, was a baroness, only seventeen years old. This young girl paced constantly, from morning until the overhead lightbulb went off at night, six steps to the door, six steps back, dodging those sitting on the floor, back and forth like an animal in a cage.

Frau Mikes turned out to be an Austrian woman who had worked as a charwoman in an office building. She often cried for her canary. “Poor little thing! What will become of him? They’ll never think to feed him.”

This would start me thinking of our cat. Had Maher Shalal Hashbaz made his escape into the street—or was he starving inside the

sealed house? I would picture him prowling among the chairlegs in the dining room, missing the shoulders he loved to walk on. I tried not to let my mind venture higher in the house, not to let it climb the stairs to see if Thea, Mary, Eusie—no! I could do nothing for them here in this cell. God knew they were there.

One of my cellmates had spent three years here in Scheveningen. She could hear the rattle of the meal cart long before the rest of us and tell by the footstep who was passing in the corridor. “That’s the trustee from medical supply. Someone’s sick.” “This is the fourth time someone in 316 has gone for a hearing.”

Her world consisted of this cubicle and the corridor outside—and soon I began to see the wisdom of this narrowed vision, and why prisoners instinctively shied away from questions about their larger lives. For the first days of my imprisonment, I stayed in a frenzy of anxiety about Father, Betsie, Willem, Pickwick. Was Father able to eat this food? Was Betsie’s blanket as thin as this one?

But these thoughts led to such despair that I soon learned not to give in to them. In an effort to fix my mind on something, I asked Frau Mikes to teach me the card game that she played hour after hour. She had made the cards herself with the squares of toilet paper that were issued two a day to each prisoner; all day she sat on a corner of the cot endlessly laying them out in front of her and gathering them up again.

I was a slow learner, since no cards of any kind had been played at the Beje. Now as I began to grasp the solitaire game, I wondered what Father’s resistance to them had been—surely nothing could be more innocent than this succession of shapes called clubs, spades, diamonds. . .

But as the days passed I began to discover a subtle danger. When the cards went well my spirits rose. It was an omen: someone from

Haarlem had been released! But if I lost. . . . Maybe someone was ill. The people in the secret room had been found. . . .

At last I had to stop playing. In any case I was finding it hard to sit up so long. Increasingly I was spending the days as I did the nights, tossing on the thin straw pallet trying in vain to find a position in which all aches at once were eased. My head throbbed continually, pain shot up and down my arms, my cough brought up blood.

I was thrashing feverishly on the cot one morning when the cell door opened and there stood the steel-voiced matron I had seen the night I entered the cell two weeks before.

“Ten Boom, Cornelia.” I struggled to my feet.

“Bring your hat and your coat and come with me.”

I looked around at the others for a hint as to what was happening. “You’re going to the outside,” our prison expert said. “When you take your hat you always go outside.”

My coat I was wearing already, but I took my hat from its hook and stepped out into the corridor. The matron relocked the door, then set off so rapidly that my heart hammered as I trotted after her, careful to stay off the precious matting. I stared yearningly at the locked doors on either side of us; I could not remember behind which ones my sisters had disappeared.

At last we stepped out into the broad, high-walled courtyard.

Sky! For the first time in two weeks, blue sky! How high the clouds were, how inexpressibly white and clean. I remembered suddenly how much sky had meant to Mama.

“Quick!” snapped the matron.

I hurried to the shiny black automobile beside which she was standing. She opened the rear door and I got in. Two others were already in the back seat, a soldier and a woman with a gaunt gray face. In front next to the driver slumped a desperately ill-looking

man whose head lolled strangely on the seat back. As the car started up, the woman beside me lifted a blood-stained towel to her mouth and coughed into it. I understood: the three of us were ill. Perhaps we were going to a hospital!

The massive prison gate opened and we were in the outside world, spinning along broad city streets. I stared in wonderment through the window. People walking, looking in store windows, stopping to talk with friends. Had I truly been as free as that only two weeks ago?

The car parked before an office building; it took both the soldier and the driver to get the sick man up three flights of stairs. We entered a waiting room jammed with people and sat down under the watchful eyes of the soldier. When nearly an hour had passed, I asked permission to use the lavatory. The soldier spoke to the trim white-uniformed nurse behind the reception desk.

“This way,” she said crisply. She took me down a short hall, stepped into the bathroom with me, and shut the door. “Quick! Is there any way I can help?”

I blinked at her. “Yes. Oh yes! A Bible! Could you get me a Bible? And—a needle and thread! And a toothbrush! And soap!”

She bit her lip doubtfully. “So many patients today—and the soldier— but I’ll do what I can.” And she was gone.

But her kindness shone in the little room as brightly as the gleaming white tiles and shiny faucets. My heart soared as I scrubbed the grime off my neck and face.

A man’s voice at the door: “Come on! You’ve been in there long enough!”

Hastily I rinsed off the soap and followed the soldier back to the waiting room. The nurse was back at her desk, coolly efficient as before; she did not look up. After another long wait my name was called. The doctor asked me to cough, took my temperature and

blood pressure, applied his stethoscope, and announced that I had pleurisy with effusion, pre-tubercular.

He wrote something on a sheet of paper. Then with one hand on the doorknob he laid the other for an instant on my shoulder.

“I hope,” he said in a low voice, “that I am doing you a favor with this diagnosis.”

In the waiting room the soldier was on his feet ready for me. As I crossed the room, the nurse rose briskly from her desk and swished past me. In my hand I felt a small knobby something wrapped in paper.

I slid it into my coat pocket as I followed the soldier down the stairs. The other woman was already back in the car; the sick man did not reappear. All during the return ride my hand kept straying to the object in my pocket, stroking it, tracing the outline. “Oh Lord, it’s so small, but still it could be—let it be a Bible!”

The high walls loomed ahead, the gate rang shut behind us. At last, at the end of the long echoing corridors, I reached my cell and drew the package from my pocket. My cellmates crowded around me as I unwrapped the newspaper with trembling hands. Even the baroness stopped her pacing to watch.

As two bars of precious prewar soap appeared, Frau Mikes clapped her hand over her mouth to suppress her yelp of triumph. No toothbrush or needle but—unheard-of wealth—a whole packet of safety pins! And, most wonderful of all, not indeed a whole Bible, but in four small booklets, the four Gospels.

I shared the soap and pins among the five of us but, though I offered to divide the books as well, they refused. “They catch you with those,” the knowledgeable one said, “and it’s double sentence and *kalte kost* as well.” *Kalte kost*—the bread ration alone without the daily plate of hot food—was the punishment constantly held over our heads. If we made too much noise we’d have *kalte kost*. If

we were slow with the bucket it would be *kalte kost*. But even *kalte kost* would be a small price to pay, I thought as I stretched my aching body on the foul straw, for the precious books I clutched between my hands.

IT WAS TWO evenings later, near the time when the lightbulb usually flickered off, that the cell door banged open and a guard strode in.

“Ten Boom, Cornelia,” she snapped. “Get your things.”

I stared at her, an insane hope rising in me. “You mean—”

“Silence! No talking!”

It did not take long to gather my “things”: my hat and an undervest that was drying after a vain attempt to get it clean in the much-used basin water. My coat with the precious contents of its pockets had never yet been off my back. *Why such strict silence?* I wondered. Why should I not be allowed even a good-bye to my cellmates? Would it be so very wrong for a guard to smile now and then, or give a few words of explanation?

I said farewell to the others with my eyes and followed the stiff-backed woman into the hall. She paused to lock the door, then marched off down the corridor. But—the wrong way! We were not heading toward the outside entrance at all, but deeper into the maze of prison passageways.

Still without a word, she halted in front of another door and opened it with a key. I stepped inside. The door clanged behind me. The bolt slammed shut.

The cell was identical with the one I had just left, six steps long, two wide, a single cot at the back. But this one was empty. As the guard’s footsteps died away down the corridor, I leaned against the cold metal of the door. *Alone. Alone behind these walls. . . .*

I must not let my thoughts run wildly; I must be very mature and very practical. Six steps. Sit down on the cot. This one reeked even worse than the other: the straw seemed to be fermenting. I reached for the blanket: someone had been sick on it. I thrust it away but it was too late. I dashed for the bucket near the door and leaned weakly over it.

At that moment the lightbulb in the ceiling went out. I groped back to the cot and huddled there in the dark, setting my teeth against the stink of the bedding, wrapping my coat tighter about me. The cell was bitter cold, wind hammered against the wall. This must be near the outside edge of the prison: the wind had never shrieked so in the other one.

What had I done to be separated from people this way? Had they discovered the conversation with the nurse at the doctor's office? Or perhaps some of the prisoners from Haarlem had been interrogated and the truth about our group was known. Maybe my sentence was solitary confinement for years and years. . . .

