

Title:

***While You Are in England:***

A Novel and Commentary about the Refugees of 1938-40

Subject:

A novel about the Internment of refugees to Britain during the Second World War and a critical commentary about the representation of female refugees in three novels published during the Second World War, by Robert Neumann, Ruth Feiner and Eunice Buckley (Rose Allatini).

Author: Sonia Lambert

University: Goldsmiths, University of London

Thesis submitted for the PhD in Creative Writing

The work presented in this thesis is my own. To the best of my belief this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signed: Sonia Lambert

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

## Acknowledgments

My novel is inspired by the memoirs and accounts of the anti-fascist internees of 1939/1940, especially Ludwig Hess, Ludwig (Lou) Baruch, Rainer Radok, Michael Sulzbacher, Alfred Lomnitz, Eva Meyerhof (Livia Laurent), and Ruth Borchard. For a full list of the relevant published and unpublished texts and oral history interviews, please see the end of the novel.

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## Abstract

This Creative Writing PhD consists of two parts. The first part is a novel entitled **Sea Air**, which deals with the Internment of 'Enemy Aliens' (most of whom were in fact Jewish refugees) by the British in 1939-40. It is the story of Ludwig and Hilde, who have escaped from Germany to London, where they hope they will be safe. After war breaks out, Ludwig is interned by the British and then deported by ship, while Hilde is sent to Holloway Prison and then to the Isle of Man.

The second part is a Critical Commentary which looks at representations of female refugees to England in three novels published during the Second World War. *The Inquest* by Robert Neumann, *Young Woman of Europe* by Ruth Feiner, and *Family from Vienna* by Eunice Buckley (Rose Allatini) were written in English by German-speaking authors, drawing on their lived experience. The texts show how female refugees were forced to reconstruct their identities on every level. The experience of exile impacted on their relationships, economic circumstances and national and ethnic/religious affiliations, often prompting a reconsideration of the norms and codes by which they previously lived. I discuss these themes with reference to a wartime essay by Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees,' and explore the way that these issues have played out in the writing of my own novel.

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# Sea Air

Sonia Lambert

*Inspired by the Anti-Fascist Internees of 1940,  
and especially the memoirs and experiences of Ludwig Hess, Ludwig (Lou) Baruch,  
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## ***Enemy Aliens***

The baby wakes Hilde in the early hours of the morning with his urgent, snuffling cries. Dragging herself slowly up through the layers of sleep, she remembers that something momentous has happened. The words still echo in her ears: “consequently, this country is at war with Germany.”

Padding across the room, she lifts the baby from his cot and opens the curtain so that she can feed him by moonlight, without waking Ludwig.

London still seems to reverberate with the strangeness of it all. The houses opposite have an ugly, blind look, with their windows all blacked out. The moon and stars have regained some of their ancient power - some of the importance they hold in the countryside. After over a year in London, she’s almost forgotten what moonlight looks like, but now it spills over the sleeping city like mercury, touching roof tiles and chimney pots, paving stones and gutters, with a faint, mysterious glow.

She sits back down on the bed, resting against the iron bedstead with a pillow behind her back. She’s rarely far from tears at the moment. Her breasts are already leaking - she rummages in her nightdress, and the baby latches on and begins to suck. Ludwig lies asleep next to them, his mouth slightly open. It’s nice to see his face look relaxed, for once. After a while, the sucking calms her down and sends a great wave of sleepiness over her, and she begins to drowse, too.

The next time she wakes, she can see daylight coming in around the curtains. The baby is beside her, awake but happy, breathing noisily by her ear. Through half-closed eyes, she can see Ludwig wobbling on one leg like a stork, putting on his socks. She feels paralysed with sleepiness. “Don’t go,” she whispers, as he loops his braces over his shoulders.

He bends and gives her a soft, reluctant kiss, then one for the baby, then another for her, like a thirsty man taking a last sip. “I have to.”



Later on, when he's gone to work, she gets ready to go out. Things feel better in the light. She drains her cup of coffee, then moves around the room humming to herself, finding her keys and a warm cardigan for the baby, tidying up as she goes. We may be "Enemy Aliens" now, she thinks to herself (trying on the phrase indignantly, in her head) but even so, we need to eat. Ludwig has taken apart a leaky fountain pen, and she carefully collects the pieces in a small glass jar, which she places on the shelf, next to the brass cigarette lighter and an alarm clock he hasn't finished tinkering with. She sighs – in this respect, he's like a little boy.

She leaves the baby fretting in his pram, while she climbs the stairs and knocks on the door of the room on the next floor, which Ludwig's parents share. "Would you like to come with me, Mother?" she asks Frau Weiss.

"I don't think so," the older woman says firmly, shaking her head at the idea. "I think I prefer to stay here."

There's no point in trying to jolly them out of it, Hilde realises. Over the past few days, Ludwig's parents have shrunk back into something worryingly like their old state. Once again their hands tremble, and a painful confusion shows in their eyes. Hilde can tell that they are reliving the events of last November, nearly a year ago now, when the world as they knew it ended. A loud noise on the street outside – a car door slamming, or the sound of a breaking milk bottle – makes Frau Weiss freeze in her chair. Hilde can tell that she's back in their old apartment, on the night when she was called such foul names. Once again, she's being forced to her knees, and local men - some she recognises - are smashing every tile around the stove, laughing at her panic and her pleading. Again, her husband's being walked to the station at gun-point, stumbling along the street in his soiled trousers.

And what if the older couple are right, Hilde thinks? Perhaps it isn't really safe to go out, even here in Hornsey. She looks quickly up and down the street before bumping the pram down the front steps and setting off for the butcher. "This is London", she tries to reassure herself, with the words they use before each news

bulletin on the BBC – this phrase has become a sort of magic spell. But who can really say what is paranoia any more, and what is a reasonable fear?

The children who played on the corner are gone, and the street echoes with their absence. As she reaches the main road, a thin woman in a brown raincoat turns her head with a strange look – both startled and reproachful - in her direction, and Hilde's heart skips a beat. They can't tell where I'm from, she reminds herself – it's just the baby, the fact that he hasn't been evacuated. People must think she's a reckless mother, ignoring the official advice.

She leaves the pram outside the shop, in a sunny spot. In the queue, there's a new camaraderie. People carry their gas masks with them, in khaki shoulder bags and cardboard boxes. A fierce-looking housewife in spectacles repeats the regulations to her neighbour, with a superstitious pettiness ("and did you see her at number eighteen, lights blazing? I had a good mind to go over myself and say something!")

"Load of cobblers, if you ask me," the butcher says. He likes to entertain the women in the shop with his stories, wielding his chopper as he talks. His sister in law has been taken to hospital after "testing" her new mask in a gas oven, he says. "Said she thought they'd given her a dud. But then she always was a silly cow. If your number's up, I told her, 'aint nothing in them leaflets that's going to save you."

Hilde watches him wrap a slippery slice of liver in greased paper, and half agrees with him. With that first siren – a false alarm, it turned out – she'd had a sense of how one might die, feeling both ridiculous and terrified, obediently wearing the cartoonish, pig-like snout, breathing the smell of rubber and disinfectant, keeping clear of the windows.

"And what will happen to your lot, now?" the butcher asks her with straightforward curiosity, as the women in the queue behind listen.

Hilde can feel their eyes turn on her. It seems important to project confidence. "We must report again to the police, with our documents," she says, a little too loudly.

“Maybe there will be some...” what was the word? She struggles for a moment, and then it comes back to her, “Tribunal! Of course you know that we are refugees? So we will explain, and they will see that we can be trusted. We are sure that the process will all be very correct, and quite fair.”

“Still, must be a worry for you,” he says, and hands her the package with a friendly smile. “In the last war, even them Kraut dogs got a hard time, din’ they, you know, them wossernames? Poor dumb animals, like they could even help it.”

Ludwig comes back late. Frau Weiss is so agitated that Hilde can’t bear to sit with her: “my God, where is he?” the older woman keeps on muttering to herself. Her alarm is infectious. Hilde also worries about him, finding his way home from the station in the unaccustomed darkness, and what if something else has happened, God forbid, some visit from the police, or some angry show-off looking for a foreign-sounding target? She paces the room with the baby - who is always fretful at this time of day - rocking and swaying to try and soothe him. She suspects, now, that the moment of vindication she has been hoping for will never come. The British will never understand what they’ve been through. The war itself will be a new and worse kind of waiting.

At last Ludwig returns, bringing a blast of the outside world. “He’s here!” she calls up to Frau Weiss, and then immediately regrets it – it’s better if the other tenants don’t hear them speaking in German. “Did you have any trouble?” she asks him, dropping her voice.

“Oh no,” he says dismissively, unbuttoning his coat and hanging it on the back of the door. “Only there’s a lot to organise. And I must find some luminous paint, to mark the keyhole – it’s very dark out there, I could hardly open the door.”

“So tell me...” she says. The baby is down at last, now, and she’s heating up the remains of the fried liver and onions on the gas ring, and some potatoes, stirring fast, swapping the pans around to try and get everything warm at once. “How are the others doing?”

“Well, it seems we are lucky not to have an employer, at least. Sacking an Enemy Alien is now a patriotic duty.” He sits down heavily, rolling up his sleeves to eat.

Hilde slides the food onto his plate. Then she takes off her small apron and folds it into quarters. “And your cousin?” she says.

“Ernst is worried that he may have to give up the car, with the new regulations, and even his precious Leica. Ruth thinks only of the children. She worries about how they will be treated out there. A teacher made some comment, while they were lining up to leave – apparently they aren’t to blame for what their parents are!”

“Poor Ruth...” she glances over at the cot, where the baby is sleeping.

They talk about it while Ludwig eats and Hilde clears up. Ludwig and his cousin have set up a small factory making office chairs, but business has been slow for months and will probably get worse: it all seems a bit beside the point right now. She knows that he’s frustrated by the skills he has and can’t put to use. He’s erupting with ideas – they wake him up in the night, although they don’t mean much to her – uses for new materials he’s read about, or slight adjustments to designs he once worked on. In Germany his technical brain seemed like a gift – she herself struggles with locks and appliances and relies on him to make things work – but here, where there is apparently no call for his skills, she begins to wonder if it is a blessing or a curse. They are grateful just to be here, of course, but they never expected to raise their child in one-room digs.

She’s most frightened of the promised Tribunal. Ludwig has heard some more about this. “It shouldn’t take too long. We shall be C, of course,” he says. “Grade A means internment, for Nazi sympathisers or possible spies, and B is for where there is some doubt if one can be trusted.” He’s unexpectedly upbeat – perhaps, after this formality, their names cleared once and for all, he might be allowed to play some more useful role. They won’t let him fly – he understands that -

but he can surely contribute in some other way, as an aircraft engineer or designer. Perhaps now, finally, they will be ready to listen. He paces the room, explaining this passionately, rehearsing the evidence in his head, while she begins getting ready for bed.

He's proud, that's the problem. If only he could just stop caring. Things that are unjust or illogical really bother him. "We, who have lost everything," he protests, indignantly, as he removes his shoes, at last. "We who warned anyone who would listen of Hitler's plans..." he takes off and hangs up his trousers, carefully. "We who were his sworn enemies for so long before the British...we are not *Enemy Aliens*, but loyal friends."

"What does it matter what they call us?" she whispers, afraid he'll wake the baby. "It's not pleasant, I admit, but..."

"Of course it matters what they call us!" He turns off the light, and gets into bed, lying down on his side, presenting her with his muscular back. "The names come first, and everything else follows – have you forgotten?"

He's thinking, she knows, of new words that have gradually crept into their language – the ugly jargon of racial superiority. According to Nazi thinking, Ludwig is a "*Mischling*" because he has a Jewish father, and there are many other unpleasant terms in use. Just words, they thought, and tried to brush it off – and naturally, they always bothered him more than her - but these words seeped into slogans, into the laws, on to street signs. These words now break windows, and bones.

She sits up in bed. "But this is not the same. This is the British." Your beloved British, she almost adds.

"No, it isn't the same," he concedes. "I'm sorry. Of course it is not the same at all."

She listens to his breathing slow. The electric heater is dimming, but it gives off a pinkish glow. "Perhaps you've been listening to Ernst for too long?" she whispers. Ludwig's cousin is a cynic, with such a bleak view of human nature that

she sometimes wonders how he keeps smiling his wry, private smile, and how he keeps on turning up for work. Ernst says that given a few months under their own Hitler, the British people would be just as bad as the Germans. The British, he says, are so convinced of their innate superiority – but this only makes them hypocrites. People are the same everywhere - stupid, and self-interested, he says, and liable to all kinds of manipulation.

“Perhaps I have,” he says, turning towards her. “Come here.” He lifts his arm in invitation, and she lies back down in his embrace. They fit together so well. He’s wearing a flannel vest. His chest is hard and bony, vulnerable with its blondish wisps of hair, and there’s a soft dip between his collar bone and his shoulder which is perfect for her head. His smell – soap, cigarettes, and an acrid undertone of sweat – calms her down. He’s her home now.

“Let’s hope for the best, darling,” he says. “They must surely have better things to do, at this time, than think about us.”

There’s a kind of shuffling of thoughts before sleep: something like prayer, something like the prelude to a dream. Please God, she thinks, let us all stay safe, and together. Keep my baby from jackboots, gas and bombs. The British are right to be cautious, it’s probably a good thing. Tribunal, category, catastrophe, chimney pot....

He begins to trace her shape, through her nightdress: his breathing has changed again. She feels a strangely balanced mixture of irritation and desire: she is almost asleep. “Really?” she whispers.

“Why not?”

Her body is beginning to respond, of its own accord. “I’m so tired...and the baby....” she murmurs. She feels as if she’s been pawed at and mauled all day.

“We’ll be quiet. Look, feel how much...”

She answers with a soft exhalation of her own. She knows that by this point, there’s no going back. Their bodies have their own language, which they speak

tenderly and fluently, without words. It's a relief to go to this secret place that exists only between the two of them. She submits to the intent pressure of his body. She tries to stifle her moans in the pillow.

Afterwards, she turns over, and he rearranges the shiny pink eiderdown over her, and she's drifting off again, almost immediately. She hears a noise from beneath the window. The baby is beginning to sputter in his cot, like a starter engine, failing to ignite. "Shall I pick him up?" Ludwig whispers, guiltily.

She feels a drowsy gratitude. It's nice that he cares almost as much as she does. "No, leave him for a bit," she says. "Perhaps he'll go back to sleep."

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On the morning of the Tribunal, Ludwig combs his hair in a small looking-glass on the shelf. The men in England wear their hair a little longer, and he's grown out his austere crop, so that the blond wisps fall to one side of his forehead. The fountain pen has been reassembled, although it has started leaking again, and the brass cigarette lighter is in his trouser pocket – he's given up on the alarm clock, for the time being. In the corner, the wireless is on: Poland has fallen very fast, and the cinemas in town have reopened. He takes a tweed jacket off the hanger and shrugs it onto his shoulders.

Baby John – British born, as Ludwig so often and proudly points out, and with a name to match - is lying on the bed, staring at the light that comes through the curtains. It's his happiest time of day, and he's gurgling with delight. Once in a while, Hilde bends down in passing to kiss his stomach or catch at his kicking feet, showering him with some of the many endearments of the German language - "yes, my treasure", "yes, my little mousey-kin." There's not much space, and she almost collides with Ludwig as she moves around the bed. She puts the remains of a loaf on the table and lifts the rattling sash window to get a little air inside.

“Yes, you are, my little bear.” Her voice insists on a bright normality, but Ludwig can tell that she’s holding herself together carefully, from the tightness of her mouth, and her perplexed, anxious eyes. There’s an answering nausea in the pit of his own stomach. They can feel it in each other; it’s familiar from their last few years in Germany. It was the same – no, worse – on the journey. It has become a part of their personalities: they will never again be completely relaxed and confident.

She comes up to him. “You look *snazzy*,” she straightens his tie and runs her hands over his lapel. She says this in English – it’s a word she’s just learned.

“So do you.” She’s wearing lipstick, for the first time in ages. Her shiny chestnut hair is scooped up into a bun and fastened with pins. He likes the film-star curves she has since the baby, her fuller breasts, her soft little tummy. Sometimes he tells her this, and she swats at him and laughs, but this time he just adds: “very elegant.” She’s moved a button and can fit back into the skirt she wore to get married.

Silently, she leans into his chest for a moment and he puts his arms around her, breathing into her neck. They keep still like this for a few precious moments, as if they are back in bed. He can feel the panic in her, like a flock of birds flapping against a roof. They are no strangers, after all, to vicious bureaucracy.

“Tell me that thing again...” she says, in a more honest voice, slipping back into German, with a tremble of urgency.

“What thing, darling?”

“That thing you told me last night, the thing Ernst said,” she sighs in frustration. “The reason they don’t have...” she looks over at the baby superstitiously, and drops her voice into the habitual, appalled whisper “*the camps* ... here.”

“You mean Habeas Corpus?” The words seem to calm her. She nods, blinking. He strokes her shoulders. He understands. It doesn’t feel right - after all this time and effort, after the years of planning, and living a double life, and lying tense



and awake at nights, waiting for a loud rap at the door - to just give themselves up, even if this is another country, with other authorities.

“Can’t we just...” she says, and he knows what she means even though she doesn’t finish the sentence. Can’t we just go away, run away somewhere? There’s only the answer he’s already given a hundred times: this is different, this is the British. Besides, this is their best effort at somewhere else, and there’s nowhere left to go. The radio talks calmly to itself, and a coffee pot on the gas ring startles them with its throaty rasp.

“Right. Your parents,” she says, reluctantly.

He climbs the stairs to their room. It’s a surprise to find them up and properly dressed for once, his father in the elaborate process of hooking on his shoes, his mother getting out the mink-collared coat in which she arrived in England, from the wardrobe where it has hung ever since. He doesn’t want to get drawn into any more of those questions that he can’t really answer. “Hilde has made some coffee,” he says.

Hilde bumps the pram down the steps, like a tank. The suspension is excellent, and Ludwig keeps it well oiled. It seems odd to walk up the hill, dressed up and all together, on this strange occasion. “If we were really Nazi spies, do they think that we would just turn ourselves in?” Ludwig objects, not quite joking. Hilde hushes him: she worries about being overheard. “Are you sure you don’t want some help?” he says.

“I do this every day, you know,” Hilde says, giving him one of her stern little looks.

Baby John glides above the pavement, still smiling up at everything in delight. He’s wearing a hand-knitted red cardigan and a red knitted hat. The sight of him makes Ludwig feel better: this astonishing thing they’ve done without knowing how, almost without intending to, in the midst of it all. Can he really be alright? He certainly seems to be, with his grabby little hands, his chubby folds of flesh, his wide-eyed,

panting approval. People look into the pram in passing, distracted for a few seconds from their brisk indifference. He's our only hope, Ludwig sometimes thinks.

He glances anxiously back at his parents. They do everything so slowly! Their English is not good enough to answer questions, and the mere sight of an official terrifies them into defensive silence. They can't travel on the underground, because of the black uniforms. He knows that he must remain calm, because they are all looking to him for reassurance. He gives them an encouraging smile. "It's not far, Mother," he says.

A few steps behind, Frau Weiss carries herself with a haughty, regal air. Herr Weiss is still rather thin, but he's walking normally again, and looks a bit better, in a new Homburg hat that Ludwig bought for his birthday. The bruises around his eyes are gone, and he has a new pair of steel rimmed spectacles, which Hilde bought him from Woolworths. It is nice to go out all together, Ludwig thinks. Hilde sometimes complains about having three babies to look after, instead of just one; maybe this can be the start of something new. It's just too bad that it's taken an official letter to get them to this point.

They find the grey stone building and give their names at the entrance. Then they are directed to a room full of benches. There are a few other Germans and Austrians, also waiting their turn. A middle-aged woman with a wide, square face admires the baby. Her husband is a Jewish chemist from Nuremburg, with very hairy nostrils. He introduces himself to Ludwig, and then looks around the room, to see if they are being watched. "I have been told that this Magistrate has a reputation for being severe," he says, in a low voice.

"What exactly does that mean?" Ludwig asks.

"I'm not sure," the man shrugs. "I fear they cannot really appreciate our situation."

Ludwig's father and mother are the first to be called. After explaining about the language difficulty, Ludwig is relieved that he's allowed to go with them.

Ludwig is expecting some kind of courtroom, but the place where they are taken is more like a large office. Herr Weiss, who served in the Imperial German Army during the last war, stands very straight, with his chest out, looking directly ahead. Frau Weiss has two pink patches, one on each cheek, and Ludwig can hear her agitated breathing. There are a few wooden-backed seats, and a portrait of the King, and some tall windows through which sunshine comes in broad, blinding stripes, illuminating a faint haze of cigarette smoke in the air. A policeman waits by the door.

Two men sit behind a desk in front of them. One of them has an impressive, Edwardian moustache – perhaps he’s the Magistrate, Ludwig thinks? The other has spectacles and greying hair. He isn’t sure what to call them – would it be Sir, or Your Lordship, or something else? In the corner there is a woman stenographer in a green cardigan, operating a machine in intermittent bursts.

“Please, take a seat,” one of the men says, and then coughs.

They sit down. Ludwig is distracted, at first, by watching the stenotype machine and wondering how it works. Herr Weiss takes off his hat and holds it between his hands like a prayer book, or a steering wheel. His hair has grown back a bit – the mottled grey fuzz has become a few silver tufts - but you can still see the shape of his skull, a vein at his temple, and the sharp bones protruding from his hollow cheeks. Frau Weiss perches on the edge of her seat nervously.

The lawyers spend some time reading and shuffling a pile of papers, squinting at the Alien Registration Cards, and murmuring to each other. The family have already completed forms giving all their details, answering the questions on religion and race with a sinking feeling (“even here, must we still submit to such nonsense?” Ludwig said). Their answers are not straightforward. Ludwig’s father is Jewish by birth but has not taught his son anything of the faith he’s left behind. Even when Ludwig was a boy, his father believed it was easier and safer for him not to know.

Not that this made any difference to their treatment in Germany, of course. “Your father’s a Jew, isn’t he?” people sometimes asked, with voyeuristic interest or distrust, as if they’d found him out. When he was still at school, it was a shock to him to hear it articulated like this, by excitable young thugs practicing for their future roles. The hatred grew bolder, backed up by policy, and it was shocking and unexpected, as perhaps it always is. Each restriction seemed crueller and more pointless than the last. His father was forced to sell his business, his parents moved to a smaller apartment, and could no longer employ a maid. Ludwig and Hilde were prevented from marrying under the Race Laws. Still, his father believed they were safe – “it will all blow over”, he used to say. “We have such good friends and neighbours, and besides, why would they bother an old man like me?”

Now, at the Tribunal, his father is asked to confirm his name, address, and the date on which he entered the country. “It states here that your father was imprisoned by the German authorities,” says the man with spectacles.

“Yes, sir.” Ludwig is pleased they have got to this, the heart of things, so quickly. “He was taken in November last year to a dreadful place - in German *Konzentrationslager* - near to Dachau in Bavaria – a place from which one is fortunate to leave alive...” he feels this is his chance to give a full account, with as much detail as possible. Ludwig hates to think back to this time – he was already in London, going from one office to another, trying to arrange visas for his parents, as his mother’s letters grew increasingly frantic. As he speaks, however, he has the uncomfortable feeling that he’s losing their attention - they shift, and sigh. At even a word of German, their eyes take on a vacant look.

“Yes indeed,” the man with the moustache cuts him off. “Quite so. The question is, can your father *substantiate* this claim?”

There’s a pause, while Ludwig racks his brains. He has heard this word before, but now its meaning escapes him. The lawyer with spectacles sees the confusion on his face and explains kindly but wearily. “Can you *prove* it?”

Ludwig's heart is pounding. What kind of proof are they looking for? His father still has scars on his back, and has lost the use of several fingers on one hand – but can he really be expected to undress, here, or to demonstrate his physical incapacity? His face, Ludwig feels, tells the story – but of course, they don't know what he looked like before. He was released after seven weeks, like many others at this time, on condition that they emigrate immediately. Nazi policy at this time is to force Jewish citizens to leave – and one of the main difficulties is finding another country that will agree to let one in. Even here in London, however, it's almost as if he's never really got away. Ludwig can't explain the shock of seeing him again at the station, suddenly so old and infirm, bent and shuffling, clutching his wife's sleeve like a bewildered child.

Ludwig translates for his father. After listening carefully, Herr Weiss takes his papers from an inside pocket, and leafs through them, with trembling hands. The room is silent, as everyone waits.

Ludwig's father holds up a page and stabs with a thin finger at the place where his passport has been marked with a "J" by the Nazi authorities. A strange passion contorts his face. The cheap new suit hangs off his thin body like a borrowed costume. Unable to speak to them, he seems to hope to convince them with mime. The effect is both embarrassing and terrifying.

"Yes, yes," the moustached man says. They have been examining these cases for days, and there are so many of them. A tension fills the room. Ludwig can sense their frustration, and a sort of awkward distaste – but beneath this, a thick hostility, that hangs like the smoke in the air. Oh God, of course! These grey-haired Englishmen are also the right age to have fought in the Great War, against men like his father, and suddenly he knows with absolute certainty that they did so. Their friends and brothers were killed. "But once again," the man says tightly, "we have only your word to go on."

“My concern, Mr Wise, is that given that your father has been in this country for less than a year and given that he appears to have made no effort whatsoever to master the English language, we cannot reasonably expect that he will have developed a sense of loyalty towards Britain. I am therefore placing him in category ‘B’. Clearly, he has no valid need to travel, and is unlikely to require a work permit, so this should cause no inconvenience. It is merely a sensible precaution, for the time being.”

They turn to Frau Weiss. Having demonstrated to themselves that they are no push-over, the lawyers seem to relax into a new leniency – or perhaps the idea that this frail, grey haired lady could be any kind of threat seems even more ludicrous. Their brief questions are more sympathetic – chivalrous even – towards her. She’s dealt with quickly, and put into category C.

They return to the waiting room. Hilde springs to her feet - the chemist’s wife is playing with the baby. “That didn’t take long!” Hilde is elated with relief just to see them again. “What did they say?”

“My father was given a ‘B’,” he tells her.

“What? But why?” she exclaims in astonishment, her face revealing her dismay, all the suppressed panic surging up into her eyes.

Now it’s their turn to be examined. They leave the baby where he is, with Ludwig’s mother looking on, for fear he might cry and disrupt things. A policeman leads Ludwig and Hilde back to the room and stands near them during the proceedings.

The first questions are about Ludwig’s business. Ludwig explains about the factory, and - because the pain is fresh - about the reasons why it has not been a success. He and Ernst have decided, at last, to let it go. The premises have been let to a company who have offered to keep them on, Ernst as a manager, and Ludwig because he has “a way with the machines.” In the end, it’s almost a relief.

“How do you survive, in that case? How do you provide for your family?” the magistrate asks him. “Do you have another source of income?”

Ludwig is embarrassed about Hilde’s cleaning work, and also worried about her lack of a permit. The idea that she might get into trouble because of his failure to provide for the family is too uncomfortable to contemplate. “I have some savings, which I deposit in the bank, in the form of gold coins,” he explains, which is true, although he has tried very hard not to spend them. As usual, the thought of the coins helps a little. They are a reminder that his family once had some financial security. He offers this information with a sort of timid pride: you see me in reduced circumstances, but we were not always like this.

“How did you manage this? Most of you chaps are as poor as church mice, I gather. Isn’t there some story about only bringing 10 Marks?”

Ludwig pauses, wondering how to explain. He remembers lying on the floor of a car, rigid as a corpse beneath a rolled-up carpet – the noise of the engine as it slowed, the muffled voices, the smell of exhaust fumes and the awful, nauseating fear. He remembers, with a sense of shame and humiliation, bracing himself for a sudden exposure to fresh air, a violent yank on his collar, an indignant shout. “I hid the coins, on leaving Germany,” he says. His voice sounds high-pitched and strained.

“And did you declare them, when you arrived here? Are you aware that there is customs duty payable on goods – gold, jewellery, furs etc., over a certain value?”

Again, Ludwig hesitates, and his voice grows quiet. Is it better to look them straight in the eye, or to look downwards, humbly? “I was not aware...”

The magistrate seems to have woken up – he speaks with a new enthusiasm. “And are you aware that smuggling is also a crime in *this* country?”

The lawyers whisper to one another for a few moments. There is the sound of distant traffic. Ludwig grows suddenly very hot and thinks for a moment that he might vomit. He wants to tell them about his past in the aircraft industry – important things

he knows about the Nazi war machine, for example the Luftwaffe test site, at Peenemunde. He wants to do useful work – and he has so many ideas at the moment. Many of them apply to civilian life, of course, but some might have a military application. Surely one or two of them will be worth investigating... He hesitates, not sure how to begin - fearing they will not understand, or that it will make him sound even more suspicious.

Then the men turn to Hilde. She and Ludwig are both anxious that she will get into trouble for working without a permit. She has other reasons to worry, as well – her parents are enthusiastic Nazis, and her brother is serving in the Wehrmacht. Fortunately, perhaps, these issues do not come up.

“Mrs Weiss, you are not apparently, how shall we say...” he gives a little smile, as if he’s making a risqué joke “...of either Hebrew faith or ancestry. It would appear, in fact, that you are of pure German stock. So why, in that case, would *you* choose to leave your home and country?”

Hilde flushes – she finds it difficult to explain to the British the illogical situation they’ve found themselves in, and her reasons seem embarrassingly intimate. “In order that our marriage should go ahead, we had to leave. Such marriages are now forbidden in Germany,” she says, with soft dignity. She senses their disbelief. It’s true that the Race Laws are ridiculous - strange as a parable set in the distant future. But there’s also an ugly sexual curiosity about their scepticism – what crafty trick has he played to lure her away from her people? Was she blinded by lust? The idea that she would voluntarily make this choice seems to be implausible, even here.

One of the men raises his eyebrows. “Hm. Do you have any children?” the other asks her.

“Yes Sir, I have a baby, born here in London since we arrive, four months of age.” They nod, and ask nothing more, to Ludwig’s relief. The baby seems to account for her, in their minds – and almost seems to explain her away.



Then the moustached magistrate speaks. “Mr Wise, I have a duty to examine you with regard to activity, status, general character, and disposition towards this country. I find that you are a man of dubious moral character, and that you show no hesitation in putting your own financial interest above the law. You disregard the laws of your own country and the laws of the British Isles alike. You cannot be trusted to remain at liberty in this time of crisis.”

“I am assigning you to Category A, for immediate internment. Your wife will be assigned to Category B.”

## **Sea Air**

Ludwig can't understand. The words "immediate internment" ring in his head, but he refuses to believe that they really apply to him. It's as if his body absorbs the news before his mind – shock surges through him like electricity, and his arms and legs begin to shake. He hears Hilde give a strange cry and place her hands over her mouth in horror.

The police officer beside Ludwig is solid and strong, a stable pillar of a man, as the room pulses and recedes with the horrifying strangeness of a dream. The officer has seen other men in this position, men at their lowest point, and takes it all as a routine matter. He takes Ludwig tenderly by the arm, supporting some of his weight, and leads him away. Hilde is still looking around in confusion. Her mouth moves silently, trying to form words, her eyes asking Ludwig for some kind of explanation or reassurance. The British Government takes charge of his body and his life – he is reborn, with no freedom, almost as a child.

Two policemen take him home in a police car to collect some belongings and to search his room. The landlady, Mrs Rose, answers the door. When she sees the policemen, her mouth falls open with surprise, and she goes white, and takes a stumbling step backwards. She must have been harbouring a German spy without knowing it! "I can't believe it! He always seemed like such a nice young man," she stammers to the police.

Ludwig wants to tell her it isn't true – but all he can do is shake his head at her.

"They often do, ma'am," the policeman says knowingly, although his experience is presumably with petty crime, and not international espionage. "One thing I've learned in this job is that you can't go by appearances." The policemen are kind to Mrs Rose – one of them takes her into her kitchen and offers to make her a cup of tea, while the other stays with Ludwig.

Ludwig looks around the familiar room in disbelief. The dirty coffee cups are still on the table. He feels a sudden pang of affection. It's Mrs Rose's best room, as she's always telling them, and much better than the other places they looked at when they first arrived. The rosebud wallpaper is faded, and the net curtains are more grey than white, but the generous proportions still sing out through the surface shabbiness. Above all, they have been happy here, despite all the worry. The bed with its pink shiny eiderdown, the four-bar electric heater, the draughty sash windows onto the street – this is home to him, their first home together.

The remaining policeman is friendly enough. He tells Ludwig to pack but not to take too much. As if in a trance, Ludwig takes his suitcase from under the bed, and starts to add a few items – woollen sweater, trousers, socks and underwear, the shaving things he got from Hilde last Christmas, a few packets of cigarettes.

While this is going on, Hilde, baby John, and Ludwig's parents arrive back from the Tribunal. The sight of them – the feelings on their faces an echo of his own, all blurred and distorted with emotion – gives Ludwig a stab of pain, as the whole thing becomes a little bit more real. They all speak at once. "Is it really true?" "We couldn't believe it when the police told us!" "It's a terrible mistake! They cannot be serious!" Even the baby begins to cry.

The policemen, alarmed by this new turn of events, try to keep them out of the room. It's like a bad play in which no one knows their parts. Ludwig has a crazy thought – what if he waits until their backs are turned, and then jumps out of the window? He has a sudden, childish urge to run away. It's impossible, of course, he tells himself, and he concentrates on trying to breathe normally.

One policeman herds his family out of the room and manages to shut the door. He then starts going through the chest of drawers. The sight of his fat, pink fingers rummaging around in Hilde's underclothes is horrible. "Do you have a camera?" the policeman says. "Or a typewriter?" Ludwig shakes his head, glad that he does not possess either of these items, which are now apparently incriminating.

The policeman opens up some shoe polish, a tobacco tin containing sewing things, and then an envelope containing a few family photographs. He peers at each of these in turn, shuts them again, and tosses them on the bed.

Then the policeman turns to the little shelf of books and papers. There's a blue booklet that Ludwig and Hilde studied hard when they first arrived, entitled "While You Are in England: Helpful Guidance for Every Refugee." Seeing it, Ludwig remembers how Hilde learned the tables about money, weights and measurements by heart, her forehead puckered sweetly into a frown - "how is it they have half a crown, Wiggi, but no whole crown?" She was indignant about the advice in the booklet - "Be loyal to England, your host!" "But of course we will be!" she'd exclaimed, vaguely wounded at the idea that they might even need telling.

The policeman takes two books which must appear suspicious to him - "Bond's Model and Experimental Engineering Handbook," which is in fact a catalogue for model railway enthusiasts, and "Arms and the Covenant," a book on international relations by Winston Churchill, which Ernst lent to Ludwig but which he has not yet read. There are also some letters in German from his uncle, and from Hilde's father. The policeman calls his colleague, and they confer. "Best take them with us," the other policeman says.

Meanwhile, Ludwig takes a notepad which Hilde uses sometimes to write to her family and tears out a sheet. He sits down at the table and writes as quickly as he can. "To the Manager, London County and Westminster Bank, EC1. I give allowance to my wife, Hildegard Josefine Weiss, and also to my father, Samuel Alfred Weiss, to open safe box number 243 in your establishment and to make use also of all contains within." He signs his name, takes one of the little keys to the safety deposit box off his key ring, and leaves it with the paper.

"What are you doing?" the policeman says sharply. Perhaps this German is now trying to send a message to his accomplices. "Let me see that!"

“It is instructions for the bank. I must leave some money for my wife and baby,” Ludwig explains, a gruff desperation in his voice. Perhaps these wretched gold coins, which have caused so much trouble, can be of some practical use to them now. After taking a quick look, the policeman – oddly, given how suspicious he is about everything else - shrugs his shoulders, and seems to accept this.

The hallway smells of boiled cabbage and carbolic soap. A dim daylight filters in through the fan light above the door. Ludwig says goodbye to Hilde and his father. Frau Weiss and the baby are not there: it’s probably just as well. Hilde has also been busy – she hands him some sandwiches wrapped in paper and holds out his overcoat. She looks pale – the colour has gone from her lips. “Take it,” she says. “Who knows? It might be useful.” It’s not particularly cold, and he did not intend to, but he does as she suggests.

Ludwig can’t bear the cowed look on his father’s face, the frightened animal who looks once again out of his eyes, like a dog that has been kicked – it makes him feel both guilty and irritated. “Don’t be afraid, Papa,” he begs. “I’ll be back soon. You’ll see me again soon.”

The policemen are looking on. Ludwig takes Hilde’s face in his hands, and kisses her on the cheeks and forehead, trying to convey some important message which can’t be put into words. Later on, he sometimes thinks back to this moment – what if he could have known all the extraordinary things that would happen to him? Is there anything that he could have done or said differently?

Now, he can feel her distress, too, lurching towards him like an animal on a leash. At least it isn’t the Gestapo, he reminds himself. “Come, now...” he mumbles to her.

“But you said...” she begins, lips trembling, angry and bewildered.

“I still believe what I said. This is the British. They are not Fascists. It’s just a misunderstanding...” He repeats the words dully, clinging to his position.

“Come along, now,” the policeman says. Ludwig has to resist a sudden urge to punch his face. That would not be wise, he tells himself. That would really not be wise.

A small crowd of curious onlookers has gathered around the police car. They whisper to each other as Ludwig is led out of the house, stepping back in respectful fascination. Ludwig hangs his head. They watch him - a tall man with blondish hair, wearing a Tweed jacket, with an overcoat over his arm, steered by two policemen. So that’s what a Nazi looks like, he imagines them thinking.

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Ludwig spends the night in a blacked-out police cell. He is in anguish, pacing the small room, groaning, while the whitewashed bricks scream silently back at him.

Your honour, Sir, Herr Magistrate – he argues with an imaginary Tribunal - surely you can see that you have made a mistake? Those were Nazi laws, designed to rob and humiliate us! Surely, to defy a Nazi law is no crime? We have the same enemy. Already since 1933 I have been at war with these barbarous and ruthless gangsters. Experience made me expect from Hitler the worst but not from friends and allies this internment.

To be treated as a spy? It is like a bad joke, a nightmare. Dear God in heaven! He moans aloud. He kicks the bench. He pounds his soft fists against the hard brick wall and sobs.

Someone bangs on the door. “Keep it down in there!” a voice shouts.

Your worship, Mr Magistrate, Sir, I have a wife and child, and parents also to support. I will to the British Government any customs duty pay. Do not for this small reason my loyalty doubt and my freedom from me deprive...

On it goes, a wave of words – his English sometimes passionately fluent, at others snagging on the rhythms of his mother tongue, sometimes failing him entirely, until he curses in German, in an attempt to clear his mind. He has lost all sense of time. Whenever he begins to calm down, the thought of his family rears up again, to torment him.

They have been through so much already! His parents have been peeled raw by the past six years, stripped of layer after layer of confidence, certainty, and comfort. They have lost everything – their home, their community, their sense of belonging and hope. He would not have believed, if he hadn't seen for himself, how fast and brutal this process could be. He thinks of Hilde, choosing humiliation, persecution and poverty – just to be with him, for reasons he still can't understand. He remembers the so-called "friends" in Germany who warned her that their children would be half-breeds, just like him, and her mother's hysterical threats; he knows what it cost Hilde to make that swim, and he's watched her at their table every evening, carefully counting out the copper pennies, to see if there's enough for the next day's shopping. Then, like a knife in his heart, he thinks of the baby, smiling up at them hopefully, with no idea what hatred and cruelty the world has in store. What will happen to them all without him? Can he really be sent away from them - presumably to some prison camp, full of Nazis and spies? He can't allow it! But he has no choice.

It breaks me down, Mr Magistrate, Sir... He paces the room, and tries the door, and rests his hot forehead against the cool metal. It breaks me down.

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At around midnight, the door is opened and a young man is pushed into the cell. He has a frightened face, with short, cropped hair, and full red lips. He wears a thick, roll-necked woollen sweater, and an oilskin jacket.

He sits down on the bench, and picks at his fingernails. Is this, then, a real German spy, Ludwig wonders? He looks so young. Anyway, there's not much he can do in here. They regard each other warily for a while. "Good evening," Ludwig says, in English. His voice is hoarse and strange.

The boy shrugs and answers him in German. "You call this good?"

Ludwig feels in his pocket for his cigarettes. As he pulls out the packet, he notices – with the sort of detachment with which he might watch someone else – that his hand is shaking. "Smoke?" he offers, and the boy nods. Ludwig's brass lighter has been taken, so they have to call the policeman outside.

"We should like to smoke a cigarette, if it is possible, please, to provide a light?" Ludwig asks.

"Have you heard this one, Stan? We've got the Count von Blinking Bismark in 'ere!" the policeman calls out to his colleague, but he strikes a match for them.

After he leaves, they sit together smoking. The boy says that his name is Herbert, and he's from Hamburg. He has been working on a British cargo ship in the Baltic and was arrested when the ship docked in London. "Must have been one of the crew that stitched me up, and I reckon I know which one. Bastard never liked me. I said I was Danish – most of them couldn't tell."

He says he doesn't want to go back to Hamburg, because he doesn't fancy getting called up. "It's a good life on the ships. Plenty of girls, you know?" Warming to the theme, he starts telling Ludwig about the girls he knows in different ports. Clara from Kiel has lovely little breasts; Mitzi from Rostock is good for a laugh, and not at all shy; Nadia from Gdansk can always be relied on for a slap-up meal. This seems to cheer him up a bit.

"Where can I take a piss?" he says.

Ludwig nods at a bucket in the corner. "Or you can try and call them to take you out. They aren't exactly responsive."

"Do you mind?"



“Go ahead. I won’t look,” Ludwig says, awkwardly.

“Look as much as you like. Touching costs extra,” Herbert winks.

He pees in the bucket, and the smell mingles with their cigarette smoke. “Still, probably better a British prison than a German one, hey?” Herbert says, adjusting his trousers.

With that, he lies down on the bench, and turns on his side. He puts his oilskin jacket over his head and goes to sleep.

Ludwig carries on pacing. He feels better if he moves – even swaying to and fro helps a little.

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The next day, Ludwig is numb and tired. This helps with his misery – it muffles it slightly, and makes it feel as if it belongs to someone else. His hand has stopped shaking so badly, and his head feels light, but there is the feeling of a heavy weight somewhere near his stomach, which makes moving around an effort.

The police give them a mug of cocoa each, but nothing to eat, to Herbert’s disappointment. Ludwig gives him the sandwiches from home – he has no appetite himself.

They are joined in their cell by two more men. The younger one has hazel-brown eyes and sharp, bony features; the other is middle-aged, with pasty skin, a full beard and a round belly. They are obviously troubled. It takes Ludwig a while to realise that they suspect that he and Herbert are the Nazi spies and parachutists that he himself fears.

“Morning, gentlemen. May we join the fun?” the younger man says warily, in English.

They introduce themselves. The younger man is an Austrian student called Kurt, and the bearded man is called Mr Gutmann, and comes from the East End of

London. "He doesn't speak German. Only Cockney and Yiddish," the Austrian explains.

Mr Gutmann shrugs apologetically. "My parents brought us over when I was a baby. After that, I never bin furver than Whitstable, once or twice, when I was a nipper."

"I wonder what you're doing here, then?" Ludwig asks. "Surely you can't be a danger to this country, if you haven't been outside of it for so long?"

"The judge on our Tribunal, as luck would have it, holds a suspicious attitude towards all Jews," the Austrian student explains, dryly. "Just the man for the job." It takes Ludwig a few seconds to realise he must be joking. "He ordered us both interned, two days ago, for reasons best known to himself." They have been held since then at another police station.

Their luggage, which was kept by the police, is returned to them – Ludwig's suitcase, and Herbert's drawstring bag. Kurt has a smart, tan-leather portmanteaux; Mr Gutmann has a sack tied up with a piece of string. The cigarette lighter, however, is not returned – it is the first of several items which he will lose.

They are taken to a railway station in a police lorry. There's a large clock, and a flight of stone steps, but it is not one of the stations Ludwig recognises. His heart sinks – he very much hopes to remain in London, or at least close by. Three soldiers arrive to guard them, with real guns, and bags buckled onto the front of their bodies containing gas masks and mysterious military equipment. The policemen look impressed and encouraged; perhaps they have really been on work of national importance, after all. They hand over an envelope for each of the men. "An armed guard! We must be dangerous." Kurt sounds astonished and amused.

"Where are we going?" Ludwig asks one of the soldiers, nervously.

"Why would we tell you?" the soldier replies, cheerfully. He's young, strong, and blank-faced – just doing his duty. "Don't you know there's a war on?"

The station is damp and dirty. Great iron columns stretch up to a distant roof. Dark crowds surge across the concourse, in frantic cross-currents of energy. Porters wheel trunks, whistles blow aggressively, friends meet each other, embracing and exclaiming with high-pitched English delight. A few people stare, but there are not enough of them to attract much attention. "Have we got time to get a quick bite, before we get on, Sarge?" one of the soldiers asks.

The Officer in charge looks at his wristwatch. "I suppose so, if you're quick".

"What about this lot?"

"I dare say we'd better feed them, too. It's a long way. Are you fellows hungry?" he asks the prisoners, loudly. He seems unsure if they will understand him. He moves his hand towards his mouth, to demonstrate. "Essen?"

"Ja, bloody hungry, Sir," says Herbert, who has the kind of vocabulary you might expect from working on a British ship.

"I'll say," echoes Kurt, the Austrian student, who speaks perfect English with an upper-class drawl.

"Only I'm vegetarian," volunteers Mr Gutmann, with his Cockney twang. The Sergeant looks puzzled (a reaction they will get used to). One of the soldiers hurries off, and comes back with several packets of chips, wrapped in newspaper.

On the train, they have a compartment to themselves. The soldiers sit with their guns over their knees, or propped on the seats next to them, and eat their chips, as the train draws out of the darkness of the station. Ludwig eats some too, although the potato feels dry and hard to swallow in his throat.

It's odd to travel with no idea of how long it will take, or where they are heading. It reminds Ludwig of being a child – he has no choice but to surrender to the slow pattern of the day. He hates the feeling of moving away from Hilde without even being able to tell her that he's going. It's like flying into a fog.

They rattle through the suburbs, which look like those on Ludwig's route to work, but there are no landmarks he recognises. London looks braced for a

shattering impact, windows all papered over and cross-hatched with tape, piles of sandbags everywhere. Silver-grey barrage balloons – futuristic and surreal, like plump cartoon fish – float over the rooftops. The station names have all been painted out, in case of invasion.

After they have finished eating, Ludwig offers round his cigarettes (with some inward reluctance – he’s beginning to wonder how long they will last). He is rewarded with a smile from Kurt - “Ah, a fellow human being, perhaps?”

“I hope so.”

Kurt wears a grey flannel suit and Oxford brogues. He crosses his legs, and clasps his elbow with a hand, and smokes as if he really needs the cigarette, looking out of the window. “Where are you from?” he asks Ludwig. “And how has our beloved Führer enriched your life?” There’s a tension in his voice, although the words are flippant.

Ludwig tells an abbreviated version of his story, including his difficulties under the Race Laws, which prevented his marriage from going ahead, and prompted their escape to London. “Really? To look at, you’re a fine example of the master-race,” Kurt says.

“So I’m told.” Back in Germany, people sometimes asked why he didn’t join the Party, and seemed annoyed when he explained, almost as if he’d deceived them on purpose. His blonde hair helped him to avoid difficult situations, and probably protected him from some of the nastier incidents. He remembers explaining to Hilde about his father, early in their courtship, and how silly they agreed it all was - this fervent, self-involved fairy-tale people increasingly told (mostly, it seemed to them, for the benefit of the angry and uneducated) with such a fuss about racial taint, and national pride, and lines on the map.

“Then you’re all three of you Jews?” Herbert says, with surprise and some distaste.

Ludwig hesitates. This is a question he never quite knows how to answer. He thinks of himself as non-Aryan, rather than exactly Jewish. “Just my father. We don’t follow the religion,” he adds, awkwardly.

He was raised in the Lutheran Church. The whole family attended, mainly to please his mother – they sat in the dark wooden pews, and Ludwig felt the cosy excitement of Christmas, the slightly gory thrill of Easter, and the self-absorbed shame of adolescence, in much the same way as many of his school friends. In his late teens – engrossed in his own scientific education, and perhaps sensing something stiff and reluctant in his father’s occasional observance - he lost patience with the ritual, and stopped going to church at all, to his mother’s despair.

Ludwig can’t deny it’s been more convenient not to think of himself as Jewish, and he doesn’t miss what he’s never known. Just occasionally, over the years, there have been moments when he’s noticed how his father is with his own side of the family – a way of talking with the uncles and cousins or with an old friend, a knowing laugh, a few strange-sounding words, intriguing as a code. His father seems to become someone different with these people: freer, with a different sense of humour, and an easy familiarity. It feels to Ludwig as if they have a shared secret or joke, something slightly dangerous, only to be revealed behind closed doors, which shuts him off, making him feel a little excluded. It’s not exactly that he’s lonely or envious, but it does make him curious, wondering about this parallel life he hasn’t had. When people ask him to explain himself, whatever answer he gives, Ludwig feels as if he is pretending – but perhaps this is a common feeling. He has to admit, with the world as it is right now, that there’s a certain logic to his parents’ approach.

“Ah, one of those,” Kurt says, drily. “Well, it seems we’re all in this together. This is quite a peculiar mix up,” he adds. “It might almost be amusing, in other circumstances.”

“Try telling that to my missus,” says Mr Gutmann. “She’s in a terrible state. She’s been on at me to get me papers sorted for twenty odd years.” He puts his head in his hands.

Herbert gets chatting to one of the soldiers, admiring his gun. The soldier, flattered, seems about to let Herbert have a look, before the Sergeant reprimands him. “Good God, man, he’s a prisoner. Don’t go handing over your weapon! What’s wrong with you?” The soldier looks sheepish.

They’re an odd assortment, Ludwig reflects. How will they cope in a camp full of real Nazis? It’s a horrible idea. Nevertheless, with a bit of food in his stomach, exhaustion washes over him, and the movement of the train begins to lull him to sleep.

Drowsily, he remembers a previous journey, terrified and elated, on the boat train which brought them to London together. They had crossed several borders by then, each time Hilde clutching her new calf-skin handbag with the coins inside; she hadn’t taken her hand off it for a single second. He was full of admiration for the railway embankments and bridges, the new tarmac roads and electricity pylons – evidence, he explained to her, of how these people governed so much of the world. They’d laughed with uncertain relief - this was the moment that they’d never quite dared to imagine – as they tried to puzzle out the advertisements together: soap which wouldn’t shrink woollens, a chewing gum that promised strong, white teeth. He’d had the sense of something huge, grand and elaborate, as they came into London, watching tenements with washing lines, big brick chimneys, fine Edwardian buildings, with no Swastikas hanging outside! She was next to him: their knees touched. He knew that he could sleep next to her that night, in the tiny flat that Ernst and his family rented, and that no one would come banging on the door in the early hours of the morning. He remembers how he stroked her hand, as they stared out of the window together, her comforting presence mixed up with the view.

When he wakes, he looks for her for a moment, but of course this is another train, and she isn't here. The countryside has changed. He shakes his head, trying to wake up properly: he ought to have stayed alert, to get an idea of their route. There are small hills, and an irregular patchwork of fields; twisty old trees, that seem to have been blown sideways by the wind. The view alarms him – he senses they have come a long way. It's pretty in the evening light, but the beauty of the landscape only adds to his anxiety. Kurt, who has seen more of England than the rest of them, thinks they are in the South West.

They change trains at a small town. The second train seems completely empty, apart from them. The countryside looks magical, touched by the last silvery light of the day. Between hills, they see a river estuary, and beyond this, a glimpse of the glistening sea.

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The light is fading as they reach their destination. It's a very small seaside town. The tiny station is deserted.

The train doors are unlocked, and the four internees – Ludwig, Kurt, Herbert, and Mr Gutmann - climb down with their bags. They stand on the platform beneath a pretty Victorian awning, stretching their limbs after their long journey. The soldiers shoulder their guns and stand to attention, feeling perhaps that the time has come to make more of a show of guarding their charges. Over a meadow, in the dusk, they can see a large sign: "Warner's Holiday Camp". They can also see a long, imposing, barbed-wire fence.

The temperature is falling fast. The four men turn up their collars, and button their coats. "Right, you lot, let's make a move," the sergeant barks, and walks them round to the entrance via the road.

A wire gate is unbolted and opened up by the guards, and Ludwig enters his first internment camp. By now, it's nearly dark. Mist rolls in from the sea, in a low-lying cloud, which gives the place an added strangeness. Ludwig can make out orderly rows of tiny wooden chalets, quaint and oddly Germanic with their overhanging peaked roofs. There's a huge, ghostly swimming pool, and tennis courts, and some additional army tents, all being swallowed up by the fast-moving wisps of white. A children's playground stands deserted, iron swings and a roundabout moving slightly in the wind. He can feel, rather than see, the sea. They walk towards a large, white, modern building at one end, which contains the camp offices.

Inside this building, an Intelligence Officer rises from behind a desk. He exchanges a few words with their guards from the train, looks the new arrivals up and down blankly, and scrutinises their documents. He gives them each internee numbers and searches their luggage again. "Sort them out with their kit," he says to a pimply young Private.

The four new internees follow the Private to a storeroom, where he presents them with two scratchy blankets each, a dented tin plate, some cutlery, and a round tin container with a handle. "Tha's yer pannikin," the Private says. Is he even speaking English? There's also a sort of canvas sack. Ludwig turns this over in his hands, curiously. Is it to carry the other things inside? "An' tha's yer pally-asser, fill 'er up over there," the Private points towards a half-demolished bale of straw, just outside the door. "Gis 'ere," he laughs at their incomprehension. "I'll show yas."

He shows them how to stuff the sack, in order to use it as a mattress. Ludwig tears off wads of straw with his hands by the light of a single lantern, with the grass seeds and the debris floating in the beam. Their silent concentration during this complex, half-grasped ritual reminds him of a dream. "It's a bit like joining the army, I imagine," Kurt says, grimly. This gives Ludwig another twinge – because it is, except



for the vital, horrible, shaming differences, which make everything the wrong way round, and make it far more like being taken prisoner.

Struggling to carry all this, they go out again into the dark and the fog, led by the Private. By now, they can't see more than a few feet ahead. Ludwig's thin city shoes slide and squelch on the muddy grass. He can hear more guards – a mournful, disembodied cry, from the perimeter wire. "Number one post, all's well." "Number two post, all's well."

He can also hear a distant music, broken up by the wind. Ludwig has a peculiar, hot feeling. Oh God, can it be what he thinks? He and Kurt looked at each other, and then look away quickly, too full of emotion to trust themselves with a reaction. It's a sound he'd hoped never to hear again. Deep German voices, melodious and beautiful, are singing the Horst Wessel song. He recognises the melody, and knows the words too well, even if they are not close enough to hear properly.

"Hitler's banner flies over the streets. The time of our bondage will soon be over."

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Ludwig dreams that the walls of the house are gone; the baby is frozen, stiff and blue in his cot. Just as he begins to howl in his dream, he's woken by a bugle.

He has slept fully dressed, in his jacket and his coat, under his blankets – but the wind blows right through the flimsy wooden chalet, and he can't feel his hands, feet or face.

Still disorientated, he staggers outside, in an attempt to warm himself up. A huge seagull hangs overhead. Riding in the air, it is the only still point, in a world of movement. The wind has picked up, causing a mad fluttering – the tents, the Union Jack, the items of men's clothing hanging on short washing-lines in front of the

chalets. The sky is battleship grey, and a few shafts of light come down through the clouds.

The first thing Ludwig does, now that it's light, is to walk to the perimeter of the camp. He needs to see for himself that he really is trapped. There are two barbed wire fences, with a duck-board walkway between – he stares at these with a kind of horrified fascination. He walks along the inside of the fence. There are low wetlands to the north, the distant railway station to the west, and the backs of guest houses to the south, facing onto the esplanade. It is odd to be so close to the sea – he can smell it in the air, taste it on his skin, hear it, even - but not see it.

The wire goes all the way round. At each corner, there's a new-looking wooden tower, and a soldier armed with a rifle. The soldier at the entrance has a machine gun, mounted on a tripod. Each of these details feels like a sharp pain in his chest. A fortified holiday camp! They aren't joking, then – this place is the real thing.

A soldier stands on the other side of the wire, only a few feet away. "Um, excuse me!" Ludwig calls out. The man stiffens but doesn't reply. How strange that they are both here, on either side of the fence, while a few days ago they might have drunk in the same pub or ridden on the same bus. He wants to laugh about it with someone.

He goes down to the dining hall to escape the wind, which he feels could quickly drive you crazy. Inside the hall, there are lots of men milling around aimlessly, in their overcoats. There are rows of trestle tables, and some iron chairs. The men are mostly clustered around two stoves, one at each end, which barely take the chill off the air. Is it safe to go amongst them? No one seems to look anyone else in the eye.

To his relief, Ludwig finds Kurt. "Hello. How's your chalet?"

Kurt laughs. "Well ventilated accommodation, with plenty of sea air," he says in English. Ludwig is envious of the ease with which he slips between the two

languages. "I think this is what the Brits call 'bracing'," he says, blowing on his fingers. "Which is Anglo-Saxon for bloody freezing, by the way".

Ludwig gives him a cigarette. He can smell some kind of food and hears a metallic clatter from an adjoining room. "Have you seen the others?"

Kurt nods. He indicates Mr Gutmann, who is talking to a couple of Jewish men, also with beards, sitting nearby. "And Herbert has made friends with the National Socialists." He points to the stove at the other end of the room.

Ludwig feels a familiar twinge at this news – it's the feeling he had in Germany, whenever one of his friends or acquaintances joined the Party. Herbert? Well, perhaps he isn't really surprised. "Have you spoken to them? What are they like?" he says.

"Sailors, mostly, I believe – not the military sort, just from cargo or passenger ships. A couple of businessmen who cut it too fine. Ordinary fellows, but a few are quite unpleasantly patriotic. They seem just as delighted to see us as we are to see them."

"I suppose so..."

"Can you imagine? Picked up by the British and then interned with a bunch of Jews and Communists! There's a certain poetic justice....."

"Justice?" Ludwig repeats. The word sounds strange to him.

"Well, maybe not justice..." Kurt says.

Looking at the men around him, Ludwig notices some of his own symptoms in their behaviour. They pace and rock, they run their hands through their beards and tear at their hair, they smoke nervously, with shaking hands, or stare mournfully into space. No one has been at the camp very long, and the shock is still fresh. Looking at some of the older men, Ludwig feels glad that his father is not here.

The men at the far end – Nazis, according to Kurt - seem to be coping rather better. They sit around playing cards, they make jokes and laugh loudly, sometimes pointedly, in the direction of his group. Perhaps it's just that the seamen are better

dressed for these conditions – in thick, roll-necked sweaters and sturdy boots – and are also somewhat fitter.

“Depressing, isn’t it?” Kurt says, bitterly. “Look at us. Degenerates and deviants, racially and morally deficient.” Once again, Ludwig isn’t quite sure if he is joking. It’s true that the refugee men look dishevelled, with long, flapping coats. “I don’t fancy our chances if it comes to a fight.”

Breakfast is served from a hatch. Lining up to get the food causes a certain mixing of groups. Ludwig finds himself behind Kurt, and just in front of a balding man with a prominent upper lip. “Good morning,” the man says, pleasantly. He ignores Kurt, but perhaps that’s just because he’s standing nearer to Ludwig. “You’re one of the new arrivals, aren’t you?” he says.

Ludwig gives his name and says that he is, and the man introduces himself politely. “I am Gustav Pahlke.” He says he is a travelling salesman for a factory which makes wallpaper. His pronounced upper lip makes Ludwig think of a human-sized duck. “The food is very bad, I’m afraid. And who would have thought that England, too, should be so very ‘over-Jewed’?” – *so stark überjudet*. He gives a friendly, slightly ironic laugh, so agreeable that it takes Ludwig a horrible moment to catch up, and for the smile to fall from his face. “The place is swarming with them. You should come and sit with us,” the salesman says.

As usual when faced with this sort of thing, Ludwig is lost for words, and merely stammers at him. “I - I’m fine, thank you....”

“Well, you know, one doesn’t like to dine near an unpleasant smell...” the man shrugs. “Good to meet you, Weiss.”

After they have eaten their porridge – burned in some places, cold in others - and drunk their sweet tea, there is something called a ‘roll call’. All the men stand on one side of the room, eyeing each other nervously, shuffling and fidgeting, and a Sergeant Major calls out a list of names, compensating in volume for his uncertainty

over pronunciation. As their names are called, the men pass to the other end of the hall.

The process is long – the camp is filling up, and there are already more than three hundred men. There are a lot of Jewish names. The middle name “Israel,” which the Nazi government began adding to Jewish passports the year before, is read out many times. The realisation begins to dawn on Ludwig that he is not in a minority – which is a relief in some ways, except that it means his situation is not an isolated mistake.

At one end of the room, there is a stage with a dusty blue curtain, which must once have been used to entertain the holiday makers. After the roll call, the camp Commandant, a Colonel, climbs up on this to address the assembled men. He has a small grey moustache and has a pair of dogs with him – two lanky greyhounds – who wait, alert, on the stage beside him. He asks for a volunteer to translate his words into German.

“Listen here, men,” he begins, with a sort of loud, strangled bark, feet astride, hands clasped behind his back. “One thing you will learn about the British, we are very fair. You may have been fighting against us until recently, but now you are here, we will treat you decently. I don’t care who you were in Germany, or what your politics are, and I certainly don’t want to know about your religious beliefs.” He pauses, to let his words sink in, and to give the interpreter time to catch up. Ludwig thinks the Colonel looks impressive, in his uniform and peaked cap, over the many heads of the listening men.

“Now, I dare say that none of us particularly wants to be here, but we just have to make the best of things. Stop bothering the office at all hours with your complaints and your requests. Don’t try to engage us in argument about the whys and wherefores. The holding of political meetings or the collecting of membership dues is forbidden. Anyone who disrespects the rules will be disciplined.”

He sighs deeply. "Keep your cabins tidy, and I'll see about getting some work for those of you that want it. And for God's sake, let's see if we can't all get along."

Kurt, whose parents' department store in Vienna has reopened under new management - "Aryanized" is the term they use - says nothing. Friedrich Koppel, whose chest has not been right since the six months he spent in Sachsenhausen, coughs a few times. Walter Geller, whose academic career ended abruptly six years ago, scratches his neck. Sixteen-year-old Heinz Reindorf, who came to England on a Kindertransport last year, scuffs his shoe on the floor. Erwin Blumenthal, whose brother recently committed suicide after being refused a visa, is silent.

There is an atmosphere in the hall, which the British seem to feel, but not understand – like a crackle of electricity, in the air.

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"It seems to me that the first thing to do is to see if we can't get separated from the Nazis," Ludwig suggests, that evening. He has decided to treat the whole thing as an engineering problem and break it down into smaller steps.

He shares his hut with a young man named Otto Lipski. Otto is short, stocky, and muscular, with pale skin, faint freckles, and tight, reddish curls. Otto switches off the ceiling light – there's a curfew – and the two men try to settle down for the night.

"We've tried that," Otto says, shifting around in his bunk. "They won't do it. If they did that, they'd be admitting there are anti-Nazis in the camp. They can't admit that, so they can't separate us." Otto is a Communist and seems to take a grim pleasure in identifying this sort of paradox. He is also Jewish, although Ludwig gets the impression that his political devotion leaves little room for religion.

Ludwig is on his straw mattress, wearing every item of clothing he packed. He's taken off his shoes and stuffed them with old newspaper, in an attempt to dry them out: they have varied between slightly damp and soaking wet since his arrival.

He is thankful for his overcoat – it's a lot colder here than in London, and the weather is getting worse. He has one blanket wrapped around his shoulders, the other over his body. His lips are chapped and sore, his cheeks burn from the wind.

“How many of us – I mean anti-fascists - are there?” he asks.

“I can't say for sure. How do you measure that, in any case? It feels as if it's roughly half and half, at the moment. I think someone's doing a sort of survey, since the Brits won't.”

“And we're all here by mistake?”

“Depends what you mean by mistake,” Otto sounds tired. “The Tribunals needed to identify some enemies, or people would say they weren't doing their job. We left-wingers are here because they don't like our politics. I expect there was personal prejudice by some of the officials, against Jews, you know. There are a few without correct documents – the Kraus brothers arrived without the right paperwork, for example, and then there are others, like you, who broke some little regulation. Quite a few seem to believe they were unfairly denounced – Frankel reckons it was a jealous colleague, and Fenstermacher blames a hysterical landlady...”

“What a mess,” Ludwig says.

“That's one way to put it.” Otto is quiet for a while. Then Ludwig hears him start to snore.

How is it possible to sleep in this temperature? Every position Ludwig lies in feels painful. He is hungry. There is nothing to look forward to except perhaps losing consciousness for a few hours, and waking up, aching with cold, to all the same problems: wet shoes, burnt porridge, and the collective misery of three hundred men. No one knows where they are, and most of the world wants to forget about them. The utter pointlessness of it all makes him wretched. “I'm sorry, my love, I'm sorry,” he says to Hilde, in his head. This internment is like being kicked in the stomach, again and again.

He wishes he'd thought to bring something of hers with him – a stocking or a glove that's been near her skin and has her smell on it. He lets the tears slide quietly down his cheeks. He hates to think about what their relationship has done to her. She's kind and beautiful and funny and sweet natured – all these things are surprising enough to start with - but the fact that she's left Germany for him, when there was really every reason for her not to, marrying in a foreign land, giving birth to his son, making their home in a bedsit... Only to be left alone, to face this new ordeal!

The thin wooden boards rattle, and the wind makes a high-pitched whistling noise. When eventually he sleeps, the sound whines through his dreams, where it becomes other things. At first, it is the noise of the baby, crying for hours on end.

“Shall I pick him up?” he says to Hilde, in his dream.

“Get away from us!” she screams.

Then it becomes the noise in the cockpit, as his aeroplane plunges into a dive.



## ***Crazy Consolations***

Hilde is left behind abruptly. Ludwig is simply gone. What is she supposed to do next?

An intense silence fills the house. She imagines she can feel many ears, straining to listen, from the different rooms. With an odd sense of moving through water, she goes out to the hall to telephone Ludwig's cousin. Should she speak in German – instantly incriminating – or in English, so that every word can be overheard and analysed? "Hello, Ernst? Something bad has happened," she says. She notices with surprise how everything she says now sounds guilty.

Ernst is loudly indignant. He comes over, and strides about the room waving his arms, making plans: names of people they will write to or telephone. "This is beyond idiotic, even by their standards," he says, loudly. He will go to the refugee organisation in Bloomsbury – they have people who might be able to help. "You can rely on me," he says. "I won't abandon you." Ernst and Ruth have been in London longer – Ernst left Germany in a hurry six years ago, just after Hitler came to power – before that, he was training to be a lawyer in Berlin and was involved in student politics. They have already been "naturalised" and are safe from internment. To look at, he's a darker, lankier version of Ludwig, and their physical similarity is unsettling to Hilde.

His wife Ruth is shocked and silent, and prepares them all some food, which they can't eat. Ludwig's parents are bewildered and horrified by what has happened. They can make no sense of it. The British are their saviours, and seemed at first to understand their situation – so how can they now have taken their son, and for what crime? Frau Weiss, between her tears, takes it as a vindication of her pessimism; the world is going to ruin, people have become like animals, and nothing makes sense any more.

Hilde changes and feeds the baby in a daze, but the sight of him – something about all the things he doesn't know - makes her choke up. She can't bear the older couple either, with their wounded incomprehension. At last they all leave her room. It will only be a few days, she tells herself, a week at most. She will face this test. She just has to get through it.

When they are gone, however, things are almost worse. Shaken, nauseous, trembling with a strange energy, the very thought of sleep seems ridiculous. Ludwig's side of the bed is empty, the pillow still smells of him. She moves agitatedly around the room, checking on the child, leafing frantically back and forth through the dictionary, starting and then abandoning letters in despair. The English phrases seem to twist and writhe in her head. She chases down a meaning until she has it safely cornered by a full stop, adapting expressions she's learned elsewhere - from the blue booklet, for example. "My husband intends to Great Britain no harm. We are loyal to England our most generous host."

During the night there's a soft tap at the door – Ludwig's parents have thought of some new ideas and have been seized by a terrible sense of urgency. Hilde must telephone the office of a man they once heard on the wireless and write immediately to a cousin in America who has legal training! They speak in frantic whispers, to avoid waking the baby. Hilde promises them to do this in the morning, and adds some notes to the list, and eventually manages to get rid of them again. She misses her own parents – her fat, silly mother, and her stern, business-like father – from the time before their admiration for their "Leader" and their ascent in the local Party stole them from her, or perhaps before her relationship with Ludwig stole her from them. Just before dawn, she throws herself onto the bed and cries violently, like a mad woman – surprisingly, this doesn't wake the baby either. Then she sleeps for a couple of hours.

In the morning, after his feed, the baby is burbling with joy ("at least you're happy," she says as she wrestles him into his clothes). She must keep going, she

tells herself, and make Ludwig proud. She fixes up her hair with shaking hands. In Germany, she usually wore her heavy plaits pinned up in a sort of coronet, from one side of her head to the other – here, to blend in, she has begun to twist it into a chignon, at the base of her neck. She does up the buttons on her shabby coat, chosen from amongst the moth-eaten relics at a Church Hall jumble sale. She climbs the stairs, as usual. “Mother, I’m going to the shops,” she says.

In the hallway, she catches sight of one of the other tenants, a travelling salesman in his fifties with a round belly and a Clark Gable moustache, whose room she’s sometimes cleaned in the past. Normally, he wishes her “good morning” politely, and touches his hat. Today, he says nothing, but raises his eyebrows at her with an expression she can’t decipher – curious, mocking and strangely triumphant. She catches her breath, and looks down at her feet, feeling confused and affronted.

First stop is the grocer. A bell rings as she enters the shop and then there’s another of the peculiar new silences. Two customers seem to have broken off mid-sentence, and make way for her at the wooden counter, stepping back hastily, as if she has some terrible disease. Slowly, it dawns on her: everyone knows, and Ludwig’s arrest has become a local scandal overnight. Will the woman at the counter refuse to serve her? She looks around at their terrified, fascinated faces.

What did she even come here for? Suddenly she can’t remember. They sell dry goods from sacks, and there are tins and packets lined up along the shelves. She feels for the shopping list in her pocket, but perhaps the only thing is to address this directly. She clears her throat. “You have heard, I suppose, about our situation?” she begins. “It is a mistake, an error. My husband is not a Nazi sympathiser!” Her words sound stiff and unconvincing, even to her own ears.

“Well, that’s as maybe. They have to be careful, don’t they? Better safe than sorry, I suppose,” the woman behind the counter says, amiably. She’s always been kind in the past, but usually speaks to Hilde a little too loudly.

“And they do say that there’s no smoke without fire...” one of the watching women contributes triumphantly, as if this proves something. What does she mean, exactly? Does she really believe that they are spies? It seems to Hilde that there are many of these trite yet brutal sayings, which the British reach for in any unfamiliar situation.

She leaves the shop without buying anything, her cheeks burning. Pushing the large pram, with its curved navy hood, she feels like mowing down anyone in her way. She looks at the other people on the street, moving along the small parade of shops, in their dull-coloured overcoats. What do the British think about, she wonders? What must be in their heads, without all this to worry about?

The butcher, at least, doesn’t seem to have heard anything. “Cheer up,” he says, with one look at her face, “it might never happen.” But perhaps it already has, Hilde thinks to herself. She collects her purchases with a miserable feeling that the other women in the queue will soon set him straight, after she’s left.

The baby begins to fret – it’s nearly time for his feed. As she hurries home, she realises that their landlady, Mrs Rose, has probably played a role in spreading the story so fast. She’ll be fascinated, of course – she’s always taken an unhealthy interest in her tenants, and after the initial shock, she’ll be unable to resist the gasps and whistles of astonishment.

This suspicion is confirmed as she reaches home. Hilde opens the front door quietly. “I know! Would you believe it? Not even his own wife knew...” she hears Mrs Rose saying to the travelling salesman. “Although how he could keep a thing like that secret...” Her voice quivers with a sort of breathless intensity. She seems to be trying out slight embellishments, as if hoping to make some kind of sense of things through variations in the telling.

Hilde lifts John out of the pram, and marches over, her heart beating hard, the squirming baby in her arms. “My husband is not a Nazi!” she exclaims. “He has more

reason to despise them than anyone. I will insist you do not say such things..." She is shaking with anger.

