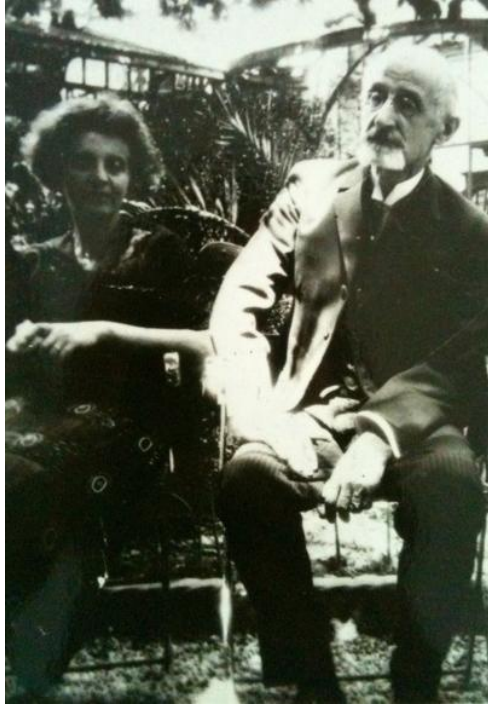


# The PÈNE family

1937-1952

By Florence Pène-Rosenberg



Louis, Pierre's father, and Hélène, Françoise's mother, July 1925



Hélène, Françoise's mother, when young

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Pierre and Françoise - civil wedding, July 1925

# Chapter one

## Before the war

1937 - 1939

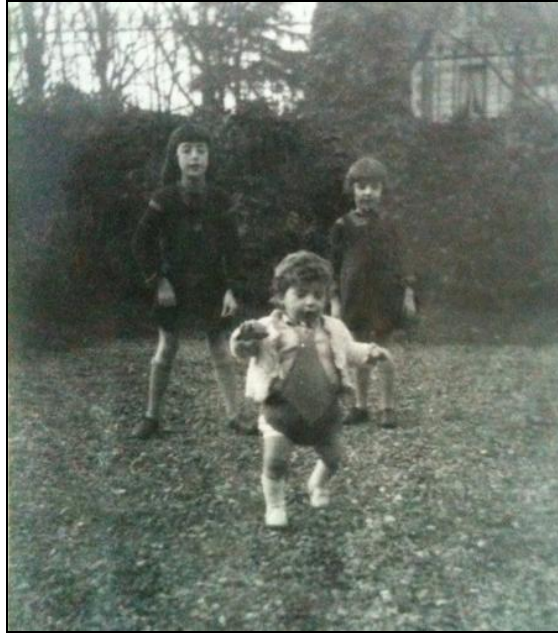
**PIERRE** , an early riser, had never needed an alarm clock. However, he dutifully wound one up every night, trusting the machine more than his own internal clock. In the rising dawn, he quietly slid out of bed, taking great care not to awaken Françoise, for fear of her mood if he did. This was too bad. He would have liked to tell her about the feeling of unease, almost dread, he felt about the book he had finished reading last night : « Mein Kampf », by Adolf Hitler. She would have to read it also, and then they would discuss it.

Pierre enjoyed the fact that he could share with this pretty wife of his most of what really interested him. She had a curious mind and enough general culture, besides her artistic talent, to be a true companion. Her fiery temperament and her strong opinions sometimes made her sound harsh, but this was compensated by her straight ethics and her sincerity. She would later, while in great danger, show remarkable acumen and extraordinary courage. He truly loved her.

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Pierre carefully lifted his side of the bed, to retrieve the pants he had put there last night, so as to freshen up their crease. Then he did his daily exercise routine : mostly stretching, to ease his arthritic pains, but also some push ups and knee bends for musculation. Slightly vain of his tall, thin, erect silhouette, he also believed in a healthy life style, and good discipline. He would later be very thankful for his lithe body, which permitted him to rapidly move his handcuffs from back to front and vice versa when the need arose.

From the bathroom, he could hear, coming from the kitchen, the girls' chattering. They had not left for school yet. Annette, very protective of her little sister, didn't seem to mind her brilliant results which, if the truth were told, were her own achievement in a way : Annette, playing school with Florence, had taught her sister to read, write, and play with numbers when the little one was only three years old. So, why was Flo always so shy, pulling her head into her shoulders on the way, when she had to go to school on her own ? He wished he understood those things. In any case, what joy it was to be a father ! And now, at last, after ten years of married life, they had a boy, a blond and curly baby, with such a winning smile that he was nicknamed Rizou.



Rizou's first steps.

Pierre finished his bowl of café au lait and his buttered bread which Henriette – sadly, neither pretty nor very smart – had prepared for him. He would have liked to go to work by foot, for the exercise, but the office was too far, and he would take his car. If Louis' health held, they would get some exercise this week-end : there was a picnic planned with the Girards, in the Compiègne forest. The swimming pool might also be open for the season, at this time. The girls were good swimmers already, under Mr. Nibourel's supervision.