In the morning my fever was worse. I could not stand even long enough to get my food from the shelf in the door, and after an hour or so the plate was taken away untouched.

Toward evening the pass-through dropped open again and the hunk of coarse prison bread appeared. By now I was desperate for food but less able to walk than ever. Whoever was in the hall must have seen the problem. A hand picked up the bread and hurled it toward me. It landed on the floor beside the cot where I clawed for it and gnawed it greedily.

For several days while the fever raged, my supper was delivered in this manner. Mornings the door squealed open and a woman in a blue smock carried the plate of hot gruel to the cot. I was as starved for the sight of a human face as for the food and tried in a hoarse croak to start a conversation. But the woman, obviously a fellow

prisoner, would only shake her head with a fearful glance toward the hall.

The door also opened once a day to let in the trustee from Medical Supply with a dose of some stinging yellow liquid from a very dirty bottle. The first time he entered the cell, I clutched at his sleeve. "Please!" I rasped. "Have you seen an eighty-four-year-old man—white hair, a long beard? Casper ten Boom! You must have taken medicine to him!"

The man tugged loose. "I don't know! I don't know anything!"

The cell door slammed back against the wall, framing the guard. "Solitary prisoners are not permitted to talk! If you say another word to one of the work-duty prisoners, it will be *kalte kost* for the duration of your sentence!" And the door banged behind the two of them.

This same trustee was also charged with recording my temperature each time he came. I had to take off my shirt and place the thermometer between my arm and the side of my body. It did not look to me like an accurate system: sure enough, by the end of the week, an irritable voice called through the food slot, "Get up and get the food yourself! Your fever's gone—you won't be waited on again!"

I felt sure that the fever had not gone, but there was nothing for it but to creep, trembling, to the door for my plate. When I had replaced it I would lie down again on the smelly straw, steeling myself for the bawling out I knew would come. "Look at the great lady, back in bed again! Are you going to lie there all day long?" Why lying down was such a crime I could never understand. Nor indeed what one was supposed to accomplish if one got up. . . .

Thoughts, now that I was alone, were a bigger problem than ever. I could no longer even pray for family and friends by name, so great was the fear and longing wrapped around each one. "Those I love,

Lord," I would say. "You know them. You see them. Oh—bless them all!"

Thoughts were enemies. That prison bag . . . how many times I opened it in my mind and pawed through all the things I had left behind. *A fresh blouse. Aspirin, a whole bottle of them. Toothpaste with a kind of pepperminty taste, and—*

Then I would catch myself. How ridiculous, such thoughts! If I had it to do again, would I really put these little personal comforts ahead of human lives? Of course not. But in the dark nights, as the wind howled and the fever pulsed, I would draw that bag out of some dark corner of my mind and root through it once again. *A towel to lay on this scratchy straw. An aspirin . . .*

IN ONLY ONE way was this new cell an improvement over the first one. It had a window. Seven iron bars ran across it, four bars up and down. It was high in the wall, much too high to look out of, but through those twenty-eight squares I could see the sky.

All day I kept my eyes fixed on that bit of heaven. Sometimes clouds moved across the squares, white or pink or edged with gold, and when the wind was from the west I could hear the sea. Best of all, for nearly an hour each day, gradually lengthening as the spring sun rose higher, a shaft of checkered light streamed into the dark little room. As the weather turned warm and I grew stronger, I would stand up to catch the sunshine on my face and chest, moving along the wall with the moving light, climbing at last onto the cot to stand on tiptoe in the final rays.

As my health returned, I was able to use my eyes longer. I had been sustaining myself from my Scriptures a verse at a time; now, like a starving man, I gulped entire Gospels at a reading, seeing whole the magnificent drama of salvation.

And as I did, an incredible thought prickled the back of my neck. Was it possible that this—all of this that seemed so wasteful and so

needless —this war, Scheveningen prison, this very cell, none of it was unforeseen or accidental? Could it be part of the pattern first revealed in the

Gospels? Hadn't Jesus—and here my reading became intent indeed— hadn't Jesus been defeated as utterly and unarguably as our little group and our small plans had been?

But . . . if the Gospels were truly the pattern of God's activity, then defeat was only the beginning. I would look around at the bare little cell and wonder what conceivable victory could come from a place like this.

The prison expert in the first cell had taught me to make a kind of knife by rubbing a corset stay against the rough cement floor. It seemed to me strangely important not to lose track of time. And so, with a sharphoned stay, I scratched a calendar on the wall behind the cot. As each long featureless day crawled to a close, I checked off another square. I also started a record of special dates beneath the calendar:

February 28, 1944 Arrest

February 29, 1944 Transport to Scheveningen

March 16, 1944 Beginning of Solitary And now a new date:

April 15, 1944 My Birthday in Prison

A BIRTHDAY HAD to mean a party, but I searched in vain for a single cheerful object. At least in the other cell there had been bright bits of clothing: the baroness' red hat, Frau Mikes' yellow blouse. How I regretted now my own lack of taste in clothes.

At least I would have a song at my party! I chose one about the Bride of Haarlem tree—she would be in full bloom now. The child's song brought it all close: the bursting branches, the petals raining like snow on the brick sidewalk—

"Quiet in there!" A volley of blows sounded on my iron door.

“Solitary prisoners are to keep silent!”

I sat on the cot, opened the Gospel of John, and read until the ache in my heart went away.

TWO DAYS AFTER my birthday I was taken for the first time to the big, echoing shower room. A grim-faced guard marched beside me, her scowl forbidding me to take pleasure in the expedition. But nothing could dim the wonder of stepping into that wide corridor after so many weeks of close confinement.

At the door to the shower room, several women were waiting. Even in the strict silence this human closeness was joy and strength. I scanned the faces of those coming out, but neither Betsie nor Nollie was there, nor anyone else from Haarlem. *And yet*, I thought, *they are all my sisters. How rich is anyone who can simply see human faces!*

The shower too was glorious: warm clean water over my festering skin, streams of water through my matted hair. I went back to my cell with a new resolve: the next time I was permitted a shower I would take with me three of my gospels. Solitary was teaching me that it was not possible to be rich alone.

And I was not alone much longer: into my solitary cell came a small, busy black ant. I had almost put my foot where he was one morning as I carried my bucket to the door when I realized the honor being done me. I crouched down and admired the marvelous design of legs and body. I apologized for my size and promised I would not so thoughtlessly stride about again.

After a while he disappeared through a crack in the floor. But when my evening piece of bread appeared on the door shelf, I scattered some crumbs and to my joy he popped out almost at once. He picked up a heroic piece, struggled down the hole with it, and came back for more. It was the beginning of a relationship.

Now, in addition to the daily visit of the sun, I had the company of this brave and handsome guest—in fact soon of a whole small committee. If I was washing out clothes in the basin or sharpening the point on my homemade knife when the ants appeared, I stopped *The Hiding Place* at once to give them my full attention. It would have been unthinkable to squander two activities on the same bit of time!

ONE EVENING AS I was crossing another long, long day from the calendar scratched on my wall, I heard shouts far down the corridor. They were answered closer by. Now noisy voices came from every direction. How unusual for the prisoners to be making a racket! Where were the guards?

The shelf in my door had not been closed since the bread came two hours ago. I pressed my ear to it and listened but it was hard to make sense of the tumult outside. Names were being passed from cell to cell. People were singing, others pounding on their doors. The guards must all be away!

“Please! Let’s be quiet!” a voice nearby pleaded. “Let’s use this time before they get back!”

“What’s happening?” I cried through the open slot. “Where are the guards?”

“At the party,” the same voice answered me. “It’s Hitler’s birthday.” Then—these must be their own names people were shouting down the corridor. This was our chance to tell where we were, to get information.

“I’m Corrie ten Boom!” I called through the food shelf. “My whole family is here somewhere! Oh, has anyone seen Casper ten Boom! Betsie ten Boom! Nollie van Woerden! Willem ten Boom!” I shouted names until I was hoarse and heard them repeated from mouth to mouth down the long corridor. I passed names too, to the right and left, as we worked out a kind of system.

After a while, answers began to filter back. “Mrs. van der Elst is in Cell 228. . . .” “Pietje’s arm is much better. . . .” Some of the messages I could hardly bear to relay: “The hearing was very bad: he sits in the cell without speaking.” “To my husband Joost: our baby died last week. . . .”

Along with personal messages were rumors about the world outside, each more wildly optimistic than the last.

“There is a revolution in Germany!”

“The Allies have invaded Europe!”

“The war cannot last three weeks longer!”

At last some of the names I had shouted out began to return.

“Betsie ten Boom is in cell 312. She says to tell you that God is good.” Oh, that was Betsie! That was every inch Betsie!

Then: “Nollie van Woerden was in cell 318, but she was released more than a month ago.” Released! Oh, thank God!

Toos, too, released!