Mrs Rose looks startled. Hilde is usually so mild and helpful. "Don't upset yourself, my dear..." she stammers. "After all, with so many young men called up, it's not like you're the only one left in the lurch. We all have to make sacrifices, don't we? At least you know he's safe..."

"It's not the same at all," Hilde says, hotly. "Any sacrifices we would gladly make to help with winning the war. But this....." a huge sob catches her by surprise, "it seems so cruel, so without purpose."

She can't finish, and Mrs Rose, who a few moments ago was implying that her husband was a spy, steers her along the hallway, and sits them down in the kitchen, and makes Ovaltine: "- it's good for the nerves, dear. We all drank it in the last war." Her sympathy is almost harder to take than the gossip. Hilde finds that it is kindness, not hostility, that breaks down her resolve, and her tears won't stop. Life is now full, it seems, of these strange contradictions. The drink is disgusting too, and she cannot swallow it.

Fortunately, there is still lots of cleaning work she can do, even without a permit. She cleans the communal areas of the lodging house with a grim determination, making the brass door fittings cloudy and then bright, running a mop over the shiny, well-worn lino, scouring the bathtub with Vim, and sluicing the front steps. She makes superstitious bargains in her head – if she can finish this within the hour, then she will get a letter from him tomorrow. If she can get the whole lot done by four, then he'll be back within a week.

The travelling salesman asks her to do his room for him again – "just a quick once-over." He sits on the bed and reads the newspaper while she works, his shirt unbuttoned over a greying vest, glancing up at her every now and again. What exactly counts as a "quick once-over" she wonders? She cleans the floor, folds and straightens a few items – she doesn't really like to touch his clothes - and wipes

down the surfaces. When she's finished he rises heavily to his feet and runs a finger over the doorframe to check for dust. This makes her nervous, but he just frowns.

Then he opens his wallet and stands completely still, for slightly longer than necessary. Hilde feels herself grow hot. She thinks she can hear the baby crying, from upstairs.

"Bit of a spot you're in, I suppose," he says, in a thoughtful, friendly voice. "Are you looking to make a bit extra? With your husband out of the picture, all of a sudden...."

What does he mean? Does he know of some other work for her? Hilde swallows, meets his eyes uneasily, and knows that this isn't what he's suggesting. She stiffens like a trapped animal, glancing helplessly at the door. "Don't look like that," he lets out an ugly laugh. "I'm only asking, pet. I know you're not really that sort - or not yet, anyway." He fishes out a few coins. "Off you go then!" he says and gives her a disrespectful little pat on the bottom.

She also cleans for a Jewish conductor from Austria, whose friends have helped him escape to London. He smokes constantly; everything in his apartment is covered in a thin film of ash. He keeps the curtains drawn all day and lies in his bed or on the sofa. He is older than Hilde. His wife and daughter are still in Vienna, but it is impossible to get them out now. Hilde bustles about, drawing the curtains, emptying ashtrays, running a bucket of water, trying to soothe herself with her routine.

"How did it go at your Tribunal?" he asks her.

She is moving the mop over the parquet flooring. She stops and breathes deeply, feeling the warm wave of indignation, the familiar prickle of tears. "My husband has been interned", she confesses. She expects that he at least will understand, as a fellow refugee. It is a relief just to speak the words.

To her surprise, he is not in the least sympathetic. "The British are quite right to be careful," he says approvingly, groping for his cigarettes. "Better they should

intern a hundred innocent men than one single Nazi should go free.” She feels like overturning her bucket and walking out, but she doesn’t. “Fortunately, I have been awarded a ‘C’ classification,” he says, with just a trace of smugness.

An unusual arrangement has evolved between them. He sometimes lets her play his piano, after she’s finished her work – a beautiful mahogany Bechstein. “You want to play, again? It’s not really what you expect from a char,” he says, as she’s reaching for her coat. “But go ahead, if you like. I suppose somebody might as well make use of it.”

So she sits down, and opens the lid, and doing this, she feels a surge of memory. She remembers her piano at home, and the dim, under-water light of the front room where it stood, dappled by the shadows of potted plants and the lace at the window – and once again she’s there, working things out, while the life of the house goes on distantly around her. There’s a pain in her chest, somewhere near her heart. She flexes her fingers, and unleashes her anger on the piano keys, bashing her way through Chopin’s Revolutionary Etude with a ferocity that makes the sideboard shake. The conductor lies on the sofa, moving his head very slightly in time to the music. “That’s the spirit,” he says.

The Daily Mail lands on the mat every morning, and every morning Hilde picks it up and puts it on the hall table. She reads the headlines - warning how easily ordinary people can find themselves “dupes of the Nazis,” unwittingly passing on vital information. The drip-feed of insinuation continues. Too few refugees have been interned. Too many are left to go about freely – instead, they should be “put where they can do no harm.” Fake passports are being made in a synagogue, by unscrupulous criminals. A new type of deadly gas is coming, which smells like violets.

Ludwig’s mother is eager to look after the baby – almost irritatingly so, Hilde feels. The older woman is obsessed with feeding the plump little infant - “do you think he might be hungry?” she suggests pointedly, every time he cries. It’s lucky she can

help of course, and Hilde can see how much good it does her to be useful, but something about the triumphant glint in her eye is hard to take. Hilde rushes back from a job, her brassiere stuffed with milk-sodden handkerchiefs, haunted by a phantom crying all the way home – only to find baby John sprawled blissfully asleep, and her mother-in-law rinsing the long glass bottle, with its dark red rubber teat.

“Hush, I only just got him off...” Frau Weiss says, glancing up. “Did you get a letter, yet?”

Hilde shakes her head. Exhausted, uncomfortable, yet unable to relax, she goes back to her own room. On the table, a pile of papers is spread out – more of the letters on which she works in her spare time, in the ornate, cursive script that she learnt at school.

She opens the wardrobe to hang up her jacket, and there are Ludwig’s clothes, hanging, still retaining something of his shape. She lurches forward suddenly and buries her face in the sleeve of an old shirt. She can still smell him – that mixture of soap, cigarettes, and a faint, precious whiff of sweat. A wave of longing goes through her, violent as a convulsion, strangely mixed with anger. Her face is contorted in a silent wail of misery, and her breath comes out in uncontrolled gasps.

She knows of course that this separation is the last thing he would have chosen, but a part of her feels a furious resentment against him. How could you leave me, she thinks? I followed you all the way here! I gave up my whole life for you! How can you leave me to do this dirty, boring work, to men who make nasty suggestions, and not even alone, but surrounded by your family?

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In the morning, Ludwig wakes half frozen, and walks stiffly up to the wire, as if to check that it’s still there. Other men, like him, blunder about the camp, army blankets wrapped around their shoulders or over their heads. They are bent, like the



trees that grow sideways in the wind, trying to shelter a small part of themselves from the aching cold. In their many layers of shabby clothing, they seem to be lugging around bodies that are no longer entirely their own. They remind him of the inmates in the yard of a lunatic asylum.

An older man stands at the fence. He's one of the Orthodox Jews, with a straggly grey beard and small round spectacles. He wears a dark hat with a large brim, and an immaculate three-piece suit, with a glossy silk waistcoat. "Good morning," he says to Ludwig politely, just as if they are holiday-makers admiring the view.

They look out through the barbed wire together. To the east there is an estuary with bull rushes and reeds, and behind this, a hill covered in brown fuzz, and the lip of a cliff. Ludwig can see sheep on the slopes, and a fine white house in the distance, where people must live a wonderful, free life.

"Last night, I dreamed I was walking on that beach which we are not permitted to see," the man says. He speaks in a calm, formal manner, like someone from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He has a silk handkerchief peeking out of one pocket.

"What is it like?" Ludwig can't resist asking. The Orthodox men make him feel uncomfortable. Their faith feels like a kind of reproach – to his father's choices, perhaps even to Ludwig's very existence. He suspects that given the chance, they will disapprove of him. It's ironic, he thinks, how he's always falling short – too Jewish for some, not Jewish enough for others, not German enough, but also too German. Whichever hat he wears, he feels somehow dishonest, even to himself.

"There were palm trees", the man offers, with a brief smile. "I suppose my brain invented those."

"Surely your brain invented all of it?" Ludwig says.

"Perhaps," the man seems unbothered by Ludwig's cynicism. "But I have had this sort of dream before, you know. In it, I was with my grandfather. He was a very

learned Rabbi, famous well beyond my hometown of Frankfurt. Perhaps you've heard of him?"

"Probably not."

The man looks at Ludwig, taking him in briefly - and then back towards the fence. "No, probably not," he agrees. "Anyway, his name, like mine, was Oppenheimer. I dream of him only rarely, and when he speaks to me, I find I am well advised to listen carefully. He warned me to leave Germany in a dream, and it was just as well I did so. Just a week after that, my neighbours write to tell me, our door was broken down and all of our windows smashed."

"Oh! Yes, I suppose that was pretty good advice. And what did your learned grandfather have to say about our situation?"

"Well, of course I asked him what we are all wondering. I asked him how long we must stay in this place."

"And did he know?" In spite of himself, Ludwig finds he is curious.

A group of the sailors are doing exercises together in the distance, bending and stretching in their thermals. They are singing another one of their songs – something about the sunrise in the east. Their low voices hum on the cold morning air.

"He said we shall be free in time for Tisha b'Av," Oppenheimer says solemnly. "However, he said that it is not permitted for us to celebrate." The brim of his hat casts a shadow over his face.

"What's that?" Ludwig says. He feels increasingly embarrassed to ask such questions. It seems ridiculous to have suffered such upheavals for a faith, or a race, or whatever it is - that he knows so little of.

"It is the ninth day of the month of Av," says Oppenheimer, which doesn't make Ludwig much the wiser.

Ludwig can see that down at the dining hall, people are starting to queue up for breakfast, and he can feel a trace of irritation creeping back in. "Well, nice to talk

to you,” he says, “Mr Oppenheimer. Please do ask your grandfather to speed things up for us as much as he can.”

After breakfast, Ludwig returns to find his small hut crammed with Communists. Otto and his comrades are holding a meeting. These are forbidden in theory, but easy to conceal, as none of the British speak much German. “We are discussing sports”, they say, spreading their fingers in gestures of exaggerated innocence, if challenged to explain their animated discussion – and surprisingly, this seems to be an excuse which the British find endlessly plausible. Ludwig doesn’t really mind – their breath and cigarette smoke and the warmth of their close-packed bodies clouds the freezing air.

Ulrich Achterberg is one of the most gripping storytellers. The younger Communists listen in awe, as this large man speaks in matter-of-fact terms, his craggy face dimly lit by the chalet ceiling light. He tells of his days in the Red Front Fighters League, operating in secret under Nazi rule, and his narrow escapes from the Gestapo. He left Germany on foot through the forests, and eventually travelled to Spain, where he joined the Thalmann Battalion of the International Brigade.

“What was it like in Spain?” Otto asks, eagerly.

Ulrich sighs. “That was an ugly fight. When you see what bombardment from the air can do....” he shakes his head, while they all think of where the next bombs might fall. He was captured by the British on a ship bound for Mexico.

“I don’t think it will be too difficult to escape from this so-called camp,” he says. “These boys are not real soldiers, I can tell. One could pluck their weapons almost out from their hands. They will hesitate to shoot us in the back.”

There’s a shocked silence in the hut. “But surely.... the British are our allies in the struggle against Hitler!” one of the other men protests. “We will not convince them of this through such talk. We must oppose this internment through political means...” As the talk moves to more abstract questions, Ludwig takes another stroll, despite the cold.

The observant Jews have been given a tent in which to hold services, led by a Rabbi from Hackney. Bent and rocking shadows are cast against the canvas. The strange and beautiful sounds of their prayer rise up over the English countryside, mingling with the caw of the gulls.

Kurt receives a hamper from Fortnum and Masons. No one else has been sent anything, and this makes him the most popular man in the camp. As well as this, the internees notice that his faintly bored-sounding, upper-class English drawl has an uncanny effect on the soldiers. When Kurt asks for a light, or says “take it easy, old chap” to an over-zealous young private who seems to want to stab someone with his fixed bayonet, the soldiers find it almost impossible not to obey him.

It is Kurt who wins the battle over letter writing. To start with, the camp authorities ignore the requests – why would one give a group of potential spies the chance to send messages? Kurt, with his calm self-confidence, and with his accent that no private can ignore, takes the matter right to the Commandant.

“What did he say?” Ludwig asks curiously, after the meeting.

“Not a lot. I reminded him that we have families too. He doesn’t like me. He didn’t say so, but I know that look. He thinks I’m a slippery bugger.”

“But you speak such beautiful English! And you’re not a Nazi....”

“Oh, I’m pretty sure he finds the seamen much easier to deal with, even the Nazis – to his mind, they’re what a prisoner of war is supposed to be. They do their exercises, they keep their kit in order, they play by the rules.”

“Surely it is more important that we are loyal to the British cause...?”

“On the contrary. The rest of us give him more trouble and make him feel more uncomfortable. I suspect that Jews of all sorts are untrustworthy, to him, but intellectual or well-educated Jews he finds the worst. He knows that given half a chance, we’ll be sending letters to the newspapers, the Home Secretary, and every bleeding-heart interfering committee in the country. Our shabby clothes and sloppy

ways, our cunning whining over this and that, our refusal to behave like a proper enemy, all make us damnably difficult to manage.”

Kurt is matter-of-fact and speaks with some irony – Ludwig can’t tell exactly how seriously he means some of this - but without bitterness. “I may sound like an Englishman, but to look at, he finds me decidedly foreign.” Ludwig can see what he means – Kurt has dark, long-lashed eyes, and a fine, Semitic nose. “I can’t really blame him. He’s just doing his duty, as he sees it, but our very existence makes this a lot more complicated. He’s spent most of his career in India, you know. He’s used to dealing with tricky natives - and he likes to know where he stands.”

At the next roll call, it is announced that they are allowed to send two short letters a week. Kurt becomes famous, in a matter of hours, as a young man with good connections, who can pull strings and get things done. Men come to him with their problems. Should one use the last of one’s savings to hire a solicitor? What is the best approach to get a speedy release? Can Kurt take a quick look over a letter they have written? An elderly mother, who speaks no English, will be starving, alone in Manchester – does Kurt know anyone who lives near there?

Poor Kurt, who after all is only in his early twenties, is overwhelmed by their problems, and unable to help. “Terribly sorry to hear that,” he says, “what awful bad luck,” and sends them away with a couple of Bath Olivers, or a slice of Dundee cake, from his hamper. He prefers, on the whole, to play chess with Ludwig in the dining hall. Ludwig has not played since he was a boy. Kurt beats him easily but seems to enjoy the process. So here they sit, bent over the board, puffing on cigarettes, both in their overcoats, warming their fingers between moves, beneath their arms.

“Don’t you sometimes envy the others?” Ludwig asks.

“Who do you mean?”

Ludwig thinks of all the men of conviction in the camp – oddly assorted though these convictions are. The Nazis with their songs, the Communists, with their reassuringly circular discussions, a small group of Zionists, who meet to study

Hebrew and the geography of “Eretz Israel,” the followers of one religion or another – wrong as it seems to link them, they all seem to draw an uncanny strength from their faith.

He struggles to explain this feeling. “I met an old chap, yesterday morning, who seems to have it all worked out. He’s in direct communication with the higher authorities, apparently, and even knows the date of our release.”

“You mean old Oppenheimer? The one with the dreams?”

“Yes, that’s him! Do you know him too?”

“Oh yes, he’s famous now. Everyone is talking about his grandfather’s prediction,” Kurt says.

“Well, obviously it’s nonsense. But wouldn’t it be better to believe in something? Those that do believe seem happier, and stronger. Otto, for example – he’s very young, of course, and I suppose that helps, but he falls asleep as soon as his head goes down. Perhaps it is better to believe, even if that belief is unfounded?”

Kurt moves his bishop to threaten Ludwig’s queen. “Gardez, my friend,” he says, because he likes to give Ludwig plenty of warning before beating him. “Keep your chin up, as the British like to say. There are many different forms of consolation. Look at us, for example, moving our small pieces around a checked board, to pass the time. Did you know that Bachmeier is writing an opera? Or that Fenstermacher can recite all of the railway timetables in Europe? You should ask him a question, by the way – how to get from Bologna to Antwerp on a Tuesday – it makes him so happy, it’s really rather touching. And you’re just as bad, don’t try and tell me otherwise. I’ve seen that look in your eyes when you’re thinking about aeroplanes, or carburettors, or whatever it is that you think about. So perhaps we have only to keep practicing our different games of crazy consolation until our time is up...”

“In internment as in life,” Ludwig says. They are gathering an audience, as men cluster round them to watch the final stages of the game.

“Hah! I like that. Check, by the way.”

Darkness falls outside, and the light in the hall fades. It's a desperate time of day. Muddy trails criss-cross the floor, speckled with small, squashed cigarette ends. The air is thick with the smells of wet wool, cigarette smoke, and smouldering brickettes. Near one of the stoves, Fenstermacher and Frankel are bent over, like elderly stags locking horns, in their own silent, never-ending game of chess. At the other end, a group of sailors deal a new hand of Skat automatically, without pleasure: it has become a reflex, a compulsion, like chain smoking. Heinz Reindorf - a teenaged boy in a school blazer and a wet fur hat - scrutinises a month-old copy of *Sporting Life*, as if the soft, well-thumbed pages contain the mysteries of the universe.

One of the new arrivals has a guitar, and begins to strum half-heartedly, but someone swears at him, and the sound breaks off, abruptly. One by one, men abandon their games and cast aside their hands of cards – they lie slumped over the tables, propping their heads up like some heavy weight they no longer wish to carry. They stare at their hands in revulsion or stub out cigarettes with a weary disgust.

Sick of waiting in the hall, Ludwig walks the muddy path to the toilet block. A few extra wooden planks have been put down, but they are already nearly submerged. The stars are bright and riotous, and the moon is large and close. As usual, the Nazis sing their songs, from the huts on the east side. The British soldiers sing, too – “We're going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line, 'Ave you any washing mother dear?” Both groups sing with a vigorous, nervous optimism which Ludwig finds almost unbearable. The sound of distant singing makes him feel sad.

It's true, he thinks, what Kurt was saying about crazy consolations. He can feel a tightness in his chest. He needs to work, to make something useful - that, and to be with his family. But is it all a pointless distraction, he wonders, from the awfulness of the world?

He finds himself thinking, without wanting to, of Hilde. He remembers the whiteness of her shoulders, the weight of her glossy hair, her sweet, slightly upturned

nose, the softness of her eyes - even when she frowns – and something secret in her smile, just for him. It makes him groan aloud. He thinks of how she used to play the piano when they first met, moving her whole body, massaging the sound out of the keys. He really should have tried harder to find her a piano. He thinks of baby John kicking and gurgling on the bed, and how it feels to bury his head in his milky smell and blow kisses on his soft stomach. He thinks of his strange and perfect little feet, not yet trodden on, unfurling like some sea creature without its shell.

He wants to howl at the moon. He wants to kick down the flimsy chalets. He wants to run into the wire, catching like a scrap of cloth on the barbs, like a giant human crow. He wants the soldiers to turn on him, shouting their usual warnings and threats, and finally using those stupid guns they are so fond of waving around. Show us which side you're on you bastards, once and for all!

When he returns to the dining hall, Ludwig notices that the guitar has started strumming again. There is a bit more muttered abuse, but other men join in, or rock in time, or just listen, with tears in their eyes. It is a familiar tune – The Song of the Peat Bog Soldiers – and the left-wing internees all know it well.

The tune is a slow dirge, in which you can hear the trudge of weary feet, but also the surly, swaggering revolt of the cabaret hall. The rebellious lament of the chorus suits their mood. It comes from a German concentration camp, where the inmates are made to cut peat from the moorland. To his surprise, Ludwig finds himself humming along. He feels a vibration in his chest, and a kind of relief cracking open his heart. Suddenly, without knowing how, the whole hall is singing, with a deep, low, throaty rumble. "Guards march back and forth, no one can get past. Flight would cost your life. Barbed wire surrounds us."

It's the first time the refugees sing together. The music seems to merge their individual misery into some wider human pattern. No one suggests it – it happens almost by instinct. They sing to pool their pain, to assert their existence, with the intense, angry grief of the dispossessed. Men who have been in German



concentration camps themselves, whose friends have been killed, who do not know if they will see their relatives again – they sing with various degrees of tunefulness, but with a passion that carries their words up into the clear sky, over the Devon coast.

The tune becomes the song of the camp, and the soundtrack to this part of Ludwig's life. It infects them like a virus. It is desperate, heartfelt, yet unspecific enough to avoid offence. Even the most enthusiastic Nazis can sometimes be caught humming it; devout Jews find fragments of it oddly mixed up with their liturgy; the British soldiers whistle snatches from beyond the wire. "It's basically a slave song," Kurt says, with his usual dry ambivalence, "but rather catchy, I suppose." There's always that guitar, somewhere, strumming it in the background.

One day, winter will be over, they sing. One day we will be able to say, with happiness - *Heimat, du bist wieder mein* – homeland you are mine again.

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At last, Hilde receives a letter. Ludwig writes that he's being held in a strange, adapted holiday camp, and asks her to send cigarettes, warmer clothes, and non-perishable food (perhaps a tin of treacle, he suggests). "It's good that you reminded me to take my overcoat – I am grateful for it every day. Once I become accustomed to the outdoor life it shouldn't be too bad," he adds, without conviction. "I think of you all the time, but we have only just been permitted to write. Exchange the coins for sterling (check that they give you a good rate) and spend what you need. I can't bear to think of you in hardship. How is the little one? Give him a big kiss from me and tell him that Papa will be back home soon."

It is such a relief to finally hear! But don't tell me "back soon" she wants to scream – don't you realise what this last month has been like? It has already been too long for that!

Ruth telephones. They must meet, she says, after Hilde has finished her cleaning job – they should go to a lunchtime concert at the National Gallery. It's the last thing Hilde feels like. She feels too guilty to do anything that might seem frivolous, with Ludwig a prisoner, with the rent still to pay. Every second away from the baby is spent cleaning or shopping: she feels as though if she stops for a moment, the whole thing will come apart.

Ruth insists, however. "It will do you good. You have to think of yourself as well," she says sternly. "Myra Hess is playing Beethoven, that should be your sort of thing. She's meant to be terribly good."

They meet on the steps to the gallery, and exchange swift kisses in the wind. Ruth looks well, small and bird-like in her bright lipstick and slacks. Her hair is cropped short, curls frothing around her cheeks. She has a new job in ARP – walking the streets in the blackout, reminding people to extinguish any visible light – "I'm not sure it makes much difference, but it seems to make them feel a bit better – and even me!" she says. There is something raw and restless about her.

"How are the children?" Hilde asks.

A look of relief lights Ruth's face – this is what she really wants to talk about. "I've just been out on the train to visit them," she says. "They are learning such funny English accents! And they begin to despise us already, so young..." a wistfulness creeps in, but she hurries on. "They seem to be adapting. It's hard to tell. Everything is so different out there."

Hilde touches her shoulder, tentatively. She can't imagine being separated from baby John – secretly, she feels that this would be the worst. "And how is Ernst?" she says.

"Quite well, thank you," Ruth says guiltily, unable to meet her eye. "He sends his regards. He means to visit you more often..." So, we both pity each other, Hilde thinks – but at least we are trying!

Why didn't we come here before, she wonders? The buildings are so grand and beautiful, it does her good just to be here. The view from the steps down Whitehall, with Big Ben in the distance, makes her feel more confident; there are statues of Generals, and Nelson's column, with its great bronze lions. There have been other battles, and Britain has won so many of them. The British are more brutal than one thinks, perhaps, beneath all their famous politeness – but this might turn out to be a good thing, as well as a bad thing, for her family.

The entrance hall is full of muted colours and scratchy new uniforms - soldiers, sailors, men of the Auxiliary Fire Service with their shiny buttons, and women of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, in knee length skirts and sensible shoes. What would they think, if they knew about the "enemy aliens" in their midst, Hilde wonders, as they wind their way through the crowd?

The art works have been taken away for safe storage. Huge, ornate picture frames hang empty on the walls, and only the name plates are left. A modern war will mean the end of civilisation, Ernst sometimes says. A gallery without pictures – surely this, Hilde thinks, is a world in crisis, a world turned upside down. Yet people still come together here in their lunch break, to eat their sandwiches on the long flight of steps, to sit on the folding chairs, carefully arranged in rows before the piano.

Perhaps we don't have long, she can feel them thinking – perhaps life as we know it is ending? We had better make each lunchtime count.

An expectant hush falls. Hilde can feel that they, like her, are hungry for something - some communal experience that will link them with the past and the future, with an emotion wider than their own.

The pianist is a solid, serious, frumpy-looking woman, with her hair in a bun. "My God, why did I come? This is ridiculous," Hilde thinks, suddenly. Ludwig is being held behind barbed wire, and here she is, wasting her time, surrounded by strangers, staring at a woman who – from the look of her - might as well be about to mop the floor!

Hunched frowning over the keys, the woman begins to play the first chords. Hilde feels them as a prickling on her skin, an almost animal unease. They are like a change in the weather - a rumble of thunder, or a darkening of the sky. Then the woman's fingers move, unleashing a storm of sound. The noise swells and swirls through the lofty atrium, working on all of them: Beethoven's Appassionata, a tempestuous musical rage against the cruelty of life.

All of the emotion that has been building inside her comes rising up. Hilde's heart hurts, as if it will break – the music is the crash of waves, the clash of armies. The whole audience seems to feel it. They are all so raw, so unpeeled, she can see it on their faces. That girl, with tears streaming down her cheeks – it must be that her brother or her sweetheart has just left for France, with the British Expeditionary Force. That young man in khaki, who moves slightly with the music, as if feeling it right through his body – probably he is going himself, in a day or two.

Ruth is right: it is good for her to be amongst other people. She has been feeling contaminated, tainted, ashamed, and so isolated. She wonders if perhaps her suffering is not so different, after all - perhaps pain is never really noble or beautiful at first hand? Maybe her own dull, wretched misery is only a part of what so many are feeling.

The music passes over her like a strange dream. She doesn't want to speak afterwards, for fear of breaking the spell. Ruth embraces her as they part; the music seems to have loosened something in her, as well. "I'm so sorry," she says, and Hilde realises, with relief, that this is all she really wanted her to say. "Your Ludwig, of all people. He just wants to fiddle around with his machines and live his life. I said so to Ernst, when he first told me. He can be stubborn, they both can, but he doesn't deserve... We worry..." she trails off. "It just seems so unfair."

Ruth gives Hilde an envelope containing some banknotes and hushes her protests. "Call us if you need anything. Let's hope it won't be long," she says.

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The younger boys can take it better. Ludwig can hear distant whoops and shouts, from where he stands at the fence, looking out over the frost-dusted landscape. He listens to the echoing ring of chunks of ice sliding and colliding, coming from the direction of the frozen swimming pool. The sounds carry clearly on the cold air. Some of the boys are skidding around, or playing an ice-shooting game they've devised, with a margarine tin filled with frozen water.

He has had a letter from Hilde. He almost knows it by heart already. It stirs feelings in him – a painful process, like the warming of hands that have gone numb in the cold. “Baby is doing well,” Hilde has written. John is pulling himself up and babbling away - this new child sounds nothing like the one he remembers. “People are always telling me to keep my chin up. This is an English expression about staying hopeful and not crying, perhaps you know it? I want to tell them that the position of my chin is not for them to decide,” Hilde writes. “Your dear mother is very helpful, although I expect you can imagine that I sometimes find her advice rather difficult to accept.”

She's keeping things going, working hard, paying the bills. She has unsuspected reserves of strength and courage and seems to be coping remarkably well without him. He is in awe of this new character – but like the baby, he has a sense that this is someone he doesn't really know. He increasingly feels that they might be better off without him. He is only a burden and a worry these days, to his family.

“Weiss!”

Ludwig turns to see Herbert crunching over the grass towards him. “My very first cell mate! How's it going with you?” Herbert calls, cheerfully.

Ludwig has not seen much of him since they arrived. Camp life seems to suit him. Most of the internees are depressed – great waves of it come off them, like a

smell - but Herbert is pink-cheeked and smiling and looks warm in his thick sailor's sweater and oilskin jacket.

"What do you want, Herbert?" Ludwig asks, cautiously.

"I hear that you can fix up my heater." He holds open his pocket a crack, and Ludwig can see that it's stuffed with wire.

"I don't know..." Ludwig says. He's been experimenting with the small electrical heating coils which have been issued after the latest dip in temperature. It is possible to "improve" these with certain types of metal (although the spoons tend to melt, he has discovered). He's worried about starting a fire or getting caught, and also, he makes a point of not doing favours for the Nazis.

"Oh, come on! They say you're the best..." Herbert wheedles. "For old time's sake? I can pay you in cash, or cigs if you prefer."

Ludwig glances around uneasily, to see if anyone is watching. Herbert was the first other internee he met, and that night in the police station in London when they were both so scared has given them a strange bond.

"I'll take cigarettes," he agrees hesitantly. He's run out and hasn't had a smoke in two days. The two of them stroll back together.

Ludwig's hut is empty. Otto must be out at another meeting. He has acquired a typewriter, which squats on a table. Ludwig helped to get it working, and to fit the ribbon, which was smuggled in via one of the soldiers with left-wing leanings. Otto uses it to write articles for the "wall newspaper," which is pinned up in the hall once a week. There is also a catalogue of motorcycle parts and accessories which Ludwig has been given in return for a previous job: reading it sometimes makes him feel better. Ludwig switches on the bulb.

"Let's see what you've got, then," he says. "You're lucky. I don't normally work for your new friends, on the west side."

Herbert sits down on Ludwig's bunk. "They're not so bad," he says, defensively. "They're just ordinary German lads, most of them. I mean you're bound

to be sensitive of course, if your father's a Jew, but most of them aren't even very political, apart from a few show-off hot heads. And they're more fun than your miserable lot. Or the Commies, who just talk all day long, and try to sign you up to join their stupid Party."

Ludwig glances up at him, briefly, curious to see if he believes his own words. Herbert looks away.

"Is that your kid?" Herbert squints at a small, black and white photograph that Ludwig has pinned up next to his bed. Hilde sent it with her last letter. Ludwig spends many hours staring at it, as if suffering some specific vitamin deficiency which only these particular blurred features can cure.

"He looks like you."

Ludwig gives a noncommittal grunt, twisting a bit of wire to break it. Perhaps he should take it down; he doesn't much like other people to see it. It's when thinking about baby John that his anger, which flares up like an ulcer, comes closest to breaking through.

"I hear Kurt went for another Tribunal." Herbert keeps on going.

"That's right."

"Do you think he'll get out? They say his aunt is rich."

"I doubt it. Who knows?" It's nearly six weeks, now. He's trying to give up speculating about these things, but Ludwig hopes so. If Kurt is released, that means that he's also in with a chance. Kurt seemed optimistic, when he got back from London. The Tribunal was in Burlington House, which was apparently very grand, and Kurt says there was a Quaker woman on the panel who promised to do what she could for him. But the waiting has begun to crush their hope.

He's finished with the wire. Might it be possible, he wonders briefly, to use the heating coils to warm water? Electricity and water don't mix, but what if one had a kettle with a false bottom, to keep the element dry? Perhaps it would eventually boil?

“There you go. I can’t promise it will last. Keep an eye on it, and turn it off when you go to sleep,” Ludwig says.

Herbert thanks him and fishes a couple of packets of cigarettes from his deep pockets. Like the others who declare themselves “loyal to the Reich,” he’s supplied by the Red Cross with cigarettes, some pocket money, and toiletries. In this way, the Nazi sympathisers in the camp are better off than the refugees.

Herbert hesitates in the doorway. “Don’t let it get to you, Weiss,” he says. He looks at Ludwig, frowning, and Ludwig wonders suddenly if he gives off his own whiff of desperation, like the others. “You’re not looking too good to me. You’ve got to take care of yourself, here. Let me know if there’s anything I can get you,” he says. “There’s a dentist in the village, he helps me out. There’s not much he can’t get hold of. I say I’ve got toothache, and they just keep on letting me go...”

“Yes, they’re not bad like that,” Ludwig says, blankly. “But I don’t think you can help, thanks. The main thing I need is just to get out of here.”



### ***Careless Talk Costs Lives***

At Christmas time, there is an Operetta.

The hall is crammed to capacity, echoing with excited chatter and rank with the smells of six hundred badly-washed men. Ludwig and Kurt edge along the rows of iron chairs to take a seat, and as people turn their heads away, Ludwig is reminded that he himself has not ventured into the shower block for weeks.

The rarely-used stage has been brought back into service. The main lights are switched off, and the babble of voices dies away to an expectant hush. Then the curtains jerk open.

“Sometimes, one suspects one has stumbled into a Surrealist film,” mutters Kurt, “or the strangest dream from which one cannot awake.” Ludwig is pleased to hear some of the old irony.

The stage is as crowded as the rest of the hall. There is even an orchestra, now – from a scuttled German ocean liner, who arrived carrying their strangely curved cases over the meadow from the station. Despite their muddy shoes and wind-reddened cheeks, they still have the straight backs, shining instruments and business-like composure with which they previously entertained wealthy diners on the high seas.

There’s also a chorus, artistically draped in army blankets, with silver-paper crowns and burnt cork make-up suggesting an “exotic” or perhaps a Biblical setting. Camouflage nets double up as scenery; Ludwig has helped to rig up some primitive stage lights, using a couple of bicycle lanterns and an arc lamp. Bachmeier, the composer of the piece, is dressed for his part as conductor, having somehow brought along a tailcoat and white gloves in his single suitcase. He lifts his baton, and the overture begins.

The score is inspired by Kurt Weill. In certain sections - where Bachmeier's intentions become a little vague - the orchestra drifts back towards the foxtrots, marches and quicksteps with which they are more familiar. When this happens, Bachmeier scowls in frustration, his thick black moustache twitches with anger, and he waves his baton furiously.

The libretto is a mixture of German and English, chanted by a vigorous, deep-voiced chorus. There have been many problems in rehearsal. Every afternoon for the past month, Bachmeier has berated them, calling them tone-deaf idiots, a disgrace both to Germany and to this new land, claiming that he'd get a better noise out of the seagulls. He can't seem to understand that they are not professionals. Strangely, considering this abuse, they've worked hard – perhaps just for want of anything else to do.

“Ze bride, ze bride, ze bride from Ophir!” the chorus builds to a crescendo, and Herbert steps out from behind the camouflage netting, in a low-cut ball-gown and silk stockings supplied by his friend the dentist. He begins to sing.

The Colonel looks startled, and the Sergeant Major frowns at his feet, so fiercely disapproving that he can't bring himself to look at the stage. Gustav Pahlke - the balding carpet salesman and the most vocal of the National Socialists - makes a loud and pointed remark to his neighbour about “degenerates.” Mostly, however, the men roar with laughter, and stamp their feet.

Herbert has a surprisingly decent untrained voice, and makes a beautiful girl, with his youthful features, pink cheeks, and full lips. He paces the front of the stage as he sings, and stares out at the audience, as proudly provocative as Marlene Dietrich. He curtsies, twirls, and blows kisses, and raises his skirts playfully to reveal a glimpse of frilly underwear. There are whistles and groans from the audience, some of which are only half ironic. Forgetting for a while the cold, the bad food, their bitter political differences and their homesickness, the men rise to their feet in rapturous applause. A strange atmosphere is being stirred up. The make-believe

calls to them, and the fact that a new way of doing things - not devised by the British - seems for a time to be allowed.

“Very original,” the Colonel comments, with faint bewilderment. “A unique performance, wouldn’t you say?”

“Not really my cup of tea, Sir,” the Sergeant Major replies, gruffly.

As they disperse into the windy darkness, there’s a wildness in the air, and a feeling that anything might happen. Ludwig and Kurt walk back up towards their huts. They can hear muffled voices, laughter, a door banging, and a warning shout from one of the guards – “Oi!”

They stop for a while at the fence. Going back to the hut at night is the worst part, the moment when there are no more distractions, and their situation feels relentlessly stark. It will take a while for the camp to settle down, and for the curfew to be enforced – they can perhaps allow themselves a last cigarette. Kurt is lost in his own thoughts. He has been very gloomy since the letter with the result of his Tribunal finally arrived: “no sufficient grounds for release.”

The bitter wind makes Ludwig’s eyes stream. The hills are black shapes, against the deep purple sky, and he can hear a very faint clank and jangle, which sounds like the harness of a horse, but in fact comes from the boats in the distant harbour. He is drawn to the fence. It is always there in his head, even when he can’t see it, and beneath all the temporary distractions of the camp, it is the basic truth of his reality.

“Do you know much about the Jewish holidays?” he asks. Kurt is an atheist, and his parents are not particularly religious, but his grandparents were observant, and he can be surprisingly knowledgeable about such things. “Tisha b’Av – do you know when that is?”

“I’m not sure”, Kurt says. “That’s the one with the egg dipped in ashes, isn’t it? Cheerful sort of holiday. But no, I couldn’t tell you when...”

They stare at the wire. Little glints of moonlight glitter on the barbs. Ludwig feels that he could go mad with the weight of it all. "It was not a good year," he says, eventually. His son was born, but even this now seems a mixed blessing. The war, which is going so badly - and now this slow torture, called internment - has soured every joy. The idea of the little boy brings him little pleasure, only worry and guilt.

Kurt laughs, grimly. "Not a good year? So you noticed, did you, my proud, dreamy friend? It was bloody rotten! And unless I'm much mistaken, the next one looks likely to be even worse." He stops laughing abruptly, perhaps aware of the hysteria in his voice. "The truth is that I'm afraid," he adds, gruffly. There's something horrible about this confession, and the desperate way he makes it.

Ludwig claps him on the back, hoping to dispel the pain with this awkward display of affection. He considers offering Kurt the motorcycle catalogue to read - it's his prize possession at the moment, and he almost knows it by heart - but he's aware it probably wouldn't help. He can feel Kurt's shoulders shaking beneath his hand. "I know, I know. But it's best not to think about it," he says.

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Mrs Rose says that it is the worst winter in a long time. Hilde makes her way to her cleaning jobs with her head bowed forward, sliding on the icy pavement, her umbrella open against the sleet.

Getting home is slow. She notices posters on buses and on the tube. They show a pair of jolly, cartoon figures, one fat, one thin - Himmler and Goering, she recognises with a shock, reimagined as if for a children's storybook. They are sitting on the bus, hiding in the luggage rack on trains, or behind the bottles in bars, while unsuspecting Brits chat merrily away within earshot. Underneath, the message - "careless talk costs lives." She goes cold at the thought. How odd, to make a joke of this.

Is it true, Hilde wonders, as she looks around at the other people in her carriage? In Germany she had the feeling of being watched, and the authorities seemed to know details about them which could only have come from informers. Are they really here, too? The only Germans she's come across in London are refugees, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. It's wise not to underestimate the National Socialists – this is something they have all been too slow to learn.

The pipes freeze and then burst, and the plumber has to be called. Hilde puts down her darning, and watches the snow blow against the window, and thinks of how cold Ludwig must be.

Mrs Rose is full of advice on the importance of flannel next to the skin, woollen stockings, and never leaving the house without a hat. "It just goes to show the foolishness of these modern fashions," she says. "When I was a girl, everyone wore shawls, and long skirts down to the floor with layers and layers of petticoats and unmentionables underneath. And we had no electric heaters or gas fires back then."

Should she still clean for the travelling salesman? Hilde debates this in her head, feeling sick and strangely embarrassed, as if she herself has created this situation. He makes her uncomfortable, but she needs the money. They share the same bathroom – she meets him in the hallway in his pale blue pyjamas, a towel over his shoulder, and he makes way for her with mock courtesy. She's a married woman, after all, not a silly young girl – she knows what men are like; she can't afford to be over-sensitive. But what if he keeps on asking, dropping hints, and what if he won't take no for an answer? Luckily, he is often out. She waits until he has left to do his room, then works as fast as she can, with one eye on the door.

Rationing is introduced. Taking Ruth's advice, Hilde buys her first Oxo cubes and experiments with "meatless dishes," but her attempts at a nut cutlet are met with politely perplexed dismay by Ludwig's parents. Frau Weiss can't see what the fuss is about. No one who has tried to run a household in Germany over the last twenty years can feel hungry under these luxurious conditions. So what if there's a long

queue at the butchers, and he's run out of cheaper cuts? Has Hilde forgotten the "Steckrübenwinter," during the last war, when they all lived on root vegetables? When Ludwig was a child they sometimes managed on cabbage broth five nights a week, and he grew up big and strong, the tallest in his class!

Hilde is sceptical about the image of Ludwig his mother conjures up – composed of wishful thinking, family myth, and twenty-year old memories. But perhaps her own "Ludwig" is just as partial and unreliable a construction? Normally, with his arms around her and the smell of him on her skin, Hilde had no such doubts, but now, the thought is strangely troubling. It's almost as if he's died.

She sees him everywhere, among the crowds of men in uniform. Sometimes it's the back of his head – the hair is cut differently, but it's the exact shade of sandy blonde, and there's that pimple that he sometimes gets on his neck line! She has to bite her lip so as not to call out his name. Several times she's on the point of getting off the bus, after thinking she glimpses him on a crowded pavement. She stares at the door of their room so hard, remembering all those evenings waiting for him to come back from work – that she sometimes believes she can make it open, with the force of her yearning alone.

She misses him so badly that she feels slightly deranged. She makes no sense without him – there's no one to complain to, no one to delight in the baby with, no one to put her fears and feelings into perspective. And oh God, it's surely too long, now? Hasn't she been brave for long enough? How much more of this insane situation can she be required to take? His letters are strange and stilted, without energy or emotion: the gaps between them grow longer, and when one finally arrives, she is so disappointed by how empty it seems, she is tempted to fling it into the waste basket. Without his love to steady her, she feels a previous version of herself – perhaps a better version - begin to slip away.

It's odd and annoying, the way the older generation seem almost to relish the new hardship. It's as if they see it as a kind of vindication – a return to some older

truth about life. "Well certainly," Hilde complains to Ruth, "we could all go back to living in caves!"

"And maybe we will before this is over," Ruth replies glumly, lighting herself another cigarette. "Why don't you tell them to hold their tongues? After all, you're the one who pays the rent. And the one who buys and cooks their dinner."

"Oh, I can't," Hilde says, with a sudden flash of empathy. "They're scared, too. They're even more scared than I am." Perhaps, she reflects more calmly, it's just their way of coping.

"I hope your work is not too bad?" Ruth enquires, with a shrewd, sideways glance. "You have to go into their bedrooms, don't you? That can't be very...nice."

Hilde can feel herself flush. She wants to say something, but what? Nothing terrible has happened, nothing she can put her finger on. "They are not always...perfect gentlemen," she admits. "It's nothing serious," she adds hurriedly. "I can take care of myself. But one of them looks at me, and the other day he said something...."

Ruth snorts angrily and presses her painted lips together. Then there is a brief silence between them. "You poor thing", she says. "The world can't guess what we have to put up with."

The war seems to Hilde like a relentless blizzard of place names and statistics. She has no enthusiasm for maps and facts, for ship names and troop movements – she wants to block her ears, or switch off the set, when a news bulletin comes on the wireless. Her younger brother is out there somewhere – even the thought of him in that uniform makes her stomach turn over, a guilty secret – and she hopes it's nowhere too awful. Baby John is now shuffling across the lino on his nappy, and pulling himself upright, grunting with determination, staggering along when she holds his podgy little hands. They are warned to brace themselves for a German onslaught in the spring, and for the strikes on British soil which everyone says will soon be coming.

It's a comfort to at least be able to knit for Ludwig, as other women do for their men. Working on a new pair of socks in the thickest wool she can find, Hilde pretends to herself that their separation is the same, too, a necessary part of the war effort. She pictures waving him off at a station, in a crowd of other brave little wives – just as awful, probably, yet so much less shameful - trying out this fantasy for a few rows at a time.

While she scrubs the front steps, an aeroplane roars overhead. Mrs Rose is just coming back from the shops. "They're worse than the Zeppelins were," she says, shrinking at the noise. "I don't like the way they go so quick. Is it one of ours?"

Hilde feels a small flicker of pleasure at this expression, *one of ours*, which seems to include her so naturally. "I expect so," she says reassuringly, although she doesn't know. She moves her bucket out of the way and takes the bag of shopping for Mrs Rose. Ludwig would be able to tell.

"I don't think I can face it if those Nasties come over here. I'd sooner kill myself than live under that horrible Hitler man," Mrs Rose says, untying her headscarf with shaking hands. Hilde (with her six years' head start on this subject) is touched – and at the same time irritated by her innocence. She nods her head in silent, apprehensive agreement.

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A new wire has been added to the fence, with little porcelain insulators, like strangely shaped teeth. The men have been warned against touching it at roll call. Ludwig stares at it, and thinks about the uses of electricity, and how people ruin everything. Nowadays there are fences, even chairs, made with the stuff. It's like the way that aeroplanes have been spoiled. He used to love aeroplanes, before they became just another way to kill.



His hand reaches out slowly. It is as if someone else is moving his arm for him, and he is just watching it happen. He is curious about how the electricity might feel. One of the Tommies is watching from the other side of the fence. It's the short one, with a pinched face, like a little old west-country gnome.

"Stop!" the Tommy shouts.

"Or what?" Ludwig says, in a quietly conversational tone. "You'll shoot me?" Nevertheless, he puts his hand quickly back in his overcoat pocket – ramming it down hard into the torn lining – and notices that his heart is beating hard. What's wrong with me, he thinks? How can I be curious about such a thing? Is it just that I'm bored? Perhaps I'm really going crazy?

Long-johns and flannel vests flap outside the huts. A Union Jack flutters on a pole, the royal blue and pillar-box red intensified by a flash of sunshine. There's the smell of wet grass, and a surprising new quality to the air – something Ludwig has almost forgotten about, which now suddenly comes back to him, as a twinge of painful memory. On the slopes of the hillside, a few new-born lambs have appeared, like tiny maggots against the green.

He hasn't written to Hilde in a while. He no longer knows what to say. It is an effort to summon the pretence – to conjure up an imitation of the husband and father he used to be. Does she still want to hear from him, he wonders, or would it be a relief to her if he simply stopped writing?

There is a news ban – now they can't get newspapers or listen to the wireless, and rumours race back and forth, with a strange power over everyone's mood. Fenstermacher says that the British are negotiating terms with Berlin. Otto has heard that the King has fled to Canada. Frankel says that Chamberlain has resigned. Pahlke insists the Germans have landed in Norfolk. Oppenheimer's dream is being talked of again – what did his grandfather actually say, people want to know? They are like frightened children, telling stories in the dark.

Ludwig can hear more of the distant singing. The Germans from the west side of the camp have begun to do their exercises without shirts. The sailors are a hardy bunch and need little encouragement to strip off. They sound pretty cheerful about something. There's another rumour that they have a hidden radio set, although Ludwig doesn't see how this is possible, as the huts are often searched. The familiar curse words – *Yid, Filthy Yid* – are once again heard, like an ugly echo in his head, in the shower block and the kitchens. Geller, one of the academics, has been tripped up on the way to roll call. A hand-made sign of the sort he used to see in Germany has gone up in the window of one of the huts, expressing an apparently impersonal distaste (*Jews Unwanted Here*) in wobbly Gothic script. The British don't understand it, and the refugees are somehow embarrassed to explain.

Ludwig can't stop looking at the wire and wondering about the voltage. Surely it must be enough to do some damage, otherwise, what is the point? Or is it enough merely to be able to reassure an outraged public that there is an electrified wire? How much would it take, in any case, to stop a heart? Perhaps at the right moment, weakened by other things, not all that much.

His hand has found its way out of his coat pocket again, and is moving tentatively, closer to the wire, as if it is shyly trying to point something out to his slow-moving brain. He doesn't know if he's really going to do it. He wonders if perhaps he's just trying to scare the soldier, or himself. Probably he should at least have a shave, beforehand? He wants to feel some kind of power, some jolt which will bring him to life again, or at least bring some change to this living death.

"What the Bloody Hell..." shouts the Tommy. His funny pinched-up face is distorted with panic and fear. It's actually quite amusing, Ludwig thinks, if only someone else were here to see it.

Ludwig feels a strong blow - something solid, as if he has been hit by a metal bar - and his body shakes. Then there's a rush of nausea, and he sinks to his knees

in the mud, and blacks out. Just as he loses consciousness, he wonders if the guard has shot him, after all.

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The sick bay is warmer than his hut, at least. It's part of the main building, with wonderful brick walls and a linoleum floor. There are four metal camp beds, with proper mattresses. Only one of them is empty.

"Why is it that you're all so obsessed with the wire?" says the Medical Officer, as he's bandaging Ludwig's hand. Ludwig finds this funny, but his laugh becomes a choking cough, and then tears start running down his cheeks. The M.O. gives him an injection, which makes him very sleepy.

The Colonel comes to visit him. Ludwig can barely keep his eyes open. "This is an honor, Herr Magistrate, Sir," Ludwig says, and giggles.

"Why did you do it, Weiss?" says the Colonel. He sounds annoyed and confused.

"To experiment it..." Ludwig says, vaguely.

"He doesn't look at all well," the Colonel mutters to the M.O. "Have you listened to his heart?" They don't want me to die, Ludwig thinks, with distant satisfaction. It would cause them all sorts of trouble. They ask him if he wants to talk to someone – the Army Chaplain, or the Rabbi from Hackney – but Ludwig shakes his head.

Apart from Ludwig, there are two others in the beds. Heinz Reindorf, a teenager, one of the youngest in the camp, has a bandaged foot. He lies back against the rough cotton pillow, reading his copy of *Sporting Life*, which he holds close to his body, as if someone might try to take it from him. He still wears the woollen school blazer in which he was interned.

"What happened to you, Heinz?" Ludwig asks.

"It was an accident," the M.O. answers for him. "Scalding water from an urn."

"Only not complete accident," Heinz says with resentful significance, looking up from his magazine.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it was one of the sailors. Because of the thing he calls me when it happens."

Bachmeier, the composer of the Christmas Operetta, is in the third bed. He's having a full-blown nervous breakdown, which Ludwig at first finds rather impressive. Apparently, he hasn't slept properly for weeks. He still wears his tailcoat, his wire-wool hair stands up in different directions, and Ludwig can smell that he hasn't washed in a long time either. He has a folder full of secret plans to win the war, which he keeps under his pillow and keeps trying to show Ludwig, during the night when they are both awake.

"The most sensitive parts are written in musical notation for added security," Bachmeier confides, his black moustache quivering with passion. "So there is no danger if they should fall into enemy hands. All I need now is a car to take me to Croydon." He wants to get the plans to the High Command in France. His ramblings, half in English and half in German, almost make a kind of sense.

After a while, Ludwig has had enough. His hand is hurting and he has plans of his own to formulate. Asking Bachmeier to keep quiet achieves nothing. Eventually, he tries another approach. "Why are you telling me all this?" he asks him, craftily. "Hasn't it occurred to you that I might be a spy?" This makes Bachmeier very upset. He starts shouting, and wakes Heinz, and the M.O. comes running, and has to call another Private for help. Bachmeier is given an injection, which finally calms him down and makes him sleep.

"For the love of God, all I ask is a car to Croydon!" he whispers, as he loses consciousness. The M.O. tucks him in tenderly and puts his papers carefully by the bed.

“I wouldn’t mind a car to Croydon, either,” Ludwig says, “while you’re at it.” He aches all over, and there’s a strange smell, although he can’t tell if it’s coming from him, or just the room. Perhaps the electricity has damaged him, inside.

Bachmeier begins snoring, and Ludwig thinks about Hilde. Touching the wire was cowardly. Perhaps there is something else he can do to help her – maybe he needs to find a different kind of courage. He thinks about this for a long time, before he finally drifts back to sleep.

In the morning, Bachmeier is moved somewhere else. This worries Heinz. “Where are they taking him?” he asks Ludwig, anxiously. The world beyond the camp barely exists for him, now. Ludwig is reminded of how young he is.

“Some sort of lunatic asylum, I suppose,” Ludwig says. “They can’t manage him here. If you ask me, he’s lucky to be getting away.”

The room seems very quiet and empty once he’s gone. Their food is brought to them on trays. In the distance, they can hear the sounds of the dining hall – it’s as if they have died and left all that behind.

Ludwig asks for paper and a pen. This cheers Heinz up a little because he has a silver fountain pen in the top pocket of his blazer, which he offers to lend to Ludwig. “My father gave it to me, on the morning of the train,” Heinz says. He says he uses it every week to write to his family. He misses them, he says apologetically, although he doesn’t want to seem ungrateful - the British have been very good to him ever since he arrived with a large group of youngsters on a Kindertransport. He also uses the pen to write to cabinet ministers, M.P.s, a Bishop and even to the King, asking them to help arrange visas for his parents and his older brother. “Look – it has my initials engraved on it!”

“It’s very nice,” Ludwig tells him.

Writing with the wrong hand is difficult for Ludwig. He should have thought to burn the other one instead. His handwriting is strange and wobbly, as if he has become a wicked child.

He has come to a decision. If he can't free himself, at least he can free Hilde. He forms the letters slowly, painfully.

"Please stop writing to me. I know you're trying to be kind, but it only makes things worse. It was wrong to ask you to come over with me, I see that now. I can offer you nothing, and I hereby release you from all obligation. It was a selfish mistake to bring a child into this world. Life may be better for you both without me. Please try to be happy in any way that you can."

He reads it back, and then underlines "in any way that you can." He thinks of her with an Englishman, a British soldier perhaps, who will raise the boy as his own. It isn't the full 24 lines they are allowed - which is a waste - but it will have to do. Oh God! He thought his feelings were blunted, cauterised by the electric shock, but it's still much harder than he expected. Tears fall on the paper, and he thinks of his mother. He would like to say something to help her, but can hardly divorce her, too. "Please tell my parents not to contact me either," he adds, at the bottom.

Outside the window, spring is coming. It's strange, Ludwig thinks, the way the world just goes on and on, regardless. Heinz is still studying his magazine. He's very keen on horse racing. "Do you think that the British will permit a Jewish boy to work as a jockey?" he asks.

"How the hell should I know?" Ludwig snaps. Can he get no peace? He feels weak and wobbly, exhausted with emotion.

Heinz flinches, and retreats behind the pages with his outraged adolescent pride, looking as if he might cry.

"I'm sorry, young man. I'm not feeling my best," Ludwig adds, more gently. It must be difficult for the boy, alone without his family. "You want to ride horses, do you?" He struggles to focus on this peculiar problem. It seems to him that there are several other questions – their internment, and the progress of the war – that would

need to be decided first, but it doesn't seem kind to mention them. Above all, he thinks, what people need is hope.

"It's not important," Heinz sulks.

"I don't know much about that sort of thing," Ludwig says, as honestly as he can. "Do you still do schoolwork? I can help you, if you like. Even here, you must try to study a bit every day. It's possible, I suppose, that if you work hard, you can do any job you want," he continues. "They are less prejudiced here. Or at least," he corrects himself, "that's what I used to think."

"Do you like the pen?" Heinz asks. "It writes very smoothly, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Ludwig says. "It's a beautiful pen."

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The bus moves in sudden lurches because of the traffic. Hilde sits with her calf-skin handbag on her knees, looking out of the window. She has not heard from Ludwig for ages, and his last letter – three weeks ago, now – was very brief and formal, a few comments on the weather and best wishes to the family, with no hint of anything personal. Is he becoming like the English, who seem to communicate through some confusing meteorological code? It's not surprising, anyway, if he doesn't feel like writing. The news has been unbelievable. People still go about their business in a kind of trance, but it seems ridiculous to do the same things she normally does.

Each headline comes as a fresh blow; she cringes inwardly in anticipation of the next calamity. Try as she might to avoid it, it is everywhere – rustling about her on the bus, shouting out from the stands in strong black capital letters, intoned with sombre authority from the wireless down the hall. The little maps of Norway with its ragged coastline have been replaced on the front pages with little maps of the low countries. The reassuring diagrams of dotted lines and little ships now show dark,

swooping arrows. Rotterdam lies in smoking ruins, and an unthinkable announcement is made in an almost-breaking voice: “Dutchmen! I still believe in the courage of our people.” A fresh wave of refugees begins to arrive, other languages on their lips, the same shocked look on their faces.

All across London – as she swims, daily, through the sea of uniforms, which surges across platforms and pavements - panic is in the air. It clings to her clothes, and stays with her at night, in the jabbering commentary in her head. Britain will be next, they all know it. The spies are already here, sitting behind net curtains in the tea rooms, at the back of the tram, listening through the walls. German planes crash in seaside villages. The young men are away, fighting in France. Old men are being sent to defend haystacks, there are schoolgirls digging trenches on the seafronts.

We mustn’t listen to rumours, she tells herself, sternly – the German propaganda machine will try to spread demoralising lies, the British Government has warned – yet how could these rumours be worse than the news already being reported?

She goes to clean for the conductor. “What can one do, when even the newspapers warn you not to believe what they print?” he says with a twisted smile, beneath which she recognises a sickly apprehension.

“Do you want to play again?” he asks her, when she’s finished cleaning. This time, she plays Mendelssohn. As usual, the conductor lies on the sofa with his eyes closed. Perhaps he is asleep.

In the queue at the butcher’s, later on, she notices adaptations being made to the British way of life. A prim young English-woman who would never have left home without immaculate gloves and hat now wears overalls in public; one customer announces sadly that she’s had poor Blackie put down; another considers buying tripe.

The fierce housewife in spectacles tells her neighbour nightmarish stories, almost with relish. “The Dutch were like us, they had it all planned. They were going



to blow up their bridges and get the Jerries that way. And at the last minute, you know what? They found that the dynamite had all been swapped with sand.”

“I heard the Jerries was everywhere all along, all disguised as nuns, and wearing our uniforms.”

“Ern says he’ll teach us how to use a gun. Everyone has to learn now, even my old Nan.”

Hilde feels dizzy and closes her eyes. Her nose is full of the thick, creamy smell of raw meat. She reaches a hand towards the counter to steady herself. Images play out, behind her eyelids. She sees the sky, crawling with small black forms – like the spiders which erupt, in their hundreds, from a single egg.

“Are you all right, love?” the butcher asks her. The lady in overalls fishes around for smelling salts, and everyone fusses over her. She knows that they will tell all kinds of stories about her once she’s gone, and yet their attention reassures her. This is the strangest thing about them. However brutal they can be as a group, when faced with an individual, they have the kindest of hearts.

Ruth comes around in the early evening and bounces the baby on her knees. She has lost her job. “There’s a Councillor – an old fellow – who thinks it’s his patriotic duty to see that any refugees employed in ARP get the sack,” she says, with a proud toss of her head. “He says it’s offensive to have someone German-speaking telling British people what to do, and where would our loyalties be in an actual air raid?”

“I’m sorry,” Hilde says. “People can be cruel.”

Ruth shrugs it off. “It’s hurtful of course, but the worst thing is, I understand how he feels. It’s like being split in half. I sometimes think I hate Germans almost more than he does.” She has found some voluntary work for the time being, but it involves sewing, which she loathes. “They have so little imagination, the English. We have changed our whole lives, I mean everything. Look at you – I’d never have

guessed, before all this, that you'd be capable.... You'd think they might be willing to change just a little bit, too."

Hilde nods in agreement – it's exhausting. Sometimes she feels as if she's remaking herself entirely, word by word, from the inside. Everything she once thought she could rely on now seems uncertain. She thinks of the women at the butcher's shop. "They *are* changing, though," she says, "that's why they hate us. It's painful for them as well."

"I wouldn't mind so much, only I'm still missing the children," Ruth confesses. "It seems so pointless, and I worry how they are treated. Every day I wonder whether I shouldn't just get on a train and fetch them..."

Hilde asks, in a hushed voice, about the mass internment of the Category B men. She doesn't want Ludwig's parents to hear.

"It is really terrible," Ruth says. "So many men, this time." She lists some of the people that she and Ernst know – "even old Herr Schreiner, who struggles at the best of times. In the Jewish parts of London, there are whole streets, and all of the women are crying. I hear that some of them escaped by hiding in the library. It reminds one...." she begins - but she doesn't finish this thought, because it's perhaps a little crass, and anyway, they don't want to be reminded.

Hilde wants to know all this, but she also finds the way that Ruth tells her - with breathless drama - rather insensitive. After all, she's been through it all herself. "It's lucky that your father in law is over sixty," Ruth goes on, "or they would have come for him, too."

"Can you really call us lucky?" Hilde says, allowing her own resentment to surface dangerously for a moment. There is always this unspoken awkwardness between them – the fact that Ludwig is interned, while Ernst is not - which they normally skirt carefully around.

"That's what's so strange," Ruth says. She buries a kiss in baby John's neck, and he squirms with pleasure. "That's what's so hard to understand. What are the

chances of any of it? That we are alive at this time, that we were born in Germany, that we married the men we married, that we made it over here.” Ruth is Jewish by birth – Hilde wonders how much this makes things different, but neither of them mentions the fact. “Depending on how you look at it,” Ruth winds up, “we are either very unlucky, or perhaps very lucky.”

Ruth has to leave. A curfew has been introduced for all foreigners; she needs to get home in time. She stands, stubs out her cigarette, and buttons her coat, swinging her satchel over her shoulder. Her hair is tied up in a fashionable turban, and a few of her curls have escaped from the sides. She is going back to her husband, Hilde thinks, while I have no husband, only fear and work.

“I feel I should do more,” Hilde confesses, in a rush, now that Ruth is almost gone. “His letters...I don’t know why, but this week, I’m so worried about him....”

“What more could you possibly do?” Ruth says.

“I don’t know. Make a nuisance of myself. Sit on front doorsteps, chain myself to railings, shout and cry and become undignified...”

“And get yourself interned as well? You know they’re taking women too, now? What good could that possibly do?”

Hilde stands as well, to see her out, and the two women embrace. “You’ve lost weight,” Ruth adds, with gentle reproach. “I hope you’re eating properly.”

“I’m still not as scrawny as you, though,” Hilde can’t stay cross for long – it is with Ruth that she feels the most nearly and honestly herself.

“What a life! It will drive us mad if we think about it too hard,” Ruth says. “Chin up, as the British like to say. Maybe you will get a letter tomorrow.”

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On this occasion, and also the next, Ludwig comes to believe that it is perhaps the swimming pool that saves him.

There are problems across the camp, obliquely referred to at roll call as “morale” - the refugees have become listless, and there is a plague of carelessness. The mild cases stop washing, eating, or getting up in the morning – others take too many pills at a time, or step in front of moving trucks, causing their drivers to break abruptly. The British are slow to catch on, but when it comes to physical exercise they have a kind of instinct, and as the weather improves, the Colonel orders the pool cleaned and brought into use. Ludwig tries not to stand at the wire so often, although he still sometimes finds himself there without meaning to. He now swims every day, churning through the icy water.

He was in the sick bay two days. “For fuck’s sake, don’t do it again,” says the M.O. when he leaves, and encourages him have a shave and get a trim. Some of the men avoid him, with polite embarrassment or a sort of superstitious distaste. Very few mention what has happened, perhaps because so many of them have those moments, those thoughts - but they all seem to know.

Kurt does not question his motives: they probably seem clear enough to him already. “You missed the Prayer’s Day Services,” is all he says.

“Which did you go to?” asks Ludwig, gratefully.

“I gave the Army Chaplain a try, but lots of people went to both,” says Kurt. “It seems, in our current situation, we are willing to appeal to any God who’s listening. I can’t help thinking that things must be pretty bloody desperate, if it’s our lousy prayers that they’re counting on.”

Now Ludwig ploughs lengths in the rectangle of water, up and down, keeping count in his head. He tries not to think about Hilde. When he can’t help it, he tries to picture her with the imaginary Englishman, going to dances, or taking baby John to the park. They make a handsome family. He had thought that cutting off any hope of a letter would release him from some of the suspense, but he is as obsessed as ever with the arrival of the post, and just as desolate as before when there’s nothing for

him. He has a sick feeling in his stomach, as if he has done something wrong, however many lengths he swims.

On the other side of the pool, Fenstermacher keeps his vest on, and does a stately breast-stroke, holding his neck upright like a swan. Ludwig can hear the younger boys splashing and shouting at the deep end. They are running around the tiled edge in their underwear, pushing each other in, excitable as puppies. Heinz is one of them – he has recovered too, although the skin on his foot still looks red and puckered. There is a story that Bachmeier has died in the asylum – “by suicide”, the whisper goes around.

Kurt sits on a metal chair by the poolside, his legs and arms crossed like a snake-charmer. He’s smoking a cigarette and reading a paperback, his dark eyes moving hungrily back and forth across the pages. He has a cat-like dislike of water, and - unseduced by the sunshine - he still wears a scarf and all his layers.

“Why don’t you come in?” Ludwig calls out to him, when he reaches the end of his length. “It’s not too cold, once you get going. Don’t you like swimming?”

“Not really. In the Mediterranean, perhaps,” Kurt says, looking up from his book vaguely.

Ludwig hauls himself out of the pool. There is now a livid purple scar on his hand. To his shame, he’s growing tanned and fit, these crazy months of waiting.

“The Communists are plotting a revolt,” he tells Kurt, as he dries himself off with a small scrap of cotton and lies down in the grass. There have been a whole series of emergency meetings in his hut. “Otto says that when the invasion comes, the British will just hand us right over. I think he’s probably right. Pahlke will get what he’s been practicing for and be appointed our new Commandant. Did you hear what he said to Otto, the other day – about how we will all be lined up along the beach and shot?”

“Charming.”

“Anyway, Achterberg wants to steal a boat.”

“But where will they take it?” Kurt gives a bleak laugh, setting aside his book. “Crossing back to Europe hardly seems wise, and even with the winds of dialectical materialism at their back, they can scarcely hope to reach America.”

Ludwig feels a flash of irritation. “They may be unrealistic, but at least they have some hope left in them. At least they haven’t given up completely.”

Kurt winces. “Too true. But you have to admit, it is beginning to look rather like check mate.”

A plane roars overhead. Everyone stops what they are doing – the swimmers tread water, tennis rackets are lowered, press-ups abandoned, songs break off abruptly, as they gaze up, open-mouthed. Ludwig raises himself on one elbow, and looks up, suddenly alert, like a dog that sniffs the wind. “What kind is it?” Kurt asks, nervously.

Is this the moment they have all been waiting for since they arrived – the moment when this uneasy pretence will finally be abandoned, and they will have to start fighting each other for real? Ludwig shades his eyes, and squints to see the fast-moving shape against the blue. He can see a gun pack under the fuselage.

His heart hammers in his chest. If only he could capture this feeling and show it to a tribunal – because at the sight of a plane, there’s no question where his loyalties lie. “I think it’s a Bristol Blenheim,” he says. “At any rate, it’s one of ours.”

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Finally, a reply arrives from Hilde. Ludwig tears open the envelope with a feeling of impending doom, not daring to breathe.

“Your last letter was very strange and a terrible shock. You ask me to stop writing. I DO NOT agree. I will keep on writing and waiting for you. You seem to forget that I am your wife. In any case, I love you, and you and I have no

choice about that. You must not talk as if our situation is your fault. You must not give in to this way of thinking. Please do not think that you are doing me any kindness by this. You do not sound at all like yourself. Has something happened?”

Relief wells up and fills his eyes, swiftly followed by a new stab of misery. He must not answer too soon, he tells himself. He must stay strong.

The announcement comes one morning, at roll call. They are being moved – some of them – and the British don't say where. They can only take 50lbs of luggage, and matches are not permitted. They must be ready to leave early the following day.

The Sergeant Major reads out a list of names. This takes a long time. An excruciating tension fills the hall. The men who are called look stunned or frightened, and some grin bashfully – they are slapped on the shoulder consolingly or embraced by their neighbours. There's no logic to it, which gives Ludwig a new wave of indignation: the leader of the Nazi sympathisers Palkhe does not seem to be included, although some of his friends are, also many Communists and refugees. The strain begins to show. Men blink back tears because they are going, others because they are not, or because they are being separated from friends. “Silence!” the Sergeant Major barks, pausing until they settle down. Waiting, listening so hard he begins almost to hallucinate the syllables, Ludwig hears first Kurt's, and then his own name, read aloud.

Then they are dismissed. As if at the sound of a starting pistol, the whole camp is in chaos, stirred up like a giant ants' nest.

Ludwig doesn't know where to go. His hut is full, as usual, of Communists, who are having another urgent meeting. “Do we trust them, Comrades?” Otto bangs his fist on the table. “This stinks to me of betrayal, at the hands of the authorities... We need to know where they are sending us!” His voice cracks with emotion. The group – who have grown closer than brothers – is being split.

“Because honestly, would anything those idiots do surprise you any more?”

Achterberg adds his own angry growl. “It is as if they have some kind of brain sickness!”

Ludwig slides outside. The camp had become like Piccadilly Circus during rush hour. Men pace in rapid zig-zags, starting off in one direction, then swivelling the other way, their faces twisted in agitation – lips moving fast, in passionate internal debate. They run from one hut to another, trying frantically to borrow stamps, string, or tape. Some rummage through suitcases, or scrawl urgent letters, pausing occasionally to look up with the expression of sleepwalkers, as if hoping to draw down the missing words, the lost item, from the air.

A small outdoor market is developing, as people try to dispose of unwanted property to meet the weight restriction. Men wave books at him hopefully, a pair of dumbbells and a tennis racket are laid out on the grass. Ludwig tries to dodge them with an apologetic wave. In the distance, he can see the queue for the camp offices, which looks at least a hundred men long.

Ludwig finds Kurt, sitting on the steps of his hut, darning a sock. There’s something about his face – an ingrained anxiety - which makes it difficult for Ludwig to look directly at him – it’s too close a reminder of his own feelings. “One begins to feel the need to get organised,” Kurt says.

“What do you think about it?” Ludwig asks, leaning against a post which supports the pitched roof of the small wooden chalet. He asks because he’s feeling very strange himself, as if his guts are in revolt against his reason. If he’s serious about letting Hilde make her own life without him – as he keeps telling himself - then perhaps it would be a good thing to go somewhere else, even further away, and conditions might be better. Yet a new dread surges through the whole of his body; he’s as sick and shaken as when he was first interned.

“I don’t know what to feel anymore,” Kurt says. “I want to get out of here, obviously. But ideally as a free man...”



“Achterberg says the ban on matches means that it’s sea travel,” Ludwig says. He lights a cigarette, and looks at it, briefly. “So is it this Island of Men we hear about?”

Kurt smiles. “It’s the Isle of *Man*.”

“Island of Man, then.” Ludwig shakes his head, impatiently. Both names sound equally ridiculous. “Where is it, anyway?”

“I’m not even sure,” Kurt confesses, squinting critically at the sock in his hands. “The Channel, I think – which doesn’t seem the safest direction of travel.”

“Herbert is jealous. He reckons it’s paradise,” Ludwig is sceptical. “Golf courses and luxury hotels, he says.” He picks a strand of tobacco from his mouth. “And a few people have been told that their families will be sent on afterwards to join them...”

“Yes, but you know how they’ll say anything at the office, just to get rid of you. That Intelligence Officer with the glasses – he contradicts himself ten times an hour and doesn’t even seem to believe what’s coming out of his own mouth....”

“Pahlke says it’s repatriation, or some kind of prisoner exchange.”

“God, let’s hope not.” The sheer horror of this possibility strikes them afresh, before Kurt dismisses it as too grim to contemplate. “You know what shit he talks, anyway. I won’t be sorry to say goodbye to him.”

The smoke and sew in thoughtful silence for a few moments, before Kurt raises another possibility. “Frankel reckons they’re sending people overseas,” he says. “He says his cousin has been shipped to Canada.”

Ludwig hasn’t heard this one before, but he finds it easy to dismiss. “Why would they do that? Think of the cost! And surely they need all of their ships for the war?”

“The British use their dominions to absorb unwanted elements,” Kurt says. “It’s one of the advantages of having an Empire – to soak up the crooks, incompetents and foreigners. I suppose they might try to pack us off to some remote

outpost, so that we all die of yellow fever..." as usual, he doesn't sound entirely serious. "I imagine the camps in England must be filling up, if they're really rounding up all the refugees."

Ludwig frowns, and then sighs. "What I don't understand is why they won't sort us out," he says. "It can't be that difficult! Even young Heinz could tell them, in about ten minutes, who is on which side."

"I suppose they don't really want to. I sometimes think they must dislike us all equally." Kurt sounds like a jilted lover; his apparent cynicism is an attempt to cover up a heart-break of his own.

The madness goes on around them, into the dusk. As he returns to his hut, Ludwig wonders what will happen to this place without him. It has seemed horrific to him all winter, but now he feels a pang of fondness for the hills above, having stared at them for so long. The few locals he glimpses through the wire have become like character in a play. Perhaps, he thinks, they are even more stuck here than the internees.

