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Sharon Dogar

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Annexed

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Poem on p.5 from *The Truce* by Primo Levi, published by The Bodley Head.
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To Jem, Xa and Ella
Our children.
This is for you.
Thank you.

May you never lay your head down
without a hand to hold . . .

PART ONE

The Annexe

13 July 1942 – Peter van Pels: Amsterdam, Zuider-Amstellaan

I'm running through the streets; it's early morning and the sun tries to break through the mist. My footsteps echo. My thoughts race: *I'm not going into hiding. I'm not going into hiding – especially not with the Franks!*

I don't know where I'll go; I only know that I can't do it. I can't stay locked up in a tiny apartment with two girls (especially not Anne Frank) and Mutti and Mrs Frank! Just because Father does business with them doesn't mean we have to like them! I'd rather take my chances on the streets.

My feet hit the pavement. Somewhere behind me there's the sound of an engine. I know at once what it is. We all know the sound – a military vehicle.

I slow down, keep to the shadows. It's still curfew time for Jews, not that I look like a Jew.

I'm nearly there.

At Liese's house.

'Liese.'

I whisper her name. I imagine her face, her violet eyes and her soft dark hair. I imagine what she might do when I tell her I'm running. She might hold me; she might lie down in the grass with me. She might . . .

I need to concentrate. I need to get over the wall and into her back garden.

I take a run and try to vault it. It's high. I miss.

The sound of the engine comes closer.

I hit the wall with my left foot, and with fear fuelling my fist I grab the top of it with my right hand – and this time I make it.

I drop onto the grass. Breathe hard and reach around me feeling for a stone, a twig, anything I can throw at her window to wake her.

But something stops me. I listen. The streets are silent. There's no sound. That means the engine's stopped. I stand completely still. Did they see me? Are they searching through the streets right now, listening, waiting for me to give myself away – to make a sound?

Into the silence comes a banging, a crashing of fists on the door and voices shouting.

'Open up! Open up!'

I stand in the garden, frozen. I watch as the lights come on. I see Liese's face appear briefly behind the window as she draws back the curtains – then she's gone. I watch as the whole family reappears behind the lit-up window of the sitting room. They're wearing their nightclothes. They gesticulate, argue, but in the end they pack their cases, put on their coats and disappear – with Liese.

I know they're calling up teenage girls. I know that's why we're going into hiding because Margot Frank has been called up. But I never thought it would happen to Liese.

I try to run to her, but my legs won't move, my hand's still

behind me holding the stone. I don't know how long it is before I can move again, before I vault the wall and run to the corner of the street, but I know it's too late. The van's already moving. I watch it turn the corner and speed away.

With Liese in it.

I start to run. I run hard but the van's already racing down the street.

Liese!

Liese!

The van goes on, disappearing. I keep on running until I'm on my knees. Too late.

Too late.

She's gone.

I can't believe it. Why? Why her? Why now?

I turn back to the house. The door's locked but I know where the key's kept. Slowly, I unlock the door. Everything is neat and tidy. The piano lid is open – Liese's favourite piece of music is on the stand. Everything looks the same, but the house is empty of her and so everything is completely different. Where have they taken her – and why did they take all of them? Where shall I go now?

I don't know what to do.

I look out of the window onto the street. I look at my watch. Six twenty-two. I'm meant to be at Mr Frank's work place in a few hours. We're arriving separately, all of us. We'll walk into the building just like it was any other visit – only this time we'll never walk out again.

We'll stay in there.

We don't know for how long.

I stare out of the window.

The early-morning streets are empty, and so am I. I can't think of anything – except the van disappearing, and the fact that I stood there and let it happen! How did I ever think I could escape them, or fight them?

She's gone.

And I know what I'm doing.

I'm going into hiding.

I wait and watch as the streets fill with people. I wait and watch the sun get higher. I wait and watch the world come to life. I wait knowing that I'm not running anywhere because there's nowhere to run to.

I look out of the window.