News from the mens’ section was longer returning, but as it did my heart leapt higher and higher:

Peter van Woerden. Released!

Herman Sluring. Released!

Willem ten Boom. Released!

As far as I could discover, every single one taken in the raid on the Beje—with the exception of Betsie and me—had been freed.

Only about Father could I discover no news at all, although I called his name over and over into the murmuring hall. No one seemed to have seen him. No one seemed to know.

IT WAS PERHAPS a week later that my cell door opened and a prison trustee tossed a package wrapped in brown paper onto the floor. I picked it up, hefted it, turned it over and over. The wrapping

paper had been torn open and carelessly retied, but even through the disarray I could spot Nollie’s loving touch. I sat on the cot and opened it.

There, familiar and welcoming as a visit from home, was the light blue embroidered sweater. As I put it on, I seemed to feel Nollie’s arms circling my shoulders. Also inside the package were cookies and vitamins, needle and thread, and a bright red towel. How Nollie understood the gray color-hunger of prison! She had even wrapped the cookies in gay red cellophane.

I was biting into the first one when an inspiration came to me. I dragged the cot out from the wall to stand under the naked overhead bulb. Climbing on it, I fashioned a lampshade with the paper: a cheery red glow at once suffused the bleak little room.

I was rewinding the cookies in the brown outer paper when my eyes fell on the address written in Nollie’s careful hand, slanting upward toward the postage stamp. But—Nollie’s handwriting did not slant. . . . The stamp! Hadn’t a message once come to the Beje under a stamp, penciled in the tiny square beneath? Laughing at my own overwrought imagination, I moistened the paper in the basin water and worked the stamp gently free.

Words! There was definitely writing there—but so tiny I had to climb again onto the cot and hold the paper close to the shaded bulb.

“All the watches in your closet are safe.”

Safe. Then—then Eusie, and Henk, and Mary, and—they’d gotten out of the secret room! They’d escaped! They were free!

I burst into racking sobs, then heard heavy footsteps bearing down the corridor. Hastily I jumped down from the cot and shoved it back to the wall. The pass-through clattered open. “What’s the commotion in here!”

“It’s nothing. I—won’t do it again.”

The slot in the door snapped shut. *How had they managed it? How had they got past the soldiers? Never mind, dear Lord, You were there, and that was all that mattered. . . .*

THE CELL DOOR opened to let in a German officer followed by the head matron herself. My eyes ran hungrily over the well-pressed uniform with its rows of brilliant-colored battle ribbons.

“Miss ten Boom,” the officer began in excellent Dutch, “I have a few questions I believe you can help me with.”

The matron was carrying a small stool that she leapt to set down for the officer. I stared at her. Was this obsequious creature the terriblevoiced terror of the women’s wing?

The officer sat down, motioning me to take the cot. There was something in that gesture that belonged to the world outside the prison. As he took out a small notebook and began to read names from it, I was suddenly conscious of my rumpled clothes, my long, ragged fingernails.

To my relief I honestly did not know any of the names he read—now I understood the wisdom of the ubiquitous “Mr. Smit.” The officer stood up. “Will you be feeling well enough to come for your hearing soon?”

Again that ordinary human manner. “Yes—I—I hope so.” The officer stepped out into the hall, the matron bobbing and scurrying after him with the stool.

IT WAS THE third of May; I was sitting on my cot sewing. Since Nollie’s package had been delivered, I had a wonderful new occupation: one by one I was pulling the threads from the red towel and with them embroidering bright figures on the pajamas that I had only recently stopped wearing beneath my clothes. A window with ruffled curtains. A flower with an impossible number of petals and leaves. I had just started work on the head of a cat over the

right pocket when the food shelf in the door banged opened and shut with a single motion.

And there on the floor of the cell lay a letter.

I dropped the pajamas and sprang forward. Nollie’s writing. Why should my hand tremble as I picked it up?

The letter had been opened by the censors—held by them, too: the postmark was over a week old. But it was a letter, a letter from home—the very first one! Why this sudden fear?

I unfolded the paper. “Corrie, can you be very brave?”

No! No, I couldn’t be brave! I forced my eyes to read on.

“I have news that is very hard to write you. Father survived his arrest by only ten days. He is now with the Lord. . . .”

I stood with the paper between my hands so long that the daily shaft of sunlight entered the cell and fell upon it. Father . . . Father . . . the letter glittered in the criss-cross light as I read the rest. Nollie had no details, not how or where he had died, not even where he was buried.

Footsteps were passing on the coconut matting. I ran to the door and pressed my face to the closed pass-through. “Please! Oh please!”

The steps stopped. The shelf dropped open. “What’s the matter?”

“Please! I’ve had bad news—oh please, don’t go away!”

“Wait a minute.” The footsteps retreated, then returned with a jangle of keys. The cell door opened.

“Here.” The young woman handed me a pill with a glass of water. “It’s a sedative.”

“This letter just came,” I explained. “It says that my father—it says my father has died.”

The girl stared at me. “Your father!” she said in astonished tones.

I realized how very old and decrepit I must look to this young person. She stood in the doorway a while, obviously embarrassed at my tears. “Whatever happens,” she said at last, “you brought it on yourself by breaking the laws!”

“Dear Jesus,” I whispered as the door slammed and her footsteps died away, “how foolish of me to have called for human help when You are here. To think that Father sees You now, face to face! To think that he and Mama are together again, walking those bright streets. . . .”

I pulled the cot from the wall and below the calendar scratched another date:

MARCH 9, 1944 Father. Released.

11 The Lieutenant

I was walking with a guard—behind and a little to the right of her so my feet would not touch the sacrosanct mat—down a corridor I had not seen before. A turn to the right, a few steps down, right again . . . what an endless labyrinth this prison was. At last we stepped out into a small interior courtyard. A drizzle of rain was falling. It was a chill raw morning in late May: after three months in prison I had been called for my first hearing.

Barred windows stared from tall buildings on three sides of the courtyard, along the fourth was a high wall and against this stood a row of small huts. So these were where the infamous interrogations took place. My breath came short and hard as I thought back to the reports I had passed on, the night of Hitler’s birthday.

Lord Jesus, You were called to a hearing too. Show me what to do.

And then I saw something. Whoever used the fourth of the huts had planted a row of tulips along the side. They were wilted now, only tall stems and yellowing leaves, but . . . *Dear Lord, let me go to hut number four!*

The guard had paused to unstrap a long military cape fastened to the shoulder of her uniform. Protected from the rain, she crunched up the gravel path. Past the first hut, the second, the third. She halted in front of the hut with the flowerbed and rapped on the door.

“Ja! Herrein!” called a man’s voice.

The guard pushed open the door, gave a straight-armed salute, and marched smartly off. The man wore a gun in a leather holster and a beribboned uniform. He removed his hat and I was staring into the face of the gentle-mannered man who had visited me in my cell.

“I am Lieutenant Rahms,” he said, stepping to the door to close it behind me. “You’re shivering! Here, let me get a fire going.”

He filled a pot-bellied stove from a small coal scuttle, for all the world a kindly German householder entertaining a guest. What if this were all a subtle trap? This kind, human manner—perhaps he had simply found it more effective than brutality in tricking the truth from affection-starved people. *Oh Lord, let no weak gullibility on my part endanger another’s life.*

“I hope,” the officer was saying, “we won’t have many more days this spring as cold as this one.” He drew out a chair for me to sit on. Warily I accepted it. How strange after three months, to feel a chairback behind me, chair-arms for my hands! The heat from the stove was quickly warming the little room. In spite of myself, I began to relax. I ventured a timid comment about the tulips: “So tall, they must have been beautiful.”

“Oh, they were!” he seemed ridiculously pleased. “The best I’ve ever grown. At home we always have Dutch bulbs.”

We talked about flowers for a while and then he said, “I would like to help you, Miss ten Boom. But you must tell me everything. I may be able to do something, but only if you do not hide anything from me.”

So there it was already. All the friendliness, the kindly concern that I had half-believed in—all a device to elicit information. Well, why not? This man was a professional with a job to do. But I, too, in a small way, was a professional.

For an hour he questioned me, using every psychological trick that the young men of our group had drilled me in. In fact, I felt like a student who has crammed for a difficult exam and then is tested on only the most elementary material. It soon became clear that they believed the Beje had been a headquarters for raids on food ration offices around the country. Of all the illegal activities I had on my conscience, this was probably the one I knew least about. Other than receiving the stolen cards each month and passing them on, I knew no details of the operation. Apparently my real ignorance began to show; after a while Lieutenant Rahms stopped making notes of my hopelessly stupid answers.

“Your other activities, Miss ten Boom. What would you like to tell me about them?”

“Other activities? Oh, you mean—you want to know about my church for mentally retarded people!” And I plunged into an eager account of my efforts at preaching to the feeble-minded.