Back in his chalet, he packs his few possessions up swiftly: they fit easily back into his suitcase. Then, at last, he writes the letter he's been putting off. He asks Otto if he can borrow the type writer, in the hope that this will help him summon the spirit he needs. He operates the machine with nervous jabs, and it does help to distance him from the process. He writes in English, to speed up the censorship process. It feels to him, as he types, that his tone is peevish and self-pitying – not at all like the imaginary Englishman would be.

"Dear Hilde,

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate the thought, but I must again ask that you stop writing to me. I don't think you can understand the strain, waiting

always for news, waiting always for letters, not able to do anything of any value. My nerves cannot take it. It breaks me down.

You're right, I'm not quite myself at the moment. We can hope that a new, better model is being prepared! (Perhaps next time round, I will be an American? I can tell you, to return as a Chinaman or anything else under the sun would be an improvement to my current status).

I have also to tell you that we are being moved. I don't know to where, and even if I did, of course I should not be able to say. This itself is likely to make a break in our correspondence and will give you another chance to think honestly if it is worth the trouble."

He does not mention the rumour that there are transports being sent to an island, or even further overseas. There's no point in worrying her, and he knows that it would be deleted by the censor. He types his internee number carefully at the top, aware of his hypocrisy as he does so. If he really wants her to break off contact, he should leave it off. It will be her only way to reach him, if she ignores his words and keeps on writing.

## ***Not to Worry!***

The rising engine noise of a car changing gear in the road outside her room becomes – in Hilde’s half-sleeping ear – the beginning of an air raid siren. She jolts awake, feeling for the baby beside her. Is this finally it, then? Where are the gas masks? She has left them over there, on the table – she can see them, in the dim light of the early morning. But no, she tells herself groggily: it was only a chord change.... a car change, no, a gear change. She lies, heart pounding, as her problems re-emerge from the darkness, with the grey shapes of the furniture.

What can be going on with Ludwig? She suspects it is something to do with his pride. His handwriting in the last letter was so strange and frightening. She can’t believe he really means what he wrote. If only she could see him and try to understand. He’s tried to give her up before. They had years of it in Germany, with similar talk of setting her free. “Nowadays one simply *cannot* marry a Jew, or even a *Mischling*” he used to say, not exactly joking but not exactly serious, with a sort of subdued, ironic laugh.

It was upsetting back then as well, and there were tears, and even a day or two of anguish, of noble self-denial, but it was easy enough for her to win the argument when they were together. She only had to press her body close to his, whispering “I don’t want to be free, you idiot,” and the heat between them took over. In those days, he was hers to command, and she believed she could follow him anywhere.

It does no good to lie awake thinking. She must sleep. The baby will be awake soon, and her chance will be gone. The telephone begins to ring – a shrill accusation, in the cold hall.

With a deep sigh, she heaves herself out of bed to answer it, pulling on her housecoat. Who can it be at this hour? If Mrs Rose has to come down, she’ll be in a bad mood all day.

Hilde shuffles out to the hall, the lino cool on her bare feet, and picks up the receiver. It's Ruth. Out of habit, Hilde speaks to her in German. "What is the matter?" A range of half-formed possibilities flash through her head. "Is there something with Ernst? Or have you heard something about my husband?"

"No," Ruth says. "It isn't that, only...."

The baby begins to cry for her, and there's a loud knocking at the front door. Mrs Rose appears at the top of the stairs, looking cross. Everything at once! Hilde switches to English, aware that the other tenants might be concerned to hear her speak German. "Can I call you back, Ruth? There's someone at the door..."

"That's what I wanted to..." she hears Ruth begin to say, as she hangs up the telephone – it will just have to wait until later. She goes back into her room to scoop up the baby, and then, balancing him on one hip, opens the front door. A policeman and a policewoman wait on the doorstep.

For a moment, Hilde can't speak. Is this about Ludwig? The man glances down at his notebook. "We are looking for Mrs Hildegard Josefine Weiss," he says, struggling with the name. The woman steps swiftly inside, without being invited.

It's a shock to hear them speak her name. What should she do? What would Ludwig want her to do? The travelling salesman sticks his head out of his doorway. "Who is it?" calls down Mrs Rose.

"I've got it!" Hilde calls back to her. "Yes?" she says to the policeman, and then, remembering her careful, hard-won English: "I mean, I am she".

"Mrs Wiss? We have instructions to take you with us," says the policeman.

Mrs Rose is coming down the stairs. "Oh really! Not again!" she exclaims when she sees the police, although this time she sounds more indignant than alarmed. She purses her lips when she looks at Hilde, as if she holds her personally responsible.

"This will be easier if we come inside," the policewoman says, although she is already in the hall.

"I suppose so," Hilde says, and leads them to her room.

Frau Weiss arrives from upstairs, almost girlish in her long white nightgown, her grey hair in a plait over her shoulders, a startled look in her eyes. Ludwig's father hobbles behind her, in his nightshirt. Oh well, bring on the chorus, Hilde thinks, grimly – we might as well make a show of it.

"What are they saying?" asks Herr Weiss.

"They want to take me into internment, Father," Hilde explains. Ludwig's mother – catching on faster, perhaps - lets out a long wail, and falls to the floor, weeping and moaning loudly. Everyone stares at her in dismay. Does she really care about me that much, Hilde thinks? Is this self-interest, or is it something to do with Ludwig, or her husband? The baby looks puzzled and starts to whimper in sympathy.

"We have instructions. All women with a 'B' classification." The policeman looks uncomfortable, and this makes him brusque.

First Ludwig, and now her. The "B" classification was just a precaution, Ludwig said to her at the time – because of his own, equally nonsensical "A". Hilde is jiggling and hushing the baby, although she can do nothing for Frau Weiss. With one part of her mind - beneath everything else – she's aware that the baby's nappy is wet, from a heaviness and warmth seeping through the towelling.

"Oh, the poor little mousey-kin!" howls Frau Weiss, and Hilde realises she's talking about the baby. "First his father - my own dear son - and now his mother. Lost! Lost to this awful *internment*."

"We are no Nazis," Hilde insists, fiercely. "That's why we came here. My husband is opposed to the National Socialists. His father, and he also, somewhat..." she hesitates, not knowing how to put it, "they are Jewish, you know."

"That has nothing to do with us," the policeman says. "You're German, aren't you? So you can see why we have to be careful. I know there's a lot of prejudice in your country. But Jews or not, that means nothing to us here."

The policewoman is harder, and more irritable. "You're to take a few things in a suitcase," she says, briskly. "Not too much, mind – you have to be able to carry it yourself." She looks at Frau Weiss, who is still on the floor, where her cries are subsiding into a sort of low moaning. "Can't you do something to keep her quiet?"

"Hush, Mother. I'm not dead yet," Hilde tells her, but she also thinks to herself – well, good luck to her. At least someone is saying what they really feel. Keeping up a stiff upper lip only makes it easier for them. But there are other, more pressing problems. "I shall need a bit of time – there are things I must bring for my child..." she tells the police, casting her eyes around the room.

The two police officers look at each other, and there's something in their look – some unspoken knowledge – that makes her feel, for the first time, really afraid.

"I don't know about that..." the woman says, awkwardly. "You'd do better to leave him here, if there's someone to mind him. Perhaps you will decide to send for him later."

Hilde gives a gasp of shock and locks her arms around the baby tightly.

"Not take him! But where am I going? Will I go to the Police Station? Will I have another Tribunal?" She looks at their blank faces. Surely they must give her some information. They are not the Gestapo, to just take people from their beds like this!

They do not look at each other, but only at the floor. Again, she feels a deep unease at their silence – at something they perhaps know, or suspect, but are not saying.

"Never mind that now. Give the child to me. I'll hold him, while you pack."

Hilde stiffens; she can almost feel the hackles rise on the back of her neck, like a cat. There is no way she's letting the policewoman anywhere near her child – she feels she could attack the woman if she tries to touch him. "Oh!" exclaims the policewoman, seeing some of this on her face, and backing away involuntarily.

With sudden resolve, Hilde kneels down, and speaks a low, soothing German to the older woman.

“Sit on the bed, Mother. You have to hold the little one for me. You have to help me to look after him.” She can feel that the police dislike her speaking another language; this alters the power balance in the room a little and gives her a slight satisfaction.

Herr Weiss reaches out a shaking arm, and his wife, breathing heavily, with a kind of wounded pride, gets to her feet, and sits next to him on the bed. There’s still a dark, animal resentment in her eyes, which she makes no attempt to hide. Hilde gives them the baby, but he starts to howl, and stretches out his arms to her. Good, she thinks. Let them know what they are doing.

“He’s hungry,” she says, by way of explanation.

Then there is a strange interlude. Everyone apart from the Policewoman leaves the room, so Hilde can dress. Hilde resents having this stranger with her, while she struggles angrily into her skirt and swipes at her hair with the brush – what is it they think she might do if left alone? The policewoman stands like a statue - she is used to this sort of situation, although Hilde is not. “Please, sit down, make yourself at home,” Hilde says, with uncharacteristic sarcasm.

She takes out the small suitcase that she brought with her to England. She begins to put things into it – a slip, clean underwear, her hairbrush, her needles and some unfinished knitting, an extra skirt and blouse, but all the time, her mind is racing. Frau Weiss is used to minding the baby, fortunately, but how will the older couple cope without her, being helpless as young children themselves? She knows, with a flash of clarity, what she must do for them. Taking the small key off her key ring, she leaves it on the table. She finds her calf-skin handbag and fishes around inside it for a folded paper. Remembering Ludwig, she puts on her coat. She sets her hat carefully on her head and checks her reflection in the glass, the wide startled eyes blinking back at her.



In the hallway, Hilde speaks to Herr Weiss. "Remember the coins, Father?" Hilde says, taking his hands between her own. She can feel a trembling – but she's not sure if it is him or her. "Now is the time when you will need them. I have left Ludwig's letter of authorisation on the table, with the key. Ernst will help you. He will take you to the bank to withdraw whatever you need to spend."

"Ah yes, the coins," Herr Weiss says, nodding.

"Stop speaking German!" the policewoman says sharply. "Speak in English, if you please."

Then the ugliness beneath rises to the surface. It's like a bad dream. As she draws close to kiss him goodbye, Hilde's baby clings to her tightly, his fat fingers clamping onto her blouse like little limpets. He begins screaming. His voice is like a high-pitched air raid siren, on a rising note of panic and distress. Hilde can't think. A kind of dread takes over, and she can hardly move.

Frau Weiss shrinks back, moaning again, with her hands over her face. The policewoman tries to prise the baby's fingers from Hilde's clothes, while the policeman pulls him off her. The policewoman's face is bright red, and her lips are very pinched together, so perhaps she does have feelings, after all.

The police split them apart – it feels like being ripped in half - and give the baby back to Frau Weiss. Hilde is hurried out, to the awful sound of the baby's hysterical, high-pitched cries.

Once again, people have gathered to watch in the street. Hilde can see surprise and excitement on their faces, as they whisper to each other. That nice young woman, with the baby – they have seen her at the shops, and even spoken with her about the weather. Who would have thought that she, too, could turn out to be a Nazi? Well – it just goes to show, they mutter to each other. You can't trust anyone, at the moment.

Hilde leans her forehead against the window of the police car. A huge emotion heaves in her chest. She did not know that people could be like this. There's

a thickness in her head, and she can hear the blood pounding in her ears. This cannot be happening to me, she thinks, as they drive her away.

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That damned bugle, showing off, doing its military acrobatics again. It's still dark. Then Ludwig remembers. This is it – they're really leaving.

"This early rising is a deplorable habit," Kurt says, as he sucks hungrily on his first cigarette. They line up for a mug of the sweet, strong tea which Ludwig has come to quite enjoy, and a dollop of porridge, as usual both cold and burned. Ludwig's stomach is still asleep, but he forces himself to eat, having learned from experience that it is wise to do so. They are each given a packet of sandwiches for the journey.

After so long with too much time, suddenly, there's barely a moment to say goodbye. Ludwig feels very churned up by it all.

Herbert is twitchy with envy, in the glare of an arc lamp. "Maybe they'll send us along to join you soon?" he speculates. "This place isn't so bad in the summer, but I don't fancy another winter here."

Three of the Orthodox men are being separated from the rest and are bidding them an emotional farewell. A man with a long face and ringlets touches Oppenheimer's cheek, his mouth turned down like a mask of grief. "Lehitraot B'Eretz Israel," he wishes him: to meet in the land of Israel.

Otto is distraught to leave some of his comrades, including Ulrich Achterberg, who is not on the list. They embrace, fiercely. "No camp can hold me!" Achterberg insists, as he has done since his arrival. "I watch, I assess, and if I choose, I go."

They walk out of the camp, each carrying his belongings, in a long procession, snaking over the meadow in the blue-grey darkness, with armed soldiers to either side. There are sailors with their kit bags, Heinz and a couple of the younger

boys - gawky adolescents in their worn-through clothes with trousers that don't quite reach their ankles - the older men with their bedraggled mackintoshes and cheap cardboard suitcases, Oppenheimer and a couple of other Orthodox men with their beards and hats. Mr Guttman, with whom Ludwig arrived, trots along nearby, still carrying a sack. His baby was born a month ago. "Do you want to see a photo of the nipper?" he says, surprisingly cheerfully, patting his pockets. He's out of breath – the camp diet has not completely reduced the round belly with which he arrived. His "missus" has been evicted by the landlord, he says, and is staying with her sister. He's hoping that he's being moved nearer to London – perhaps she will even be given permission to visit.

Some people have put on extra layers of clothing, in an attempt to get around the weight restrictions. Beneath his mackintosh, Geller, one of the academics, wears his plus-fours, an argyle sweater, two checked shirts, a waistcoat and bow tie. The ragged line winds its way from the camp gates to the fragile little station, which for so long has seemed an unattainable symbol of freedom. Ludwig has imagined doing this many times – but he always thought he'd feel elation, not this mixture of apprehension and resignation, as heavy as the porridge in his stomach.

When they reach the platform, Ludwig finds himself next to Oppenheimer. "Is it nearly that day, Tisha b'Av?" Ludwig asks him.

"No, not yet, but not much longer now – it's less than two months."

Oppenheimer is placid and good natured, as usual – perhaps he's used to being teased about this. "But then, we are not yet free, are we?"

"Not to worry!" says the Intelligence Officer, cheerfully – perhaps at the sight of their strained, sombre faces - as they board their train.

"That's easy for him to say," Kurt mutters, to the banging of doors all along the platform.

In a larger market town (the covered-up station names make the journey into an odd sort of guessing game), they change onto a bigger train, and are locked into

their compartments, before setting off again. Ludwig watches the first light spread over the fields and woodlands, igniting the different shades of glowing green. Both dawn and sunset, during his internment, seem more beautiful than ever before in his life, and he wonders, distantly, why this is. Perhaps it is just that now he has the time to appreciate them.

The men settle down to a long train journey, gradually peeling off some of their extra layers to use as pillows and blankets. Ludwig sits next to Kurt, and opposite Geller and Blumenthal. He leans his forehead against the window and drinks in the early-morning view. The wildflowers growing on railway cuttings, the chipped enamel advertisements on the railings, the lush, irregular meadows and the stately, twisted old trees – all are stunning to him, with a vivid intensity. England seems the loveliest of countries, and despite everything, he feels his affection for the land growing. He'd like to bring Hilde and the baby to this part one day – but no, he remembers – perhaps he should no longer allow himself such thoughts.

The men doze in their seats or pick up their endless card games. Ludwig watches the countryside go by. Heinz sticks his head out of the window, making their guard uneasy - to see the train snaking behind, and the great billowing ribbon of steam – resuming his seat with soot on his face, but a child-like exhilaration in his eyes. After so long stuck in one place, it's good just being on the move.

There are small villages in the distance, with thatched roofs and old churches. The rhythm of the land changes gradually, as they move through it – fields grow, fences and five bar gates give way to irregular stone walls. It looks so peaceful – the war has left no visible mark on these parts.

Then the train jolts to a halt and they wait in sidings. Ludwig watches a dark bird with a dazzling white shirt front strutting around outside the window. “A single blackbird. The British believe that it's a sign of good luck,” says Geller.

“That's not a blackbird, it's a magpie,” Kurt says, irritably. “And it isn't good luck either, I'm afraid - quite the opposite.”

They pass through a larger city. “This is surely not London?” Ludwig wonders aloud, seeing the close-packed ranks of small Victorian houses and blackened warehouses. Uncertainty ripples through the group. Half remembered English place-names are suggested, and disputes develop: is there really such a place as Wessex? Does each county have a capital city, and is there some rule about the adding of “shire” to a place name, as Blumenthal doggedly maintains? Ludwig sees his own anxiety reflected on their faces. God knows where they are being sent! Is York in Scotland, or on the west coast? Geller thinks that this is Bristol, which he visited in the '20s. After the blackbird, however, he’s lost some of his authority, and no one believes him.

They draw into a vaulted station, and the arguments suddenly dissipate, as if all at once, they have lost the energy to care. They watch a young woman in a flowery dress, standing on the platform. She’s not particularly beautiful – indeed, she’s rather fat - but she looks so wonderfully normal, such a tantalising part of an unreachable world! Every pair of eyes on the train dwells greedily on the way her flowery dress skims her legs, and pinches the curves of her torso, as she bends to pick up her bag.

Ludwig sleeps. When he wakes, they are passing through an even bigger, grimier metropolis, halting at a station exploding with banging doors, shrill whistles, and huge numbers of uniformed men, moving in different directions.

Otto jumps to his feet. “It’s Birmingham!” he exclaims, like a man awakening from a dream. He grows increasingly distracted from the political talk which bubbles along like a stream, in his corner of the carriage. He looks out of the window with disbelieving eyes, exclaiming at each landmark – announcing, again and again, that they are definitely heading for Liverpool. Ludwig can see the anguish on his face at this familiar territory – how awful, to see your home, but still not be free.

It is evening by now. They pass through a long tunnel, and emerge by the dockside, at a landing stage which protrudes into the water. An enormous grey ship

looms above them, like a towering granite cliff-side. The men are stunned, uttering long whistles, and low curses. "I don't think we're going to the Isle of Man in that," Otto says.

Oh God, can it be true? They are being sent out to sea. It is insanely dangerous. Ships are being attacked all the time. Could it be that in the midst of all this, he is being banished to another country? He feels a deep, seismic tremor at this prospect – the rumbling of some distant but growing awareness, like the noise of an approaching avalanche. Ludwig puts his head in his hands. Perhaps he's made a terrible mistake, in sending those cruel letters. Perhaps he will never see his family again? If so, what an awful punishment - to be sent away, without the chance to repair things!

All eyes are drawn to the ship. She's a daunting sight, dominating them completely. She's the size of a water borne city, topped with two huge funnels. Ludwig's situation slowly becomes real to him. His stomach turns over at the sight of the small blacked-out windows which dot the ugly grey flank, and the sheer bulk of this floating prison.

There is a long delay. Military men salute and address one another by the tracks. Some serious talking goes on, and superior officers are fetched – is something wrong? Will it affect them? It seems not. The doors are unlocked, and they get down from the train with their bags - stretching from the long journey - and form their ragged line along the platform.

It is cooler and cloudier here, and the light is fading. The fresh sea air is welcome after the stale smoke and sweat smells of the carriage. In the distance, Ludwig can see the dark shapes of dramatic buildings. They make him think of the photographs he has seen of Chicago, rather than of anything he expected to come across in England. Near to the railway tracks there is a low passenger terminal, with several walkways leading to the landing stage, set in an industrial landscape of large open spaces on an inhuman scale.

Now he can get a better look at the ship. The elegance she must once have had, as an ocean liner, is marred by her sinister new grey paint, and a scribbled mess of barbed wire and strange military structures on her deck. Long metal arms like cranes stick out from her sides, to attach experimental anti-torpedo nets. Many of the men look as horrified as he feels. The sailors from the next carriage, however, have a glint in their eyes – their loyalty to the Nazis means less to them, in most cases, than a more general frustration with life on land. Heinz and some of the younger boys perk up, nudging each other with excitement – at the glamour of sea travel, and the undeniable drama of a journey across the ocean. And alongside his dread, Ludwig feels a kind of grudging admiration. As an engineer, he can't help but appreciate the ambition, the ingenuity, and the sheer power of this machine.

Looking up, in the twilight, he sees her name, which stands out in huge letters, grey on grey. He can hardly pronounce it. "Arandora Star" they spell out to one another, trying out a different emphasis on the syllables, and deferring to those with better English. "What does it mean?" Geller says. "Is it a place on earth, or perhaps in the heavens?"

Ludwig takes a deep breath, as if to steady and locate himself, with the stink of oil in his nose. It's his last moment, perhaps, on British soil. He looks up at one of the nearby gulls – swift and graceful, with a smooth, torpedo-shaped body, and dark, glinting eyes – following its movements with envious eyes. He has dreamed of flight, after all, for most of his life, and even, for a time, experienced it. There were gulls in London, too, he seems to remember, although he had no time then to notice them. How far do they travel, he wonders? It is as if he was once an adult, and now has somehow become a child again, condemned to notice details, but powerless to change his fate.

Instructions are barked, and the men shuffle along in their line. A doctor looks in their eyes and mouths, quickly, without speaking to them, as if they are cattle.

Then, like a procession on a mountainside, like the Jews trailing through the wilderness, they climb the gang plank and board the great ship.

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The police car is a sedate, curvy Wolseley, with well-stuffed leather seats. Hilde watches through the window as they move along one of the uglier arteries of North London. She can see Georgian stucco, flaking with age and blackened with grime. Dusty plane trees shiver in the wind.

She wonders what her employers will think when she doesn't turn up to clean for them. She saw how it went when Ludwig was interned. People have such faith in the authorities. They'll think back over the time they've known her, and try to find some clue, some reason to suspect her. They'll say that she never seemed quite right for a char – too quiet, perhaps, always looking at the newspapers or picking through their gramophone records, and what would a real cleaning lady know about music? They'll wonder what took the authorities so long – because if her husband was up to something, it stands to reason she must have been in on it too. Even if she's allowed to go home soon, she's sure no one will want her to clean for them now.

An army truck in front belches exhaust fumes. "We're taking you to Holloway," the policewoman says, in a no-nonsense, conversational tone. Hilde thinks that she's heard the name before – she has the feeling it's a district of London. Does it also refer to a police station, or maybe a school? She's heard stories, and anything seems possible - one of Ernst's friends is being held at a racecourse.

"What will happen to me?" she asks. Her voice wobbles like a small child's. She's afraid of facing another Tribunal alone.

"I dare say you'll be off to that island, living the life of Riley by all accounts, staying in hotels and whatnot." The policewoman sounds aggrieved. "You'll be safer,



away from London. A nice little holiday for you, I shouldn't wonder, with all expenses paid."

Panic flutters in her chest. The policewoman could be wrong, she reminds herself. Perhaps it will be "sorted out" quickly. And they said she could "send for" the baby to join her... Surely they can't lie about that – it would be too cruel. She feels sick at these thoughts. For a moment she worries she might pass out.

There's a long high wall, running beside the road. The police car turns a corner. Hilde looks up and sees – like a moment from a dream - a huge, neo-gothic castle, topped by the most preposterous battlements. There are large stone griffins on either side of an enormous wooden door. She's astonished. The building does not look real: it could almost be a film set. It could have been transported from the banks of the Rhine. Where on earth are they? A number of possibilities enter her head. Could this be the Tower of London, or perhaps Windsor Castle? Why, in God's name, have they brought her here?

The car slows down in front of the gates. There is a wooden sign which reads "H.M. Prison Holloway." The policeman sounds the horn and waits for the gates to open.

They drive through. There is a yard, with a parking area, where the police car pulls up. The policeman yanks the handbrake and turns off the engine. He comes round to the back, and opens the door for Hilde to get out. Hilde can't move, however. The words on the sign have passed through her body like a jolt of electricity, and all of the strength has gone from her legs.

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Ludwig and his companions are the last group to embark, and the ship is already heaving with men. A flustered steward, frowning with concentration, allocates them a few remaining cabins, and they split themselves into the usual groups,

clinging to their friends with grim determination – Communists banding together, observant Jews, the sailors, the younger boys.

Ludwig is in a cabin with Kurt and two brothers of nineteen and twenty - Felix and Fritz Kraus – who are friends with Kurt from the camp. They both have big feet and intense frowns, and the younger one wears spectacles. There are two beds, for which they draw lots; Ludwig and Felix get a space on the floor. There isn't much room, but it feels luxurious in comparison to the huts of their camp. The ship was originally a cruise liner. The washstand and brass fittings are of the finest quality.

The engines start to hum beneath them. The tremor is like a feeling, vibrating through his body – a deep shiver that has something in common with fear, arousal, or excitement. He thinks about flying, and the peculiar mixture of panic and elation – so we're really going to do this? - that he felt when the ground crew stepped back, and the propeller became a blur. There's a sense of movement, like a great animal coming to life. The huge ship begins to stir, taking all of their lives with it.

Ludwig goes to explore. There are armed guards at the end of the corridor, so he can't go up on deck, but he can walk along the corridor and look into some of the different rooms. The unsteady feeling of being on water, the gentle tilting of the walls and the corridors, the thrumming which goes through everything, all take a little getting used to. He tries not to think again about leaving England, and about Hilde and baby John.

A huge ballroom is crammed with Italian men, sprawled across the polished parquet floor with their luggage. Most are in a terrible state – staring into space, hugging their suitcases, some crying and moaning, others engrossed in angry, animated conversation. It's odd to see this chaos reflected in the mirrors, between painted pastoral scenes on the walls, and ornate marble-effect columns. They seem to be newly interned; Ludwig realises, with a shock, that Italy must have entered the war! Some of them have "palliasses" to sleep on, but they tell him there are no more to spare. There are also piles of old-fashioned cork life-jackets lying around. Ludwig

picks one of these up to take back to his cabin – he thinks it will do for a pillow – and as an afterthought, takes another one for Kurt.

Back in the cabin, Kurt lies on his bunk with his face turned to the wall. “Have you seen all the Italians?” Ludwig says.

“Yes,” says Fritz, looking meaningfully towards Kurt’s back. Then Ludwig remembers that Kurt’s parents were last heard of in Naples. Kurt draws shaky breaths through his nostrils, absorbing this new shock. He does not know if they have managed to leave in time.

At ten, they are served dinner. With the help of the two brothers, Ludwig manages to coax Kurt out of his berth and along the corridor. The large Louis XIV style dining saloon feels a long way from what they’re used to, and the men chatter excitedly as they wait for their food. Ludwig has eaten nothing but a few sandwiches since the early morning, and the smell is intoxicating. Meat, gravy, roast potatoes and vegetables – it’s the best meal since they were interned, served on china plates. This helps to improve his spirits and distracts him from his darker thoughts.

Halfway through the meal, Otto recognises one of the ship’s stewards, and hurries over to talk to him. They seem delighted to see each other. They speak for a while, their faces alight with astonishment.

Otto re-joins the table where Ludwig is sitting. “Fellow traveller?” Kurt asks, with a touch of irony.

“Yes! Would you believe it? That’s a bloke I know from the Liverpool Edge Hill branch of the Young Communist League,” Otto tells them. “Good man. He says that there’s a petition for my release going around. Apparently, I’m getting pretty famous back home.” He seems happy not to have been forgotten. “Oh yes, and guess what? We’re heading for Canada!”

The men think this over, as they chew their food: Canada! Life is extraordinary, and so much less predictable than one expects – how is it that one can suddenly find oneself on a ship bound for Canada?

“Why would they send us there?” Geller is baffled.

“At least we’ll be safe from the Luftwaffe!” says Blumenthal, carefully mopping up the last of his gravy with a roast potato.

“And from invasion....” Otto is thoughtful. “That’s if we’re not sunk on the way.”

The two brothers, Felix and Fritz, have a plan to meet their parents in the USA, so this is exciting news for them. Kurt also brightens a little - he has an uncle in New York, and he remembers that this is not so far from the border. They talk for a while, stirred up with a mixture of agitation and excitement, and then lapse into silence, lost in their private daydreams, readjusting their individual visions of future.

Ludwig once saw a short film about Canada at the pictures, just after the newsreel, while Hilde was pregnant. He remembers logs rolling along a river, and mountains covered in fir trees. It seemed very big, and clean, and very empty – an appealing image, in this crammed-full, floating tin city, seething with the smells and sounds of sixteen hundred men. He tries to imagine a new life out there one day – a menial job, perhaps an apartment - but what comes to him instead is an image of Hilde and the baby, at the door of some kind of cabin.

After dinner, they are allowed out on deck for a while. The vessel is so crowded that it’s hard to move around. It’s windy – the ship is blacked out and moves as a huge dark shape on the inky water. On the upper decks, Ludwig can see the silhouettes of several large guns, and of sentries keeping watch. Small red lights glow from a couple of illicit cigarettes – a guard tells them to extinguish these, and they are trodden out after more slow, resentful drags. Fragments of Italian catch on the wind.

There are other Germans, from different camps, and once in a while, Ludwig is surprised by a face he recognises from his own camp in Devon, emerging from the chaos of the dim crowd. Many of the Italians, raw with shock and anger, are eager to tell their troubles to anyone who will listen. An older man talks to Ludwig, tugging on

the sleeve of his overcoat. "Thirty years I been in that country," he objects, in a London-Italian accent, which is a sort of rapid Cockney with extra vowel sounds. Ludwig has to concentrate to follow what he's saying. "I even pay the bloody taxes! My only son, he's in the Army. And now they send me to Cana-dia! Is-a not right, eh?"

Ludwig watches the black water churning, far below, and turns up his coat lapels against the cold. Traces of foam show paler on the waves, like the contour lines which mark altitude on a map, or the shoreline of undiscovered continents. He listens to more of the voices around him. Another young man has come from a Welsh mining town. He tells his audience - in a soft, sing-song lilt - how the pit whistle was sounded when he and his brother were taken by the police, just as it was when there was an accident in the mine. "It was our mates, see? We grew up there, we went to school with them. They wanted us to know that they were thinkin' of us." Like lost souls, they move from one stranger to the next, in darkness, telling and retelling their stories.

Worn out, Ludwig and the others turn in, and settle down in their cabin. It's warm enough for once, and the floor feels reasonably comfortable once he's spread out his overcoat. Half-formed thoughts flicker through his mind. He can't believe they're going so far from his family! He tries to talk himself into it. Maybe it will be easier to build a new life out there – perhaps they will be more outward-looking, and welcoming to foreigners? Perhaps he will become a success, in some modest way. He might even, eventually, be able to send for the rest of them. They will be resentful of his absence, of course – but perhaps they will forgive him - perhaps they will be so impressed by Ludwig's achievements that he will win them round... He remembers the pine forests, and the logs floating down a river, and his mental picture of Hilde, holding the baby outside a wooden cabin. The ship has begun to rock on the waves, the lunging and rolling surprisingly soothing. The engines sound out a deep, reassuring rumble.

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A female warden takes charge of Hilde and her suitcase. In her uniform, she looks like a lady bus conductor, except that she has a bunch of keys at her waist instead of a ticket machine. She complains good-naturedly to the police about the number of “aliens” they keep on bringing in, but all of the emotion goes from her voice when she speaks to Hilde. “Come along,” she says briskly.

She leads Hilde across a yard, and around some buildings. Steam comes through a half-open window, and Hilde recognises the smell of a laundry room. The warden unlocks a door, relocking it behind them, and leads Hilde along a long corridor.

They reach the prison reception, where there are many small wooden cubicles. Hilde’s suitcase is taken from her, and she is shown into one of these. There’s only space to sit down, on a sort of shelf-like bench. She peels off her gloves, and takes off her hat. Then she puts her head in her hands. Prison! So I am to be a prisoner. The shock, horror and shame of this fact pound through her body. The idea of being “sent to jail” terrified her as a child. Somehow, “internee” doesn’t sound quite as bad, but here is the awful truth of her situation.

What will Ludwig say? Will he be furious and anguished on her behalf – or will he be revolted, in spite of himself, by the idea of a wife who has been in prison? It should make them more equal – he should no longer blame himself or feel this insane need to cut himself off – but she fears that his stubbornness, his pride, will mean that it’s not so simple. Will everyone know, for the rest of her life, and condemn her for it? And the baby, when he grows older – how can she explain to him that his mother has been in jail? The thought of him, waiting for her return, is too much for her. She feels a series of sudden spasms somewhere near her diaphragm. She squeezes her eyes tightly shut but can’t stop the tears.

Nearby, she can hear the female wardens remonstrating with a woman called Rose, who seems to be causing them trouble. It sounds as if they know her well already. There's the sound of someone else crying – loud, gulping, child-like sobs. There's graffiti scratched on the wooden sides of the cubicle: "Tom Shawcross is a LYING BASTERD."

Hilde listens as the sobbing winds down and subsides into intermittent sniffs. It echoes her own crying, and she convulses silently, in time with this unseen woman, wiping her face with her sleeve, blotting angrily at her eyes with one crumpled glove. From time to time, other voices call out. "Excuse, I haf to use the facilities!" warbles one high-pitched voice, which Hilde assumes must belong to another "alien."

After a long while, Hilde is brought out to see a doctor. He listens to her chest with a stethoscope. "Any history of tuberculosis?" he asks, bluntly. "Pregnant?" Hilde shakes her head, sullen and embarrassed. Her eyes are sore and her face feels hot and blotchy, but he must be used to that, because he makes no comment.

She's sent back into the small cell. Hilde hears the woman called Rose unleash a torrent of unfamiliar swear-words, and then apologise with elaborate theatricality for her language. She seems to be performing several different roles in her own private drama. The crying also starts up again. "Shut up, you silly cow," someone shouts.

Hilde's called out again. She's getting used to strange English voices distorting her name in new ways. She's brought into a room and stands watching, as another female warden goes through her suitcase, rummaging through her underwear and shaking out every piece of clothing with a blank thoroughness. They take her money, house keys, wedding ring, and a lipstick, and she's asked to sign for these in a ledger. She's told to undress behind a screen, and to hand over her clothing, *everything* if you please, for examination. While she's standing awkwardly in her slip, trying to cover herself with her arms, they ask her if she wants a bath. This is

such a surprising question that for a moment, Hilde wonders if she's understood.

"No, thank you," she says, crisply. To her relief, the warden doesn't insist.

They give her back her clothes, and she dresses hurriedly, buttoning her blouse in the wrong holes. She's given a discoloured square of cloth – this is to be her bed sheet. It's all very strange and demeaning. By the end of this process, Hilde feels as if she herself has been gone over by strange hands, turned inside out and crumpled up, with every part of her examined and exposed.

She follows a different warden down more long corridors, the floors scuffed to a dull shine. They stop, as the warden opens and then locks a series of doors. Noises reverberate, in this world of iron and stone: their echoing footsteps, and the distant banging of the heavy metal doors. They climb two flights of metal steps – there's a thick paint over the pipes, iron railings and brickwork. It's the strangest place – part medieval castle, part giant Victorian machine for the processing of human misery. The warden doesn't speak to Hilde. The suitcase cuts into her hands, until her fingers are striped white and red.

Women look out of their doorways, or stare curiously from inside, as they pass. Hilde is not ready to meet their eyes but looks down at the floor. Her head aches from crying, and she feels sick. There's a faint, echoing murmur of female voices throughout the building.

She's shown into a cell and left alone with the door unlocked. She sets her suitcase down. There's a small, high window, divided into little square panes of glass. There's a plank bed, with a thin, stained mattress. In the corner there's a washstand, with a metal basin on top and a chamber pot underneath. There's a cord, to ring a bell, and three hooks on the wall. Under the window there's a simple chair and table.

Hilde sits on the bed. She doesn't want to touch any part of the place with her skin. Thank God she hasn't brought little John! What a horrible place for a child. A



series of uncontrollable shivers pass through her body. She moans softly to herself and closes her eyes.

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After some time, the landing outside Hilde's cell explodes with activity. A babble of female voices – Polish, Yiddish, Flemish, Dutch, Czech, Austrian and every dialect of German – echo down the stairwell, like the noise in a swimming pool. Something is happening – Hilde opens her door and looks out, and many other women do the same. On the lower level, a warden is shouting instructions.

A stout, middle-aged woman appears from the cell next door. Hilde immediately feels that there is something familiar about her. "What's wrong?" Hilde asks. The noise and chaos seem to indicate some momentous event – perhaps they are being moved already, or even released?

"It's just that they're bringing the food," the woman says. "Don't get too excited. It's barely edible."

"Oh," Hilde says. "Is that all?" She feels like crying again.

The woman looks at her kindly. "One feels quite horrible, to start with. One is very shocked, initially. I think we all suffer with this reaction." She wears a plain blue dress, which stretches tightly over her ample curves, and has a clipped, Viennese accent. Her hair – a dark, almost bluish black, with many strands of grey – is drawn back into a bun.

Hilde tries to work out where she has seen her. There's something so deeply reassuring about her manner. She speaks with the formal, carefully weighed tone of a doctor giving a diagnosis. Hilde thinks of solid, dark furniture, and sugar-dusted biscuits, and remembers a flat in Swiss Cottage. "I think I know you!" she exclaims. "Frau Doktor Liebreich? You examined me when I was pregnant with my son."

The woman peers at her quizzically and seems pleased to be remembered in this other guise. “Oh yes. I remember your husband. With fair hair? Such a good-looking man.”

Hilde – still on the brink of tears - flushes with pleasure. Someone new who remembers Ludwig is a rare treat, and their previous circumstances were so different. Then, she was an expectant mother, nervous but full of hope, visiting a doctor, with her husband at her side. “How extraordinary! But what are you doing here? Surely you can have done nothing wrong.”

“And you have?” Dr Liebreich raises her eyebrows.

“Of course not. Only my husband has been interned since the autumn,” she sighs heavily at this confession. “He is a ‘Category A’.”

“We must not begin to feel guilty, just because we are here,” Doctor Liebreich insists, gravely. “It is imperative that we continue to state our case.”

Some of the women have been tasked with fetching the food and climb the steps with large trays containing small metal pails. Dr Liebreich invites Hilde to eat in her cell and tells her to bring a chair next door. “One should not eat alone too often. A little company is better for the spirits, and therefore for the digestion,” she says.

The food is indeed horrible – a greasy stew, with a grey baked potato. Hilde can’t eat, in any case – she is too shaken up. Dr Liebreich has crackers and fish paste and even a bar of chocolate, which have been sent in to her by a former patient. There’s another girl, perhaps Hilde’s age or a little younger, with a long, mournful, horse-like face, and light brown hair in a plait. She introduces herself as Inge von Hofmannsthal.

“Don’t they lock us in?” Hilde asks, anxiously. The others haven’t been there very long themselves, but they are learning fast, and they answer Hilde’s questions as best they can.

“They will do later,” Dr Liebreich replies. She sees Hilde’s face. “It is unpleasant,” she concedes. “One just has to try and think of other things. Inge here plays her recorder. The wardens don’t like it, but it helps many of us enormously.”

Inge smiles shyly, but her face still looks sad.

“What happens if you ring the bell?” Hilde asks.

“Usually they ignore it. Many of the new arrivals ring for hours on end.”

The crackers are offered around, as decorously as at a normal dinner party. Hilde shakes her head again. Then Dr Liebreich lights up a cigarette and leans back against the thick-painted brick of her wall.

“What about your little boy? Have you found someone to leave him with?” she asks.

Hilde explains about her mother in law. “That’s good,” Dr Liebreich says. “Some women arrive here with babies, but they are taken away pretty quickly, and put in a Children’s Home.” Hilde can tell from the way she says this that the “Home” is not a place of which she approves. “And the mothers are terribly distressed. Frau Mayer, three doors along, is beside herself.”

Hilde asks – timidly, because she can imagine that it’s not a good subject – about the doctor’s own circumstances. Dr Liebreich is as matter-of-fact about this as anything else, however. She has a grown-up daughter who is studying in Scotland, she says, and who so far remains at liberty. “It was probably a mistake to see patients in my flat,” she says. “I wanted to continue to practice, to do something useful.” She has been denounced, she believes, by a neighbour in her block of flats. The number of German-speaking visitors she received must have seemed suspicious. “But if she had ever spoken to me, I could have told her about my work – I made no secret of it. I have a type writer on which I make notes of all my cases, and this seemed to settle it, as far as the police were concerned,” she says, dryly. “And for such a crime, one can end up God knows where, in these peculiar times. I

understand that the British have a long tradition of deporting undesirables - such as ourselves - to the Colonies.”

“We are to be deported?” Inge looks alarmed. Hilde also feels uneasy – the ground shifting slightly beneath her – to hear it so bluntly put.

“Probably,” Dr Liebreich continues, briskly. “Let us hope it is to this island in the Atlantic, or the Irish Sea at any rate. I hear that the facilities are better.”

“Like Napoleon!” Inge is a romantic soul, “I don’t think I like the sound of that.” Her voice wobbles with alarm.

“Hmm,” Dr Liebreich snorts. “With Hitler to fight against, you’d think they wouldn’t waste time with this nonsense. It’s all due to their newspapers. They print rubbish, and then the Government is obliged to do the most ridiculous things to keep their readers happy.” Being ferociously well-organised herself, she has little patience with such things. “To have so many countries want to be rid of one so badly! I must say, it does seem odd,” she concludes, a little wistfully, stubbing out her cigarette.

They tidy up the dinner things, and then it is time to go. The walkway outside is very busy again, and long queues for the lavatories have formed. Most of the women are recent arrivals in prison, and some seem to be in an even worse state than Hilde – their faces, too, are blotched with crying, their hands tremble as they clutch hold of their things. An old lady calls out from her cell, her voice thin and distressed. “I need my medicine! I must take my medicine! Can’t anybody help me?” Dr Liebreich, who is rapidly becoming a sort of unofficial social worker for their floor, goes to see if she can calm her. Two tall Bavarian girls are having a heated argument about a bar of soap. From a distance, coming nearer, Hilde can hear the banging of metal doors and the jangle of keys.

The idea of being locked in a cell overnight is horrifying to Hilde. It is an awful moment when the heavy door swings shut, and she hears the sound of the key turning in the lock.

Thoughts press in on her. What will the baby think when she doesn't come home – will he cry for her? This idea makes it difficult to breathe. This time of day is normally full of him – it is strange that such a small person can consume so much of her evening – and now, suddenly, she has so much time. Is it possible that Ludwig might ask to be transported to the Isle of Man, and that they could eventually be interned near to each other? Can she send for little John, to come and join her, as the policewoman suggested? It seems like too much to hope for, based on past experience. Perhaps she was a fool to have left the baby, perhaps she should have fought like a lioness to keep him with her... She doesn't know what to do with her empty arms, and hugs herself, swaying slightly. Along the corridor, she can hear a woman screaming, and a dull thumping noise, made by someone banging against their door.

Other voices join in – remonstrating or consoling, Hilde can't tell – and a few people ring their bells half-heartedly. Then the screams die down. It's quiet for a while. Hilde moves restlessly around the cell. She saw a tiger, once, in London Zoo, who paced the cage in a similar way. By climbing on her chair, she finds she can look out of the window – she sees the tops of some tall trees, and the roof of a distant tenement building. In her head, she talks to Ludwig. "Would you believe it, my darling? They've put me in *prison*. In prison!"

Then the sound of Inge's recorder - her *liebe Blockflöte* - comes through the walls. It's like a friendly voice, calming Hilde a little. The summer evening fades slowly outside her small, barred window. She recognises "Hänschen Klein," Lightly Row, "Schwesterlein," and other familiar folksongs of her childhood. She cries some more at the light, bubbling music, but it's a better, less violent kind of crying.

She crosses the room, stands by the thick, studded metal door, and looks out through the peep hole.

On the recorder, Inge plays "In stiller Nacht," a folksong set to music by Brahms. Hilde mouths the words to herself, alone in her cell. "And from such bitter

sorrow and grief, my heart has melted. The little flowers – with my pure tears, I have watered them all.”

Looking out through the peep hole, the corridor is dark, but she can see other bright points of light, one in each door, from the peep holes along the walkway opposite. “I am not alone,” she says to herself, out loud.

## ***Sights Not Fit For Human Eyes***

A loud explosion lifts Ludwig several centimetres off the floor. He's awake immediately, his eyes wide in the darkness. His ears ring with the aftershock.

"What was that?" Kurt says. "Turn on the light!"

They are in complete darkness. Ludwig heart spasms painfully in his chest. He can feel the explosion throughout his body – he's trembling with the force of it. There's a deep sense of alarm - he feels as if the world is ending - but he can't, for a few confused moments, work out what is happening.

"I'm trying," says Felix, the younger of the two brothers. "It isn't working."

"This isn't good," Kurt says, a tremor in his voice. "This isn't good at all."

Ludwig is nearest the door. He slips his shoes on without tying the laces and feels his way out into the corridor. Everything is wrong. There's a strange, obtrusive silence; he realises that the engines, which hummed all night, have stopped. A choking smell – acrid and electrical – fills his nostrils, and he can feel broken glass crunching beneath his feet. People are shouting out from the other cabins, suppressed panic in their voices: "Helloo? Does anyone know what's up?" The ship is tilting at an angle.

Ludwig returns to the cabin. Before he can speak, to put the situation into words, he realises that the others are reaching the same conclusion. "We've been hit," Fritz says. "And badly, I think – can you feel how the floor is sloping? We must get out on deck." Ludwig feels in darkness for the life jacket he has been using as a pillow.

In the small cabin, the men jostle against each other. "I c-can't find my glasses," says one of the brothers. Ludwig can tell from his voice that he's crying.

"Leave them," urges the other.

They make their way, arms extended in the darkness, up the sloping corridor towards the dim light, and the deck. Ludwig can hear running feet on an upper deck,

and the crash of crockery from the dining room. The brother with no glasses also has no shoes, and he yelps indignantly as his feet are cut by the shattered light-bulbs on the floor.

There's the doorway – and fresh air at last! The grey daylight is a relief, but the scene is no less dream-like. Their whole world is tilting at a slight angle. "She's going down! We have to get off," someone is shouting. Ludwig sees on his wrist watch that it's twenty-five past six. Panic pounds in his ears, and the wind whips at his pyjamas. The sky is cloudy, and the waves rise and fall. At every stairway, dazed and horrified men come crowding up from below. The list of the ship makes it hard to keep his footing on the deck. People stagger, slide, and cling onto the railings.

There's a strong smell of oil.

On the upper deck, a group of the German sailors from Ludwig's camp are trying to launch a lifeboat. On the lower deck, where Ludwig stands, some people are stunned and serious; others are panicking. Men fall to their knees, their hands over their faces, moaning and praying aloud; one fingers his rosary, and recites intently: "Nel nome del padre...." People are climbing down ropes, and hanging, suspended over the water. Others are jumping overboard, with suitcases in their hands.

A British soldier stands on the deck, with a rifle and fixed bayonet. "What are you doing?" Ludwig asks him.

"Nothing," the soldier says. His face is the wrong colour, and his lip trembles like a small child's. "That is.... I'm waiting for orders."

"You should throw away your gun and jump," Ludwig shouts. "The ship's sinking" – he's distantly aware of the strangeness of this fact. "We've been hit. It must have been a torpedo. We have to save ourselves."

"I can't," the soldier stammers. He looks around, helplessly. "I have no instructions."

Ludwig looks over the side. There are bodies floating in the water, brown with oil – some are thrashing about, but he sees with horror that several are not moving,



and that there is something wrong with their faces, and the angle of their heads. “It’s the life-jackets,” he shouts to Kurt, as he works it out. The cork they’re made from is hard. “If they aren’t tied up properly, they can break the neck on impact with the water.” Kurt’s chest inflates suddenly, as if he might throw up, and he cups his hand over his mouth.

At this moment, the sailors above succeed in dislodging one of the lifeboats, but the angle is wrong – Ludwig flinches as it comes hurtling down and hits the side of the boat, smashing and splintering on the way. Then it hits the water and sinks slowly underneath.

Otto is yelling and waving his arms. He’s organising a group of his comrades, who are ripping anything that isn’t fixed off the deck and throwing it into the water, in an attempt to create rafts from whatever might float. This seems like a plan of sorts, although dangerous to the people already in the water. It’s like a Medieval vision of Hell, or a painting by Hieronymus Bosch – a chaos of small, insignificant bodies, suffering and death, with people doing odd and unexpected things, and the normal order of life apparently overturned. Ludwig can’t believe what he’s seeing or make sense of the many strange details around him.

“Tie up my lifejacket,” he urges Kurt. “Then I will do yours. It is vital that they are correctly secured, so that there is less movement on impact with the water.” He feels that his only hope is to treat this as an engineering problem. Thinking of it this way helps him to function, but he’s angry that people have not understood, and have had their necks broken for such a foolish reason.

Kurt manages to tie the straps up tight, but Ludwig sees that his hands are shaking. Next to them, a short Italian man is crying. “I have no shoes! I’ve lost my shoes.”

“You can take mine, if you like,” Kurt snaps. “I can’t see that they’ll be much use to me.” He removes his beautiful Oxford brogues, and sets them neatly, side by side on the deck, but the man just stares at them.

Why is he wasting time with this nonsense? Kurt's shivering in the thin cotton vest in which he's slept. "Let me do up your life jacket," Ludwig shouts to Kurt over the wind, and the noise of the other men. Kurt turns, and allows him to fasten the straps on his life jacket very tightly. Ludwig can see that he's breathing with difficulty - his chest is heaving. "Now we must jump," Ludwig tells him, removing his own shoes too.

"I don't like water."

In their time at the camp, Ludwig has never seen him swim. He just sat, smoking, by the poolside. "That's right...." Ludwig remembers. "You only swim in the Mediterranean...."

"I don't really swim at all." His dark, beseeching eyes are moving rapidly from side to side, as if searching for a way to escape. His pupils are enlarged, and he seems somehow altered, hollowed out with terror. Ludwig wants to slap him or shake him.

"We have to." He feels another surge of anger that alongside everything else Kurt - who has always been a source of consolation, even strength, with his down-beat, melancholy irony - is introducing new difficulties to his plan.

They are distracted by some more yelling, from the deck above. The German sailors have succeeded in freeing another lifeboat, and this one makes it down to the water without breaking. The Arandora Star is still moving, and the lifeboat begins to drift away, spinning in circles, behind the ship. Some of the people in the water swim towards it, like waterfowl converging on a piece of food.

Ludwig pulls himself up onto the railings, and sits on the top, with his legs dangling over the side, high above the water. In Devon, there were times when he thought that he might almost welcome a way out, but it seems now that he very much wants to live. His bare toes are curled over the metal bar. "Am I really here?" he thinks. Further along the ship, he sees one of the two brothers climbing down a rope ladder. He doesn't look back at Kurt - he needs all of his resolve for himself.

He has many thoughts in his head, an odd jumble of the trivial and the serious. He considers removing his wristwatch, and then realises (with a small, choking chuckle to himself, that feels near to hysteria) that there's no point – if the ship is sinking, it will get wet anyway. He wonders if it is time for him to die.

He thinks of Hilde and the baby, or rather feels them, like a heartbeat, urging him on. Now that it seems likely that he might really die, he knows, with absolute clarity, what matters most to him in the world. How stupid he was to think he could ever give them up! How vain and foolish he has been! He must fight for them with every last flicker of his pulse. Leaving the ship feels like jumping off the edge of the world. With a kick against the railing, a feeling of losing control and a terrible lurch through the air, he flounders down.

He falls for several long seconds and hits the water with a smack. He feels the shock of the cold, and he goes down, and then comes back up, buoyed by the lifejacket. He wonders if his neck is broken, but it doesn't seem to be, since he can still move his arms – so his theory about tying the strings tightly is correct! His triumph at this fact is short-lived, quickly replaced by panic as he surfaces. There is oil in the water, and some of this gets in his mouth. Coughing and spluttering, he wipes his face with his hand, blinking furiously. With relief, he realises that he can breathe and see.

He looks around for Kurt. He hopes that Kurt will follow his example, and jump. Perhaps by waving up, he can reassure him that he's still alive! He cranes his neck, to look up at the ship, but it's impossible to see onto the deck, and he also knows that it's dangerous to stay nearby. There's too much oil, and he might get hit by the objects people are throwing from the decks, or be sucked down with the stern, which is rapidly sinking into the water. Taking another gulp of air, he strikes out in the direction of the lifeboat. He's grateful for all the swimming he did at the camp – his body seems to know what to do, almost of its own accord.

It's difficult going because of all the debris and the people in the water. The lifejacket hinders his movements – he can't swim normally but settles on a sort of frog-like breast stroke. The water near the ship is churning with limbs, alive with panic. There are shouts in Italian, in German, in English, and in no language at all. Between the tilting waves – which seem much higher, now he's in them – he sees a piece of wood which might make a float, except that it's covered with barbed wire. Then he sees a metal canister, and then a man who is dead, lunging and rolling with the water, horribly animated by the sea, his blank face turned up to the sky. Then, a few strokes later, he sees another man who is struggling without a life jacket, his face contorted with terror. Ludwig doesn't try to help – there are too many others floundering around him. He would like to catch a glimpse, at least, of Kurt, to know that he's made it this far too. Ahead of him he sees one of the brothers, Felix, try a plank for buoyancy, and then carry on, toward the same lifeboat he has in his sights.

Ludwig concentrates on his breathing. He thinks of swimming out into the Rhine to meet Hilde, on the day of her escape, two years before. He pictures her, in her dark, wet swimming hat, bobbing like a seal in the distance. He thinks of swimming in the "Obersee" of Lake Constance, as a boy. He remembers his early swimming lessons – and how terrifyingly bottomless the black depths had seemed to him as a six-year-old, suspended from a pole, dipped from time to time by the unsympathetic instructor, swallowing large quantities of lake water. "It's only water," he tells himself, just as he used to then. "After all, it's only water."

With the ungainly spasms of his limbs, he makes a path through the waves of the North Atlantic, pushing his way with his arms, his legs kicking him free. For the second time in his life he saves himself, splashing out towards a new life – or struggling, perhaps, through a new death – after which nothing will ever be quite the same.

He arrives at the lifeboat. It's already very full. Some of the men wave him away – he can see their angry, shouting faces, and wildly gesticulating arms, but his

ears are full of water, and their voices sound distant. There's no more room, and they are afraid that one more man might capsize it.

Felix is inside the boat by now, and holds out an arm towards him, urging him on. Getting on board isn't easy. The body of an elderly man is caught in some rope that trails from the edge of the lifeboat. Ludwig can't think of it as a human - he pushes all such thoughts to the back of his mind. The only way for him to get into the lifeboat is to step onto the slippery body, so he can be pulled inside by Felix and some others.

For a while, Ludwig lies on the floor of the lifeboat. He feels sick - partly from the oil he's swallowed - and exhausted. His thin pyjamas are soaking, and he's very cold. Because of the weight of all the people, the lifeboat lies low in the water, and waves come over the side - some of the other men bail it out using a soldier's tin helmet, a shoe, and even their bare hands.

Then Ludwig raises himself up and looks out. From the lifeboat, he can see the strangest sight. The Arandora Star really is sinking, in the centre of a huge field of oil, debris and bodies, spreading out over the water. It's quite choppy, but there are at least no white foam caps on the waves. At first he sees only one other lifeboat, but others may be obscured on the other side of the ship.

On his lifeboat, a British sailor is helped to steer by two German sailors. As well as Felix, Ludwig recognises several other men from his camp and there are lots of Italians. Many men are in pyjamas or only half dressed - one is stark naked - and all are wet and cold, crouching in the bottom of the boat. The filthy brown oil is everywhere, streaking them like mud. "You fucking crazy! We can't take any more. We all go drown!" one of the Italians is shouting.

Oppenheimer is there - he's lost his large hat, but still has on his trousers and beautiful silk waistcoat, gleaming wet - does he sleep in it, Ludwig wonders? His beard and ringlets are damp, but he's managed to keep his spectacles, although they

are cracked and perch at an angle on his nose. His voice is calm. "It is not for us to deny a man his chance of life," he says.

Influenced, perhaps, by his words, they take on two more swimmers – others cling to rafts of various kinds in the water. The lifeboat is large but filled beyond capacity. Ludwig looks around for some sign of Kurt, but it's very hard to make out faces, in the distance and the chaos – the bodies are just small brown lumps. Felix is distraught – he's scanning the water for his brother – but the sailors say they must move further away from the sinking ship. Ludwig, when he's recovered some of his strength, takes a turn at the oars. They row some way and look back.

On the deck of the Arandora Star, he can still see people moving around, in the distance. The stern is now completely awash. Holes in the foredeck open up, and great jets of steam or smoke come hissing out. Then – as he watches in silent horror – the bow of the huge ship rises up into the air, and she tilts almost vertically. It's the most extraordinary and awful sight – abnormal and unbelievable – this towering construction, which last night was their city, their planet, suddenly becomes like some flimsy child's toy. Ludwig can see people falling along and down the decks. There's a terrible roaring noise, as air is forced out of the openings, and the ship slides down, stern first, beneath the water. A cloud of steam and a great fountain of water throw bodies into the air, arms and legs splayed like tiny dolls, along with other debris.

Ludwig and the other men on the lifeboat watch in stunned silence, their hands clasped over their mouths, their eyes wild with disbelief. For a long time, no one speaks, packed tightly together in the lifeboat. Their minds simply cannot comprehend the messages from their eyes. The ocean looks very large and empty.

There's no land in sight. Ludwig shivers. He notices that his wrist watch stopped working at ten minutes past seven, which must be the time that he went into the water. He has lost his wedding ring – it was loose, already, after the months of poor food, and must have slipped off his finger as he swam.

There are other lifeboats, now visible from time to time, between the rising and falling of the sea. Some of these, less heavily laden, row back to pick up a few more survivors, but there are so many people swimming or clinging to wreckage, and not enough room in the boats for them all. Patches of oil have caught light, and the water itself seems to burn. This must be what hell looks like, Ludwig thinks.

The two Nazi sailors on the lifeboat are speaking to each other. "What are they saying?" the British sailor asks.

"They are wondering if the U-boat that hit us is still in the area," Ludwig translates for him.

"Let's bloody hope not," the British sailor says, but the two German sailors exchange a look, and Ludwig can tell that they do not agree. "I've already been torpedoed once, at Narvik," the British sailor says. "What are the chances of that? I'm beginning to think your lot have got it in for me."

They row closer to the other lifeboats. Ludwig is cheered to see Otto, sitting in the sea on an upturned deck seat, along with three other men – one on each corner. They bob in the swell, but look reasonably secure, despite the fact that their legs are submerged in the water.

The British sailor communicates with one of the other lifeboats, using a mixture of shouting and hand signals, and tells them all that an SOS was sent before the ship went down. This restores them slightly – perhaps help is on its way? The sailors discuss how far from the coast of Ireland they might be, but since no land is visible, trying to reach it does not seem a realistic option. The waves and the wind are dispersing the survivors over an ever-wider area.

Then they lapse into a miserable, preoccupied silence, rowing into the swell to steady the boat.

The wind blows, the boat rises and falls on the waves, the men huddle together unhappily, and time passes. The movement of the sea – which was soothing to watch from the deck of a great ship – is sickening and exhausting, now

that they are so much a part of it, although there's still something hypnotic about it. They take turns at the oars. A dead body comes into view, face down, the neck swollen with water. It moves alongside them for a while, and they push it away with one of the oars.

After he's relieved of his oar by another man, Ludwig stares blankly at the grey sky. Where is Kurt, he wonders, again? Somehow, somehow, he must have made it off the ship. Sunshine breaks through, and his clothes have almost dried. Several men moan and sob, others shiver uncontrollably. The naked Italian covers his genitals with his hands; the sight of him, stripped of all his dignity, is especially troubling. Ludwig tears off a trouser leg from his pyjamas, so that the man can tie it round his waist as a sort of loin cloth.

The problem of the life jackets is also bothering Ludwig. Surely there must be a better material to use than cork? He is cold, but he notices that the parts of his body covered by wet pyjama material are actually less cold than those parts which are exposed to the air. He starts to daydream about a survival suit made out of rubber – or perhaps a thin layer of rubber lined with stocking material, to trap warmer bubbles near to the skin? Perhaps the rubber itself could be made to trap air bubbles, both as a flotation aid and as a means of insulation? So many lives could be saved, he thinks – it's too late for them, but at least in the future... These thoughts distract him for some time, until in spite of everything, Ludwig is ashamed to discover that he's hungry.

Then, over the horizon, he sees a small shape against the clouds. His heart leaps, with an excitement that feels strangely familiar. He feels the ache of his first love – a sharp pain that swells within him - almost before he realises what he's seeing. It's so much what he hopes for that at first he does not trust his eyes. It's as miraculous as the first aeroplane of his life, a Rumpler Taube, which he ran out onto the porch to stare at, when he was only five years old.



“Over there!” he shouts, leaping to his feet, and making the other men jump, as the boat rocks. “An aircraft! I think...Ja, das ist es - yes, it’s a Sunderland!”

Whoops and shouts spread quickly from one lifeboat to the others. “Has he seen us?” the men ask each other, a new terror occurring to them.

“Quick, the flares!” There’s a desperate fumbling in the bottom of the boat, accompanied by mumbled curses – one of the flares is damp, and can’t be lit.

“Raise your oars! Up to the sky, up, up, so they can be seen!”

“Caro Dio...” Many of them begin to pray aloud.

“Liebe Gott....”

“Baruch atah Adonai...”

“Dear God, dear God....”

A flare goes up from another boat, sending a red plume into the sky, and raising a hopeful cheer from the men. The aircraft turns towards them, a friendly, snub-nosed shape. Ludwig can see the guns quite clearly.

The Sunderland flies right over their lifeboat. It’s a sea-plane, and Ludwig hopes – his hope as fervent as a prayer - that it will land on the water. The British sailor rises unsteadily to his feet and tries to signal to it with hand gestures and a lantern. The aircraft flies around, marking the area in which survivors can be found with a wide circle of flares. It drops a few packages into the water, and then flies away. It’s hard to have to wait, but the men reassure each other that help must now, surely, be on the way.

Ludwig loses all sense of time. They fish a package out of the water, and rip through the plastic with their hands, and share the contents – biscuits and chocolate, as well as cigarettes, which they have no means to light, and would not have dared to in any case, given all the oil around. The chocolate is waxy and tasteless, but eating it reminds him that he’s still alive. How can I be enjoying this, he thinks with disgust, in the proximity of so much death? His head nods forward onto his chest.

Perhaps I should have saved a piece for the baby, he thinks confusedly, as his eyes begin to close.

The lifeboat moves endlessly on the waves. They wake up to bail out the boat at intervals. The sun isn't visible behind the clouds, so Ludwig can't even track its movement.

Some time in the afternoon, another dark grey shape appears, low on the water. This rouses them all. "It's a destroyer, I think," the British sailor says.

The German sailors mutter to each other. There are large numbers painted on the side – H83 – and soon, small figures can be seen moving about on deck, between the guns. "It's one of ours," the British sailor announces, to Ludwig's relief. The German sailors look crestfallen.

Then, a speedboat appears, and begins zipping around the area, picking up survivors in the water. The Sunderland sea-plane also comes back.

The British sailor, more confident now in his command, decides that they should row alongside the destroyer, as it will take a long time for all of the survivors to be picked up. Ludwig takes another turn at the oars. It's hard work to get there – the boats and the wreckage are now dispersed over a wide area of sea. As they approach, they see that boarding the destroyer will not be easy. Another lifeboat has already reached her, and they watch the process. Ladders have been lashed to the sides of the destroyer, and some netting let down, and as the first lifeboat rises on the crest of a wave, the survivors on board have to grab hold of this – at the rate of about three men at a time – and climb up the side. It's agonising to watch, as the exhausted men wait for the next wave to come, and reach up for the ladders, sometimes failing to reach them before falling back with the choppy sea, then struggling up the side of the ship with the last of their strength, like crabs clinging to a rock.

Their spirits are lifted by one piece of good luck. Felix recognises his brother Fritz, in the other lifeboat, and shouts out, waving to him delightedly, tears streaming

unashamedly down his face. The other men clap him on the back, their own hopes rekindled by this single happy outcome. Ludwig is cheered by this discovery. Kurt, surely, must be one of those struggling up the ladders, or already on board.

The constant movement of the waves makes climbing up onto the destroyer difficult and dangerous. Ludwig helps to push several other men high enough to grab hold. Then it's his turn. As the ship rises on a wave, he reaches up, and grabs onto the bottom of the ladder with all his strength. He clings on for dear life, and climbs up the metal precipice rung by rung, not daring to look down, using the very last of his energy to haul his cold, heavy body. It's a long way up, and with every lurch of the sea, he risks missing his hold and sliding back down into the crashing water.

As he reaches the deck of the ship, strong arms reach over and hoist him up by the shoulders. The feeling of relief which comes over him is so intense that Ludwig will remember it for the rest of his life. "Are you alright?" a voice asks him, in a wonderful accent that manages to convey both warmth and power with these few words.

"Yes," Ludwig says, but the strength goes from his legs, and he collapses onto the warm metal deck.

Distantly, he can hear these sailors talking to more of the survivors, as they pull them on board, three at a time, covered with oil, many of them more dead than alive. The oil looks like shining brown mud, and the survivors seem hardly human, like semi-naked swamp dwellers. Some cough sea-water from their lungs or vomit more of the slime. Soon the deck is smeared with this foul liquid.

The sailors' voices are mellow, like Hollywood action-heroes. Through his half-closed eyes, their bodies look unusually large against the light, and they seem to Ludwig like a tribe of gods, or perhaps muscular, god-like midwives, as they deliver trio after trio from the water, with the rough tenderness of the sailor towards the half-drowned.

Someone helps him to his feet, and hands him a tumbler of brandy. "What - I mean who - are you?" Ludwig asks the man.

The sailor laughs and says that they are Canadians – "coming to the defence of the motherland," he explains, with a hint of good-natured irony.

"Canadians?" Ludwig repeats. They were heading for Canada, he remembers distantly, before the ship was sunk – it seems almost another lifetime, although it's still less than twenty-four hours ago. It appears that instead, Canada has come to them.

Ludwig sips, and the burning liquid is like a miracle after all that salt water. He has been afraid, he realises, for the past eight hours. All the way through, he thought that he might die. It's only now, with the brandy, that he begins to realise that he will live. He feels drunk and dizzy with relief. Life might be hard - this internment might be a special kind of torture - but at this moment, he's grateful just to breathe the evening air. What a privilege! How confused and idiotic he has been, all because he lost sight of this fact. To live and to love – how could one ask for more? He feels that one should never, ever, take it for granted.

A large man, completely naked and slippery with oil, is being hauled up the ladder, and onto the deck. He can't climb, and they have tied a rope around him, and are winching him up like a piece of meat. The sight is grotesque, but he still seems to be alive. They sluice him with water, to try and get some of the oil off.

Ludwig goes down below decks. The destroyer is filling up with people, many in an awful state, and the air is thick with a putrid smell. Men are bloated, half-pickled in sea water, their bodily fluids replaced with the Atlantic brine. The exhausted and injured lie slumped in every available space, and it's hard to move around. Ludwig is given food: cocoa, some biscuits, and a slice of bread. He eats in a daze, his body welcoming every mouthful with something near ecstasy. Then he scans the crowds, looking for familiar faces.

Otto's there, and does not seem to have fared too badly. He's recognised another Communist Party Member from Bootle, who was a crew-member on the Arandora Star, and they're deep in conversation. Fritz and Felix have made it, as he already knows, and a good number of the German sailors. He notices Geller's bald head - so he has survived - although he does not look at all well. Young Heinz, too, is waving joyfully at him, and beckons him over. He looks delighted to see Ludwig and seems to have some important news to convey. Ludwig bends down towards him. "My pen! I saved my fountain pen!" Heinz pats his top pocket.

But where are all the middle-aged men? Ludwig can't see Mr Gutmann. Several Orthodox men from the camp are missing, some of the academics, and some of the older Communists. The Italians seem far fewer, now – where, for instance, is the man with the funny Italian-cockney accent, whose son was in the British Army? Others are searching for friends and relatives – "has anyone seen my cousin?" one man repeats, again and again. "Umberto Rossi?" "Luigi Mancini, from the town of Bardi?" "Vitale Scarabelli? Black hair, very tall?"

Worst of all, Ludwig can't see Kurt, although he scans the hold until he's sick with looking, and squeezes into the make-shift hospital area. He does not ask anyone out loud, frightened even to speak Kurt's name, and to join the unbearable chorus of plaintive voices. Perhaps these missing people are still waiting to board, he tells himself, without conviction. But to deny what he's seen – tempting as it is – feels dangerously close to madness. An image keeps recurring to him, any time he closes his eyes, even for a second. In his head, tiny figures fall, continuously, from the deck of the up-ended liner. His body aches with sadness and horror.

The Canadian sailors do not seem to distinguish between Germans, Italians, or Brits – they see only half-drowned men, and respond with shocked compassion. Many of the survivors are nearly naked, and soon wear a strange array of donated items. "Say, kid, looks like you could use this," one man offers, gruffly, handing over a vest; others give trousers, underpants, even raincoats, but there are still not

enough to go around. Ludwig's thin pyjamas are smeared with oil, missing a leg, and still wet from the spray. A kind Canadian sailor brings him a pair of white flannel underpants, a blanket and a belt – “sorry, pal, I got nothin' else left” - so Ludwig strips off the useless rags, and wears the blanket, fastened around his body instead of clothes. He keeps his wrist watch on – it's all he has left, and besides, perhaps it can be mended.

In this basic get-up, Ludwig goes back up on deck. The night is mild, and the wind on his face feels better than the close, confined atmosphere below.

The sailors on deck are all busy, scurrying about making preparations to leave. It's unsafe to remain in the area, they say, when Ludwig asks them. No one knows where the U-boat has gone, and it might still be nearby. Now that the survivors have been picked up, they have to move on, leaving the dead to sink forever into the unmarked ocean, or to be carried by currents to the distant shores of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Ludwig finds a large coil of rope on deck, across which he lies, sprawled. For that one night, he isn't a prisoner – he's just a human body, stripped of everything else.

Images crowd into his head. He thinks of the things he has lost: the letters from Hilde, his small, black and white photograph of baby John, his wedding ring, all of his documents, the overcoat which got him through the long camp winter, the socks and scarf Hilde knitted.

His eyes close; he remembers the jolt of the explosion and feeling his way onto the deck of the ship, from the darkness of his cabin. The one, overwhelming thought in his head was to survive, to see his wife and child again. He's sees it all now with absolute clarity. How could he have been so wrong? If only he hasn't messed everything up - if only he can get back to them, to make things right again.

“I made it, my darling,” he says to Hilde, inside his head. “I’m still alive.” He sees men jumping into the water, with suitcases in their hands. He sees the helpless panic in Kurt’s eyes. Exhaustion rises up, black as the waves, above his head.

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Hilde is woken by a bell at six in the morning. She’s surprised to find that she has slept. Sunlight comes in through her cell window, and flickers over the thick-painted wall. Outside, she can hear the sound of nearby doors being unlocked, and then, after a few moments, her own. “All right?” the female warden calls out mechanically, each time, without waiting for a reply.

As she leaves her cell, Hilde notices that a filing card had been fixed outside her door, with her name, internee number, religion (Protestant), and “Alien” written on it. How strange. She has already begun to belong here, it seems.

On the landing, a long queue has formed again. Other “enemy aliens” of all shapes and sizes are lining up to use the lavatory, or to collect hot water in their metal jugs. Every sort of nightwear is on display – quilted dressing gowns, sensible flannel, cerise silk pyjamas, antique lace. Hair is up in curlers, tied in turbans, fashionably bobbed, or hanging down to the waist in plaits or dishevelled tresses. Some of the more recent refugees – from Holland and Belgium – seem to have arrived with no more than the clothes on their backs, and wear the same thing both day and night.

Tea, porridge and bread is brought up to the cells by some of the inmates whose turn it is to carry. Hilde is surprised by how hungry she suddenly feels. She eats with Dr Liebreich and Inge, again. “They say that the tea is mixed with bromide, to keep us calm,” Inge says. Dr Liebreich nods as if she thinks this a perfectly sensible precaution, and Hilde notices that it doesn’t seem to stop either of them from drinking it.

After breakfast, they are locked up again. This causes an upsurge of resentment. The women become like unruly children, arguing and protesting, whimpering and pleading, clinging to the doorframes, and making excuses not to go back inside. Some disappear into the toilets, or volunteer for cleaning jobs, to avoid being shut in. The wardens lose their patience and push and shout. “They struggle to cope with us, we are so many,” Dr Liebreich observes.