He arrived at his office before any of his subordinates. They were all good and trustworthy engineers, but Pierre liked that moment of quiet solitude before they arrived.

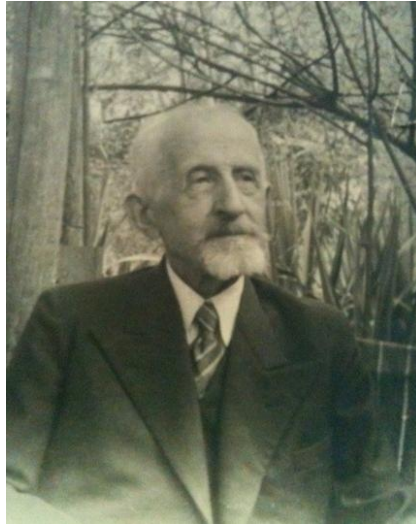
**FLORENCE** was dreamily contemplating the golden rings of melted butter dancing on top of her bowl of café au lait, now that she had removed the disgusting skin from its top. She had put ten sugar cubes in it, and was dunking into it half a baguette, golden and crisp on the outside, white and soft inside, slit lengthwise and slathered with butter. How good it was. Annette was still probably brushing her thick and curly auburn hair or whatever, just to make sure that, once more, they would get to school after all the students had filed into their classrooms. The school was just around the corner, and Flo could easily have gone there by herself, but was used to, and enjoyed, her sister's protective presence.

Plans for the week-end had changed. That was a good thing, since the water in the swimming pool would still be too cold. The picnic wasn't something she was looking forward to either : ants would ruin such an expedition. The mushroom hunting that would, as usual, follow, would be no fun either : she never found any bolete nor chanterelle, while maman and Annette filled baskets with their discoveries. It was no great solace that papa was not much better than she at this.

The reason plans had changed was that grand-père Louis was not doing well at all. So, what had been the use of the small altar she and Annette had built from twigs in a corner of the garden, where they had prayed for his recovery ? Was God perhaps not really all powerful ? or had their prayers not been fervent enough ? This was too bad. Grand-père was very nice. Flo liked him. They would all go and see him in Paris.

Maman gave Annette and Flo a strange speech before the week-end. It was about the difference between real lies – a terrible thing, severely punished at home – and white lies, made with good intentions. If grand-père asked about his health, the girls were

supposed to pretend that all was well... a white lie. He should not know that he was really dying, and the girls were asked to help allay his fears.



Louis Pène, Pierre's father

The only thing that bothered Flo about the thought of this trip was that, before going, Françoise would want to cut the children's hair. Annette's and Rizou's curls would always fall prettily, no matter what, while Flo's straight, caca colored hair would show every bad angle, every wrong nick, and the whole thing would be too short, with bangs looking like a mad saw.

The nice thing was that they would sleep at the Lévy's. Denise was a cousin of maman's. Claudie had a clock with a Mickey Mouse that marked the seconds with his foot, socks with pink flowers on them, and many other wonderful possessions. It was also a lot of fun to look out of their fifth floor windows at the teeny cars and people on the street.

**FRANCOISE**, who always read late at night, would have liked to stay in bed all morning, but there were things to do. Pierre had left for work, the girls for school, and she had to check on what Henriette would have accomplished by now. Once everyone's shoes were polished, she had gone to buy the fresh breakfast baguettes and some milk, had ground the coffee beans and made the coffee. She had bathed, dressed, and fed the baby. Now she was supposed to clean the whole house perfunctorily, and one room thoroughly.. She would have to prepare lunch when Françoise came back with the food for the day. The block of ice in the ice box never lasted very long, and food did not keep well. Shopping had to be done daily, from the green grocer to the butcher, the dairy, and the baker.

Washed and dressed, satisfied that things were going smoothly at home, Françoise, her hands in white lace gloves, put on a pretty hat from which a small veil fell, partly covering her porcelain, fine featured face. She climbed on her bicycle and went downtown.

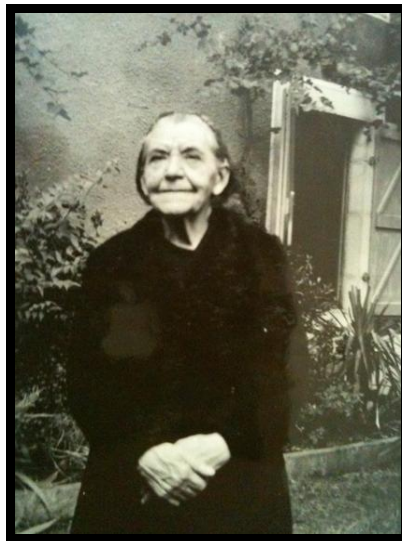
The week-end had gone well. The children had said nothing untoward to their grandfather, who really looked very weak. They had spent the night at the Lévy's and Françoise had left them there the next day while she went back to rue le Marois where her in-laws lived. The patient looked even worse than the day before. Françoise had been shocked when Alice had sent Clotilde to fetch a priest, to give Louis the last rites. Louis was not a believer, and went to church only under duress, for a wedding or a funeral. Of course, Alice did believe in heaven and hell, eternal life and all that rigmarole, but why submit him to this barbarous custom, letting him know that he was dying ?



