

# 1945

Konzentrationslager (KL)

**BERGEN-BELSEN**

Kleines Frauenlager

The Lüneburg Heath

## THE GERMAN REICH

She lies sprawled among the dead who carpet the frozen mud flats, time slipping past, her thoughts dissolving. The last of her is leaking away as the angel of death hovers above, so close now. So close that she can feel him peeling away her essence. Her body is baked by fever and ripped by a murderous cough; her mind is more animal now than human. She is numb to the bitter cold that has penetrated her bones. Thirst is gone, and so is hunger. She has passed through them on her way out of her body.

But from somewhere there is a loud pop, the anonymous discharge of a rifle or a pistol, and she can feel the darkness above her hesitate. The sound of the gunshot has grabbed its attention, and instead of collecting her final breath, death, in its forgetfulness, passes over her. And in that fractured moment, the world that would have been takes a different path: a flicker of the girl she once was makes a last demand for life. A breath, a flinch of existence. A small, tentative throb of expectation dares to flex her heart. A beat. Another beat, and another as her heart begins to work a rhythm. She coughs viciously, but something in her has found a pulse. Some vital substance. She feels herself draw a breath and then exhale it. Slowly. Very slowly, she pries open her gluey eyelids till the raw white sunlight stings.

She is alive.

## HER ONE TRUE CONFIDANTE

Writing in a diary is a really strange experience for someone like me. Not only because I've never written anything before, but also because it seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl.

—Anne Frank,  
from her diary,  
20 June 1942

... all Dutch Jews are now in the bag.

—Dr. Hans Böhmcker,  
Beauftragter des Deutschen  
Reiches für die Stadt Amsterdam,  
2 October 1941

1942

**Merwedeplein 37**

Residential Housing Estate  
Amsterdam-Zuid

**OCCUPIED NETHERLANDS**

**Two years since the German invasion**

Anne gazes out the open window of their third-story flat in the Merwedeplein, her elbows braced against the windowsill. The sun is cradled in a sharp blue sky. The grass of the common is a lush green. It's a Sunday midday. Down below, a stylishly dressed wedding party is off to the magistrate's office, and Anne is absorbing the details with excitement because she positively adores fashion. The bride is modeling a well-cut suit with a tapered skirt and a felt hat. A wartime look for a bride, sleek and smart without the frills. She carries a generous bouquet of white roses. People peer from their balconies as the bride and groom process down the steps and pose for a movie camera as if they were film stars.

"Anne, get away from the window, please," her mother calls out. Unwilling to budge, Anne calls back over her shoulder, "In a minute!" She imagines herself in front of the camera one day, as a famous film star. Like Greta Garbo, or Priscilla Lane. She loves the films and film actresses, and it angers Anne more than almost anything that the Nazis have seen fit to ban Jews from the cinemas. After the war, though, who knows? She could become another Dorothy Lamour, followed everywhere by eager photographers.

Her mother grows adamant, correcting her in her normal sing-song reprimand. "You should be setting the table for lunch. And besides, it's simply too unladylike for you to be there with your head stuck out the window like a nosy giraffe." Though Mummy herself

cannot resist a discreet giraffe's peek, followed by a shallow sigh. "When I married your father, I wore a beautiful white silk gown with a long, long train," she reminds herself. "Decorated by the most charming little filigree of Belgian lace, specially imported."

"I'm never going to marry," Anne decides to announce at that instant, which leaves her mother blinking, utterly appalled. Really, Anne was just irritated and wanted to strike back at Mummy in some way she knew would sting. But her mother's expression is positively stricken, as if Anne has just threatened to jump out the window.

"Anne, but you *must*," she insists. "Your papa and I must have grandchildren."

"Oh, Margot can handle that," Anne assures her casually. "That's what firstborn daughters are for."

"Anne," her sister, Margot, squawks from the chair where she is paging through the book of Rembrandt plates, a gift from their omi in Basel. Her hair is combed back with a single silver clip holding it in place. Lovely as always, which makes Anne even madder. "What a thing to say!"

Anne ignores her. "I'm going to be famous," she declares. "A famous film star, probably, and travel the world."

"So famous film stars don't have *children*?" her mother asks.

Anne enlightens her, trying not to sound too superior. "They do if they want, I suppose. But it's not expected. Famous people live a completely different existence from most people, who are *happy* to live boring lives."

"Happy lives are not boring, Anne," her mother instructs her. Anne shrugs. She knows that Mother was sheltered by her upbringing. That the Holländers of Aachen were a religious family who kept a kosher household, were bent on respectability, and that any ambitions beyond marriage and family she might have harbored were eclipsed by the diktats of tradition. So she tries not to condescend too much when she says, "Maybe for *some* people that's true, Mummy. But for those who devote themselves to great achievements, it's different."

That's when her papa appears from the bedroom. Anne's dear Pim. Her dearest Hunny Kungha. Tall and lanky as a reed, with

intelligent, deeply pocketed eyes and a pencil-thin mustache. Only a fringe of hair remains of the crop from his youth, but the loss has exposed a noble crown. He's so diligent that he's even been out tending to business on a Sunday morning. He still wears his skinny blue necktie but has changed into his around-the-house cardigan. "Hard work and dedication. That's how *lasting* fame is achieved," he informs all assembled.

"And talent," Anne replies, feeling the need to counter him in some way, but not unpleasantly. Pim, after all, is on her side. That's the way it's always been. Margot and Mother can grouse, but Pim and Anne understand. They understand just what kind of fabulous destiny awaits Miss Annelies Marie Frank.

"Yes, of course. *And* talent." He smiles. "A quality both my girls possess in great abundance."

"Thank you, Pim," Margot says lightly before sticking her nose back into her book.

But Mummy doesn't look so pleased. Maybe she didn't appreciate being left out of Pim's accounting of talented girls. "You'll spoil them, Otto," she sighs, a favorite anthem of hers. "Margot has a head on her shoulders at least, but our petite chatterbox?" She frowns, referring to who else but Anne? "It only makes her more insufferable."

Inside, daylight whitens the lace of the tablecloth as the adults cluck over their coffee cups and slices of Mummy's chocolate cake, eggless, baked with flax meal instead of flour, surrogate sugar, surrogate cocoa, and two teaspoons of precious vanilla extract, but still not so bad. Nobody has ever said Mummy isn't a resourceful cook. Anne has already gobbled up her slice and is sitting at the table hugging her beloved tabby, Moortje, while her parents converse in the muted, apprehensive tone they've adopted since the occupation.

"And what about those poor souls who have been sent to the east?" Mummy wonders. "The horrible stories one hears over the English radio."

Anne holds her breath and then exhales. For once she is only too happy to be left out of the adult discussion. She's often informed about how terribly unreasonable she can be, but would it be *so* unreasonable

at this moment to go hide in her bedroom and stick her fingers in her ears? She does not want to hear any more about the conquering Hun and his atrocious behavior; she wants to pick out her birthday present.