The lieutenant’s eyebrows rose higher and higher. “What a waste of time and energy!” he exploded at last. “If you want converts, surely one normal person is worth all the half-wits in the world!”

I stared into the man’s intelligent blue-gray eyes: true National Socialist philosophy, I thought, tulip bed or no. And then to my astonishment I heard my own voice saying boldly, “May I tell you the truth, Lieutenant Rahms?”

“This hearing, Miss ten Boom, is predicated on the assumption that you will do me that honor.”

“The truth, sir,” I said, swallowing, “is that God’s viewpoint is sometimes different from ours—so different that we could not even guess at it unless He had given us a Book which tells us such things.”

I knew it was madness to talk this way to a Nazi officer. But he said nothing so I plunged ahead. “In the Bible I learned that God values us not for our strength or our brains but simply because He has made us. Who knows, in His eyes a half-wit may be worth more than a watchmaker. Or—a lieutenant.”

Lieutenant Rahms stood up abruptly. “That will be all for today.” He walked swiftly to the door. “Guard!”

I heard footsteps on the gravel path.

“The prisoner will return to her cell.”

Following the guard through the long cold corridors, I knew I had made a mistake. I had said too much. I had ruined whatever chance I had that this man might take an interest in my case.

And yet the following morning it was Lieutenant Rahms himself who unlocked my cell door and escorted me to the hearing. Apparently he did not know of the regulation that forbade prisoners to step on the mat, for he indicated that I was to walk ahead of him down the center of the hall. I avoided the eyes of the guards along the route, guilty as a well-trained dog discovered on the living room sofa.

In the courtyard this time, a bright sun was shining. “Today,” he said, “we will stay outside. You are pale. You are not getting enough sun.”

Gratefully I followed him to the farthest corner of the little yard where the air was still and warm. We settled our backs against the wall. “I could not sleep last night,” the lieutenant said, “thinking

about that Book where you have read such different ideas. What else does it say in there?"

On my closed eyelids the sun glimmered and blazed. "It says," I began slowly, "that a Light has come into this world, so that we need no longer walk in the dark. Is there darkness in your life, Lieutenant?" There was a very long silence.

"There is great darkness," he said at last. "I cannot bear the work I do here."

Then all at once he was telling me about his wife and children in Bremen, about their garden, their dogs, their summer hiking vacations. "Bremen was bombed again last week. Each morning I ask myself, are they still alive?"

"There is One who has them always in His sight, Lieutenant Rahms. Jesus is the Light the Bible shows to me, the Light that can shine even in such darkness as yours."

The man pulled the visor of his hat lower over his eyes; the skull-and-crossbones glinted in the sunlight. When he spoke it was so low I could hardly hear. "What can you know of darkness like mine. . . ."

Two more mornings the hearings continued. He had dropped all pretense of questioning me on my underground activities and seemed especially to enjoy hearing about my childhood. Mama, Father, the aunts—he wanted to hear stories about them again and again. He was incensed to learn that Father had died right here in Scheveningen; the documents on my case made no mention of it. These documents did answer one question: the reason for solitary confinement. "Prisoner's condition contagious to others in cell." I stared at the brief typed words where Lieutenant Rahms's finger rested. I thought of the long wind-haunted nights, the scowling guards, the rule of silence. "But, if it wasn't punishment, why were they so angry with me? Why couldn't I talk?"

The lieutenant squared the edges of the papers in front of him. "A prison is like any institution, Miss ten Boom, certain rules, certain ways of doing things—"

"But I'm not contagious now! I've been better for weeks and weeks, and my own sister is so close! Lieutenant Rahms, if I could only see Betsie! If I could just talk with her a few minutes!"

He lifted his eyes from the desk and I saw anguish in them. "Miss ten Boom, it is possible that I appear to you as a powerful person. I wear a uniform, I have a certain authority over those under me. But I am in prison, dear lady from Haarlem, a prison stronger than this one."

It was the fourth and final hearing, and we had come back into the small hut for the signing of the *procès-verbal*. He gathered up the completed transcript and went out with it, leaving me alone. I was sorry to say good-bye to this man who was struggling so earnestly for truth. The hardest thing for him seemed to be that Christians should suffer. "How can you believe in God now?" he'd ask. "What kind of a God would have let that old man die here in Scheveningen?"

I got up from the chair and held my hands out to the squat little stove. I did not understand either why Father had died in such a place. I did not understand a great deal.

And suddenly I was thinking of Father's own answer to hard questions: "*Some knowledge is too heavy . . . you cannot bear it . . . your Father will carry it until you are able.*" Yes! I would tell Lieutenant Rahms about the traincase—he always liked stories about Father.

But when the lieutenant returned to the room a guard from the women's wing was with him. "Prisoner ten Boom has completed her hearings," he said, "and will return to her cell."

The young woman snapped to attention. As I stepped through the door, Lieutenant Rahms leaned forward.

“Walk slowly,” he said, “in Corridor F.”

Walk slowly? What did he mean? The guard strode down the long door-lined halls so swiftly I had to trot to keep up with her. Ahead of us a prison trustee was unlocking the door to a cell. I trailed behind the guard as much as I dared, my heart thumping wildly. It would be Betsie’s cell— I knew it!

Then I was abreast of the door. Betsie’s back was to the corridor. I could see only the graceful upswept bun of her chestnut hair. The other women in the cell stared curiously into the corridor; her head remained bent over something in her lap. But I had seen the home Betsie had made in Scheveningen.

For unbelievably, against all logic, this cell was charming. My eyes seized only a few details as I inched reluctantly past. The straw pallets were rolled instead of piled in a heap, standing like little pillars along the walls, each with a lady’s hat atop it. A headscarf had somehow been hung along the wall. The contents of several food packages were arranged on a small shelf; I could just hear Betsie saying, “The red biscuit tin here in the center!” Even the coats hanging on their hooks were part of the welcome of that room, each sleeve draped over the shoulder of the coat next to it like a row of dancing children—

“*Schneller! Aber schnell!*”

I jumped and hurried after my escort. It had been a glimpse only, two seconds at the most, but I walked through the corridors of Scheveningen with Betsie’s singing spirit at my side.

ALL MORNING I heard doors opening and closing. Now keys rattled outside my own: a very young guard in a very new uniform bounded in.

“Prisoner stand at attention!” she squeaked. I stared at her wide, blinking eyes; the girl was in mortal fear of something or someone. Then a shadow filled the doorway and the tallest woman I had ever seen stepped into the cell. Her features were classically handsome, the face and height of a goddess—but one carved in marble. Not a flicker of feeling registered in her eyes.

“No sheets here either, I see,” she said in German to the guard. “See that she has two by Friday. One to be changed every two weeks.”

The ice-cold eyes appraised me exactly as they had the bed. “How many showers does the prisoner get?”

The guard wet her lips. “About one a week, *Wachtmeisterin*. ” One a week! One shower a month was closer!

“She will go twice a week.”

Sheets! Regular showers! Were conditions going to be better? The new head matron took two strides into the cell; she did not need the cot to reach the overhead bulb. Rip! Off came my red-cellophane lampshade. She pointed to a box of soda crackers that had come in a second package from Nollie.

“No boxes in the cells!” cried the little guard in Dutch, as indignantly as though this had been a long-standing rule.

Not knowing what else to do, I dumped the crackers out onto the cot. At the matron’s unspoken command, I emptied a bottle of vitamins and a sack of peppermint drops the same way.

Unlike the former head matron, who shrieked and scolded endlessly in her rusted-hinge voice, this woman worked in a terrifying silence. With a gesture, she directed the guard to feel beneath the mattress. My heart wedged in my throat; my precious remaining Gospel was hidden there. The guard knelt and ran her hands the length of the cot. But whether she was too nervous to do

a thorough job or whether there was a more mysterious explanation, she straightened up empty-handed.

And then they were gone.

I stood gazing numbly at the jumble of food on my cot. I thought of this woman reaching Betsie's cell, reducing it again to four walls and a prison cot. A chill wind was blowing through Scheveningen, cleaning, ordering, killing.

IT WAS THIS tall, ramrod-straight woman who unlocked the door to my cell one afternoon in the second half of June and admitted Lieutenant Rahms. At the severity in his face, I swallowed the greeting that had almost burst from me.

"You will come to my office," he said briefly. "The notary has come." We might as well have been total strangers. "Notary?" I said stupidly.

"For the reading of your Father's will." He made an impatient gesture; obviously this minor matter had interrupted a busy day. "It's the law— family present when a will is opened."

Already he was heading from the cell and down the corridor. I broke into a clumsy run to keep up with the strides of the silent woman beside me. *The law? What law? And since when had the German occupation government concerned itself with Dutch legal procedures? Family. Family present. . . . No, don't let yourself think of it!*

At the door to the courtyard the matron turned, erect and impassive, back along the corridor. I followed Lieutenant Rahms into the dazzling early summer afternoon. He opened the door for me into the fourth hut. Before my eyes adjusted to the gloom, I was drowning in Willem's embrace.

