

The Hiding Place – Selected Passages

Family

“Together we climbed onto the train, together found seats in a crowded compartment, together wept tears of gratitude. The four months in Scheveningen had been our first separation in fifty-three years; it seemed to me that I could bear whatever happened with Betsie beside me.” (183)

“And so was established the pattern our lives were to follow for over twenty years. When Father had put the Bible back on its shelf after breakfast, he and I would go down the stairs to the shop while Betsie stirred the soup pot and plotted magic with three potatoes and a pound of mutton. With my eyes on income-and-outlay, the shop was doing better and soon we were able to hire a saleslady to preside over the front room while Father and I worked in back.” (69)

“The dining room was in the house at the rear, five steps higher than the shop but lower than Tante Jans’s rooms. To me this room with its single window looking into the alley was the heart of the home. This table, with a blanket thrown over it, had made me a tent or a pirate’s cove when I was small. I’d done my homework here as a schoolchild. Here Mama read aloud from Dickens on winter evenings while the coal whistled in the brick hearth and cast a red glow over the tile proclaiming, “Jesus is Victor.” (20-21)

Community

“Father came down with the hepatitis that almost cost his life: during the long stay in the hospital his beard turned snow white. The day he returned home—a week after his seventieth birthday—a little committee paid us a visit. They represented shopkeepers, street sweepers, a factory owner, a canal bargeman—all people who had realized during Father’s illness what he meant to them. They had pooled their resources and bought him a radio.” (72)

“Then we were all singing together, the full voice of Holland singing her forbidden anthem. We sang at the top of our lungs, sang our oneness, our hope, our love for Queen and country. On this anniversary of defeat it seemed almost for a moment that we were victors.” (92)

“Develop your own sources,” Willem had said. And from the moment Fred Koornstra’s name had popped into my mind, an uncanny realization had been growing in me. We were friends with half of Haarlem! We knew nurses in the maternity hospital. We knew clerks in the Records Office. We knew someone in every business and service in the city.” (99)

Rescue

“There was a place on a nearby tulip farm, but the farmer had decided he must be paid for the risk he was taking. We would have to provide a fee—in silver rijksdaalders, not paper money—plus an additional ration card. It didn’t happen often that a “host” would require money for his services; when one did we paid gladly.” (112)

“We talked often, Father, Betsie, and I, about what we could do if a chance should come to help some of our Jewish friends. We knew that Willem had found hiding places at the beginning of

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the occupation for the German Jews who had been living in his house. Lately he had also moved some of the younger Dutch Jews away from the nursing home.” (85)

“There were eleven of us at the table that day, including a Jewish lady who had arrived the night before and a Gentile woman and her small daughter, members of our underground, who acted as “escorts.” The three of them were leaving for a farm in Brabant right after lunch.” (121)

“If evenings were pleasant, daytimes grew increasingly tense. We were too big; the group was too large, the web too widespread. For a year and a half now we had gotten away with our double lives. Ostensibly we were still an elderly watchmaker living with his two spinster daughters above his tiny shop. In actuality the Beje was the center of an underground ring that spread now to the farthest corners of Holland. Here daily came dozens of workers, reports, appeals. Sooner or later we were going to make a mistake.” (125)

Faith

“I have always believed that it was my role to save life, not destroy it. I understand your dilemma, however, and I have a suggestion. Are you a praying man?” “Aren’t we all, these days?” “Then let us pray together now that God will reach the heart of this man so that he does not continue to betray his countrymen.” There was a long pause. Then the chief nodded. “That I would very much like to do.” And so there in the heart of the police station, with the radio blaring out the latest news of the German advance, we prayed. We prayed that this Dutchman would come to realize his worth in the sight of God and the worth of every other human being on earth.” (136-137)

“Law-abiding citizens, are you?” Kapteyn went on. “You! The old man there. I see you believe in the Bible.” He jerked his thumb at the well-worn book on its shelf. “Tell me, what does it say in there about obeying the government?” “Fear God,” Father quoted, and on his lips in that room the words came as blessing and reassurance. “Fear God and honor the queen.” Kapteyn stared at him. “It doesn’t say that. The Bible doesn’t say that.” “No.” Father admitted. “It says, ‘Fear God, honor the king.’ But in our case, that is the queen.” (145-146)

When I got back the last time, a group had gathered around Father for evening prayers. Every day of my life had ended like this: that deep steady voice, that sure and eager confiding of us all to the care of God. The Bible lay at home on its shelf, but much of it was stored in his heart. His blue eyes seemed to be seeing beyond the locked and crowded room, beyond Haarlem, beyond earth itself, as he quoted from memory: “Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word. . . . Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. . . .” (149)

Values

“Father could never bear a house without children, and whenever he heard of a child in need of a home a new face would appear at the table. Somehow, out of his watch shop that never made