With her cell door locked, Hilde takes a while to settle. She unpacks a few things and picks up the piece of knitting she has brought. Before she came, she had begun a sweater, or *pulli* for Ludwig, in thick blue wool. At least she might make some progress with this. The movement soothes her, requiring just the right balance of half-hearted concentration and hypnotic repetition to lull some of the noise in her head. Of course thoughts keep butting in, over the soft click of the needles – and how long before she runs out of wool? At least she knows where Ludwig is, she reflects – unlike several of the women here, who seem to have no idea where their men are being held.

Then she tries to write a letter. This is harder. She wonders how to break news of her whereabouts to Ludwig’s parents, picturing how shocked and horrified they will be. “I am in Holloway Prison -” she hesitates even to write it, the wrongness of the fact startling her all over again.

“It is not far away, and conditions are not at all bad. Please send on any letters from Ludwig. Many of the women here are in a similar situation. Let me know how the little one is doing. I hope that I will be able to take him back soon, when we are moved to a place where I will be able to care for him properly. There is no definite information yet, but still talk of the island. I hope you can manage until then. Ernst and Ruth will help with anything you need. It is very lucky you can care for him, as some of the other children have been sent to an institution.”



A wave of worry rises within her, and she picks up her knitting again for a couple of rows. When the taste of panic subsides, and her breathing slows, she continues.

“If you can spare any food, the diet here is rather dull, and it is possible to receive parcels. I should also very much like a little more wool. There are two balls of blue in the bottom drawer of my dresser. Don’t worry about me! Much love, Hilde.”

She knits almost a whole sleeve, and even dozes for a while. Time passes so slowly. She hasn’t had a moment to herself for so long. For the last few years, since she came to England – and certainly since the baby was born - she’s always had others to care for. It’s a very odd feeling. She finds a phrase of music – four bars of a Bach Cantata - repeating in her head. It’s so clear she almost seems to hear the notes.

Later on, they are allowed out into the yard for exercise. There are hundreds of women, moving in a great tide, swirling and eddying around a large courtyard. High walls rise about them, studded with countless small windows, which to Hilde look like ranks of blind, glazed-over eyes. The women stroll in small groups around the pathways. There’s a large circle doing gymnastics, and another crowd, which Inge joins with her recorder, singing canons and madrigals. Older ladies sit on garden chairs and turn their furrowed foreheads to the sun.

“Somewhat like the circles of Dante’s Inferno,” Dr Liebreich says.

She turns out to be a helpful guide. Hilde finds the sight of so many people quite daunting. “Are there many Nazis here?” she asks, dropping her voice.

“It’s hard to tell,” Dr Liebreich replies, considering, thoughtfully. “Even back in Germany, one never really knew, did one? We want our enemies to announce

themselves with their cruel deeds and an evil glint in the eye. But more often, it is the mass of people, who keep silent with regret, and allow a thing to happen – or those who harbour a quiet prejudice, which distorts their vision...”

“But here, almost everyone I’ve met seems to be either non-Aryan, or a political refugee...” Hilde says. “Or married to one,” she adds, thinking of her own situation.

“Yes. I suspect that right now most of the true Nazis are to be found in Germany.”

Hilde, who is considerably taller, struggles to keep up with the older woman, with her energetic, waddling walk (“it is so important to take exercise, don’t you find?”) Pigeons squabble for scraps near the rubbish bins, and flap noisily up to the sky.

“Of course there are also the 18Bs, the British Fascists,” Dr Liebreich adds. She explains that they are held in a separate wing. “You’ll see them in Chapel, on Sunday,” she says, dryly. “They have some quite splendid hats.”

Other internees come up to Dr Liebreich, asking for help. It’s partly that she’s a doctor, and word had spread – but also her brisk, competent manner, which makes one hope that perhaps, after all, something can be achieved.

“A moment, please, Frau Dr Liebreich...”

“Frau Doktor, I’m sorry to bother you, it’s about my friend....”

Dr Liebreich stops, and listens with her usual matter-of-fact sympathy, and takes a few notes in a pocket book. Sometimes she’s calmly reassuring “yes, yes, quite normal, you’ll find...” and at others, indignant. “It must be put right. Surely, it would be a simple thing....”

When they start walking again, she’s full of ideas, which she tries out first on Hilde. Why shouldn’t she be allowed to help the prison doctor, who is obviously overstretched? And the governor must introduce some simple measures to prevent illness! The prison diet is inadequate – especially for the most recent refugees from

Holland and Belgium, who have arrived with nothing, on the last boats to leave, and have no friends to send them extra food from outside. Many of the women are cold, and their luggage is being stored in the basement, out of reach; one can already see sniffles and respiratory infections taking hold. She's making a list to take to the governor. "I can see that they have a problem with us, these English. But their problem will only get bigger if they don't take some basic measures to get organised."

Hilde can only marvel at her calm, persistent energy. Surely there's still hope in the world, with people like Dr Liebreich in it.

Around them, the internees are stirred up like a flock of twittering birds - a shifting, restless, female mass. Hilde can hear a note of high-pitched pain, communicated in tone, in gestures, in the air - "my husband," "my child," "my home" - "gone, gone, gone!" It matches the frequency of her own inner noise so closely as to be almost unbearable.

Time - as she knew it outside - changes in some fundamental way. Or rather, it's as if she has been swallowed up by a different sort of time. The two immediate concerns of her life - the baby, and the struggle to scrape together enough money to get by - soften out of focus, a general anxiety rather than a practical occupation. She still carries a sense of Ludwig with her, like a secret, but it is becoming a more abstract feeling, a sort of guilty habit. If he wants to do without her, perhaps she will just have to try to do without him. Surprisingly swiftly, the prison begins to become her world.

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Sleeping on the deck of the destroyer, Ludwig dreams about Kurt. In his dream, they are by the swimming pool, in Devon. He is showing Kurt his design for a survival suit made of rubber.

“We don’t need that. I can swim now,” Kurt says. His dear face is lit by a beautiful golden light.

“I knew you could!” Ludwig exclaims, throwing away the plans, laughing with relief.

Kurt takes off his shoes, and places them neatly, side by side, at the edge. He raises both his arms, and steps forward, one slightly bent leg in front of the other. Then he dives gracefully into the water. The beauty of this movement – his body unfolding, straightening, in a nonchalant yet controlled forwards fall - sends a sharp pain through Ludwig’s heart. The plans float on the surface of the pool; the oil is gone, and the water is sparkling clean. “Diving is just like flying,” he thinks to himself, with astonishment.

Still in his rope cradle, Ludwig opens his eyes.

He’s cold beneath his blanket. Grey is everywhere – before his face, all around the destroyer. He rises unsteadily to his feet, bare toes splayed on the cold metal deck, rearranging the belted blanket around himself. Not far away, over the bow, an island of the most extraordinary shape rises out of the mist. It is rugged and very steep, with high sides, like something from a Chinese painting. They pass by it, in an eerie quiet.

“Where are we?” Ludwig asks a sailor. He has no reference point – the fog makes this feeling more acute. Because he’s still confused, and because he knows of its famously dramatic coastline, his first thought is of Norway. He’s used to being denied information – the British guards always refused to answer such questions as a matter of course - but the Canadians are not like this.

“She’s quite somethin’, aint she?” the sailor says. “They call her Ailsa Craig. We’re heading up the Clyde.” Ludwig must still look baffled, because he elaborates: “west of Scotland. Won’t be long now – I reckon you boys could use a hot bath.”

Ludwig goes below deck. It's almost too crowded to move, but he manages to get himself a breakfast of tea, two biscuits and a hard boiled egg. He learns that four more men have died during the night.

He and Otto get out of the scrum and go back up on deck. They smoke a couple of cigarettes which Otto has been given by one of the Canadians, while looking out over the side. Unlike the liner, with its sturdy railings, the destroyer has only a thin rope at the edge of the deck, and Ludwig has the sense of standing on the lip of a cliff.

They shared a hut the whole time they were in Devon. Otto's youth and his politics often irritated Ludwig, but now, he finds his familiar presence strangely soothing. Otto's short, reddish curls are stiff with salt, and he wears only a donated vest and a pair of ragged shorts – but this is smart compared with Ludwig's peculiar outfit.

The mist is clearing. They can see mountains, brown and gold and green, dappled by the shadow of the clouds which move overhead. Everything seems to shimmer with life – and Ludwig can feel an answering ripple within him. The world is so beautiful; the sight of it hurts his eyes.

“Bloody joke, the whole thing,” Otto says bitterly, in English – Ludwig thinks this an odd choice of phrase but is reassured by Otto's tone that he finds it far from funny. “Bloody chaos, from start to finish. No bloody boat drill, not enough bloody lifeboats.... We should have been in convoy.”

“Those cork life-jackets! Surely it must by now be possible to make something better....” Ludwig contributes.

Otto nods. “They should have stuck on a red cross, or something, to show we were prisoners. Complete bloody cock-up, from beginning to end.”

“Did you see Kurt, when you were in the water?” Ludwig asks uncomfortably. He is only just beginning to accept, reluctantly, that Kurt isn't with them. He looks at

the mountains. He didn't realise that such scenery existed in the British Isles. How he's missed mountains! Without them, he's only half alive.

Otto shakes his head, apologetically. "Did you see Finck?" he asks, back. Klaus Finck was in his sixties, and was a Communist member of the Reichstag, imprisoned by the Nazis for four years before he fled to England.

"No." Ludwig pauses. "I'm sorry."

"I heard he just sat on the deck, and waited," Otto says.

Watching the shore, Ludwig feels burdened by some new knowledge about life. It's something he can't put into words or tell other people – but perhaps he recognises when someone else knows it too. Is it something about how we are animals, really, and will die like animals? Or is it rather about how much more there is than one expects – or how much more terrible and awesome the world? His priorities feel clearer, but he is also more aware of the limits to his power. Whatever it is, it feels mixed up with this mighty view.

"Look – over there!" Otto cries out. A pair of porpoises break the waves, in the distance. Ludwig feels his heart leap with them. "Now that's something you don't see in Swabia. Aren't they fine?" Otto says.

"I keep thinking that there might have been another rescue boat – one that we didn't see..." Ludwig says, aware, even as he speaks, that this is an impossible hope.

"Don't be a bloody idiot. You know that there was no other boat," Otto says gently, despite the harshness of his words. "We saw what happened to them. We know."

That's the problem: he knows. He's alive, and they are dead. Ludwig feels as if he's weighted with the unbearable responsibility of living for them: Mr Gutmann, who will never see his new child; Kurt, who will never see these mountains, or feel this wind on his face. He thinks of the stranger in the water, whose panic-stricken final moments he alone witnessed. What a memory to have to carry! If only he could

believe that they were here, somehow – in the towering clouds, or in the graceful porpoises. It seems more plausible than that they could be so suddenly and completely gone.

“Poor buggers,” Otto says, heavily. They smoke in silence, too full of sadness for words.

## ***Lost at Sea***

Hilde grows more used to the solitude of her cell.

For the first day or so, she's haunted by the same four bars of the Bach Cantata. It's so loud and insistent that it startles her, and she's worried she's going mad. Little by little, however, she finds that she has some control over the music in her head. She begins to expand her repertoire. She finds that she can recall quite long stretches with astonishing clarity, hearing them aloud yet internally, turning the volume up and down, almost as if she's listening to the wireless.

She watches the small patch of sky outside her window - the changing hue and saturation, a fragment of cloud, sometimes a few tiny stars. She carries on knitting, although she lives in dread of running out of wool. It's very odd to be thrown back on herself like this. She barely even knows who she is any more, without Ludwig or the baby, or her normal working routine to occupy her. There are still times when she sobs quietly to herself, and others when she wants to wail aloud. The brutal fact of being locked up feels like a fresh affront every time the key turns. Yet to her guilty astonishment, Hilde also finds some moments surprisingly restful.

When they are left unlocked, she begins to help Dr Liebreich with her "social work." However well she gets to know her, Hilde can never quite bring herself to address her by her first name, Miriam. It seems somehow disrespectful, and any shred of dignity, of past identity, seems worth insisting on. She feels that a female doctor is a rare enough thing to deserve emphasising.

"What these English lack is any systematic approach," Dr Liebreich complains. "They make more work for themselves by this peculiar way of 'muddling through'. They insist on seeing everything on an individual basis, when many of the difficulties we experience in fact conform to a pattern...." With the bemused permission of the over-stretched authorities, she sets up a table in the corridor, and begins to sift through some of the issues.



Some of the women don't know where their children have been taken. There is an institution in Essex to which some have been sent, but no one has kept a proper list. Financial hardship, missing relatives, lack of information, visa issues – there are many problems which do seem to merge, after a while, into a sort of symphony of woe. Some of the tales Hilde hears almost break her heart: children who missed their place on a transport out of Europe, because of a cold; parents who were due to fly out on the week that war was declared and are now stuck in an awful limbo. It's depressing and exhausting even to listen to them. Dr Liebreich tries to console her. "Even when one can do nothing, at least one can try to keep some record," she says. "To be heard is not much, but at least it is something."

It feels to Hilde as if they are living through the last days, the end of times. It's an extraordinary and frightening thing to find herself in prison, yet not quite so extraordinary and frightening as the news from outside. It is odd, really, that life goes on, so busy with small detail, like the stitches in her knitting, like the notes in the music. These details seem to add up to something more than they once did, a sort of strange poignancy, because daily life itself is at risk. Hilde is aware of the moments of unexpected beauty – the light on a puddle, the iridescent pink of a pigeon's wing, the warmth in a voice or a look - in this, the most unpromising of surroundings.

Gathered around a wireless set on the ground floor of C Wing, spilling into the corridor outside, the interned women hear news of the fall of France. Their intent listening wells up into something solid; their straining after every word is almost unbearable.

Hilde scans the faces around her. Women shut their eyes, gasp, and press hands to mouths, as sickening dread surges into a horrified disbelief. The German troops have followed them right up to the channel. It's hard to see her own feelings reflected back, but harder still when she thinks she catches a flicker of something else, hastily suppressed. Most of them are clearly devastated, but once or twice she thinks she catches (or is it her imagination?) a knowing look – a little nod of

vindication. Frau Glöckner raises her eyebrows and purses her lips. Is she thinking that these English, who have behaved so despicably, will now get what they deserve? Hilde feels exhausted by the emotion all around her, as well as by her own soul-destroying suspicion. They bow their heads in quiet despair, as if they are praying.

On Sunday, the women attend chapel. This gives Hilde and those in C Wing a chance to see the prisoners held in other parts of Holloway, and a dizzying sense of the scale of the place.

The “18Bs,” the English Fascists, arrive – just as if they were off to a Church Service in the Home Counties. They wear spotless white gloves and hats laden with artificial flowers and fruit, silk scarves and tailored jackets. They murmur together, as they sit down in the pews, straight-backed and reproachful, with a disdainful glance at the scruffy foreigners behind them.

“See how they look at us – as if we were dirt on their shoes!” Dr Liebreich whispers. “*They* recognise that we make pretty poor ‘Nazis’, even if the authorities fail to.”

There are rows of ordinary prisoners, in drab blue capes. What must they make of it all, Hilde wonders? The women shuffle and look at each other. People chat to their neighbours. Behind curtains at the front they glimpse the women awaiting trial. “I’ve heard that there’s a murderer,” Inge mouths. “Who do you think it is? Perhaps that one with the blonde hair?” She cranes her neck to see up onto the balcony, and tries to read the faces, with a ghoulisn fascination.

The vicar begins to preach. His words - of light and darkness, hope and salvation, trial and redemption – resonate through the large room, and thrum in the hearts of his congregation. A great wave of longing for her child rises up in Hilde’s chest, and begins clawing at her ribs, as it often does at quiet, unexpected moments. For a while she can’t see clearly or breathe easily, and she worries she might cry out aloud. The vicar’s sermon continues, as an undertone to her panic. Good and evil

are not abstract or distant, but seem to tramp the earth, and roar through the sky, reported each day on the wireless.

“Let us all sing Hymn number 517.” There’s a great movement of bodies, as they rise to their feet. The Fascists warble imperiously through “Lead, Kindly Light” and then “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep....” They sing with a haughty passion, picturing - Hilde imagines - the rolling fields and strong, fresh-faced youngsters of an England free from the corrupting influence of degenerates and Jews. The regular prisoners sing too - with hearty cockney gusto or sullen, ashen-faced resignation. The women from C Wing warble and lisp, uncertain over the tune or the words, with their thick foreign accents. “Why should we not sing also?” they seem to insist. “We are as good as the rest of you.” Even the Communists, dismissive of this “opium of the masses,” nod along, perhaps thinking of a better world, rising from the ruins. A terrible craving – for their loved ones, for their homes – seems to radiate from every woman there.

After chapel, their doors are left unlocked for several hours, and the atmosphere feels calmer. There are visits from one cell to another, strange little tea parties with carefully hoarded treats, and a chance to talk or to listen. Just to speak and hear German again is a pleasure for Hilde. The women get the measure of one another slowly – outward politeness masking their inward suspicion. Tentative questions are cautiously put, as they flick through a sort of mental card-index, marking, altering, correcting. “You are from Frankfurt, I believe?” “She is a darling, but you know, of course, that her husband is a Notorious Red, and Most Unreliable!” “Ah, I see – your husband might know of my brother-in-law...” A complex system of new hierarchies and alliances begins to grow.

Hilde is also subject to some of this probing. A group of them are crammed into a cell, sitting along the bed and on chairs, and standing by the window. A splendid cake has been shared – Lotte worked as a maid for a wealthy family in Hammersmith, who appease their uneasy conscience by sending in generous food

parcels – and there is even “Nes” coffee. Some of the women, including Hilde, have picked up their knitting.

Frau Mayer, the woman beside her, is also knitting; her face is vacant, dull, and faintly perturbed – in contrast, her hands fly purposefully, busy as nest-building birds.

“Who do you knit for?” Hilde asks her, in an attempt to draw her out. She has never heard the woman speak.

“My son, Hans. He is so hard on his clothes - always making holes in the elbows.” Frau Mayer’s face lights, briefly, with fond impatience – a comfortable, reflex emotion – before the cloud seems to settle over her again, and her hands move faster still.

“What about you, Hilde? Are you knitting for the handsome blonde husband Dr Liebreich tells us about?” Inge asks teasingly.

“Oh yes, such a fine young man,” Dr Liebreich confirms, with a twinkle. “Let’s hope your son has his looks.”

“He followed her here, to England, so they could be married!” Inge informs the others. She’s an enthusiastic romantic, yet she often gets things slightly wrong.

Hilde feels a painful need to correct her. “People often think that. Actually, it’s the other way round. I mean, we couldn’t get married, it’s true, because he is non-Aryan. I followed him...” She can feel some gaping hole opening up beneath her, and yet she’s powerless to avoid it. She can tell that Dr Liebreich and perhaps many of the others assume that she’s Jewish, and Ludwig isn’t – it’s a natural assumption, as she has darker hair, and he’s blonde. Is it better to tell the truth, even if it’s not the story they want? It’s awkward for her to set things straight. She wants so much to feel a part of the group.

As she speaks, she can feel an uncomfortable silence filling the cell. Conversations break off – others are listening, with the intense curiosity bred of years of obsession with race.

“You’re not Jewish, then?” There’s a note of caution, of distrust, in the question.

They scrutinise her face, the way they have all been scrutinised so often. There’s a prickle of something – awkwardness, or even fear - in the room. Hilde’s eyes are blue, her nose small and upturned. Does she think this makes her better than them? What does it mean for her politics, for the way she feels in her heart? Who in here can one really trust, come to that? The old anxieties bubble up, never far beneath, from years of habit.

“No. I’m ‘Aryan’, as they say. Except – I suppose – by marriage....” Hilde hastens to add.

“Of course, one must reject these Nazi ways of thinking. We are all human beings, just the same,” Dr Liebreich says, to break the tension. Hilde feels the same half-guilty annoyance as she sometimes has in the past - both angry and faintly sickened that these things are considered so important. Can they never move beyond this destructive habit of categorising according to ‘race’? Will she always be doubted, because of her blood? Surely she has done enough, suffered enough, to show where she stands.

To her relief, the conversation moves on to another favourite topic. They speculate about the likely date of the next transport, rather as one might about the weather. “Do you think it will be soon?” they ask one another. “I feel certain it must be next week, or at least the week after. Don’t you agree?”

The Isle of Man has become a sort of promised land to many of them. For Hilde it’s her hope of getting baby John back. To others, it’s the possibility of being nearer to their husbands. Hilde imagines a wind-swept rock, with barracks and soldiers – how can she care for a toddler in such a place? Is she selfish to even think of it?

Inge, like others still, doesn’t want to go, because she will be further from her friends and her mother in London. “Oh do stop going on about it!” she bursts out, and

then begins to cry. The waiting produces a terrible tension – it puts everyone on edge.

After a few days, Ernst comes to visit. Although she envies others their visitors, once her name is called, Hilde is afraid to see him. He's a reminder of her past life, and his presence here brings a new wave of shock and humiliation. She sees him enter the visiting room, and is stung by the pity in his eyes, the caution in his bearing, the suppressed disgust with which he scans the inmates. He looks relieved when he greets her. "Why, you look just the same!" he exclaims. They embrace awkwardly, and Hilde wonders what it was he expected.

"Have you seen Ludwig's parents? And the baby?" she asks.

"Yes, of course. We're doing everything we can to help them. Ruth goes almost every day."

"How is the little one?" She's ravenous for details – how he looks, the noises and gestures he makes, if he smiles, or laughs – but Ernst can only say, like a typical man, that he seems quite well.

"My aunt will see to it that he doesn't go hungry..." he says. She manages a painful, twisted smile.

She wishes that Ruth had come instead. Dear Ruth would be honest with her! Is it that she was afraid to come to the prison – fearless Ruth, with her bright red lipstick? Or is it that he has forbidden her? "And how is Ruth?" she asks.

"She still misses the children," he says, and then stops abruptly, as if he's made a terrible faux pas.

Hilde tries to ease his discomfort. "But of course. Are they well?"

"They are very well. They are becoming quite English," his voice is half proud and half sorrowful. "They are embarrassed by us, and they don't want to speak German. It's natural, I suppose."

Ernst says that he has helped Ludwig's parents to withdraw the gold coins from the bank. He thought that they would take a few coins, which he would help

them to exchange, and expected that they would leave the rest in the deposit box for later. But he says that Ludwig's parents have taken the whole bag of coins back to their room.

This gives Hilde a jolt. Although they haven't resorted to using them, the thought of the coins, safely in the bank, has been a great comfort. Perhaps her face reveals this. "They say that they have found a very safe hiding place," Ernst adds quickly, with a guilty shrug. "And I will try to persuade them to take them back to the bank."

"Well, perhaps they are right..." Hilde says, hesitantly. She isn't sure if she trusts all of the tenants in the house. Still, there's nothing she can do about it now. "How do they seem?"

Ernst hesitates. "They are very nervous. We all are. My uncle especially. They do some chores – he digs in the garden, she looks after the little one – but they still so rarely go out. He doesn't trust the bank, or the British authorities. Why should he, with the two of you interned? We hear that everyone Jewish in Amsterdam has been told to register with the police. The same thing will happen in any invaded country as in Germany. He feels we will be robbed again, and maybe this time, not even our lives will be spared."

He seems to hesitate, and looks at the prison warden, who waits impassively a few feet from their desk. Then he opens his shoulder bag, just a crack. He has brought a letter.

As soon as she sees Ludwig's handwriting on the envelope, it's as if nothing else in the room exists. Hilde notices with irritation that it has been opened already – once by the censor (it bears the usual obtrusive white sticker), but also by someone else, presumably Ludwig's mother, even though it has Hilde's name on it. Hilde can't really blame her - knowing, as she does, the aching need for news of him - but this doesn't stop her from feeling a twinge of annoyance.

She opens the letter with shaking hands and scans the page rapidly, worried that at any moment it might be taken away.

It is hard to take it all in at once. For some odd reason the letter has been typed – is it really from him? He still sounds low, and strangely formal, and sorry for himself. He asks her again not to write, and the pain and anger well up inside her. One phrase springs out at her: “it breaks me down.” He writes that he is still “not quite myself” and some nonsense about Chinamen. His signature looks strange and childlike, like the writing on his previous letter. What is wrong, dear God, with his hands, that he can’t seem to form the letters for himself? She is filled with a dread that she won’t formulate into thoughts. There is perhaps a kind of apology concealed behind his words, but they still wound her deeply.

He writes that they’re being sent away from the camp in Devon. This is alarming, but also hopeful – perhaps they are going to the Isle of Man! However, he ends on a note of that harsh, self-protective ambivalence. “This itself is likely to make a break in our correspondence and will give you another chance to think honestly if it is worth the trouble.”

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The destroyer docks at Greenock. From the deck, Ludwig and Otto see a row of red-brick warehouses with pointed roofs, and cranes which stretch their long necks like skeletal giraffes. The refugee men break out in a spontaneous chorus of “Gott Save the King” followed by an enthusiastically chaotic half-verse of “There’ll All-vays Be An Ink-land” (which is not quite the right choice, given their arrival in Scotland, and confusing to the Canadians, who think they are prisoners of war.) There are many soldiers on the dockside, as the ropes are thrown, fixed, and made fast.

The Canadians shake their hands vigorously and wish them well. They seem to feel a special bond with these dishevelled, half-drowned foreigners, who they



pulled from the sea in such desperate circumstances. The survivors try to compress their gratitude into a few inadequate words and gestures, according to the constraints of their culture – the Italians put their hands to their hearts, and touch the men's faces, the Germans click their heels and bow deep, the British say "thanks awfully," and "best of luck, mate." Those in the hospital section stay on board until later.

The British sailors and guards disembark first, to applause and cheers from the watching men. For a moment, smiles light faces, and it seems almost like a happy ending.

Then Ludwig and the other internees begin to make their way unsteadily down the gangplank. Silence falls suddenly and completely, and at an order, the soldiers snap to attention, and present arms. "They don't seem very happy to see us, do they?" Fritz says. The contrast is shocking.

"Ever felt like a pork chop in a Synagogue?" Otto raises his eyebrows.

A soldier with a clipboard counts them off the ship. On the dockside, they are separated into two groups – Germans and Italians. The older and more talkative of the Kraus brothers - Fritz – takes up the role of self-appointed spokesman and explains politely that a third group of refugees should be formed. "We are anti-Nazis. We fled from Germany. We feel ourselves to be your allies in this war. We insist on this separation."

The soldier with the clipboard scowls at this unwelcome information as if it might be some kind of a trick and confers with a superior. Is this a lone trouble-maker, he asks hopefully? But no, the request is echoed by Otto, and the remaining anti-Fascists, who have learned from experience the need to make this clear at every point. After some discussion, they are permitted to form a separate group, apparently in the spirit of "whatever keeps them quiet". While this is going on, the sick are disembarked, some on stretchers, and loaded into ambulances. Last of all come the bodies, covered with grey blankets, on stretchers of their own.

Ludwig and the other survivors walk slowly through the streets of Greenock, under armed guard. Ludwig's bare feet slide on the cobblestones. He has a blurred impression of his surroundings - a roadway apparently unchanged since Victorian times, with ranks of pallid faces against a dense brickwork background. The pavements are lined with silent, staring crowds. They stop the traffic, the morning routine temporarily suspended.

Ludwig hangs his head, feeling many eyes burn into him. In his belt and blanket, he feels like a medieval beggar, carrying out some ancient penance. Half-dressed, in rags and improvised garments, with oil still around their fingernails and in the creases of their ears, stumbling with weakness, they are a miserable sight. Slowly, slowly, they wind their way, like a tattered, half-mad funeral procession, their shoulders weighted down with invisible corpses.

They were stared at, sometimes, in Devon, but never by such a large crowd, and never with such intensity. The shipwreck has been reported in the newspapers, and everyone wants to see. They are like wild animals in a circus. Ludwig has never felt so utterly humiliated, or so much like an "enemy alien."

It's a relief to turn off the main street. They are herded into a dilapidated, three storey warehouse, pock-marked with broken windows. The Nazis are put on the top floor, Italians in the middle, and refugees on the ground floor.

As they file in, their diminished numbers are painfully obvious. Ludwig guesses that only around half of the men from Devon have survived. The Nazi group have done rather better – perhaps because they are on the whole younger, fitter, and many of them are sailors - but there are only sixty or so anti-fascist survivors on his floor. The Italians seem to have lost the most lives: Ludwig has the impression there were many more of them on the ship.

They wait for whatever will happen next. Ludwig sits down on the dusty floor, which is splattered here and there with bird droppings. He adjusts the blanket he's wearing and leans against one of the rusty iron pillars which support the ceiling. The

light is dim. Some of the small window panes are broken in irregular patterns, like lace-work, or a spider's web. He finds himself counting the smashed panes and trying to read the pattern, as if they are a kind of code. His eyes blur in and out of focus.

The dead are still travelling with them. The back of a head, or the curve of a shoulder reminds him, with a lurch, of Kurt. He recognises Strauss, a biologist who gave a couple of lectures at the camp - and is about to greet him in relief (he thought he hadn't made it), when he realises with a dull nausea that it's another man of a similar build. The survivors look so altered, with their staring eyes and sharp-boned nakedness, that it's hard to reconcile them with the shabby-suited yet still proud and talkative men with whom he set out. Now, they sit or lie for hours on end without a word. Even the Communists seem to have lost their appetite for debate.

Other worries trouble him. Perhaps Hilde and his parents have heard of the sinking and put two and two together – how frantic they'll be! He feels so ashamed of his last, grudging letters to her – how could he have left her hanging like that? Then there's the awful business of finding and telling the families of the drowned – surely they are owed that much, at least? This won't be easy. Kurt's parents were last heard of in Italy, and although there's an aunt, he has no contact details. He begins making a mental list of casualties, but the task soon overwhelms him.

A few elderly guards take positions at the door. Ludwig glances at his wrist watch, forgetting that it isn't working. He'd like to take it apart to see what's wrong, but this is impossible without any tools, and he expects they'll be moved at any moment. It's still stuck at ten past seven, which seems apt, because he feels that his life has stopped, too. They have become like cargo in a goods yard, waiting to be shunted from one place to another. Outside, the sun moves across the sky.

From the street beyond the broken windows, a few small boys stare in, daring each other closer, then run away. The guards become gruffly apologetic, in their impenetrable Scottish accents.

“Isn’t someone going to take our names? Our families must be told!” Fritz objects, but the guards merely look troubled.

“All in good time, son,” one of them says, shifting his rifle uncomfortably. “Dinnae fash yersel. It will be awe rite.”

Waves of misery pass through the group – they sway on their feet or lean against the walls and pillars. Some squat on their haunches, their eyelids drooping, heads nodding forwards on their chests. Then gradually, one by one, the men keel over on the bare concrete floor, and sleep where they’ve fallen.

Ludwig feels the chill of evening. He drifts in and out of consciousness, and still no one comes.

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It’s dark outside. He hears the sound of trucks. The warehouse doors open, and volunteers from the Salvation Army arrive, bringing small miracles: a tea urn, blankets, and corned beef sandwiches. “What time is it?” Ludwig asks a white-haired angel about the age of his own mother, as she hands out these wonderful reminders of civilisation. She tells him that it’s ten in the evening. He settles down to sleep some more.

In the morning, the Italians are moved out of the warehouse. Ludwig does not know whether to feel jealous, or anxious on their behalf – there’s a rumour that they are being sent to another transport ship.

The small boys reappear at the windows and are joined by a few of their mothers - broad, freckle-faced women, with wide, strong arms and small babies on their hips. They peer inside with curiosity and some trepidation but grow braver at the sights within. “Those puir men,” one of them murmurs to another. Then a trickle of gifts begins to arrive, passed in through the broken panes: a few packets of cigarettes, a bag of butterscotch, even a parcel of chips wrapped in newspaper. The

men accept these hesitantly – what will the guards do? But perhaps they've won some sympathy, because the guards stand impassively by, turning a blind eye as the things are taken inside and shared around.

“My good woman, we have gratitude from deep vizin our hearts. Since days we have received almost no food, and alas, you find us, sorry to say so, more or less dishabille,” said Geller, who in fact is one of the better dressed, in a pair of Canadian long johns and a string vest. Humiliated by their hunger and their attire, they are anxious to show that they are still capable of politeness. The smell of the hot, vinegary chips is so wonderful that Ludwig feels he might cry.

“This fine example of working-class solidarity should put the British authorities to shame,” Otto says.

“That's nae trouble,” the boldest of the women says. “Our lad's away, we dunnae ken where he bides. I hiner some would do the same for him.”

The chips vanish quickly. Then Otto takes the newspaper in which they were wrapped and smooths it out so they can look at it. The men crowd round and read through the grease spots. At first they struggle to make sense of it, then it comes as a terrible shock. They knew that things were bad, but not this bad. This is how they learn of the fall of France, and the evacuation of Dunkirk. From the central light shaft of the warehouse, they can hear the Nazis singing, up above. Perhaps they too have been catching up with the news.

After this, seeing their curiosity, the women bring more newspapers, including that day's. Grimly, as if working together on some horrific jigsaw puzzle, the men begin to piece together some of the events of the last few months. They've seen the gist of it, written in the faces of their guards in Devon, as well as the sailors on the Arandora Star, but reading it now in black and white produces a dread in the pit of every stomach. Hitler has visited the Eiffel Tower – Swastikas hang from the flagpoles of Paris! The Channel Islands are being bombed. Nothing in the Great War – which somehow still serves as the model for most – has prepared them for this.

The great nation of France brought to ruin, and most of the continent under this brutal tyranny.... Their own misfortune begins to seem smaller in the face of this wider calamity. Ludwig begins almost to suspect some apocalyptic new law of nature in operation. So this is how the world is! Perhaps he was naïve to have hoped for anything different.

Their shipwreck is on the front page. The men crowd round again, as Fritz Kraus reads the article aloud. "Germans torpedo Germans," he begins. Then he hesitates, scanning the rest of the article. The subheading gives an indication of the sort of thing to come – "aliens panic as U-boat sinks Arandora Star." Fritz reads the first paragraph, which tells of the U-boat attack, and gives a figure of 800 dead.

"Go on – go on!" Frankel says. But Ludwig is standing close enough to read another of the sub-headings, which says, quite simply – "Cowards."

Fritz continues, a pained indignation building in his voice. "Soldiers and seamen among them told of the panic among the aliens when they realised the ship was sinking. All condemned the cowardice of the Germans, who fought madly to get into the boats," he reads.

There are protests and snorts of disbelief, but he carries on. "The Germans fighting with Italians to escape were great hulking brutes... They punched and kicked their way past the Italians... The whole mob of them thought of their own skins first.... The scramble for the boats was sickening." Fritz flings the newspaper down.

There's a stunned silence in the warehouse. Frankel paces in agitation; a large Communist called Kowalski clenches and unclenches his fists. Geller picks up the newspaper, as if he needs to see the words for himself. Blumenthal puts his hands over his face, and slumps dejectedly on the floor. Ludwig finds himself blinking back tears – not for himself, he thinks angrily, but for the drowned, defenceless against these slanders.

"What did I tell you? The Capitalist Press prints nothing but lies!" Otto exclaims.

“There’s no mention of refugees, or civilians. They write as if every man on board were a Nazi, and a prisoner of war,” Geller objects, in his dry, measured voice.

Ludwig is shocked. He’s always admired the integrity of the British press and has often told Hilde and his parents how refreshingly it contrasts with the propaganda, over recent years, in Germany. He usually believes what is reported. The tone is rather inconsistent perhaps – up until the outbreak of war, they were too forgiving of Hitler, and since then, a little cartoonish in the depiction of evil – but that’s only to be expected. So it is profoundly troubling to read this bizarre distortion of his own experience. How has this story been put together? No one has spoken to them, or even tried to give a balanced account. Is Otto right, then, after all, to say that the British news is also full of lies? And if so, what in the world *can* one trust?

A Scottish man with a long white beard appears in the doorway. The guards let him in and greet him respectfully. He wears a dark, faded tunic, and has a fine, clear, modulated voice, rolling his “r” impressively. “I felt you might have need of me,” he says. “After all, we are all God’s creatures.”

He’s a Reverend from the Church of Scotland. Ludwig feels a twinge of irritation – there are many people they have more urgent need of, he thinks - and Otto snorts, but Fritz says politely that it is true, they do have need of him. “We have lost many of our friends and companions. Can you help us pray for them?”

“Very well.” Leafing intently through his Bible, the Reverend finds a passage. The men shuffle to their feet and make a semi-circle around him. He reads from Psalm 107: “He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.” He seems almost to be singing, even when he’s speaking.

“Oh Lord, we pray for those men lost at sea,” he intones. A great wave of emotion rises up, sudden and overwhelming. To his surprise, Ludwig finds relief in merely hearing the dead acknowledged. It seems there are old words and forms designed exactly for the process. Every person present, of whatever denomination and none, bends his head in potent silence. So many gone at once – it does not

seem possible! So many different experiences, busy lives full of incident and accomplishment, so many loves, such potential, all swallowed up by the water. Kurt, so young, so clever and talented, ended so abruptly. Oh God, how can it be true?

Then Oppenheimer raises his voice to say the Kaddish, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead. His words, rising and falling in an ancient tongue, echo around the dusty warehouse. He is the only one of the small Orthodox group to have survived the shipwreck. A few others, raised within the faith, join him in the responses – too few, too quietly.

The Reverend seems moved by their plight and asks if there is anything he can do to help them. He's mobbed with requests – can he contact relatives? Send a message? Bring pencils and paper? Organise hot water and towels, so they can have a proper wash? He comes back later with a district nurse and more members of the Salvation Army, bringing writing materials, buckets of warm water from nearby houses, and a collection of faded shirts and patched trousers donated by the poor but generous local parishioners. Ludwig picks out a pair of threadbare grey trousers and a rough, collarless shirt. He is delighted to wear clothes again, however ragged.

Together, the men begin to compile from memory a list of those who have been lost in the shipwreck. It's a terrible task, watching the dog-eared pages fill up with names. They argue over what should happen to the list – can they entrust it to the authorities? "Of course not. Will you silly buggers never learn?" Otto says.

Ludwig thinks about trying to escape. They are not heavily guarded and have not been counted since they disembarked. He has no money, however, and a strong German accent, and knows he will attract immediate attention. He's law-abiding by instinct and has been stared at enough already to know how uncomfortable a sensation this is – in the current climate, he fears he might be attacked or even killed before he has a chance to explain.

An Officer hands out postcards, printed with the line: "I AM SAFE." They are instructed to address and sign these and told that they can add no other information.



This leads to more protests, snorts of derision, and raised eyebrows. No one has been told that they were on the ship to start with, and now, no one will be told specifically that they have survived the sinking. They can hardly imagine what their relatives will make of it.

Ludwig addresses the card to Hilde and his parents. He hopes that it will provide them with more reassurance than alarm. He hopes that his parents' lack of English might have protected them from news of the sinking, and Hilde has no particular reason to suppose he was on the ship. The more he thinks about it, however, the more inadequate he knows this to be. He has already left far too much unsaid.

So, that evening, he plucks up courage to scrawl an illicit note to Hilde, at their Hornsey address. Heinz lends him the fountain pen, and he writes in secret, beneath his blanket, terrified of discovery, but even more worried about getting Hilde or his parents into trouble by sending them an unauthorised message. Telling her about the shipwreck brings home to him some of the enormity of what has happened.

"Hilde, my dearest darling girl. So much has happened that I hardly know how to tell you. From our camp in Devon we were sent by train and loaded onto an ocean liner at Liverpool. The ship was torpedoed by a German submarine about two hundred miles off the Scottish coast and sunk in a very short time. I made it to a lifeboat, I can still hardly believe it, and we were picked up by another ship. All of the swimming in Devon helped me, and honestly, I have not even caught a cold after that ordeal. But so many good men died that day, even my closest friend from the camp. Please don't ask me to say any more about the disaster because the sights I witnessed were not fit for human eyes to see.

My darling, I know because I nearly died how very much I want to see you again. I can't give you up, even if perhaps it seems to best and most honourable thing to do. I have been such an idiot, I don't know what I was thinking. I can't believe I asked you not to write, when you and the child are all I live for. I'm so sorry for everything I've put you through. Can you ever forgive me?

You see – not even German torpedoes can do for us!

Forever yours, Ludwig”

The next day, the nurse tucks these papers swiftly into her medical bag, and promises to post them, with a glance over her shoulder. “I probably shouldn't – but your pair families!” she says, her red-rimmed eyes brimming over with tears.

He thinks about Kurt. He's haunted by the fact that Kurt was wearing one of the cork life jackets. Ludwig tied the straps himself. Kurt probably went down with the ship and Ludwig hopes he died quickly – perhaps a blow to the head might have saved him the terror of drowning. But would the life jacket cause his body to rise up again to the surface? How long would it remain floating? It seems like a terrible end, especially for a man who did not like water. Every night, Kurt comes back to him, in his dreams – sometimes alive and vital, sometimes bobbing blank-faced on the waves.

Mysterious cardboard boxes arrive, containing old army uniforms, probably from the last war, with the buttons cut off. These are thick and very scratchy, spotted with ancient grease stains. Ludwig sorts through a large pile, on the warehouse floor, in an attempt to find the right sized jacket, and after several swaps, tracks down a pair of big-enough boots. He keeps the thin cast-offs he's been wearing for use as

underwear or pyjamas. Now he appreciates what a good invention clothes are. When they are dressed, their backs are daubed with a large cross, in red paint, by one of the guards.

Fritz Kraus asks again if they will be separated from the Nazis and receives the usual non-committal assurances. "Gather up your things. And don't worry, boys, it's all being taken care of."

Stepping out through the doorway, they blink in the unaccustomed daylight. "So, here we go again," Ludwig says to Hilde, in his head. The khaki they're wearing brings out new notes of yellow and green in their sallow, anxious faces, as they queue up in the cobbled yard outside.

## ***A Daylight Robbery***

Hilde is on her way down to collect the breakfast trays when she hears about the sinking. The news passes through the prison like a convulsion, from one person to another.

“Did you hear? Another ship has gone down!” Inge says.

Lotte elaborates: “A transport ship carrying internees!”

“Oh God! Dear God!” one of the women in the toilet queue is crying out.

The stairwell echoes with distress. “Lots of Italians are dead. Some German internees as well!”

A wave of cold goes through Hilde’s body. No, she thinks, no, not me, not mine! She is dizzy and her heart thumps in her throat. She remembers the last paragraph of Ludwig’s last letter, in which he said that he was being moved. Her legs are weak, and she has to lie down on the floor, right where she is, at the base of the metal staircase. For a few moments, she can’t speak or move.

“Oh, I’m sorry! Do you think that...” Inge kneels down beside her, where she’s lying.

Hilde realises that she is behaving strangely, but she needs to feel the cool, solid stone beneath her. A few faces peer curiously down at her - has she fallen? “No,” Inge whispers significantly – “*her husband...*”

Hilde can hear the ripples of panic spreading up the stairs and along the corridor, the running feet, sharp exclamations of distress or disbelief in many languages. It’s as if the moment a woman knows, she has to tell someone else – powerless against the awful force that passes outwards from cell to cell, in concentric rings of anxiety and pain.

Is it possible that Ludwig is dead? Surely she would know it, somehow, if he were! She can still feel him – his voice in her head, his touch on her skin – he’s still

alive inside of her – and surely she would be able to tell? Oh Lord, but what if he is...and her baby boy, her poor motherless, fatherless baby!

Inge helps her up, slowly, to her feet. Hilde can see other women around her absorbing the awful new possibility, their faces contorted, wincing with shock, flinging their hands upwards in despair, shaking their heads, protesting. She can see on their faces how each of them is making rapid internal calculations, trying to account for each of her menfolk who has been interned. It's like a physical blow. A name – husband, son, brother, or uncle – sounds in their head, urgent and terrible, driving all other thought or sensation away, just as it does for her. Even the air in C Wing seems to sour and change. They look at one another with new dread, because some of them are newly bereaved, and no one knows who.

The rush of relief, for those who know their men are safe, is impossible to conceal. Inge has a brief but unmistakable gleam of triumph in her eyes. Hilde can see her trying to compose her face into the correct look of sympathetic concern. Someone has got hold of a newspaper, and is reading the report aloud to a large, silent group.

“Lean on me,” Inge says. “It probably isn't, you know....”

Back in Hilde's cell, a fervent debate starts up in her head. You should not jump to conclusions, she tells herself. People say that one ship has already reached Canada, and that other ships have reached the Isle of Man – why should Ludwig be on the very ship that was sunk? She rummages for his last letter, and spreads it out on her knees, with new dread in her heart. True, the date written on it seems to make this a possibility – but just because a thing is possible, that does not mean it is so! The news is of many Italian casualties. The Germans in the report seemed to be Prisoners of War, and not civilians. There are survivors, and Ludwig is a strong swimmer. He is just a selfish brute, not to write!

Malevolent voices chime in: does she really believe they are safe? Hasn't she noticed how everything goes wrong for them? There's a cold, rational voice: terrible

things happen. There is nothing one can do or think to protect oneself. That way leads to madness. After a while, she springs to her feet and paces the cell in agitation. There are moments when it simply feels true. She can imagine receiving the news of his death – the curtain of fear and darkness that falls so suddenly and completely. She already has a foretaste of how it might feel.

Dr Liebreich comes to sit with Hilde and lets her pace and groan. After a while, at Dr Liebreich's suggestion, they go to the office of the prison governor. To Hilde's surprise, the fierce lady warden in the front office goes in to ask, and the governor agrees to see them, even offering them a seat. He has the usual portrait of the King behind his desk.

"Do you have any more news about the Arandora Star? Will there be a list?" Dr Liebreich asks.

"Nothing yet," he says, with rather more sympathy in his voice than usual.

Back in her cell, Hilde picks up her knitting as a defence against despair. Row by row, the *Pulli* for Ludwig is taking shape. He will wear it on his warm, living body. Please God, they will look back on this dark time. Please God, they will have another child, they will have a life together. Baby John needs him so much. No one else besides Ludwig can ever love him so much, almost as she does. She can't carry all the responsibility of his little life alone. This cannot be the end for them. Knitting feels like an act of faith in the future, now even more than before.

This spirit, however, can only get her so far, and as the light fades, she runs out of wool and a new sense of hopelessness comes over her. The night is a dense jungle of dark and awful shapes. Grotesque reality is almost worse than the distortion of nightmare. It's many hours before she can sleep, and sleep is no longer a refuge, but a swamp filled with vicious new dangers, tricks played by her own mind.

Before dawn, she wakes abruptly - certain that he's alive. She has felt his warmth, in her dreams. But as she remembers, as her eyes open in the darkness,

the awful thoughts come flooding back. She pictures baby John – reaching hands, a crying mouth. Does he still have a father?

It's the longest night of her life. Her sleepless journey through the slow hours makes it all a tiny bit truer. How can she get up and carry on, just as if nothing has happened? How does one even begin to live with this horrific new uncertainty?

Her friends come to Hilde's cell, and bring her breakfast. She tries to wave them away. Finding the face she normally wears to meet the world seems impossible. Getting dressed, doing her hair, walking around and talking to people all seem to require a hypocrisy, a force of will, she can't summon – undone by her night of worry, she doesn't know how to start. "I can't..." she says.

Dr Liebreich strokes Hilde's hair, and holds onto her as she sobs. "I know, my dear. I know," she says.

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Ludwig and the others are marched to the station. The elderly Scottish guards say goodbye, a note of awkward apology in their farewell. "Perhaps ye'll return in better times?" one of them says.

"I hope so," Felix says, politely. Those better times are very hard to imagine.

"I hope so too, son. Haste ye back, an' I hope ye'll not think badly of us? Ye mus' promise us that," the guard urges him.

Their new guards are also soldiers, and there are not enough of them for every carriage in the train. After a debate, it's decided that the Nazis are the priority – the anti-fascist internees, locked in their carriages, can travel without a guard. The men are elated by this news, which makes them feel a little less like prisoners. "You see!" Fritz Kraus takes this as a vindication of his strategy. "They begin to trust us!"

Otto is scornful. "This is the typical thinking of a bourgeois lackey – always trying to find favour with the oppressors."

Where are they going? Perhaps a new camp, closer to home – surely there must be some processing, some reconsideration, after the shipwreck. There's something about a train journey – even to an unknown destination – that lifts Ludwig's spirits. It's a relief watching the lush green of the Scottish countryside go by outside the window. He is alive, and he's moving - for the first time - in the right direction, towards Hilde and baby John! As sunlight flashes through the train window, Ludwig feels a weak fluttering, like a trapped butterfly, in his chest. The British are cruel and idiotic, but surely they aren't monsters. How long does it take to get to London? Perhaps there's at least a chance...

The train slows down as it passes through a level crossing. To Ludwig's confusion, people are smiling and waving. A woman holds her little boy into the air to see them go by – perhaps he's only slightly older than baby John. The men wave back. "They can't see our red crosses!" they say to each other, in delight. "They think we are British troops!" The trapped butterfly inside flaps more painfully, and Ludwig feels his eyes well up with tears. In another life, he thinks to himself, this is how it would be.

"I wonder where we're off to this time?" they try to keep their voices nonchalant. Frankel is still hoping for the Isle of Man, where his wife is being held. The train goes south – Ludwig can tell this much from the position of the sun. They see craggy outcrops and a fine Roman aqueduct, rolling green hills and tumbling-down stone walls.

After a while, the countryside starts to become more familiar, and Otto swears suddenly under his breath. As they enter the tunnel outside Liverpool, Ludwig realises that they will once again be put to sea. The men fall abruptly silent, and their faces are stricken. He's not a superstitious man, but he can't shake off a feeling that surviving the shipwreck in which so many others died is a sort of fluke, a mistake. It feels almost as if fate must seek to rectify this anomaly. They rock and jolt in their



seats with the movement of the train, nauseous with dread. It feels so much like the last time.

When they see the ship, they know what it means. A great hull looms over them. She's painted a darker colour - dull black rather than grey – most of the way up the sides, but the rim and the top decks are a dazzling white. This colour scheme reminds Ludwig of a pint of Guinness, which he's never tasted, but often seen advertised on posters in London.

This time, no one has to say it. This is not a short hop on a ferry. She's huge – similar in size to the Arandora Star. Once again, there's barbed wire on the decks. There's only one funnel, but two tall masts to the fore and the stern. She's newer, Ludwig speculates; he guesses she's powered by oil and not steam.

Because of the angle at which their train draws in, they read the huge letters on the hull backwards: A-R-E-N.....is this possible? Their faces are grey-white; their mouths hang open. Then.... U-D. Ludwig shakes his head, trying to clear the fog of panic which is closing in, trying to think like a scientist. "It's back to front," someone croaks. The name is like a malicious anagram, like the taunting of fate. The new ship is called the "Dunera."

Ludwig feels a huge weight pressing down on his chest. It's all happening again! He somehow felt that it would. Is this, then, to be my coffin, he wonders? The younger of the two brothers – Felix – has begun to tremble visibly.

Hundreds of other internees are already boarding, and can be seen moving on the decks, like a swarm of dark ants. Ludwig and the others get out from the train, and stand on the landing stage once more, queuing to get on. They shuffle reluctantly towards the ship, like condemned men, moving towards the gallows with all the hope crushed out of them.

A group of British soldiers are walking in the opposite direction, leaving the ship. "Look what I got, Jerry!" one of them shouts. They hold small objects in their hands, which they wave delightedly, laughing as if at some private joke. What are

they? At first Ludwig thinks they are medals, but then, as the soldiers pass by, he sees that the things in their hands are actually wrist-watches, on small leather straps. One of them has an old-fashioned pocket watch, which he swings around slowly on a long chain. Another clutches a fist full of pound notes.

“What do they mean?” Ludwig asks Otto. Otto has spent longer in England and can generally interpret their sense of humour. “Perhaps they are going on leave?” But Otto shakes his head, bewildered.

No one in their group can understand, yet, the significance of this strange behaviour.

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Hilde does get up again. She writes to Department P.W.3. of the War Office, S.W.1. – “Dear Sir, Please can you kindly provide informations on the where-about of my husband?” – giving his name and internee number. She works hard to construct alternative scenarios in her head. Clearly, he’s simply making good on his intention to end their correspondence, which is apparently so painful! Or perhaps he’s on another ship in the Atlantic, or in a camp without a functioning postal service? She prays passionately that he has never even heard of the Arandora Star. Most of the time, a brittle hopefulness seems to carry her through, alongside waves of anger towards him for his last two letters. A few times a day, however – when she wakes up, for example, and remembers, or when the names are called for those who’ve received a letter or parcel – her stomach seems to turn over inside her, and she glimpses the chasm beneath her, remembering the feeling of that first night and day.

As time goes on and no reply comes, she finds her hopes and daydreams drifting in another direction: the Isle of Man. This is when she’ll get her baby back, her “Schatzi,” her treasure - it has been promised, or at least implied, many times. Is it too much to hope that Ludwig might also be there, waiting for her? So many people

she meets have husbands there, why not hers, too? If not - well then, perhaps someone over there will at least have some information? There might be military men, she imagines vaguely, with files and field telephones, who understand the system and know how to extract answers from it. There might be other internees from Devon who can tell her where he has been sent. They must at least be better organised – here at Holloway, no one seems to know anything! The prison staff are polished blank of all compassion, worn smooth as pebbles on the beach by many years of friction with the inmates; they are expert at deflecting questions.

Her separation from baby John hurts more and more. For short periods she's able to function, as if another part of her has taken over – a part of her from before she became a mother - but at unexpected moments she's overwhelmed with panic and despair. And as time goes on, her hunger grows. She dreams of searching for him, of following his cries down long corridors, of watching him from a high window as some dangerous animal bounds over the grass, teeth bared. She's like a musical instrument with one string tightened to breaking point. She finds herself staring vacantly at the wall, or at a bare patch of paving stone. She feels herself grow like Frau Mayer, another mother on the same corridor, bovine and stupid, bewildered by the sudden removal of her main purpose in life.

It's not just her, though. This summer she feels the whole world is poised, tense and fearful, on the edge of a cliff, not daring to look down. The battle for France is over, Churchill says on the wireless, and the battle for Britain has begun. At exercise in the yard, they watch vapour trails in the sky overhead, or shade their eyes against the sun, straining to see the markings on the planes.

An air raid warning sounds when they are locked in their cells. Hilde is lying on her narrow bed, moving her fingers over the rough sheet, as Schubert's Piano Sonata in G Major plays in her head. The music stops as abruptly as if a needle has been lifted from a gramophone, and she feels disorientated, irritated, as if she's been asleep. Such a horrible noise! It's like the howl of some immense wounded animal.

She wonders what will happen. She waits for footsteps, the unlocking of doors. Nothing, apparently – except that the sirens change the quality of the night, their panic-inducing wail tingeing everything with an alarming wrongness.

She gets out of bed and puts on her house coat. A few people begin ringing on their bells and shouting out. “What must we do?” “Surely they will not leave us locked up?” They have been training for this for months, buying tins and blacking out windows, digging ditches and erecting shelters – yet here it is, and she feels completely unprepared! Surely there will be orders, bustle and movement, some kind of a plan, perhaps one of the prison wardens in a tin hat? Surely she won’t be left like this, to do nothing – to merely wait, cowering, unable either to protect herself or to escape?

A new sound makes her skin prickle. Oh God, they are coming! That’s the drone of an aeroplane – or is it more than one? Hilde flinches at the noise of anti-aircraft guns – a crackle of sharp explosions, surprisingly close by, then stuttering into the distance. She stands on her chair and looks out of the window. Searchlights criss-cross the sky, illuminating the treetops and the tenement roofs weirdly.

Women begin banging on their doors. Many bells are now ringing. “Let us out! For God’s sake, let us out!” Hilde can feel panic rising up inside her. She’s shaking. She has no gas mask. What must she do? They don’t care – the prison staff will save only themselves! Of course! She has always felt this about them instinctively, but only now does it crystalize into something shockingly obvious. She needs her baby, she has to get to her baby! She has a grotesque image of how it will be to die alone – a mere few miles from her child - pressed up against that metal door, gasping for breath, or under the heavy rubble of this hellish building.

She seems to see herself from the outside – a small woman, locked in a small, shadowy cell. What is this strange new sound in her ears, the straining sensation in her throat? She realises that she’s screaming, along with the others. The whole dark skeleton of the building echoes with noise. They have become a

single, panic stricken mass, a sort of inarticulate, many-throated alarm. Like a cage of wild monkeys, they shriek and slam. "Oh God, oh God, let us out, for pity's sake!" Metallic banging travels in waves - an irregular, syncopated rhythm, up and down the corridors - thundering, with the fast, erratic heartbeat in her head. The bare brick, stone and metal reverberate like a bell, a pealing cacophony, in the crazy, lit-up night.

Then, at last, the wardens come. The long, drawn-out cry which rings through the corridors seems to change pitch, coming down a semi-tone, and loses a little of its intensity. Hilde hears the familiar sound of brisk footsteps, keys jangling, of doors along the corridor being unlocked. The relief takes her back to her childhood – she remembers waking from a very real-seeming nightmare which filled her bedroom and shook her body and hearing the reassuring tread of her mother on the stairs. Then come the voices of the wardens – sharp, reproachful, somewhat shaken themselves, yet not unfriendly. "What a racket!" "Goodness me, there's no need for that."

Hilde's door is unlocked. The terror pumping through her body takes a while to subside, leaving her weak and wobbly. She feels her way along the corridor to Dr Liebreich's cell, where Inge sits shivering on the bed, her white face streaked with tears. They sit together in darkness, clinging onto each other's arms, jumping with the crump of every distant explosion, and waiting for the All Clear.

The following morning, pale and fragile from lack of sleep, they are called in front of the prison governor. He lectures them sternly on their "excessive and uncalled for" behaviour. "I had intended to organise an air-raid drill," he says, in a clipped, defensive voice, "but on reflection, I considered it unnecessary – a waste of my time and yours. Do you not realise that this prison is one of the safest places in London? The thick walls will protect you against any blast." He speaks as if this were completely self-evident, clear to even the stupidest child. They listen in silence, hang their heads, and sniff, guiltily. It's clear that they have not behaved as the British require. He seems to see something despicable - something foreign - in their

cowardice. "I am disappointed in you," he says. "Please try to control yourselves in future."

Hilde looks at the subdued, traumatised women all around her – women who have been driven from their homes and separated from their families. Frau Spitzer is plucking at her shawl with frail, quivering hands; Estelle Daalman, (who says little in the day, but pleads loudly in Flemish every night in her sleep), is wiping a tear from her cheek.

Dr Liebreich keeps her eyes steady, and her face impassive. "He is a bully," she says, afterwards. "I have met his kind before."

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Ludwig and the other internees queue up along the pier in the dusk, beneath the huge cliff face of the new ship: the HMT Dunera. They move slowly along the wooden plank-way, as a light rain begins to dampen their shoulders. The queue leads them through a narrow doorway, into another part of the landing stage.

Ludwig watches the men ahead of him, making their way with the usual slow scuffle and lurch. There are a lot of backwards glances, and he notices heads tilting towards each other: the men in front look anxiously around, and then turn to the man immediately behind. He realises that a whisper is passing along the line, from the front. "There's a search! Hide your things. Pass it on." Ludwig raises his eyebrows – he's used to being searched and has nothing left to hide – but he passes the message obediently back to Otto, behind him.

Then he steps through the doorway and knows immediately that something is wrong. His body seems to know it before his brain – he feels a shiver along the back of his neck, and then the heart-thumping panic of a trapped animal. The door swings shut behind him.

There are many soldiers, and lots of noise. It's getting dark now, and the narrow landing stage is illuminated by a dim yellow electric light. Ludwig feels a weird disconnectedness: it's like a nightmare in which certain details seem troubling - significant, even - but don't quite make sense. Several people are shouting at once, but their voices are muffled and at first Ludwig can make out only swearing.

He looks around, trying to work out what's going on. Ahead of him, Geller stands with his arms outstretched, waiting, resigned, for this familiar indignity, in the usual vaguely Christ-like pose. Erwin Blumenthal is kneeling, with his hands cupped protectively over his crooked nose: he had it broken before he left Germany. But what is that noise? Beneath all the shouting, someone is moaning. There is a dull thumping sound.

On the wooden floorboards, there are piles and piles of things, hard to distinguish in the sour light. Empty wallets lie scattered about, gaping like new wounds, their cloth linings pulled out of the worn leather. Open suitcases spew cascades of crumpled clothing; books have fallen so that their pages are crushed or balanced on an end. There are several white cloths on the floor. At first, Ludwig thinks they are table linen or towels, perhaps from the ship – but then he realises that they are traditional Jewish prayer shawls.

He sees and hears only fragments. "You want a receipt, you piece of shit? I'll give you a fucking receipt." There are grunts, and gasps, and Ludwig feels sick, not clear what's happening, yet somehow already tainted by it.

From elsewhere, he hears a small, indignant voice, quivering with fear. "What is the meaning of this? That is my personal property!"

Blumenthal is scrabbling on the floor, trying to pick something up. "What are you waiting for? Move along. Get a *fucking* move on."

One Tommy calls back to the others. "This lot aint got no kit! Nothing in their pockets, neither."

“Das Geld, Jerry. Wo ist das *fucking* Geld?” Ludwig is shocked to see that just a few feet in front of him, a cowering man is being hit with the butt of a rifle.

Ludwig’s mouth opens in slow astonishment, but there’s no time to protest – it’s his turn. He’s beckoned forward. It’s cold, but the soldier in front of him (a short man, with the usual close-clipped hair) is wiping sweat from his forehead. The soldier flexes his arms, as if to stretch an aching muscle - his cheeks are flushed, and there’s an oddly altered look in his eyes. He wears a beret with insignia – a crossed rifle and a spade. Ludwig raises his arms, to allow the soldier to search him. The soldier pats Ludwig down briskly and feels in all his pockets.

Then he sees Ludwig’s wrist watch. “Take it off,” he says. He makes a small beckoning gesture with his fingers. Ludwig hesitates, and looks around. The watch hasn’t worked since he swum for his life, but it’s all he has left, and he hopes to get it mended one day. Besides, which new regulation forbids the men from wearing watches?

The soldier sighs wearily, as if he’s tired of this routine, steps back, takes a swipe, and punches Ludwig in the jaw. A sharp sensation fills Ludwig’s head – the precursor to pain – and he lets out a startled cry. At first he feels shock more than anything else. He staggers, then sinks down onto all fours. The soldier kicks him in the ribs, once and then twice. Indignation wells up inside him, swiftly followed by fear. He curls up to protect himself, flinching in anticipation.

“Come on!” the soldier says. “Or do you want some more?” Ludwig dares a quick glance up at him, and with trembling hands, he unbuckles his watch strap, holding it out to the soldier in surrender. The soldier snatches it, looking disgusted.

A few feet away from the group, a tall man stands smoking a cigarette. From his prone position, Ludwig can see the three stripes on his arm – he’s a Sergeant. Geller is just in front of Ludwig and tries to appeal to this bystander. “I must protest!” Geller’s voice is indignant, high-pitched, and trembling with emotion. “This is no search! Sir, this is a daylight robbery!”



“Why..?” adds Blumenthal, who is also nearby, holding his head in his hands. “They took...they *stole*....this isn't a search....”

The Sergeant looks angry at being addressed like this. “By the time this lot have finished with you, you'll be lucky to have your belly buttons left,” he says. “Don't you know there's a war on?”

“But we are no Nazis! We are not Prisoners of War. We are refugees!” protests Geller. The well-worn response is almost automatic by now; it has become their creed.

“Do you think they care?” the Sergeant gives a shrug and stubs out his cigarette. “There's a lot worse than this going on in Paris, I can promise you. As far as we're concerned, the only good German is a dead German.” But he shouts to the soldiers, anyway. “Move them along, boys. You won't get much out of this lot.”

Otto's just behind. He helps Ludwig to his feet. Upright again, Ludwig's head spins, and his limbs are weak. They move along. Ludwig holds his cheek, which burns with pain, and tastes blood in his mouth.

He can't believe what has happened. He's grown used to British soldiers – their ruddy faces, their down-beat humour, their enthusiasm to serve their country in any way they're told. These men, though, are altogether different. They seem crazed, intoxicated, and inexplicably brutal. Are they drunk?

Otto catches the eye of another Tommy as they pass. The soldier appears to jump, visibly. “Tim? Is that you?” Otto says.

“Lippy?” the soldier clears his throat in disbelief. Otto has not lost his knack for finding another Communist in every situation, and after all, they're in his hometown again. Ludwig has not heard this nickname before, a shortened version of Otto's surname – and perhaps a jokey reference to his love of discussion.

“Comrade!”

“Your lot just robbed us! What the Hell is this?” Otto says. “They can't do this! What's got into them? They're like animals!”

The soldier looks startled. The two of them stare at each other helplessly for a moment – Ludwig can almost see their brains working, as they try to grope their way back into a past identity. The soldier’s face crumples suddenly, and he rubs his eyes with the back of his hand. “I’m sorry. I never knew it was you!” he protests. “You know we’re not like that!” He’s as indignant as if he’s the one who has been attacked. “You know we’re not really like that!” Otto is at a loss for words. The rules seem to have been altered in some new way.

There’s a warning shout from one of the other Privates, and they move on.

Dazed and shocked, cowering and limping, Ludwig and the others are herded up the long steps and onto the ship. On the deck, more suitcases and discarded belongings lie about in piles: letters and photographs, clothes and hairbrushes, silk neck-ties and crushed hats, a splintered fiddle and a smashed-up accordion. It is like the debris on a battlefield. Apparently, they are not the only ones to have been “searched” in this way – it must have been quite some operation.

Fritz Kraus realises that they are being taken to the same part of the ship as the Nazi seamen. He stops walking. “We must protest!” his voice is shaking but determined. “We will not be kept together in the same place with these men. We are anti-fascists!” They all stop and murmur their agreement. Ludwig wonders what will happen – will this provoke the guards further? He’s afraid of their reaction. However, the men escorting them look bemused and exasperated, just as usual, and a pair go off to ask their superiors.

For twenty minutes or so, they stand around in the dark, on deck, waiting for an answer. Indignant and still breathing hard, they compare stories, in urgent whispers. Ludwig’s ribs begin to ache, from the kicks – there is a sharp pain each time he inhales.

“Not since the Gestapo have I witnessed such thuggish behaviour!” exclaims Erwin Blumenthal, wiping a trickle of blood from his nostril.

Felix Kraus whispers urgently: “this lot are crooks. Did you see the one with the tattoos?”

“My tobacco!” grunts Jakob Kowalski. “Can you believe that *gonif* took my tobacco?”

“They...I can’t believe, they took my wedding ring!” stammers Josef Brenner, examining a rip in his pocket.

Ludwig watches the ship’s crew - Indian Lascars in tattered, collarless shirts and baggy cotton trousers - making ready to depart, hauling on ropes and scaling ladders. A few lights show on the black water, and a breeze blows in from the sea. Ludwig can see the dark shapes of two elaborate clock-towers, topped with what look to him like eagle statues (but surely, he thinks, he must be mistaken), in profile against the moonlit sky.

They are taken to the back of the ship. Climbing down metal steps, they are driven into a mess room below the waterline, underneath a deck occupied by Italians, also survivors of the *Arandora Star*. Despite all their efforts, the Nazi seamen are in an adjoining mess. There are wooden tables and benches, but no mattresses or blankets.

They complain to each other, comparing losses and injuries, and asking each other – repeatedly – if they imagined it – has everyone else seen what they saw? Ludwig once believed the British to be so principled. He has often told Hilde how reasonable, measured, and civilised they are. Perhaps Ernst and his mother are right, however, that under their own Hitler, the British would be just as bad, or that people everywhere are becoming like animals. It doesn’t take much, apparently, to turn men into bullies, he thinks gloomily – it seems that many of them are just waiting for an excuse.

Some of the men try to sleep on the tables and benches, while Ludwig and many others lie down on the floor. It’s cold and uncomfortable, and the hard surface makes his ribs hurt much worse. Heinz is whimpering like a dog. “Come now, young

man,” Ludwig says to him, but he feels too low himself to offer much consolation. His head throbs with pain, as they move out again into the ocean.

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Hilde sits in her cell, waiting for the warning to sound, her knitting to hand, and her housecoat over her nightdress. Now the air raids are very frequent. There it is! The noise makes her feel sick with apprehension, but now it’s dulled a little by habit. She nods and picks up her things. They’re early tonight.

A harassed prison warden works her way along the corridor with her keys, huffing and puffing about it as if the internees are personally responsible for this disruption to routine.

“And you can hand over that bloomin’ pipe,” she says to Inge, a few doors down. “For all we know, you could be sending up signals to the enemy planes!”

Inge gives a wounded gulp and begins to sob.

“I’ve never heard such nonsense,” Dr Liebreich intervenes, from her cell. She sounds as if she’s about to give the warden a piece of her mind, then seems to stop herself, perhaps remembering that the warden too has family at risk from the bombs. “Don’t worry my dear, I’m sure you shall have it back,” she calls over to Inge.

Hilde slides along the shadowy parts of the corridor (these visits are now tolerated, although not strictly allowed) and joins her friends. They sit huddled in Dr Liebreich’s cell, shuddering through the dreadful, man-made storm outside. Inge is smarting from the loss of her recorder and can no longer distract them with music. Instead, she stands on a chair and gives a commentary on the flashes and beams that light the sky. From time to time, one of the others squashes up next to her to have a look. The rooftops are backlit with the orange glow of fires, and the sky is a dark red. The sight of it is not so bad – it’s almost like a firework display, and they let out “oohs” and “ahs” at the shifting interplay of searchlight and tracer fire – but the

noises are awful. The others listen – sometimes rocking slightly, sometimes gasping or moaning - to the crackles and pocks, deep thuds and crumps, as if some new species of giant is partying over the city.

“Whereabouts? Which direction?” Lotte asks. Hilde feels each sound with the whole of her body; each explosion seems to take place somewhere inside her chest. She waits – not daring to breathe - for Inge to make up her mind.

“I think it’s the east, again.....”

Hilde breathes again, deeply, and then feels ashamed of her relief, because someone else’s child must be there – but not hers. Please God, not hers.

In the morning, the air is misty with smoke and plaster dust, and people talk about what a bad night it had been, and stare into space, distracted, half asleep. At exercise, the urgent clang of ambulance bells, the shrill of whistles and the indignant wail of police car sirens can be heard from beyond the prison walls, like the call of exotic birds in an unfamiliar new jungle. What is life like out there? Can this really go on? It feels like a peculiar dream.

They are no longer allowed to listen to the radio. “But how will we know what’s going on?” protests Inge. Are wounded people wandering the streets, is there still food in the shops, do the trains still run? What hope is there for an elderly refugee couple with a baby, in this national emergency? Certainly, the fires are still burning – Hilde can see the smoke. They plead with the wardens for information. One of the wardens manages to reassure Hilde slightly, by reminding her haughtily of the “pluck” and “spirit” of this island. “London can take it,” she maintains, grimly, but what does this actually mean?

Letters are slow, because of the censor. It’s a relief to hear from her mother-in-law. She doesn’t say much about the bombs – and Hilde worries about whether they are using the shelter. Instead, Frau Weiss wants to know when Hilde can take the baby. He’s quite well, she writes, but “needs his mother” (what does that mean? Hilde wishes she were more specific!) In truth, she writes, he makes a lot of work for

a couple of their age. This annoys Hilde – Frau Weiss writes almost as if this separation is something that Hilde has chosen.

Frau Weiss also writes that a mysterious card has been received from Ludwig, with only the words “I AM SAFE.” What can this mean? She has asked Ernst, and even Mrs Rose, but no one seems to know. Does it mean that he was *not* on the ship that sunk, or that he was on it, and was rescued? Is he wounded, or sick – and if not, then why doesn’t he explain? Still, it’s something, at least, and a huge relief. Hilde is just as confused, and asks her friends, but it’s a puzzle to everyone.

Dr Liebreich comes to find Hilde, when she’s rinsing out her underwear in a basin of warm water. The moment Hilde sees her face, she realises that something is wrong.

“Oh no! Not my husband....” She removes her hands so suddenly that the water slops over the edge of the basin.

“No, no.” Dr Liebreich hastens to reassure her. She drops her voice. “It’s just that we are to be moved, next week. I have seen the list.”

Why, then, is Dr Liebreich looking at her like that? Fear grips Hilde. “Am I not on it?” she whispers.

“You are on it.” Dr Liebreich pauses, choosing her words carefully, her beetling black eyebrows puckered in a frown. “But.... the children in Council care are to come with us. The children who are being privately fostered are to follow soon by separate transport.”

It takes a moment for this to sink in. “My boy, my little boy – he isn’t on the list?” Hilde’s voice is hoarse.

Dr Liebreich shakes her head sadly, in confirmation.