Well, a priest had come, and shut himself in the room with the old man. Françoise had been amazed to see how much calmer, relieved, at peace, Louis had seemed after that, ready for death.

What would happen now to Alice and Clotilde ? What a shame that the latter was not married. If only she took better care of her appearance ! She didn't look bad. A better hair cut, a little bit of make up would suffice. The worst part of it was that when Françoise invited her with an eligible bachelor, Clo made no effort at being charming, nor even simply pleasant. An engineer in an electronic factory, she always seemed to need to affirm her intelligence, her power, her equality with any educated man. Men needed to have their egos massaged. Did she not know it, or did she not care ? She often claimed that she missed the presence of a man only when she was not able to open a tightly shut jar.

As to poor old Alice, homely, heavy, smelly, semi-paralyzed, her sparse, grey, greasy hair held in a snood, always clad in black, how would she fare, alone with silly Léonie, when Clo would be out at work ?



Alice Pène, née Bétille, Pierre's mother

She was intelligent and kind, with a lively sense of humor, and had been much fun when young. She had always been nice with her daughter-in-law. But Françoise couldn't always go to Paris to take care of her, she had enough to do at home.

When they had come back from Africa, Paris had offered too many temptations to their young couple, hungry for Parisian shows and dancing clubs. Pierre and Françoise had had good fun, but they were spending much more than Pierre's wages. He eventually had asked for a job in the provinces. Pierre was now public works engineer in Soissons, a small town north of Paris. The trip there could take up to three hours.

**ANNETTE** : Henriette was fished out of the river Aisne yesterday. Some soldiers were passing by, who pulled her out. Did she wait for them to be there before she plunged ? This is a nasty thought. Poor Henriette. She is back in her family.

Now, life will be untenable at home : Until she finds a new maid, maman will be scrubbing everything with rage, and have to cook, and be in a foul mood. The parents have been tense enough, these days. Last night, Flo was sent away from the dinner table twice to wash up, and ended up with a broom stick behind her elbows, to straighten her back.



As for me, I get scolded all the time in any case, so things haven't changed. At least, here, they no longer hit me with a whip as they used to do in Abyssinia ! Normally, when one of them was in a bad mood, the other one was extra nice, but right now, they are both edgy.

We had some reprieve when we went to the International Fair in Paris. That was fun, but I was very embarrassed when maman rinsed Rizou's soiled diaper in the public fountain, in front of everybody. The same Rizou was very cute when he pointed accusingly at tante Clo, saying « Clo, clepe », because she had finished the piece of crepe he had not eaten.

I suppose the general bad mood is due to what is going on in the world. Last year, when there was, during dinner, a good tango or rhumba on the radio, the parents would get up from the table and dance to it, looking tender and happy. Now, instead of music, all we hear is things about the Sudeten Lands, Poland, Daladier, Spain (where we were not allowed to enter last year, while all we wanted was to go and buy some « torrone » across the street, and we had driven all the way from Cier !) or Chamberlain. I don't really know what is going on, but it feels like a big black cloud is coming towards us.

### Annette, Rizou and Florence



I escape from the house every time I can, and climb everywhere. From wall to fence, René Roy and I travel through the town, setting foot on the ground as seldom as we can. The other day, in an empty lot, we saw something very interesting : a couple were half naked and, holding onto each other, were moving strangely, and making funny noises. They didn't see us, but we watched them. I think that is the way people make babies. René got inspired, and asked whether he may kiss me. I let him kiss the tip of my braids.

At school, some of the girls already have little breasts pointing, while I stay flat as a board. Is there something I can do about this ? ointments perhaps ? I am also waiting for my period to start, as maman warned me. I sometimes have cramps, but nothing comes. Darn it all ! Flo is too small and dumb, and an awful scaredy cat ; as to Rizou, he is even smaller and dumber. He is cute, but maman pays too much attention to him. I wonder whether mothers always prefer their babies, especially if they are boys.

**PIERRE** : We didn't see him very often, but I already miss my father. He was a good man, straight, with a curious mind and a warm heart. As rigidly Victorian as his personal ethics were, he was relatively tolerant for others ...(except when he saw a man urinating on the side of the road, and went to kick him in the behind, after making me stop the car ! )

I hope I made him proud.