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money, he fed and dressed and cared for eleven more children after his own four were grown.” (21-22)

“I remembered the day six or seven years earlier when he had first come into the shop, so ragged and woebegone that I’d assumed that he was one of the beggars who had the Beje marked as a sure meal. I was about to send him up to the kitchen where Betsie kept a pot of soup simmering when he announced with great dignity that he was considering permanent employment and was offering his services first to us.” (24)

“Suddenly the chief interrogator’s eye fell on Father. “That old man!” he cried. “Did he have to be arrested? You, old man!” Willem led Father up to the desk. The Gestapo chief leaned forward. “I’d like to send you home, old fellow,” he said. “I’ll take your word that you won’t cause any more trouble.” I could not see Father’s face, only the erect carriage of his shoulders and the halo of white hair above them. But I heard his answer. “If I go home today,” he said evenly and clearly, “tomorrow I will open my door again to any man in need who knocks.” The amiability drained from the other man’s face. “Get back in line!” he shouted. “Schnell! This court will tolerate no more delays!” (151-152)

Empathy

“Betsie and I knelt down by the piano bench. For what seemed hours we prayed for our country, for the dead and injured tonight, for the Queen. And then, incredibly, Betsie began to pray for the Germans, up there in the planes, caught in the fist of the giant evil loose in Germany. I looked at my sister kneeling beside me in the light of burning Holland. “Oh Lord,” I whispered, ‘listen to Betsie, not me, because I cannot pray for those men at all.’” (79)

“There was a long silence. The man bent forward, his hand in spite of himself reaching for the tiny fist curled around the blanket. For a moment I saw compassion and fear struggle in his face. Then he straightened. “No. Definitely not. We could lose our lives for that Jewish child!” Unseen by either of us, Father had appeared in the doorway. “Give the child to me, Corrie,” he said. Father held the baby close, his white beard brushed its cheek, looking into the little face with eyes as blue and innocent as the baby’s own. At last he looked up at the pastor. “You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family.” (115)

“Since her ailment compromised the safety of the others, we took up the problem in caucus. The seven most concerned—Eusie, Jop, Henk, Leendert, Meta, Thea, and Mary herself—joined Father, Betsie, and me in Tante Jans’s front room. “There is no sense in pretending,” I began. “Mary has a difficulty—especially after climbing stairs—that could put you all in danger.” In the silence that followed, Mary’s labored breathing seemed especially loud. “Can I speak?” Eusie asked. “Of course.” “It seems to me that we’re all here in your house because of some difficulty or other. We’re the orphan children—the ones nobody else wanted. Any one of us is jeopardizing all the others. I vote that Mary stay.” (122-123)

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War

“I sat bolt upright in my bed. What was that? There! There it was again! A brilliant flash followed a second later by an explosion that shook the bed. I scrambled over the covers to the window and leaned out. The patch of sky above the chimney tops glowed orange-red. I felt for my bathrobe and thrust my arms through the sleeves as I whirled down the stairs. At Father’s room I pressed my ear against the door. Between bomb bursts I heard the regular rhythm of his breathing. I dived down a few more steps and into Tante Jans’s rooms. Betsie had long since moved into Tante Jans’s little sleeping cubicle where she would be nearer the kitchen and the doorbell. She was sitting up in the bed. I groped toward her in the darkness and we threw our arms around each other. Together we said it aloud: War!” (78-79)

“For five days Holland held out against the invader. We kept the shop open, not because anyone was interested in watches, but because people wanted to see Father. Some wanted him to pray for husbands and sons stationed at the borders of the country. Others, it seemed to me, came just to see him sitting there behind his workbench as he had for sixty years and to hear in the ticking clocks a world of order and reason. I never opened my workbench at all but joined Betsie making coffee and carrying it down. We brought down the portable radio, too, and set it up on the display case. Radio was Haarlem’s eyes and ears and very pulse-rate, for after that first night, although we often heard planes overhead, the bombing never came so close again.” (80)

“During the first months of occupation, life was not so very unbearable. The hardest thing to get used to was the German uniform everywhere, German trucks and tanks in the street, German spoken in the shops. Soldiers frequently visited our store, for they were getting good wages and watches were among the first things they bought. Toward us they took a superior tone as though we were not-quite-bright children. But among themselves, as I listened to them excitedly discussing their purchases, they seemed like young men anywhere off on a holiday. Most of them selected women’s watches for mothers and sweethearts back home.” (81)

“Though there was little snow, the cold came early and stayed late, and fuel was scarce. Here and there in the parks and along the canals trees began to disappear as people cut them down to heat cookstoves and fireplaces. The damp unheated rooms were hardest on the very young and the very old.” (109)