She feels the excitement twitching in her body, so it's hard to keep still and sit up straight at the supper table. "Mother, can we use Oma Rose's sterling ware for my party?"

"Excuse me, Anne," her mother answers, frowning, "please don't interrupt. It's rude. Your father and I are having an important conversation. Unpleasant, perhaps, but necessary."

Pim, however, seems to be happy to remind them all in his gently pointed manner that one should not believe every rumor one hears. One must recall that there were stories of all manner of atrocities fabricated by the English about the kaiser's army in the last war. "Propaganda," he calls it. And shouldn't Mummy admit that he's the expert on this subject? He was, after all, a reserve officer in the kaiser's field artillery.

Mummy is not dissuaded. She is not convinced that the talk she has heard is all English fabrication. She believes that the Nazis have made Germans into criminals. "Look how Rotterdam was bombed," she offers. A defenseless city. And must she continue to enumerate the horrid slew of diktats imposed upon Jews since that Austrian brute Seyss-Inquart was installed as Reichskommissar, the high, almighty governor of the German occupation?

Anne's father shrugs. Certainly it's no secret that since the occupation, Germans have been happy to treat Jews abominably. Decrees are enshrined weekly in the *Joodsche Weekblad*, the mouthpiece of the Nazi invader, published by what the Germans call the Jewish Council. Within its pages are the details of their persecution. Jews are forbidden *this* and Jews are forbidden *that*. Jews are permitted to do their shopping *only* between such and such times. Jews must observe a curfew; they are forbidden to walk the streets from this hour to that hour. Jews who appear in public are required to wear a yellow star of explicit dimensions sewn to their clothes. Pim, however, harbors sweeter memories of the good old Fatherland and makes allowances for Good Germans as opposed to Hitler's hooligans. "Edith," he says to his wife, pronouncing her name with a calm, intimate authority. A

standard tone. “Perhaps we can table this,” he wonders, indicating the children. But Pim is incorrect if he thinks that the mere presence of the children is enough to dissuade Mummy from her favorite subject: how she was robbed of the life she once led. She wants to know if it has slipped her husband’s mind how much she was forced to give up, and she doesn’t just mean visiting Christian friends in their homes. She means how much she’s been forced to leave behind. The lovely furniture made from fruitwoods. The velvet drapes. The carpets handwoven in the Orient. The collection of Meissen figurines a century old.

According to the story she’s so fond of repeating, their family once had a big house in the Marbachweg in Frankfurt and Mummy had a housemaid, though Anne remembers none of it. She was just a toddler when fear of Hitler caused them to flee Germany for Holland. To Anne their flat here in Amsterdam South is her home. Five rooms in this perfectly well-respected bourgeoisie housing estate in the River Quarter, occupied by perfectly well-respected bourgeoisie refugees of the deutschen jüdisches variety. The children have started gabbling away in Dutch, but for most of the adults settled here German is still the daily conversational vernacular. Even now the Frank household speaks it at the table, because heaven forbid Mummy be required to learn another word of Dutch, even though German has become the language of their persecutors.

Mother is seldom happy, it seems, unless she’s unhappy. Anne suspects that when Oma Rose died, she took something of Mummy with her. A piece of her heart that connected her to the world of her childhood, a comfortable world of affection, warmth, and safety. But after Oma passed, Mummy seemed to lose all resilience. Perhaps the loss of a mother can do that to some people. At least Anne can pity Mummy for this. Anne, too, still mourns the loss of her sweet grandma, so she can try to imagine her mother’s pain. But she doesn’t dare imagine what it would feel like if she were to *ever* lose her papa. Her one and only Pim.

“Aren’t we going to the shop?” Anne inserts this question with a quick, prodding tone.

“Please, Anne,” her mother huffs. “Put down the cat. How many times must I remind you that animals do not belong at the table?”

Anne rubs her tabby’s fur against her cheek. “But he’s not an *animal*. He’s the one and only Monsieur Moortje. Aren’t you, Moortje?” she asks the little gray tiger, who mews in confirmation.

“Anne, do as your mother asks,” Pim instructs quietly, and Anne obeys with a half sigh.

“I just wanted to know how much longer I have to sit here being bored.”

“Bored?” her mother squawks. “Your father and I are discussing important matters.”

“Important to *adults*,” Anne replies thickly. “But children have a different view of the world, Mother. Based on having *fun*.”

“Oh, *fun*, is it? Well, isn’t *that* important news,” her mother mocks her sternly, the line of her mouth going flat. “It’s too bad that children like you don’t run the world.”

“I’ll agree with *that*,” Anne says. “Don’t you agree, Margot?”

“There are other things more important than fun,” her sister informs her.” Now, *that’s* Mummy.

“Your sister is sixteen,” their mother explains approvingly. “She’s not a child any longer.”

Margot gives her sister a quietly dismissive shrug. “You just don’t understand, Anne.”

“I understand plenty, thank you very much. What I *don’t* understand is why grown-ups take such pleasure in chewing over the worst of the world like gristle.”

“Finish your brussels sprouts,” her mother says, frowning.

Anne frowns back, her voice fizzling with dejection as she says, “I don’t like them.”

“Finish them anyway.”

Pim breaks in gently. “Edith. Perhaps she can have more carrots.”

Mummy quite definitely disapproves, but she shrugs. “Of course. By all means. Let her do as she pleases. It appears that children rule the world after all, Anne.” To her husband she says, “It’s only that one must *wonder*, Otto. It may all just be ‘propaganda,’ as you like to



suggest, but one must wonder how many hungry Jewish girls there are right now in terrible circumstances who would give *quite a lot* for a plate of healthy food.”

No answer to this. How could there be? Mummy takes a grim sip from her coffee cup as Anne quietly scoops a small helping of carrots onto her plate, isolating them from the abominable choux de Bruxelles. Pim exhales, releasing a breath of smoke from his cigarette. Again he suggests a change of subject.

Poor Pim thinks he can shield his daughters from the ugly realities. Impossible. It's obvious that things are not good for the Jews since the Hun occupied the city. It's even obvious to a child that terrible things are happening. Anne is not so oblivious as everyone believes. But why in the world should they dwell on it so? If Anne confined her thoughts each morning to the lurking menace of the German hordes billeted in her lovely Amsterdam, she would be paralyzed, hiding under her bed, refusing to budge. She *must* believe that tomorrow will come unimpeded. That the sun will rise at dawn in spite of the old Herr Six-and-a-Quarter Seyß-Inquart on his high Nazi perch. Margot calls her childish when she says this, but who cares what sisters think? And really, whether there are crimes against Jews in progress a thousand kilometers away or in the center of Amsterdam, what can *she* do about it? Crimes against Jews are as ancient as Scripture. And doesn't she have a duty to God to enjoy the life he has given her? She is about to turn thirteen, and the entire German Wehrmacht has not been able to prevent *that* from happening. Besides, she has an ultimate, unshakable faith that Pim will figure things out for all of them, as he always has. Mummy isn't completely wrong—there are plenty of Jews in much, *much* worse circumstances than the family Frank, and there is only one reason for that: Pim is too smart to allow them to be caught in the Hitlerite net. Surely even Mummy must recognize that fact. It's only too bad she cannot see past her own fear and give her husband the credit he deserves, instead of always moaning about the past. One would think a wife would do as much for the man she's wed. As for Anne, there is no one on earth who can make her feel as safe and loved as her papa. And though it may hurt Mummy when Anne chooses Pim to listen to her prayers at

bedtime, she cannot help it. She knows that as long as God and Pim are on the job, she is protected.