We had dinner at the Roys' last night. Louis, a surgeon whose corpulence reveals the « bon vivant » personality, turns out to be quick and witty.( I read somewhere that Caesar wanted his generals to be fat and bald. Was he right ? Should I gain weight ? As to being bald, despite all my care, I am afraid I may soon fill the bill). I think he is also quite ethical, and reliable. He is funny : The first time we met at some friends' house, he exclaimed :

« But we have slept together ! ». It is true that we had both followed the same training at the same time in the same military base before being sent to the front as reserve non-commissioned officers in January, 1918.

His wife Jeanne is small and rather cute, but a bit mousy. Eager to please her gourmet husband, she concocts delicious dishes.

The other couple there were the Touzés. Eugene is the new « sous-préfet ». He has a war scarred face, is intelligent and cultured. He seems to live in the shadow of his wife, an impressive tall brunette, with beautiful regular features. Coming from a renowned Protestant

family, she has a noble mien, and ignores Françoise's tauntings. To the latter's frequent « Parpaillotte », she refrains from answering with « Youpine » as she might, since everyone in town knows that Françoise is Jewish. She claimed it loud and clear when we moved to this town, hoping to thus avoid hearing unpleasant remarks. Her method seems to have worked so far.

What bothered me last night was that the hosts as well as the guests, all thought that we must avoid war at all costs. This means giving Hitler all he wants. I am afraid that Françoise and I are the only ones who have read « Mein Kampf » in this town. This Hitler is terrifying. We can't expect anything good from his vengeful and narrow perspective. I understand his wanting to give his people hope, and to strengthen the economy of his country, weakened by its defeat in 1918 and the Great Depression. But he seems to want more, and crazily envision world domination. His attitude towards Jews is irrational and worrisome. Why are these people blind ? They fear Socialism, and so do I. It is also true that none of us wants to live again the horrors of the last war, the « War to end all wars ». But isn't some surgical intervention sometimes better than gangrene ?

**FLORENCE** : Last Saturday, I went to play at Alain Deshayes'. It is at the other end of town, and it is a long walk, but it is worth it. Alain's father is a landscapist. His fields are covered with flowers in neat rows, and there are a few hot houses, where we may play hide and seek. If I were he, I think I would fear for my dahlias and gladiolas, but he is nice, and lets us have the run of the place.

This afternoon, I shall go to town and buy « La petite Anne de Guigné », a book that Françoise Knoll lent me. I want to read it many times again, and try to be as good as Anne was. I have been asking the parents for that book for a long time, and they have finally said yes. I am afraid of getting lost in town, even though I know that the book store is right in the center of town, beyond the cathedral. Anne de Guigné was very good ; her father died during the Great War, and she, too, died, when she was ten years old. I want to be like her.

Last night, I dreamed once more that I was flying. It was a lot of fun, it was easy, and everybody was surprised. I wish I could do it when I am awake ! I also would like to understand what all those birds are saying, when they gather noisily in large groups in the crab apple tree outside my window. St Francis could talk with birds in their own language. He must have been terribly patient ! I shall try.

For my seventh birthday, maman is inviting some children, including the boy next door. I wonder what he looks like. I wish she would invite Françoise Knoll's half brother : he is very handsome, with black hair and large light blue eyes.

**FRANCOISE**, after a few exhausting weeks, was looking forward to some relief, since a new maid had been hired. It seems that Henriette had been quite unhappy, Françoise was sorry that she had not been aware of it.

Marie-Rose looked clean enough, and gay. Older than Henriette, she was nineteen, and would start soon. Françoise was tired of doing not only what the maids would normally do, but also what they regularly ignored, such as the space under the kitchen sink, finger marks on the doors, the broom closet, etc... This cleaning besides the daily food shopping and preparing the three daily meals had made it difficult for her to take care of other chores such as mending, taking care of the mail, paying the bills, shopping for things other than food, visiting... she had too much to do !

She had had no time for painting, lately. Before Henriette's problem, she had made a few things she was rather pleased with : a good gouache of the tower of St Jean des Vignes, another one of the « Chemin des Dames », where fighting had been intense during WWI, and a cute small pastel silhouette of Flo in a tutu, seen from the back. It was not good to stop painting for too long. Painting was not exclusively an aesthetic and creative endeavor : it

was a wonderful way to forget reality, the daily routines, oneself. She needed it. She had loved the art school she had attended in Grenoble, with professor Burkhalter.

She felt sorry for those housewives who did nothing but gossip, and whose whole universe revolved around house-husband-children. They didn't even read, or usually just silly women magazines or romance novels. Their horizon was so limited. They didn't even know how to have fun. What could she do to shake them up ?

Françoise had an idea : as soon as Marie-Rose was used to her new job, Françoise would organize a costumed dancing party. Of course, Pierre would grumble. He hated to costume up, and didn't even like parties very much. Despite his dark good looks, and the efforts Françoise had made to make sure he dressed better, he still was a little shy and awkward, like a peasant in Sunday clothes, even though she was the girl from the provinces, and he, the true Parisian !