The world I can see isn't my world any more – it's theirs: the National Socialist German Workers' Party's – the Nazis'. They've taken it away from me – piece by piece. I can't ride in trams or cars like everybody else. I can't swim in the same water or sit and watch films in the same cinema. I can't shop in gentile shops. I can't sit in the street. I can't drink from the water fountains. I can't walk anywhere without a star on my chest. I can't . . . I can't . . . I can't do anything. If someone decides to attack me I can't expect any help – and I mustn't fight back. If I *do* then they might beat me to death, and no one would stop them. If I *don't* fight back, then I'm exactly what they say I am – a cowardly Jew-boy.

I don't exist any more. They've turned me into a nobody so that they can wipe me off the face of the earth.

It feels so obvious to me now.

I can't believe I didn't see it before.

How did I miss it?

How did I ever think I could escape?

How did I ever think I could fight?

I should leave now. It's time. I find a satchel and a spare jacket with a star sewn onto it, but then at the last minute I decide not to wear it. If this is my last walk through the city I'm going to do it free – as me – and if anything happens, if they find me – then let them.

The walk to Prinsengracht is a long way, maybe an hour. At the end of it is a warehouse; at the top of the warehouse, hidden at the back, is an annexe.

No one knows it's there, except the workers who'll help hide us. Father says we're lucky, lucky he happens to be in business with Mr Frank. Lucky Mr Frank's asked us to join his family in hiding. I don't think so. I'd rather be in America.

I've got a diagram of the Annexe. I know where to go in, which stairs I have to use and how to find my way to the back of the house where the rooms are hidden. Where I'll be hidden.

I should go now.

If I'm going.

I'm on the street. The sun is on my face. There is no star on my chest. I'm free for another hour. One more hour. The


Mutti & Papi
Peter
Anne
& Margot
Mr & Mrs Frank

whole world feels strange around me: pin-sharp and beautiful. Without my star I get no pitying looks. I've forgotten what it's like not to be noticed. I stop. I drink from a fountain. Mutti would be horrified. I could be arrested, killed, sent away if I was found out. A Jew, drinking from a fountain! I could infect all the non-Jews, but with what?

What is it we've got that's so evil?

'Beautiful morning!' a woman says, and smiles. I smile back, but inside I'm thinking, *I'm a Jew, you stupid woman, can't you see? Can't you even tell what I am without my star to guide you? Here*, I think of saying to her, *put it on. If you feel so sorry for us why don't you all wear them, and then who would know the difference between us?*

But I don't say anything.

I just smile back.

And walk away.

The walk is over quickly – too quickly. The wide avenues turn into the small canals and streets around the centre of Amsterdam. And then I'm there. I'm at the warehouse – 263 Prinsengracht. I stare at the wide, wooden warehouse doors and at the narrow door up the steps that I'm meant to go through.

I'm scared.

I want to run. I want to run and run and never stop until I find Liese. I'll hold her hand, and we'll run together until we find some woods, some hills, some caves to hide in. But there aren't any – only flatlands. We've already fled from

Germany to here. And now we're surrounded. The Nazis are everywhere: Luxembourg, Belgium, France. Holland is just a small pocket in a whole coat made of Nazis. There is nowhere else for us to run. I stare at the doors.

I feel sick.

I feel the sun hot on my back.

I turn and look down the street. I shouldn't be doing this, I shouldn't be doing anything that draws attention to me – but I can't help it. I turn and look down the long narrow street. I look at the trees and the water of the canal. I look at the people walking past me, but it doesn't matter now how long I stand here, looking. Nothing will change.

Liese's not coming back.

I'm probably never going to see her again.

My name is Peter van Pels. I'm nearly sixteen years old. I walk up the stone steps and turn the handle of the narrow wooden door. I push it open and step forwards. The door closes itself behind me.

I can still see the street and feel the soft, summer air. Fresh air. In the Annexe I remembered air the way I now remember the taste of fresh vegetables and the sound of laughter.

As something already lost – and best forgotten.

13 July 1942 – Peter enters the Annexe: 263 Prinsengracht, Amsterdam

It's dark and hot between the two doors. The air is stale. I push on through the second door and up the stairway. I picture the diagram of the house in my mind.

I must get it right. I must be quiet. I walk past a window with OFFICE written on it. There are voices behind it, shadows of people moving. I'm a ghost; they don't know I'm here. I move quietly along the dark, narrow corridor. The heat is stifling. Up some more stairs and the corridor widens. On my left is a window, covered in dark fabric. Below it another staircase going down. It's dark. I stand and wait for my eyes to adjust. In front of me is a wide door with a latch on it. I don't want to go through it. I want to turn back. I want to run. And then in my mind I see the van disappearing down the street. My heart's beating so fast I can't breathe. I lift the latch quickly, before I can think, and open the door.