After the dishes are cleared, her father bends down to her and whispers the good news. “Go get your coat. It’s time to put our troubles aside.”

Anne claps her hands together and hooks Pim with a hug, inhaling the zesty scent of his cologne. Her parents are allowing her to choose a present for herself in *advance* of her birthday party. There are still hours before the Jewish curfew begins, so they all visit the stationery shop a few blocks away. Blankevoorts Subscription Library at Zuider Amstellaan 62. One of Anne’s favorite spots. She loves the inky smell of the place. The neat boxes of thick writing paper tied with ribbons. The sleepy orange tom lounging on one of the shelves, purring when she strokes his fur. At least Jews are still allowed to pet cats!

Mummy tries to draw her attention to a flower-pressing kit and then a scrapbook with a Moroccan leather binding, but Anne knows precisely what she wants. She has picked out a red tartan autograph album with a lock that snaps shut, because her favorite writer is Cissy van Marxveldt and she has been absolutely captivated by the adventures of the author’s plucky young heroine, Joop ter Heul. Joop keeps a secret diary and addresses her many entries to her friends: Phien, Loutje, Conny, and especially her very best friend for all time, Kitty. Anne thinks this is a breathtaking idea, and she intends to have loads of fun keeping her *own* diary of adventures. When it’s time to leave, Pim’s cheery voice separates Anne from her mother. “So the young lady has made her choice?”

The lilt of disappointment colors Mummy’s response. “This is what she wants,” she says, and shrugs.



**Joods Lyceum**  
Stadstimmertuin 1  
Amsterdam-Centrum

The so-called Jewish Lyceum, where it has been decreed that *all* Jewish children attend classes, is housed in a decaying cavern of sandy

red brick west of the Amstel. In the classrooms paint peels from the ceiling. The hallways stink vaguely of moldering plumbing. Her mathematics teacher is a bespectacled old bird who speaks passable Dutch with a sharp, clip-clop Berliner's accent. The rumor is that he had been a member of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences until the Nazis purged all Jews. His pupils call him "the Goose," because his name is Gander and because of his habit of honking into his handkerchief.

As the Goose opens his lesson that Monday morning, drawing down a clean blackboard, he glances about the room, and when he spots the newest vacancy among the desks, he waits for the silent explanation. It's a code that's developed between teacher and pupils. The teacher's glance is the question. Another empty desk—what has become of the former occupant? The pupils answer with subtle hand signals. The clenching of a fist means arrested, a small downward swooping motion means gone into hiding. "Diving under," it's called. *Onder het duiken*. This time the Goose pauses slightly and then goes about chalking an equation onto the board.

Anne, though, catches the tart scent of the river breezing through the open windows. It's not that she doesn't want to pay attention to the teacher, but she can be so easily distracted—by a breeze, by a scent, by a slant of light—and her mind veers off into another direction. Outside, the beauty of nature beckons her. If she had her way, she would be sitting in the grass watching the river flow by. It's a secret she keeps to herself, but being with nature allows her to sink into herself, not in a lonely way, mostly, but in a private way that permits her to ponder the Anne on the inside, who is not always so bold or confident. Not always so wonderfully cheerful or impervious. She thinks about what a good time she had with Mummy and Margot last Saturday, baking macaroons. They were laughing and joking with one another, and when Anne used too much coconut, Mummy wasn't critical at all but instead started singing a ditty about the little monkey who steals too many coconuts from the coconut palm.

"Miss Frank?"

It's in those moments that Anne wonders if she is completely wrong about her mother. If Mummy is *not* a faultfinder at heart but

is generous and loving and appreciates Anne for who she is. For who God made her to be.

“Miss Frank?”

She looks over at the sound of her name, only to find the Goose glaring at her under his bushy eyebrows, a wry expression on his face. “Are you in dreamland again, Miss Frank?”

The class titters.

“No, sir,” she replies, doing her best to gather her dignity, though she can feel her face flush.

“Then please,” the Goose says, “solve the equation for  $x$ .”

“Oh, Mr. Gander,” Anne replies, “I’m sure we both know that’s not very likely to happen.”

And this time when the class titters, she feels a lift. Victory.

On the playground she shows off with her favorite trick, displacing her shoulder from its socket and then, like magic, popping it back into place. A performance guaranteed to draw a crowd of admirers. Even the boys leave their football to come watch. She likes the attention. Especially from the boys. Her many beaux, as her mother would call them, with her favorite overtone of criticism. Mummy always warns her about flirting. The *dangers* of it. “Look at Margot,” she insists. “Do you see her behaving in such a way?”

There’s a boy whom everyone calls Hello, who’s much closer to Margot’s age. A Good Jewish Boy, excruciatingly polite, with only a hint of playful devilishness. He once took Anne for a gelato at Oase on the Geleenstraat, one of the last ice-cream parlors to serve Jews, and it made her feel grown-up. She liked his attention. She likes the attention of boys in general, it’s true. It makes her feel bright and adored.

The name of her friend, her *very best* friend, is Hanneli, but Anne often calls her by her nickname, Lies. She lives in the Amsterdam South, too, with her parents and baby sister. Her father was once an underminister and a press secretary in the Prussian government, but the Nazis took care of that, purging Jews from the civil service, so now the family has made their adopted home here in Amsterdam,

just like the Frank family. Anne finds Lies to be sweet and thoughtful, and shy enough to make for a good counterpoint to Anne's bravado.

"But wouldn't you rather have a surprise?" Hanneli wants to know. They are soldiering on with their book satchels after leaving school. They walk now because no Jews are permitted the use of bicycles. Or streetcars. Or public parks. No more swimming in the Amstelparkbad pool for Jews, or ice-skating, or tennis at the Apollolal, because that's all for gentiles only now. But today who cares? These are the final days of school before the summer holiday. And on a fresh, cloudless afternoon like this one, Anne can inhale the briny-sweet drift of the Amstel and listen to the chatter of the gulls. She feels light in her body, as if she could easily fly away on a breeze, and she might just do so.

"I'm mad about surprises," Lies declares wistfully. "I mean, for me, half the fun of birthdays is the surprises."