"Corrie! Corrie! Baby sister!" It was fifty years since he had called me that.

Now Nollie's arm was around me too, the other one still clinging to Betsie, as though by the strength of her grip she would hold us together forever. Betsie! Nollie! Willem! I did not know which name to cry first. Tine was in that little room too—and Flip! And another man; when I had time to look, I recognized the Haarlem notary who had been called in on the watch shop's few legal consultations. We held each other at arm's length to look, we babbled questions all at once.

Betsie was thin and prison-pale. But it was Willem who shocked me. His face was gaunt, yellow, and pain-haunted. He had come home this way from Scheveningen, Tine told me. Two of the eight men crowded into his tiny cell had died of jaundice while he was there.

Willem! I could not bear to see him this way. I crooked my arm through his, standing close so that I did not have to look at him, loving the sound of his deep rolling voice. Willem did not seem aware of his own illness: his concern was all for Kik. This handsome blonde son had been seized the month before while helping an American parachutist reach the North Sea. They believed he had been on one of the recent prison trains into Germany.

As for Father, they had learned a few more facts about his last days. He had apparently become ill in his cell and been taken by car to the municipal hospital in The Hague. There, no bed had been available. Father had died in a corridor, separated somehow from his records or any clue as to his identity. Hospital authorities had buried the unknown old man in the paupers' cemetery. The family believed they had located the particular grave.

I glanced over at Lieutenant Rahms. He was standing with his back to us as we talked, staring down at the cold unlit stove. Swiftly I opened the package that Nollie had pressed into my hand with the first embrace. It was what my leaping heart had told me: a Bible, the entire Book in a compact volume, tucked inside a small pouch with a string for wearing around the neck as we had once carried

our identity cards. I dropped it quickly over my head and down my back beneath my blouse. I couldn't even find words with which to thank her: the day before, in the shower line, I had given away my last remaining Gospel.

"We don't know all the details," Willem was saying in a low voice to Betsie, "just that after a few days the soldiers were taken off guard duty at the Beje and police stationed there instead." The fourth night, he believed, the chief had succeeded in assigning Rolf and another of our group to the same shift. They had found all the Jews well, though cramped and hungry, and seen them to new hiding places.

"And now?" I whispered back. "They're all right now?"

Willem lowered his deep-sunk eyes to mine. He had never been good at concealing difficult truths. "They're all right, Corrie—all except Mary." Old Mary Itallie, he said, had been arrested one day walking down a city street. Where she had been going and why she had exposed herself this way in broad daylight, nobody knew.

"The time is up." Lieutenant Rahms left his perusal of the stove and nodded to the notary. "Proceed with the reading of the will."

It was a brief, informal document: the Beje was to be home for Betsie and me as long as we wanted it; should there ever be any money realized from the sale of house or watch shop, he knew we would recall his equal love for us all; he committed us with joy to the constant care of God.

In the silence that followed, we all suddenly bowed our heads. "Lord Jesus," Willem said, "we praise You for these moments together under the protection of this good man. How can we thank him? We have no power to do him any service. Lord, allow us to share this inheritance from our father with him as well. Take him too, and his family, into Your constant care."

Outside, a guard's footsteps sounded on the crunchy gravel walk.

12 Vught

Get your things together! Get ready to evacuate! Collect all possessions in pillowcases!" The shouts of the guards echoed up and down the long corridor.

I stood in the center of my cell in a frenzy of excitement. Evacuate! Then—then something was happening! We were leaving the prison! The counter-invasion must have begun!

I snatched the pillowcase from the little wad of straw I had stuffed into it. What riches this coarse bit of muslin had been in the two weeks since it had been provided: a shield for my head from the scratch and smell of the bedding. It almost didn't matter that the promised sheets had never arrived.

With trembling hands I dropped my few belongings into it, the blue sweater, the pajamas—covered now back and front with embroidered figures—toothbrush, comb, a few remaining crackers wrapped in toilet paper. My Bible was in its pouch on my back where it remained except when I was reading it.

I put on my coat and hat and stood at the iron door clutching the pillowcase in both hands. It was still early in the morning; the tin breakfast plate had not yet been removed from the shelf in the door. Getting ready had taken no time at all.

An hour passed. I sat on the cot. Two hours. Three. It was warm in the cell this late June day. I took off my hat and coat and folded them next to me on the cot.

More time passed. I kept my eyes on the ant hole, hoping for a last visit from my small friends, but they did not appear. Probably I had frightened them by my early dashing about. I reached into the

pillowcase, took one of the crackers, and crumbled it about the little crack. No ants. They were staying safely hidden.

And suddenly I realized that this too was a message, a last wordless communication among neighbors. For I, too, had a hiding place when things were bad. Jesus was this place, the Rock cleft for me. I pressed a finger to the tiny crevice.

The afternoon sun appeared on the wall and moved slowly across the cell. And then all at once there was a clanging out in the corridor. Doors scraped. Bolts banged. "Out! *Schnell!* All out! No talking!" I snatched up my hat and coat.

My door screeched open. "Form ranks of five." The guard was already at the next cell.

I stepped out into the hall. It was jammed from wall to wall: I had never dreamed so many women occupied this corridor. We exchanged looks. "In-va-sion," we mouthed silently, the soundless word sweeping through the massed women like an electric charge. Surely the invasion of Holland had begun! Why else would they be emptying the prison!

Where would we be taken? Where were we headed? Not into Germany! Dear Jesus, not Germany.

The command was given and we shuffled forward down the long chilly halls, each carrying a pillowcase, with her belongings forming a little bulge at the bottom. At last we emerged into the wide courtyard inside the front gate of the prison and another long wait began. But this wait was pleasant with the late afternoon sun on our backs. Far to the right I could see the columns of the men's section. But crane my neck though I would, I could not see Betsie anywhere.

At last the huge gate swung in and a convoy of gray transport buses drove through. I was herded aboard the third one. The seats had been removed, the windows painted over. The bus lurched

dreadfully as it started up but we were standing too close together to fall. When the bus ground to a stop, we were at a freight yard somewhere on the outskirts of the city.

Again we were formed into ranks. The guards' voices were tense and shrill. We had to keep our heads facing forward, eyes front. Behind us we could hear buses arriving, then lumbering away again. It was still light, but I knew by the ache in my stomach that it was long past suppertime.

And then, ahead and to the left of me, in the newest group of arriving prisoners, I spotted a chestnut bun. Betsie! Somehow, some way, I was going to get to her! Now instead of wanting the day to end, I prayed that we would stay where we were until dark.

Slowly the long June day faded. Thunder rumbled and a few drops of rain fell. At last a long row of unlit coaches rolled slowly over the tracks in front of us. They banged to a stop, rolled forward a little farther, then stopped again. After a while they began backing. For an hour or more the train switched back and forth.

By the time the order came to board, it was pitch dark. The ranks of prisoners surged forward. Behind us the guards shouted and cursed: obviously they were nervous at transporting so many prisoners at one time. I wriggled and shoved to the left. Elbows and shoulders were in my way but I squirmed past. At the very steps of the train, I reached out and seized Betsie's hand.

Together we climbed onto the train, together found seats in a crowded compartment, together wept tears of gratitude. The four months in Scheveningen had been our first separation in fifty-three years; it seemed to me that I could bear whatever happened with Betsie beside me.

More hours passed as the loaded train sat on the siding. For us they flew, there was so much to share. Betsie told me about each of her cellmates—and I told her about mine and the little hole into which they scrambled at any emergency. As always, Betsie had given to

others everything she had. The Bible that Nollie had smuggled to her she had torn up and passed around, book by book.

It must have been 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning that the train at last began to move. We pressed our faces to the glass, but no lights showed and clouds covered the moon. The thought uppermost in every mind was: is it Germany? At one point we made out a tower that Betsie was sure was the cathedral at Delft. An hour or more later the clack of the train changed pitch: we were crossing a trestle. But—a very long one! As the minutes passed and still we had not reached the other side, Betsie and I exchanged looks. The Moerdijk Bridge! Then we were headed south. Not east into Germany, but south to Brabant. For the second time that night we wept tears of joy.

I leaned my head back against the wooden slats of the seat and shut my eyes, reliving another train trip to Brabant. Mama's hand had gripped Father's, then, as the train swayed. Then, too, it was June—the June of the first sermon, of the garden back of the manse, of Karel. . . .

I must have fallen asleep, back in that other June, for when I opened my eyes the train had stopped. Voices were shouting at us to move: "*Schneller! Aber schnell!*" An eerie glare lit the windows. Betsie and I stumbled after the others along the aisle and down the iron steps. We seemed to have stopped in the middle of a woods. Floodlights mounted in trees lit a broad rough-cleared path lined by soldiers with leveled guns.