I hear a voice high and clear:

'Well we're lucky, aren't we? Imagine if we didn't have a father to find us an annexe, or if we were all stuck in here hating each other!'

I feel a sharp stab of irritation. Anne Frank, as loud and sure of herself as ever!

Lucky? How can we be lucky? She makes it sound as though we're playing a parlour game.

Straight in front of me is another staircase; steep and dangerous. To the left is where the voices are. Everything is small and cramped like the streets and canals outside. And dark.

I turn left and stand in the doorway. The Franks are sitting at a table. They all turn and stare at me.

'Oh!' says Mrs Frank. For a moment there's a shocked silence. We all stare at each other. 'Oh, Peter! It's you! For a moment I didn't recognise you.'

I blink. It's hard to see their faces clearly in the half-light. Mr Frank is standing up and walking towards me. He smiles: 'Peter. You're here. Let me show you your room.'

'Room!' says Anne. 'That's not what I'd call it.'

'Anne!' says her mother. I don't look at her. Anne Frank thinks enough of herself already, without me joining in.

'Hello, Peter,' says Margot, quietly. *Why are you here?* The thought flashes furiously across my mind – *Why are you here, and not Liese!* I nod at her.

Mr Frank takes me back to the steep stairs. I follow him up, slowly. We go through a kitchen.

'This will be your parents' room and our communal kitchen. We all have to double up, I'm afraid.'

I don't say anything. I can't. Next to the sink is a doorway. He steps through it.

'And this is *your* bedroom.'

There is a window, covered with a dark blind. It's hard to believe the sun is still out there behind it – shining. We're

pushed up close together by the lack of space. Beside us is another staircase going up.

'Above you are the attics where we store everything, and hang washing – that means you'll have us all traipsing through here I'm afraid.'

At least there's light coming from somewhere.

'The attic windows are too high to be covered,' says Mr Frank, 'and so at least this room has some light.' As though he can read my mind. I take a deep breath. Squashed up next to the staircase, is a bed. At the bottom of the bed is a desk.

'Well,' he says, 'it's perhaps not what we'd normally call a room, but it's all yours.'

I sit down on the bed.

'Thank you,' I say. The words come out small.

'I'll leave you then . . .' but he stops at the door. 'Would you like to see the bathroom?'

I shake my head.

'You know the names of all the office workers downstairs who'll be helping us, don't you?'

I shake my head, I can't remember. Mr Frank smiles.

'Well you'll have plenty of time to get to know them. There's Miep Gies, she's our main contact with the outside world, then there's Mr Kugler, Mr Kleiman and Bep and her father, Mr Voskuijl.'

'Thank you,' I say again.

'Well, come downstairs and have a drink when you're ready – and welcome, Peter!'



'Thank you,' I say quickly. I want him to go away.

I lie down. I close my eyes. Behind them the heat throbs in my head. The room is airless. If I stretch out my arms . . . if I stretch out my arms they'll crash into the walls on one side and the staircase on the other. If I stretch out my legs my feet will hit the door. I lie on the bed and keep everything close to my sides. Somewhere outside, the church clock rings the quarter.

I close my eyes and begin to shake. I open them, but I can still see Liese's face at the window – and the van disappearing.

Where is she?

Where will they take her?

The sound of voices next door wakes me.

'Mrs van Pels, have you really brought hats in your hat box?' laughs Anne.

'No! No!' says Mother. 'It's not a hat in there, it's a . . . chamber pot!'

They all laugh, Mutti loudest of all. I pull the sheet up over me. I hide my head beneath its light cotton and curl up, trying to escape, but the picture keeps on coming . . . Liese's face . . . a bright hot pain sears through my head. White, like lightning.

Mutti steps through the doorway. 'Peter?' she asks. 'Peter!' She reaches for my hand but I put it quickly under the sheet. She bites her lip.

'You're here!' she says. 'Thank God!'

'Why wouldn't I be?'

She stares at me. I look away.