He had no gift for painting either. Whenever, during one of their picnics, he would accept to try, at her urging, he came out with the ugliest colors, and then she couldn't prevent herself from scolding him. Françoise often wished she could refrain from her harsh reproaches, but they came out too fast, she could not help it. Her mother Hélène had always told her she was too direct.

Pierre was a handsome, witty, cultured, and good man, with large, black velvety eyes, whom she admired and loved. However, she was a little worried, these days : Anne Touzé, a good-looking woman, seemed interested in him, and her husband didn't quite seem to fit the bill. Pierre had always appreciated beautiful women. Was there real danger ?

**ALICE** : Oh, God, my creator and protector, our Father in Heaven, I don't want to sound disrespectful. I have always tried to serve and obey You to the best of my abilities, but I do have a few complaints, please forgive me. Why do You send such suffering to your children ?

Of course, Louis was seventy-nine years old, and it was normal that You should have called him back to You. I know it, but even so, several months later, I still have a moment of panic when I don't find him next to me upon awakening. After forty-five years of togetherness, I still am not used to his absence, and cannot stop crying.

If it is true that You give more challenges to those of Your children you love most, I sometimes wish You would love me a little less, and would even forget me on occasion.

You have not spared me : the only daughter of a man who lost his last penny and more at gambling tables, I was still very young when I had to go out and work, to feed the family and pay some debts. The nuns who hired me as a piano teacher in their school were so mean that I was very relieved when I found work in a Jewish institution. (Isn't it paradoxical, my dear God, that Your servants be less humane than supposed friends of the devil ?). I discovered early that life was hard.

When some friends introduced Louis Pène to me, I found him pleasant, good-looking, and interesting. He did not find me repulsive either. The bizarre coincidence was that I had once, from a train, admired the small village his ancestors came from, and wished I could live there. Situated at the foot of the Pyrénées, it is called Cier de Rivière.

Louis was a charming man but, the only son of a hard and authoritarian woman, he was a mama's boy. When my father-in-law Augustin Pène died in 1898, terrible Pierrette came to live with us, until her death in 1914. She occupied the room that would have been Clotilde's, so the poor child slept in our bedroom until she was fourteen. Every evening, Pierrette went to kiss Louis good-night, telling him all sorts of nasty things about me. She was hard on everyone, but especially mean with me.

As if that wasn't enough, Louis caught that mysterious and undiagnosed disease that forced him to retire at forty-two. He had been overworked, calculating train schedules for the International Exhibit of 1900. We suddenly became almost poor. The only consolation is that dear Louis then had time to play his violin, and to listen to the orchestras that played for free in public parks. We could also leave for Cier as soon as the boys were on vacation for the

summer. When there, Louis could take care of all the fruit trees he had lovingly planted and grafted in the « pré ».

But You know, my dear God, that the worst blow You sent me was Henri's death. Yes, Virgin Mary, I know that you too have cried over your son's death, but yours was thirty-three years old, he had more or less desired his death, he came back to life and, no minor detail, he was God ! Mine was hardly grown-up, and, his spine destroyed by schrapnel, it took him two years as a paralytic, to die ! How can You permit such things ? And can You believe that a stupid Cierrois implied that he had been running away from combat, since he had been wounded in his back ? (That is one person I shall never speak to again). The poor child was hurting in his body and in his soul, sometimes telling us :

« If you really loved me, you would let me die »... at twenty !

Henri had been such an active child, running through fields and forests, that immobility must have been especially hard on him. He usually brought back from his forays, not only the animals he had hunted for our dinner table, but beautiful drawings of plants and animals he had admired. He drew very well. The poor child died in April, 1918, during the last strong German assault, thinking that his sacrifice had been in vain, and France had lost ! My heart was thoroughly broken then, and I have been wearing nothing but black since.

Forgive me, please, oh You, God of love, for hatred is in my heart : anger, and hatred of everything German. I am now seventy-six, and won't last much longer. The strokes I have had make it difficult for me to move as I would wish. My God, I trust You and I love You, but why do You make life so difficult ?

Of course, I also have good reasons to be thankful to You, and I thank You for them in my daily prayers. First, there is Clotilde, very smart and with a good heart. Since I can hardly move, she washes and dresses me before leaving for the factory, and the arrival of Léonie. She gives me my medications, and does everything needed. She does it out of duty, without any joy. I see her laugh heartily with her brother, and with her friends, but never with me. She must think that I have always favored my boys, and she might be right. She was as good a student as they (and I must admit that Pierrette, « grand-mère-fais-tes-règles », was instrumental in their successes, not letting them raise their noses from their school books) and yet, I always made more of a fuss over the boys' achievements. Weren't they the ones who would have to earn a living, while a girl, once married, becomes a sort of unpaid servant ? (Didn't my dear husband prevent me from working, after our marriage ?) Clo has rebuffed the men who were interested in her, and now, she must work as hard as they.