Spurred by the shouts of the guards, Betsie and I started up the path between the gun barrels. "*Schneller! Close ranks! Keep up! Five abreast!*" Betsie's breath was coming short and hard and still they yelled at us to go faster. It had rained hard here, for there were deep puddles in the path. Ahead of us, a white-haired woman stepped to the side to avoid one; a soldier struck her in the back

with a gun butt. I took Betsie's pillowcase along with mine, hooked my other arm through hers, and hauled her along beside me.

The nightmare march lasted a mile or more. At last we came to a barbed-wire fence surrounding a row of wooden barracks. There were no beds in the one we entered, only long tables with backless benches pulled up to them. Betsie and I collapsed onto one of these. Under my arm I could feel the irregular flutter of her heart. We fell into an exhausted sleep, our heads on the table.

The sun was streaming through the barracks windows when we woke up. We were thirsty and hungry: we had had nothing to eat or drink since the early meal at Scheveningen the morning before. But all that day no guard or any official person appeared inside the barracks. At last, when the sun was low in the sky, a prisoner crew arrived with a great vat of some thick steamy substance that we gobbled ravenously.

And so began our stay in this place that, we learned, was named Vught after the nearest small village. Unlike Scheveningen, which had been a regular Dutch prison, Vught had been constructed by the occupation especially as a concentration camp for political prisoners. We were not yet in the camp proper but in a kind of quarantine compound outside. Our biggest problem was idleness, wedged together as we were around the long rows of tables with nothing to do. We were guarded by the same young women who had patrolled the corridors at Scheveningen. They had been adequate enough as long as we were behind locked doors; here they seemed at a loss. Their only technique for maintaining discipline was to shriek obscenities and hand out punishments to all alike. Half rations for the entire barracks. An extra roll call at rigid attention. A ban on talking for twenty-four hours.

Only one of our overseers never threatened or raised her voice. This was the tall, silent head matron from Scheveningen. She appeared in Vught the third morning during the predawn roll call and at once

something like order seized our rebellious and untidy ranks. Lines straightened, hands were clamped to sides, whispers ceased as those cold blue eyes swept across us.

Among ourselves we nicknamed her “the General.” During one long roll call a pregnant woman at our table slumped to the floor, striking her head against the edge of the bench. The General did not so much as pause in her expressionless reading of names.

We had been in this outer camp at Vught almost two weeks when Betsie and I, along with a dozen others, were called out by name during morning roll call. When the rest had been dismissed, the General distributed typewritten forms among us and instructed us to present them at the administration barracks at 9:00.

A worker on the food crew—a long-term prisoner from the main camp—smiled encouragingly as he ladled out our breakfast.

“You’re free!” he whispered. “Those pink forms mean release!”

Betsie and I stared disbelievingly at the sheets of paper in our hands. Free? Free to leave—free to go home? Others crowded around, congratulating us, embracing us. The women from Betsie’s cell at Scheveningen wept unabashedly. How cruel to have to leave all these behind!

“Surely the war will be over very soon,” we told them. We emptied our pillowcases passing out our few belongings among those who had to stay.

Long before 9:00 we were standing in the big wooden anteroom of Administration. At last we were summoned to an inner office where our forms were examined, stamped, and handed over to a guard. We followed this man down a corridor into another office. For hours the process continued as we were shuttled from one room and official to another, questioned, fingerprinted, sent on to the next post. The group of prisoners grew until there were forty or fifty of us standing in line beside a high anchor-chain fence topped with barbed wire. On the other side of the fence was a white birch

woods, above our heads the blue Brabant sky. We too belonged to that wide free world.

The next barracks we entered held a row of desks with women clerks seated behind them. At one of these I was handed a brown paper envelope. I emptied it into my hand and the next moment was staring in disbelief at my Alpina watch. Mama’s ring. Even my paper guilders. I had not seen these things since the night we arrived at Scheveningen. *Money . . . why, that belonged to the world of shops and trolley cars. We could go to a train station with this money. Two fares to Haarlem, please.*

. . .

We marched along a path between twisted rolls of barbed wire and through a wide gate into a compound of low tin-roofed barracks. There were more lines, more waits, more shuffling from desk to desk, but already the camp and its procedures had become unreal to me.

Then we were standing before a high counter and a young male clerk was saying, “Leave all personal effects at the window marked C.”

“But they just gave them back to me!”

“Watches, purses, jewelry . . .”

Mechanically, like a machine with no will of its own, I handed watch, ring, and money through the small barred window. A uniformed woman swept them into a metal box. “Move along! Next!”

Then—were we not to be released? Outside this building a florid-faced officer formed us into a double column and marched us across a broad parade ground. At one end of it, a crew of men with shaved heads and striped overalls were digging a ditch. What did it mean? What did any of it mean, this whole long day of lines and

waits? Betsie's face was gray with weariness, and she stumbled as we marched.

Through another fence we arrived in a yard surrounded on three sides by low concrete buildings. A young woman in a military cape was waiting for us.

"Prisoners halt!" barked the red-faced officer. "Explain to the newcomers, *Fraulein*, the function of the bunkers."

"The bunkers," the girl began in the bored voice of a museum guide, "are for the accommodation of those who fail to cooperate with camp rules. The rooms are cozy, if a bit small: about the size of a gym locker.

To hasten the educational process the hands are tied above the head. . . ."

Even as the horrid recital continued, two guards came out of the bunkers, carrying between them the form of a man. He was alive, for his legs were moving, but he seemed to have no conscious control over them. His eyes were sunken and rolled back in his head.

"Not everyone," the girl observed in the same detached drawl, "seems to appreciate the accommodations at the bunkers."

I seized Betsie's arm as the command to march came again, more to steady myself than her. It was Father's traincase once again. Such cruelty was too much to grasp, too much to bear. *Heavenly Father, carry it for me!*

We followed the officer down a wide street lined with barracks on either side and halted at one of the gray, featureless sheds. It was the end of the long day of standing, waiting, hoping: we had simply arrived in the main camp at Vught.

The barracks appeared almost identical with the one we had left this morning, except that this one was furnished with bunks as well as tables and benches. And still we were not allowed to sit: there

was a last wait while the matron with maddening deliberateness checked off our documents against a list.

"Betsie!" I wailed, "how long will it take?"

"Perhaps a long, long time. Perhaps many years. But what better way could there be to spend our lives?"

I turned to stare at her. "Whatever are you talking about?"

"These young women. That girl back at the bunkers. Corrie, if people can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love! We must find the way, you and I, no matter how long it takes. . . ."

She went on, almost forgetting in her excitement to keep her voice to a whisper, while I slowly took in the fact that she was talking about our guards. I glanced at the matron seated at the desk ahead of us. I saw a gray uniform and a visored hat; Betsie saw a wounded human being.

And I wondered, not for the first time, what sort of a person she was, this sister of mine . . . what kind of road she followed while I trudged beside her on the all-too-solid earth.

A FEW DAYS later Betsie and I were called up for work assignments. One glance at Betsie's pallid face and fragile form, and the matron waved her contemptuously back inside the barracks where the elderly and infirm spent the day sewing prison uniforms. The women's uniform here in Vught was a blue overall with a red stripe down the side of the leg, practical and comfortable, and a welcome change after our own clothes that we had worn since the day of our arrest.

Apparently I looked strong enough for harder work; I was told to report to the Phillips factory. This "factory" turned out to be no more than another large barracks inside the camp complex. Early in the morning though it was, the tar beneath the shingled roof was beginning to bubble in the hot July sun. I followed my escort into the single large room where several hundred men and women sat

at long plank tables covered with thousands of tiny radio parts. Two officers, one male, one female, were strolling the aisle between the benches while the prisoners bent to their tasks.

I was assigned a seat at a bench near the front and given the job of measuring small glass rods and arranging them in piles according to lengths. It was monotonous work. The heat from the roof pressed like a weight on my head. I longed to exchange at least names and home towns with my neighbors on either side, but the only sound in the room was the clink of metal parts and the squeak of the officers' boots. They reached the door across from where I sat.

"Production was up again last week," the male officer said in German to a tall slender man with a shaved head and a striped uniform. "You are to be commended for this increase. However we continue to receive complaints of defective wiring. Quality control must improve."

The shaved-headed man made an apologetic gesture. "If there were more food, *Herr Officier*," he murmured. "Since the cutback in rations, I see a difference. They grow sleepy, they have trouble concentrating. . . ." His voice reminded me a little of Willem's, deep, cultivated, the German with only a trace of Dutch accent.