So she knew.

She sensed that I wanted to run.

I don't say anything.

I want her to go away.

But she doesn't, she looks around instead.

'Oh, Petel!' she whispers. 'It's so small.' And then she takes a deep breath. 'But at least we're all here. And we're all safe!'

Except Liese.

I don't say anything. I don't ever say anything much anyway, unlike the Franks – but I think a lot. I wonder how this can be called living? How can we be in a space this small? We're trapped in this building like rats in a burning house, waiting to be caught. The pain flashes through my head again, lightning striking a steeple.

Anne's voice floats up the stairs: 'We've made tons and tons of jam already... and doesn't the whole place smell wonderful – of cherries and sugar! Oh, and Daddy, I think this must be the best hiding place in the whole of Holland!'

I feel my body tighten. I can't help it, or do anything about it. It flinches at her words. It's taking on a life of its own. It's like it's trying to crawl away through the walls, back to the outside.

Back to wherever Liese is.

Why didn't I stay? Why didn't I fight? Why did I stand there with a stone in my hand doing nothing?

I groan out loud.

'She makes it sound like we're at a tea party!' I hiss.

'Peter!' says Mutti. 'We must be—'

'Grateful,' I say quickly, because if I hear her say it I think I might have to scream or slap her.

Mutti stares at me. 'I'm sorry,' she says, 'I know it'll be hard for you, but we are lucky. Lucky to be alive and lucky to have someone prepared to help hide us!'

Lucky! That word again. Lucky!

I don't feel lucky.

'Peter?' she asks, and I turn to look at her.

'What?'

'There wasn't only a chamber pot in that box you know!'

She gestures to the door, standing on the threshold, head cocked to one side and ears erect, is Mouschi. My cat.

'Oh!' I say. Mutti smiles.

Mouschi leaps up onto my bed and curls into my side.

'Thank you!' I say.

'Well, now he's here what can anyone say?' she whispers.

I don't answer; I just bury my head in his fur. When I look up, she's gone.[5]

[5] In fact, Mouschi arrived with Peter. I'm grateful to Carol Anne Lee for this information, as well as commenting on the fact that although Anne refers to Mouschi as a she, he was a tom.

I didn't know.

I didn't know that a bed below an attic is a luxury. I didn't know that to grieve, as I was grieving for my freedom, is a blessing and a privilege, as well as a sorrow.

Here in the lager there are no feelings. Only the minutes passing, the one foot in front of the other, the mud, the staying upright, the hanging on to the spoon for your soup so that no one steals it. You cannot grieve for another. You are too busy making sure that it will not be you.

8 August, 1942 – Peter is haunted by Liese in his dreams

I wake up, my heart beating fast, clicking along like a train through a tunnel. Darkness.

Wetness in my hands.

Eyes wide open and searching through the dark.

I'm trying to hold onto something. My mind gropes for it, but it's gone. It's over. Limp and finished. I feel my face flush red in the night. I listen. Somewhere in the distance the church clock strikes three. Next door, Mutti groans and turns over.

Did I make a sound? Did anyone hear me?

I listen to the silence. It's so high up here. The whole night feels different.

The memory of the dream comes without warning. I dreamed of Liese. Liese in a crowd. She is carried along by a river of people. Her dark hair a dot among many.

'Liese!'

I scream her name.

I'm terrified that no one knows who she is. No one but me.

She turns. Her violet eyes are wide and frightened, our eyes catch before she's carried away by the stream of people. Forced along by the high banks of soldiers beside them.

Suddenly I'm right up next to her. Pressed against her by the thousands of bodies around us. They lift us up from the

ground. I feel my face sink into her breasts, my arms lock around her body. I feel us carried along as her legs surround my waist . . . I bury myself in her. I hold on tight until we explode together.

And then I'm far away above us both, watching the memories pour out of me. The taste of her lips, the feel of her skin beneath my fingers, the first time I saw her, her hands moving across the piano keys, the day I asked to carry her books . . . the memories fall around us like rain as we cling together.

But the river of people keeps on moving – as though nothing is happening at all.

'Liese,' I whisper.

She holds my face in her hands and we stare into each other's eyes.

'Peter!'

I reach out but she's already beyond me. I watch, helpless, as she disappears into the crowd. Calling my name. 'Peter!'