As to Pierre, my second child, he has given me nothing but pride and joy. Even as a baby, he was much easier than Henri. Later, he protected Clo when Henri teased her too much. It is also thanks to his insistence that we have let Clo pursue her studies in physics. He left for the war only in January, 1918, and as an artillery officer. Back in one piece and having become a man, he finished his schooling at the « Ecole Polytechnique », ending among the top fifteen. Sharing his father's passion for geography, he then chose to work in the colonies, after specializing at the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées.

Why did he fall in love with Françoise, an art student in Grenoble where he was interning as an engineer ? A war orphan, she could nevertheless offer a decent dowry. She is very pretty, her thick, curly, blond hair surrounding a lively, expressive face, with diaphanous skin, and bright, malicious green eyes. She is vivacious, and cultured, but very young, and, I fear, somewhat spoiled by her widowed mother. She was born in Epernay, and makes me think, indeed, of a cup of Champagne. Pierre loves champagne.

She is Jewish, but I don't see this as a big problem, since she accepted to be baptized for her marriage, and has promised me to raise the children as Catholics, which she does scrupulously. Of course, her children are very spoiled, with toys we wouldn't even have dreamed of, a weekly bath and shampoo, more than one outfit for week days, etc. Worse, they don't show their parents the respect they should. But I don't want to be another Pierrette, and don't say anything.

This is all for today, my God, and I Know I should not feel so sorry for myself. Please forgive me. Amen.

**PIERRE** : What I had feared has occurred : France and England have done nothing to prevent Hitler from invading the Sudeten lands. We have heard also of a « Kristallnacht », a general rampage on Jewish establishments, which seemed to have been well organized and planned, throughout Germany. In the country of Goethe ! Where are we headed ?

Françoise may be right, to want to have as much fun as possible, while we can. Her party was a success. Mercifully, she had not costumed me this time as a Spanish woman, with a large comb and a mantilla on my wig, and two grapefruit in an enormous bra ! As a public works engineer, this time I was in denim overalls she had bought from her cousins the Lévy's, with a few tools in my pocket. She was ravishing as a river, a cardboard bridge she had made on her head, from which flowed green tulle, which blended with her curls, and matched the color of her eyes and her long dress. We did have a good time.

Meanwhile, I still do my job, trying to keep my roads and bridges in good shape. The soil is very rich in Picardy, and sugar beet is one of the main crops, on large estates. The trucks that transport those beets are very heavy, and damage the roads, those beautiful roads I love, lined with plane trees. It is expensive to repair them. I have asked the local land owners to participate in the expenditure involved. Two of them have responded, only one making a generous offer. This lack of civic sense is discouraging.

I love my new car as much as my old roads. A Peugeot, it is maneuverable, spirited, spacious, and has enough room in its trunk. For long trips, a hammock will be hung from side to side behind the front seats, where Rizou can sleep comfortably. He just turned three, and is very cute, even though Dr. Roy calls him the « deputy of the opposition ». It is true that he can be quite stubborn, and scream with anger when things don't go his way. When this happens, Françoise holds both his hands, saying she'll let go when he cedes. They can stay like that, angry and screaming, for very long. I wish our politicians had that strength of character !

**RIZOU** : I shall ask Père Noël for a train with smoke. Can one find smoke in a box ? Without smoke, it can't work ?

**FLORENCE** : Why is grand-mère crying all the time ?

« Listen, Flo, aren't you sad that your grand-father died ? »

« Yes I am, but I don't feel like crying all the time. What is grand-père doing, up in the sky ? Is he an angel ? »

**ANNETTE** : Christmas has come and gone, and the new year 1939 will start soon. The usual routine was followed, but at grand-mère's and tante Clo's. We were quietly in bed, and our shoes were waiting by the fireplace. The parents, having made sure that Flo and Rizou were asleep, placed the presents around the shoes, then made big noises, supposedly the toys falling down the fire-place. That awoke everyone. There was nothing very special, except, for Flo, a splendid doll, who shuts her eyes ! I have never had such a beautiful doll.

What happened the next day was funny : Marie-Rose was dressing Rizou, but couldn't find his shoes. We all looked under the beds, in closets, behind doors, everywhere, but found nothing until someone thought of looking in the fireplace. Sure enough, that is where the little imp had put them, hoping for a new miracle !

**FLORENCE** : « It is Père Noël, right, maman, who brings us presents, and not our parents and grand-parents ? »

« Who told you otherwise ? »

« Rizou says that it is grand-mère who gave us the presents, since we found them in her fire-place. »

**ANNETTE** : I got yelled at again. It is true that my report card was not brilliant, but the parents are a pain. I am bored in class, except for gym and drawing. It is not my fault if I could practically speak no French when, seven years old, I arrived in France ! In Addis-Abeba, I had spent most of my time playing with the servants ... truly, with the little kitchen boy, who was about my age, and probably spoke « gouragé » (When papa wanted to learn the local language, he certainly took classes in Amharic, the language of the noble « ras »). I didn't understand what the teacher said in class in Paris, so she asked to see my parents, supposing them to be illiterate ! They didn't like that very much.