"Then you must wake them up! Make them concentrate on the penalties! If the soldiers on the front can fight on half-rations, then these lazy—"

At a terrible look from the woman officer, he stopped and ran his tongue over his lips. "Ah—that is—I speak of course merely as an example. There is naturally no truth in the rumor that rations at the front are reduced. So! I—I hold you responsible!" And together they stalked from the building.

For a moment the prisoner-foreman watched them from the doorway. Slowly he raised his left hand, then dropped it with a slap to his side. The quiet room exploded. From under tables appeared writing paper, books, knitting yarn, tins of biscuits. People left their

benches and joined little knots of chattering friends all over the room. Half a dozen crowded around me: Who was I? Where was I from? Did I have any news of the war?

After perhaps half an hour of visiting among the tables, the foreman reminded us that we had a day's quota to meet and people drifted back to their places. The foreman's name, I learned, was Moorman and he had been headmaster of a Roman Catholic boys' school. He himself came over to my workbench the third day I was there; he had heard that I had followed the entire assembly line through the barracks, tracing what became of my dull little piles of rods. "You're the first woman worker," he said, "who has ever shown any interest in what we are making here."

"I am very interested," I said. "I'm a watchmaker."

He stared at me with new interest. "Then I have work you will enjoy more." He took me to the opposite end of the huge shed where the final assembly of relay switches was done. It was intricate and exacting work, though not nearly so hard as watch repair, and Mr. Moorman was right. I enjoyed it and it helped make the eleven-hour workday go faster.

Not only to me but to all the Phillips workers, Mr. Moorman acted more as a kindly older brother than a crew boss. I would watch him, ceaselessly moving among his hundreds of charges, counseling, encouraging, finding a simpler job for the weary, a harder one for the restless. We had been at Vught more than a month before I learned that his twenty-year-old son had been shot here at the camp the week Betsie and I arrived.

No trace of this personal tragedy showed in his care for the rest of us. He stopped frequently at my bench, the first weeks, more to check my frame of mind than my work. But eventually his eyes would travel to the row of relay switches in front of me.

"Dear watch lady! Can you not remember for whom you are working? These radios are for their fighter planes!" And reaching

across me he would yank a wire from its housing or twist a tiny tube from an assembly.

“Now solder them back wrong. And not so fast! You’re over the day’s quota and it’s not yet noon.”

Lunchtime would have been the best time of day if I could have spent it with Betsie. However, Phillips workers were not allowed to leave the factory compound until the workday ended at 6:00. Prisoners on kitchen detail lugged in great buckets of gruel made of wheat and peas, tasteless but nourishing. Apparently there had been a cutback in rations recently: still the food was better and more plentiful than at Scheveningen where there had been no noonday meal at all.

After eating we were free for a blessed half hour to stroll about within the Phillips compound in the fresh air and the glorious Brabant sun. Most days I found a spot along the fence and stretched out on the warm ground to sleep (the days started with roll call at 5:00 a.m.). Sweet summer smells came in the breezes from the farms around the camp; sometimes I would dream that Karel and I were walking hand in hand along a country lane.

At 6:00 in the evening there was another roll call, then we marched back to our various sleeping barracks. Betsie always stood in the doorway of ours waiting for me; each evening it was as though a week had passed, there was so much to tell one another.

“That Belgian boy and girl at the bench next to mine? This noon they became engaged!”

“Mrs. Heerma—whose granddaughter was taken to Germany—today she let me pray with her.”

One day Betsie’s news touched us directly. “A lady from Ermelo was transferred to the sewing detail today. When I introduced myself, she said, ‘Another one!’”

“What did she mean?”

“Corrie, do you remember, the day we were arrested, a man came to the shop? You were sick and I had to wake you up.”

I remembered very well. Remembered the strange roving eyes, the uneasiness in the pit of my stomach that was more than fever.

“Apparently everyone in Ermelo knew him. He worked with the Gestapo from the first day of occupation. He reported this woman’s two brothers for Resistance work, and finally herself and her husband, too.” When Ermelo had finally caught on to him, he had come to Haarlem and teamed up with Willemse and Kapteyn. His name was Jan Vogel.

Flames of fire seemed to leap around that name in my heart. I thought of Father’s final hours, alone and confused, in a hospital corridor. Of the underground work so abruptly halted. I thought of Mary Itallie arrested while walking down a street. And I knew that if Jan Vogel stood in front of me now, I could kill him.

Betsie drew the little cloth bag from beneath her overalls and held it out to me, but I shook my head. Betsie kept the Bible during the day, since she had more chance to read and teach from it here than I did at the Phillips barracks. In the evenings we held a clandestine prayer meeting for as many as could crowd around our bunk.

“You lead the prayers tonight, Betsie. I have a headache.”

More than a headache. All of me ached with the violence of my feelings about the man who had done us so much harm. That night I did not sleep and the next day at my bench scarcely heard the conversation around me. By the end of the week I had worked myself into such a sickness of body and spirit that Mr. Moorman stopped at my bench to ask if something were wrong.

“Wrong? Yes, something’s wrong!” And I plunged into an account of that day. I was only too eager to tell Mr. Moorman and all Holland how Jan Vogel had betrayed his country.

What puzzled me all this time was Betsie. She had suffered everything I had and yet she seemed to carry no burden of rage. "Betsie!" I hissed one dark night when I knew that my restless tossing must be keeping her awake. Three of us now shared this single cot as the crowded camp daily received new arrivals. "Betsie, don't you feel anything about Jan Vogel? Doesn't it bother you?"

"Oh yes, Corrie! Terribly! I've felt for him ever since I knew—and pray for him whenever his name comes into my mind. How dreadfully he must be suffering!"

For a long time I lay silent in the huge shadowy barracks restless with the sighs, snores, and stirrings of hundreds of women. Once again I had the feeling that this sister with whom I had spent all my life belonged somehow to another order of beings. Wasn't she telling me in her gentle way that I was as guilty as Jan Vogel? Didn't he and I stand together before an all-seeing God convicted of the same sin of murder? For I had murdered him with my heart and with my tongue.

"Lord Jesus," I whispered into the lumpy ticking of the bed, "I forgive Jan Vogel as I pray that You will forgive me. I have done him great damage. Bless him now, and his family. . . ." That night for the first time since our betrayer had a name, I slept deep and dreamlessly until the whistle summoned us to roll call.

The days in Vught were a baffling mixture of good and bad. Morning roll call was often cruelly long. If the smallest rule had been broken, such as a single prisoner late for evening check-in, the entire barracks would be punished by a 4:00 a.m. or even a 3:30 call and made to stand at parade attention until our backs ached and our legs cramped. But the summer air was warm and alive with birds as the day approached. Gradually, in the east, a pink-and-gold sunrise would light the immense Brabant sky as Betsie and I squeezed each other's hands in awe.

At 5:30 we had black bread and "coffee," bitter and hot, and then fell into marching columns for the various work details. I looked forward to this hike to the Phillips factory. Part of the way we walked beside a small woods, separated only by a roll of barbed wire from a glistening world of dewdrops. We also marched past a section of the men's camp, many of our group straining to identify a husband or a son among the ranks of shaved heads and striped overalls.

This was another of the paradoxes of Vught. I was endlessly, daily grateful to be again with people. But what I had not realized in solitary confinement was that to have companions meant to have their griefs as well. We all suffered with the women whose men were in this camp: the discipline in the male section was much harsher than in the women's; executions were frequent. Almost every day a salvo of shots would send the anguished whispers flying: How many this time? Who were they?

The woman next to me at the relay bench was an intense Communist woman named Floor. She and her husband had managed to get their two small children to friends before their arrest, but she worried aloud all day about them and about Mr. Floor, who had tuberculosis. He worked on the rope-making crew in the compound next to Phillips and each noon they managed to exchange a few words through the barbed wire separating the two enclosures. Although she was expecting a third child in September, she would never eat her morning allotment of bread but passed it through the fence to him. She was dangerously thin, I felt, for an expectant mother, and several times I brought her a portion of my own breakfast bread. But this, too, was always set aside for Mr. Floor.

And yet in spite of sorrow and anxiety—and no one in that place was without both—there was laughter, too, in the Phillips barracks. An impersonation of the pompous, blustering second lieutenant. A

game of blind-man's bluff. A song passed in rounds from bench to bench until—

"Thick clouds! Thick clouds!" The signal might come from any bench that faced a window. The factory barracks was set in the center of the broad Phillips compound; there was no way a camp official could approach it without crossing this open space. In an instant every bench would be filled, the only sound the businesslike rattle of radio parts.

One morning the code words were still being relayed down the long shed when a rather hefty *Aufseherin* stepped through the door. She glanced furiously about, face flushing scarlet as she applied "thick clouds" to her appearance. She shrieked and ranted for a quarter of an hour, then deprived us of our noontime break in the open air that day.

After this we adopted the more neutral signal, "fifteen."

"I've assembled fifteen dials!"