Wild fury wells up inside Hilde. How can a mere baby, her little *Schatzi*, be expected to follow “by separate transport”? What about the bombs that are falling every night – how can she leave him amid all this? How can arrangements be made with Ludwig’s parents, who speak almost no English? She has no faith in these

promises – she has seen how badly organised the authorities are. They have lied to her! She has been betrayed!

Dr Liebreich speaks gently. “The children in these Council run institutions must be a priority. We hear alarming stories. They are not being properly looked after. Some of them have fallen ill, they are underfed – their mothers are so worried.....”

Hilde cannot be magnanimous about this. She wants to throw the basin of water at Dr Liebreich. Instead, she kicks it over with her foot, and then sinks down in the puddle, soaking her skirt, and covering her face with her hands. Dr Liebreich tries to comfort her, but Hilde is too angry.

“Go away!” she howls. “Go away and leave me alone!”

Later on, Hilde complains bitterly to Inge. “How can she be like that! She is like a machine. It isn’t natural to do so much for other people.”

Inge looks at her quizzically, almost accusingly. She’s always very loyal to Dr Liebreich.

“What?” Hilde demands.

“You know about her husband?” Inge says.

Hilde shakes her head. Dr Liebreich seems so self-sufficient and is also older - Hilde hasn’t pictured her with a husband, except perhaps in the very distant past.

“I didn’t know, either,” Inge goes on. “She doesn’t talk about it. I only heard about it from Frau Biedermann, who knew them in Vienna. Her husband was one of those arrested after the Anschluss and was killed not long afterwards. Apparently,” Inge’s voice is hushed, and her eyes widen, “they sent his ashes back to her, in a package in the post.”

Hilde shakes her head. She doesn’t want to hear such things. She has no emotion to spare for other people – only for herself. Besides, there’s something awful in the whispered exchange of these stories – a sort of horrified fascination, a process that seems to contaminate them all with the horrific deeds of others.

“How bitter do you think that would make you?” Inge says. “Since then, she can’t think of herself, only of others. Perhaps she’s like a machine because she needs to be.”

Hilde almost wishes she didn’t know. She feels sorry for her friend, but what good does that do? She doesn’t want to treat her differently and feels instinctively that Dr Liebreich will not want her pity.

Later on, Dr Liebreich tries to apologise. “I’m sorry,” she says, stiffly. “Perhaps I should not have told you like that. Perhaps I could have given you more chance to absorb – and not offered excuses – forgive me...we all become a little hardened by these times.”

“No,” Hilde says, although she still throbs with pain and disappointment. “If I had to hear it, I’d much rather hear it from you.”

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Ludwig gives up trying to sleep at around dawn. He’s very cold and his jaw is hurting. One thought thrums through his body, as urgent as the chugging of the engine. It has been fighting its way to the surface all night. He has to find a way out, in case this ship goes down.

The memories of his last voyage are more real to him than his new surroundings. First there will be a loud noise, then the lights will go out, then comes the horrific scramble to stay alive, the insane upside-down world of sudden death, bodies floating all around.

Well, the lights are still on, at least – electric side lights, illuminating everything with a weak, bluish glow. There’s a sharp pain in his jaw, and the side of his face is sore and swollen. He feels it timidly, trying to assess the damage, but it’s difficult to tell without a mirror. One of his teeth feels wobbly.



Moving around a bit might warm him up, too. He rises to his feet, swaying with the movement of the ship, and begins picking his way over the close-packed bodies which lie all around him, moaning and cursing softly in their half-conscious state.

He looks into another large mess room, on the next level, also crammed with men – Italians - on benches, tables, even propped up against the wall in a seated position. Some sleep with troubled looks on their faces, others stare drowsily into space: they make Ludwig think of the bodies after a terrible battle. The floor is wooden, but the walls and ceiling are mostly made from sheet metal, welded together, thickly painted, reverberating with the engine.

From the smell of urine, he finds a primitive sort of toilet, to the front of the Italian quarters. A greyish light filters in through a tiny port hole. There is a long open gutter, drained by sea water which trickles in from one end, slops around a bit, and is discharged towards the stern. Ludwig relieves himself and continues his search.

He finds a door, but it's locked. Another entrance is obstructed with barbed wire. It's hard to move about, there are so many people, even in the gangways, mumbling in Italian and squirming sleepily as he tries to step over them.

He climbs the central stairwell. Grey daylight, and fresh air – this is more like it! On an upper deck, he emerges into a small outside area, about twenty-foot square. Is this his escape route? Scanning the barbed wire rapidly, he sees with horror that it is entirely fenced in, and that the wire gate is securely locked. He's trapped! He has no access to the rest of the deck or the railing, and no way to escape should the ship go down. He certainly can't reach any lifeboats – he can't even jump overboard. Ludwig feels a deep horror at this realisation. Unless someone unlocks them, they are in a floating cage.

A soldier stands guard outside the barbed wire barrier. Beyond, Ludwig can see the huge grey expanse of the Irish Sea. There are other ships in the distance – it seems that they are part of a large transport, accompanied by two destroyers.

“You! Back down below!” the soldier just outside the wire orders him.

Downstairs, the others are stirring, waking to new spasms of outrage and anxiety. Where are they heading – is it Canada again? And what about this new ship, which seems to have the atmosphere of a floating concentration camp? “Can we get up on deck?” Otto asks Ludwig, and he has to shake his head, grimly. Everyone’s talking at once, and the metal chamber echoes with their angry objections. Ludwig puts his hands over his ears and waits for it to pass.

Later on, they are ordered on deck for exercise. They stumble up the stairs and are unlocked from their wire prison. The deck is large, the wind and air seemed overwhelming: Ludwig feels dizzy with the light and space.

Mounted Lewis machine guns are stationed at either end of the deck. The sentries keep their fingers on the triggers, and aim at the internees, and look as if they would like to let rip. Other armed soldiers stand on the bridge and along the deck.

“Move, you lazy fucking scum.” Ludwig is given a push: the idea, it seems, is to walk around the deck in a large circle. The huge sea makes him feel small. In the distance, he catches a glimpse of the other vessels in the convoy.

One of the guards is shouting. He has a strong accent, and Ludwig can hardly understand him. “Faster, Jerry, faster, git a bloody move on, you sorry fucking German cunt! You cabbage-eating piece of shit!”

Their strange clothes cause confusion. “This lot ‘ave tried to dress themselves up as our boys! Bit of a crappy effort, eh? Look at that sorry fucker, with ‘is trousers comin’ down!” Brenner tries to hold them up with one hand, as they are urged into a clumsy run. The guards laugh.

“How dare you, Jerry? You’re a fucking insult to that uniform!” one of them swerves abruptly from amusement back to rage.

“D’you think I want the bloody thing?” Otto mutters, breathless with jogging.

“Oh! Cheeky bastard, are we?” The guard trips him easily, and he falls heavily to the deck, where this is followed up with a few hard kicks.

The men falter, in shock – their instinct is to help Otto back up to his feet – but the guards shout at them to keep running. The wind whistles through the masts and ropes, and the spray dampens Ludwig’s face. So, this is what it’s like, Ludwig thinks to himself. He’s always suspected that he’s no hero, and now he knows it for sure. He feels angry and ashamed.

The wake of the ship stretches behind them, like a wide, white highway. There are still piles of suitcases lying around – some seem to have been forced open with bayonets, the contents wilting mournfully in puddles, or flapping in the breeze.

The Lascars – the ship’s Indian crew - crouch on their heels, watching the internees exercise. They eat with their hands from a large pan, and grin at one another. It occurs to Ludwig that it’s probably a novelty to them, seeing white men so degraded.

They are given a final push, and the gate is locked behind them. The men stagger back down to their quarters. There is no end, it seems, to this nightmare. Someone has been through their things! Their clothes are spread around the hold, trouser pockets turned inside out, the lining cut out of a jacket.

There are howls of outrage, as they take frantic stock of what has happened. More items are missing! While they were out on deck, other guards have been through their belongings. Josef Brenner had hidden a brass cigarette lighter and discovers that it’s gone – another man has lost his wedding ring, which he’d concealed in his sock whilst boarding. Worst of all, Heinz has lost his precious silver fountain pen. Disbelief is soon replaced by rage, and then despondency. The lighter, like Ludwig’s watch, hasn’t worked since the shipwreck, but these items represent for their owners a precious link with a past identity. Heinz is inconsolable.

Slumped miserably on his small patch of floor that night, Ludwig thinks of the bag of gold coins – safe, or so he hopes, in a safety deposit box in London, where

they can be used to support his family. He loved the bank in the City, with its marble entrance hall and tiled floor – the clerk called him Sir, and the system was so efficient, with the box, the signature, the little keys! It was one of the first places they visited, when they arrived in London, and he remembers walking out with Hilde afterwards, arm in arm, and how this small transaction gave him such a sense of triumph, of investment, and of belonging. At least the coins are not here, to be stolen by corrupt so-called soldiers. Perhaps one should be thankful for these small mercies.

He can hear Josef Brenner sobbing in a nearby hammock. There's something disgusting and grating about the noise – all this fuss, over a cigarette lighter! The Communist, Jakob Kowalski, is lying on a table between them. His large, muscular body looks like a mountain range, in the dim side-lights. "For God's sake shut up, you little Pisher, or I'll come over and throttle you myself," Kowalski growls. Brenner tries to suppress his sobs, but they still emerge every now and then in small, choking explosions.

Ludwig thinks of Hilde. "Darling, I cannot tell you of the conditions on this second ship. It is horrible...". A wave of desperation washes over him: he remembers her voice, and the little songs she sometimes sings to the baby, and the way she climbed out of the Rhine, in her blue swimming costume with the red piping. He thinks, with an ache of longing, of the softness of her breasts and the inside of her thighs, of the warm, wet slick of hair at her crotch, of the noises she made beneath their shiny pink eiderdown.

He remembers the day they were married; how they stood on the steps of the Town Hall afterwards, while the London traffic roared by. Ernst fooled around with the marriage certificate ("I have in my hands a piece of paper") and captured the moment on his Leica. The sun came out from behind the clouds, and he pulled her towards him for a newly-entitled, shamelessly public kiss.

He's moving away from her, further every hour. He wouldn't want her to join him – not like this – even if it could be arranged. He doesn't want her to know about this way of living. There'd be something humiliating about even confessing the depths to which he's sunk. Who could care about this stinking body, locked up in a metal hold? Still, she remains in his mind, like a small chink of light, as he falls asleep.

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It's not the departure Hilde hoped for. It's now with a sense of dread, and not eager anticipation, that she waits for the day to come. Women with children avoid her, as if her situation might be contagious – and women without children can't be expected to understand. She does not want to become a sad person – there are too many of these already - but she feels that she's like a composition in which one minor chord begins to dominate all other refrains.

She packs carefully, only to have the contents of her case turned out onto the floor along with everyone else's, during a final search. It seems somehow symbolic of the chaos brought to their lives by internment. The reception-area room becomes like a jumble sale, with piles of clothes and personal belongings everywhere, and kneeling women, trying to reassemble their things and cram them back into suitcases. "Just in case we should somehow have acquired a radio transmitter," Lotte mutters to her neighbour, causing rebellious giggles.

"Or a time bomb!" suggests Inge.

"Or perhaps a parachute?" suggests Dr Liebreich, dryly, refolding a large item of underwear. A sticker is slapped onto the side of each case: "Rushen Camp, I.O.M." They are each given a circular disk with their name on it, to thread through a button hole on their coats.

There's something magical about having their handbags restored.

Respectable matriarchs and dowdy housewives, fashionable young girls and prim elderly ladies, refugee women of Hampstead, Ealing or Bethnal Green, they all clutch these - their precious and eternally useful "Einkaufstaschen" - like a kind of armour against the world. Hilde regains the calf-skin handbag that Ludwig bought for her in Switzerland, with which she made the crossing to England. She also receives ten shillings in money, and the other tools of her past life - house keys, wedding ring, lipstick. Is it possible they are becoming human beings once more?

Laden down with cases, bags and rolled-up blankets, wearing their coats and hats, with timidly hopeful smiles on most faces, they form a long queue in the soft drizzle of the prison courtyard, and look up at the high windows for the last time.

Two large red buses are parked inside the prison gates. The children! A great surge of emotion runs the length of the queue, as they crane their necks to see. There they are, delivered up by the stern, unsmiling Women's Voluntary Service; small, disorientated figures, scanning the queue shyly, with a heart-breaking diffidence - then claimed, squashed into coat buttons by forceful embraces, their faces touched and stroked wonderingly. "Liebling!" "Liebchen!" "Boychik!" "Mein Schatz!"

It's painful for Hilde to watch, but the transformation is extraordinary. Frau Mayer - always so lost and bewildered, a vague, child-like lump herself - is instantly restored to new levels of strength and purpose, as if awakening from a bad dream. They reassert their ownership - scrubbing at faces with handkerchiefs, scolding fondly, straightening collars and smoothing down hair: "but so thin! So pale!" The little ones cling on like limpets, the older ones squirm in angry embarrassment, and wipe a tear from their eyes. They stare at each other with fascinated hunger, like the missing piece in a puzzle. Hilde recognises this with an ache in her chest that makes it hard for her to breathe.

They climb onto the buses, and then sit waiting for nearly an hour – more than long enough for the children to begin to wriggle and need the toilet, and for the women, who've had an early start, to start yawning and wilting. Then, at last, the engines choke into life, and they drive through the huge, heavy gates, and out of Holloway Prison.

## ***The Barbed Wire Holiday***

“Tell us again about the Somme, Herr Hirschwitz, and how you thought your time had come...” Heinz begs. He lies in a hammock, scratching his arm, which has an ugly red rash. They have hit rougher weather, and the hammocks tilt and swing with the movements of the ship. The stink of vomit combines with the other unpleasant smells in the hold. Some of the men are too sick to do anything but moan; Ludwig finds he’s not too badly affected, except for an overwhelming listlessness. The younger boys, especially, are eager for any story that will provide a distraction.

“Tell us about the French girls, and how they took pity on you, that night when you were drunk and lost...” prompts Felix, from his hammock.

“Not again!” Hirschwitz protests. He’s a bit older than the others, and retains a certain dignity, even though he sits in his underpants, waiting for his trousers to dry. After a week or two without shaving, they have begun sprouting strange beards, like the mould that grows on rotting food. Otto’s red, wiry curls have spread down to his chin, thick and springy as a scouring pad.

“Tell us about that place you used to visit in Berlin, Herr Stein, and the girl with *exceptional muscular control*...” Felix tries again. Stein, a dull, respectable-seeming book keeper, has an encyclopaedic recall of the back-street brothels of the early thirties, and can recite their specialisms like a restaurant critic.

“If you like,” Stein agrees. “Let’s see... I always looked for somewhere clean, with healthy looking girls. You can get them a lot cheaper near the Alex...” As he talks, he strokes the wispy fuzz now growing on his chin with his long, bony fingers. His nose gleams pale in the side-lights.

Once a day, “carriers” come, bringing food for the kitchen from the Quartermaster’s Store – a boy from Leipzig, and sometimes another from Danzig - they usually manage to exchange a few words. They say that the ship is full of



refugees, category “B” and even “C”. They have been told they are going to Canada, and believe (or hope, at any rate) that some of their families are travelling on one of the other ships in the convoy.

The thefts continue with depressing regularity, every time they go on deck for exercise. An Officer volunteers to take care of any belongings they are still worried about, if they will give them over to him for “safe keeping.” This sets off long debates. Can he be trusted? “He’s an Officer,” Fritz reminds them, “and of a different class!” They have little left to lose, in any case – so it’s a mostly theoretical issue. Should one succumb to this new, hard-bitten cynicism about the British, or is it important to cling to the shreds of a previous admiration? Ludwig can’t decide. To lose all faith in the British seems, to him, to be close to losing all faith in humanity – because what does it matter, then, who wins the war? Otto is as usual full of scorn – how gullible they are! In the end, a few pitiful trinkets are labelled and handed over with great ceremony, and never seen again.

Chess fever takes hold of most of their group. To start with, playing chess reminds Ludwig too much of Kurt, but soon he realises that some kind of distraction is really essential to help him get through the days. Otto makes some chess pieces out of the uncooked doughy centre of their bread. It is hard to tell them apart, which leads to many quarrels (“it’s a bishop, I tell you!”) although the audience are usually eager to weigh in on one side or the other (“no, it’s a pawn, you idiot – don’t you remember your third move?”) The covers of an exercise book are made into a chess board, with the help of a precious pencil stub. Games go on all day and night, to a chorus of impassioned advice from the watching “*kiebitzers*”. In between the phantom torpedo attacks which punctuate his sleep, Ludwig often dreams of chess; or these preoccupations merge into a lethally complex pattern of troop ships and U boats, unfolding over an immense chequered ocean, according to a series of mysterious moves.

Oppenheimer tries to follow a Kosher diet, which consists mostly of sago. He spends hours praying, rocking, moving his lips. Ludwig feels sorry for him – he seems a lonely figure, even in the crowded hold. One day, Ludwig sits next to him to eat, and tries to make conversation.

He notices that Oppenheimer has no food. “Is there nothing you can have, today?”

“I’m fasting,” Oppenheimer says.

On a nearby table, a group of Christian converts bow their heads and put their hands together to say Grace. “Look at them!” Oppenheimer says. It is the first time Ludwig has noticed him betray any irritation. “Who do they convince, with their talk of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost? They think that by abandoning their faith, they can change their destiny. Yet they are still Jews: it is marked on their faces.”

“You sound like you blame them...” Ludwig says. “But they are sincere in their faith, as you are in yours.”

“Oh no!” Oppenheimer says. “Blame is the wrong word. I just pity them for their weakness. Those stories you all tell – they are not good for the ears of the young. Without our faith, we are nothing. I feel sadness for the children of those who marry out. Those like yourself, who are lost to any faith - neither one thing nor another.”

‘Aha!’ thinks Ludwig. He’s always suspected that Oppenheimer disapproves of him. He likes to think of himself as liberated rather than lost and is a little insulted. Perhaps being persecuted does not necessarily make one a better person? And why, he wonders, is religion so often linked to this feeling of superiority towards others, and a condescending pity towards the ‘unenlightened’? But he’s also curious – perhaps it has something to do with missing his father. He wonders if Oppenheimer can help him to understand.

“I’m sorry,” Oppenheimer says heavily, as if reading his mind. “Today, I am struggling.”

“What’s wrong?” Ludwig knows as he speaks that it’s a stupid question. “I mean, beyond the obvious.” He looks around with a rueful smile.

“I believe today is....” Oppenheimer breathes deeply. Astonishingly, he still has his spectacles, although the glass lens is completely missing from one hole, and Ludwig is shocked to see the gleam of un-spilled tears in his eyes. “Today is Tisha b’Av.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.” There is a long silence between them, over the thrum of the engine. Ludwig wonders which bothers Oppenheimer the most – the passing of time, or the fact that his dream has not come true. He feels oddly disappointed on the other man’s behalf. “There’s a few hours left. Perhaps something is going to happen...”

“The only thing that could happen is we could all drown,” Oppenheimer says, angrily.

“Perhaps your dream meant Tisha b’Av next year?” Ludwig ventures.

Oppenheimer looks at him. “Yes, I suppose that could be it,” he says, but the idea hardly seems consoling.

“And what is one supposed to do on Tisha b’Av?” Ludwig asks. For a moment, he wants the older man to tell him everything – to explain all the things his father never taught him about the Jewish faith. They certainly have the time, stuck here in this eternal mess room. But would it help? Ludwig suspects that it’s too late – he doesn’t have the patience, and something in him distrusts it. Perhaps you have to learn these things as a child, he thinks, if they are to “take”, when you still have that hunger for magic, that sense of awe.

“It is a day of mourning,” Oppenheimer says. “In the dream, my grandfather said that we will be free, but not permitted to celebrate – and perhaps this is why. We eat an egg dipped in ashes, before we fast. We sit on the floor, and think of what we have lost, and mourn our dead.”

“So pretty much business as usual, on the Dunera?” Ludwig observes.

Oppenheimer does not smile.

Where are they going? Ludwig tries to remember what he once knew about navigation, and the geometry of a sphere – together with Stein the book-keeper he makes calculations in pencil on a piece of toilet paper, based on the angle of the sun. At first, the Canada theory is a strong favourite. Then things get confusing, and the measurements stop making sense. At exercise, they lose sight of the rest of the convoy. When the sun comes out from behind the clouds, the water shines green, and the large, rolling waves are like hills, almost too bright to look at - they are all alone, in the wide expanse of the sea.

It is over two months since he last heard from Hilde. He has no news of the war – London could have been flattened by bombs; the invasion could have taken place. They could be interned as well – perhaps they are even on another ship, although probably they are still in Hornsey. They are always there in his head, just out of the corner of his eye, underlying everything he sees and feels. They are a feeling – a warmth, a hope. In a way, they have become his religion.

Ludwig takes turns with the others to squeeze outside into the small barbed-wire enclosure. To breathe the fresh air and to see the sea makes a welcome change. One of the guards just outside the enclosure smokes a cigarette about half way, and then drops the rest onto the ground, just beyond the barbed wire. “Take it, Jerry,” he nods, encouragingly, with a suppressed smile. “You can have it!” The cigarette smells good. The men are mostly smokers and were last given cigarettes by the sympathetic locals in Greenock, but any remaining tobacco was stolen in the “search,” and they’ve not had a chance to smoke since boarding.

“Don’ trust him,” an Italian warns. “This one’s-a no good. He’s-a messin’ with us.” The temptation, however, is too great, and after a while, Josef Brenner reaches a cautious hand carefully through the barbed wire to pick up the still smouldering cigarette. The first guard slams a rifle butt down on his hand, and the other stamps

on his fingers with a boot for good measure. The guards laugh, delighted as children, while a mortified yowl of pain goes up from their victim.

“What’s wrong with them?” Felix, the younger of the two brothers, wonders aloud, later on, as Ludwig lies on his boot-pillow, trying to sleep.

Fritz, in a hammock above, has developed an explanation which allows him to retain his fundamental admiration for the British. He has a theory that these guards were at Dunkirk and they have seen their comrades killed in France. “You can see that some of them were wounded – like that short one, with the glass eye. That’s why they hate us so much,” he explains. “They’re angry, and any German will do.”

Geller, in his paisley-patterned pyjama top, disagrees. “Don’t try to tell me that these are war heroes!” he protests. “Those are old scars, from many years ago, probably from drunken brawling in a bar. They are merely ignorant. Such coarse and obscene language! My friend in the kitchen says that they were common prisoners, released early to help with the war effort. I blame the Officers. We see how weak leadership can so easily allow the baser instincts to surface.”

Otto has an involved explanation based on false consciousness and dialectical materialism. Ludwig feels he can’t bear to hear them talking any longer – the unrelenting closeness is taking its toll. They have become more familiar to him than his own family, and the intonation of their voices, their habits, even their smells now infuriate him. He knows the intent expression with which Geller picks his nose, the disgusting little snort with which Blumenthal jerks off at night, the rotten-vegetable smell of Otto’s farts – and he heartily wishes to forget these things.

“What does it matter? We are here, that’s all,” Kowalski mutters.

There are other grunts and moans across the hold – although whether they are of agreement, or in protest against the noise, it’s hard to tell. What is the point in all this talk? Does it make any difference *why* the guards are sadistic bullies, or even where they are going? They are stuck, that’s all, in this slave ship of old, sitting targets for the next torpedo. What’s the point in anything?

“Tell us about Guadalajara, Herr Zaletski, and about the inn-keeper’s daughter...” Heinz tries, hopefully. No one even bothers to swear at him this time.

“He’s asleep,” says Fritz. “Can’t you hear him snoring? Tell us about your pretty wife, Weiss, and how she swam the Rhine to join you in Switzerland...”

Ludwig regrets sharing this story, although one night he felt obliged to pay into the pot. He’d made them laugh, describing how the clothes he’d bought for Hilde to change into were too big, and how they’d had to cut her a new belt with his pen knife (“we thought she might be arrested after all – for indecency!”)

This time he doesn’t answer, but stares at the ceiling, lulled into a strange blankness, while the hammocks sway around him. They are like pieces of rotting meat, he thinks – pieces of rotting meat in a hold, that try to remember what it is to be human. Perhaps it’s true about a sedative in the food – he certainly has a phenomenal capacity for sleep.

In the morning, a group of Italians are sent on deck and ordered to throw the suitcases into the ocean. These can still be seen when Ludwig goes up for exercise, bobbing far behind the ship, in a long, sad trail of debris.

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Hilde and the internee women board a ferry at Liverpool. From the deck, Hilde watches a large seagull wheeling in the sky.

Leaving the mainland makes her heart hurt. As they chug away from the dockside, she can feel the distance opening up, like a gaping wound, between her and her child – her flesh and blood, her kleines Mäuschen, her own precious Schatzi! “I know, I know...but I can’t help it! I’m sorry! I have no choice,” she says to Ludwig, in her head. The sound of the engine, the slowly dwindling buildings of the ferry terminal, the chattering of the others, all are sickeningly wrong; she feels as if someone has died.

And where is Ludwig? The postcard – “I AM SAFE” – was a relief, but she keeps coming back to his mother’s question - how can he be safe, yet unable to explain any more? Is he still low, perhaps too miserable to write, or is he prevented in some way? Surely the British authorities would not be so pointlessly cruel? She watches the gull carve its cryptic curves into the sky. Perhaps the word could tell her, if she could only read its code.

They are allowed to move about the boat freely, just like the other passengers. There are a few Servicemen on leave, flirting with the younger internees, and making them feel – with a startled pleasure – that they are still attractive women; that their shameful status, “enemy alien,” is not visible on their faces. They have their handbags, and their ten shillings - almost like respectable citizens once more!

Hilde – drained by emotion, and also the early start – sleeps on a wooden bench, and then plays a little with Frau Mayer’s youngest. Watching the other children is painful, but a kind of compulsion – like picking at a scab. She looks for echoes in the way the little boy squirms when tired, or points, or cries – just like her own! But he keeps a wary eye on Frau Mayer, as if afraid she might disappear again, and whimpers when Hilde tries to distract him. It’s no good – she isn’t the one he wants - and his mother takes him back with a sympathetic smile.

Blinking back tears, Hilde goes back on deck, and stands looking out at the horizon. People are pointing at a strangely shaped cloud in the distance. No, it’s definitely more than a cloud, it’s a hilly island, rising mysteriously out of the sea! The Isle of Man: it’s like something from a story, like something she imagined as a child, and then forgot all about until now. It’s magical.

Hilde remembers her first journey to England, straining for a sight of the famous white cliffs. She was so afraid, then, and yet they’d made it. Sometimes when she thinks about it now, it’s as if that journey happened to someone else. She survived all that, she tells herself sternly – surely she can survive this, too?

The ferry lands at Douglas. Will they be able to see the men's camp, perhaps in the distance? Some women have husbands here – and anyway, it might give them an idea of what to expect. There's no sign of any military camp, but as they watch from the deck, they are pleasantly surprised by the substantial rows of grand Victorian buildings, set around a harbour. "Rather the style one might find in West London," Frau Glöckner says, appreciatively.

"Why, it's just as fine as Brighton!" exclaims Dr Liebreich.

They form another long file with their luggage, and trail off the ferry. Island officials take their ration books and identity cards. Stepping off the gangplank, their excitement is quickly deflated. A crowd of onlookers wait at the seafront, and stare as they pass, whispering to each other. A bedraggled sight by now, tired from their long journey, the women limp up the road towards the station, carrying their children and suitcases as best they can. The islanders scrutinise them like some repulsive yet fascinating sight. Will these alien women have hard faces, and a fanatical gleam in their eyes? Will they be haughty yet beautiful "Mata Hari" types, sent to seduce "our boys" into telling military secrets? This shabby group, all shapes and sizes, with anxious (mostly brown) eyes, and frightened, clinging children, seems somehow disappointing, and not quite the enemy they are hoping for.

"And they call themselves the master race!" Hilde hears a loudly cynical remark, made, no doubt, in the spirit of patriotism. Her cheeks burn. The staring faces swim before her eyes, and her chest fills with a hot, powerful mix of humiliation and anger.

A charming little steam train, with gleaming brass trim and red and cream paintwork, waits for them at the station. They cram themselves into the tiny carriages, and the doors are locked. Crushed between Frau Mayer and her brood, and another ample Hausfrau from Cologne, Hilde can scarcely move, but instead looks out of the window.



Puffing and straining, the engine picks up speed, and soon leaves the town behind. They pass through lush woods, alive with rustling leaves, brown-green shadows, and banks, soft and furry with ferns. After the dull colours and institutional drabness of Holloway, the journey seems shocking – almost unreal – in its beauty. A plume of steam unfurls above them, proud as a flag, and every so often the train gives a triumphant, throaty whistle.

There are golden fields of hay, and little stations with white picket fences, and the odd palm tree. “Wie schön!” the Cologne Hausfrau mutters approvingly. It’s hard to picture the prison camp they fear, which has different details for each of them, but certain recurring features, more or less clearly imagined, in these picture-postcard surroundings. Maybe the stories about a holiday paradise - which they have hardly dared to believe - are actually true!

As they approach the southern tip of the island, the land grows wilder, and the large skies, the roaring wind, the hills that mount into abrupt nothingness – all make it feel as if they are reaching the end of the world. There are stunted trees, growing at odd angles, with twisted branches; there are grey stone walls, and occasional, dazzling white houses. Flashes of sea, like a heart-lifting promise, appear between rolling fields. There is the wonderful sense of light and space you only really get on an island.

The sun is now low in the sky. Despite her unhappiness and her worry – or perhaps even because of them – the beauty around her hits Hilde with an unexpected force. She knows that she is tired and overwrought. The emotion she feels is like the first, painful pangs of a powerful new love.

They reach the end of the line, and another tiny, red brick station, with hanging baskets and a little awning roof. The younger children are asleep, slumped against shoulders, and the rest of them move like sleep-walkers, so tired they can hardly speak.

There's a lot of standing around on the platform, and a long queue for the ladies' toilet in the waiting room. Hilde understands only that they are being allocated billets, in a sort of peculiar auction. Stern-faced women in headscarves and overcoats are haggling over numbers and calling out strange words they don't understand: "four, no babies," "eight, nine at a pinch," "Bay View," "Bradda Glen," "Falcon's Nest," "Snaefell" – it's like a new language. The mothers with children clasp them tighter – the friends who want to stay together huddle in small knots. Hilde feels that it's hardly important: what can it matter what happens to her now?

Inge links arms with her, and in time they are claimed, along with a good-sized group, by an unsmiling middle-aged woman. They are led along a street, around a corner to the seafront, and oh – below them, the beach!

It's a splendid sight. The sun is setting right in the middle of a bay, in a pink and scarlet blaze, reflected all across the wet sand. A huge crescent of Victorian buildings face boldly out to the sea – substantial bay-fronted boarding houses and hotels, their different shades of cream and white tinged rose by the sunset. A few eccentric architectural touches – little turrets, pretty gables and fanciful battlements – give a fairy tale whimsy to their austere ranks and add to her sense that it might all be some vivid dream. In the distance, Hilde can see the dark shape of a headland, with a small tower, silhouetted against the vivid sky.

It's the kind of view that seems to burn itself into your memory. Through her exhaustion, Hilde feels moved to the point of tears. She has a sense – although she wouldn't say so aloud – that the beauty of the sunset contains some obscure message, some secret reassurance. It's a solace for her raw feelings – she's suffered, certainly, but there's also all this! You and your troubles are so small, she tells herself. What exactly it means she can't say (is it something about hope, or life – could it be a promise about Ludwig and the baby, or a compensation for their absence?) She only feels that it's important; both powerful and consoling.

“So!” exclaims Dr Liebreich. “It seems that these stories of a sea-side holiday, enforced by the government, are not so wrong after all... What a very peculiar arrangement.”

They climb up some steps, to the entrance hall of the Belle Vue Hotel.

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It grows hotter by day, and at night, the air in the hold is almost unbreathable. The men rip the legs off their trousers to make shorts and laugh – with an edge of craziness - at the sight of their knees beneath, and the overall oddness of their attire.

It’s difficult to tell because none of them have watches any more, but it seems that the sun is now overhead at noon. They are travelling south. They should have arrived in Canada by now, and they’re heading in the wrong direction. A rumour begins to take hold. Is it the carriers who mention it first, or the kitchen staff? At first it sounds like a joke, and people say it ironically. “Apparently we are heading for Australia!” You can tell from their eyes, however, that the idea is worming its way into them. It seems ludicrous, and awful - so far from the world they know, so far from their families.

Ludwig lies on his boot pillow, while hunger roars in his ears and whimpers in his belly. Without clocks, time has become a cruel and slippery thing, like the slap-slapping of the waves. He’s always alert for noises in the kitchen, which make his mouth begin to water unbearably. There are rows at meal times. “That pathetic little shrimp has more potatoes than me! You call that fair?” Kowalski is like an aggrieved child.

“Boots off!” the guards shout at them, when they’re let out of their enclosure for exercise. “You buggers are wrecking the deck. Bare feet from now on, you stinking bastards.” The soldiers too have another uniform: paler khaki shorts and domed sun helmets. Like lords of the ship, they flaunt their trophies shamelessly,

wearing many rings on their stubby fingers, with an array of fountain pens in their breast pockets.

The sea is a beautiful, dazzling blue. Ludwig sees flying fish – strange slivers of silver gleaming above the waves, flinging themselves chaotically from one crest to another. The fresh air fills his chest, clean and delicious: after the foul smells below deck, it feels like champagne for the lungs. A sliver of moon is still visible. It is the only time they can see the open horizon without obstruction.

The guards' new game is to entertain themselves by throwing empty bottles and cans at the internees, shouting mockingly at them to “get a fucking move on, Jerry. Hup, hup, hup!”

“Too bad all the sunshine doesn't seem to improve their temper,” Otto mutters. They are embarrassed and angry, and don't want to catch each other's eyes; there is a sort of tacit agreement to pretend this isn't happening. A bottle breaks. The men have to jump and swerve to avoid the shards of glass. Heinz cuts his foot on a splinter but is too frightened of the guards to stop.

“That's it, twinkle toes!” The guards fall about with laughter. “Dance for us, darlin'!” Heinz keeps on running with a stumbling limp, while the red smears of his blood mark a wide circle on the deck.

“Get a fucking move on, you fucking idiots!” shouts another.

Josef Brenner is lolloping around the deck, just like everyone else, about five men ahead, in front of Ludwig. He's a quiet fellow – Ludwig can't remember hearing him speak for weeks.

Suddenly, with no warning, he breaks away from the line, and runs – with the blindly impetuous look of a rebellious child – towards the side of the ship. What is he doing, Ludwig wonders? He will be shot! He is reminded of his own moment of madness, when he touched the electric fence in Devon.

“Stop!” shout the British guards.

“Stop him!” shouts Fritz, in English and then again in German.

Bewildered, the internees stumble to a halt. The British guards raise their rifles. Josef Brenner looks round at them all with a blank, expressionless face, and pulls himself up on the railing. He tilts his head back, and squints at the sun. He is perfectly unreachable: Ludwig has a sudden, exhilarating sense that he has escaped them all already. Then, without hesitating, he flings himself overboard. Ludwig cannot see his fall, but he somehow seems to feel it - as a large, soft object, heavy, inert and sickening, hitting the water with a smack.

No one can believe their eyes. What will happen now? Time seems to slow down. The guards run to the edge. They don't shoot at him and can't seem to decide what to do next. They shout confused instructions at one another. Then a couple of lifebelts are thrown and the ship's siren sounds "accident stations."

The internees exchange looks of disbelief. There's simply one less man on deck, that's all. To Ludwig's surprise, the great ship slows, turns around, and goes back - making a giant loop with the churned-up highway of its wake. Sailors stand at the side, and peer at the waves through binoculars. "Exercise" is abandoned, and the men mill about on deck anxiously. There's no sign of Brenner, and sharks have been seen in the area. Then the search is abandoned, they are ordered back down, and the ship resumes its course. Ludwig hopes that he drowns quickly.

Why did he do it? The hold is much quieter than usual, as they take up their spots, and slump back into their habitual poses. Ludwig helps Heinz to bathe his cut foot in salt water. They can hear an excited babble in the Italian hold, as the news spreads around the rest of the ship.

"He had a hard time with the guards," Otto says. "You know how those bastards can smell out a victim."

"He must have been weak-minded," Kowalski says. There are some murmured objections. "I'm sorry to say it, but there..." Kowalski insists. "We all suffer - but to do such a thing!"

"He lost sight of his faith," intones Oppenheimer, sombrely.

Fritz chimes in with soft reluctance: “he spoke with me about his problems. He had a visa for Argentina, where he hoped to find refuge and join his family. It was due to expire this week.”

Ludwig thinks again of the moment he touched the electric wire, in Devon. He still has no good answer, beyond that which he gave the Colonel: “to experiment it...”

“That should do it,” he says to Heinz. “Do you have a clean sock?” The boy’s only socks are filthy. “Here,” Ludwig says, because he recently washed his spare pair, “you’d better take mine.”

They lapse into silence, with their own unhappy thoughts. Could we have shown more sympathy, and tried to dissuade him, Ludwig wonders? Could one of us have held him back, as he ran for the side – or was it kinder just to let him go? His feelings towards Brenner are an odd mixture of admiration and disgust, with just the faintest envy. For Brenner, at least it is over. It would be nice to think that all the trials and tests of this experience could unite them – but instead, they seem to be fossilizing into a dreadful selfishness. The hold is so crowded, but no one wants to take the dead man’s hammock that night.

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Now the men are ordered to shave, and a few razors issued. A couple of the Italians who have worked as barbers in the past are set up to give haircuts on deck, and long queues form. This gives an opportunity for those in the back hold to mix with those who have been travelling at the front of the ship.

They are excited to meet these other internees at last. Otto swiftly finds the other Communists. Oppenheimer is cheered to meet a group of Orthodox Jews, including several Rabbis, and enquires eagerly about their rulings on which foods are permitted and which are “*treif*”. Felix meets his old piano teacher from Berlin. In

return, these others are fascinated to hear first-hand about the sinking of the Arandora Star, and to meet the dangerous hoards of "Category As" in the stern.

Ludwig gets chatting to one of the food carriers, the young man from Leipzig. "They say all this will be over soon," says the boy, jiggling on his toes with a nervous energy. "We will be free. No more internment."

"The ship with our wives and families has overtaken us! Isn't it wonderful? They will be waiting to meet us at the dock, when we arrive," another man from the front hold insists, his eyes damp with tears of joy. He laughs too loudly and moves on to the next person with his news.

"What is this crap they're all talking?" Kowalski growls. "Is there some new broadcast they've listened to that I don't know about? Suddenly, everyone's an expert."

Finally, when they have almost ceased to believe in its existence, they catch sight of land. Now they are allowed to go up on deck more freely. One evening, a huge rainbow appears, like a gateway into this strange continent. Moving along the coast, they see the most extraordinary sunsets.

"Would you ever consider returning to Germany?" Ludwig asks Otto. "Let's say, for example, that Hitler was assassinated, and things went back - somehow - to more like they were before...." They stand side-by-side on the crowded deck, watching a sandy beach in the distance, with dunes and hills behind it, and an enormous red and gold sky. This is another kind of abroad: Ludwig sees things with the completely fresh eyes of a child. For the first time, he begins to understand some of the excitement about this "New World." After all, the old one seems to have gone so horribly wrong.

Otto laughs. "Things never go back. Haven't you noticed that yet?" he says.

"No," Ludwig agrees sadly. "I suppose they don't."

He feels, with a shiver, the ghosts beside them - Kurt and the others, who never arrived at their journey's end.

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Hilde wakes to the high-pitched cries of seagulls. From their piercing protests, it sounds, to her sleep-muddled brain, as if they are squabbling about something. Is it that they are fighting amongst themselves, she wonders, or is it that they don't like the way they are treated? She opens her eyes.

Inge lies next to her, on the other side of the double bed. The hotel is overcrowded, and there is nothing for it but to share, but Hilde sometimes misses the privacy of her cell in Holloway. Marianna Grossman, a good-natured trainee nurse, is already dressed, and sitting on her single bed, on the other side of the room, reading a book.

The bedroom has a high ceiling, and next to Hilde's side of the bed there's a large sash window, which rattles in the wind. Hilde sits up and places her feet gingerly down on the floor. The floorboards are bare, and you have to be careful of splinters – Mrs Quayle, the landlady, has taken up all of the bedroom carpets to protect them - "and it's just as well," she says, grimly, when one of the Bavarian girls along the corridor spills a jar of face powder. The internee women, Mrs Quayle makes clear, are not the type of clientele she's used to.

Outside the window, Hilde can see a wrought iron balcony, and beyond this, a white painted building, and a grey stone wall. From a certain angle, looking around a corner, she can see a thin sliver of sea.

The rhythms and routines of the hotel now structure her days. Soon a gong will sound for breakfast. Downstairs, there's a large dining hall, which must once have doubled as a ballroom, judging from the large mirror on the wall and the ceiling cornice (an elaborate design of tropical foliage and pineapples), now flaking and discoloured. There are many round tables at which the internee women eat their meals. There's also a grand piano, covered by a green cloth, in one corner.



Hilde has a strange feeling every time she sees it – a lurch of guilty, nervous longing. It feels so long since she’s had the chance to play. She wants to hear what sound it makes. She hears someone practicing scales, in the late afternoon, and then a lurching rendition of the “Blue Danube.” So – it *is* possible! She makes up her mind to ask.

Mrs Quayle has issued dire warnings on their arrival, mostly to do with not bringing her establishment into disrepute. It’s strictly forbidden to talk to local men, or to swim in one’s underclothes. There’s an elaborate housekeeping rota to which their names are added. But the really burning questions – how does one get or send letters, for example? – they have to work out for themselves, by asking the others, who have been there for longer. No one seems to know very much about the piano.

On the rota, however, many people have an opinion. “It’s all very well for some of the girls – they’re used to it, they were in service already, and it will give them something to do. But surely, they might find a better use those of us with an education...!” Dr Liebreich objects. “Don’t you agree?” When asked directly, Hilde has to point out that she was also working as a cleaner before her internment, and doesn’t really mind joining in.

She’s on the rota to help clear breakfast on her third day. After the work is done, she loiters near the piano, and can’t resist raising a corner of the green cloth, and then opening it up, to look at the keys beneath.

Mrs Quayle keeps a close eye on these operations and is busy counting cutlery back into a wooden tray. “Don’t touch that, please!” she calls over, sharply.

Hilde flushes, and withdraws her hand quickly. Don’t be so pathetic, she tells herself! This could be her chance – she must not let it pass her by. She clears her throat, nervously. As usual, her voice comes out sounding more accented than she expects. “Excuse me. I was wondering... Might I be permitted, sometime, to play on it?”

Mrs Quayle abandons the cutlery tray with a sigh, strides over, and looks at her. "Are you any good? Only I get complaints about the noise."

Hilde doesn't know what to say. She was often complimented on her playing as a girl, when she was star of the local *Musikabende*, but that was years ago. Nowadays, it feels more of a secretive compulsion than a public accomplishment. There are times – although it feels foolish to say so - when she can feel the music welling up inside her, threatening to spill out. Sometimes she's worried it might deafen her.

Mrs Quayle is a busy woman and doesn't wait for an answer. "Well, I suppose one more of you won't make a difference. So long as you're careful. That's a valuable instrument, we've had it for years," her face softens slightly, at the sight of Hilde's delighted smile.

"Thank you!"

"But no German music," she adds, as an afterthought.

This is a puzzle to Hilde. What exactly does she mean? Most of Hilde's favourite composers are German – but could she really mean no Bach, Beethoven, or Schumann? And will Mrs Quayle also object to Austrian composers? "What about Mozart?" she suggests, hesitantly.

Mrs Quayle waves her hand, as if to brush away the question. "Just so long as it's nothing foreign," she says, briskly.

When Hilde gets to know her better, she realises that Mrs Quayle probably has some vague worry about military marches, having seen the goose-stepping armies on the newsreels. She always worries about being held responsible for subversive activity in her hotel. As far as her own tastes go, she enjoys the Music Hall and dance numbers of the last decade - "Yes We Have No Bananas," or "If you knew Susie (Like I know Susie)," and Hilde feels sorry she can't oblige her with these. It's agreed that if there are no complaints, Hilde can play between ten and

eleven in the mornings, when breakfast has been cleared and before lunch is being set.

It's a lovely piano, and pretty well in tune. Each time, Hilde sits down with a little more confidence, and her hands move with a little more fluency. Things come back to her that she thought she must have lost forever. She tries a few bars, and soon notices that in fact, no one seems to mind which composers she plays.

Far from getting complaints, her performances are appreciated as never before. The internees seem to regard any accomplishment by one of their number with huge gratitude and relief – as a rebuff to the collective slight of their imprisonment. “Vonderful, vonderful.” purr the Viennese ladies, anxious to assert their claim to a cultural heritage that will set them apart from the riff-raff. “It makes one feel – how shall I say – quite cultivated!”

“She plays zo beautiful. It's like on ze vireless!” enthuse the younger ones. Sometimes she attracts a small audience, who clap loudly and excitedly at the end of each piece, sitting very upright in the dining chairs. Other musicians introduce themselves – there's a violinist, with blond hair, called Clara - sheet music is offered, and a few people ask if she'll consider giving them lessons.

Outside the hotel, things are even stranger. The sheer scale of it makes one doubt one's eyes - thousands of refugee women, milling aimlessly around the streets of a small seaside town. Miles of barbed wire fencing have been hastily erected over the summer, and at first, the whole southern tip of the island is included, although gradual adjustments are being made, partly to placate the local residents, who are allowed in and out with a pass, but have mixed feelings about the whole thing. There's an evening curfew, but during the day, the internees are allowed to stroll within a wide area, which includes the beach, the town of Port Erin, and some of the surrounding hills.

The pretty streets and slightly run-down boarding houses, emptied of British summer holiday-makers, now bustle with the displaced persons of central Europe. If

she closes her eyes on the promenade, Hilde can almost imagine herself on Unter den Linden, or the Kaerntnerstrasse in Vienna. The local shopkeepers were stiff and suspicious to begin with, but are by now friendly, making the best of an unexpected boost to their trade. An arrangement exists to allow the women to draw an allowance from their post office accounts. The wool shop has sold out of stock.

She realises very quickly that just like in Holloway, there are people to be careful with. Old Frau Neumann, for example, who scans the sea compulsively, searching for enemy ships and U-Boats, whilst making unconvincingly light remarks about the weather - or Heidi Manz, who cries so hysterically and for so long that they send her away to a place called Ballamona, which seems to be some kind of mental asylum. Some people don't want to talk about their families and will do almost anything to avoid the subject – and some women can talk of nothing else.

The food at the hotel is rather bad, and very plain. Hilde and Inge put slices of the tasteless white bread on the window sill to dry, and call it *Knochenttoast*, or pick a succulent plant from the stone walls, *Mauerkresse*, which they clean and eat. “To have some vitamins is most important,” Dr Liebreich agrees. They walk along the cliffs to Bradda Head, where they pick blackberries, or lie on the springy turf and look out at the silvery sea. Hilde feels guilty – because even without Ludwig, even without her beloved little boy, even with London in flames and God knows what horrors on the continent, there are moments – just flashes – when she feels briefly and unexpectedly elated, and happy to be alive.

After her piano practice, Hilde goes to join the long queues at the camp offices, at the centre of the little town. The staff are overwhelmed with questions and requests, both large and small, and here Hilde's heart sinks, as she begins to appreciate how long it might take to disentangle her own problems from those of so many others.

Dr Liebreich often appears with her sheaf of notes, making suggestions, collating cases, and steadily pointing out inconsistencies “forgive me, my dear, but

you told me yesterday that..." She makes herself unpopular with the British staff – well-meaning ladies in cardigans and skirts, who signed up to "do their bit" but have no notion of how to tackle a mess of this magnitude. It's clear they feel quite sorry for some of the internees – that sweet little blonde, for instance, so worried about who will feed her pet cat while she's gone. There are others they obviously dislike. Hilde sees how they roll their eyes when Dr Liebreich approaches the desk, and the way they make excuses to pass her on to someone else. Although they sometimes listen with exaggerated politeness, they complain about her as soon as she's gone. ("I just had that Jewess with the eyebrows, you know, who never smiles." "Oh God, I *know!*") They regard her as haughty and arrogant. "Stop telling us what we ought to do!" one of them bursts out at her, indignantly. ("I'm sorry, but really! I don't know who she thinks she is!")

Hilde admires her – she finds it hard enough to pursue her own problems, let alone worry about anyone else's. She has been to the office several times already – but is generally shooed away, after waiting a few hours. There's not time to see everybody, she must try again tomorrow.

The queue trails out of the building, and along the street outside. Hilde, who is waiting in it, leans against a small, front-garden wall, underneath an ornamental palm tree. Dr Liebreich, who has just been hustled out of the office, stops next to her for a chat, and allows herself a cigarette.

"How do you keep on trying?" Hilde asks her.

Dr Liebreich inhales deeply and breathes out slowly. "Of course one is just a woman – and a refugee, at that!" she says, her low voice loaded with disdain. "But to give in to this awful aimlessness and futility – for me, that is death itself."

Just inland, they watch a flock of crows rise up into the sky, and then settle in a tall tree. "Death itself," Hilde thinks, vaguely... and indeed, the women do seem a little like lost souls, wandering helplessly - by some administrative accident - around this peculiarly British heaven, with its stodgy food, draughty accommodation, and

grudging good manners. Or perhaps, with all the waiting, it's more like purgatory, or limbo?

When eventually Hilde's turn comes and she finally reaches the desk, the questions she's been rehearsing threaten to escape her, and she hardly knows where to begin. "My son!" she blurts out. "He - he's only little, sixteen months. I was told that there will be a children's transport, so that he can join me. Do you have any information about this?"

The woman who sits across the desk has pink lacquered nails, and a large brown mole on her chin. Hilde has been watching her for so long that she has become almost like a character in a film, and it's a surprise that she now responds. "Yes, that's right, I believe that preparations are underway, and it should be very soon."

This sounds promising, but it's not enough – she's queued for too long to be dismissed with vague generalities. "Very soon?" she repeats.

"That's what I said. Getting around is jolly difficult at the moment, as you may be aware," the woman sounds sarcastic, even angry. "Liverpool is in a bad way – you can see the fires from the other side of the island. The ferries have to leave from further up the coast." She breathes fiercely through her nose. (You see what your people are doing to us? You see that your own problems are rather small in comparison, here on your safe, sunny holiday?)

"And I'm trying also to find news of my husband. I don't know where he's sent. I am worried that perhaps he's one of those moved overseas? The last news from him was a postcard, on this was only written 'I AM SAFE.' Please, please, perhaps you have some information, what does this mean?" It does not sound as urgent as it feels: almost every woman in the land, after all, has endured this agony of anticipation, waiting for the next letter.

"You must write to the War Office to enquire," the woman begins writing out the address on a slip of paper. Of course, Hilde has already done this – she must not

cry, she tells herself! She must keep asking, calmly, in case there's anything else. "No, there are no lists of the men held in other camps," the woman snaps. "We're rather busy here, as you can probably see. If you believe you have a relative in the men's camps, you can apply for a visit, by filling in a form."

"But I don't know!" Hilde repeats, her voice trembling now in her disappointment. She can feel the lack of sympathy in the woman's false, frosty politeness, like a shutter going down – surely, she seems to be thinking, it's Hilde's own responsibility to work out where her relatives are.

Another woman in the queue a few places behind Hilde is listening to their discussion, and as Hilde leaves, she stops her, with an agitated excitement on her face. She's a few years older than Hilde and wears a long skirt. She has a plain, friendly face and shiny black hair that – as Hilde is beginning to recognise – is probably a wig. She has two small children with her. "Excuse me please," she says politely. "I have also received this same postcard, 'I AM SAFE!' from my husband." Her name, she says, is Frau Oppenheimer.

Hilde waits for her, and they leave the office together, talking quickly. What can it mean? Her husband, too, was held in Devon. "I believe that he was rescued from the wreck of the Arandora Star," she says. "Probably they are on another ship, and that is why they haven't written." This is what Hilde has begun to suspect, although it's a shock to hear it spoken out loud. Hilde nods in agreement, feeling afraid yet relieved to meet someone who shares her predicament.

They walk down to the beach together, so that the two small children can play on the sand. "That way we will have a chance to talk," Mrs Oppenheimer says. It's late September, but there's still a pleasant warmth, the tail end of a beautiful summer.

As they make their way slowly down the steep road, Mrs Oppenheimer explains her situation. She's staying at a large hotel with a number of Orthodox

women, where, thanks to an unusually sympathetic hotel keeper, it's even possible to prepare Kosher food.

"It's all a mistake!" she says – and Hilde recognises her tired vehemence all too well. "My husband is a good man. He is very devout, always obeys the law, and is a wonderful father. He should never have been given this 'A' classification." They are from Frankfurt. She has four children – the youngest two with her, and the older two joining her soon, she hopes by this same children's transport. But she also has many relatives still in Germany, who haven't been able to get a visa for another country. "And for them, I fear, the problems are far worse."

On the beach, the two women sit with their backs against a wall. Blotting the tears from her eyes, Mrs Oppenheimer carries on with what she's doing, peeling outer layers of clothing off the children. Hilde also feels emotional; she blows her nose a few times and gets out her knitting. Hundreds of internee women are spread over the soft sand, tilting their faces up to the sun, or paddling sedately in improvised beach-wear - head scarves and hitched-up cotton dresses.

Hilde can hear a soothing babble of German and other languages, interspersed with muffled calls, as people cry out to friends or children ("Grüss Gott, Frau Weisman! How's your throat - better I hope?" "Come here, Frederieke, you'll ruin those shoes!") People compare landladies ("mine's dreadful!" "Oh really? Mine's a dear.") They prod each other for new information on the inexhaustible topic of release and speculate in hushed whispers about whom one can trust, and who has a high-ranking Nazi uncle.

Hilde watches Mrs Oppenheimer's youngest boy toddling unsteadily a few yards away, busy digging holes and rearranging stones, strangely purposeful in his low-hanging nappy. He's a similar size, and she thinks of her own son – will he be taller, by now? Little John was babbling away before she left, and Frau Weiss wrote, in her last letter to Holloway, that he's starting to say real words, but Hilde can't



imagine this: she suspects that the older woman is unreliable on this topic, prone to wishful thinking.

“Is he talking, yet? Your son?” she asks Mrs Oppenheimer.

“Not really, but he certainly makes a lot of noise!”

Watching him, Hilde feels a pang of jealousy that’s dangerously close to madness. She wants a little boy too, *her* little boy, not this similar but subtly wrong impostor. She wants to scoop him up and breathe in his smell, to nuzzle and tickle him, to eat him up! A wave of desire, a clenching in her stomach, almost makes her cry out aloud – she needs to be close to him, to brush sand off his tiny feet, to lovingly wipe every crease on his chubby body, to see him eat and sleep. Soon, please God, her own child might play on this beach!

*Dear God, keep them safe, wherever they are.* This is the prayer she clutches, like the handkerchief in her pocket, at all hours of the day and night. The knitting lies in her lap. Squinting into the blue of the bay, Hilde looks out at the smooth expanse of the sea.

### ***The Land Where the Lemon Trees Bloom***

Fritz Kraus is called out to speak with an officer and comes back with news. They are landing in Melbourne the next morning. All those in their hold are to disembark.

They must fill out new Alien Registration Cards. A guard hands them a fountain pen, as they queue up to sign, one by one. "That's my pen!" Heinz jumps visibly, as his turn comes. "My pen! Can't you see, it has my initials on it?"

"No it isn't," says the guard blankly, slipping the pen back into his pocket. Heinz chokes with a helpless fury, and Felix puts a hand on his arm to restrain him. There's nothing Heinz can do but let out an indignant wail. Ludwig tries to calm him down.

Ludwig can't sleep that night. As the others begin to stir, he takes a last look around the mess room, where they have suffered so many long hours, crammed together – the wooden floor which they splattered with their food and their vomit, the long tables and benches, the dim electric lights. He feels that a part of him will remain, forever, in this place.

They are all allowed up on deck. Crowded along the sides, as they come into the bay, shivering in the morning chill, they are awed by a sense of occasion. Two tug boats pull them towards a pier. On the quay, far below, they can see a train waiting for them, and a group of Australian soldiers or "Diggers". They look funny, with their wide-brimmed slouch hats, green uniform, and red-brown boots – so different from the Tommies they are used to. There are some photographers and journalists from the local press.

The steep descent down metal steps gives him a moment of giddiness. Ludwig wears his army rags with cut-off trousers. The waist fitted him reasonably well when they embarked – now they are held up by a piece of string. He carries

three items of clothing tied up in a blanket – his only piece of luggage - and feels ashamed of how strange he looks. He feels like a new species of sub-human.

It's wonderful to feel the solid earth beneath his feet. He's so used to the movement of the ship that the ground itself seems to sway. The Australians are well prepared: Ludwig is escorted to the train by two soldiers – one in front, with a revolver, and one behind, with a rifle. At least there's none of the pushing or shouting they're used to.

They make thumbs up signs, and wave to the other internees, tiny figures up on deck. From the train, they look up at the huge ship that has been their world for so long. "Not a bad old crate, really, from the outside," Otto says, almost fondly. Ludwig feels a rush of emotion – he has survived! Fifty-five days of misery - it's only now that they are off that he begins to admit to himself what an ordeal it has been. "I'm on dry land!" he tells Hilde, in his head. "And perhaps there will be more to eat, now." Whatever comes next, at least that is over.

Ludwig's carriage has two armed guards, who stare at their new charges with a nervous fascination.

By the time the train begins to move, the fog is thinning. From the window, they see glimpses of Melbourne. They are mesmerised by these signs of civilization – tall buildings, trams and cars - it's like a film, playing out before their eyes. As they reach the outskirts, there are bungalows, gardens with lemon trees, eruptions of purple bougainvillea, and corrugated iron fences. Geller quotes a line from Goethe, about the land where the lemon trees bloom. The contrast with their confinement in the hold is dizzying. It looks like paradise.

"I say, my good man!" Geller addresses one of the soldiers, in his best English. "Can you tell me, vot is the name of zat yellow flower?"

Ludwig tenses – on the ship, any questions were answered with curses or blows. Geller has an open, naïve optimism, and still cannot restrain himself on those subjects which interest him.

The soldier looks around. He isn't sure how to respond, addressed by this bald, half-dressed Prisoner of War. He bends down, as he tries to understand him, and then his face twists into a bemused smile. "You mean the wattles, mate?" he says.

Geller's face is rapturous with delight. "Ah! I sink in Europe, ve say Mimosen...."

Encouraged by this approachability, the other men begin asking cautious questions – what season of the year is it, here? Which part of the country are they in? Will it be a long journey? Now they see wooded hills, with small farms. The trees are a different shape: beautiful, ancient, and straggly against the sky – which is now an astonishing blue.

"Are there no kangaroos, no emus?" Felix asks.

"Give us a chance, cobber!" says the soldier, with a laugh.

After a while, the soldier ventures a few questions of his own. "You fellas look like you could do with a slap-up feed and a decent shave. Where did they capture you? Didn't the Poms give you any tucker on that ship?"

The lure of a sympathetic ear is overwhelming. They tell him of their troubles – first with a proud reticence, but soon with a tumbling eagerness, a terrible need to be listened to and believed. As they relate their stories – all in a rush, and out of order, the shipwreck, the thefts, the many petty pretexts for their internment – Ludwig has the feeling that it's almost too implausible to be true.

The guard takes off his slouch hat, and scratches his head, incredulously. "Strewth," he says. "Come and listen to this, Bill! This lot say they aren't even Nazis."

Bill – a middle aged soldier, with a broad, farmer's face – leaves his post at the door, and comes to listen. The two soldiers exchange anxious glances, as the men tell their overlapping stories, interrupting each other in their eagerness.

"Because we came vizout proper documents!" Fritz explains.

Otto says: "...because we are Communists."

“Because of a mistake about customs duty,” Ludwig hangs his head.

“Because,” Nathaniel Oppenheimer adds “...because I believe that he did not like the Jews.”

The soldiers whistle and shake their heads. “Cripes!” they say, and Ludwig can see they are perturbed. They have been expecting parachutists and spies, or at least battle-hardened Nazis. They seem quite willing to hear criticism of the British – “duffers and crims, you say? Stole your gear?” But they glaze over a bit when it comes to individual misfortunes, and the problems of Europe seem reassuringly far away to them. What else is it that’s different, Ludwig wonders? Is it that they are not afraid – perhaps because they have no fear of being bombed? The younger one of them – Otto learns – has Communist leanings, and promises to inform the party in Melbourne of their plight.

“How is it,” Ludwig asks, “that you seem to find a sympathetic Commie on every ship, and on every continent?”

Otto grins; this fact gives him great encouragement. “We are everywhere,” he says, with a theatrical wink.

“You blokes are hungry, you say?” the older one, Bill, enquires. The land is flatter here - wide grasslands, with sheep and some cattle.

“We are starving,” Fritz says simply, without exaggeration. “The food, since several months, has been quite inadequate.”

The soldiers offer round their “smokes”, and take out the lunches from their back packs, and share around what they have – chocolate and salty crackers. Now they see kangaroos, a whole group of them, bounding alongside the train, as the men jostle and point at the windows. “You see, I told you to give us a chance!” the soldier laughs, proudly.

After a few hours, they reach Seymour Station, where a cluster of women in hats and white gloves are waiting on the platform together with some Army Officers. There are trestle tables in a waiting room, decked with white cloths, and plates piled

with sandwiches and cake. There's real butter on the bread, fresh fruit, and tea with milk! The internees are stunned, made humble and tearful by these luxuries, naming these blessings to one another with trembling disbelief, before cramming their mouths with solemn ecstasy. The local dignitaries seem shocked by their appearance, and the ladies dab delicately at their noses with handkerchiefs. The Germans bow formally, and click their heels, and the Italians blow kisses.

Later on, they reach a small station called Rushworth, where the local people - with battered sun hats, weather-beaten faces, and simple smocks – have gathered to watch the arrival of these ragged beggars from far away. The men climb off the train, and into some buses. They drive through hilly grassland and eucalyptus trees: the minty, pine smell mingles with the dust in their noses.

The velvet dark thickens around them, and the exotic new constellations of the Southern Hemisphere shine out brightly, on this new, upside-down world. Ludwig imagines he can feel the mysterious countryside around them, rustling with strange creatures, the hills rippling out for miles in every direction. "My love, you won't believe where we are now..." he says to Hilde, in his head.

They reach their new camp. The Commandant is at the gate to meet them. It looks very large – Ludwig sees rows of corrugated iron huts, arranged on a hillside, lit up by electric lamps, with enormous insects swarming around. The newly-skinned fence posts gleam white in the artificial light. There's a dead snake – recently killed - hanging over the barbed wire fence.

Well, here we are, Ludwig thinks. Perhaps this is really as far away as it is possible to go?

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The longed-for children's transport is due at last.

Hilde can't bear to talk to people, yet she also hates to be alone with her thoughts. What if it's cancelled at the last moment? London is bombed every night – and every hour contains the potential for tragedy. So many things can go wrong. Why would the British make good their promise to a few 'Enemy Aliens', at the height of the Blitz? What if Ludwig's parents fail to understand the instructions, or decide to keep John with them, or don't reach the station in time? She has written to the older couple explaining each step in the process, and also to Ruth and Ernst, urging them to help – but she's had no reply, and the whole thing seems impossibly complex. What if, oh God, an incendiary bomb, a collapsing ceiling, the glass from a window, a direct hit...?

An impatient crowd waits at the little station in Port Erin. Every mother there is beside herself with agitation, and the high pitch of their emotion seems to buzz in the air. Hilde is light-headed and dizzy. They wait in a small forecourt, at the entrance near the road, twisting their handkerchiefs and rolling on their feet, a human wave, kept back by a few policemen.

The Camp Commandant is also there. She's a fierce, elderly matron, in a tweed skirt and military-style coat, her white hair pinned up under a black hat. She wears spectacles, and carries – somewhat unnecessarily, in Hilde's view - a riding crop. She was once an important figure in the Red Cross, and is now a "Dame," as the status-hungry refugees tell each other, in solemn and impressed voices.

A shiver of excitement goes through the crowd. The little train appears along the track, and gives its throaty whistle, chuffing so slowly alongside the platform. Children are waving in the windows. They are much older than her little boy, however – Hilde feels certain, suddenly, that he cannot be among them.

The train stops. There's an excruciating pause – the engine exhales steam, but it is the only thing that still seems to be breathing. Something is wrong – the doors aren't being opened. Ladies of the WVS confer on the platform, in a cluster of dark green uniforms – where are the keys to the carriages? As if at some pre-

arranged signal, many of the children begin to cry, their small wailing faces white against the windows. The policemen look at each other – there are not very many of them, and a lot of internees. A rebellious mutter goes through the crowd. There's thunder on the mothers' faces. They look as if they might charge forwards and tear the doors off the train with their bare hands.

A genteel cry goes up, from a harassed English woman – “wait, wait, I say, here they are!” To everyone's relief, the keys have been found, and the carriages are unlocked. The crowd can no longer be kept back, and surges forward onto the platform.

“Order, I will have order!” shouts the Commandant, striding around and waving her riding crop at people – but the women are beyond caring. A happy chaos explodes amid the luggage. Everywhere she looks, Hilde sees frantic searching, mothers and children flinging themselves into each other's arms, kissing and crying and questioning and fond scolding. Frau Oppenheimer has found her two older children and is squeezing the air out of them with her embrace.

“Oh God,” Hilde thinks, the chasm of despair opening again at her feet - “he really isn't here!”

But then she sees him, in the arms of a woman from the WVS. Her heart seems to stop at the sight of this one particular little face - an arrangement of features which somehow seems more familiar to her than her own. Her boy! The woman hands him over, with a small suitcase.

“Thank you,” Hilde says, shaking with relief.

“My pleasure. He's a sweet little thing,” the woman says.

Then she's breathing him in – inhaling his special smell – and he's so different, yet the same! Baby John looks bewildered, and squirms in her arms. “Oma?” he says.

“Nein, nicht Oma, Mama!” she says, laughing through her tears.



So it's true! In the five months they've been apart, he's really learned to speak a few words. She feels guilty for disbelieving Ludwig's mother about this. "Mama? Mama?" he begins to repeat, tentatively. He's a real person – this will never cease to amaze her. She's speechless with joy, but at the same time angry that she's missed so much.

She's gulping, and trying not to frighten him, and he's smiling delightedly, touching her face, which is all slimy with tears. Her arms wonderfully full, she struggles back to the hotel. On the street, several women offer to help her, but she has a new strength, and doesn't want to pass over even the suitcase.

"Your son! Isn't he adorable!" says everyone they pass. They're surrounded by admirers, hungry for happy endings. Miracles can happen. Perhaps things might still turn out alright, after all.

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There's a sort of honeymoon period, when Hilde and baby John can't get enough of each other. How wonderfully he fits into her neck, or the crook of her arm, as he burrows his way against her, and how delicious he smells, fresh from the bath! He loves to play with her hair and will not let go of her skirts – she's his best new toy, and he's her everything. She talks to him constantly, in a low murmur, explaining everything: "here's your new bed, here's where Mama sleeps, here's where we eat our supper." By making the world seem safe and friendly to him, she also makes it better for herself. The other women look on with envy, as Hilde covers him with kisses.

Her life changes again, of course. His food, the potty, and nap times become central features. A cot is moved into her shared room, and she's given the privilege of the single bed. Inge and the other women on her corridor join in happily, and little

John becomes the pet of the hotel – or indeed, it sometimes seems, of the whole camp.

In John's suitcase, his little clothes have been carefully darned and altered, and there are some new knitted items which Hilde has not seen before. Carefully folded in with these is a letter from Ludwig's mother.

“Thank you for your concern for our safety. At our age, perhaps you will understand that it is quite impossible to spend the night in that hole in the ground! We always do what is necessary to keep the little one safe, and took him often to the public shelter, even though it is not at all comfortable and we cannot speak for fear of attracting abuse from the ignorant and ill-informed.

I trust you will find the little one in good health. He certainly has an excellent appetite. We are taking the best care we can of other *precious things* for you as well, although we do not know whom one can trust, and it is impossible to be confident in these dangerous times, with so many barbarians and hooligans around.

It has been a shock these months to care for a baby, but also an unexpected delight. I must say, my dear, how much we appreciate all you have done for us in our time of need. At first you may know that we had our doubts about you. I myself suffered for my choice of husband, and this choice has become so much harder in recent years due to the poison of race hatred. We were not sure if you had the strength which unfortunately you now need. However, I am not too proud to say that you have proved me wrong a thousand times over. We could not wish for a better wife for our poor son, or a more excellent mother for our beloved grandson.”

Reading this to herself, Hilde smiles with recognition at the usual list of complaints, and towards the end her throat thickens with emotion. Perhaps she should stop worrying about them so much, she thinks – perhaps they are tougher and more resilient than they seem.

The weather is beginning to turn. Now, there are days when the wind batters their window, and mist swirls in from the horizon, and a rain cloud settles over the island. Hilde returns to her room after breakfast or follows little John as he toddles happily up and down the corridors pulling on her skirt, trying to discourage him from making too much noise. Mrs Quayle softens towards her - and allows her a stretch of washing line on which to hang out the nappies.

They venture out, their cheeks stinging and aching from the wind, as they make slow process along the Promenade. John is admired and fed treats at every few steps. A yearning seems to come from the women – is it something about the normality of childcare which they crave, or the hope for the future which he represents? It's as if he has some mysterious healing property, like some medicine that everyone needs a dose of.

Hilde begins to recognise the different groups in the camp. There's a large crowd of "Deaconesses" from a German hospital in London, who have all been interned together. There's a group of bookish young women, all hairpins and tweed, determined not to be licked, at least in terms of their intellect, who set up reading groups which they are always asking her to join, and work their way doggedly through the classics by Goethe and Shakespeare. There are also a few scientists, who collect seaweed and study marine biology, and a group of Theosophists, inclined to earnest discussion about the soul.

The Orthodox women are quite self-contained, at their large hotel in Port St Mary, but Hilde sometimes bumps into Frau Oppenheimer, and stops to chat, always with the hope that she might have heard something more from her husband. They've been celebrating their New Year's service in a church hall, Frau Oppenheimer says.

Inge, who has an ear for gossip, sometimes comes with Hilde and John on their walks. One group of smart young women stop to coo over John. A girl with bright lipstick and a glossy fox-fur bends down and feeds him chocolates. "Oh, he's adorable," she says, with a laugh. Inge waits until they are out of sight, then pulls a face.

"What's wrong?" Hilde asks.

Inge draws her closer, and whispers. "They are rumoured to be ladies of easy virtue. You know...."

"Oh!" Hilde exhales. "Oh, really?"

"Yes! Lotte told me, everyone says so, and I'm pretty sure it's true – look at how they dress, after all. You really should try to be more discriminating." Inge's face shines with excitement. "Lotte says that the tall one is the mistress of a famous newspaper tycoon. He owns one of the newspapers that wanted us all locked up! Too bad for him that she's German."

"Well, perhaps it serves him right, for always printing such nonsense about us!" Hilde replies.

Further along the seafront, Inge suddenly scoops little John onto her hip, grabs Hilde by the arm, and swerves across the road, to avoid a pair of women on the pavement opposite. "They're from a brown house," she hisses – which means that they are Nazi sympathisers. "You should be careful who you talk to," she warns. "He's a darling boy, but very blonde – which they like, of course - and you know how easily people start to make assumptions."

The down-side to all the attention John attracts is that everyone has an opinion. The little boy should be fed more of this and less of that, he should be wearing warmer clothes, and is getting too big to be carried. "You're spoiling him!" warns one of the older women at the hotel, at breakfast. Hilde nods politely but ignores the advice – there's still a trace of bewilderment in his eyes, and she feels he needs a little spoiling.

She has less time for the piano, but there's no shortage of people eager to mind John, and plenty of clamour for her to perform, so she still practices when she can. Clara Weber often plays with her, on the violin. Inge learns some of the haunting folk songs of the Isle of Man and of Ireland, together with Old English folk songs and rounds, which she plays on her recorder.

At last, Hilde receives the letter that Ludwig wrote from Scotland, three months before. She can tell from all the stamps on the envelope that it's been sent on from Hornsey to Holloway, and then to the Isle of Man. She reads it in a sort of trance – she feels as if she can see herself from somewhere on the ceiling, with her bent head and trembling hands, as she scans the lines for information. So he was on the Arandora Star and was rescued – dear God, dear Heaven, it's really true! After imagining all the possibilities for so long, it feels very strange to finally know.