I wonder what I'll do when I grow up. I would love to be a doctor ; In any case, I want to take care of people. If I ever marry, it will be with a navy officer, so he won't be home too much.

**FLORENCE** : I lost my first tooth, and the little mouse gave me a checker board, a jump rope, and two francs ! Rizou says that a mouse can't carry all that, but of course it can, with baby Jesus' help !

For Christmas, I got a very beautiful doll, as big as a real baby, with beautiful eyes that close when she lies down. The best yet is what I got for my birthday and « prix d'excellence » : a bicycle ! It is blue, and has brakes, and a bell. It is too bad that we live at the top of the boulevard Jeanne d'Arc, I am afraid of going too fast and not being able to stop at the crossings.

I caused a big uproar the other day : I spilled our ink pot on our pretty pink rug. Maman had such a fit, she couldn't stop hitting me, punching, kicking. It was not the usual slaps in the face ! She was really very mad. Why does everything always have to look so pretty ? It is true that I should be more careful.

I would like to become a saint like Anne de Guigné but it is not easy. She was very patient with her little brother and I try, but Rizou can be very annoying. He is not the only one : the parents are annoying also, mostly maman, because papa, at least, is sometimes funny. Annette is the worst. She teases me and then says :

« If I were you, I know how I would respond ».

I feel like punching her when she does that, but she is so much stronger and bigger than I, that most of the time I don't even try. It's not worth it.

Luckily, there is God. When everyone has been mean, He comes in my dreams at night and says that He knows that I am really not bad.

Once when I was sick, grand-mère Hélène came to sit with me. I was so tired that I didn't want her to tell me stories, as she had offered to do, so she just sat, knitting. That is what she does when she is not playing the piano. She is nice. I saw her with her hair down only once. It is very long, white, and curly, and usually wrapped around her pretty head in a braid. She understands children much better than the other grown-ups.

I love school, but had a minute of panic the other day : Renée Collet and I had just brought into the classroom a silent map of Africa, when an inspector came in. The teacher called me to the desk :

« Florence Pène, you were born in Abyssinia ; can you show us where it is ? ».

I had no idea of where it was, but made a broad gesture, and she was pleased. I see that it can be easy to pretend to know what you don't.

Sometimes, though, I know what I am doing. One day last year, our teacher was sick, so we were put at the empty desks of the next classroom, one grade above us. The teacher, wanting to keep us quiet, gave everyone a problem, which I solved easily. No one else did ! That new teacher told the class :

« Here is Florence Pène, barely six years old, who is the only one to solve this problem ... aren't you ashamed ? ».

I don't think the other children were too mad at me, after that. They can take their revenge in sewing class, or during recess when we play ball games. Colette Dessort had her time of glory when we were asked to make bread, or the day we had to make butter.

**RIZOU** : Me, I like all the girls. You know, Marie-Rose, the parents are a pain : with them one is not allowed to do anything ... now don't go and tell them I said that !

**ANNETTE** : I have turned thirteen, and don't feel different. I have so much metal in my mouth that I am afraid of getting too close to magnets ! Besides making me ugly, it hurts. It might straighten my teeth, but won't straighten my legs, nor help me grow. My chest is still flat as a bread board, and I see René ogle Marie-Rose's breasts ! I have pimples, and spend my life with my nose in an inhaler, because of my frequent colds. I have stomach cramps, but no period yet. All this is so frustrating ! When people want to pay me a compliment, all they can talk about is my hair. That heavy hair is what gives me headaches. I find solace in the books I read. I loved Quentin Durward !

If at least we were dressed better. Thank heavens, maman no longer dresses us alike, Flo and me. But our dresses are made by that poor little woman in the slums, while maman is always elegant and stylish. In my every day dress, I look like a sausage, and am even uglier in my Sunday dress.

Maman is not nice. She sent another beggar away again yesterday. There seem to be more and more of them. There are also people mending broken dishes, re-caning old chairs, sharpening knives on the streets. They are clearly poor. Of course, it does not compare with what I saw in Africa, but I wish I could help them. Maman says that she gives them some bread and offers them to work (do some weeding or wood cutting) for money, so as not to encourage laziness, and that it usually makes them run away. I would give them money if I could.

Maman keeps repeating the first lines of a play she is going to act in with some friends. « Onze heures, je ne peux plus attendre ». It is fun.