I am Peter – the thought wakes me.

This is who I am.

I am Peter.

I whisper the words into the night.

I try to hold onto the remembered warmth of Liese's body in the sheets.

I don't know how I am to wash the sheets. I don't know how I am to hide my shame. I don't know how I am to live any more.

Yes, I am Peter – but will somebody tell me how?

9 August 1942 – Peter is suffocating in the Annexe

'Petel! Petel!' Mother's voice wakes me. 'Get up. Everybody is wondering where you are!'

But I can't. It's always so dark in here, it's like the day never really begins. I wake up so tired.

'I'm tired,' I say. I turn over.

'You've got five minutes!' she hisses. She's embarrassed by me. I should be awake and not asleep. I should feel lucky and not worried that I might be dying. But all I want to do is sleep.

The kitchen is right next door to my room. Everyone has breakfast there. I can hear everything. Father's telling everyone how cleverly he fooled people into thinking that the Franks had fled to Maastricht. I stumble into the room. Nobody greets me they just glance at me, at my slept-in clothes and my filthy hair. I sit down. They nod at me and carry on.

I wonder if I'm really here.

The story is 'What Happened When the Franks Left'. I've heard it a million times already, we all have, but they still go on and on. I try to listen to the words, but the sound of their voices comes at me from a long way away. The words all make sense in my head, but I keep on getting the feelings wrong. I shiver, when everyone else is laughing.

Anne looks at me – a harsh, questioning look. A slow blush crawls over my cheeks. She looks away, scornful.

'. . . and old Mrs Siedle told me herself that she had seen you all loaded into a military vehicle!' says Mutti.

I remember the feel of my foot hitting Liese's garden wall, I hear the military engine coming down the street.

'Yes!' laughs Papi, taking over. 'I heard it myself, too! And here we are, sitting right in the middle of the same city! Who would believe it?'

They all laugh. Anne glances at me again, sharp: 'Peter doesn't think it's funny,' she says.

I stand up too quickly and the chair falls over. Slowly their eyes land on me. I try to stand up straight and be polite. I don't know what's happening to me. My head's full of shavings – leftover pieces with no shape or meaning. 'Excuse me,' I say, and feel my face blush. I leave the room. Behind me I hear Anne clap her hands like a child with a new present.

'Now no one will *ever* guess. Ever!' The laughter goes on.

I don't lie down on my bed, I drop down. I fall away from the thoughts that won't stop churning inside me.

Where are you, Liese?

How can this be funny?

Am I the only person in the world not laughing?

Falling asleep feels wrong – it feels like drowning.

I can't get up. The days go by – half-light, half-dark. I sleep. I eat, but the food doesn't taste of anything. I blush and stumble when the Franks talk to me.

I dream of Liese. And sometimes I wake with my sheets wet and my heart wild. I'm not sure what's real any more. I think Anne came and stood in my doorway.

'Do you like your room, Peter?'

'It's not a room, it's a corridor.' She raises her eyes to the ceiling. She's so thin, a child really, not like Liese.

Liese.

Liese.

Liese.

Where are you? What's happening to you?

I shiver. When I look up Anne's gone. I'm not sure she was ever there.

If I close my eyes I can feel Liese's hands landing on me. Light. Soft, like butterflies. I nearly groan aloud. Stifle it. I feel a pain like longing, an ache in my side. I can't breathe.

Am I dying? I think I must be.

'I'm dying!' I can't believe I've really said the words aloud, but I must have, because everyone's looking at me.

I blush.

'Honestly, Peter!' Mrs Frank says as she flicks out a clean tea towel.

'Have you ever heard of the word *hypochondria*?' asks Anne.

'I can't breathe!' I whisper.

'Perhaps if you did a bit more and slept a bit less?' Mr Frank says gently.

Mutti and Papi look furiously at each other.

No one believes I'm ill.

I go back to bed.

The Westertoren church bells strike midnight. I creep up the attic steps. One of the windows is very slightly open. I lie down and breathe in the fresh, outside air. Gulp it.

'Can you hear the bells, Liese?'

I look at the moon, the way we always promised each other we would. We never said goodbye, just:

'At ten.'

'At ten.'

I whisper the words – is she doing the same somewhere?