He writes that he hasn't even caught a cold after the ordeal, but – in a phrase that haunts her - that the sights he witnessed were “not fit for human eyes to see.” He writes that he knows for sure, after his narrow escape from death, that he could never give her up, even if it might seem the right thing to do. At last he seems to have come to his senses, although it has taken this horrific tragedy to awaken him. She reads his letter many times, and cries with a mixture of pent-up relief and frustration. Thank God, at last! But there is still no return address “You see – not even German torpedoes can do for us!” he writes. This makes her superstitiously angry, because torpedoes can “do for” anyone, surely? She hopes he's right – because where is he now?

All that she has is an ever-present sense of him, in her head. She walks along the windy beach, and he's in the rhythm of the waves, or at the other end of the glistening path that the sun makes on the water. She tucks a photograph of him into the edge of the looking glass in the bedroom, and points it out to baby John, and tries to get him to say “Papa.”

On the evening of her birthday, they give a little concert in a Café, overlooking the sea. There's a curved bay window, with a panoramic view of the bay. The women sit around tables, and there's a decent piano.

Inge introduces them. "Ladies, we are pleased to share with you some music from our talented friends, Hilde Weiss and Clara Weber." There's a polite patter of applause.

Hilde and Clara play a Mozart Sonata, while Inge turns the pages. Marianna comes in with little John, who behaves beautifully, and falls asleep on Dr Liebreich's lap, while she brushes the blond wisps of hair gently from his forehead. From time to time, Hilde looks up, and sees tears gleaming in the watching eyes. Some women cry openly, pressing handkerchiefs to their faces.

The waves crash on the shore below, and the sun goes down, tinting the clouds blood-red and purple. The sky makes Hilde think of a landscape in flames – and of the war going on, over the horizon. The music, the sea, her son, and the surge of affection which she feels towards her fellow internees - it's all the more precious, because it feels so fragile. Her hands move up and down the keys, and the music seems to flow from somewhere far away, through her hands, and into the room.

## ***Heart Trouble***

Ludwig gets up very early, when the camp is still asleep, to chop wood for the kitchen. It's still relatively cool, and peaceful. The neat rows of huts, the washing lines, the latrines, the garbage bins – in a small cloud of flies - and the oil-drum incinerator: all lie silent. He can hear the long, strange peal of a kookaburra, and the occasional echoing call of a magpie.

The wooden watchtowers are manned, and the elderly guards wait high above their charges, with the relaxed half-attention of life-guards by a swimming pool. Beyond the double lines of barbed wire fencing at the perimeter, the bush stretches away in a series of undulating hills, until the trees are just small blurred scribbles, in the misty distance.

Ludwig works beneath one of the larger gum trees in the camp. He swings his axe: the cracks ring out at intervals. Australian wood is hard, but also brittle and misshapen: he does his best to make regular pieces, and sometimes feels almost like a sculptor. A lizard scuttles for the safety of the woodpile.

His body – so scrawny and pitiful when they disembarked, a pale frame marred by skin rashes and protruding bones – is now wiry and strong, filled out by food, and burned golden brown by the Australian sun. His hair is a little thinner on top these days, and sun-bleached so blonde it's almost white. To everyone's relief, they have at last been separated from the Nazi sailors, but now he has learned of Hilde's internment. His sweet harmless wife - locked away in a prison! What can such a place be like? How can the baby and his parents cope? With friends like this, who needs enemies! The news of the war is terrible: his insides turn to liquid when he thinks about the mass bombardment of London. Work helps him a little, the mechanical movement and the absorbing rhythm - and crack follows loud, echoing crack.

A soft buzz – like an insect – intrudes on his solitude. He lowers the axe, straightens, and shades his eyes. In the distance, he can see the post office van from the small town nearby, making its way in a cloud of dust and petrol fumes along the dirt road outside the boundary. It stops at the gates of the camp and waits as they're opened up by the guards on duty.

The sight of the van produces a nervous contraction of his stomach. Who will get a letter today, he wonders? Probably not him, this time – and it's better not to hope.

He returns to his work, and then, once he has a reasonable load, delivers the wood to the kitchen in a wheelbarrow. The head cook once worked in one of the best hotel kitchens in Vienna, and now performs daily miracles with the plain but plentiful ingredients, salting his labours with the swear words of several camp languages. He calls out his customary greeting - "About time, you lazy Schwanz, unless you like your breakfast raw?" and waves Ludwig in the direction of the wood-fuelled cooking stoves, before returning to berate one of the younger kitchen helpers at his chopping board ("Not like that, you useless little Pisher, here, let me show you!")

Ludwig leaves his load of wood. They're having problems with the refrigerator cabinet, and he's promised to take another look – he removes some dry grass from around the compressor, fiddles around with a loose connection, and hopes for the best. Then he takes a tin mug of tea and finds a quiet spot outside to smoke a cigarette.

He thinks about the experiments he's been doing with different substances, to see which protects best against sunburn. So far he's tried a mixture of Vaseline and toothpaste, and cooking oil mixed with sand. The red-brown tan on his arm is oddly striped, as a result. He plans to try again today.

The camp is slowly beginning to stir. Smoke rises up from the Kosher kitchen. Someone has switched on the wireless, tuned to a Melbourne station, and a tinny music spills out into the sunshine. A queue is forming at the bath house. Other cries



and whistles carry on the morning air. To his surprise, one of the cries becomes his own name – “Weiss! Hey, Weiss!”

Ludwig finishes his cigarette and stubs it out in the dust. His hut partner, Leonhard Drechler, jogs across the open space near the mess hut. He’s one of the new crowd that has joined them, shipped over from Singapore in comparative luxury, with trunk loads of possessions, in light tropical suits and panama hats. There are even some women and children, who have been moved into a family compound next door.

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere,” Leonhard pants. A former ski instructor, he’s a rare type in the camp - neither Jewish nor exactly political, he doesn’t like to toe the line, and has a deep temperamental aversion to being forced to join an organisation he dislikes. For these reasons, and for refusing to back down, he finds himself on the other side of the world. “They want you in the Commandant’s Office. Apparently, there’s a wire!”

Ludwig feels a lurch of alarm. A letter is the source of great envy – men scowl angrily at the lucky recipient, who is usually doing a victory jig, or running off like a dog with a bone to chew – but a telegram? This is clearly significant (Leo Piski got one, when his wife gave birth in Guildford) but also troubling.

“If it’s that Putz Churchill, about my release, you can tell him he took his time,” calls over the cook - but even he sounds impressed.

The sun has begun to sting his skin. Ludwig walks to the office, but his legs have lost their strength, and his heart is thumping. Is it good news or bad news, he wonders? In internment, he’s become more like a child, both hopeful and superstitious. Perhaps as a result of his powerlessness, even small things feel important, and the bigger things contain a sense of the limitless potential for unthinkable joy, just around the corner. But his body tells him it’s bad – he can feel it in his stomach. Despite the heat of the day, a chill grips his guts, like a cold, iron hand around his intestines.

This Commandant here, Captain Buckley, is a barrel-shaped man: broad chested, although not especially tall, with large shoulders and arms. He has olive skin, tanned leathery-brown by the sun, and a broad nose. Like most of the guards, he's a veteran of the last war. When Ludwig arrives, he's drinking his morning tea (although Ludwig has heard rumours that whiskey is more his thing). He has a thick Australian accent, and his voice is a low growl. "Weiss? Have a seat. I'm afraid, old fellow, we have a wire from London. Shall I read it aloud?"

Ludwig feels his way into the chair. The telegram is from Ruth. "Please – no!" he mutters to himself, as the Captain begins speaking. Not the baby, not Hilde, anything but that...

"Direct hit 24 Belfort Road N8 stop." Ludwig can hardly hear through the hurricane in his head. "Regret to inform you both parents fatally injured stop. No further casualties stop." It's his parents – but only his parents! He feels a wave of guilty disorientation, almost as if he's responsible himself, because of his frantic inner bargaining. The funeral has been arranged, Ruth says (and in fact, by the time he gets the wire, it has already taken place). Hilde is apparently on the Isle of Man, presumably with the baby, and she has also been told.

Ludwig puts his hands over his face. He does not cry – once again, his body seems to feel the effects of the news, long before his mind can absorb it. He's shaking, and nausea washes over him. Both his parents are dead! But not Hilde and the baby, he reminds himself. He feels the world shudder and rearrange itself around him.

Captain Buckley looks down at his desk. "I'm sorry," he says. He holds out the telegram, so that Ludwig can read it again, for himself. He sees his parents' names in the small, square type.

With a small part of his brain, Ludwig is watching himself with curiosity, and wondering if he's reacting the way he is supposed to. Can there be some mistake? Surely it can't be true? He will refuse to believe it! He helped them escape from

Germany, only to be killed by a German bomb. He should have been with them, to protect them! But here are their names, there can be no doubt.

There's a strange sensation in his throat, and he clutches at his chest. Captain Buckley looks worried. His dark eyes glitter with concern, buried in the deep creases of his face. "You don't suffer from heart trouble or anything, do you?"

He has to repeat this question several times. "No heart trouble, or anything like that? Are you in pain, old fellow? Shall I call the M.O.?" Ludwig shakes his head – it's typical, he thinks – all they care about is the risk of extra paperwork.

"No," he says, "it's just...."

"You take your time."

He looks at the Commandant's face, and sees the pity reflected back.

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News of Ludwig's loss spreads around the camp in an instant; suddenly, everyone knows. He's treated with a superstitious sympathy. It's a telegram along the lines that so many of them dread. Within a few years, most of them will lose their families or friends, and because he's one of the first – because the news is so sudden, and absolute – his loss seems to strike them all, like an awful premonition.

Voices are hushed at his approach. The darkness he felt in Devon returns. They communicate their sympathy in any way they can – clumsy embraces and claps on the shoulder, extra stew at dinner – but there are some who can't face him and leave the table when he sits. Oppenheimer offers to gather together the necessary group and recite Kaddish for his parents – if Ludwig will permit this? – and there are other offers of prayers. Some of them have seen death first hand, when the Arandora Star went down, but although there are similarities, this is different – so personal and individual, touching one man alone. It's isolating. Ludwig sometimes

feels as if he has become a cautionary tale – he’s like the grim reaper, or perhaps Mephistopheles, from Faust.

They remember him later, when it comes to them, although it comes to them differently. Letters will begin to find their way back after many months, stamped with an eagle, and scrawled with a blunt message – “No further residence in this town,” “Vanished without trace,” “Departed – no forwarding address.” So will begin their slow, lifetime’s journey through horror. And before this, Ludwig begins, gradually, the painful task of believing it. This might take, he sometimes feels, the rest of his life, if he ever manages it at all.

Their ghosts visit him at night – white from the plaster dust, their limbs bent to strange shapes by the falling masonry – to join the swollen, oil-smeared ghosts of the drowned. With time they come less frequently, but they never stop coming entirely, as if to feed some childish sensory curiosity about the moment of death. Not to be able to bury his parents, Ludwig discovers, makes him unable to mourn them properly. He has the sense of some vital human task left undone. The war has found him - even here - in the strange, indirect way it finds most people. Having lost them to violence, he can no longer experience the world as a peaceful place, however quiet his surroundings.

The life of the camp goes on, but it now seems at a distance. Felix and a couple of the younger men begin brewing an illicit liquor from fruit and sugar, which they get hold of by bribing the cook. Ludwig tries to help, but it’s tricky to get right. They bury the bottles under the huts, which are raised on wooden poles, a few feet above the ground. One of their experiments explodes during morning roll call, with a noise like a muffled bomb, making the elderly Australian guards jump and grab for their guns, and look around in bewilderment.

Visitors arrive, nervous and dusty, with suits crushed by the journey, wiping the sweat off their faces with handkerchiefs. They are shown around the camp and given the chance to ask questions: they come on behalf of different charitable

bodies. They are often under the impression that the men are prisoners of war.

“Were you captured on a submarine?” one of them asks the cook and then seems confused by the torrent of German and Yiddish swear words which he splutters into his vat of goulash. A man from the Jewish Aid Committee looks at his feet. “We will try to help you, but please don’t think of staying here”, he mumbles. “Australia is a very welcoming country, but there are limits. We have worked hard to build good relations...”

Ludwig lives it all through a veil of sadness. He will never see his parents again! The memories are everywhere, hidden like incendiaries in his daily life. He remembers his mother as she once was – young, strong and bossy – in the days when she ruled over his world. He remembers his father, and what a proud, guilty joy it was even to have a father, in the days after the Great War – his large hands, fixing broken toys, teaching him to fly his first kite.

A process which began with his emigration now seems to be reaching some climax. He feels as if he’s dying himself. It’s perhaps the death of his youth – and the end of the German part of his life. He seems to see the past superimposed on the present. The sparse, dry Australian bush becomes overlaid, for him, with the dense green beauty of the Black Forest; the gleaming reservoir becomes the vast expanse of the Bodensee. Clouds of cockatoos swirl overhead. At night, he hears a baby crying from the family compound, and the sound fills him with an exquisite pain. In the hut used for prayers, all the candles have melted. Some of the men make wreaths from eucalyptus leaves or carve wooden angels. In the summer heat of this country, he experiences an empty, upside-down Christmas, like a cruel parody, the inverse of all the others he has known, once so filled with family, and love.

In his dreams, he’s running. Someone is screaming – “another one’s coming – take cover! Take cover!” His mother has another chance to reach the shelter, but she’s dying again soon, and he can’t help her. He dreams of blasted ruins, half buried by a sandstorm, and wakes with an ache in his chest, and tears in his eyes.

Fritz and Felix spend time with him, although he is hard company through his moods of hopelessness and fury. Felix has received a new pair of spectacles in the post, and they joke that he looks as if he works for the Kreditanstalt. The hut smells of overheated woodchip, like a sauna. There is a map of Europe, from a newspaper, pasted onto the wall.

They look at a text book – Ludwig has offered to help Felix with his study of physics - but Ludwig struggles to concentrate. Science itself now seems complicit. The concepts and formulae, which once contained an abstract beauty, now speak to him only of broken bodies.

“God Damn those Nazi bastards, for all they have done to mankind!” he breaks out.

“And may He grant us to be victorious over them soon.” Fritz completes the thought, which has acquired, for them, the repetitive, musical passion of a liturgy.

There is a rumour that the USA has suspended all immigration. Then a telegram from the Home Office asks for a list of all internees with US “waiting numbers” – bringing new hope for Fritz and Felix, who want to join relatives in America. “I’ve been a second-class citizen in Germany, and in Britain. But in the USA – perhaps we shall have the chance to prove ourselves on merit alone,” Felix says.

“Perhaps soon, we’ll be eating steak in New York,” adds Fritz, raising his empty tin mug as if in a hopeful toast.

Ludwig writes to Hilde. He finds it difficult to believe in her continued existence. He has no idea of conditions on the Isle of Man, and the time delay means that so much has changed before he gets to hear about it. His wife and child, in a prison camp, on a rock in the ocean! Oh God, will he ever see them again? This loss has become all too imaginable to him, but it is a blow he could not bear.

It’s a while before he can bring himself to do so, but he also writes to Ruth, thanking her stiffly for her kindness and for making the arrangements. He would like

to know more details, but what's the use? He hopes that she, Ernst and their family are safe and well.

She must know, he writes, about the gold coins. Does she know what has become of them? If some are left, they can perhaps be used to cover any outstanding costs of the funeral, and any remainder kept safe for Hilde and their child.

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Hilde also receives a telegram. Ludwig's parents have been killed by a bomb.

It can't be true! She reads the telegram over and over, as if it is a riddle which might contain some other meaning. Then she thrusts it at Inge – unable to read the words aloud. She feels shaken and sick.

"If you weren't here, you could have been killed too," Inge spells it out, with her usual lack of tact. For a while, all Hilde can do is to hold on to the child, horrified by the thought of how easily she could have lost him. He can't understand, of course – and perhaps it is a blessing.

The other women cluster around her with a fascinated horror. She wishes they would leave her alone. It is impossible to believe – she still has her mother-in-law's letter on her dressing table, her peevish voice in her head! Yet she has no choice, she must begin to believe it. She feels sadness, but also a terrible guilt. Ludwig's parents were a burden at times, but they were family. She should have taken better care of them for Ludwig. Perhaps she should somehow have got them out of London, or even insisted they should be interned too? Will he ever forgive her? "My poor darling," she whispers, in her head. "I'm so sorry!" And where will she and the child go, now, if they are released? The only home they had is gone.

She knows, now, that Ludwig is in Australia. It has been reported in the newspaper that a ship of internees has landed there; there are other women in the

camp in the same situation, and gradually, they find each other. She writes to him every week, in the hope that the letters might at some point reach him. It's an act of faith and feels like a precariously one-sided conversation – as if she's sustaining her marriage by sheer effort of imagination, almost as though she's making him up. Does the man she's created in her mind bear any relationship to reality? She has to write and tell him what has happened, although she is reluctant. Is he strong enough to withstand such a blow? She's afraid of what it will do to him – his letters, especially the last few from before her left England, seemed so strange and bleak, so full of suppressed despair. As she writes or reads, she's aware of the censor, a silent but powerful intruder in their relationship, who reads the words first.

The weather grows cold and very windy: the window frames rattle all night. Hilde finds excuses to visit the boarding houses with warm sitting rooms. Dr Liebreich has moved to one of the better heated, but the camp authorities have finally recognised that she will be less trouble if she's given some patients to look after, and she's happily delivering babies in the Hydro, so is rarely to be found at home. They sleep covered with bedding, coats, and even rugs. There's an occasional air raid warning, but the island is not bombed.

A pair of Manx women give Hilde and Inge black looks, as they pass them by the shops on Station Road. "It's a bit much," one remarks loudly to the other, "swanning around as if they own the place!" Sometimes there's no more than a disapproving tut-tutting, or a deliberate slowness and reluctance to help, which convey their dislike almost as clearly.

One morning, Hilde is in the wool shop with some friends, and a local woman opens the door, breathes deeply, and leaves again.

"What's wrong with her?" Hilde asks the shopkeeper, who is usually very friendly.

"You can't really blame her," he says, flatly. "Her husband was on the Mona's Queen. He was killed at Dunkirk."



“Oh!” Hilde says. “Oh, I see. How dreadful.” She’s choked with shock, and her eyes fill up. She’s pictured receiving this news herself, so often – all the months she’s had of worrying so much for Ludwig, and not knowing if he’s drowned – and she’s stung with an awful sympathy for the woman.

People move from one boarding house to another, and sort themselves into groups. Once they have found like-minded friends, they become more confident in their views. Those with Nazi sympathies allow their prejudice to show.

Hilde’s in a café on a rainy afternoon – she’s brought John along just to get out of the hotel for an hour or so. The door opens with a jangle, and three women come in. The room is crowded, and all of the tables are occupied. It’s humid inside and the windows are misty with condensation. The owner glances up from her newspaper, from behind a counter, next to a few rock buns under a glass dome.

The new arrivals look around at all the Jewish women, in animated conversation. “Mein Gott, it seems we are in a Judenschule!” one of them exclaims disdainfully, and her friend laughs.

There’s endless gossip – who can be trusted? Who’s hiding their true loyalties? People are being called back to new tribunals, and sometimes released, which also causes bitterness. “I can’t believe it! Her cousin in the Gestapo, and her uncle, high up in the SS – and they let her out. Yet poor Mrs Oppenheimer got an “A” again. I just don’t understand these people!”

Christmas comes. The internees buy up every trinket in Port Erin to give as gifts, and knit each other presents, or make things with shells. At the Belle Vue, the women decorate the dining room with paper chains, and set up a fir tree. Large Frau Hummel appears in a red dressing gown with cotton-wool trim, as the “Weihnachtsmann,” and John and the other children in the hotel receive their gifts with solemn awe. Hilde plays the piano, and they sing “Stille Nacht” and “O Tannenbaum.”

“Of course, it’s for the children,” they assure each other, a sharp needle of pain in their hearts.

Hilde thinks of the last two years with Ludwig’s parents. She closes the piano lid, and sits back in her chair, with her cheeks hot, and a lump in her throat. How can they be gone, just like that? What’s the point in pretending? What kind of Christmas is it when bells can’t ring, because that’s the signal of the invasion, and the lights can’t shine, because of the blackout; when people huddle underground, afraid of the sky? How can anyone celebrate, with families torn apart, and tragedy only a telegram away?

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Ludwig wakes one morning and feels numb. It’s 1941. The constant nausea in the pit of his stomach is gone. Perhaps he’s reached a saturation point, exhausted with grieving. He feels that everything impossible has already happened. He showers, shaves, and gets dressed – all the time waiting for it to hit him again – but the world seems distant and muffled, as if behind glass. He’s stopped feeling any emotion with much intensity. It’s a kind of relief. He’s aware of the noise around him – so much agitation about this and that. “Why do they bother?” he thinks. Hilde and John become very remote – like a pleasant story he’s once heard, long ago, in the distant past.

He looks out at the family compound, next to his own. As always, there’s a fence in the way, with its wire twists like decorative calligraphy, or musical notation – almost pretty, if you can forget what they’re for - vicious little buds on a futuristic bough. He can see children playing in the dust, and clumps of women, chatting beneath a tree. One of the women reminds him, from a distance, of Hilde. She’s slender and dark, with a baby on her hip.

He watches them for a while, with a foolish hunger. When she's alone with the children, he calls out to her. "Guten Tag," she replies politely, with a wave, and he beckons her over.

As she approaches the fence, he sees that she's not like Hilde at all. "Excuse me, young lady," he calls out, as politely as he can, although he's lost the habit of speaking to a woman – "would you mind telling me, how old is your child?"

The woman looks nervous. Perhaps, Ludwig suddenly thinks, she's worried that he's one of those with a "damaged roof" – camp slang for the people with psychiatric symptoms. She answers him, however, with a timid smile. "He's four months old," she calls back.

"Ah!" This is no good, of course – the baby is much too young. "I was wondering, what does a child of about twenty months look like?"

"My friend's boy, over there, is eighteen months," she says, pointing.

He watches the little boy she's indicated. This toddler is something else entirely, more like a miniature person - unlike the vulnerable, big-headed baby, who seems to belong to another species. He watches as the toddler's mother bends down, and sets him off like a mechanical toy, running in one direction, unsteady but surprisingly fast, with a high-pitched squeal of delight.

"Thank you," he says, and turns away abruptly to avoid a look of pity on her face. He has almost forgotten what it feels like to touch a woman, to lift a child. He feels that his body has now become completely un-loveable.

Ludwig carries on working. He rises rapidly from the role of wood-chopper to Quartermaster, responsible for food stores for the camp. It's a relief to have something practical to occupy his mind. He's suggested some work to improve the toilets and the waste disposal system and is drawing up some plans. It helps that he's not from any of the major religious or political groups, who all suspect each other of seeking favourable treatment. This new responsibility means that he sits

every day with the Commandant, Captain Buckley, going through orders and supplies in his office.

Captain Buckley is different from the British Officers he's come across. There are often a couple of other men outside the office when Ludwig arrives, waiting to talk to him – and Buckley sees them himself, unlike the Colonel in Devon who delegated this task to someone more junior. Buckley listens to their problems with none of the eye-rolling or bafflement they've been used to, just a frown of concentration on his wide, sun-weathered brow. He asks them a few questions, and then makes an enigmatic comment of some kind, which no one else understands, but which seems to amuse him considerably. The men leave without much hope – they are so used to disappointment. After a few days, however, and to everyone's surprise, the camp schedule or facilities are suddenly altered. The men find that they can observe the Sabbath, begin to practice their trade, or study for exams. Helpful items arrive, sent by the charitable visitors, and passed on by the camp authorities - separate utensils for the Kosher kitchen, text books for the students, even a harmonium on which hymns can be played.

Ludwig wonders if Buckley is too soft – perhaps these accommodations will erode his authority? The atmosphere of the camp is better, however, than any of the other places where they've been held. The concessions almost seem to happen by accident, and Buckley's leadership style is erratic and confusing. The soldiers say that he has "a touch of the tar brush", which Ludwig doesn't understand. Buckley does not seem very aware of his own rank – his language can be quite coarse - and he often talks to Ludwig as if there's no difference in their situation.

"How are you doing, Weiss?" Buckley says, one afternoon, as the ceiling fan – the only one in the camp – clanks overhead.

"Not too bad, Sir," Ludwig says.

"No more heart trouble?"

Ludwig frowns. Does he mis-remember, or is this some kind of analogy, or joke? “I don’t suffer with any heart trouble, Sir,” he says.

“Oh, you know what I mean, don’t you?” The Commandant opens the cabinet drawer that contains a bottle of whiskey and pours himself a small glass, which he drinks down quickly. He doesn’t offer any to Ludwig, who is used to this routine - but hands him a cigarette and takes another for himself. “I wouldn’t blame you if it took a while,” he continues, in his low growl. “I’ve seen some messy things in my time – Gallipoli, now that was a bloody shit show on another level. But there was something about seeing you, sitting there... I don’t know.”

Ludwig is embarrassed by this. He would prefer to talk about supplies again, or his waste disposal ideas. He’s good at this new job and has managed to make savings. Outside the window, there’s a view of the rows of corrugated iron and timber huts, and a flag pole, where the Australian flag flutters in the sun.

“You were an Aircraft Engineer, you say?” the Commandant says, as Ludwig lights his cigarette. “I’d have thought the Brits might find a use for a bloke like you, helping with the war effort.” Ludwig once thought so, too, but now he says nothing. He has learned that his views make no difference.

“What does it mean, when they say that our problem is ‘ticklish’?” he asks Otto, later on. They are walking along the inside of the perimeter fence, in the early evening.

“It seems that the Australians, too, do not want refugees,” Otto explains. “It is indeed an odd paradox that a nation created by immigration can be so unshakably opposed towards all newcomers.”

“You might think, with all this space...” Ludwig says, looking at the empty miles outside, and the blueish hills, rolling into the distance. He’s heartily sick of communal living, of so many people, of the smells and sounds of men.

They read in the newspapers that they are to receive compensation for their losses on the Dunera, and that some of the Officers on board are threatened with a

court martial. They are pleased to learn that their treatment has become a scandal. "I'm not getting on a ship with you!" jokes Leonhard, Ludwig's hut partner. Leonhard's own luxurious journey on the Queen Mary from Singapore makes a bizarre contrast, and they sometimes tease each other about this. "You seem to have rather bad luck in that department."

Ludwig can see what he means – after what he experienced on the Arandora Star and the Dunera, the idea of another voyage is not appealing. The sensation of numbness helps with this, too. What does it matter what he wants? One shouldn't bother wishing for things, he's learned - it only makes things worse. The others talk endlessly, debating the latest rumours and plans, but he no longer even listens.

Finally, a Major arrives, sent by the British, to begin to unpick the messy situation they have created through their own illogical policy. The men stand on the area of open ground between the bath house and the mess hut, where they assemble for roll call every day, to listen to his speech. The weather is turning cooler at last. Ludwig has received a parcel containing the blue pull-over which Hilde knitted for him in Holloway, and he's wearing it. It's strange to think that her hands have touched this very wool.

"Now that's a uniform we haven't seen in a while," Otto comments, but even he looks excited, and all the men strain to hear.

In a business-like, unemotional tone, the Major lays out their situation. Unusually for the British, he is very blunt. "Quite frankly, your best chance of getting home is to join the Pioneer Corps," he says. "This is your war too. You chaps have got a snowball in hell's chance of being released in Australia." He tells them that if they sign up, they might be allowed back to England.

A disappointed murmur goes through the crowd. Is this what they've spent so long waiting for? "Shipping is a problem," the Major goes on, "it will be hard to find transport back to Britain, and there is a significant risk of torpedo attack. Married men, with wives in England, will also be favourably considered." He's not making

promises, and the options he sets out do not sound very encouraging. After this they are dismissed, and trail back to their huts miserably.

The Kosher cooks prepare a Seder meal, and the whole camp is invited for Passover. "I hope you will join us," Oppenheimer says.

Almost all of them are in the dining hut that night, some tables crowded with men in skull caps and ringlets, other tables lined by men with slicked down hair and carefully scrubbed faces. Many wear new suits which they've ordered from the camp tailor.

Rabbi Himmelstein recites the Haggadah, standing at the head of the top table, swaying slightly to the overlapping torrent of sound. Ludwig is surprised by the number of men who seem familiar with the ritual - even Otto, and some of the other Communists, who Ludwig has never suspected of religious sentiment. Now that it is too late to ask him, Ludwig thinks of his father, and wonders how he felt, as a child, listening to these same prayers? How well did he know these ancient words and lyrical melodies, and what did they mean to him? He feels frozen: there was this whole part of his father's personality that he cannot share, and now it is too late to even try. Outside, the sandy ground looks white in the moonlight, and the wooden watchtower casts an inky shadow.

The large front door to the mess room is opened. The men wait in silence. "What's happening?" Ludwig whispers.

"We wait for Elijah to come," whispers Erwin Blumenthal.

Outside, the Australian bush is dense with noise. An orchestra of crickets thrum in the darkness, joined from time to time by other-worldly chirrups and calls, from the nightjars, possums, frogs and owls. Everyone stares at the doorway. The night seems to pulse with longing.

Ludwig realises they are all thinking of the people, far away, they most want to walk through it. There is a strange tension, as if someone might really arrive. He imagines his parents stepping in – it's ridiculous, of course, but no more impossible

than the idea that they are completely gone. There is only a small gust of wind, from outside.

At last they eat. "Are any of you going to join up?" Ludwig asks. A list of volunteers is being made.

"I haven't decided yet. Are you?" says Frankel.

"What, and become cannon fodder for the imperialist and his lackeys?" Otto and some of the Communists have objections in principle, but there are lots of other, more practical worries.

"What if we're captured? They'd kill us, obviously, but what worries me is what they'd do to us first..." says Blumenthal.

Geller is pink-cheeked from the wine. He wipes a few beads of sweat from his bald forehead with a handkerchief. "I still hope to use my professional skills – why should we sell ourselves as 'coolies' to shovel sand, while anyone with half a brain can see that we're educated men, with more to offer?" Several men raise their eyebrows at this, wondering which particular skills he has in mind.

"Well, I'm in," says Kowalski. "I want out of here, in the worst way." Ludwig thinks, from the look on his face, that Kowalski might quite like to kill someone – and failing that, he'd be able to move a lot of sacks. "Well, we have to do something, don't we?" he says.

Fritz and Felix are hoping to join their parents in the USA. "We'll try for transmigration first. If that doesn't work out, we might join up," Fritz says.

"My parents are in Frankfurt," says Heinz. "What if the German authorities find out, and take it out on them? Life has become very hard for them already. I couldn't..." he trails off.

They look down at the table, laden with food. The letters from within the Reich are written in a strange, circumspect code, but there are rumours they begin to hear. Ludwig feels sick. Perhaps it's the shock of his parent's death, but increasingly, he has the feeling that something unimaginable is going on, far away. It's a good job he



no longer cares about anything, because if he did, how could he live? He thinks of his uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. How can he be here, eating like this, when back in Europe, God knows...

"My mother is in Mainz..." Frankel pushes away his plate.

"My sister has been moved to a 'Jewish Residential Area' – whatever the hell that means..." Kowalski scowls.

"My wife and daughter are still, I think, in Amsterdam," says Blumenthal.

An awful silence descends, into which the final verses come like a lament. Ludwig gulps down another mouthful of the liquid. He's unused to alcohol. Large insects swarm in the beam of the searchlights.

The phrases of the evening linger with a mysterious, dream-like poetry. Slavery and exodus, freedom and suffering, this night of all nights - at this time, of all times. How sad all this would be, he thinks distantly, if any of it really mattered. There's a strange relief in being close to other Jewish men – they all remind him, in different ways, of his father. For all his distrust of organised religion, there is something animal about this feeling of affinity, a sort of physical recognition. It's like an underground river, which runs through him and them.

Around the tables, the men speak an overlapping toast, some smiling bitterly, some shrugging, some mumbling their emotion. They raise their tin mugs. *"Next year in Jerusalem."*

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"Have you heard?" Heinz runs from hut to hut the following morning, to spread the news. A list has been posted on the notice board! They cluster round to read. A group of men has been selected for the first transport back to England. It contains the names of those who are ill or frail – Hirschwitz, for example, one of the oldest men to have survived the shipwreck, one fellow with asthma, and another with

a liver problem. Heinz is also on the list. It seems he has already been “released” by a British Tribunal in his absence, although no one in authority knew where he was, so it hasn’t made any difference to him. The Pioneer Corps volunteers are disappointed – Kaminski and Blumenthal, who’ve signed up, swear bitterly beneath their breaths - but at least something is happening at last. Ludwig’s name is not up there, but there’s no reason why it would be, and he’s not surprised. He reads the list without emotion. He feels no envy, or frustration, or even much happiness for those heading back.

He sits in the Commandant’s office that afternoon, going through a list of supplies. The kitchen refrigerator has broken again, and a whole vat of butter has been spoiled. Perhaps it’s this that makes him feel irritable.

“You understand, don’t you, that I can’t get involved on compassionate grounds?” Captain Buckley says, his broad shoulders bent over the record books. “Every man here would have a case. It’s the Major who gets to make the decisions.”

Ludwig thinks this goes without saying. “I understand, Sir,” he says.

Buckley looks troubled. “You’re still determined to go back? The crossing is none too safe at the moment. It’s too bad – we could use you out here.”

What does it matter what he wants to do? Nevertheless, Ludwig nods. “If I get a chance. It’s my wife, Sir. She’s all alone now, with our child, and I don’t know what conditions are like for her.”

Buckley sighs and shakes his head. “You see my friend, it’s the old heart trouble, again! I was right, wasn’t I? I spotted it straight away,” he laughs wheezily to himself, and slides open the whiskey drawer. “Sometimes, a girl will give you a lifetime’s dose...”

Ludwig frowns, then decides he must be joking. This Commandant is impossible to understand - he seems to have the most peculiar sense of humour. “It was the same in the last war,” Buckley carries on. “I shouldn’t feel too sorry for you

blokes - it's not like I'm your father, is it? I've had enough bloody troubles of my own, haven't I? This whole shitty mess – there's no point in taking it personally.”

That night, Ludwig dreams of the little boy in the next compound. The small child is running towards him – a fast, unsteady streak of energy - and there's no ugly wire between them. As the boy gets closer, Ludwig realises that this is in fact his own son and reaches open his arms to catch him. The boy smells of cinnamon, like Christmas biscuits, and his skin is as soft as a rose petal. Ludwig wakes with a choking sensation, and a feeling on his cheek, like the imprint of a kiss.

“Weiss, Weiss – come and look!” Leonhard is calling to him from outside their hut.

Bracing himself for some new horror, he stumbles out, still in his pyjama trousers, and without a shirt.

“What is it?”

“Come and see,” Leonhard puts a hand on his shoulder, and steers him through the camp towards the noticeboard, where a small crowd has gathered.

Rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, Ludwig sees that his own name has been added by hand to the bottom of the typed list. He has to read it several times, and still cannot believe it. Is he still dreaming? Everyone else is just as bewildered. “How did you get on there, you bastard?” Otto asks him, suspiciously. “Some mystery illness? Extra rations for the Major?”

The shock jolts Ludwig fully awake. He experiences a strange sensation in his stomach – a movement, some kind of tightening or loosening. Should he run for the latrine? But no, it does not seem to be his bowels. After clutching his flank for a moment, and taking several deep breaths, he realises that perhaps it is merely the unfamiliar feeling of hope.

He suspects some kind of mistake, or perhaps some kind of irregular intervention. He knows immediately that whatever has happened, it's better not to ask any questions. People are already slapping him on the back and congratulating

him, ruffling his hair with a fond yet bitter aggression, swearing softly in astonishment, and swallowing back their resentment. From nowhere, a wild excitement is building up in his chest. His body seems to come to life, for the first time in months. He can feel his heart beating, the blood pumping in his limbs, a tingle of energy right to his fingertips. Chance has brought him here, perhaps chance can also get him home! Can he really get away with it? Is it possible that the “English muddle,” which for so long seems to have worked against him, might also provide him with a way out?

A few frantic days of preparation follow. Ludwig hardly dares stop to think. He and the chosen few rush around the camp with new purpose – collecting last minute orders from the camp tailors, visiting the camp bank, packing, and passing on prized possessions. The others look on with a mute envy, paralysed in their usual listlessness. Ludwig – when he has a spare moment – feels the occasional twinge of guilt. He persuades Stein, the book-keeper, to take over his role as Quartermaster, and tries to explain the ins and outs of the job.

“It’s a bloody shame, really. We’ll miss you,” says Captain Buckley, as he signs off the final stock-take. Ludwig takes a sideways look at his face, trying to detect some sign of complicity – he thinks that the Commandant might have had a hand in this, and perhaps even added his name himself. If so, Buckley gives no sign. “I expect you’ll want to say goodbye to a few mates tonight. But keep it down, for Christ’s sake,” he places one of his large hands on Ludwig’s shoulder, “and remember your early start.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Ludwig says.

They dig up a few of the surviving bottles, under cover of darkness, for a farewell party. Heinz is made a huge fuss of and encouraged to drink too much – the baby of the camp, somehow their hopes go with him. Even Nathaniel Oppenheimer, who does not usually socialise, drops by to wish Ludwig and the others well.

How can he say goodbye to these men, who have become like brothers to him? They drink toasts to the journey, with the strange-tasting sweet liquor. He can feel their jealousy, although they try to hide it - yet having sympathised with him over the death of his parents, they don't resent his strange good fortune as much as they might. Leaving the group which has been his world for so long is a wrench. He feels afraid of facing another sea voyage alone.

Fritz makes a little speech, with a few words for each of the men who are going. "Today we also wish a *bon voyage* to our dear friends, who have been with us in Devonshire, on the Arandora Star, in Scotland and on the Dunera – throughout this world tour, made possible by His Majesty's government, to whom we still hope to prove our loyalty!" There are nods, snorts, and ironic chuckles.

"Let's drink a toast to our dear Ludwig Weiss. He has helped to fix things which are broken, brought the miracle of refrigeration to our kitchen, and counted many cans and sacks in our stores. One day we hope he will be a famous inventor and grow rich from one of his crazy schemes and gadgets. He has lost a few games of chess," – friendly jeers – "and stayed out of a good many arguments. He can be a stubborn fool, sometimes, but perhaps his pride is what carries him through. We hope that he will return safely to his beautiful 'Rhine-maiden' and find some happiness at last. We beg that he will not forget us, and hope and pray to meet again, in better circumstances, victorious against the Fascist menace."

The men who are going make a sort of receiving line, as if they are the chief mourners at a funeral. Heinz can barely stand up by this point, so Ludwig helps support him, and Hirschwitz blinks rapidly, embarrassed and bewildered by all the attention. Leaving the hut, the others speak to them one by one, although Ludwig feels as if he's the one who has to console them.

Felix looks downcast. "Good luck with the exams," Ludwig says. "Invite me to your graduation. Maybe one day, we'll eat that steak in New York?" he reminds Fritz.

Otto hugs him. Perhaps he's right, Ludwig thinks, and a better world can emerge from the ruins – at any rate, he has to admire the energy and dedication of his attempt. "Keep up the fight, Comrade," he says.

Oppenheimer shakes his hand, solemnly. "I will pray for your safe crossing," he says. Ludwig feels guilty – Oppenheimer is older than he is and should surely be going back instead of him, with his greying beard. He too has a wife in England, and many children.

"When is Tisha b'Av this year?" he asks.

"In August," says Oppenheimer. "So there is still hope. Perhaps we may meet again."

"Next year in Jerusalem? Or at least in the north of London!" Ludwig says. Oppenheimer nods, stiffly.

They step out into the Australian night, one by one, and then Ludwig follows them. Despite the barbed wire fence, there's a dizzying sense of space in the thick darkness, and he seems to feel the thousands of miles that stretched around them. It would be enough just to meet as free men, he thinks, as he trudges back to his own hut. He's dreading the voyage – surely his luck must run out, and the torpedo will at last find its mark. Probably the mysterious "mistake" will be spotted, and he'll be sent straight back to the camp. He wonders if any of them are likely to survive this dreadful war.

The next day, Ludwig leaves the camp. He and the rest of the group that are going climb into army trucks and drive down the dirt road to the station. They are loaded onto a train and taken under guard to Sydney. After a long train ride, it's astonishing to see crowds, and trams, and department stores.

Ludwig is called to see the British Major in an army tent, in a camp just outside Sydney. It's dark, but the Major is still working, leafing through a stack of papers by the light of a paraffin lantern. He looks up, and then back down at a paper on the desk. He seems annoyed.

“Ah yes, the mysterious Weiss. What are you doing here?” he demands.

“How did your name get on the list?”

Ludwig shakes his head, blankly. He notices that British army tents are the same on this side of the world, right down to the musty smell. “I believe – I assumed, that is, Sir - that you must have asked for my name to be added.” He tries to speak meekly, with respectful deference.

The Major frowns, and looks perplexed, and moves a manila folder from one pile to another. “I don’t see why I would have done that. Plenty of other chaps older than you. And you’re a Category A, as well.”

Ludwig tries to swallow back a surge of panic. He feels the door closing on this chance, at the last moment. The awful mis-categorisation of his first Tribunal, back to haunt him again! He begins to talk fast and frantically. “It was all a mistake, this A category. I am opposed to the Nazi regime, and my father is – was - a Jew.”

The Major is a busy man. He has two thousand such case histories to get through. He takes a swig of something from a tin mug. “What was your line of work, in Germany?”

“In Germany, I previously worked as an engineer, specialising in aircraft design. I have always hoped that perhaps I could be useful to the war effort, back in Britain...”

He trails off. The Major is holding a page, scanning it with his eyes. “Oh, I see!” he interrupts. “Well, why didn’t you say so? That explains it. Jolly hard to make out, in this light. Nothing to be ashamed of, man! Not much in the way of notes, though...”

He’s writing something. There’s a long silence, while Ludwig prays to the Gods of confused British bureaucracy to smile on him, just this once. His future depends on the scratching of this pen.

“And you have a wife in England?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Yes, I see. Since it’s all a bit last minute,” he says, “we’ll have to squeeze you on as a consideration case. You’ll still be interned, when you land. Take it easy and get a good rest on the ship.”

Ludwig is confused, and hesitates, before leaving. “Excuse me, Sir – please, can I ask what it is that you read? What is it that is written on my notes?”

“What’s on your notes? Hah, that’s a bit irregular!” he smiles, as if amused, and looks back down at the paper. “Still, I don’t see why not, it’s not exactly top secret. It’s only in pencil, which is why I missed it first time. You’ve had a spot of heart trouble, it says here.”



### ***Be Loyal to England Your Host***

Ludwig makes the voyage back on a smaller ship, the *Largs Bay*. They see the huge span of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and the water teeming with yachts, ferries and ocean liners. The first thing he does, once they have boarded, is to find and memorise the fastest route from the cabin to the upper decks, and the lifeboats.

He's allowed complete freedom of movement during the journey. Sitting on a deckchair, without a guard in sight, he feels almost like a free man.

This time, the ship goes east. They call at Wellington in New Zealand, loading up with wool and with a crowd of young men who've joined up. Then they move on again, back into the "roaring forties," where they hit mighty storms, with waves like mountains. Ludwig is a good sailor, and now has plenty of experience. He tries to show the New Zealanders how to roll with the waves, bending at the knees like a skier. The boys are very sick, and sometimes, Ludwig sits alone at his table in the dining room, taking back a bread roll for Heinz, who is too ill to leave the cabin.

When the weather grows calmer, the Pacific Ocean is beautiful. Ludwig sees huge clouds of flying fish, and great expanses of sea, glowing at dusk with an uncanny phosphorescence. Looking out from his deckchair, he can see the curve of the globe, and huge cumuli, rising up from beyond the horizon. He plays cards with the New Zealanders and he and Heinz tell them the story of how they survived a torpedo attack. The New Zealanders make a good audience, hungry for adventure - although later in the voyage, Ludwig begins to feel guilty for scaring them.

He tries to civilize Heinz a little, in preparation for his return to normal life, showing him how to tidy his things or darn his socks. In the evening, and Heinz wants to go and join the New Zealand boys, sitting out on deck. "May I go now?" he asks.

"Why are you asking me?" Ludwig says, grumpily.

“I don’t know,” Heinz looks crestfallen. “I suppose I just felt as if I should ask permission from someone...”

“It’s fine,” Ludwig reassures him. “Go, enjoy yourself, and don’t stay up too late.”

The ship goes through the Panama Canal. Ludwig admires the ingenious series of interconnected locks, set against the lush green mountainside. It’s very humid, and any movement leaves him soaked with sweat. It’s a relief when they meet the cooler air of the Atlantic.

The ship refuels in Curacao. In the harbour at Willemstad, Ludwig watches shoals of brightly coloured tropical fish, in the crystal-clear water. He sees palm trees, and pretty houses in pastel shades with Dutch, gabled roofs. It’s here that he learns from the crew that Germany has attacked Russia. This news fills them with new hope – surely, with this, Hitler’s regime has overreached itself, and their fortunes will begin to turn!

The Atlantic crossing is dangerous, and the days are harder to fill. He tries to teach Heinz some mathematics, but the youngster is jumpy and distracted. “I expect there will be some letters waiting for me in England, don’t you?” he asks Ludwig, once. “I expect the headmaster is keeping them for me. They won’t have known where to send them.” Ludwig doesn’t know how to answer. His default position has become a wary pessimism about nearly everything, probably because of what happened to his own parents, but he reminds himself that this is not logical. Some of us at least must survive, he tells himself.

The New Zealand boys look nervously out at the horizon, while everyone keeps out of the way of the crew; no one talks much anymore. Their lives are in the hands of the sailors. They join a convoy, in which armed Corvettes help ward off the U boats. An aeroplane above warns them of approaching submarines.

It's a huge relief to see the green shores of Ireland, and then, at last, the entrance to the Clyde once more. It's just over a year since he left the British Isles. During his internment, Ludwig has made a complete circumnavigation of the world.

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Everyone along the corridor wishes Hilde well, and some of them lend her items of clothing. It's as if she's going for a Tribunal, or perhaps getting married. "You must be so happy!" Lotte says, and she nods, wondering why she isn't. She can't let herself believe it, yet. In fact, she just feels nervous.

She gets up early, and dresses in a borrowed navy skirt and fresh, cream-coloured blouse. Her hands tremble, as she rolls on Inge's best pair of stockings, and takes out the curlers which Marianne fixed for her the night before. John is scooped, still sleeping, from his cot, and sits – pink cheeked and dreamy-eyed – on the potty, before having his face scrubbed and blonde hair damped down and combed, by his many willing handmaids. "What a handsome boy!" they tell him, and he beams back, delightedly.

"Don't forget your handkerchief," Inge reminds her, with an envious sigh. "I'm sure there'll be a few tears." This seems odd to Hilde, but she takes it anyway – she's more likely to need it for John, she thinks.

One of her biggest worries is how John will react. What notion can he have of a father? To him, "Papa" is a photograph tucked into the mirror on their shared dresser. She's afraid he might cry or try to run away.

It's not as if he sees many other examples around him. From time to time, parties from the men's camp have been allowed in to visit their wives. A curfew is imposed, and those without visitors have to stay in their rooms. On these occasions, Hilde and Inge peer through the curtains at the procession of husbands, walking with armed guards along the sea front. They try to guess who they belong to (people are

supposed to resemble their pets – is the same true of couples, and can one tell, by looking?) Since the spring, there's also a married camp, where couples can live together, which has caused quite an upheaval, and further restrictions on their movement. But how much can little John be aware of any of this? All he knows of Papas is that they sometimes bring gifts, wonderful home-made toys – doll prams, or wood carvings - for the other children in the camp.

At the station, they meet three other women whose husbands have just arrived, and so will be travelling with them. All of them are older than Hilde – middle aged or even quite elderly - and one has a teenaged daughter with her. They are accompanied by a guard and a policewoman. Hilde knows the policewoman already. She's called Joyce Pike, and always smiles and jokes with John.

It's a beautiful summer's day. Hilde watches the view from the train window and feels terrified. All over the island, the Fuchsia are in flower, erupting over walls and fences in torrents of shocking pink and deep red.

She tries to justify it to herself. She's a different person, now. He will be different too, and probably quite unlike the husband in her head. Perhaps the imaginary Ludwig suits her rather well, actually, with none of the disadvantages of a real, flesh-and-blood man. How can she be expected just to slip back into things, as if nothing has happened? She doesn't feel ready. If only she could go back into it more gradually. She feels as if she'd prefer some kind of formal introduction, and perhaps a period of courtship. Yes, that would be the civilised way to do things.

She begins to understand the women with shell-shocked faces who confess tearfully, at their own goodbye parties, that they'd almost rather stay where they are, and not go "back into the world" at all. Having struggled so painfully with his absence, she's now grown used to it. There are some advantages, perhaps, to her female world, however irritating it often seems - the hundreds of friendly aunts for little John, for a start. The idea of a real-life man both alarms and troubles her. What can he be like, after everything he's been through? She imagines he will be disappointed,

tormented, and angry with her: perhaps he will be stiff and cruel, like those awful letters. She blames herself for leaving his parents in London: she expects that he will too.

She watches the beautiful countryside go by, blinking hard, to keep the tears at bay. Some internee men in blue overalls are working the fields, and wave at the train. She feels the same tremulous sickness as the day on which she tore up her papers and waded into the Rhine. She can't imagine he can he still love her, after everything that's happened, and it's better to be prepared for this. How can he be capable of love now, after everything he's been through? He will be full of darkness, like the men who came back from the last war. She remembers how they used to stare at her so angrily when she was a girl, with some empty part of their clothes pinned up, as if their missing limb was all her fault.

The train arrives at Douglas. The local people are now very used to seeing internees, and to Hilde's relief, they hardly draw a second glance. John insists on being carried, and the policewoman picks him up. "A big boy like you! You should be walking," she scolds him, affectionately. Is this a sign that he too is disturbed? Normally, he loves to walk. Hilde frets about what will happen after lunch, when he generally has a nap – will he cry, and cause a scene? It's really too much, she thinks, blinking back tears. Everything is disrupted, again.

They are taken to a recruiting hall. They are given cups of tea, and sit on benches, and eat the packets of sandwiches they've brought with them. John points at the posters of men in uniform - "Help Britain Finish the Job!" – urging people to join the Home Defence, the National Fire Service, the Navy. Hilde lifts him up to see. "Papa?" he asks, politely curious, of each picture. They look at their watches and the big clock on the wall. There seems to be some delay.

Eventually, four shabby, odd-looking men walk into the room. They are tanned by the sun, and wear the most peculiar, home-made, foreign-looking clothes. Hilde recognises a man who must be Ludwig. Her heart is thudding in her chest. He

looks the wrong size, although she can't tell if it's that he's bigger or smaller than she remembers.

It isn't at all what she's expecting. The part of her that's watching all this in a disconnected, anxious state of mind is apparently not the part of her that controls her body. She lets out a loud, startled cry - almost of alarm - and flings herself headlong towards him.

It's more of a collision than anything else. He staggers backwards in surprise, with a short laugh of astonishment. They are like two magnets which are drawn together – she's propelled by a force that neither is expecting. She clings to him with all her strength. The guard who's with him steps aside respectfully and can't resist an amused smile.

She's convulsed with sobs, half laughing and half crying. The hall around them disappears. "It's you! Wiggi, it's really you!" she says, using the nickname he hasn't heard since he was first interned. Taken aback, but gathering himself, Ludwig embraces her, trying to absorb some of her trembling, tracing the shape of her arms wonderingly, as if astonished by her physical reality. He bends his face toward hers, and feels a strong surge of unfamiliar emotion, as if he has only been half alive for all of this time. She can feel his warmth, and breathe in his smell – she feels dizzy with it all - and what on earth is he wearing? She will have to do something about his clothes. She notices a new, purple scar, horizontal across the palm of his hand and his fingers. It's all extremely strange.

John has scurried after her, and gives his own self-pitying wail, tugging at her skirt. She fishes for the handkerchief up her sleeve – how funny that she should need it for herself, after all. Then she bends down to pick John up. It's clear that he wants to be included. "Who's this? Who's this strange man?" she says to John, jiggling him on her arm.

After all, she realises, with a rush of hope – perhaps he needs a father more than he needs a nap. John hides his face shyly, burrowing into her, but Hilde can see that he is smiling.

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Hilde walks along the sea front towards the allotments, her skirt flapping against her legs, holding tightly on to John's hand. It's further than it looks, especially with a small child. There are a few scrawny palm trees, dotted at intervals along the road, and then, on the other side, an alarmingly steep slope down to the beach.

The sea sparkles on the horizon. The barbed wire fence is close here, but she's so used to it that she barely sees it. In her other hand, she carries a basket.

They reach the huge bulk of the Balqueen Hydro - a vast, fort-like hotel which dominates the headland - which gives them some protection from the wind. Now, the rushing in her ears gone, Hilde begins to feel the warmth of the sun through her cardigan. In the distance, the allotments look idyllic – there's something pleasing about their miniature scale, and the impression of tamed wildness. Between smudged rows of green and brown, she can see Ludwig, bending at the waist, with one foot in front of the other, like a figure on some ancient frieze.

“Look – see, there's Papa!” she points him out to John.

She had not realised – had not allowed herself to realise – what a difference it would make to have a man. She was pitied, and now she is envied. What a fuss, when she moved to the new Married Camp – the gifts, tears, heartfelt farewells, renewed emotional crises. “I'm only just along the road!” she protests, but she also understands that she's crossing some deep and primal divide, between the abandoned and the lucky few. It's unfair, but there it is – Ludwig gives her a status, a place in the world. She can see why this is just as bitter-sweetly painful to her friends as the releases, which now come along nearly every week.

John, too, has changed overnight. Before, he seemed indifferent to the distant, theoretical concept of a “Papa” – but the new discovery comes to him with the force of a religious conversion. Papa is suddenly his hero, a God, the centre of his world, the last half-smiling whisper on his lips at night, and the first insistent demand in the morning. The unfamiliar relationship is enacted with a sort of delighted theatricality on both sides. Sometimes the intensity of it – brittle, passionate, insecure - almost scares her, reminding her that despite appearances, all is not yet quite right with her little family. They are lucky, though – so ridiculously lucky!

Hilde waves and calls greetings to a few other people who are working on the allotments. Mrs Brunneman looks startled - her white hair escaping in long tendrils from her straw hat, as she murmurs encouragement to the raspberry bushes - and the gruff, unforthcoming Freydels scowl back at her suspiciously. The people here are eccentric, damaged in different ways by their sudden and violent uprooting from previous lives, but slowly unbending a little, like the plants they tend, under a gentle regime of fresh air and sunshine. The rhythms of the earth begin to renew them. Should we plant new crops, they sometimes ask themselves, when we hope not to be here to harvest them? Is it even worth thinking ahead, with the world in such a shameful state? Well, after all – they answer themselves - one has to keep busy, so, why not?

Hilde smooths down her headscarf, as Ludwig walks up to join them, a smile breaking across his sun-burned, work-flushed face. He touches John’s cheek, as if admiring some precious object, and gives her a kiss. “Have you got something to drink?” – she even likes his matter-of-fact demands. She passes him a glass bottle, and he flicks off the stopper, throws back his head and gulps. Then, wiping his mouth, he bends down to John. “Do you want to see what I’ve got?”

As usual, it’s an unexpected relief to have the child’s attention safely diverted. Hilde spreads out a cloth and sets out the picnic. They have cheese sandwiches, a few slices of reasonably successful plum cake (although it’s a shame about the



aftertaste of the margarine), and some of the malted milk biscuits that John likes. Within ear-shot, Ludwig shows off his treasures to their big-eyed boy – freshly dug potatoes, creamy white and still covered with soil, the runner beans, the tomatoes beginning to blush on their stalks, the courgettes ballooning rapidly into marrows. The allotment was planted by a family who are now free. Hilde often hopes that they have enough to eat, wherever they are.

The first few nights in the Married Camp have been very odd. They make love – like bashful, half-familiar strangers - and Hilde discovers that it is not as difficult as she expected, and that after all, his intense, sober gratitude is all the wooing she needs. Then they lie together talking in hushed whispers, so as not to wake John next door, or the others in their new boarding house.

Telling their stories is like an awkward kind of work, in the darkened bedroom – he asks her strained, blunt questions about Holloway, as if afraid to know the answers. She does the same – the blurred film-reel she’s constructed for herself of his time in internment coming a little more into focus, as he speaks – the darkness around them filling up with his weary indignation, his reticence, their different kinds of discomfort and dread.

There are things they don’t talk about. She kisses the scar on his hand, thoughtfully, as if she can heal it. “What’s this?” she whispers, flinching in anticipation.

“Nothing. A burn,” he says. It’s true that there is a darkness in him that scares her.

He can’t say much about the sinking of the Arandora Star. He doesn’t want to give her those images, or even to revisit them himself. She doesn’t tell him about how it felt to have everyone stare at her, or her shame when the travelling salesman offered her money, or about her first few days in prison, or how she felt waiting for news when the ship went down. It’s not something she can put into words - and she doesn’t want to make him feel any worse.

Over time, they labour to piece together the gaps left by the censor, in the letters so full of holes that they almost fell apart, the flimsy threads of information which link their lives. Already, there are things they can't remember. Both feel a little jealous of the other's time apart, and of the intense friendships of internment, instinctively understanding that here is lost ground that can never quite be regained.

And now, the autumn days are filled with the routines of family life – and picnic lunches, like this one. Ludwig devours his sandwiches, dirt beneath his fingernails, his sleeves rolled up, and then lies back, lazily. It's like their long-postponed honeymoon. John pokes about with a stick nearby, doing his own digging.

Hilde doesn't want to spoil it – she can hardly bring herself to risk altering his mood. Today, he looks so relaxed, but she knows he's always half waiting for bad news, for things to catch up with them again.

"There's a letter," she says tentatively, trying to put a reassuring normality into her voice. He raises himself up quickly and looks right at her. A jolt - like anger, almost like a gun shot - seems to pass through him. "Nothing bad, don't worry!" she hastens to add.

It would be nice to have a little longer. If only they had more space for themselves. Sharing the kitchen, bathroom and living room with a whole new set of strangers is a strain – but even so, she would almost have liked to stay where they are. Perhaps freedom is overrated, in the current circumstances. What does the outside world have to offer them now?

"It's good news, really," she tells him. "It's just that they've set a date for our Tribunal."

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It takes three weeks for the result of their Tribunal to come through. After waiting for so long, it all seems strangely abrupt. They take a ferry back to the

mainland in November. By horrible coincidence, it's the day Hilde's brother is killed, fighting against the Russians in the east, but they don't know this at the time.

Hilde hopes to get a last view of the island from on deck, but bad weather forces them to take shelter in the wood-panelled saloon bar. She notices something rigid in Ludwig's bearing, and he radiates distress like a cornered animal, but he tries to hide this, and is protective and considerate towards her – he treats her especially gently, at the moment. “Why don't you go and lie down for a while?” he says to her. “I'll stay here with the little one.” John sits on a creaky leatherette seat, swinging his little legs, sucking thoughtfully on a half-melting rusk, watching the rain splatter against the windows, and the grey waves tilting higher.

“Don't you want to take the bags down?” she asks.

She felt his suppressed panic as they boarded the ferry, his eyes darting around anxiously, noting the position of the lifeboats, the circular orange life belts, the swing doors, as if he were working on some secret mental plan of the ship. Now, grimly watchful, he scans the room – the barman, the bolted down furniture, the other passengers slumped in damp overcoats or listless behind newspapers – as if he can't afford to relax his focus for a second.

“Are you alright, Wiggi?” she prompts.

“I'm fine,” he says, shortly. “I like....” he glances at the windows, and, once again, at the exit, “I like to see out.”

She sighs. She knows what it is, after Holloway, to fear a locked door, and to want to keep your eyes on an escape route. It's true, as well, that she's very tired. The smell is unpleasant – stale beer, a whiff of oil from outside, disinfectant, and beneath that, the clinging, acrid suggestion of vomit, threatening to tip her nausea over into something worse. It's not just seasickness. She's already pregnant with their second child (“making up for lost time”, they joke, half-seriously). What with everything else going on, they haven't really had a chance to let it sink in.

Another lurch of the ferry sets the bottles behind the bar clinking, and she closes her eyes as an answering surge of sickness slops through her. "Don't the waves bother you?" she says.

He moves his mouth, in a stiff imitation of a smile. "You call these waves? Believe me, this in nothing," he says. He doesn't tell her, but the smell of oil bothers him more. It brings back memories.

They agree, in the end, that the thing to do is to go back to London. It's not an easy decision. Taking John back into the danger of the Blitz seems irresponsible, and it's not as if they have anywhere to live. But it's also the place that feels the most familiar, the closest thing to a home. The British have two faces with which to greet foreigners, it seems – one curious and welcoming, the other suspicious and filled with hate. They have seen the second face more often since leaving the town. They need the cosmopolitanism of the great city, the presence of other refugees. They can't postpone their lives for any longer. She hopes she will not have to clean for other people – there must be something else she can try. Ludwig hopes that he will have more chance of finding meaningful work.

They arrive late and exhausted. At first, London seems almost unchanged – the great railway stations, the traffic, still pulsing with life - but they notice something different in the mood, a strange sort of battle-weary acceptance. The station porter, the bus conductor, a shop keeper, the other lodgers in the hallway of Ernst and Ruth's block - all seem surprisingly cheerful, if a little unhinged, and willing to give yet more shabby foreigners the benefit of the doubt. They are surprised and delighted by the warmth of their reception. They fear being a burden, but Ernst and Ruth are almost delirious with joy. Ernst has acquired a bottle of Kirschwasser, of all things, which he pours out in different sized glasses. "To my well-travelled cousin! Welcome back!" It's as if anyone mad enough to be here is welcomed in. Hilde and Ludwig fear that internment must somehow have marked them out – like a shame that can be read on their faces - and are both relieved and bewildered to find that it has not.

The next morning, their first task is to visit the bank where the gold coins were kept in a safety-deposit box. They are very short of money. Perhaps there will be something left? It would be so useful. They hardly dare articulate this hope, even to each other. Ernst and Ruth seem gloomy – Ernst isn't sure if any coins were left, and where they might have ended up. "I did try...." He says, apologetically. "But they didn't want me to tell them what to do, and I didn't want to pry. They had some quite definite opinions..."

The city of London is all smashed up. Through the bus window, they watch the canyons of crumbling stone, jagged stripes of light and shadow, the grim fields of ruin. Little John is excited to ride a red bus, and bounces up and down on his seat, pointing and squealing. Craters are filling up into new rainwater lakes. Walls reach up into the open sky, and staircases hang off the sides of buildings, leading abruptly into empty space. There are signs everywhere: "Danger – Do Not Enter."

Life goes on, in and around the rubble. There are still cheerfully sarcastic Cockneys selling newspapers or sandwiches, and crowds of men with bowler hats (most rather older than before, perhaps, and mixed up with more women), surging towards their patched-up offices.

The bus swings around a corner. "Here we are! At least, I think this is it...." Ludwig says. It's hard to tell with so many landmarks gone. Moving around freely is a novelty for both of them, and they half expect someone to tell them when to get off the bus.

They step down carefully, and stand on the pavement, bewildered, dazed by it all – the crowds, the voices, the noise of the traffic. Hilde keeps a tight hold of John, and Ludwig grasps her other arm. After their limited lives in internment, the sheer variety and the different options are almost overwhelming. It's like reaching adulthood for a second time – Hilde finds herself looking around for a guard, before remembering that they are quite alone. From time to time she wonders what is for

lunch, or what she will be expected to do next, before recalling that it is entirely up to her.

“You lost, Sir?” a newspaper boy in a flat cap asks Ludwig, with an ingratiating grin, hoping perhaps for a tip. Ludwig looks startled, and then pleased. How wonderful, to be called Sir again!

The bank, when they find it, seems undamaged and is open. A good omen, perhaps? The doorman raises his hat to them. No one can tell! They are just like everyone else. Hilde giggles, and they go through the revolving doors, giddy with elation and also nerves, their shoes echoing across the marble entrance hall. The floor is like an invitation to run. John – unwatched for a moment, as they make their enquiries – speeds off in a skittering slide and has to be caught by the wrist and spoken to sharply by Hilde.

Above all, Ludwig is concerned not to lose face, and not to betray his feelings. He braces himself for a shout of outrage, a yank at the collar, a rough ejection onto the street. What are they thinking, a pair of “aliens,” marching in as if they own the place? Instead, the clerk shows them along the corridor, and back to the wall of safes. Hilde still has one of the little keys. “I’m not really sure what’s left...” Ludwig finds himself compelled to confide.

“It is not Our Policy to enquire as to Contents,” says the clerk, with peculiar self-righteousness, as if to head off some faintly indecent confession.

Hilde and Ludwig hold their breath, as the little deposit box is unlocked. The clerk stands respectfully back. Ludwig stoops down, his heart thumping, and feels around inside. There is something! It’s the little cloth bag, and for a moment his heart lurches with hope.

He draws out the bag. It’s flat, and very light. He puts his hand inside. The bag contains just one gold coin. They stare at it, lying on the palm of his hand. On one side there’s an eagle in flight, on the other the figure of a woman, striding forwards holding an olive branch, and a single word in English – LIBERTY. It’s the

remains of the money that his father got for his business in Germany. He was lucky, he used to say – although it was an odd definition of luck, Ludwig always thought, specific to that unluckiest time. By selling to an old friend he'd got a reasonable price, and in dollars too, which were popular because they'd held their value in the years of run-away inflation.

Ludwig turns the bag inside out, but there's nothing else. All the rest is gone. All that remained of their lives - and his parents' lives - in Germany, is lost without trace. It's hard to believe. He has tried to brace himself for disappointment, but it is still a shock.

For a moment, neither of them can speak. "One is better than nothing, though?" Hilde whispers, gently.

Why did his parents leave just one, Ludwig wondered? Was it a mistake, or a kind of insurance? There is no way, now, to know.

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They discuss it that night, gathered around the gas fire, in Ernst and Ruth's small living room. Ludwig, Ernst and Ruth are smoking. The empty supper plates lie on the table - the jars of preserved vegetables they brought with them have already been polished off with great enthusiasm, along with tinned beef, bread and half a bottle of sherry. Everyone in London is very preoccupied with food, and Hilde's pregnancy hunger is also kicking in.

Ernst isn't surprised the coins are gone. He says he has a suspicion that Ludwig's parents buried some of them in the back garden. "You remember how it was last summer?" he says. "We were all waiting for the invasion. Your father, especially, did not believe that the banks were safe. Why should he? He thought that it would be the same in London as it is in the Netherlands. Over there, Jewish

property is confiscated to fund the Nazi war effort. He said they had found a very safe hiding place, better than any bank.”

Ruth is perched on the arm of his chair, balancing an ashtray in the palm of her hand. Even in an old sweater and slacks, she still manages to look elegant. Her brightly painted lips are pursed in disapproval. Does she feel that Ernst is giving them false hope? “What does it matter!” she says. “I say that the coins are gone, for sure. You’ll never find them. Either they were spent, or buried, or else...”

“Or else what?” Ludwig says.

Ernst and Ruth exchange an embarrassed look. Ernst picks up from her. “We went to the bomb site afterwards, to recover anything that was left, but....” he gives an awkward cough, and trails off again. Hilde senses that he doesn’t want to add to their distress.

“What?” Ludwig’s voice is growing angry. He hates that he wasn’t there, that he doesn’t know.

Ruth takes pity on him and finishes the explanation. “There were signs of looting, I’m sorry to say.” She looks at him steadily and draws on her cigarette. The war has hardened her too. “About three or four houses were damaged, and most of the others were empty. People were loading up prams and sacks with anything they could find. Even if any coins were there, they were probably stolen.”

Ernst is apologetic. The death of his uncle and aunt has been a terrible shock to everyone, and he feels bad that he couldn’t do more for them. He can see how difficult things are for his hapless cousin. But sympathy, too, is on the ration and in short supply. At least Ludwig is out of internment now, and reasonably safe – unlike the other relatives who are still in Germany. It is months, now, since Ernst has heard news from his own parents, in Berlin.

Ludwig goes alone to the wrecked house to search. He has written to Mrs Rose, who moved out to her son’s house in Reading when the bombing started, to ask for permission to dig. He has her letter as proof, but he’s nervous, anyway – of



all people, he knows how little it takes to get an “alien” into trouble. The bomb-site is roped off, and there are more of the warning signs, but it is not difficult to get in.

He can see straight away that it is hopeless. The whole back of the building is destroyed, and the place is a huge pile of rubble. He’d need machinery to make any impact. Besides, his heart is suddenly no longer in it. It makes him feel worse to see for himself what happened. It starts to snow, the flakes softening the ruins with a fine dusting of white.

Some of the dulling misery of the early days returns. Hilde tries to console him, but it will be a long job, requiring all the reserves of her patience and love. She feels they were very lucky, as well as quite unlucky. If she hadn’t been interned, she and John might both have been killed as well.

Ludwig can’t join up – a legacy of the mysterious “heart trouble,” which despite the investigations of several doctors, proves almost as impossible to shake off as his accent. Instead, he registers with the Labour Exchange and is sent for a job interview at a heavy engineering firm which makes bridges, boilers, and aircraft hangers. This too, he feels, will be “doing his bit.” He finds their interview questions confusing – he does not understand the technical terms in English - but as soon as he sees the drawings, he knows what they mean, and is able to suggest improvements. They agree to take him for a week’s trial period.

London is very empty, and property is cheap. They rent a house in Muswell Hill. It seems an incredible luxury to Hilde – the whole house, and her own kitchen! There’s a view across London. From the back windows, they can see the barrage balloons over the city, and watch the German aircraft come in on clear nights. As the anti-aircraft fire crackles and dances up the hill towards them, Ludwig can judge the right time to take shelter.

There’s a poster campaign: “Is your journey really necessary?” Ludwig finds this ironic, given his own round the world trip. He points it out to Hilde, and she laughs loyally, although she never really sees the funny side.

At first, their British acquaintances are strangely reassured by the fact that they have been interned and then released. With an unshakable faith in the official process, they see it as confirmation that Ludwig and Hilde are “the right sort.” This is preferable to any suspicion, of course, but sometimes rather irritating, because it falls so far short of the truth of what they have experienced. After a while, their friends forget it ever happened, or just don’t know. On the whole, it is easier not to bring it up.

They sometimes hear news from other internees. Otto makes it back to England in 1942 and carries on his life in Liverpool. Forty others are drowned, however, including Kowalski and Blumenthal, when the ship they are returning on is torpedoed. This is another terrible shock. Ludwig can imagine it all too well. He could so easily have been on this ship himself; in some ways he feels he should have been. Sometimes it gives him nightmares.

Fritz and Felix write occasional letters. Their plans to go to America are frustrated. They join an Australian Labour Battalion, the Eighth Employment Company; they load ships, go to the pictures, date Australian girls – and Felix carries on studying in his spare time. Like many of the “Dunera boys,” they settle there after the war, and gradually become Australians. Ludwig hears of Geller some years later, lecturing at Melbourne University.

Heinz does a series of odd jobs, including stable hand in Suffolk, and Ludwig writes to him from time to time, inviting him to stay. Heinz no longer hears anything from his family in Germany, and this silence somehow grows louder as time goes on. After Ludwig receives a few polite excuses, Hilde gently suggests letting it drop – Heinz is nearly an adult, now, and may be trying to leave his past behind.

Nathaniel Oppenheimer returns to Britain eventually and is freed in plenty of time for Tisha b’Av 1942. Ludwig thinks more of the second part of his dream prediction, which proves to be uncannily accurate - that it is forbidden to celebrate. How can they celebrate, with so many of their number needlessly drowned, and so

many countless relatives missing, sent to some monstrous death in the east? “We should rather eat an egg dipped in ash, and sit on the floor, to mourn our dead,” he says to Hilde, who doesn’t quite understand what he means, but is learning to weather his flashes of anger. By this point in the war, he has come to feel that no one – German, Jewish, British, and any combination thereof – should ever be permitted to celebrate again.

Oppenheimer settles with his wife and children in North London, not so very far away. Somehow, although they always half intend to – and although Hilde, too, has fond memories of his wife - they never get around to meeting up. Ludwig has an uncomfortable suspicion that his own persistent distrust of organised religion, and the half-hearted Anglicanism that Hilde settles into, will prove an insurmountable barrier, however graciously the Oppenheimers pretend otherwise.

It’s an eventful past, but not one that Ludwig cares to re-examine too closely. When he thinks about it, it is with the feeling that there are certain significant moments in which he’s dislodged, or stuck – or perhaps more accurately, that are dislodged inside him. Their taste and sensation come to him in dreams. He feels that that there is a sense in which he will always be on the floor of the car, under the rolled-up carpet, crossing the border. Another part of him is forever swimming the Rhine to meet Hilde. He will always be jumping from the Arandora Star or crouched in the hold of the Dunera. These moments are layered, like the rubble of the bombed house – too chaotic, dense and integral to be sifted apart now. They are structural, deep in his sub strata. Is it like this for everyone, or is he damaged in some way? This, having been given only one life, he can’t say.