Her chestnut hair is woven into braids, which swing lightly as she walks. They make Anne jealous sometimes, those braids, but in a delicious way. Sometimes she'd just love to give them a good yank. Instead, Anne delivers her opinion. "For me surprises are overrated. I'd rather get what I know I want," she says with conviction, and then her heart tightens in her chest. An angry gust of thunder invades the street as a German motorcycle squadron blasts past with their steel helmets and goggles, polluting the air with their fumes. Anne grimaces, clutching her school satchel against her breast, concealing her yellow Judenstern, though she knows it's illegal. But Lies just stares at them with a blank kind of terror, her hands clapped over her ears and her star on perfect display as the squadron roars down the street, uninterested in two scrawny Jewish schoolgirls on the sidewalk. "They're such beasts," Anne breathes.

Lies has lowered her hands from her ears, but her expression is racked by anxiety. "I asked Papa if we were going to go into hiding."

"Really?" This interests Anne. "And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Hiding from *what*?' " she answers vacantly.

Anne shakes her head. "I don't want to talk about this," she

suddenly decides. Instead she has a swift desire to misbehave. She tastes it like spice on the back of her tongue.

Up ahead there's a clot of older boys loitering on the sidewalk. They are congregated in a slump at the corner of the Uiterwaardenstraat by a tobacconist shop that has a reputation as a black-market hangout, run by a Galician Jew who trades in Jewish valuables. At least that's the story from Mr. van Pels, Pim's business partner.

"These sorts of operations are a growing concern," Mr. van P. had insisted while visiting their flat for coffee. "So you've been hiding the jewelry under a floorboard to keep it from the Germans? Your heirloom set of silver is under the bed? Your great-great-granny's gold-plated menorah's at the bottom of the laundry hamper, and in the meantime you're wondering how to feed your family? Why not resign yourself to the inevitable and sell off the lot to the Galician? It's better than handing it over to the robbery bank. You'll only get a pittance, but at least it's a pittance from another Jew."

"The robbery bank? What is *that*?" Anne had wanted to know, because she likes to know everything. No harm in that. Mummy had shushed her, but Pim had explained it in his quiet way. Along with all the other indignities, Jews have been ordered to deposit any assets of worth with the Sarphatistraat branch of the Lippmann, Rosenthal & Company. Now run by the Nazis, of course.

At this point Mrs. van Pels, who's anything but retiring, puffed herself up to declare, "I don't care how hungry I get, Putti. I'm never going to let you sell off my furs. I'll be buried in them first," causing her husband to hoot out a laugh.

"And she's not joking!" he assured all assembled with a fat grin.

One of the boys up ahead is kicking at a crack in the sidewalk, sending pebbles flying. Another laughs suddenly, sounding like a mule braying. Who knows *what* boys think is funny? Yellow stars are stitched onto their pullovers and jackets. Maybe Mummy likes to believe that if they must wear the Magen David in public, then they should do so with pride, but these boys wear their stars like what they are: badges of exclusion. Of rejection. Badges that assert their status as outsiders, as rough cuts on the edge. Their clothes ragged at the

seams, their hair poorly groomed, the boys examine the two approaching girls with the kind of sullen interest common to street-corner troublemakers.

“Don’t look at them,” Lies warns. She has already cast her eyes downward to the uneven pavement of the sidewalk, tracking the progress of her feet. But Anne cannot quite follow Hanneli’s example. She knows that Hanneli thinks she’s overly obsessed with boys, but this isn’t about silly flirting with their well-mannered schoolmates. Anne cannot help glancing at the wild challenge of their eyes.

“Wanna smoke?” one of them inquires, offering his cigarette butt. His clothes are unkempt, and he looks poorly cared for.

“No,” Lies replies firmly.

But Anne has stopped.

“Anne,” her friend prods with a scandalized whisper.

“It’s just a *cigarette*,” Anne insists. “I’ve never tried one.”

Only for an instant does she catch the curious smirk on the boy’s face when she plucks the cigarette from his fingers. The butt is damp from his saliva as it touches her lips, and she inhales with what she believes is a certain aplomb. But her body quickly convulses and her breath contracts as she chokes on the gritty smoke. Garbo she is not. The boys laugh as she coughs it out, her face flushing, her eyes tearing up. She drops the cigarette without thought as Lies seizes her by the arm, dragging her away. “Anne,” she says with both reproach and sympathy.

“Don’t tell your mother,” Anne manages to beg as they leave the sniggering boys.

“What? My *mother*?”

“Don’t tell her, please,” Anne begs, smearing tears from her eyes. “I don’t want her to think I’ve gone boy-crazy. She already thinks I’m a know-it-all.”

“She *does not* think you’re a know-it-all, Anne,” Lies replies in a tone that suggests she is defending her mother as much as defending Anne.

“She *does*,” Anne insists. “You heard her: God knows everything, but *Anne* knows everything else.”

“That was a joke.”

“No it wasn’t. It was true. I *am* a know-it-all.”

“All right,” Hanneli concedes. “And you’re boy-crazy, too. But we still love you.”

And now Anne laughs. She sniffs back her tears, flinging her arm around Lies’s shoulder. Darling Lies. But then she says, “Oh, *no*.”

“Oh, no?”

“Good *morning*, Mrs. Lipschitz,” Anne sings, properly polite, at the approach of a matronly mitteleuropäische specimen with the star on her coat.

“Good morning, child,” the gnädige Mrs. Lipschitz replies with disapproval, a shopping bag looped over her arm and a scowl stamped onto her face as she passes.

“Oh, now I’m really in for it,” Anne predicts with dread when they’re a safe distance away.

“Who was *that*?”

“*Mrs. Lipschitz*. I call her Old Mrs. Snoop. She’s always looking for something to criticize me over. If she saw me taking a puff off that cigarette, she’ll go straight to Mummy about it,” Anne huffs. But there’s nothing to be done about it now. “I want a pickle,” she announces.

She’s spotted an old fellow with a pushcart across the street. “The town’s most delicious pickle!” he claims, calling out to all who pass. The girls laugh as their pickle halves crunch satisfyingly in their mouths, tasting nutty-sweet from a hint of mace. Anne parts with Lies at the Zuider Amstellaan, indulging a sudden urge to hug her good-bye for no other reason than just because. Lies does not seem to mind.

But traveling up the Deltastraat with her schoolbag on her shoulder, Anne feels the light flush of joy drain from her heart as a stinging loneliness, unbidden and enigmatic, creeps over her. She tries to cheer herself with another crunching bite of her pickle, but she really only wanted it to mask the smell of tobacco on her breath, so she tosses it down a storm drain when she crosses the street. It’s this loneliness that often makes her cry for no reason. If her parents catch her, she pretends to have a stomachache, because they’ll readily fall for that one. Mummy is always saying how sickly she is. What a weak constitution she has, catching everything there is to catch. But really



it's an ache like a hook that threatens to drag her into a dark hole. Maybe it was the puff on the cigarette. The dizziness that seized her and the bitter choking. She stops and hugs a lamppost, her breath rising. This is the Anne she keeps secret from others. The panicked Anne. The helpless Anne on the edge of a lonely void. It would not do for such an Anne to show up in the world. Grabbing her wrist, she thumbs her pulse and tries to calm its speed. Mummy will say she's just a nervous child, like so many girls, and dose her with valerian. But Anne knows it's something more than a twitch of girlish nerves. When it arrives in force, she feels as if there's a black fog coming for her. It's a fear that has clutched at her since she was too young to define it. A fear that beneath her smiles and jokes and know-it-all antics, she is simply a fraud. That she will live her life with nothing to offer but her shadowboxing frolics and leave not a single lasting mark, because no one will ever truly love her or truly know her, and that her heart is nothing but dust that will return to dust.