Where are you?

I fall asleep in the wisp of air from the window. I don't dream. I sleep wondering if the moon is shining down on us both. All through the night I hear the church bells striking through my dreams.

Can you hear them, Liese?

When I wake up it's light. Birds are singing in the big chestnut tree outside. My neck is stiff and my head hangs sideways off my neck like it's cocked and listening. Or broken. Listening for something no longer there.

The clock chimes five times. I hear it again, beneath the bells, the click of wheels against the track, the trains that carry us all away. Where to? There are whispers like wheels. Rumours like dark tunnels. But we know really, don't we? We all know, but we can't say it.

Camps.

Death camps.

Suddenly I know it, feel it. She's gone. She was here in Amsterdam, where she could hear the clock, but now she's gone – into that river of people.

I crawl, stiff and slow, down the attic steps.

'Peter!'

Mutti stands at the bottom of the steps, staring up at me. How long has she been there?

'What?' I begin, and then I see my filthy sheet rolled up in her hand. On my bed is a clean, white flat sheet. We glance at each other, look away.

'I…'

'Shh!' she smiles at me. 'Don't worry. I can wash it before the Franks are even up, and we can replace their sheet. They won't notice.'

'Thanks,' I mutter, but she's already gone.

The bed feels good. Cool and clean. I sleep without dreams.

When I wake up again breakfast is over.

When I dream of Mutti, that's how I see her, standing at the bottom of the stairs. The way she did when I was a child, her legs braced and arms raised, waiting for me to leap into her arms.

I dream I'm in clean sheets on a real mattress, and that I'll wake with the sun on my face. Best of all, I'll turn, and go back to sleep in the sunlight.

But it's only a dream.

When I wake, I crawl over all the dead and dying bodies to piss in the pot. I listen. Good the pot is not too full. To piss when it's full can mean death. You have to go out into the freezing night and empty it. After that all sleep is over.

All hope of rest is gone.

I crawl back and wait for the word that drags us from our bunks:

Wystawach.

Wake up.

But it doesn't come.

21 August 1942 – Peter's father is angry

'Peter! Peter! Peter!'

I didn't know I was asleep. My name comes at me, hissing and angry.

'Peter! Peter! Peter!' It's Father, calling me. I sit bolt upright.

'*What?*' I'm about to shout, but his hand covers my mouth quickly, forcing my head back down onto the pillow.

'It's only me: Papi,' he hisses. 'It's OK, don't make a sound.'

I force my body to go limp. I close my eyes. I feel my heart beating.

'Get up,' he hisses. 'Get up and help. Right now. Do you hear me?'

I don't answer. I try to take his hand away without opening my eyes, but he keeps it there.

'You could at least try to be a man!' he says. I turn over. I want to go back to sleep, to be anywhere but here.

'How dare you shame us all like this!' he hisses. 'You're nearly sixteen years old. Get up. Stand up. Start helping. Those two girls do more than you.' He takes his hand away.

'If I can't fight what point is there?' I don't know where the words come from; they are just there, between us. The shock of them makes me open my eyes. We stare at each other.

'Fight!' he says, and he sits back and shakes his head at me. 'You think you can fight this? Get up and make yourself useful, that's how we fight.'

I don't move. I try not to blink. I stare at him.

'Show me you can get out of bed and do a day's work before you talk of fighting!' he says.

'You're in my way,' I hiss back. He stands up. I run my hands through my hair, it's stiff with dirt. I get up slowly, partly because I'm still shaking, partly just to annoy him. He stands by the attic steps. There's not enough room to change with him there. I can't get up without having to touch him.

'I'll see you in the kitchen,' he says. 'Two minutes.'

I don't say anything. I wait for him to leave and then I dress.

I go downstairs. Mr Kugler is trying to make the entrance to the Annexe secret.

'Hello,' he says. He has a nice face. 'Can you give me a hand?'

I try. I collect wood shavings and put them in a pillowcase. I make a pad for the door to stop everyone banging their heads on the frame. It's awkward and useless work, ugly, not like the things I used to make for Aunt Henny: mending the pieces she loved, fixing her sofa. I need to forget about all that. We've disguised the door as a bookcase, and the lintel is hidden so you have to duck down. Great, I think, a bookcase. As though it isn't bad enough already being locked up with the book-crazy Franks.