Their daughter Margaret is born in 1942. Two years later, during a night of V1 attacks in 1944, Hilde gives birth to their youngest son, Kurt. After two very English names, Hilde is pleased that Ludwig feels they can allow themselves a German-sounding name. Both the boys are blonde, and little Margaret is dark. Dr Liebreich

visits them afterwards – she’s working again, by then, at a London hospital – and pronounces him very healthy.

On VE Day, Ludwig is given time off work. He suggests they take a bus into town, but Hilde is worried the children will be crushed, or lost in the crowd. Instead, they venture out with the pram, to see what is going on closer to home.

Their neighbours, an older couple in their fifties, are putting up flags. They seemed unsure about the refugees next door to start with but are now generally nicer to Ludwig and Hilde than they are to each other.

“It was just like this after the last war,” the husband remarks, from his step ladder. “We had a right old ding-dong, danced till dawn we did, little guessing that in a year or two we’d all be lining up on the dole.”

“Miserable old sod, isn’t he?” the wife puts in. “I’ve told him, he’s not spoiling it for me, whatever he says. There’s a party later for the kiddies. Make sure you bring them back in time.”

Hilde thanks her. “What about you?” the woman goes on. “Will you be thinking of going back now?”

“Going back?” Hilde repeats.

“Yes, back home.” The woman is smiling - she means no harm - and it takes Hilde a few shocked moments to realise that she’s asking if they’ll be going back to Germany. She can feel Ludwig stiffen, beside her. Hilde hopes he will not be rude to them. At least twenty members of his father’s family remain unaccounted for, and the incomprehensible horror of their murder will stay with him for the rest of his life.

They walk along Muswell Hill to look at the decorations, and then down to Hornsey Town Hall, where the fountains have been turned on and there’s a band. Crowds of people are milling around, some of them in paper hats and red white and blue rosettes, all apparently waiting for something to happen. Small surges of excitement pass here and there between the people, like an electric current – a few

shouts and whoops, a burst of singing – and then fizzle out. Everyone seems rather dazed, and not quite certain how to celebrate.

Baby Kurt sleeps, oblivious, in the pram. Ludwig hoists Margaret onto his shoulders, where she happily waves a small paper flag.

“Do you know why they’ve all come out?” Hilde bends down and asks John, a solemn little boy in short trousers, whose chief aim in life these days is keeping his little sister in her place. She calls him “Schatzi” - treasure - which is what she calls each of them in turn.

“Because the war is over?” he suggests. Like the rest of them, he’s having some problem with this concept. The war is all he’s ever known, and seems to be the explanation for everything, a bit like God, or gravity. He finds some aspects easier to grasp, however. “And because Hitler is dead!” he adds, with a grin.

The sun shines. They stand and listen to Mr Churchill’s speech through the loud speakers, and then “The Last Post”, that haunting and very British prayer for the dead, played on a single bugle. An older man next to Hilde seems to be having trouble – his mouth twists, his neck shakes, and for one moment she thinks he might be having a stroke. It’s just a spasm of emotion, however, suppressed by some supreme effort of his facial muscles. After the last note dies away, he turns towards her. “What a waste, eh?” he says, bitterly.

Hilde can only nod, unable to speak. The crowd joins in with “God Save the King,” but she doesn’t sing, and seems to hear the rumbling roar as if from a great distance.

She thinks of her little brother. While the war was going on, she could almost believe it was all temporary, and that one day, things would get back to some kind of normal. Now she realises - with even that tiny part of her that has been resisting this truth - that it’s irreversible. There’s no going back. The dead will stay dead. Her Germany is gone. The songs and stories of her childhood now seem an obscene lie. Last month, they watched the newsreels in stunned silence. The cinema audience

sat rigid, transfixed by the images which flickered over their appalled faces. Now these are in her head, she can never forget them: mass graves, barely-living skeletons, so weak and stunned they can hardly sip from a cup, and a chain of women, passing stone-filled buckets from hand to hand on a mountain of rubble.

That night, the children finally in bed, Hilde washes the dishes, and Ludwig dries. They listen to the King's speech on the wireless, and the first weather forecast to be broadcast since 1939, and then a light-hearted music selection entitled "Victory Parade."

From their kitchen window, London looks transformed – proudly lit in her brazen, peace-time jewels. The sky glows pink from the celebration bonfires, and searchlights swing back and forth in giddy, playful arcs. A popular dance number comes on the wireless – "In the Mood."

Ludwig flicks the damp tea towel over his shoulder and holds out his arms. "Shall we?"

Hilde wipes her hands on her apron. The war in Europe is over. Ludwig takes one of her hands in his and slides his other arm around her waist. Together, they dance around the kitchen.

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The story of the gold coins was inspired by a “find” in North London, sometimes called “the Hackney Hoard,” which was buried in 1940 and ultimately reclaimed by the Sulzbacher family in 2007.

The booklet referred to is called ‘While You Are in England: Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee,’ published by the German Jewish Aid Committee in ca. 1938.

Some of the biographical details of my character, “Ludwig” are inspired by the story of Ludwig Hess, as described in *The Memoirs of L. W. Hess, Reminiscences and Some Thoughts on Life*, a memoir at the Manx National Heritage Library. Several of the letters are based on letters between Ludwig Baruch and Hilda Froome, held in the Ludwig Baruch Internment Archive at the J B Priestly Library in Bradford. Baruch’s memoir, *Lou Baruch – Reminiscences*, also at the Manx National Heritage Library, provided lots of useful context. Descriptions and details of life in the camps and on the ships owe much to a memoir by Rainer Radok, *Before and After the Reichskristallnacht: the History of a Königsberg Family*, which is available online (see the list below for more details). Hilde’s experiences are inspired by various memoirs (especially those by Ruth Borchard, Livia Laurent and Charlotte Singer, listed below) and oral history interviews at the IWM.

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## Critical Commentary

Writing About Women Refugees to London in 1938-1945:

***'we females of this blessed age.'***

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Relationships and Isolation: 'It was a lonely business.'

Work and Money: 'counting the sardines.'

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## Introduction

This critical commentary explores representations of the experience of female refugees who fled the Nazi regime to Britain in three novels published during the Second World War. The texts were written in English by writers from German-speaking Jewish backgrounds. They depict the exile experience drawing on personal observation: two of the authors were refugees themselves, the other wrote about the impact of this displacement on her family. I also discuss the ways in which the themes in these texts have played out in the writing of my own novel, *Sea Air*, eighty years later.

The books discussed are *Family from Vienna*<sup>1</sup> by Eunice Buckley (Rose Allatini), *Young Woman of Europe*<sup>2</sup> by Ruth Feiner and *The Inquest*<sup>3</sup> by Robert Neumann. These have been chosen because of their unusual focus on the experience of female refugees at this time. Two are by women writers, and the other is about the life (and mysterious death) of a female refugee. Taken together, they vividly and movingly illuminate some of the difficulties and frustrations as well as the opportunities provided by this upheaval.

Using these texts, I will show how the experience of exile was profoundly challenging to female refugees, prompting them to reconstruct their identities on every level. The texts do not depict a straightforward move from one country to another (difficult as this might be, in itself). The trauma of the refugees' persecution, the circumstances of their flight and their arrival in Britain (overshadowed for the first few years of the war by the twin threats of internment or invasion) - all had very deep consequences for their sense of self. Their position in the family, their relationships with men, their economic security and of course their national identity were all profoundly changed, in many cases leading to a reconsideration of the norms and codes by which they had previously lived. The struggles of this reinvention are depicted – in positive and negative ways – in these texts.

Why should we consider female refugees in particular? The position of women in general (including British women) was drastically changed by the war, and of course male refugees also experienced many of these challenges. However, I believe that special attention to writing by and about female refugees is relevant, and - despite some valuable work in this field – is still an under-researched area. Women

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<sup>1</sup> Eunice Buckley, *Family from Vienna* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Feiner, *Young Woman of Europe* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1942).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Neumann, *The Inquest* (London: Hutchinson's International Authors, 1944).

experienced the hardships of exile in different ways to their male relatives,<sup>4</sup> not because of any essential differences between men and women, but rather as a result of the different roles, responsibilities and opportunities available to them. They were 'doubly marginalised'<sup>5</sup> as both women and refugees, and this puts them at the forefront of the changes that went on to impact on the other groups, which they experienced differently and often more acutely. The ways in which their stories are documented in these texts sheds light on the intersection of gender, race and class during this period, and the overlapping ways in which these identities are constructed through literature. By paying attention to these previously neglected voices, we can reconstruct a more accurate, multi-dimensional picture of this important period. In addition, I believe that these stories have some striking resonances with the present day, both in terms of British attitudes to refugees, the impact of the right-wing press on policy making, and British attitudes towards the rest of Europe.

In this introduction, I will provide a brief background to each of the authors and their texts, as well as the historical context within which they were written. I will highlight some considerations relating to terminology and to feminism, while outlining my approach. Finally, I will discuss the influences and process that led me to approach this subject in my novel.

### **Three Wartime Texts about Refugee Women**

Eunice Buckley is one of several pseudonyms used by Rose Allatini (later Scott by marriage). She was born in 1890 in Vienna, and her parents moved to London before the First World War. She was a prolific writer, publishing thirty-nine novels, all of which were written in English. Most of these are now very obscure, although her 1918 novel *Despised and Rejected*<sup>6</sup> (published under the pseudonym A. T. Fitzroy) has received more attention than the others because of its subject matter and the controversy around its publication. Its treatment of same-sex relationships was unusual for its time, and it was banned under the Defence of the

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<sup>4</sup> Marion Berghahn, 'Women Emigrés in England', in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. by Sybille Quack, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Washington, D.C. : Cambridge: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Charmian Brinson, Andrea Hammel, and Jana Barbara Buresova, 'Introduction', in *Exile and Gender II: Politics, Education and the Arts*, ed. by Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel (BRILL, 2017), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> A T Fitzroy, *Despised & Rejected* (London: C W Daniel, 1918).

Realm regulations as guilty of delivering a pacifist message, and therefore likely to affect the recruitment and conduct of the military.

*Family from Vienna* is the first of a number of her novels to deal with refugee characters. Published in 1941, it is set just before the outbreak of the Second World War. It describes the arrival in England - after the *Anschluss* in 1938 - of the Viennese branch of a large Jewish family, and the impact on their relatives who have already lived in London for several decades. Told in a series of vignettes, the book moves through a succession of character sketches, with an atmosphere of sadness, nostalgia and gentle humour. A central theme is Jewish identity and assimilation into British society. Although not especially plot-driven, the novel skilfully captures small, often domestic details such as language, food and family relationships to show the rupture of lives, and the characters' faltering efforts to recover.

Ruth Feiner was born in 1909 in Stettin, in what is now Poland. She fled Germany in 1933 after the National Socialists came to power. She worked as a songwriter, novelist and translator, and her novel *Three Cups of Coffee* was adapted into a Hollywood film. She wrote her first books in German, and switched to English during the war, publishing a total of thirteen novels.

*Young Woman of Europe* is her second novel in English. Published in 1942, it is the fictional autobiography of a young refugee who shares Feiner's initials, 'Renate Feldt', and is divided into two parts – 'The Wrong Side of the Channel,' which describes her childhood and early years in Germany from the First World War through the rise of fascism, and 'The Other Side of the Channel', which describes her attempts to make a new life in London, from the early 1930s through to 1940. At times 'a strident text',<sup>7</sup> the story is related in a straightforward style, with a 'tone of urgency, historical realism and overall quest for authenticity.'<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes weighed down by its message, the conversation can be stilted and the characters simplistic, but it makes a case with an endearing energy and immediacy. The book is by turns a family saga, the story of a group of female friends, and a love story, but these feel secondary to its political and polemical preoccupations. It is a rallying cry aimed at its female readership, and above all 'a valiant and insightful effort in documenting the challenges and losses of war and exile as women experienced them.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nicole Brunnhuber, *The Faces of Janus: English-Language Fiction by German-Speaking Exiles in Great Britain, 1933-45*, Exil-Studien ; v. 8 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005) p126.

<sup>8</sup> Brunnhuber p127.

<sup>9</sup> Brunnhuber p137.

Robert Neumann, born in 1897 in Vienna, was known in the 1920s as a satirist, literary critic and journalist. His books were burned by the Nazi regime and he fled to Britain in 1933, where he wrote a film script and was active in émigré circles. *The Inquest* is the second novel he wrote in English and was published in 1944. It concerns the apparent suicide of Bibiana or Vivian Santis (or Hermann), a female refugee in London during the war. The male protagonist, a writer named Shilling, meets her and spends the night with her, leaving her flat in the early hours of the morning. Later the next day, he is visited by a policeman, who tells him that she is dead. Shilling retraces her final days, and her story unfolds in the plot-driven style of a detective story. By means of fragments – conversations and encounters with those who met (and often failed to help) her - the 'life of a female refugee is almost wholly reconstructed by superficial and self-contradictory male testimonies.'<sup>10</sup> Nothing is certain, and the text constantly undermines itself, suggesting, questioning and then revising each interpretation of events. Amid this mood of uncertainty, Neumann builds up a picture of the exile community across Europe, and of the tragedy of the left in the 1930s.

All three novels focus on the lives of female refugees and draw heavily on the personal experience of the authors. They are illuminating on many levels, as noted by Nicole Brunnhuber. First, they 'demand recognition as valid historical documentation,'<sup>11</sup> recording some of the hardships and opportunities of female refugees to Britain and allowing us an insight into their daily lives. Secondly, they are interesting for their role as 'pedagogical and motivational texts,'<sup>12</sup> making a plea for understanding and support to the wider population, as well as a rallying cry to both women and refugees, concealed within a more marketable format. Superficially, they present themselves as one thing – a detective story, romance, or family saga – but their real intentions lie elsewhere. Brunnhuber argues that these writers 'opted for the more unassuming framework of conventional popular forms in order to disguise the marginal and, at times unpopular discourse of the German-speaking refugee.'<sup>13</sup> Andrea Hammel also notes that using 'the conventions of genre fiction is one possibility to overcome some of the difficulties of expression suffered by exile writers'.<sup>14</sup> (This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter). Thirdly, and

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<sup>10</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea Hammel, *Everyday Life as Alternative Space in Exile Writing: The Novels of Anna Gmeyner, Selma Kahn, Hilde Spiel, Martina Wied, and Hermynia Zur Mühlen*, Exil-Studien; v. 12 (Oxford; Bern: Peter Lang, 2008) p. 164.

related to this, they are means for the writers to begin to reconstruct their own identities, as they strive to explain and understand the events around them. Through this process, they do some of the things that literature can do best: helping their writers and their readers make sense of huge upheavals - and creating a new place for themselves in the world.

## Context

Estimates vary, but it is believed that in the region of 90,000 German-speaking refugees fled to Britain in the years before the outbreak of the war.<sup>15</sup> 20,000 of these arrived on 'domestic permits', allowing them to work as servants (and although the exact numbers are unknown, this group certainly contained a much higher proportion of women.) Once war was declared, these recent arrivals were characterised as 'enemy aliens', and around 8,000 were immediately sacked from their jobs. In 1940, in response to the rapid German advances in Europe and a newspaper campaign headed by the *Daily Mail*, approximately 25,000 German-speaking men and around 4,000 women were interned by Britain. The vast majority were Jewish or political refugees. Although a much smaller number of women were interned, the crisis affected many more through the sudden incarceration of husbands and other relatives, and the enormous anxiety created. In addition, around 4,000 Italians were also interned, many of whom had been living and working in the UK for many years. After the sinking of a ship which was transporting internees, the *Arandora Star*, public opinion began to shift, and most were released by the end of the year.

In the decades immediately after the war, little attention was directed towards the specific circumstances of female refugees, and 'gender (was) deemed irrelevant in early exile studies.'<sup>16</sup> There was a 'bias towards illustrious men and great leaders'<sup>17</sup> which led to an initial 'gender distortion.'<sup>18</sup> In the context of a world struggling to comprehend the enormity of the Holocaust, a focus on gender seemed

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<sup>15</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Katharine Prager, 'Exemplary Lives? Thoughts on Exile, Gender and Life Writing', in *Exile and Gender I: Literature and the Press*, ed. by Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies ; Volume 17 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016) p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Prager, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 112.

'irrelevant, even irreverent.'<sup>19</sup> From the 1980s onwards, however, there was a shift in focus to an 'interest in the unknown and everyday,'<sup>20</sup> and an appreciation began to emerge of the 'distinct difference in the experiences of male and female refugees'<sup>21</sup>. Scholars began to pay closer attention to female accounts of exile and internment, although this is still an under-researched area, and female writers from the period have always been neglected.<sup>22</sup>

Any consideration of this topic is complicated by the fact that the language in this area is inconsistent, emotive, and contentious. Terms such as refugee, exile, émigré, stateless person, migrant, asylum seeker, and tourist refer to overlapping groups – people who cross borders – yet are so laden with historical association, condescension, xenophobia, and sometimes a kind of romanticism, that they are almost impossible to disentangle.<sup>23</sup> In addition, 'conceptual debates about the long history of the exile in politics, art and literature'<sup>24</sup> also colour the use of this language.

A refugee is defined (by the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees) as a person who has 'fled their country of origin' because of a 'well-founded fear of persecution'<sup>25</sup> (sometimes listed as race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion). This definition can be problematic – for example, it is hard to prove if fear of persecution is 'well-founded' except in retrospect, and difficulties arise from the fact that one must cross a border (often 'illegally') to become a refugee. Exile is 'the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons'<sup>26</sup> (and also contains logical ambiguities, especially when used to describe 'self-imposed' exile). Despite their related subject matter, the two terms have different connotations. Edward Said explores this idea in his essay *Reflections on Exile*, explaining that 'refugee' is a

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<sup>19</sup> Joan Ringelheim, 'Genocide and Gender: A Split Memory', in *Gender and Catastrophe*, ed. by Ronit Lentin (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Prager, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> 'Introduction', in *Exile and Gender 1.*, by Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies, Volume 17 (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016) p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Hammel, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Hammel, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations. Department of Public Information, *Magna Carta for Refugees. By James M. Read, etc. [The text of the "Convention relating to the Status of Refugees," with an introduction.]* (New York, 1951).

<sup>26</sup> Oxford University Press, *The Oxford English Dictionary.*, 2nd edition prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).



negative term, which implies a mass condition, whilst exile suggests a degree of romance and exclusivity: 'exile contains within it, I think, a touch of solitude or spirituality.'<sup>27</sup>

Other terms such as émigré (one who has emigrated, implying a degree of choice), stateless (with a focus on legal status), migrant (with a focus on economic necessity), and asylum seeker (again, with legal associations, and more recent connotations, before refugee status is established) - also carry varying associations and degrees of stigma. As Hammel has noted, a row over terminology has been 'raging for some years.'<sup>28</sup> Some use the terms exile, immigrant, emigrant and refugee 'almost synonymously' while others express 'dislike for one term or the other' – for example the term exile for its 'supposedly elitist connotation.'<sup>29</sup> The vocabulary used continues to change over time and between academic disciplines, partly due to shifts in intellectual fashion, and partly to changing nuances of emphasis, which can obscure some of the enduring themes.<sup>30</sup>

## My Approach

I look at the novels I have chosen alongside a wartime essay by Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees'.<sup>31</sup> Arendt writes with a passion born of her own experience<sup>32</sup> about the refugee's tension between optimism and despair, the pressure to assimilate, and how refugees can be the 'vanguard of their peoples.'<sup>33</sup> She articulates some of the paradoxes and opportunities of exile, influenced by her own reception in France including her war-time internment at Gurs, and her arrival in America. 'We Refugees' reads as a vivid, angry, impressionistic contemporary draft – she returns to many of these preoccupations in her later philosophy, for example in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,<sup>34</sup> where she makes a case for the wider importance of the 'stateless'. We want to see human rights as universal, but in practice, they are

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Hammel, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Hammel, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Liisa H. Malkki, 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), 495–523.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, 'That Which You Are Denying Us: Refugees, Rights and Writing in Arendt', in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 274.

<sup>34</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

only conferred by the nation state. A refugee crisis is not just a result, but also a cause of human rights catastrophe.

Exile Studies draws on many different disciplines, and I will be looking at what these texts can tell us about the circumstances - historical, economic and emotional - of female refugees at this time. Although these are fictional depictions, I believe they can tell us both about the material position of female refugees at the start of the war, and about how this might have felt. Reading as a writer, I used these texts to inform my own novel, and I know (both from my own experience of writing fiction, as well as from details in the text, and from the biographical information about their lives) that the authors will have drawn on their own observations and experiences, as well as those of the women they were close to.

I will attempt a feminist approach in two senses - firstly, by looking at the way in which these texts record and make visible female experience, and secondly, by looking at some of the power-relations and gender-based assumptions within these texts. This approach draws on existing work. Jane Marcus has argued that 'feminism is a natural medium and method of the examination of exile, for, in its explicit articulation of otherness, it places the critic in the position of exile, aware of her own estrangement from the centre of her discipline, awkwardly measuring just how much marginalization she is willing to bear.... edgingly balancing on boundaries and testing limits.'<sup>35</sup> Following her lead, Andrea Hammel argues that feminism, 'with its investigation of women as the 'Other' in their positions of marginality and centrality, is a vital methodology for the analysis of exile literature.'<sup>36</sup>

Susan Grayzel has examined how the literature of the First World War formed part of complex dialogue around gender, breaking down divisions between the 'front' and the 'home front', recruiting women to the war effort, and reasserting traditional norms. She argues that 'reconstruction' of gender was 'a constant and ongoing process from the first day of the war,'<sup>37</sup> and concludes that whilst early feminists did achieve 'some significant political and cultural gains', on the whole 'the war's lasting influence on gender was more conservative than innovative', and that 'the gender system was not a casualty of the war.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jane Marcus, 'Alibis and Legends: The Ethics of Elsewhereness, Gender and Estrangement', in *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Angela Ingram and Mary Lynn Broe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Hammel, p. 246.

<sup>37</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> Grayzel, p. 246.

Grayzel's discussion is limited to the First World War and its immediate aftermath and change of this sort is not a straightforward or linear process. However, all three of the writers I look at here (and indeed most adults during the Second World War) were part of a generation that lived through both of these major conflicts. If we take a longer view and look at the first half of the twentieth century as a whole, then literature reflects a process of upheaval through which attitudes towards women were revolutionised. By the end of the Second World War, expectations and assumptions around women were beginning to look very different.

The texts represent three different points of view on the experience of female refugees, suggested to some extent by the different perspectives of their titles. *Young Woman of Europe* is a first-person account, with a highly autobiographical feel, inviting us to share the experiences of a female refugee from an internalised and intimate position. *Family from Vienna* is written in the third person, and from the perspective of a more assimilated relative, allowing us to "see" its female refugee characters with a little more distance, registering their quirks, affectations and differences from the society into which they have arrived. *The Inquest* adds a further distance, using a more ambiguous technique to reconstruct the life of a female refugee entirely through the testimony of the men who have known her. This approach – which contains modernist and experimental elements – places us somewhat outside the female experience of exile, which nevertheless remains the focus of the novel, and a subject of intrigue and fascination. These various lenses have a very different impact on the reader, and on the way in which our sympathies are enlisted – and although each text is open to a feminist interpretation, I will try to show that they are different in the degree to which they humanise, identify with, and sometimes objectify their subjects.

This commentary contains three chapters, which deal with relationships, work, and assimilation. In each of the three chapters, I will consider the more negative aspects of trauma and loss, as well as some of the more positive opportunities presented by the experience. There is a 'tension between celebrating achievements and documenting trauma and loss' on this subject,<sup>39</sup> and this tension between grief and opportunity is evident in each chapter of this commentary.

The themes discussed in each of my chapters are related to identity. As they were driven into exile, the comfortable (or at least familiar) ways in which the refugee women previously identified themselves – in terms of socio-economic position, their role in the family, and their cultural identification with Germany or Austria - were

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<sup>39</sup> Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel, p. 3.

abruptly denied them. Instead, they met prejudice and suspicion, and were frequently distrusted or disapproved of by their new hosts. In 'We Refugees,' Hannah Arendt describes the corrosive effect of this sudden loss of status: 'most of us depend entirely upon social standards; we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us.'<sup>40</sup> She identifies 'discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed.'<sup>41</sup> Drawing on Arendt's essay, I examine some portrayals of the anguish caused by this rupture.

In the first chapter, I will look at relationships: the position of refugee women in relation to the men and others in their lives. In each of these novels, traditional family life is abruptly disrupted. Single women are presented as a plot device – a problem that needs solving, an anomalous, and sometimes potentially threatening force. Andrea Hammel has drawn attention to the recurring theme of the waiting woman in exile literature,<sup>42</sup> and this plays out through these novels. I will examine the greater sexual and emotional freedoms which resulted from a sudden 'liberation from the structural chains of normality'.<sup>43</sup> The early years of the war were a time of exceptionally rapid change, and traditional attitudes towards sex and gender were being disrupted, but for refugee women this process was accelerated. These books contain unconventional love stories and family structures, and do not lead to happy endings.

In chapter two, I will look at work, money and domestic arrangements. Refugee women faced poverty and exploitation, both of which had a gendered aspect. Their gender gave women access to different routes for self-reinvention - in traditionally female occupations, and also as wives, mothers and home-makers. Their exile sometimes caused them to rethink previous attitudes towards class, as previously privileged women were exploited, or brought into more intimate contact with the working people they might once have employed. There are some interesting portrayals of female political activism in two of the novels (*The Inquest* and *Young Woman of Europe*), while the third (*Family from Vienna*) shows how domestic and family arrangements are also, at their heart, about politics and power.

In the third chapter, I will look at the different ways in which these novels chart the process of assimilation. The female refugees are preoccupied with understanding the English and are well placed to reflect on their quirks and contradictions, from the intimate perspective of domestic servants, tenants, friends

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<sup>40</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 273.

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 273.

<sup>42</sup> Hammel, p. 162.

<sup>43</sup> Prager, p. 174.

and sometimes lovers. The novels also reflect the internationalism of their authors, and sometimes present European co-operation as a defence against nationalism. The intersection of race with gender is another particular issue for these refugee women, and I will discuss anti-Semitism, both external and internalised, as well as the ambivalence of the established Jewish community in Britain as suggested in these novels. I will discuss the ways the authors and their characters mourn their lost homelands, and their sense of betrayal as a result of internment by the British. As women, these processes often played out with a different focus, and in subtly different ways. It has been suggested that the refugee perspective is linked with creativity and originality of thought – I will look at ways this idea features in the novels, and some of the more positive representations of refugees in the texts.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will attempt to draw out some of the implications of these texts. Female refugees were challenged to transform themselves and their way of looking at the world. Did they in fact cope better than their male relatives, as has sometimes been suggested, or did they just come from a more disadvantaged starting point, meaning that they had less to lose, relatively, and more to gain? I will end by linking the position of refugee women in these texts to the evolving position of women more widely – and argue that the disruption of tradition brought about by the war contributed to an ongoing revolution in the role of women.

## **Sea Air**

My own work contrasts the male and female experiences of exile and internment. My novel, *Sea Air*, is about a refugee couple - Ludwig and Hilde - who are living in London at the outbreak of the war, with their baby and Ludwig's parents. Ludwig is interned, and Hilde tries to support the family by working as a cleaner. In May 1940, with the war going badly and a newspaper campaign headed by the *Daily Mail* casting doubt on the reliability of the refugees, Hilde is also interned, and sent to Holloway Prison and the Isle of Man. Ludwig is deported on the *Arandora Star*, which is torpedoed in the Atlantic. Some of his friends drown, but Ludwig survives the sinking. Shortly afterwards he is loaded onto another ship, the *Dunera*, where he is robbed and mistreated by the British guards on his way to Australia. I follow the couple on their journey, based on memoirs and oral history interviews from the time.

I wrote, as it were, from the other end of the telescope, and had a very different relationship with my material to the contemporary authors. They wrote from personal experience, about things that were happening around them. Some seventy-

five or eighty years after these events, from a 'postmemory'<sup>44</sup> perspective, I felt uneasy about my right to tell this story. My grandmother was a refugee to Britain in 1938, but she rarely identified herself in this way. She was not interned, and my novel is not her story, although curiosity about her early years in Britain fuelled and sustained my initial interest in the topic. I relied heavily on research, reading many published and unpublished memoirs from the period.<sup>45</sup> My story is based on incidents and anecdotes from these, and I at first felt hesitant about drawing on my own imagination. This has given my work a flavour that is somewhere between fact and fiction, an ambiguity which I think it shares with several of these texts, in particular Feiner's.

Victoria Stewart has traced the changing ways in which fiction has dealt with the Second World War over the decades.<sup>46</sup> Whereas fiction in the 1960s and 1970s was often concerned with articulating the horror of war, and a more nuanced replacement of wartime propaganda with an emphasis on the human cost, more recent novels have frequently explored 'aspects of wartime experiences and narratives that have not been incorporated into what Mark Connelly describes as the "collective national memory" of the war'.<sup>47</sup> In other words, she goes on, 'part of the intention of authors such as Waters, or in a different context, William Boyd, is to defamiliarize collective memory and to disrupt this homogeneity by incorporating less familiar aspects of the war into their work and, in the process, asking why these have come to be concealed or neglected.'

This was certainly a factor in my own choice of topic and story. I was shocked and intrigued when I learned about the internment crisis, the deportation of refugees, and the deaths on the *Arandora Star*. It seems to me that the pattern of prejudice, chaos, cruelty and then denial has been repeated on many subsequent occasions (for example, the persecution of Commonwealth citizens, now often referred to as the Windrush Generation, under an officially-sanctioned 'hostile environment'). The story encapsulated something I had often felt about British attitudes, but (perhaps because of the complexity of the situation, and the urgency of memorialising different aspects of the war) an aspect which I had rarely seen represented. I wanted to explore this aspect of the war and of the British relationship with Europe. Like the other texts I

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<sup>44</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> For a list of these, see the end of my novel.

<sup>46</sup> Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Stewart p2

discuss, the impulse at the heart of my novel is therefore polemic, despite the distance in time. The writers I discuss were motivated by a covert or overt argument for acceptance, and an indignation about the treatment of refugees, which they make by focusing closely on the lives of refugee characters, and their struggles. These writers had a sense that their situation was not just an obscure detail – but was in fact a central issue. I had a similar feeling that this untold story had a wider resonance, not only in relation to the war, but also right through to our own times.

Perhaps naively, my initial focus was purely on internment: I did not plan to write about either gender or about the Holocaust in my novel. However, researching the story, I read vivid and engrossing accounts of internment by two refugee women, Livia Laurent<sup>48</sup> (Eva Meyerhof) and Ruth Borchard.<sup>49</sup> I visited the site of the women's internment camp on the Isle of Man and was inspired by more recent research into the experience of women in internment.<sup>50</sup> Alternating the experiences of my couple, Ludwig and Hilde, I found myself thinking about the male and female experiences of internment, and the differences (and similarities) between the two. I also gradually came to realise that a book about Jewish refugees during the Second World War was also – albeit indirectly – a book about the Holocaust, and to develop a more evolved sense of the extent to which the slide towards genocide in Europe was a backdrop to these events. In Britain, both during and afterwards, there has been a comforting tendency to distance ourselves from these issues. Writing this novel has led me to think about some of the ways in which the British – through incomprehension, inaction and indifference - were also a part of this story. In *The Inquest*, Robert Neumann's constructs an indictment of internment, which is characterised by one character as 'laziness of heart',<sup>51</sup> a description which seems widely applicable to many aspects of British policy, both then and since.

I began work on my book in 2015, when a new refugee crisis was making the headlines, and comparisons with the past were in many minds. I had that heightened sense of relevance that a new project brings with it and saw parallels all around me. I was working on a shipwreck scene, for example, trying to describe the survivors of the *Arandora Star*, and wondering how they would look and behave, when I turned

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<sup>48</sup> Livia Laurent, *A Tale of Internment*. (London: G Allen and Unwin, 1942).

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Borchard, *We Are Strangers Here: An 'enemy Alien' in Prison in 1940*, ed. by Charmian Brinson (London ; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Charmian Brinson, 'In the Exile of Internment.', in *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Edited by William Niven and James Jordan., Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, N.Y. : [Woodbridge: Camden House ; Boydell & Brewer, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Neumann, p. 151.

on the news to see a group of exhausted and traumatised men who had been rescued from a sinking ship in the Mediterranean, something so similar to the scene I'd been trying to picture, in the present day. The rise of a new nationalism, often accompanied by overt racism, played out through the Brexit referendum of 2016, the election of Donald Trump, and in a range of public rhetoric since: I wondered about the similarities between the period I was writing about and the time I was living through. We were forced to consider, again, the links between economic hardship, mass displacement, populism and the rhetoric of hate.

My grandmother died in 2018, and writing my novel sometimes felt like a kind of homage – or at least a farewell - to her generation. I found echoes of her experience in these books and caught glimpses of her in some of the characters. I drew inspiration from the authors - their resilience, their determined internationalism, their indignation at injustice, and their attention to human nature in difficult circumstances. They were living through desperate times: their books do not, on the whole, have happy endings. However, I was touched by their faith, even from the brink of despair, in the power of stories to help us.



### **Relationships and Isolation: 'It was a lonely business.'**<sup>52</sup>

All three of the refugee novels discussed here concern the isolation of exile and the fracturing of families. Female characters in the three books are presented as solitary, and loneliness is a central theme. They are separated from their families or lovers by exile, and further marked out from their surroundings by their cultural and ethnic differences. In a world which categorised women in relation to their family ties, this makes them anomalous: both vulnerable and threatening. Their position as an outsider allows them to look at ordinary life from some distance and offers them a different perspective on society. Their situation is exhausting and confusing for them, but also destabilising for the world around them, which tends to regard them with suspicion and unease. They are in suspense, waiting for news of loved ones – in each novel, a male character and love-interest is either trapped in Nazi territory or interned by the British. However, their new circumstances also open up some emotional opportunities, and give them greater agency and choice.

As noted in the introduction, and like other works by refugee writers of this era, these texts draw from genre fiction,<sup>53</sup> at least partly in an attempt to secure publication and a readership for their authors, who were impoverished by exile and attempting to navigate a relatively unfamiliar market. The interwar period was a golden age for detective fiction, and by the early '40s, women on the Home Front constituted the majority of the British reading audience. Although, as Brunnhuber points out, several aspects of genre fiction lend it well to a questioning of surface values, the use of genre by these authors is sometimes at odds with their political preoccupations and means that their more polemical points about the war or the treatment of refugees must be smuggled in by stealth. Feiner adopts some of the conventions of romantic fiction, Neumann presents his novel as an unusual detective story, and Buckley opts for what we might now call a family saga, in an attempt to make their work more marketable. In these genres, the solitary woman frequently functions as a plot device: a problem that needs solving. According to these conventions, a single woman is introduced towards the start of a novel – a young girl searching for love, a wronged victim, or perhaps a mysterious figure, beautiful but unreliable, who may not be what she seems. In the refugee novels under consideration here, a single female character at first appears to conform to this

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<sup>52</sup> Feiner, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> Hammel, p. 34.

pattern. In the long-run, however, the neat resolution or happy ending we expect is to some extent denied.

In *The Inquest*, Neumann explores the death of a female refugee. This character has many names – reflecting her geographical relocations through her first name (Vivian, Bibiana, Tatjana), and the different men in her life through her surname (Santis, Hermann and Spiers) – as well as a mood of unreliability and ambiguity which permeates the novel. She is recently widowed, and has no family in London, but a crucial question - on which the result of *The Inquest* seems at times to depend - is how alone she actually is. The text plays with our reactions, veering dramatically between insinuation and an implied empathy. At times, we seem to be presented with two opposing interpretations: is she vulnerable and alone, loyal to Ventura, a man who keeps coming back into her life, or is she sexually manipulative, living off many lovers? Brunnhuber points out that her name, Bibiana Santis, can be seen as a reference to Saint Bibiana, (or Vivian), who resists seduction before her death.<sup>54</sup>

At the start, when Shilling discovers that Santis - with whom he has just spent the night - has died (apparently by suicide), she immediately becomes a tragic figure. He still feels her breath on him, which he thinks of as 'the breath of night unbefriended, food uneaten, coldness undispeled.'<sup>55</sup> Emphasising the recent nature of her death – the breath which has just left her is the very stuff of life – this description suggests a paradox between their physical intimacy on the one hand, and the lack of human warmth and consolation he has been able to offer her, on the other. She is an outcast in every sense, and the basic needs of food, warmth and friendship are denied her, even as she interacts with others. Troubled and disturbed by this encounter, he sets out to investigate the cause of her death by retracing her steps over the previous days and reconstructing her last interactions with a hostile world.

At another point in the text we overhear a charity worker, who questions Santis about her position.

“Have you someone to look after you?” And looked at her, and corrected herself: “I mean, you are not alone, by any chance?” With slow lips, smiling, Bibiana said “Oh no. I am not alone.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 104.

<sup>55</sup> Neumann, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> Neumann, p. 80.

The issue of whether she is alone is again highlighted – and a suspect sensuality is suggested in the way she answers the question. There is something dubious – or even threatening – about the ambiguity of her status. She needs a man to ‘look after’ her – but the fact that she smiles, and her ‘slow lips’ when she admits that she may have one (or even more than one), implies a pleasure in the thought. One feels that the reader is being invited to condemn her reaction as inappropriate: it is worrying for a woman to be alone, but even worse if she has a lover.

In *Young Woman of Europe*, the central character, Renate Feldt, grows up in Germany, tries to make her living, and falls in love with a married man, while her younger half-brother is seduced by the rise of fascism. She escapes to London after her playwright father is killed by the Nazis. ‘It was a lonely business,’<sup>57</sup> she writes of her attempts to make a new home. There is a dream-like quality to the descriptions of her daily life, brought about through the contrast between the hustle and bustle of normality (such as the city on a fine day) on the one hand, and the alienating, isolating anxieties experienced by those stigmatized in the language of the time as ‘aliens’, on the other.

What an idealistic, short-sighted, and stupid fool I was! There I stood in springtime London, with the buds bursting in the spacious parks, with hazy blue skies above me, and friendly but quite indifferent people around me. I thought I could make myself heard...<sup>58</sup>

She describes ‘endless evenings in my little bed sitting-room...long solitary walks in the park... lonesome scrappy meals at one of the Corner Houses’<sup>59</sup>. Added to this is her frustration at not being listened to. (‘But surely this is just our own propaganda?’<sup>60</sup> an English friend responds, when she talks about the persecution of Jewish people in Germany). Her beloved father has been murdered, and she is living alone for first time in her life. She writes ‘letters enough to choke the letter-boxes of all England’<sup>61</sup> but discovers cynicism and reluctance to hear ‘atrocities stories.’ She feels isolated and removed from her surroundings:

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<sup>57</sup> Feiner, p. 221.

<sup>58</sup> Feiner, p. 219.

<sup>59</sup> Feiner, p. 222.

<sup>60</sup> Feiner, p. 195.

<sup>61</sup> Feiner, p. 219.

‘although I walk through this beautiful and grim autumn of the year of disgrace 1940 without many obvious restrictions, I don’t really belong to that brave, bruised and battered city of London.’<sup>62</sup>

The word ‘disgrace’ perhaps here suggests some of the guilt and shame (both collective and personal) that goes with her marginal position, as one of those condemned to see - but unable to prevent - the approaching catastrophe. These quotations give a sense of her intense otherness. She is not at home in the world in which she finds herself: a Cassandra figure, cursed to utter prophesises which are not believed.

In *Family From Vienna*, the central character Camilla is not a refugee herself, but shares some of the outsider’s perspective. She is an adult (middle-aged) daughter, living in London with her mother, who regards the fact that she is not married as ‘a life-shame’.<sup>63</sup> Camilla is described as ‘a rather guarded personality’<sup>64</sup> who protects her mother from the truth about her emotional life. Her single status is explained by the fact that Camilla (like Renate in Feiner’s novel) has been in love with a married man. Her mother remarks that ‘with the remarkable brains you have, my dear, and meeting so many interesting people, I have never been able to understand –<sup>65</sup> and the text goes on, following Camilla’s thoughts: ‘it was just as well that she should *not* understand...’. The author at this time had separated from her husband and embarked on a long-term lesbian relationship. Same-sex relationships are another recurring theme in her work (although in this novel, this applies only to the secondary character of Erich). Camilla feels to some extent autobiographical, and although she is written as a heterosexual character, the burden of her secret is conveyed with a subtle, knowing resignation which also marks her out as an outsider and seems likely to draw on the author’s own experiences.

Camilla’s single status puts her in the position of an anomaly for the time, but also makes her an astute observer of family dynamics, both affectionate and clear sighted: ‘... there was a part of herself that could remain utterly detached; saw them almost like characters in some strange play; saw herself seeing them.’<sup>66</sup> It also leaves an opening for a potential reunion with her childhood sweetheart, who is trying

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<sup>62</sup> Feiner, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Buckley, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Buckley, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Buckley, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Buckley, p. 94.

to escape Austria. However, he is arrested at the border, echoing the wider tragedy of the Jewish community.

All three central characters therefore occupy a position somewhat outside of the conventional family dynamic and are given a vantage point which sets them at an angle to mainstream society, with both the unusual perspective and unsettling vulnerability which this suggests. They are alone, on the whole, because the war has separated them from family, husbands and communities, and they are waiting for news and possibly to be reunited. Hammel has pointed to a recurring theme of the waiting woman in exile literature, citing a 'gender aspect to the waiting topos'<sup>67</sup> in her analysis of the exile novel *Café du Dôme*. One of the characters in this novel raises a toast to "The women who have the strength to wait."<sup>68</sup> Renate, Camilla, Bibiana and (as I will show) my own character Hilde, are all waiting for news of the men they love. The dread and helplessness of this waiting are one of the main ways in which women (and also men) experience the war.

In my own novel, my female character Hilde is abruptly separated from her husband, and has to support the rest of the family, when Ludwig is interned. Early in the novel, Hilde realises that the outbreak of war will not bring an end to the suspense – but rather the reverse.

She suspects that the moment of vindication she has been hoping for will never come. The British will never understand what they've been through. The war itself will be a new and worse kind of waiting.

I trace the impact of this change in the family dynamic, and the way her sense of self changes before, during and after internment. Like the characters in the refugee novels, Hilde is forced to reinvent herself on every level. At first, she is worried about Ludwig, but also about whether she can cope without him. She continues to work as a cleaner, supporting her child and Ludwig's parents, and begins to question her mother-in-law's overbearing attitudes. Her friend is sympathetic: "Why don't you tell them where to get off? After all, you're the one who pays the rent. And the one who buys and cooks their dinner." Ludwig, getting her letters, notices that 'she seems to possess unsuspected reserves of strength and courage. He is impressed by, and even in awe of this new character – but like the

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<sup>67</sup> Hammel, p. 162.

<sup>68</sup> Anna Gmeyner, *Café du Dôme*, trans. by Trevor Blewitt and Phyllis Blewitt (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941), p. 36.

baby, he begins to worry that this is someone he doesn't really know.' Like Renate, Camilla's aunts, and - although we have less direct evidence of this - like Bibiana Santis, Hilde must rebuild every aspect of her previous identity to live independently in a new country. She evolves into a tougher, more self-contained person. In prison and on the Isle of Man she must hold her own in a community of other women and develop confidence in her choices as a mother. Near the end of the novel, before they are reunited, Hilde worries about what they will have in common.

She's a different person, now. He will be different too, and probably quite unlike the husband in her head. Perhaps the imaginary Ludwig suits her rather well, actually, with none of the disadvantages of a real, flesh-and-blood man. How can she be expected just to slip back into things, as if nothing has happened?

These stories echo the wider experiences of women during the war. There was a high price to pay in terms of loneliness, but this sudden disruption also led them to question some of the established social conventions of the pre-war era and made them less willing to accept the constraints of the past.

**Sexual Morality: 'things no decent English girl would do.'**<sup>69</sup>

The reason that a single woman is perceived as disruptive, a threat, is her sexual potential – the risk that she will attract men and tempt them to act on this. Isolation and poverty put these women in a position of sexual vulnerability, which in turn makes them suspect, so that they become a source of fascination and disgust.

This issue is played upon throughout *The Inquest*, and the question of sexual morality is returned to repeatedly. It is suggested by many different characters that Santis may be a prostitute. Right at the start of the novel, the policeman who informs Shilling of the death does so with an insinuating sneer.

"I didn't want to suggest she was a professional. It's difficult, though. Sometimes you don't know where to draw the line. We watch them pretty closely. They would do things no decent English girl would do."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Neumann, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Neumann, p. 17.

Another character, Roth, makes this point of her time in Paris.

‘They gave her some attic in the house. There was much coming and going in that attic; gentlemen. But one was used in that house to ladies having comings and goings of gentlemen. Those who took her to be a tart on a professional errand that first day must have been right. One settled down to it...a woman with her background beating the pavement! But one got used to such things in those Paris days; exile; don’t poke your nose in.’<sup>71</sup>

Mr Silverman, at ‘Charity House,’ deals with another domestic worker who is pregnant: ‘you have only yourself to blame getting into trouble like this without even a promise of marriage...’

Her client, M.A., defaulting shop assistant and one who had lost her honour (age: thirty-six) rose guiltily from the edge of her chair. “I am sorry,” she muttered in a strangely bodiless voice, and went, fled, noiseless like a flabby bat.<sup>72</sup>

In this description, Neumann uses the juxtaposition of contrasting details (such as M.A. and shop assistant) to give a sense of the unusual circumstances in which this woman finds herself. However, the demeaning physical descriptions (‘a flabby bat’) also convey a sense of disgust and misogyny, which both intensify and complicate the reader’s sympathy, as they do in many of the physical descriptions of Santis.

Later on, Spiers, who is attracted to Santis and has helped her come to England, justifies his expectation that this will lead to a sexual relationship. “There were thousands of them would have dropped on their knees for sheer thankfulness if an Englishman -!”<sup>73</sup> This issue comes up, again, at the tribunal at which Santis and Ventura are interned – “And this lady was living with you in sin? Has she been on the streets?”<sup>74</sup> This echoes Neumann’s own experience, as discussed by Richard Dove. The fact that the author was living with his girlfriend Rolly Becker, and that they were not married, was cited as a factor at Neumann’s own internment tribunal.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Neumann, p. 50.

<sup>72</sup> Neumann, p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> Neumann, p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Neumann, p. 147.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Dove, *Journey of No Return: Five German-Speaking Literary Exiles in Britain, 1933-1945*. (London: Libris, 2005), p. 173.

Understandably, this fact added to his anger and indignation about the whole messy, unfair and demeaning process.

The constant speculation by the narrator Shilling about this issue makes the novel, so skilful in many ways, difficult to interpret. Is this a means to highlight hostile attitudes towards women, or does the author himself believe that her sexual morality is central to the story, and to the question of whether she deserves our sympathy? Brunnhuber sees this as a deliberate strategy, a plea for a 'reassessment of traditional, gender-based assumptions.'<sup>76</sup> 'Rather than provide a solution to the mystery of her death, the male testimonies inculpate themselves as patriarchal preoccupations with Santis's gender and assumptions of her sexuality.'<sup>77</sup> Certainly, Neumann seems to rely on this technique in other contexts – for example when he uses a chorus of hostile voices to kindle our sympathy for the domestic workers, as I will discuss in my next chapter. However, given the misogyny of the era, and the demeaning language in which his female characters are so often described, it is hard to work out exactly where Neumann stands on this issue. Although a female refugee is at the heart of the story, the narrative point of view is very differently handled from the other texts considered here, and she remains an enigma to the end.

Some sections are presented as drafts of a text on which Shilling is working. He attempts two alternative versions. First he writes an account of her life in which she is uninterested in sex. 'She was asleep! A virgin! .... She lived on substitutes of emotion...' Then he works on another in which sex explains everything she does. 'She was a tart. She slept with them... moved among Brownshirts and Communists with equal security.... Slept with either and cared for neither.' The passage concludes even more harshly. 'Her life's driving power was fornication.' He gives up both drafts in frustration. 'Across it all, with shaking fingers, he wrote: to be deleted.'<sup>78</sup>

Shilling (and perhaps by extension Neumann) seems to have his own conflicted attitudes, as well as qualms about the attention he devotes to this theme: ('There must be something wrong with his own facts sexual, to make him so predisposed.'<sup>79</sup>) These attempts to define and explain Santis are 'highly arbitrary, oscillating between the polarities of saint or whore, and doomed never to be fixed'.<sup>80</sup> Santis is rarely given an opportunity to speak for herself, and the stories of her life always seem to be filtered through the account or imagination of a male character,

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<sup>76</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 104.

<sup>78</sup> Neumann, pp. 56–58.

<sup>79</sup> Neumann, p. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 104.



except in a passage near the end of the novel, in which it is not clear if we are really hearing her thoughts, or just Shilling or Ventura imagining them. Here, she is unsympathetically presented, willing to exploit a number of men for their money, and to distract herself from the present: 'I must be with someone. I must not go back home alone...'<sup>81</sup> Even if this ambiguity is a deliberate strategy as Brunnhuber suggests, to draw attention to society's unfair standards, the emphasis on this aspect of her life above all others feels demeaning and reductive.

### **Love outside Marriage: 'incorrect behaviour'<sup>82</sup>**

In the other two novels, the single women are approached from a more intimate perspective - *Young Woman of Europe* is written in the first person, and *Family From Vienna* in a more straightforward close third person – and are far less ambiguously portrayed. Although there is greater sympathy and less implied judgement, however, the women in these books are also encouraged by their situation to break established conventions and norms.

Their drastically changed circumstances expose them to suspicion, hardship and risk, but also sometimes give these female characters an opportunity for greater emotional freedom. Andreas Lixl-Purcell identifies a 'removed loyalty to obsolete cultural codes'<sup>83</sup> amongst refugee women, which leads to a 'new sense of subjectivity, new identity and new future.' Because their world has been 'turned upside down' everything changes – 'the exception becomes the rule and trespassing of norms became the norm of exile life.'<sup>84</sup> Ultimately, this is what gives each woman the 'right to live by her own standards.'

In *Family from Vienna*, right from the start, we are shown the different perspectives of a mother (Annushka/Nushka) and daughter (Camilla) in relation to sexual morality. Nushka is worried about her granddaughter, travelling unchaperoned back from Vienna, while Camilla is alert to other dangers for a Jewish girl with a British passport:

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<sup>81</sup> Neumann, p. 170.

<sup>82</sup> Buckley, p. 197.

<sup>83</sup> *Women of Exile: German-Jewish Autobiographies since 1933*, ed. by Andreas Lixl-Purcell (Westport, Conn. : London: Greenwood ; Eurospan, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Lixl-Purcell, p. 7.

Far more catastrophic, in the circumstances, to lose one's passport than one's virginity. But that wasn't the kind of thing one said to one's mother. At least not to mothers like hers<sup>85</sup>

Camilla concludes that her mother was one of those who 'lacked even the power to imagine that life might be imposing other codes, other standards, on their daughters and granddaughters of to-day.'<sup>86</sup>

Later in the novel, both mother and daughter see the possibility of a reunion with a former admirer as a result of the refugee crisis. The older woman enjoys a late-flowering romance with a childhood sweetheart, her chief concern being what the servants will make of her visits to his flat:

What, above all, would Sims think, when Burton over his eleven-o'clock coffee in the kitchen inevitably unfolded to her and Cook the tale of their mistress's incorrect behaviour?<sup>87</sup>

Her daughter manages to convince her that 'this was England in nineteen-thirty-nine, and not Austria in eighteen ninety, or even nineteen-hundred [...] she really must move with the times.'<sup>88</sup> Things are further complicated by the fact that Wolfi also brings along a live-in companion, Else, a former employee of the family. After some eyebrow raising, both the narrative and the characters seem to accept Else's role - as something more than a carer and less than a wife - with bewildering broadmindedness. Lucky old Wolfi enjoys the devoted attention of both women and dies in a state of happy confusion: 'they were close about him, those who had loved him, whom he had loved. Nushka - Annemarie - Else...'<sup>89</sup>

For Camilla, events unfold less smoothly. As a young woman, she rejected the opportunity for an affair with a married man - 'the conventionality of her upbringing had proved too strong for her; stronger even than her longing for him [...] shrinking from the idea of such flagrant disloyalty to another woman'.<sup>90</sup> She has relaxed these qualms since then and had a long running relationship with a married man (which is now over), so she is excited and hopeful at the news that her former

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<sup>85</sup> Buckley, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Buckley, p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Buckley, p. 197.

<sup>88</sup> Buckley, p. 197.

<sup>89</sup> Buckley, p. 270.

<sup>90</sup> Buckley, p. 191.

sweetheart is escaping to London. However, her hopes are disappointed when Gerhardt is detained at the frontier: Camilla sees the bad news written in the approach of her aunts, who lean on each other 'as if for support', and whose faces have 'a curiously ashen tinge'.<sup>91</sup> Through 'the strange singing in her ears, which suddenly made everything seem very far off,' Camilla hears the voice of another refugee woman, and is linked with the wider suffering around her, via 'the cry wrung from the hearts of all those women who in anguished impotence must accept the torture of their men.'<sup>92</sup> Clearly, too many happy endings would be unrealistic in this context – and the wistful, melancholy mood of the final chapters is perhaps appropriate, if unexpectedly downbeat in contrast to the rest of the novel.

In *Young Woman of Europe*, the love story also centres around an extra-marital affair. The fact that David is married at first 'made him taboo'.<sup>93</sup> However, after Renate has helped engineer his escape first from Germany, then Austria and finally Belgium, and he has been abandoned and betrayed by his 'Aryan' wife, the marriage ties begin to seem much weaker. When he finally arrives in England, there are 'no frontiers between us any longer except one – your marriage licence. That frontier I crossed without a visa.'<sup>94</sup> Feiner here makes a direct analogy between the flight of the refugee – the physical crossing of frontiers – with the loosening of the strict legal and moral code represented by the 'marriage license.'

In *The Inquest*, as we have seen, the chaos of exile provides a female central character with an opportunity for greater freedom in her relationships with men, which puts her under suspicion, but also could be read as an ambiguous and partial liberation. Once again, a love affair that spans Europe proves to be more enduring than a marriage, although in this case it is the female character who is already married, and her husband is killed fighting in Spain. Although Bibiana Santis seeks stability by marrying Hermann, her childhood admirer Ventura follows her from Italy to Berlin and then Paris, then to Spain, and finally to England, where they are at last able to live together briefly, until they too are separated by internment. Whichever reading of her actions we accept (as shown above, these are presented in several different lights), the shifting cultural norms and the freedom of war – although they ultimately cost her life - also provide her with another chance to follow her heart.

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<sup>91</sup> Buckley, p. 244.

<sup>92</sup> Buckley, p. 245.

<sup>93</sup> Feiner, p. 139.

<sup>94</sup> Feiner, p. 331.

## Female Friendships: 'The bright lights of my existence...' <sup>95</sup>

Female solidarity is a theme in two of the novels, and its absence is striking in the third. *Young Woman of Europe* emphasises the importance of female friendships, which time and again provide Renate with the strength and support she needs to keep going in impossible situations. In *Family from Vienna* it is the women who negotiate details, pull strings, and wield power within the family, and they are shown turning to one another for support as mothers, sisters, and daughters, alongside a realistic depiction of the competition and irritation that such relationships generally entail. In *The Inquest*, however, Santis lacks female support, and is portrayed only in regard to her relationships with men. This is one of the limits (whether deliberate or accidental) of the impressionistic technique which Neumann adopts: she is depicted repeatedly as a saint or a whore by the men who knew her, but never quite as a person. Neumann is the only male author considered here. As I have discussed, according to a more generous reading of the novel, his unsympathetic portrayal of the male characters who let her down and attempt to alternately sanctify or slander her can be seen as a critique of a male-dominated society's abuse of a female refugee. However, for all his considerable skill and insight, Neumann never fully transcends the mentality he portrays.

There are few glimmers of hope for Santis – the women she turns to for help at Charity House are cruel and prejudiced against her, and her lack of a voice means she never becomes a fully-rounded character. Santis is the most completely and lethally alone of the female characters – she has no female friends or relatives to turn to, and no inner resources to which we have access (although we can guess at a passionate political conviction) - perhaps partly because she was written by a man. Like some of the nineteenth-century female characters which may have inspired her creation (there are echoes of Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina in her story), Santis seems to be trapped in a downward trajectory, and once her reputation is compromised, the only ending which feels possible for her is a tragic death. On the one hand, it is perhaps admirable given the attitudes of the era that a male writer can create and empathise with a female character to this extent, placing her at the centre of the plot – on the other, there is still something both squeamish and voyeuristic about his treatment of her sexuality. We can admire Neumann's attempt to address this subject, which has some very modern elements, whilst also noticing some of the

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<sup>95</sup> Feiner, p. 252.

ways in which it falls short of an evolved or adequately nuanced depiction of the female experience of exile.

The independence of these characters is reflected in a range of non-traditional family structures in all three books. In *Family from Vienna*, Ernest has moved back in with his mother after the breakdown of his marriage, so the household is headed by female matriarch presiding over her two adult children. In *Young Woman of Europe* Renate lives either alone or with friends. In *The Inquest* we see Santis living either alone or with a lover outside of marriage. The traditional nuclear family is threatened by war, exile, and social change, to show, as Hammel comments in relation to the exile writers she examines, 'the possibility of alternatives to existing societal structures.'<sup>96</sup>

I have also tried with my own novel to suggest that friendships can form one of the lasting consolations of internment. The semi-fictionalised accounts of Livia Laurent<sup>97</sup> and Ruth Borchard,<sup>98</sup> as well as many oral history and written accounts of internment, gave me a sense of how close these women often became as a result of their ordeal. Laurent and Borchard were both interned in Holloway Prison and the Isle of Man in 1940, and their books are based closely on their own experiences (although Laurent's was published immediately afterwards, while most of Borchard's was not published until after her death). They differ from the novels under discussion here in their direct focus on internment, and both novels highlight the (at times all-consuming) relationships between the female internees. The women did not always get on well – far from it – but where they did form a bond, it became a lifeline, more intense than the friendships of the outside world. I have drawn heavily on the descriptions in both these books, as well as the mood and atmosphere they convey. In my own novel, I have tried to explore this aspect through Hilde's reliance on Dr Liebreich (which is echoed, in the other main storyline, by Ludwig's affection for Kurt) – but also to suggest their feelings of solidarity with a wider community of internees, thrown together by circumstance in prison and in the camps.

The wartime texts resist a traditional happy ending in which a male and female protagonist are united. *The Inquest* follows a bleak premise from the start. The other two novels are at times surprisingly positive in tone, with a note of cheery defiance beneath the anger and mourning for lost certainties, but neither leads to a traditionally romantic conclusion, despite generating this expectation. In *Family from*

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<sup>96</sup> Hammel, p. 173.

<sup>97</sup> Laurent.

<sup>98</sup> Borchard.

*Vienna*, Camilla's former sweetheart Gerhard is stopped at the border, and sent to a concentration camp. Even in *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate does not get her man. After she's waited for David for most of the book, he's disposed of abruptly ('The road to your heart was so terribly long and difficult that now, when I have reached the end of it, I am too tired'<sup>99</sup>) although a handsome American appears at the last minute as a potential consolation. In *The Inquest*, there's a redemptive note – Bibiana Santis has not killed herself, we learn, but has died by accident – but she is still denied the reunion with Ventura which so nearly takes place, and as a result, it is a tragic story.

On the whole, therefore, the women in these novels remain independent, with both the disadvantages and unexpected benefits this implies. Camilla, Renate and Bibiana Santis are not reunited with their former lovers and retain the freedom to make more choices for themselves. Even Santis – who meets the bleakest end of all, a lonely death in her boarding house - remains an enigma, beyond our understanding, finally out of reach of the speculation and judgement of others, and so to some (albeit rather negative) extent her own woman. Falling in love and getting married is by no means the main adventure to befall these refugee women, and marriage is by no means their only route to a happy (or even unhappy) ending.

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<sup>99</sup> Feiner, p. 347.

## Work and Money: 'counting the sardines.'<sup>100</sup>

This chapter considers the material and economic conditions of the female refugees, as depicted in these novels. For many refugees, sudden impoverishment was the most immediate challenge. These texts reveal a gendered aspect to poverty – for the female refugees, this plays out through domestic details such as food and accommodation, which usually took up a greater proportion of their time and energies, and often the suggestion of a sexual vulnerability, as discussed in the last chapter. Like their male relatives, their very sense of self is threatened by hardship, but in subtly different ways.

Years of economic persecution under the Nazi regime had already depleted their resources, and the process of leaving was costly. Restrictions were placed on how much money Jewish refugees could take out of Germany, yet Britain also required assurances that they would not become a financial burden. Economic hardship is closely linked to self-esteem, and for previously affluent families this reversal in fortune often came as a particular shock, as Arendt explains. 'Having felt entitled from their earliest childhood to a certain social standard, they are failures in their own eyes if this standard cannot be kept any longer. Their optimism is the vain attempt to keep head above water. Behind this front of cheerfulness, they constantly struggle with despair of themselves.'<sup>101</sup>

In *Young Woman of Europe*, the narrator, Renate, introduces this theme right at the start, 'I lived between desperate poverty and comfortable wealth.... dangling up-side-down from the rope of finance between the steady rock of riches and the bare earth of poverty.'<sup>102</sup> She writes that:

money has never been a faithful friend to me, only a fleeting acquaintance – and often a hostile one at that. It came into my life and laid its cold, dirty fingers on my mind, reassuring me, lulling me into security, only to withdraw with an ugly grin and leave me desperate.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Buckley, p. 71.

<sup>101</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 268.

<sup>102</sup> Feiner, p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> Feiner, p. 17.

Personified as a sinister and corrupting male presence, the unreliability of money is here combined with a suggestion of sexual intent.

*Family From Vienna* details the attempts to adjust to refugee life by Camilla's previously wealthy relatives. It was 'sheer anguish for her to see Irena, a hostess far-famed for the lavishness and exquisiteness of her cuisine, thoughtfully counting the sardines in a tin and declaring that the odd one must be kept as the basis of tomorrow's lunch.'<sup>104</sup> On the whole, Camilla is touched by the 'courage and gallantry with which they strove to adapt themselves to these strange new conditions.'<sup>105</sup> They discover 'the joys of bargain basements' and of the 'provision department at the Marble Arch Corner House,' which they take 'to eat in their rooms off Woolworth plates.'<sup>106</sup> In this novel, it is often through the preparation and serving of food that the female characters experience and adapt to the experience of exile. By reframing their hardship as a game and making great efforts to enjoy the novelty of their new situation, they refuse to sink into misery or self-pity, mindful perhaps of how much worse things could be. "But one cannot feed on memories alone," objects one sister. The other explains her attempts to adapt: "these things I have had in generous measure, without stint...nothing in the present can ever alter that; and now when, for a change, I am having something quite, quite different – I'll enjoy that too."<sup>107</sup>

In *The Inquest*, the corrosive effect of poverty underlies the death of Bibiana Santis. As Shilling retraces her steps, he realises that she has tried to borrow money from a succession of men who have turned her away. We see the refugee hotel in Paris, with 'washing like sodden flags, limp sails of the ship Despair.'<sup>108</sup> This description evocatively suggests both movement and hopeless struggle, the political banners of war, and the sense of an epic journey (even, paradoxically, carried out whilst stationary) transposing these into a domestic sphere characterised by desperation. There is perhaps an implied disdain for the sordid realities of women's work: in order to be inspirational or effective, flags should not be 'sodden' or sails 'limp'. Santis comes to this hotel, apparently to sell stockings, half dead with exhaustion and starvation. At other times the poverty she experiences seems almost romantic, with a note of pathos, as when Santis and her lover Ventura are reunited in London – 'their walking about looking for a room; their cadging a mattress [...] their scraping together those sixpences and pennies for the first weekly rent; her being

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<sup>104</sup> Buckley, p. 71.

<sup>105</sup> Buckley, p. 69.

<sup>106</sup> Buckley, p. 69.

<sup>107</sup> Buckley, p. 95.

<sup>108</sup> Neumann, p. 45.



bent to laughter all the time, and bent to tears.<sup>109</sup> Their desperation is tempered, here, by their love of each other, but although they share the ‘scraping together’, it is the female character who is ‘bent’ to laughter and tears, verging perhaps on hysteria, often traditionally depicted as a typically female response to stress.

I first began thinking about this topic when I read about ‘The Hackney Hoard’ in a local history journal<sup>110</sup> and was intrigued by the story of a jar of coins that was found in Stoke Newington in 2006. These were originally the property of the Sultzbacher family, who came to London from Frankfurt in 1938. Martin Sultzbacher was interned, and deported on the *Arandora Star* and the *Dunera*, while his wife was sent to the Isle of Man with their children. His brother’s family remained in London. Their house received a direct hit in the Blitz, and the family in London were all killed. When Martin was freed from internment, he found that the gold coins were missing from the safe where he’d left them, in a London bank. Neighbours believed that they had been buried in the back garden – the family in London had feared that they would be confiscated if the Germans invaded, as had happened in most European countries. However, the family members who knew where they were buried had all been killed in the Blitz. Martin searched the bomb-site with a metal detector, but was unable to find them, until they were rediscovered many years later.

This was the initial story from which my novel grew. The coins in my novel are important as a fall-back, or safety-net – the idea of them sustains my characters, Ludwig and Hilde, even though they are very reluctant to spend them. The coins stand between them and absolute poverty. Ludwig thinks of them at some of his lowest moments – during the Tribunal and also when he’s on the *Dunera* – as a reminder of the security he once enjoyed, and his hopes for a more prosperous future. Like many immigrant families, the couple struggle to gain a feeling of financial security, and the trauma of having suddenly lost everything will reverberate for several generations.

I have tried to show, in my novel, the particular ways in which poverty might have been experienced by a female refugee. I enjoyed researching the details of ‘home economics’ during the war, which were so much on the minds of the women who lived through it. Hilde – left alone when Ludwig is interned – is forced to become the family breadwinner, and to develop a different relationship with her mother-in-law and her child. Although she resents the fact that her mother-in-law takes over some

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<sup>109</sup> Neumann, p. 143.

<sup>110</sup> Ian Richardson, ‘Stoke Newington’s Double Eagles: The Story of the “Hackney Hoard”’, *Hackney History*, 17 (2013).

of her caring duties, and despite the fact that working as a cleaner makes her vulnerable to sexual exploitation, she also gains experience and begins to assimilate through being forced to work outside of the home. Shopping becomes an ongoing theme in the novel, as the means through which she makes choices, and gets hold of what they need to survive – but also the route through which she interacts with local people both in London and on the Isle of Man. The shopkeepers and British women she encounters play the role of a chorus, reacting both to the war and to internment, and through them we glimpse the impact of the war on other lives. Money is a worry to Hilde throughout, but by taking on the financial responsibility for her family, she also gains new confidence and status.

### **Working as Servants: ‘the domestic mentality’<sup>111</sup>**

Changes to their employment impacted male and female refugees in different ways. Tony Kushner has written about the way in which a shortage of domestic servants provided one of the main routes into the UK for refugees at this time.<sup>112</sup> The domestic permit scheme (administered with the help of refugee organisations) allowed 20,000 predominantly female refugees into Britain to find work as domestic servants.

Many higher-status professions (such as, for example, medicine, accountancy and the law) were barred to refugees, in the UK as elsewhere, both by regulations and language difficulties. Arendt writes about some of the psychological effects of this on refugees who already had an established career, from the (relatively unusual) standpoint of a woman with some professional status. ‘We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world.’<sup>113</sup> In contrast to some of the other adaptations to a new life, she implies that this was one of the most difficult. ‘It is true we sometimes raise objections when we are told to forget about our former work.’<sup>114</sup>

As Andrea Hammel points out in her study of female exile writing, these novels provide insights into the intersection of class, race and gender, exploring ‘how the oppression of women links up with other forms [...] such as class, racial and political oppression.’<sup>115</sup> The refugees’ new circumstances disrupt existing class as

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<sup>111</sup> Feiner, p. 313.

<sup>112</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*.

<sup>113</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 265.

<sup>114</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 265.

<sup>115</sup> Hammel, p. 34.

well as gender hierarchies. Middle or upper-class women, previously protected from hardship but constrained within the traditional family structure, were suddenly subjected to the treatment and conditions routinely experienced by the working-class women they might once have employed. Women as well as men with some education or social standing saw their previous advantages melt away. This loss of status was often the hardest aspect of exile to adjust to.

In *The Inquest*, we overhear the problems of some of the female refugees who have arrived on a domestic permit. In a technique which he uses throughout the novel, Neumann reports the words and thoughts of the characters who deal with the refugees in a minimally punctuated flow, leaving the reader to construct for themselves a more sympathetic narrative. Neumann himself had considerable first-hand experience of helping new refugees to become established,<sup>116</sup> and 'Charity House' is modelled on Bloomsbury House, where the main agencies were based.<sup>117</sup> Mrs Silverman deals briskly with a succession of young women in her office: "you don't scrub the shop floor on principle Sir David doesn't like such principles why didn't you stay in Germany with such principles?"<sup>118</sup> She plays on their fears. "And if you don't stop crying right now and sign this form we'll tell the Home Office and they will cancel your permit and deport you right away."<sup>119</sup> She takes the side of unreasonable employers. "Gertrud, I called you in because there are complaints against you, I have a letter here from Miss Danby, she says you refuse to dig in the garden on your afternoons off, although she explained to you it is healthier for a girl of twenty-two than going to the cinema...."<sup>120</sup> She also – from long experience, one feels, of these cases – has seen how frequently problems arise. "If they take a domestic they want a domestic, not a D. Phil.; they hate having their lavatory cleaned by a professor of mathematics, even if she did it and did it gladly, and this she won't."<sup>121</sup>

In *Family from Vienna*, we hear from one of these girls herself, who is feeling the loss of status acutely, and articulates the shame and frustration of her sudden demotion to menial work. The physical description of this character complicates (and perhaps defers) the reader's sympathy, although only for a few sentences, in a way that is reminiscent of Neumann's 'flabby bat' (discussed in the previous chapter).

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<sup>116</sup> Dove, *Journey of No Return*, p. 158.

<sup>117</sup> Dove, *Journey of No Return*, p. 161.

<sup>118</sup> Neumann, p. 64.

<sup>119</sup> Neumann, p. 78.

<sup>120</sup> Neumann, p. 78.

<sup>121</sup> Neumann, p. 79.

“Work – ha!” one of the girls, a dark, lumpish looking creature, burst out hysterically. “Perhaps they will be kind enough to give you a scullion’s job in a hotel or restaurant....I, as a student of chemistry, on the point of taking my final examination, may perhaps be allowed to go as general servant to a woman in some outlandish part of the country who can’t get anyone else to wash her dirty dishes or scrub the floors for her....But I should not speak so, I am sorry,” she pulled herself up. “I know one should be thankful to be allowed to exist at all. It is only that sometimes -” She caught her breath, and one of the other women patted her on the shoulder. “Na Trude, calm yourself; Frau Beardmore understands, I am sure.” She explained in English: “The man whom she should marry, a doctor in the Child Hospital in Vienna, is taken away three-four-months ago. He is not heard from, any more...”<sup>122</sup>

In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate describes the newer arrivals. ‘The women switched over from being mistress in their own homes to being servants in other people’s houses. The men, not quite as adaptable, felt superfluous, and developed inferiority complexes.’<sup>123</sup> Again, it is the change in status, as much as the material hardship, which really hurts.

Once her money has run out, Renate also begins to work as a housemaid. She describes how she acquires ‘the domestic mentality,’ despite the fact that she ‘fought against it like a tiger cat’.<sup>124</sup> Her efforts to sustain an independent outlook and an intellectual life beyond her work seem doomed to failure, as ‘the broom and the duster and the vacuum-cleaner, and all the other vital weapons of war against dirt, followed me into my dreams [...] Every article in the house took on a different meaning.’<sup>125</sup> The Second World War brought civilians directly into the firing line – as the phrase ‘Home Front’ implies - and Feiner echoes this with the idea of an ongoing war in the home. There is a sense of the uncanny, the familiar is changed, and the domestic sphere becomes a source of struggle and confrontation rather than relaxation. This description of repetitive work will perhaps feel familiar to most women who expend their time and energies on under-recognised domestic tasks.

The fact that domestic work was one of the few areas open to refugees meant that women often became the main breadwinners. These texts suggest,

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<sup>122</sup> Buckley, p. 148.

<sup>123</sup> Feiner, pp. 314–15.