She has taught herself tricks when the panic overtakes her. Focusing on the clouds floating above like grand barges. Counting backward from a hundred. Or simply bawling her eyes out. She could easily do that now, but she does not wish to sob in public, so instead she chooses to concentrate on the progress of a long-legged spider up the lamppost. Spinning his silky filament, Mr. Longlegs. Higher and higher on a silvered thread. Anne breathes in deeply and exhales slowly. She swallows hard, and the clutch of dread begins to loose its grip. Her pulse retrieves its usual tempo. Wiping a clammy sheen from her brow, she slings her schoolbag back over her shoulder. Like the clouds above her head, she is on the move, herself again. The emptiness safely locked away.

The rows of modern sandstone apartment buildings radiate in symmetry from the central star of a tall yellow tower called the Wolkenkrabber. The Cloud Raker. A twelve-story jut of concrete masonry, steel, and glass scraping the cloud bellies as it anchors a commons of well-groomed turf. The afternoon smells of the bread in the ovens of the Blommestein bakery with a trace of pithy river air. This is the Merwedeplein, which Anne likes to call "the Merry."

Her home is number 37. Four rooms, a kitchen, a bath, and a water closet, plus a room upstairs, which they rent to a bachelor tenant. It's an airy flat, with a wonderful little platje—their narrow, tar-pebble terrace that's as good as any lakeshore for sunbathing in the summer. Anne bounds up the stairwell from the doorway and meets her mother, who's dressed in her housecoat, a look of glum disappointment on her face. She is a stolidly built lady, her mother, with a broad brow and the easy smile of the Holländer family, though she seldom smiles these days. “*Anne.*” Mummy frowns. “I need to speak to you for a moment. Come sit down.”

The sea-green French doors of the living room are open. Plunking her book satchel down on her mother's camelback sofa without argument, she plunks herself down as well and exhales her annoyance, head tilted toward the more arrogant side of obedience. Old Mrs. Snoop must have absolutely *sprinted* home to telephone Mummy and inform on Anne. She watches her mother seat herself in the club chair opposite, ankles crossed, and waits for it, the downpour of scorn and criticism.

But instead her mother says simply, “You're growing up.”

Anne blinks.

“*I know that,*” her mother tells her. “Only days away from thirteen, and how that happened so soon I can't begin to guess. But it's clear; you're becoming a young lady. You think I don't understand,” she says, “but you're wrong. I understand very well. I was once thirteen, too, believe it or not, and I thought that your oma Rose, bless her name, didn't understand a single fig's worth about me. At that age I wanted to try new things. I wanted to be like your uncles and get in trouble once in a while. Break a rule or two. But since I was the girl, well . . .” Mummy releases a breath. “It was unacceptable at the time. My mother watched me closely to make sure I stayed firmly within the limits of what was proper.”

“*Really?*” Anne says. She must admit that she is surprised. Oma Rose, may she rest in peace, always liked to tease Mummy over her addiction to propriety. Anne's mother shakes her head with a wry smile, pursing her lips.

“Oh, I know. You think that your oma was always on *your* side,

that she liked to have her jokes about how Her Majesty Edith must have everything just so, but believe me, she was much, *much* stricter than I have ever been. I wasn't even permitted to *speak* in the company of adults unless spoken to first. Can you imagine *that*, my dear daughter?"

Anne must admit, "No, I *can't*, Mummy. I think I would explode."

"Yes," her mother agrees, still with her dry smile. "I think you *would*. So I am not that way. I try, Anne, I *do try* to allow you and your sister as much latitude as I am able. And it's not as if I haven't suffered plenty of criticism as a result. Many of the other ladies think that I'm far too modern with you, far too permissive. But I say time passes, the world changes. So when you tell me that you simply cannot tolerate brussels sprouts, I let you have another helping of roasted carrots. When a boy rings our doorbell and asks to take you for a walk or for an ice cream, I hold my breath and don't object. When you want privacy, I try to give it to you. And when you have something you think is important to say, I *do try* to listen, regardless of what you choose to believe. *But*," Anne's mother says finally, "I am still your mother, and I am still responsible for your well-being. That, my dear girl, will never change, no matter how grown-up you become."

Anne gazes from the sofa. She is trying to figure this out. Her mother's eyes are moons. She tries to imagine Mummy evolving someday into a sweet grandmother, just like Oma, but her mother's face has thinned since the moffen have come, and her skin is rumped around her chin. There is no sweetness in her face. Her thick head of lustrous caramel-colored hair, of which she's always been so proud, is pinned neatly with an amber comb and threaded with silver. Her mother's hands have been folded in her lap all this time, in the proper position, but now they fidget. She strokes her hair as if to smooth an errant strand, a sure sign that Mummy is either about to say something that will start an argument or is deciding *not* to say something that she knows will start an argument. "I don't want to be harsh," she tells Anne. "As I said, I know that you are growing up. But for now I must insist on this: You cannot *smoke*, Annelies. After all the illnesses you've suffered since you were small, you must realize how harmful smoking will be to your respiration."

“So Mrs. Lipschitz reported,” says Anne heavily. Finally they are at the root of the matter, and she can barely keep herself from rolling her eyes. At least it’s the smoking she’s in trouble over and not, amazingly enough, the boys.

But there’s a tick in her mother’s expression, and she looks a bit confused. “Mrs. Lipschitz?”

Glaring at the sofa’s velvety upholstery. “She told you I took a puff off that boy’s cigarette on the way home from school.”

“Anne.” A frown immediately collapses her mother’s expression. “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re saying. I’m talking to you because I found *these* in your desk cubby,” she says, removing one of the thousands of blue, red, and white Queen’s Day cigarette packets dropped over Holland by the British Royal Air Force. A map of the Dutch Colonial East Indies on the front of the packet and on the back the Dutch tricolor. VICTORY APPROACHES, the slogan proclaims. Anne suddenly laughs, slapping the knobby knees poking out from her skirt.

“What?” her mother demands, her expression tensing. “What’s funny?”

“Oh, Mummy, those are Papa’s. He gave them to Margot as a souvenir.”

Her mother’s eyebrows knit together when she frowns, causing her eyes to look beady and too close-set. “Margot?”

“Yes, the *good* daughter,” says Anne. “Don’t you know that she’s collecting cigarette cards of the royal family?”

“No. I didn’t know that.”

“Well, she is. Mr. Kugler is always saving them for her,” Anne says, the relief of her laughter losing steam. “Ask her if you don’t believe me. Ask Pim.”

“No. No, I believe you, Anne.”

“Though, I might note that you automatically assumed that *I* was the criminal.”