During the long hot afternoons, pranks and talk died down as each one sat alone with his own thoughts. I scratched on the side of the table the number of days until September 1. There was nothing official about that date, just a chance remark by Mrs. Floor to the effect that six months was the usual prison term for ration-card offenders. Then, if that were the charge and if they included the time served at Scheveningen, September 1 would be our release date!

"Corrie," Betsie warned one evening when I announced triumphantly that August was half over, "we don't know for sure."

I had the feeling, almost, that to Betsie it didn't matter. I looked at her, sitting on our cot in the last moments before lights out, sewing up a split seam in my overalls as she'd so often sat mending under the lamplight in the dining room. Betsie by the very way she sat evoked a high-backed chair behind her and a carpet at her feet instead of this endless row of metal cots on a bare pine floor. The

first week we were there she had added extra hooks to the neck of her overalls so that she could fasten the collar high around her throat and, this propriety taken care of, I had the feeling she was as content to be reading the Bible here in Vught to those who had never heard it as she'd been serving soup to hungry people in the hallway of the Beje.

As for me, I set my heart every day more firmly on September 1.

AND THEN, ALL of a sudden, it looked as though we would not have to wait even this long. The Princess Irene Brigade was rumored to be in France, moving toward Belgium. The Brigade was part of the Dutch forces that had escaped to England during the Five-Day War; now it was marching to reclaim its own.

The guards were noticeably tense. Roll call was an agony. The old and the ill who were slow reaching their places were beaten mercilessly. Even the "red light commando" came in for discipline. These young women were ordinarily a favored group of prisoners. Prostitutes, most from Amsterdam, they were in prison not for their profession—which was extolled as a patriotic duty—but for infecting German soldiers. Ordinarily, with the male guards anyway, they had a bold, breezy manner; now even they had to form ruler-straight lines and stand hours at frozen attention.

The sound of the firing squad was heard more and more often. One lunchtime when the bell sounded to return to work, Mrs. Floor did not appear at the bench beside me. It always took a while for my eyes to readjust to the dim factory after the bright sun outside: it was only gradually that I saw the hunk of black bread still resting at her place on the bench. There had been no husband to deliver it to. And so hanging between hope and horror, we waited out the days. Rumor was all we lived on. The Brigade was across the Dutch border. The Brigade was destroyed. The Brigade had never landed. Women who had stayed away from the whispered little prayer

service around our cot now crowded close, demanding signs and predictions from the Bible.

On the morning of September 1, Mrs. Floor gave birth to a baby girl. The child lived four hours.

Several days later we awoke to the sound of distant explosions. Long before the roll-call whistle, the entire barracks was up and milling about in the dark between the cots. Was it bombs? Artillery fire? Surely the Brigade had reached Brabant. This very day they might be in Vught!

The scowls and threats of the guards when they arrived daunted us not at all. Everyone's mind had turned homeward, everyone talked of what she would do first. "The plants will all be dead," said Betsie, "but we'll get some cuttings from Nollie! We'll wash the windows so the sun can come in."

At the Phillips factory Mr. Moorman tried to calm us. "Those aren't bombs," he said, "and certainly not guns. That's demolition work. Germans. They're probably blowing up bridges. It means they expect an attack but not that it's here. It might not come for weeks."

This dampened us a bit, but as the blasts came closer and closer, nothing could keep down hope. Now they were so near they hurt our ears.

"Drop your lower jaw!" Mr. Moorman called down the long room. "Keep your mouth open and it will save your eardrums."

We had our midday meal inside with the doors and windows closed. We'd been working again for an hour—or sitting at our benches, no one could work—when the order came to return to dormitories. With sudden urgency, women embraced husbands and sweethearts who worked beside them at Phillips.

Betsie was waiting for me outside our barracks. "Corrie! Has the Brigade come? Are we free?"

"No, Not yet. I don't know. Oh Betsie, why am I so frightened?"

The loudspeaker in the men's camp was sounding the signal for roll call. No order was given here and we drifted about aimlessly, listening we scarcely knew for what. Names were being read through the men's speaker, though it was too far way to make them out.

And suddenly an insane fear gripped the waiting women. A deathlike silence now hung over both sides of the vast camp. The loudspeaker had fallen silent. We exchanged wordless looks, we almost feared to breathe.

Then rifle fire split the air. Around us women began to weep. A second volley. A third. For two hours the executions went on. Someone counted.

More than seven hundred male prisoners were killed that day.

There was little sleeping in our barracks that night and no roll call the following morning. About 6:00 a.m. we were ordered to collect our personal things. Betsie and I put our belongings into the pillowcases we had brought from Scheveningen: toothbrushes, needles and thread, a small bottle of Davitamon oil that had come in a Red Cross package, Nollie's blue sweater, which was the only thing we had brought with us when we left the quarantine camp ten weeks before. I transferred the Bible in its bag from Betsie's back to my own; she was so thin it made a visible bump between her shoulders.

We were marched to a field where soldiers were passing out blankets from the backs of open trucks. As we filed past, Betsie and I drew two beautiful soft new ones; mine was white with blue stripes, Betsie's white with red stripes—obviously the property of some well-to-do family.

About noon the exodus from camp began. Through the drab streets of barracks we went, past the bunkers, through the maze of barbed-wire compounds and enclosures, and at last onto the rough dirt

road through the woods down which we had stumbled that rainy night in June. Betsie hung hard to my arm; she was laboring for breath as she always did when she had to walk any distance.

“March! *Schnell!* Double-time!”

I slipped my arm beneath Betsie’s shoulders and half-carried her the final quarter-mile. At last the path ended and we lined up facing the single track, over a thousand women standing toe to heel.

Farther along, the men’s section was also at the siding; it was impossible to identify individuals among the shaved heads glistening in the autumn sun.

At first I thought our train had not come; then I realized that these freight cars standing on the tracks were for us. Already the men were being prodded aboard, clambering up over the high sides. We could not see the engine, just this row of small, high-wheeled European boxcars stretching out of sight in both directions, machine guns mounted at intervals on the roof. Soldiers were approaching along the track, pausing at each car to haul open the heavy sliding door. In front of us a gaping black interior appeared. Women began to press forward.

Clutching our blankets and pillowcases, we were swept along with the others. Betsie’s chest was still heaving oddly after the rapid march. I had to boost her over the side of the train.

At first I could make out nothing in the dark car; then in a corner I saw a tall, uneven shape. It was a stack of bread, dozens of flat black loaves piled one on top of another. A long trip then. . . .

The small car was getting crowded. We were shoved against the back wall. Thirty or forty people were all that could fit in. And still the soldiers drove women over the side, cursing, jabbing with their guns. Shrieks rose from the center of the car but still the press increased. It was only when eighty women were packed inside that the door thumped shut and we heard iron bolts driven into place.

Women were sobbing and many fainted, although in the tight-wedged crowd they remained upright. Just when it seemed certain that those in the middle must suffocate or be trampled to death, we worked out a kind of system where, by half-sitting, half-lying with our legs wedged around one another like members of a sledding team, we were able to get down on the floor of the car.

“Do you know what I am thankful for?” Betsie’s gentle voice startled me in that squirming madhouse. “I am thankful that Father is in heaven today!”

Father. Yes! Oh Father, how could I have wept for you?

The warm sun beat down on the motionless train, the temperature in the packed car rose, the air grew foul. Beside me someone was tugging at a nail in the ancient wood of the wall. At last it came free; with the point, she set to work gouging the hole wider. Others around the sides took up the idea and in a while blessed whiffs of outside air began to circle about us.

It was hours before the train gave a sudden lurch and began to move. Almost at once it stopped again, then again crawled forward. The rest of the day and into the night it was the same, stopping, starting, slamming, jerking. Once when it was my turn at the air-hole, I saw in the moonlight trainmen carrying a length of twisted rail. Tracks ahead must be destroyed. I passed the news. Maybe they would not be able to repair them. Maybe we would still be in Holland when liberation came.

Betsie’s forehead was hot to my hand. The “red light” girl between whose legs I was wedged squeezed herself into an even tighter crouch so that Betsie could lie almost flat across my lap. I dozed too, from time to time, my head on the shoulder of the friendly girl behind us. Once I dreamed it was storming. I could hear the hailstones on Tante Jans’s front windows. I opened my eyes. It really was hailing. I could hear it rattling against the side of the car.

Everyone was awake now and talking. Another storm of hail. And then we heard a burst of machine-gun fire from the roof of the train.

“It’s bullets!” someone shouted. “They’re attacking the train.”

Again we heard that sound like tiny stones striking the wall, and again the machine guns answered. Had the Brigade reached us at last? The firing died away. For an hour the train sat motionless. Then slowly we crawled forward.

At dawn someone called out that we were passing through the border town of Emmerich.

We had arrived in Germany.