<sup>124</sup> Feiner, p. 313.

<sup>125</sup> Feiner, p. 313.

however, that just because they were forced to take up this route, the female refugees were not necessarily happy with it – and often felt an associated indignity almost as acutely as workless men.

For all the humiliation involved, the disruption of the existing hierarchies of class was also sometimes experienced as a positive process, which allowed the refugees to bond with people from different walks of life and gain an understanding of different outlooks and traditions. The figure of the landlady looms large in these novels, as a representative of the ‘ordinary’ and often working-class British population, and usually the first local person with whom the refugees have a close relationship. In *Family from Vienna*, the refugees are delighted with their landlady, who is polite and respectful, in contrast to the racism they have grown used to: “to be treated like a human being by a woman like that – after being spat at by crossing-sweepers and tram conductors – you can’t think what it means.”<sup>126</sup> In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate also sings the praises of her British landlady. ‘I should like to advise single people with very limited means always to move into lodging houses which are run by working-class women. Not only do they know how to keep a place clean, but they also have hearts, and warm ones at that.’<sup>127</sup> Mrs Ralston becomes a loyal defender of the ‘referdgies’ and sees ‘further ahead than many of her more learned compatriots.’<sup>128</sup> Although the refugee characters often retain a strict sense of social hierarchy, unlikely alliances are formed and feelings of solidarity begin creeping in.

However, despite their own trials, one gets the sense that their empathy only extends so far, and many of them retain some of the snobbery characteristic of the era. In *Family from Vienna*, for example, the characters are often nostalgic for the loyal and conveniently undemanding servants they remember from the pre-Nazi days.

“Oh, wonderful, fairy-tale world,” murmured Camilla; “world in which there is no sending to the laundry, nor gnashing of teeth because the laundry hasn’t sent back what you sent... but armies of tame laundresses with short full skirts and coloured handkerchiefs round their heads, washing beautifully, washing cheerfully, washing songfully in the *Waschküche* of one’s own *Schloss*.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Buckley, p. 92.

<sup>127</sup> Feiner, p. 224.

<sup>128</sup> Feiner, p. 225.

<sup>129</sup> Buckley, p. 107.

Camilla is gently ironic here, but she highlights a mood that the rest of her family adopt with less self-awareness. The happy peasant servants are contrasted with their British equivalents, who create more problems for their employers by voicing their own opinions and requiring some fairly reasonable home comforts. "Over here, quite apart from tearing each other to pieces, each would have demanded a room to herself, complete with radio and gas-fire."<sup>130</sup> In conclusion, the feeling is that life was much better before working people began to hope for a better standard of living for themselves, when they "accepted the situation as a matter of course."<sup>131</sup> In some cases, therefore, the refugees transfer their expectations of a social hierarchy to serve their needs directly from one country to another and return to their former roles as employers as soon as they can afford to; in others, the reversal of their own fortunes leads them to question the social justice of these arrangements, often edging towards a more socialist outlook.

In my own novel, Ludwig and Hilde's first close encounter with the British also comes in the person of their landlady, Mrs Rose. She is friendly to their faces but also nosy, spreading rumours about them to the other tenants, especially once Ludwig is interned. Class hierarchies are disrupted in my narrative, especially for Hilde, who works as a cleaner - which puts her in a position of vulnerability, but also helps to build her self-respect, by allowing her to support herself. Hilde encounters an odd combination of warmth and suspicion in the local women she meets at the shops. 'She knows that they will tell all kinds of stories about her once she's gone, and yet their attention reassures her. This is the strangest thing about them. However brutal they can be as a group, when faced with an individual, they have the kindest of hearts.' For Hilde, as for the refugee characters in the war-time novels, finding a place in a new land means finding an economic role as both worker and consumer. There is no sense of inevitability about existing arrangements to the new arrival - that things have always been this way and can never change. The peculiarities and absurdities of the British class structure are made starkly obvious by their unfamiliarity and are therefore more open to critique.

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<sup>130</sup> Buckley, p. 107.

<sup>131</sup> Buckley, p. 107.

## Female Activism: 'She was rather mixed-up with politics, certainly.'<sup>132</sup>

These novels explore some of the different ways in which their female characters interact with their political context: either directly, as activists, or through what Andrea Hammel describes as the 'narrativization of the everyday',<sup>133</sup> using domestic detail to suggest wider political and social change.

Lixl-Purcell has described, in his introduction to a collection of autobiographical writings by female refugees, how the telling of their stories, as well as their lived experience, often leads these women towards a challenging of traditional norms, and a sort of political awakening.

By subverting the popular images of women's vulnerability and by overcoming the stigma of powerlessness, each memoir establishes a different notion of women's autonomy directly opposed to the sanctioned norms of identity. The recognition that culturally prescribed role models offered no solutions to the problems of their lives convinced many women of exile to experiment with radically new models of political behaviour.<sup>134</sup>

The novels I examine here document – in very different ways – this process.

Two of the novels, *Young Woman of Europe* and *The Inquest*, contain female characters who are politically active – Sybille (one of Renate's friends, a secondary character) and Bibiana Santis (the central female character). The physical descriptions of these women can be clichéd: their political engagement often seems to play havoc with their hair. Sybille tends to 'come home in the small hours of the morning, her face scratched, her hair flying',<sup>135</sup> while Santis is often described with a dishevelled or unruly appearance: 'She shook her short, angry, untidy hair back from a cleanly outlined, youthful and strongwilled forehead; it looked as if she were not standing in room's seclusion [...] but in the open, on ship's deck, facing the wind.'<sup>136</sup> However, beneath the somewhat stereotypical surface (bearing in mind, also, the genre conventions within which both novels operate), the presentation of these women as autonomous agents is already a radical step. Their individual stories are

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<sup>132</sup> Neumann, p. 101.

<sup>133</sup> Hammel, p. 243.

<sup>134</sup> Lixl-Purcell, p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Feiner, p. 166.

<sup>136</sup> Neumann, p. 31.

set within the context of political trajectory of the 1930s: the failure of the left to stem the rise of fascism.

*Young Woman of Europe* traces the dislocation of Renate and her three friends, Christel, Sybille, and Ilona, all uprooted by the political turmoil of the thirties. Renate and her school friends are first described as a 'generation of underfed gnomes, with young bodies and ancient minds, with tragedy, death, deprivation, hatred, and tears as our invisible companions. We were the sad cocoons from which later on emerged one of the most harassed bodies of human history: the young woman of Europe.'<sup>137</sup>

As the title implies, the idea of Europe is central to the book, and Feiner repeatedly suggests a pan-European ideal as a counterbalance to the rise of Nazi Germany. Renate and her father travel around Germany and are warned about the rise of Hitler. "If that bogus, no-good League of Nations is not strong enough to create at long last the United States of Europe then we'll have another war within ten years" [...] "The United States of Europe! What a dream!" sighed father.'<sup>138</sup>

Renate becomes convinced of this and works for the 'All Europe Friendship League' until their offices are raided by the Nazis, and their leader is beaten up. As each of the friends in turn is forced to leave Germany, they cease to be Germans (in her own case this process is strikingly literal: as a 'political undesirable', Renate receives a letter from the German Embassy revoking her German passport) and they become instead 'young women of Europe.' Christel is a doctor and goes to Spain to tend patients during the Civil War. Sybille is politically active with the Communists and she flees to Czechoslovakia, to work underground against the Nazi regime. Ilona performs piano concerts in the capital cities of Europe. Renate uses her writing to support the anti-fascist cause from London. When they meet for the last time, the phrase becomes a sort of rallying cry: 'Young woman of Europe – use your abilities. That means: be what you are a hundred per cent.'<sup>139</sup> The novel suggests that each of these female characters is changed – perhaps even radicalised – by their experience.

*The Inquest* follows a similarly ambitious arc, also crossing the continent of Europe. Santis is politically very active, but what we learn of her is continually filtered through the (often self-justifying and suspicious) accounts of others. We discover that she was involved in a bomb plot against Mussolini when she was still a teenager:

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<sup>137</sup> Feiner, p. 70.

<sup>138</sup> Feiner, p. 135.

<sup>139</sup> Feiner, p. 250.



appearing in court, there is a 'fighting animal's look in her angry eyes.'<sup>140</sup> We meet her distributing Communist leaflets while the Reichstag burns. She has a 'strangely veiled, deep, beautiful and somehow rebellious voice,'<sup>141</sup> and her appearance is also that of a fiery rebel. When Spiers meets her during the Spanish Civil War, 'his impressions at that time were of a Heroic Virgin, facing the great onslaught – Jeanne d'Arc, unreal somehow [...] A Heroine and a Saint!'<sup>142</sup> Recounting the experience a few years later, his admiration has cooled. 'She was rather mixed-up with politics, certainly,'<sup>143</sup> he concludes, less admiringly. She flees from Spain desperate and exhausted, her husband dead and the cause for which they fought defeated.

In both novels the political trajectory leads from hope and rebellion towards despair. In *Young Woman of Europe*, tragedy strikes each of the friends in turn, as they lose their husbands, families and homes. As we have seen in the last chapter, internment comes as the final blow in both novels. Santis loses her unborn child and although we do not know if she loses faith in her last political hope, the British, Ventura, who accompanies her on much of this journey, is ultimately disillusioned with 'The disease political. That feeling of false well-being [...] That indulging in illusory stimulants.'<sup>144</sup>

*Family from Vienna* is a less traditionally political novel, and the focus here is on how wider political developments impact on domestic detail. Andrea Hammel has written about how the domestic sphere and everyday life can become 'alternative spaces'<sup>145</sup> in exile writing, in which it is possible to express female resistance, ambition or conflict. In *Family from Vienna*, it is in the day-to-day business of home-making, socialising and negotiating relationships that the strong female central characters exert their influence. Hammel also discusses a tendency to dismiss the domestic sphere as 'conservative and oppressive'<sup>146</sup> but argues that when examined less simplistically, these settings and topics can be 'represented as areas for transformation.' In *Family from Vienna*, the mechanisms and processes of family life are shown to be central to the fate of the families involved, and in this narrative it is the male characters who often seem helpless or irrelevant. As Hammel writes of the

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<sup>140</sup> Neumann, p. 41.

<sup>141</sup> Neumann, p. 30.

<sup>142</sup> Neumann, pp. 94–95.

<sup>143</sup> Neumann, p. 101.

<sup>144</sup> Neumann, p. 144.

<sup>145</sup> Hammel.

<sup>146</sup> Hammel, p. 36.

novels she examines, 'it is not the dramatic public political acts which open up space for resistance [...] but the small instances of the everyday'.<sup>147</sup>

Nushka is concerned with family dynamics, and knitting together her unravelling family, which is being torn apart by the arrival of so many new refugees, and the different approaches to assimilation of her children. Camilla is a wry observer of manners, self-delusions and love affairs. In this book, the women follow the more traditionally feminine routes of serving food, organising charity events to raise money for the new arrivals, co-ordinating birthday celebrations, and the fraught business of inter-generational diplomacy. The text uses domestic details to illustrate the changing circumstances of the refugees. For example, the Bayswater rooms of the aunts become 'a centre of reunion' characterised by 'snug little bridge parties and sandwiches daintily prepared',<sup>148</sup> while later on, Wolfi's bleak accommodation is softened by Nushka's gifts of lobster mayonnaise, cooked asparagus, or a tin of pate de foie gras. Nushka's other efforts to help include 'tickets heroically taken for concerts she didn't want to hear [...] pictures bought of refugee artists which it was far too embarrassing to hang in any of her rooms.'<sup>149</sup> Her efforts to organise a party both heighten but also diffuse some of the tensions and grief of the family. The writing is alert to the nuances and power-dynamics behind these processes, which require under-appreciated reserves of diplomacy, skill and tenacity. The survival of the family depends on these negotiations, which are shown to be the very politics of life.

The central characters in all three novels are therefore more than just 'women who wait' (the phrase which Hammel takes from *Café du Dome*, an exile novel by Anna Gmeyner<sup>150</sup>). Renate takes her fate into her own hands – rescuing both herself and David not once but many times. The women in *Family from Vienna* make active and creative use of all the resources available to them, re-establishing uprooted lives in a new city. Beneath the sexual preoccupations of those around her, we can discern another reading of Bibiana's story, in which she is politically active and engaged throughout her life, taking part in a bomb plot against Mussolini, distributing Communist leaflets while the Reichstag burns, running away to Spain to fight the Fascists, gun-running in Paris and engineering her own escape to London. In my novel, Hilde's journey is perhaps less dramatic, but I have tried to show how by supporting the family and surviving internment, she also becomes the central

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<sup>147</sup> Hammel, p. 39.

<sup>148</sup> Buckley, p. 72.

<sup>149</sup> Buckley, p. 197.

<sup>150</sup> Hammel, p. 162.

character in her own life story, rather than seeing herself mainly as a companion to her husband, waiting for his release from internment much as she used to wait for his return from work. Hilde's sense of herself changes to the extent that she is apprehensive about his release, worried about the inconvenience to her new routines. As Lixl-Purcell suggests, it is their experiences as refugees which force the women into these challenging new roles, leading them to reassess their own views of their position both within the family and society more widely.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Lixl-Purcell, p. 6.

### **Identity and Assimilation: ‘amongst these living question marks.’<sup>152</sup>**

These books can be read as chronicles of a (sometimes painful, sometimes amusing or enlightening) journey towards integration in a new land. The British are a bewildering new species to the refugees. The dual perspective of exile allows them to form a perceptive analysis of the quirks and contradictions of their hosts. As Tony Kushner puts it, the transition to a new culture ‘enabled anthropological insights that allowed these newcomers to audaciously explain the nature of Englishness.’<sup>153</sup> They illustrate, as Andrea Hammel explains, the ‘contradictions inherent in life of exile, the tension between love and loathing for their country of origin, the desire to adapt and at the same time to distance oneself from the country of exile.’<sup>154</sup> In addition, the different vantage points available to women refugees – able to observe the British from within their own homes, as in *Young Woman of Europe*, from within their own families, as in *Family from Vienna*, or perhaps from within their bedrooms, in *The Inquest* – tend to provide opportunities for an unforgiving intimacy. These novels illuminate some of the specifically female routes towards integration, as servant, housewife, mother or lover.

In this chapter, I examine the way these journeys are represented in the three novels. The struggle towards a new identity plays out in terms of relationships with the British, attitudes towards race and religion, attitudes towards Germany or Austria, the trauma of internment, and the bleak, underlying theme of suicide. Finally, I consider some of the more positive representations of the refugee perspective in these novels, with the suggestion that this is linked to creativity or originality, as well as the recurring image of refugees (and female refugees in particular) as forerunners – experiencing wider changes ahead of the rest of society.

### **Attitudes to the British: ‘Complacent Adventurers’<sup>155</sup>**

The refugee characters tend to find the British at once confusing and admirable and are often bewildered by their different priorities. Ruth Feiner describes the English as ‘the Chinese of the West’<sup>156</sup> (playing on the problematic stereotype of

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<sup>152</sup> Feiner, p. 213.

<sup>153</sup> Tony Kushner, *Journeys from the Abyss: The Holocaust and Forced Migration from the 1880s to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>154</sup> Hammel, p. 244.

<sup>155</sup> Feiner, p. 213.

<sup>156</sup> Feiner, p. 213.

the inscrutable Oriental) – ‘eight years after my arrival on this island, I confess I haven’t begun to know them.’<sup>157</sup> She calls them ‘the Complacent Adventurers,’<sup>158</sup> suggesting a potentially reckless self-confidence resulting from centuries as the hub of the British Empire. She is perplexed by their values, and their apparent unconcern over serious issues. ‘The unfathomable, incomprehensible, impossible English, who take death so lightly and football so seriously.’<sup>159</sup>

Different national approaches to insulation, food, and living arrangements are much remarked upon (it seems significant that the title of Feiner’s first novel about refugee women, *Fires in May*, alludes both to the surprising heating arrangements she encounters in English homes, and to the Nazi book-burnings of May 1933<sup>160</sup>). In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate’s housekeeper in Germany expresses reservations about her decision to leave. In England “they eat everything half-raw, they have no real windows, but fancy pieces of glass which you push up and down, and no balconies! [...] What a place to go!”<sup>161</sup>

More taxing than these strange details, however, is the adjustment which is required to understand the British mentality. After a few years in England, Renate is still baffled by the attitudes she encounters. ‘What a nation that needs drawbacks, kicks, and blows to become cheerfully determined, when any other nation needs success and encouragement to be able to carry on!’<sup>162</sup> They are ‘so childlike in many ways [...] infantile delight in games [...] masters in the art of dabbling.’<sup>163</sup> She offers this ambivalent advice to other refugees:

my fate...sent me off to live amongst these living question-marks, to bring to their hospitable shores my anguish, my misery, my yearning for revenge [...] if you cannot wait for them to warm up to you like their chilly rooms before their symbolic fires – turn back from the white cliffs of Dover and stay away. But if you can survive this passive assault upon your Continental mentality and all your habits and ideas – then you will in good time – no – not be one of

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<sup>157</sup> Feiner, p. 210.

<sup>158</sup> Feiner, p. 213.

<sup>159</sup> Feiner, p. 31.

<sup>160</sup> Anthony Grenville, *Encounters with Albion: Britain and the British in Texts by Jewish Refugees from Nazism* (Legenda, 2018).

<sup>161</sup> Feiner, p. 188.

<sup>162</sup> Feiner, p. 212.

<sup>163</sup> Feiner, p. 212.

them, but at least pass in the crowd. And that is the highest one can achieve in England.<sup>164</sup>

In this passage, Feiner contrasts the deep feelings of the refugee – ‘my anguish, my misery’ – with the ‘chilly’ and ‘symbolic’ gestures of her host, which operate as a ‘passive assault’ on her previous identity. The most she can hope for is to ‘pass in the crowd’ – a poor substitute for a real sense of belonging.

Similarly, in *Family from Vienna*, Buckley describes Nushka, an older woman who has lived many years in London, yet still marvels at the reserve of her British-born children:

This calm, cool way of entering a room as if nothing had happened, when so much must have happened; how admirable it was, what a triumph of the English upbringing [...] but oh, how, at this moment, she hated it [...] longed to break through the unnatural barriers of restraint and good form.<sup>165</sup>

This internal debate continues, as Nushka urges herself to be more like her children. ‘But Ernest was right, of course, she reproved herself: if one had the good fortune to live in England, one must not only do as the English did, but try to *be* as the English were.’<sup>166</sup>

### **Jewish Identity: ‘this accursed race’<sup>167</sup>**

Another dimension to the refugee identity comes through the intersection of gender, national identity, and race. Doubly ‘foreign’ – both German or Austrian and also Jewish – the refugee women can be subject to prejudice on several fronts. The characters in these texts are frequently forced into an agonised reassessment of their Jewishness – which has been given a brutal new emphasis by Nazi ideology.

A contentious issue, and one which still divides minority communities, is how much assimilation is necessary or desirable? Arendt argues against the ‘hopeless sadness of assimilationists,’<sup>168</sup> seeing something ridiculous in their efforts to adapt to each new situation. She illustrates this with the figure of Mr Cohen, who moves from

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<sup>164</sup> Feiner, p. 213.

<sup>165</sup> Buckley, p. 27.

<sup>166</sup> Buckley, p. 27.

<sup>167</sup> Buckley, p. 101.

<sup>168</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 272.

one country to another, trying to be more French than the French, more American than the Americans. 'Whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews.'<sup>169</sup>

Arendt talks about two difficult paths available to the new arrivals: to become 'social pariahs and their counterpart, social parvenus'.<sup>170</sup> In other words, they can either be outcasts (taking a position outside the mainstream, with the distrust this implies) or arrivistes (playing the game of social advancement, but also encountering prejudice, and often dismissed as 'social climbers' or 'new money'). Certainly, many classic anti-Semitic - and indeed anti-immigrant - tropes seem to be associated with this dynamic. However, in suggesting these two paths, Arendt appears to contrast the aspirations and attitudes of the refugees with the more 'genuine' loyalties and national feeling of their hosts, whereas it is arguable that all members of society are acting or assuming a role, and that all nationalism is based on the construction of what Benedict Anderson has termed 'imagined communities'.<sup>171</sup> As Marion Berghahn points out, a discussion of assimilation is often combined with moralizing judgements as to whether it is 'good' or 'bad' – and frequently equated with religion.<sup>172</sup> Traditionalists fear the loss of identity, whilst for host communities, the 'good immigrant' is largely seen as one who assimilates thoroughly and quickly.<sup>173</sup>

The novels illustrate some of the problems around assimilation in this racial sense. Today, social scientists generally understand 'race' as a social construct, albeit one with profound implications. 'Although biologically meaningless when applied to humans – physical differences such as skin colour have no natural association with group differences in ability or behaviour – race nevertheless has tremendous significance in structuring social reality.'<sup>174</sup> This distinction was rarely made at the time when these novels were written. The writers considered here (all of whom are Jewish themselves) reject Nazi ideology, but tend to accept, to some extent, the idea that there is a biological or 'natural' basis for the concept of race, an idea which plays out in some of the ways they describe their characters.

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<sup>169</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 271.

<sup>170</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 274.

<sup>171</sup> Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>172</sup> Berghahn, p. 72.

<sup>173</sup> As suggested, for example, in Nikesh Shukla editor, *The Good Immigrant* (London: Unbound, 2017).

<sup>174</sup> Matthew Clair and Jeffrey S. Denis, 'Sociology of Racism', *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 19 (2015), 857–63 (p. 857).

It is noticeable that many of the characters in these books are depicted with complex racial identities, which fluctuate or evolve according to the situations they are in. They often fall into the paradoxical position of my own central character, Ludiwig – of being too Jewish for the Nuremberg Race Laws (which stigmatised those with at least one Jewish grandparent) but not fully accepted by Jewish religious tradition (which emphasises the importance of the maternal line). Renate Feldt in *Young Woman of Europe* and Bibiana Santis in *The Inquest* both have Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, as does Isabel in *Family from Vienna*. The different responses of these characters to the question of what it means to be Jewish, or partly Jewish, allow the authors to explore this area. Most characters feel torn about this, and almost all display an internalised anti-Semitism, unsurprisingly in the context of the times. Jewish “self-hatred” was debated from the 1930s onwards (first in German writing, and later on in English), and is both referred to and depicted in these novels. Some of the most troubling anti-Jewish feeling in the novels comes from characters who are to some degree Jewish themselves.

In *Family from Vienna*, the British branch of a prosperous Jewish family has assimilated over many decades, and to ‘get on’ in society, the second-generation children have worked hard to conceal their origins. The character of Ernest is introduced as

that somewhat unpleasant but not altogether unique phenomenon, a Jewish-born anti-Semite. From his earliest youth he had been in resistance to everything connected with the race; his every effort had gone towards modelling himself upon the standards of the average Englishman, which with the aid of Harrow and Oxford he had achieved with astonishing success.<sup>175</sup>

He has not told his daughter Isabel that he is Jewish, and this discovery – which is dramatically made visiting Vienna during the *Anschluss* - comes as a shock to her: “To think how one’s always despised and jeered at them – at school and everywhere – and now to know that one’s just one of the Hunted oneself! Melodramatic though it might have seemed, the cry went to Camilla’s heart.”<sup>176</sup>

When Isabel falls in love with a young Jewish man, her father forbids the relationship. ‘To let her be drawn back – now – into this accursed race from which in every possible way, both inwardly and outwardly, he’d always striven to free

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<sup>175</sup> Buckley, p. 13.

<sup>176</sup> Buckley, p. 29.



himself...<sup>177</sup> seems inconceivable to him. The rest of the family, reluctantly agree: “nowadays one can’t marry a Jew. It would be utterly impossible” [...] “Utterly impossible”, the others echo with conviction; then they sighed and laughed a little at themselves.<sup>178</sup>

Ernest looks around a room full of the new arrivals with disgust.

Jews, every one of them – *Refujews*, as a chap at his club rather neatly dubbed them; greasy, foreign-looking crowd, talking too noisily, eating too noisily, making themselves generally conspicuous and objectionable. God, how he loathed them.<sup>179</sup>

However, we gain a more complex understanding of Ernest’s position as we learn more about the prejudice he experiences – the upper-class Englishmen who say “Oh, that Jew!” or: “He’s a Jew, isn’t he...?” in just that supercilious tone of faint disgust that cut like a whiplash.<sup>180</sup> We also learn his deep worry – not unfounded in the 1930s – ‘the fear, that was ever in his mind: “*If one day it comes here.*”’<sup>181</sup>

[...] even in this blessed country of wholesome instincts and balanced outlook, it should become possible for the poison of race-hatred, race-persecution to gain power. His whole aim, his whole desire, was to get the child away before the wave broke over their heads. <sup>182</sup>

In other words, Ernest wishes to assimilate and erase all trace of his Jewish identity not just to climb within the social hierarchy, but also to protect his daughter from the threat of persecution in Britain.

Other characters illustrate a range of different responses – often inconsistent or irrational, but no less deeply felt – to the racism around them. Subtle signifiers of language are used to situate the characters across a spectrum of different racial and national identities. There is the grotesque Minna, who complains in broken English “why must so many Jews write to me?”<sup>183</sup> Her relatives point out that she is “like a French aristocrat at the time of the Revolution when you speak of the ‘rabble’ in that

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<sup>177</sup> Buckley, p. 101.

<sup>178</sup> Buckley, p. 102.

<sup>179</sup> Buckley, p. 211.

<sup>180</sup> Buckley, p. 143.

<sup>181</sup> Buckley, p. 140.

<sup>182</sup> Buckley, p. 141.

<sup>183</sup> Buckley, p. 120.

tone.”<sup>184</sup> Like many of the characters, she considers herself as other to the ‘Jews’ she complains about, protected by both her class and her British citizenship. However, her attempts to present herself as an upper-class Englishwoman and (as she says) a “Chentile”<sup>185</sup> are undermined by her struggles with the language. “I am everything heart and no head, and where will be my capital if this goes on?”<sup>186</sup> Having secured her own situation, she has little empathy for others. ‘As you see, I am surrounded with the bosom of my family, and we are having such a cosy pow-pow about old times, isn’t it?’<sup>187</sup>

We also meet the patronising do-gooder, Kathleen (or ‘Kassleen’ as the refugees call her), determined to keep the new arrivals in their place, and to lecture them on ‘karma’ and personal growth. Her anglicized name marks her out as more assimilated – she is what we might now refer to as ‘second generation’ – and allows her to maintain sense of distance from her relatives.

“I do feel it doesn’t Look Well for refugees to live in style in first-class hotels even if they can afford to, which of course they can’t [...] For all we know, this experience may be just what is needed for their spiritual evolution.”<sup>188</sup>

Erich, an Austrian monarchist, is “an example of perfect assimilation”<sup>189</sup> in another sense. Like the characters above who have become (or are trying to become) so British that they see themselves as entirely other to their continental relatives, Erich considers himself completely Austrian, and struggles to conceive of himself in any other way. “Really, I hardly know what is a racial characteristic and what isn’t. You’ve no idea, Camilla, how remote the whole business seems to me. I suppose I’d been so well baptized in infancy that one might truly say it ‘took’.”<sup>190</sup> He was completely unprepared for his rejection by his country. “It never occurred to me – or to them – that there was any kind of barrier between us.” Like many others, until the rise of Nazism, he felt accepted and entirely assimilated. “And then comes this crazy nonsense that emphasises the barrier, and puts one on the wrong side of it; one is branded as a member of a race so alien to one, that to have to suffer with it

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<sup>184</sup> Buckley, p. 124.

<sup>185</sup> Buckley, p. 200.

<sup>186</sup> Buckley, p. 130.

<sup>187</sup> Buckley, p. 126.

<sup>188</sup> Buckley, p. 38.

<sup>189</sup> Buckley, p. 155.

<sup>190</sup> Buckley, p. 154.

seems just a fantastic nightmare!”<sup>191</sup> His use of the expression ‘crazy nonsense’ comes close to an outright rejection of racialised thinking, for its emphasis on ‘the barrier’. However, it is unclear (as with most of the characters) if his objection is to the fundamental idea of a Jewish ‘race’ as a category, or merely to the fact that it is ‘so alien’ that he objects to being included within it. He concludes with a wish for a return to better times. “I live only for the time when that swine of a house-painter in Berchtesgarden will have had his day, and we shall help to bring the Monarchy back to Austria.”<sup>192</sup>

Camilla, the central character, also articulates mixed feelings about her Jewish heritage, veering between affection and distaste. The following passage illustrates something of this duality. Like Arendt in *We Refugees*, Camilla feels both proud and ashamed of the group to which she (almost) belongs, at once harshly critical (using some stereotypical descriptions), as well as loyally indignant.

She glanced surreptitiously round the group, at those faces all more or less stamped with that paradoxical racial mixture of tragedy and arrogance, resignation and discontent. Somebody with a nose smashed in by a Nazi heel: somebody whose lover agonised behind Nazi prison walls; somebody – everybody – uprooted, homeless, stripped of all they possessed. And this was only a fraction – this little handful gathered together, almost at random – an infinitesimal cross-section of the total picture of Jewish affliction, Jewish woe. For an instant her whole being ached for these her own people; she was one of them...<sup>193</sup>

It is an awareness of their suffering that makes Camilla feel Jewish. Her outrage is clearly and movingly articulated – a rallying cry against the anti-Semitism that was not yet clearly acknowledged by most at the time. Yet there is also a suggestion of internalised prejudice mixed up with her empathy, evidenced by her choice of words: ‘arrogance’ rather than pride, ‘discontent’ rather than anger or unhappiness. By using words that imply an unjustified emotion (both ‘arrogance’ and ‘discontent’ suggest that these feelings may be excessive, rather than fully reasonable responses), Camilla undermines the very sympathy she makes us feel. There is even, buried

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<sup>191</sup> Buckley, p. 154.

<sup>192</sup> Buckley, p. 155.

<sup>193</sup> Buckley, p. 149.

deep within her indignation, a paradoxical hint that they might almost deserve their persecution, or at least that they fail to carry it with the dignity she would like.

The paragraph continues with a more overtly hostile description, which articulates a very familiar British brand of anti-Semitism, and illustrates the uncomfortable double-vision of many assimilated immigrants.

Yet equally she could swing over to the opposite point of view and see them as they probably appeared to the eyes of the average Gentile, revolted alike by their cringing humility and their self-satisfied boasting; irritated by their perpetual insistence on preferential treatment, their eternal demand for favours, coupled with ungracious and sneering acceptance of them; nauseated by their perpetual arguing, bargaining, chaffering, which could cause an onlooker to go hot all over even if, the next minute, such petty haggling might be offset by some act of spectacular and flamboyant generosity. To see one's race as others saw it, certainly wasn't a pleasant thing to do.<sup>194</sup>

In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate grows up with a Jewish father and an 'Aryan' mother. Throughout her childhood, we are presented with a contrast between the creative and enlightened Feldts and the stern, proud and unsympathetic Dressels. Renate increasingly embraces the Jewish side of her family, idealising her father, and rejecting her unfaithful and weak-willed mother. At her paternal grandmother's funeral, she has a moment of realisation, ('with poignant clarity, that this is where I belong'<sup>195</sup>) and asks the Rabbi for instruction into the Jewish faith. Like most of the characters in *Family from Vienna*, discussed above, her feelings about her heritage are not straightforward, although the direction of her journey is different. Whilst Erich's baptism 'took', and he feels himself to be entirely Austrian, Renate's political and ethical repulsion towards Nazism lead to a rejection of her German and Christian relatives and a more wholehearted embrace of her Jewish religious and ethnic identity. Although she is refreshingly proud of her refugee status (as I will show), even Renate can be superior about the later arrivals at the end of the decade, 'a bewildered, unfortunate lot [...] stuck together, speaking German all the time, and therefore making themselves conspicuous.'<sup>196</sup> Like Camilla in *Family from Vienna*,

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<sup>194</sup> Buckley, p. 149.

<sup>195</sup> Feiner, p. 65.

<sup>196</sup> Feiner, p. 314.

Renate's sympathies are with the refugees, but they make her self-conscious because of their failure to blend in.

Although the established Jewish community in Britain provided help and assistance to the new arrivals, these novels often devote pointed criticism to the limits of their generosity. Arendt comments (although not specifically of the UK) that 'the mere fact of being a refugee has prevented our mingling with native Jewish society, some exceptions only proving the rule. Those unwritten social laws, though never publicly admitted, have the great force of public opinion. And such a silent opinion and practice is more important for our daily lives than all official proclamations of hospitality and good will.'<sup>197</sup>

Neumann plays on some of these attitudes and concerns in his cutting descriptions of the ways in which the well-established and affluent British Jewish community respond to the arrival of the refugees. The extent to which these 'rich Britishers' feel threatened by the arrival of European Jewish refugees is illustrated in his description of 'Charity House', where

the rich Britishers financing the enterprise tackled the meting-out of Fate to the scum of a Continent. It was dirty work. It had to be done, it must be done. The anti-Jewish tide, staved off this island successfully for centuries, went with the scum's vermin and with its stink. Therefore: keep out the scum! And if you can't keep them out: at least keep them down and keep them on the move.

The demeaning language used here ('scum', 'dirty', 'vermin' and 'stink') is all the more startling because it is intended to convey the inner thoughts of Jewish philanthropists – whose objective, ironically, is to stave off the 'anti-Jewish tide' – or at least to deflect it from their own shores. The central character, Santis, is refused help time and again by British Jewish characters who might be in a position to sympathise with her. Mrs Fine and Mrs Silverman are British Jewish workers at Charity House, who have set out with a wish to help, but have become indifferent to the suffering around them, impatient with their clients, and even rather nostalgic for 'the heydays of Charity House and letting them wait until they turned black in their faces.'<sup>198</sup> Roth, a financially successful new arrival, has met Santis several times over the years, but refuses to help her the day before her death. "You can't give it

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<sup>197</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 271.

<sup>198</sup> Neumann, p. 65.

away to them all. You wouldn't know where to start and where to finish..."<sup>199</sup> A similar criticism is implicit in the character of Spiers – a British (presumably Jewish) civil servant, who helps Santis to come to England, but later refuses to see her.

My doctoral thesis takes its title from a pamphlet which was issued to new arrivals in 1938, which illustrates some of this diffidence in the British context. When Ludwig is taken in by the police, they find a copy of this pamphlet in his room. *While You Are in England: Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee*.<sup>200</sup> Offering stern advice to new arrivals in both English and German, it indicates some of the fears of the established Jewish community that the refugees would make themselves unpopular and exacerbate existing anti-Semitism. Refugees are implored to blend in ('do not make yourself conspicuous by speaking loudly, nor by your manner or dress'), are asked not to express any political views, and to aspire to practical vocations like agriculture or domestic service ('there are already far too many professional men amongst the Refugees for the needs of today'). The pamphlet stresses the temporary nature of their new home and urges refugees to 'be loyal to England, your host.' Ludwig remembers how indignant Hilde was about this advice – "but of course we will be!" she exclaims. However, it is this suspicion that is behind their internment, and the phrase becomes the title of my final chapter.

### **Lost Homelands: 'all the dear old life'**<sup>201</sup>

Another aspect of the refugee journey is the changing relationship to the homeland which has been left behind. The three texts deal with this in different ways. The characters in *Family from Vienna* are in mourning for their past, to which they return compulsively in an attempt to make sense of what has happened; many are nostalgic, and the sensory details of their pre-war lives are carefully evoked. In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate is engaged in a more violent process of rejection, having chronicled the rise of the Nazi regime in greater detail. In both texts, memories of Austria or Germany from the pre-Nazi era can serve as a kind of mythical hinterland, contrasting with the present. There is a wish to preserve, reaffirm or celebrate the better aspects of the countries in which they grew up. *The Inquest* engages less directly with this process, but the influences of the past infuse the novel in less overt ways.

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<sup>199</sup> Neumann, p. 53.

<sup>200</sup> German Jewish Aid Committee, 'While You Are in England; Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee.' (Anchor Press, 1938).

<sup>201</sup> Buckley, p. 177.

*Family from Vienna* is perhaps the most celebratory on this subject. The sections dealing with 'present day' (1938/9) London are interspersed with vivid and lyrical memories from the first two decades of the century. There is the house in the woods around Vienna where Camilla spent idyllic holidays as a child: 'an endless succession of keenly remembered delights [...] The poignant scent and flavour of wood-strawberries for breakfast, waiting in a neat conical pile over which Franz, the butler, would shake a sudden snowstorm of soft powdery sugar.'<sup>202</sup> Another character is 'frightfully homesick, too, at moments [...] just for the most absurd little things – the smell of the Vienna streets, the chattering of the market-women under their big umbrellas, the voice of one's friends ringing up on the telephone to say what it was like at the party yesterday.'<sup>203</sup> These sensory details build up a picture of a more innocent time from the perspective of their female characters, as a little girl or a busy housewife. The giddy social scene of the city itself is also celebrated and mourned.

Pre-war Vienna – pre-Hitler Vienna... Paradise of Jewish financiers; of waltz-kings and operetta composers; home of the Carnival spirit, of the naughty piquant intrigue that had the masked ball or the cosy secret *Absteigquartier* for its setting; home of most arrogant formal tradition – and of all wistful, melancholy-sweet romance: could one ever forget it?<sup>204</sup>

The role of women in passing on family stories and a sense of identity from one generation to the next is implied, as each of the female characters muses on what has been lost. Ernest, in contrast, tries to obliterate all trace of his origins, by acquiring a very British wife, education and job. In this book, to a large extent, it is the female characters who choose to remember.

A more emphatic rejection – in this case of Germany - can be seen in *Young Woman of Europe*. Renate describes her Jewish father as patient and long-suffering, and her 'Aryan' mother as unfaithful and weak. When her father is away fighting in the First World War, her mother takes in a lodger, Herr Gellhorn, who bosses the young Renate around, and (it is implied, via a child's innocent perspective) has a relationship with her mother. Feiner makes it clear, in a note at the start, that this aspect is not based on her own life story. Brunnhuber suggests that 'the

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<sup>202</sup> Buckley, p. 110.

<sup>203</sup> Buckley, p. 117.

<sup>204</sup> Buckley, p. 187.

demonization of the mother is to be seen as a deliberate literary construct, through which the author intends to express her contempt for her native country.<sup>205</sup> Even in the sections dealing with the First World War and the 1920s, Renate is aware of a darker side to German nationalism, and describes the proud and self-important Herr Gellhorn, as well as her mother's side of the family, as lacking in insight or compassion.

Renate travels with her father around Germany, and there are many poignant discussions in which her father maintains that Hitler will never establish power. She celebrates the sensible and good-hearted people they encounter. 'It is the world's most sinister miracle to me that all those men and women we met and talked to should have been turned into wild beasts who hailed and applauded a handful of highway-men when they seized power and began their shady career by beating up harmless minorities.'<sup>206</sup> These positive memories seem to make her rejection of her homeland all the more painful.

While she is crossing the channel, Renate moves into the fog, and away from a past she firmly disavows: 'back there, buried alongside slaughtered human decency, lies my youth.'<sup>207</sup> Later on, at the outbreak of war, she assures her British employer: 'I have no own country any longer, sir, I have only a deadly enemy called Germany.'<sup>208</sup>

In *The Inquest*, perhaps in an attempt to appeal to a wider readership, Neumann makes the male central character, Shilling, an Englishman who has spent time on the continent: a somewhat uneasy compromise, presumably intended to explain Shilling's close association with the exile community and outlook. Whilst his characters do not reflect directly on the past, as they do in the other novels, Neumann's background and previous life seep into his descriptions and settings in other ways. A reviewer in the TLS at the time argued that 'it was a mistake to make Shilling English'<sup>209</sup> and I agree that this aspect is never fully convincing. Partly for this reason, there is less opportunity in this novel for nostalgia towards a past homeland, but Neumann's approach also seems to reflect a difference of personal attitude. For all Feiner's insistent rejection of Germany, she and Buckley allow themselves to remember and even eulogise positive aspects of the past. Neumann rarely looks

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<sup>205</sup> Brunnhuber, p. 129.

<sup>206</sup> Feiner, p. 142.

<sup>207</sup> Feiner, p. 106.

<sup>208</sup> Feiner, p. 323.

<sup>209</sup> 'Review of *The Inquest* by Robert Neumann', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 October 1944; quoted in Brunnhuber.



back to Austria or Germany in this book (the exception being the scene during the burning of the Reichstag), and glancing references seem brisk, angry and unrevealing.

Instead, the past makes an appearance in other, less direct ways. In Neumann's English language work, there are often incongruously continental descriptions and characters as well as a distinctive use of language, transposed into an English setting. Richard Dove comments that the 'most striking thing about... (his) three English novels is how relentlessly un-English they are: the subject matter, style and cultural resonance remain intrinsically Germanic.'<sup>210</sup> In *The Inquest*, people are hard to place: Shilling is just one of a number of vaguely German-sounding surnames, it is rarely specified if a character has Jewish heritage or not, and the exile experience is universalised to the extent that at times, almost everyone seems to have lived through this dislocation (which is perhaps how it must have felt during the period, to those moving within the exile community of London). It seems probable that it is Neumann's mining of his own memories and experiences to provide material for the more fictional aspects of the story which gives rise to many of these incongruities. For example, Shilling talks about the train stopping at Ulm, which for him is a shorthand for a missed opportunity for change; it might have been relatively easy to transpose this to a British train station and would have given Shilling at least some hint of a backstory in his supposed homeland. His habits, memories and possessions are those of a refugee from the continent. He first meets Santis at 'the Austrian theatre',<sup>211</sup> he owns 'an ornamental, Continental, heavy wardrobe',<sup>212</sup> he has bad dreams about currency regulations and passports. The unfamiliar details and reference points seem vaguely unsettling to an English reader and contribute to a dreamlike mood of uncertainty, reminiscent of speculative fiction in their suggestion of an alternative reality. At times this is almost surreal in effect, forming a very different approach to the precise itemising of cultural differences in the other two books. Perhaps this technique (deliberate or not) also has the effect of blurring boundaries, insisting on some continuity, and harking back to other, more fondly remembered German influences, blending this author's pre-war 'past' into his war-time 'present'.

In my novel, the theme of assimilation is also central. I explore Ludwig and Hilde's encounters with the British through interactions with their landlady, the other

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<sup>210</sup> Richard Dove, 'Almost an English Author: Robert Neumann's English-language Novels', *German Life and Letters*, 51.1 (1998), 93–105 (p. 101).

<sup>211</sup> Neumann, p. 5.

<sup>212</sup> Neumann, p. 10.

women Hilde meets in the shops, British soldiers in various prisons and internment camps, and with the bullying guards on the Dunera. Ludwig is an anglophile throughout – and tries to encourage Hilde to follow his lead. His position is sometimes hard to sustain (particularly at his lowest points), and I think they are both is forced into a more nuanced affection for and understanding of their new homeland, which they can never quite take for granted, as they move towards a new cultural and ethnic hybridity. After many years studying his hosts from a position of extreme vulnerability and later from a position greater security, Ludwig, like Renate, will never feel completely at one with the British.

### **Internment by the British: ‘the bird-cages of democracy’<sup>213</sup>**

Internment came as a huge blow to the recently arrived refugees, and to their evolution of a new sense of identity. In many, it also triggered earlier traumas. *The Inquest* charts the impact of internment on Santis and Ventura – it looms over the whole novel, and is often referred to, although not represented directly. In *Young Woman of Europe*, internment is also referred to obliquely, as a disappointing contrast to the hopes of the new arrivals. This aspect is not covered by *Family from Vienna*, which takes place slightly earlier, before the outbreak of the war. My own novel focuses more directly on representing the day to day experience of internment, partly because I felt that this element was missing from the literature that I had read.

Internment can also be seen as central to the evolution of Arendt’s thinking and to the ideas about the vulnerability of ‘human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings.’<sup>214</sup> In ‘We Refugees’, she cites internment alongside Nazi persecutions on several occasions, as if to make the point that, if not exactly analogous, they are both part of a wider pattern. ‘Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.’<sup>215</sup> She also suggests, however, why this aspect of the refugee experience is often downplayed. ‘In order to forget more efficiently we rather avoid any allusion to concentration or internment camps we experienced in nearly all European countries.’<sup>216</sup> Arendt herself was interned by the French and held at Gurs, a camp in the Pyrenees. She seized a brief opportunity to

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<sup>213</sup> Neumann, p. 142.

<sup>214</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 273.

<sup>215</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 265.

<sup>216</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 265.

leave, when France fell to the German invasion and the camp changed hands: those who hesitated became victims of the Holocaust. She goes on to develop this theme in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

In *The Inquest*, Santis and her lover are interned, and the book is shot through with an articulate anger at this injustice – for a while, it seems this final straw may even have brought about her suicide. The section of the novel in which Santis' lover, Ventura, tells his story, is animated with anger about internment, and makes this one of the most powerful parts of the book. At the outbreak of war, all their hopes are riding on England. In 1939, Ventura and Santis 'fell for...democracy'. Like an 'old tough business horse from Steeltown. You thought it was dead, a carcass, rotting at the roadside. But they kicked it in the back too long! There it stands up, and movingly, helpless and tough and preposterous, there it stands and is the Monument of Democracy! He's risen late, but he has risen!'... 'here is this war, and is our war!'<sup>217</sup> This emotional investment in the British system makes their apparent rejection – when they are arrested and interned as 'Enemy Aliens' – all the more painful.

At the outbreak of the war, and at intervals after this, German and Austrian refugees in Britain were called before a tribunal and classified A, B or C according to their perceived risk to British security. However, this process was deeply flawed and inconsistently applied. Ventura's description of the 'dug-out carcass of a K.C. who presided over the tribunal'<sup>218</sup> vividly implies a relic from the First World War. His line of questioning is hostile and suspicious. "So you have been in jail in Italy? and in Spain you have been fighting against your own kinsmen? As a partisan of the Reds, isn't it?"<sup>219</sup> Ventura is too left wing for his taste, and 'guilty of having crusaded against Hitler too early.'<sup>220</sup> This reflects what we know of Neumann's own experience, from his internment diaries. Neumann was living with his girlfriend, and this was referred to in his tribunal, in what Richard Dove describes as 'a clear case of guilt by cohabitation.'<sup>221</sup> It is possible, I would suggest, that *The Inquest* of the title itself serves as a sort of proxy for Neumann's tribunal - which seems to have been a very traumatic experience. Shilling is constantly aware of this looming legal hurdle and spends the novel counting down how many hours he has left until he is due to appear at *The Inquest*.

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<sup>217</sup> Neumann, p. 146.

<sup>218</sup> Neumann, p. 147.

<sup>219</sup> Neumann, p. 147.

<sup>220</sup> Neumann, p. 148.

<sup>221</sup> Dove, *Journey of No Return*, p. 173.

Internment leaves Ventura and Santis with nothing to believe in. 'It was unbearable, presumably, to go on living if this lock-up was not just a misunderstanding, if this Crusade was not our Crusade.'<sup>222</sup> So, says Ventura, the 'illusion was kept up between them.' However, talking to Shilling, later on, he is able to articulate some of the anger of these 'conveniently forgotten men'<sup>223</sup> in the 'bird-cages of democracy.'<sup>224</sup>

For Santis, who is pregnant, the results of internment are tragic.

As for her, she lost the child. Not in Holloway. Not in that Liverpool boxing ring that day when she slipped in the ankle deep muck [...] Nor when people stoned the buses with these women and children while they were driven through the town. No, the child she lost only later as they lay packed all night on the bare planks of the open deck. There was not a rug nor a rag for her.<sup>225</sup>

By piling up the wrongs and insults she has suffered (many of which are recognisable from documentary accounts, and probably to some extent drawn from the internment of Neumann's partner at the time), the reader is forced into a position of empathy, and the discomfort and vulnerability of her body is evoked in the 'bare planks of the open deck'. His use of the word 'rag' suggests (deliberately or accidentally) the bleeding of a miscarriage, at a time when references to this subject in literature are rare.

At the end of this section, Ventura takes the British to task for this policy, which Shilling (an Englishman) is inclined to defend, in a passage which could be an indictment of British institutional cruelties over many decades, and perhaps even centuries.

Shilling said: "Mistakes. Muddle. Can you be guilty of muddle as you might be guilty of rape, torture, violence?"

Ventura said: "You can be guilty of muddle [...] You can be guilty of laziness of heart."

"Minor injustices?" said Shilling.

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<sup>222</sup> Neumann, p. 149.

<sup>223</sup> Neumann, p. 150.

<sup>224</sup> Neumann, p. 142.

<sup>225</sup> Neumann, p. 149.

Ventura said: "There are no minor injustices. Justice is indivisible."<sup>226</sup>

Similarly, in *Young Woman of Europe*, internment comes as a cruel blow. The earlier passages, describing Renate's childhood and youth, often make reference to the 'present' of the novel (1940) with a bitter knowingness. Renate is at last reunited with David, only for him to be interned. This exchange between Renate and her friend (who is in fact telling her about internment in France) makes some of the objections explicit.

"But this is ridiculous!" I cried. "Don't they know that they have a whole army of splendid fighters amongst them, ready to take up arms against Hitler immediately?"

"I tried to tell several people exactly that, but they hate the refugees even more than the genuine Nazis, who receive every consideration and comfort if captured and imprisoned, whereas the wretched immigrants are thrown into foul and rotten camps...."<sup>227</sup>

In these refugee novels from the time, internment is referred to by the characters, but not represented directly. My own novel focuses more directly on the experience of internment by the British. Inspired by work over the last few decades uncovering the experiences of women in internment, I was interested in comparing and interweaving the experiences of Hilde and Ludwig and the close bonds they form with other internees. I drew on internment memoirs by both men and women, as well as works on the history of internment, which are listed at the end of my novel on page 292. I was also interested in depicting the attitudes of the British public and of the soldiers and guards, who were often friendly and open-minded on an individual level, at the same time as collectively hostile and subject to manipulation by the press - this seemed to me to have parallels with the present day. I tried to evoke the strange atmosphere of the camps and the ships, and the sometimes oppressive, sometimes empowering female environment of Holloway and Rushen Camp on the Isle of Man. I was also interested in the collective amnesia around internment, which does not fit the wartime narrative we have chosen to remember, in contrast to the

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<sup>226</sup> Neumann, p. 151.

<sup>227</sup> Feiner, p. 327.

Kindertransport, for example, which has become more widely known about in the past thirty years.

Visiting the sites of the internment camps in my novel was an important part of my research and made these stories real to me - enhancing even the most vivid texts which I had read. During my trip to the Isle of Man, I was struck by the atmosphere and mood of the island – remarkably little seemed to have changed, and it felt like travelling back in time. The weather was beautiful, and I walked among the crumbling hotels of Port Erin, on the beach, and out over the springy turf to a tower on the headland. The little steam train was still running for the benefit of tourists, and the Marine Biology Station (at which some of the internees worked) was still standing abandoned, on the bay.

The only islanders left who remembered the camp were children at the time. I visited Betty Kelly, whose mother ran the Golf Links Hotel. She remembered the shock of getting back from school one day to find the barricades up, and the camp being prepared. She had fond memories of some of the ‘aliens’ – ‘they made Christmas so lovely, it was really nice’, especially a ‘Jewess’ who made her a red dress – ‘they were really clever with their hands.’ But one of the women ‘did a Heil Hitler in front of my mother, and she was furious!’<sup>228</sup> When Betty came to study German later on, her teachers were surprised by how good her accent was. From her window, she pointed out the remains of the barbed wire fence posts, which were still visible as small stubs, on the beach at Port St Mary.

At the Manx National Heritage Library, the archivists helped me to find the stories I was looking for. My starting point was the Sulzbacher family, the original owners of the gold coins, so I looked for other men who had been on the same strange journey. Memoirs or ‘reminiscences’ by Ludwig Hess<sup>229</sup> and Ludwig Baruch,<sup>230</sup> who were interned in Devon and deported on the *Arandora Star* and the *Dunera*, provided a more detailed basis for my story, as well as the name of my central character. A touching letter, written after the death of Inge Hess by her friend ‘Helli’, gave details of life in the women’s camp, and a sense of some of the friendships and musical interests which sustained the women there.

Often, the librarian said, people came looking for information about their parents or grandparents. The archive was testament to the human instinct to leave

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<sup>228</sup> Betty Kelly, Interview with Betty Kelly, Port St Mary, Isle of Man, April 2015.

<sup>229</sup> Ludwig Hess, ‘The Memoirs of L W Hess, Reminiscences and and Some Thoughts on Life’, 2005, Manx National Heritage Library.

<sup>230</sup> Ludwig Baruch, ‘Lou Baruch - Reminiscences’, 2007, Manx National Heritage Library.

an account for those who come after us, and to dig into the past to try and make sense of our place in the world. One visitor got more than she expected, the librarian told me, when she discovered the existence of a half-sibling she was unaware of, born in the camp (presumably out of wedlock) and given up for adoption. I was also moved by a document left by a visitor from Israel, giving his reasons for returning.

People have asked me why I wanted to go back to the Isle of Man. I don't think that I can offer a complete and satisfactory explanation for an action motivated largely by instinct. For most of my life it would never have occurred to me to do such a thing, and then suddenly I felt an urge to revisit the isle of my internment. It was partly out of curiosity. I was intrigued to see for myself what these places, shaped out of a child's memory, really looked like. It was almost as if I wanted some visible proof that all this had really happened. But more than that, I needed to reconcile the feeling of indignity and outrage that we were subjected to when they put us behind barbed wire and took away our freedom. Not that I was aware of these sentiments at the time. Perhaps it was an adult's need for self-respect and recognition that had to be indulged, and I could only do this by demonstrating my freedom and my independence.<sup>231</sup>

At the time, the novels examined here were not especially concerned with documenting the experience of internment: it was simply what had happened, referred to in passing (albeit with a wince of pain), and made to fit the demands of the genres in which they were writing. However, with the addition of hindsight, it felt important to me to convey some details of this lived experience, as part of a wider project of reimagining some of the more controversial aspects of British history, especially those that have been neglected or slipped from the record.

### **Suicide: 'Killed by the disease Exile'<sup>232</sup>**

The conclusion of all these different attacks on their identity leads the refugees towards despair, and sometimes to suicide. Arendt discusses the way in which many refugees strive to be optimists, but also points out how brittle this

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<sup>231</sup> Jochanan Frank, 'Inside Out: Isle of Man Revisited, 1940-2000', Manx National Heritage Library, Douglas, 2000.

<sup>232</sup> Neumann, p. 53.

optimism often is. They have learned from experience 'how quickly eloquent optimism could change to speechless pessimism.'<sup>233</sup>

Arendt devotes several pages to this topic, which she approaches with a bleakly shocking irony. She writes that 'there is something wrong with our optimism. There are those odd optimists among us who, have made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way.'<sup>234</sup> There is no need to leave a note. 'Nobody cares about motives, they seem to be clear to all of us.'<sup>235</sup> Even in another land, they cannot really escape. 'Suicides occur not only among the panic-stricken people in Berlin and Vienna, in Bucharest or Paris, but in New York and Los Angeles.'<sup>236</sup> Religion provides some defence, but only for those who remain devout. 'We are the first non-religious Jews persecuted and we are the first ones who, not only in extremis, answer with suicide.'<sup>237</sup> In this context, the act has become strangely predictable, and is not the dramatic gesture one might assume: 'our suicides are no mad rebels who hurl defiance at life and the world [...] Theirs is a quiet and modest way of vanishing; they seem to apologize for the violent solution they have found for their personal problems.'<sup>238</sup>

Suicide provides a background theme to two of the texts and accompanies two of our central characters as a grimly recurring motif, reflecting the darkness of the topic and the times. In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate makes her father promise not to "do what my mother did"<sup>239</sup> – "We are not here to die before our time. We are here to live and fight... Suicide is a deplorable way out!"<sup>240</sup> This is one of the reasons she knows that the Nazis are lying when they claim he took his own life in captivity. At the end of the book, Ilona and her husband commit suicide together as Paris falls to the German army.

In *The Inquest*, the theme of suicide is also central. For most of the novel, we believe that the female refugee Bibiana Santis has killed herself. As we hear a range of excuses and evasions from those she encountered, we feel a sense of complicity in the neglect that seems to have led to her death. Early in the novel, the pathos of her death is highlighted by a conversation with Santis which Roth recounts. The

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<sup>233</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 267.

<sup>234</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 266.

<sup>235</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 267.

<sup>236</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 267.

<sup>237</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 268.

<sup>238</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 268.

<sup>239</sup> Feiner, p. 194.

<sup>240</sup> Feiner, p. 164.



theme becomes a sort of internal debate about whether or not to abandon hope. “It must be terrible for someone to die now,” Santis says.

“Not to live to see the days to come.” And paused, and said even more quietly: “I should hate to die.”

“The days to come,” Roth said, strangely embittered, “the glories of the days to come!”<sup>241</sup>

She is not the only one in the novel, however, to be ‘Killed by the disease Exile.’<sup>242</sup> Near the end, Ventura shows Shilling all the names in his address book – victims of Nazi brutality or British indifference – a list in which suicide seems not so different from the other forms of murder –

disappeared going over border, shot while trying to escape, died of heart attack waiting for a visa, fallen out of the train, fallen out of the bedroom-window, found kicked to death in a barrack cellar, drowning in a British internment ship, found hanged in a lavatory [...] this little address book of his was like a waist-pocket churchyard with its little crosses.<sup>243</sup>

The torment of persecution leads some to this extreme conclusion, and looms over many others. Like internment, suicide is not directly represented in these novels, but suggestions and hints of it are everywhere.

In my own novel, suicide also forms a dark undercurrent to the main events of the plot. Two secondary characters kill themselves: Bachmeier suffers a nervous breakdown and dies in a mental asylum “by suicide”, and Josef Brenner jumps overboard on the *Dunera*. Ludwig touches the electrified fence after it is installed – “to experiment it”, as he tells the Colonel afterwards. All three of these incidents are based on contemporary accounts, although I have changed the names and some details in the course of fictionalising them. Ludwig himself is not sure if he really intends to kill himself, but he has reached a very low state, and no longer cares if he lives or dies. It is not until the shipwreck that he realises how much he wants to stay alive, to see his wife and child again.

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<sup>241</sup> Neumann, p. 47.

<sup>242</sup> Neumann, p. 53.

<sup>243</sup> Neumann, p. 140.

## The Refugee Mentality: 'endless gymnastics and adjustments'<sup>244</sup>

Alongside the anguish described above, the three novels discussed here suggest that the refugees sometimes gained access to new perspectives and insights as a result of their experiences. By sharing so directly in the wider tragedy of their times, the refugees are depicted as forerunners of social change.

The special relationship between exile and art has been discussed by many critics and thinkers, with a particular emphasis on the links between exile and modernism. In his essay *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said makes the controversial claim that 'Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees.'<sup>245</sup> He celebrates the exile's unique perspective as 'nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal' (in the sense of being simultaneously aware of at least two different cultures). Writers such as Joyce, Conrad, Beckett and Nabokov all have something of the exile about them. Christine Brook-Rose writes of how 'exile is an immense force for liberation, for extra distance, for automatically developing contrasting structures in one's head.'<sup>246</sup> Ideas about creativity, deterritorialization and the 'unhoused' have been explored in the work of Deleuze and Guattari as well as George Steiner.<sup>247</sup> Julia Kristeva even argues that 'writing is impossible without some kind of exile.'<sup>248</sup>

However, Brooke-Rose, Said, and others take pains to point out that there is some danger in equating these very different sorts of 'exile' – voluntary and involuntary, psychological and physical. Many people choose to travel, and exile as a metaphor is a seductive and interesting topic – but to equate being robbed, humiliated and driven out by force to a voluntary stay in a foreign capital to broaden the mind can lead to parallels which are offensively simplistic or crass. There is a risk that these labels are applied so vaguely as to be almost meaningless. Hammel points out that there is a 'tension between exile as a modernist concept and exile as an experience'<sup>249</sup> to the extent that it is often unhelpful to conflate the two. To make the same point in other words, she says, there is a 'dichotomy between exile as a

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<sup>244</sup> Buckley, p. 40.

<sup>245</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2012) p148.

<sup>246</sup> Christine Brooke Rose, 'Exsul', in *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. by Susan R Suleiman (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>247</sup> Kaplan.

<sup>248</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 298.

<sup>249</sup> Hammel, p. 247.

metaphor and precondition for modern art and exile as a brutal reality of visas and boardinghouses.<sup>250</sup>

In *Family from Vienna*, Camilla highlights some of the mental flexibility required by the refugee. 'There was no denying that this whole refugee question demanded endless gymnastics and adjustments of one's point of view; a perpetual juggling with, and comparison of, relative values.'<sup>251</sup> The impression she gives is reminiscent of the hyper-active, somewhat frenzied attempts to make sense of the inexplicable in Arendt's 'We Refugees' ('there is something wrong with our optimism.')<sup>252</sup> Camilla notes a strained aspect to her relatives' efforts to stay cheerful, which is both impressive and alarming.

What amazingly agile mentalities the three aunts had...How they could balance themselves between their sense of tragedy and their sense of burlesque, serious at one moment, incorrigibly, courageously flippant the next [...] How much too acrobatic they were, with their sudden changes of mood and tempo.<sup>253</sup>

There are moments in the texts when the perspective broadens, to reveal the wider setting. In *Family from Vienna*:

And what a strange thing this whole refugee movement was, when you stopped to think about it: a wave-like movement sweeping blindly on, tearing people apart, throwing others together in the most unlikely juxtaposition....<sup>254</sup>

In *The Inquest* the analogy is also, by implication, with a wave, on which the exiles are carried as 'driftwood.' Neumann captures something of the fear and despair of this moment in history, as well as making the point that no one is safe.

No, there was no escape. And their misery, this man's and this woman's, trapped in this room and world and clinging to each other in the embrace of desperation, was part of a greater misery. Some man and woman would cling to each other at that same moment somewhere in a cattle truck shunted

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<sup>250</sup> Hammel, p. 131.

<sup>251</sup> Buckley, p. 40.

<sup>252</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 266.

<sup>253</sup> Buckley, p. 93.

<sup>254</sup> Buckley, p. 194.

down gas chamber and mass grave way. Some drowning sailor, at that same moment, would cling to another's arm. Some airman, burning. For what was the driftwood called exile but part of the driftwood called human race? What was their frustration but part of the Great Frustration? The Apocalypse, the Apocalypse stood outside on the landing of this dreary deserter's den knocking and knocking at their door!<sup>255</sup>

The couple may, for a moment, hide in a 'deserter's den', but really they threatened by the same 'Apocalypse' of war, 'knocking at their door'.

In *Young Woman of Europe*, Renate refuses to be ashamed of her status, even though she is alert to the new layers of prejudice and suspicion she meets in London. She makes a link between the refugee experience and a heightened awareness, implying a role for the refugees as fore-runners for the enlightened. 'Proud I am only perhaps of the by-word 'refugee,' as it is a sign of being opposed to Hitlerism and to a country that has sunk so low as the country of my birth. I like us refugees to be called the *avant-garde* of Democracy.'<sup>256</sup> She echoes Hannah Arendt's phrase in 'We Refugees': refugees 'driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples.'<sup>257</sup>

All three novels, therefore, draw attention to the mental flexibility required of the refugees. Their status puts them at the front of a wave of change which will affect the whole of the population. The refugees are an 'avant-garde' or in 'the vanguard' of their peoples, and these novels suggest, through their choice of characters and the difficulties they experience, that the female refugees are particularly exposed, at the very crest of this wave. Their situation may be especially difficult, but their suffering is emblematic of a wider suffering, as part of the 'driftwood called human race.'

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<sup>255</sup> Neumann, p. 165.

<sup>256</sup> Feiner, p. 214.

<sup>257</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 274.

## **Conclusion: 'we females of this blessed age'<sup>258</sup>**

Why should we care about these stories? These things happened long ago and predominantly concern a minority group – Jewish refugees (and, in the case of this commentary, only one subset of this - women). Arendt offers one possible answer, when she concludes that how we treat any group within a community matters to the whole, with words that seem resonant today: 'The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.'<sup>259</sup> I believe that these stories are worth returning to because they can tell us who we are, and who we are capable of being, both at our worst and our best.

Although the women in these books wait, work and suffer, they also do more than this – they argue their case, use their networks and their tenacity to organise emigration, support their families, jump on trains to rescue lovers or relatives, and take an active role in resistance movements. As a result of these experiences, they begin to challenge some of the gender-based roles and assumptions within which they previously lived. As Andrea Hammel puts it, although 'the suffering of the women in exile was often especially acute [...] it cannot be denied that the shifting of boundaries between the genders which took place in exile had sometimes liberating consequences for women.'<sup>260</sup>

The writers struggle, in different ways, with the stereotypes of the time. Feiner seeks romantic conclusions, and sometimes reins in her political message to conform to the demands of her genre. Neumann grapples with sexual stereotypes, which he undermines but does not entirely reject. Buckley writes from before the outbreak of the war and therefore cannot be expected to anticipate later developments. All employ some inevitably dated language and thinking around race. However, we can see in their characters and narratives the first tentative steps towards a demand for equality.

Do these changes in status brought about by exile imply that women actually fared better as refugees than their male relatives, taking the initiative and a more active role? This is a debate in exile studies which can also be examined through different readings of these novels. As we have seen, Renate repeatedly rescues

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<sup>258</sup> Feiner, p. 252.

<sup>259</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', p. 274.

<sup>260</sup> Hammel, p. 36.

David, by arranging new jobs and visas for him ahead of the advancing Nazis. It falls to Bibiana to scabble around borrowing money for Ventura, on his release from internment. In *Family from Vienna*, it is the female characters who are shown making plans and arrangements for exile and engaged in the rebuilding of lives afterwards. In my novel, too, Hilde is given new agency and responsibility by her situation. Feiner echoes this thought in dialogue: 'Sometimes I wonder if our menfolk are half as hardy and ready for sacrifice as we females of this blessed age.'<sup>261</sup>

Appealing as it may be, I believe that such a generalisation risks being oversimplistic. It is true that the female characters in these novels often exhibit a growing political consciousness, enjoy some new opportunities for emotional liberation, and a greater economic confidence, arising from their efforts to support themselves and their families. Writers and scholars have debated the 'greater adaptability of women refugees [...] to the exile situation.'<sup>262</sup> It has been suggested (for example by Claudia Koonz<sup>263</sup>) that women's skills were more transferable.

However, as Prager notes, 'female autobiographies of exile are very heterogeneous – just like male autobiographies',<sup>264</sup> and the same can be said of these more fictionalised texts. It seems insensitive to offer the fact that some (often younger) refugees thrived as a sort of consolation for the sufferings of the group as a whole. Prager warns that 'some characteristics repeatedly attributed to women in exile should [...] be treated with great care'<sup>265</sup> (such as, for example, pragmatism, optimism, and willingness to integrate) in order to avoid a 'reductive and clichéd image of the woman in exile.' Perhaps we are wise to be suspicious of essentialist arguments that rely on speculation about the generalised characteristics of women or men, even when these are flattering to women. In addition, any improvements in their situation are relative – perhaps the female refugees had less to lose, in some respects, but any new freedoms they gained were only in comparison to the more constrained lives they were already living. Most characters in these novels remain nostalgic for past lives in Austria or Germany, and such consolations often seem bitter-sweet in comparison with what they have lost.

The war changed the world beyond recognition, and the many millions of people who lived through it: the refugees were just one part of this wider story.

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<sup>261</sup> Feiner, p. 252.

<sup>262</sup> Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel p1.

<sup>263</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics.*, Routledge Library Editions. Women's History ; Volume 24 (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>264</sup> Prager p15.

<sup>265</sup> Prager p15.

However, it felt trite to me to overemphasise any consolations or redemptive messages we might take from their experiences. In my novel, Ludwig struggles with depression – his various losses play out in the mysterious ‘heart problems’ later in the novel - and both characters are often overwhelmed by the scope of the situation they are part of. To make this a story about personal growth or salvation through pain feels like adding insult to injury. Perhaps the problem comes with defining people by the abuse they have suffered – and with the whole idea (necessary, but in a limited way) of grouping them together, as ‘refugees’ or even ‘exiles.’ Most of the refugees themselves rejected this and did their best to shrug off this stigmatising label as soon as possible.

I do allow my central characters a happy ending, unlike the texts from the 1940s. Writing during the war, with death all around, I can see why Feiner, Neumann and Buckley might have felt a conventional ‘happy ever after’ to be unacceptable. From the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, I know that some people did survive, some couples were reunited and went on to have families and rebuild lives, while still carrying with them the weight of their experiences. This is a passage from late in my novel, attempting to describe Ludwig’s feelings about his life.

It’s certainly an eventful past, but not one that Ludwig cares to re-examine too closely. When he thinks about it, it is with the feeling that there are certain significant moments in which he’s dislodged, or stuck – or perhaps more accurately, that are dislodged inside him. Their taste and sensation come to him in dreams. He feels that that there is a sense in which he will always be on the floor of the car, under the rolled- up carpet, crossing the border. Another small part of him is forever swimming the Rhine to meet Hilde. He will always be jumping from the Arandora Star or crouched in the hold of the Dunera. These moments are layered, like the rubble of the bombed house – too chaotic, dense and integral to be sifted apart now. They are structural, deep in his sub strata. Is it like this for everyone, or is he damaged in some way? This, having been given only one life, he can’t say.

*Family From Vienna* concludes with an episode which feels almost apocryphal, given the many different versions of the story I have heard from refugees of this generation - about a terrifying, stern, but ultimately decent British policeman. One of the elderly aunts is painting a picture in Hyde Park when she sees a policeman heading towards her, and ‘blind, unreasoning panic seized her. She was

back again in Vienna, three days after the Anschluss, that night...'<sup>266</sup> Her thoughts convey some of the lasting effects of trauma.

Oh God, if you had once in your life been trapped and hunted – trapped and hunted by those in power, by those so much stronger than yourself, never, never could you really forget it. You might push the memory of it as far out of your mind as possible...camouflage it with what was known as your wonderful equanimity, your remarkable wit and humour and superficial gaiety that were such a good blind, but it might spring out at you at the most unexpected moment...hold you dumb and shivering and paralysed with fear at the sight of an approaching policeman in Hyde Park!<sup>267</sup>

The policeman merely looks at her picture, and remarks 'with respectful cheeriness that the trees certainly *did* look like trees and no mistake'.

England...murmured Stefi. Sanctuary for the hunted, for the despised and rejected of men; freedom for the oppressed; home for the homeless.... She sat for a long time quite still, tears pouring down her cheeks.<sup>268</sup>

This conveys for me the gratitude of many refugees, and the reasons they were prepared down-play, and often forgive, the less overt abuses and humiliations they suffered from the British. It also recalls an ideal of England that I sincerely hope we might one day still aspire to.

The three wartime texts struggle bravely to tell little-heard stories of this era. Even if they are sometimes, inevitably, marked by the prejudice of their times, their ambitious attempts to draw attention to life stories outside the mainstream sheds light on a neglected area. They can be regarded as an unusual angle on British World War Two fiction, and also, arguably, as a preamble to Holocaust literature. There is something irrepressible about these heroines, even when they speak in stilted, strident tones (as Renate Feldt), when their agency and creativity is 'limited' to the historically undervalued domestic sphere (as in *Family from Vienna*), or when the author lingers uncomfortably on their sexuality (as Neumann is inclined to with Santis). We begin to empathise with Renate, who keeps on picking herself up, time

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<sup>266</sup> Buckley, p. 274.

<sup>267</sup> Buckley, p. 274.

<sup>268</sup> Buckley, p. 275.



and again, or Camilla, with her perceptive and affectionate portrayal of her displaced relatives, and even with Santis, for whom we can reconstruct a love story and a sense of driving political commitment from the clues left by the trail of men who encounter her. The very act of placing these women at the centre of a novel is a way of insisting on their humanity and value. Much of the power of these stories is in the details, so evocative of the era and of the refugee experience, which convey a mood of autobiography or at least lived experience that is so often at the heart of emotive writing. As well as examining oppression, *The Inquest*, *Young Woman of Europe* and *Family from Vienna* illustrate a gradual, halting empowerment of women through their narrative. In some ways, these texts feel surprisingly modern, as a prelude to the Second Wave of feminism which began to emerge after the war.

The refugee novels I have looked at here are revealing of this wider process, reflecting a transformation (faltering and gradual as it may sometimes feel) in the life choices and opportunities available to women. They are part of an ongoing effort to make other voices heard, from outside of a privileged male elite. Most importantly, they can still challenge us, across time, to take the wider view, avoiding that 'laziness of heart'<sup>269</sup> which takes for granted the inferiority or suffering of other people. They provide a chilling reminder of where such prejudice can lead – to internment camps and state-endorsed persecution, even in the familiar seaside towns of Great Britain.

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<sup>269</sup> Neumann, p. 151.

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