“I didn’t,” says Anne’s mother. “I didn’t. It’s just that . . .” But her mother doesn’t seem to be able to finish this sentence, so Anne finishes it for her. Helpfully.

“It’s just that you can’t imagine *Margot* ever doing anything against the rules, and it’s just that you *always* assume that *Anne* is at fault.”

Her mother blinks. Then her face sharpens. “So you took a cigarette from a boy on the *street*?”

Anne huffs lightly. “It was only a puff, Mummy.” Frowning at the strands of hair she is twirling around one of her fingers.

“A *puff* from a strange boy’s *cigarette*?” Her mother’s voice is rising. “First of all, think of the diseases he may have transferred to you.”

“Oh, *diseases*,” Anne repeats, emphasizing the ridiculousness of the word.

“Not to *mention*,” her mother adds, “the *appalling* lack of good judgment on your part to be consorting with a strange boy.”

“I wasn’t ‘consorting.’”

“With a strange boy, *on the street*.”

“Oh, that’s what’s *really* worrying you, isn’t it? Not the *diseases*.”

“You were endangering your reputation.”

“Mine or yours, Mother? You’re not worried about *me*. Not really. You’re just worried about what gossip that busybody Mrs. Lipschitz is going to spread about Mrs. Frank’s little troublemaker.”

“You don’t understand, Anne. You’re still so young.”

“I’m old enough to know that things are changing, Mummy.” She slants forward to emphasize her point. “Girls my age simply aren’t *accepting* the old rules that our mothers bowed to. We intend to make our *own* decisions.”

“And that will include acting like . . . like a *strumpet*?”

Anne recoils as if she has just been slapped. She can feel her eyes heat with tears. Snatching her book satchel, she darts from the room. She can hear her mother calling after her. “*Anne!* Anne—*please!* That was too harsh. I’m sorry, I just lost my temper. Please come back.” These are the last words Anne hears before she slams shut the door to her room.

Bedtime. Anne is dressed in her silky blue pajamas. She had begged for these pajamas after seeing a magazine picture of Hedy Lamarr in a pair, but now her legs are too long for them. Her mother complains that she won’t stop growing.

In the lamplight the room’s wallpaper is warmed to a pale honey color. Beds were too difficult and expensive to transport from

Frankfurt and were a scarce and pricey commodity in Amsterdam, a city flooded by waves of immigrants fleeing the Reich. So they don't have regular beds, Margot and she, not really. Anne sleeps on a davenport with an upholstered back and Margot sleeps on a bed that folds up into the wall! Still, Anne appreciates the room for its coziness. Her prized swimming medals, her schoolroom paintings, and the pictures of royal families and film stars that she's pinned onto the wall give her a sense of proprietorship over her space. Mummy's mahogany-veneered secretaire, where they do their homework, stands in the corner like a friendly sentry. And thanks to their lovely tall window, she can look out at the trees. She stares for a moment at the dark branches rustling under the clouded night.

Margot is still busy with her ablutions in the washroom, but Anne has hurried through hers and has wrapped two curlers in her hair in the continued hope of obtaining wavy bangs. Now, though, lying in bed, she feels a heavy silence resting on her chest. She barely glances up when Pim knocks on the doorframe.

"Do you want to hear my prayers, Pim?" she assumes.

"Yes. But in a moment." He enters and sits on the corner of her bed. "We need to talk first."

Anne moans dully and stares blankly at the ceiling. "*Fine.*" She sighs.

"Your mother is very upset," Pim tells her quietly.

"Well, she should be," Anne insists self-righteously.

"She's very distraught," says Pim.

"Did she tell you what she *called* me? Did she tell you the *word* she used?"

"Yes, she did. And she regrets it deeply."

"So she sent you in to tell me that?"

"Well. Quite honestly, Anne, I think she is ashamed to tell you herself."

"She would never have called Margot a name like that. *Never.*"

"Your mother's relationship with Margot has nothing to do with this. Mummy made a mistake. A dreadful mistake. She hurt your feelings, and she is very, very sorry for it."

Anne says nothing.

“But it is *also* true, Annelies, that you have a talent for provoking your mother in unnecessary ways.”

A gleam of tears appears. “So it’s *my* fault as usual.”

“I’m saying it takes two to argue. Mummy lost her temper and said something she didn’t mean. But she was also looking out for you. Trying to teach you about certain behavior that, as a child—”

“Of course! I’m *such* a child.”

“That as a child,” her father repeats, “you are still quite uninformed about.”

“Don’t be so sure, Pim. I may be a child, Pim, but *children* are quite well informed these days.”

“In that case you should have known better.”

“I accepted a *puff*, Pim.” She frowns, pushing herself up on her elbow and glaring into her father’s face. “A *single puff* from a boy’s cigarette. That’s all. I didn’t even like it. And yet in *her* eyes that was enough to make her daughter a *strumpet*.”

Pim breathes in and exhales slowly. “You must understand that your mother’s nerves are stretched. You must remember what she was forced to leave behind when we came to Holland. She had a life in Frankfurt. A lovely house. Lovely things.”

“I know all about it, Pim. We’ve all heard it a hundred times. The big house, the maid, everything. But may I point out that *you* left a life behind in Germany as well, and yet *you* don’t hate me.”

“Your mother doesn’t *hate* you,” Pim corrects her firmly. “She *loves* you. She loves you and Margot more than anything.”

Anne drops back down onto her pillows, wiping her eyes on her pajama sleeve. “Well. Margot maybe.”

“*Anneke*.” Pim sighs forlornly, shaking his head. “You can be so hard on her. And she can be hard on you, too, I know this,” he concedes. “But she is sorry. *Sincerely* sorry. And when a person’s regret is sincere, then the only decent thing to do is to forgive them.”

Anne frowns at the air. “All right,” she agrees thinly. “All right. For your sake I’ll forgive her. I’ll pretend it never happened. But you’re wrong about one thing,” she tells him. “Mummy will never love me. Not like you do. You’re the one who truly loves me.” She pushes

herself up and embraces him, arms around his neck and her ear pressed to his chest so she can hear the tick of his heart.

“Your mother loves you,” he insists quietly, patting her back. “We both love you, and there’s nothing you can *do* about it, young lady. Now, let’s forget all about tears and angry words. It’s your birthday coming. Sleep tight and dream about what a marvelous day it’s going to be.”

But as her father rises to leave, she calls out to him, “Pim, are we going into hiding?”

Her father stiffens as if he has just stepped on a tack but wants to keep it a secret. “Why do you ask such a thing?”

“Because I wonder where Oma Rose’s sterling-silver set has gone.” One hundred and thirteen pieces from Koch & Bergfeld of Bremen, and one of her mother’s prized possessions. “I was hoping that I would be allowed to use it for the party, but when I looked for it in the cabinet, it was missing. I even looked under the beds. The entire case has vanished.”

“And did you ask your mother about this?” Pim wonders.

“No. I’m asking you. Did you have to turn it over to the robbery bank?” Anne asks, worried to know the answer if it’s yes.