'Oh!' says Anne. 'So you've graced us with your presence, have you?' I don't answer. I'd like to. I'd like to ask her why she's always breaking things, dropping them and banging into things? Why isn't she more careful? Why does she always behave as though this is a house party?

But I don't say anything.

'Thank you, Peter,' says Margot.

'That's all right.' I blush. Margot turns away, trying not to see, but Anne stares at me as though she is trying to decide exactly what shade of red I'm going. I turn away and stumble back upstairs.

'What an idiot!' says Anne, and then she drops her cup and they both start laughing.

Mutti's at the door to my room, smiling at me like I've just wiped out a whole platoon of Nazis all by myself, not simply nailed up a bag full of wood shavings!

'Better?' she asks.

'Better,' I say, even though it isn't.

'Unlike your hair!' And she smiles. I smile back. It feels strange, muscles creaking into a new shape.

'Let me wash it for you,' she says, and I'm about to say no, but then I think of her stealing an extra sheet out of the communal cupboard. I think of the clean white sheet on my bed. I think of how she washes away my sins and dries them – all without saying a word. I think of the insults she takes from Mrs Frank because of me.

'If you think you can use all of our sheets and none of your

own you are very much mistaken!' says Mrs Frank. Mutti says nothing, nothing of how they use our bowls and hide their own. Of how Anne has broken nearly all of ours and never said sorry. So I say *yes*. I let her wash my filthy hair.

She scrubs and digs and rubs at my scalp as though she could chase all the evil away with her fingers. It hurts. At last she is done.

'Ah!' she says. 'Now you are my Petel.'

'Thanks,' I mutter.

'Margot!' We both hear Anne's voice outside the bathroom door. 'His mother's in there washing his hair! I'm only thirteen and I even dye my own moustache!'

'Shhh!' says Margot quickly, but the damage is done. Mutti's smile falls off her face and all the way to the floor. Poor old Mutti; never as good as the Franks, never as clever, or funny – or wise. If Anne were a boy I'd punch her. I'd spit on my palms, draw a line straight between those brown superior eyes and land my fist right in the middle of all that confidence.

I hate her.

'Much better.' I say out loud. 'Thank you, Mutti, I feel wonderful.'

And as soon as I say it I realise it's true.

I do feel better.

A bit.

22 August 1942 – Peter gets annoyed

Anne and Margot have discovered the attic. It's a pain. The way they just walk right through my 'room' to get to it. I know. I know. The world is ending outside the Annexe (as Anne calls it) or at least it is for the Jews and gypsies and anyone else who doesn't measure up to the Nazi standard! Mr Frank said they think they know we're Jewish by measuring our noses, or our skulls! Mutti snorted and said: 'Well I know an easier way to tell if a man's a Jew!' But she didn't say it in front of the Franks; she waited until it was just the three of us alone, upstairs.

All that happening outside, and I'm stupid enough to be angry with two of the most annoying girls in the world. At least Margot looks a bit apologetic, but Anne! She just flounces through my room.

'Any ailments today, Petel-pie?' she laughs.

They spend ages up there, taking it for themselves, the only place where we can see the sky.

Mrs Frank does try to cut Anne down to size: 'Hanneli's mother was right about you, Anne,' she says. 'Do you remember what she said?'

Anne glares at her mother then turns to her father who looks away. I think he might be smiling.

'She said, "God knows everything but Anne Frank always knows it better." Well you don't know it better, young lady!' says Mrs Frank.

Anne goes white with rage and her lips tremble. She storms off, saying nothing.

We all pretend to be busy. After a while Margot follows her.

'Well!' says Mrs Frank. 'No doubt that's another episode for Kitty to enjoy.' Mr Frank glances at her – a warning glance. I wonder who Kitty is, and how Anne keeps in touch with her.

'Every child needs privacy. What she writes in her diary is her business,' remarks her father in his normal voice, quiet and calm. No one has heard Mr Frank raise his voice. Ever.

'But why call her diary Kitty?' asks Mrs Frank. But Mr Frank doesn't answer, just shakes his paper.

Ah! So Anne keeps a diary. I bet I know what she writes in it – how wonderful she is!