But Pim’s expression remains calm. Rational. “Your mother’s silverware is quite valuable to her,” he explains. “We thought it would be safer to ask some friends to hold on to it for the time being.”

“Friends who aren’t Jewish,” says Anne.

“That’s right,” her father admits without embarrassment.

“So the silverware has gone into hiding, but not us?”

“This is nothing you need to worry about tonight, my dear,” her father tells her. He returns to her bedside long enough to give her forehead a kiss. “Now sleep.”

“Pim, wait. My prayers.” Anne closes her eyes. Sometimes when she prays, she pictures God listening. A colossal, snowy-bearded bomp, the contented Master of the Universe, who gladly sets aside the governing of the cosmos long enough to listen to Anne Frank’s small recitation. Her prayers are in German still, just because they always have been so, and she ends them as she always has, with her closing message to the Father of Creation. *Ich danke dir für all das*



Gute und Liebe und Schöne. Her thanks for all the goodness and love and beauty in the world. Amen.

“Very nice,” her father says with quiet satisfaction.

She gazes for a moment at the misty image of the divine in her head but then blinks it away. “Do you think that God can protect us, Pim?”

Pim appears surprised by this question. “Can he? Well. Of course he can, Anne.”

“Really? Even when the enemy is all around?”

“Especially then. The Lord has his plan, Anneke,” Pim assures her. “No need to worry yourself. You should simply have a good night’s sleep.”

Anne settles. He kisses her again on the forehead as Margot enters from her toilette.

“Good night, my dear Mutz,” he tells Margot.

“Good night, Pim,” Margot answers, and stops for a kiss on the head before their father exits into the hallway. Anne’s tabby has pranced into the room behind her sister, slinking around Margot’s ankle, but when he hops up to the end of Anne’s bed, Anne seizes him, gazing at her sister closely. Margot does not bother with curlers. She never talks about cosmetics, like Anne does, or begs Mother to let her wear lipstick, as it’s generally agreed that of the two of them Margot is the Naturally Pretty One. Anne is all gawky elbows and limbs, with a too-pointy chin and therefore in need of some cosmetic improvement. She stares as her sister says her prayers alone in an intimate whisper into God’s ear, too old to require Pim to watch over her. “*What?*” Margot demands thickly when she finishes.

Anne squeezes Moortje like the little bag of stuffing he is. “I didn’t say a thing.”

“Maybe not.” Margot fluffs her pillow with a spank. “But I could hear you anyway.”

“I asked Pim if we were going into hiding.”

“Yes?” Margot faces her, now alert.

Anne lifts the cat up under his front legs so that his paws dangle loosely. “He said they have given Oma Rose’s silverware to Christian friends for safekeeping. But that’s it.”

Margot expels the breath she has been holding. “Good.”

“Good?”

“I don’t want to go into *hiding*,” she says as she slips into her bed. “Do *you*?” she asks, as if Anne might be harboring some silly desire on the subject.

“No, of course not.” Anne returns her attention to Moortje, who mews lightly when she lowers him enough to press his nose against hers. “You think I want to be stuck in a smelly old farmhouse somewhere and lose all my friends?”

“I never know with you,” her sister says, settling her head on the properly fluffed pillow. “Anyway, you told me that Pim said there’s nothing happening.”

“No,” Anne must point out, letting Moortje loose on the blanket. “In fact, he *didn’t* say that. Not in so many words. He said I should go to sleep.”

“What a tremendous idea,” Margot replies with sisterly sarcasm.

Anne huffs but says nothing further, settling under her bedclothes as Moortje finds his spot at the foot of her davenport. Hiding. A frightening prospect, but also slightly exciting. Can she be forgiven for feeling a certain sly thrill at outsmarting the Nazis? Diving under. Onder het duiken! Farewell, Boche! Auf Wiedersehen! May we never meet again.

The rumor at school is that the whole Lowenstein family is paying a Christian farmer in Drenthe to let them live in a hayloft. Could *she* live in a hayloft? Surely not. She draws her knees up under the covers and rolls over toward the wall. Certainly, if the day comes, they will do better than a hayloft. If. *If* the day comes. Until then she will rely on Pim and God, as always, to make the right decisions.



### Prinsengracht 263

Offices of Opekta and Pectacon

Amsterdam-Centrum

The Canal Ring West

When Anne was still a toddler, Pim had purchased an Amsterdam franchise of the Opekta pectin company to cover their exit from

Germany, opening the office with Mr. Kugler, selling products for quick jam. Mr. Kleiman had come aboard soon after to keep the books, and then came Miep, who had quickly been promoted to senior secretary, though, as Miep tells it, Pim had her in the kitchen for her first month making batch after batch of ten-minute jam so that she'd learn *everything* that could possibly go wrong with every recipe. "Too much fruit," says Miep. "That was the main problem. People didn't follow the recipe. They put in too much fruit and not enough sugar."

Dearest Miep. She was sent to a foster home in Holland as a child because her parents in Vienna were too poor to feed her. It's difficult for Anne to imagine such a thing, but it happened, though Miep is not the least bit bitter about it. She is such a trustworthy and understanding soul, Anne thinks. And even if she still speaks with a ghost of a wienerisch accent, she can be forgiven that, because in every other way she is completely Dutch.

A Dutch husband. Dutch fortitude. Dutch honesty and stubbornness. Miep possesses them all.

The window glass rattles. Another squadron of Luftwaffe Junkers grumbles through the sky from its air base north of Arnhem. Eyes rise for as long as it takes the buzz of the bombers to drift away, but no one has much to say about it. The German occupation is a fact of life, like a chronic bowel problem.

There's a German, in fact, in the private office. A Herr So-and-So from the Frankfurt office of the Pomosin-Werke that oversees all Opekta franchises. He is cloistered in there with Mr. Kleiman, but the managing director of the franchise, Mr. Frank himself, is in the kitchen washing out dirty cups and saucers.

Anne has abandoned her after-school office duties, sorting invoices and such, out of boredom, and also out of a kind of nervous curiosity. "So what are you doing in *here*?" she asks Pim, hanging in the kitchen's threshold.

A glance and a half smile. "What would you guess I'm doing?"

"Well, you're washing dishes, but *why*?"

"Because they are dirty."

“You know what I’m asking,” Anne says, and she captures Pim by the arm. “Why is there a mof in your office?”

“I don’t appreciate that term, Anne,” he tells her.

“So why is there a *Hun* in your office?”

Pim sighs. Shakes a few drops from the cup he has just rinsed.

“He’s going over our books.”

“Not with you.”

“No,” Pim admits, “with Mr. Kleiman.”

“But not with *you*.”

“Mr. Kleiman is our bookkeeper.”

“And you’re the owner of the company.”

There’s a small lesion in her father’s composure, as if he’s trying to swallow a nail.

“You *are* still the *owner*, Pim, aren’t you?” Only now does Anne drop her prodding tone and betray a note of the fear she so often tries to conceal. Even from herself.

“It’s business, Anne.” Pim’s voice softens, perhaps in response to the slip of anxiety in Anne’s tone. “We’ve had to make some adjustments to the company’s organization,” he explains.

“Because we’re Jews.”

Pim places a cup on a towel to drain. “Yes,” is all he says.

“But you are still the *owner*, correct?”

“Of course,” says Pim. “Nothing has *really* changed, Anne. It’s only paperwork. Speaking of which, don’t you have a job to finish for Miep? Filing invoices?”

“Maybe,” Anne mutters, and she allows herself to collapse girlishly against her father. “But it’s absolutely boring me to pieces.”

“Well, life cannot always be electrifying, can it? We’d be worn to a frazzle.” Pim hugs her shoulder. “You must go and see to your responsibilities, yes? What is our motto?”

“I don’t remember,” Anne lies.

“You *do*. ‘Work, love, courage, and hope.’ You know this, I’m sure. Now go. Miep needs all the help she can get with the paperwork. You and Margot are essential to the operation here.”

“Ha,” says Anne glumly. “Essential as well-trained monkeys.”

“Would you like to come down to the warehouse with me instead? You can say hello to Mr. van Pels.”

“No. I’ll return to the salt mines.” She sighs, surrendering to her fate. She likes to watch the grinder at work, milling spices, even though it’s loud, but today she can comfortably skip an opportunity to visit with Hermann van Pels, who’s often as loud as any grinder while expressing his opinions. Also, he tells the worst jokes in the world and thinks they’re hilarious. Better that she returns to the front office. The business has only recently moved from the Singel to this roomy canal house in the Prinsengracht, and the room still smells of newly applied floor wax. Mr. Kugler’s desk is vacant, but she and Margot are squished into sharing Mr. Kleiman’s desk across from where Miep and Bep toil as secretaries—though, *where is Bep* anyway? Her chair is empty. “Where’s Bep?” she asks curiously.

Miep is on the telephone, but when she covers the mouthpiece for a moment, all she says is, “She’ll *be* here, Anne.”

Margot is matching up invoice copies with numbers in a large ledger. “And where have *you* been?” she wants to know.

“To the moon,” answers Anne.

“I believe it. That’s where you live most of the time.” Margot is dressed in a short-sleeved blouse and a skirt she has sewn herself. Another of the Amazing Margot’s talents. Anne gazes at her sister. They’re only three years apart, but since Margot turned sixteen last February, she most definitely takes the adults’ side. Margot’s body has grown so womanly, too, while Anne still feels as shapely as a broomstick.

Margot exits into the corridor with the file, and Anne can hear her descending the steep, break-ankle stairway, but then she hears an exchange of greetings, and a second later, when the office door bumps open, Anne is delighted to see that it’s Bep, the firm’s typist. Thoughtful Bep. Bashful Bep, but cheery when she feels at ease. “I’m here,” she announces. She’s a slim girl, Bep, with an oval face and a high forehead. A barrette inserted in her wavy hair. Not, perhaps, a conventional beauty, but beautiful on the *inside*, Anne knows. Her papa is the foreman of the work crew, a trusted friend of Pim’s and well

known as the handiest man in the warehouse. Bep has his shy, gentle eyes.

“Hello, Bep,” Miep replies. “Just in time. Would you mind brewing a pot of coffee for Mr. Kleiman?”

“Of course not,” says Bep. “Happy to do it.”

“I can brew coffee,” Anne chimes in, but gets ignored for her trouble.

“Where is everyone?” Bep wonders, hanging up her hat and scarf on the coat tree.

“Mr. Kugler’s on a sales call,” Miep reports, “and Mr. Kleiman’s in the private office.”

“With a mof,” Anne is compelled to insert.

“Anne,” Miep scolds with a half frown.

“Well, he *is* a mof.”

“He’s a representative from the Frankfurt office,” Miep explains to Bep.

“And he’s wearing a Nazi stickpin,” Anne adds, putting two fingers to her lip to imitate the infamous Hitlerite mustache and flapping up her hand in a mock salute.

“Anne, *please*,” Miep corrects, obviously trying to contain her alarm. “This is not how we behave in the *office*.” It’s a sensible warning, Anne knows, but one that she feels suddenly compelled to ignore.

“It’s true,” she says. “I’m not making that up.”

“And neither are you being helpful,” Miep can only point out. “Now, I’m sure Bep is not frightened of a stickpin. Just as I’m sure you have plenty of work to occupy you.”

“It’s all right, Anne,” Bep tells her lightly. Bep’s eyes are bright behind her eyeglasses, but something about her makes Anne wonder if she’s forcing it a bit. Bep frets. They all know that. And today her smile strikes Anne as rehearsed. Anne, in fact, has made Bep a sometime project of hers. Trying to boost cheerful, sunny Bep to the surface more often. So what else can she do but investigate?

The telephone rings, and Miep picks it up. Anne surrenders to her desk work, but not for very long. As soon as she’s convinced that Miep is deeply enough involved in her call, she makes her escape.

In the kitchen Bep and she often gossip together, mostly concerning the male of the species, Anne gabbing away on the subject of her many beaux and Bep on her up-and-down relationship with her boyfriend, Maurits. But now as she enters, she finds Bep with her back to the door, head down, and bracing herself against the counter.

“Hello again,” says Anne.

Bep turns. A flicker of alarm is quickly overlaid by the smile she pushes up. “Oh. Hello again yourself,” she says, opening the cabinet and bringing down the surrogate. But her eyes are slightly panicked.

“Mummy taught Margot and me how to brew perfect coffee. You must start with cold water, else it’ll taste flat.”

Bep nods but does not reply.

“Bep, is something the matter?”

Bep glares at the spoonful of peaty surrogate she is leveling off from the tin. “What makes you ask *that*?” she wonders.

“I have instincts for that sort of thing.” This is what Anne likes to believe. “There’s something on your mind, I can just tell.”

A swallow, and then Bep drops a bomb in a whisper. “I think Maurits is going to ask to marry me.”

Anne’s eyes pop wide open. “Are you *serious*, Bep? *Maurits*?”

“Yes. That’s the one.” Bep’s glance is shy as she replaces the lid on the tin of Hotel Koffiesurrogaat. Her eyes are cool lakes.

Anne feels a giddy grin on her face. “Oh, *Bep*. You must be *beside* yourself.”

“Yes. I know I *should* be,” Bep agrees.

And now Anne feels a tiny secret thrill. Bep getting a proposal of marriage is one thing. Bep *refusing* a proposal of marriage? That’s something else again. She tries to trim the eager curiosity from her voice. “Are you thinking of telling him no?”

Bep plugs the percolator into the electric socket. “Maybe,” she says, and then she stops and looks at Anne with blunt trepidation. “Would that be such a terrible thing?”

“Terrible? I—” Anne shivers. “I don’t *know*. Are you sure he’s going to ask?”

“Pretty sure.” Bep nods. “I mean, I think he’s hinting at it. He’s saying things like at our age his parents were married with two children.”