I hear we are going to travel all around France this Summer ; we'll go east at first, then south, and then west, with a stop at Cier. We will then drive back north along the ocean. It should be interesting, but I fear the long hours squeezed in that car, in which we are not allowed to eat or drink, and god forbid we should touch its body, ever so slightly ! Papa tends it like a jewel. He gets so tense when he drives, it is not funny. And if maman takes the wheel, she drives in spurts, which makes him even more nervous. They are on edge these days in any case, probably because of the war everyone talks about. It seems to worry everybody, even though they all say that we are sure to win, thanks to the Maginot Line.

**FRANCOISE** : Never had I expected that I would one day be ashamed of being French, even though my elders might have wondered during the Dreyfus affair.

My mother's parents, Jules and Ida Bloch, were well-to-do Parisians. Jules, whose thick and curly mane I have inherited, was a patriarch, still feared by his sons when they were in their sixties. He suddenly caught cold in his eighties, and died rapidly. I remember Ida only as a very old and sick woman. She died when I was still a child. She had had seven children ; Hélène, my mother, was the sixth, the second of two girls.

Jules forbade Hélène to marry the young man she loved, for he was a Goy. She rejected every other man who asked for her hand. When she was twenty-four, she was made to marry the next aspirant, my father Armand, whom she never liked. He sought comfort with the maid, Pauline, who treated Hélène with authority and scorn.



Hélène is a dreamer, playing the piano all the time, but without discipline, not caring if she skips a note or hits the wrong one. When she knits, there is yarn trailing here and there. A relaxed housewife, she finds justification in Beaudelaire, who supposedly said that a mess was a form of art. Personally, I can't stand it.

My father's parents had fled their château in Alsace when it was invaded by the Prussians in 1870. Salomon and Elise Lévy-Neumand moved to Épernay in Champagne, where he was a prosperous grain merchant. They had four children, two of which, the girls, died young. Elise was a well organised housewife, whose garden and library gave me great joys in my childhood. Salomon and Elise spoke Yiddish together so that we would not understand them, but felt ferociously French. When my father left for the war in 1914 and an onlooker said, pointing at him :

« Down with the Jews », Armand replied :

« I am the one going to fight for France, while you are staying at home ».

The war was being fought practically on our door-step. We saw soldiers marching one way or the other, sometimes French (and we would give them bread and fruit), sometimes Germans. When the canons were too noisy, we sought safety in the garden shed. One day my father came back, sick, and he died at home, for my eleventh birthday.

My mother then took us down south. The first town the train stopped at, that was not already overflowing with war refugees was Grenoble, so that is where we settled. It is in Grenoble that I met Pierre, ten years later.

Why do I go into all this ? I am French, and want to be proud of it. And here we are, rag dolls letting Hitler help himself to Czechoslovakia. He is preparing himself to do the same in Poland. France cowardly abandons her allies. Hitler has now created the Steel Pact, is allied with Italy and Japan, and craves world domination. This is very worrisome, as well as the edicts against German Jews. Where are we headed ?

Among French politicians, Paul Reynaud is the only one who would resist Hitler, and yet I don't like him. There are racist groups taking shape, such as « Action Française », proning violence, frighteningly fascist. I fear them even more than I fear the Socialists.

More pleasantly, I must get things ready for our family trip around France. I look forward to showing the girls some of my favorite monuments in Beaune, Vézelay, les Baux in Provence, etc... Annette at least will appreciate the beauty of our heritage. Flo may be too young yet.

**RIZOU** : « The sea, was it also made by engineers ? »

« No, it was made by God »

« Oh, He must be very tired, then ! »

**PIERRE** : The trip is fatiguing, but France is so beautiful. I am proud and happy to show it to the children. They are not too difficult : the girls sing, chatter, or sleep in the car. The hammock is a blessing for Rizou.

We were driving along the famous route Napoléon took during his « Hundred Days » march, in 1815. We had visited Françoise's sister and her family in Moutiers, in Savoie, and were going to Cap d'Ail, near Monaco, where Hélène owns a small cottage. We were planning to stop in Grenoble on the way, but were behind schedule : Françoise always wants to stop and visit this small church, or that renowned old castle. It was getting dark and suddenly a terrible storm took us by surprise, as we were on the most dangerous hairpin roads. A ball of fire was following the car, frightening even Annette, despite my explanations about the isolating virtues of my beloved Peugeot. The restaurant where, exhausted and tense, we stopped for dinner, refused to serve ham and mashed potatoes to Rizou, to which Françoise reacted with fierce complaints and threats of letters to the Michelin guide that had given the place a star.

Grenoble, the site of our young love, brought some respite. The children liked the new swimming pool, where Flo dived head first, without being pushed by Françoise, for once. Our time there would have been delightful if the news had been better. Hitler has now signed an alliance with Soviet Russia ! This is a very strange pairing, such different ideologies ! For us, it is certainly bad news. The war is becoming more likely every day.

**FLORENCE** : After our scary ride down the Alps, with a ball of fire following the car, we arrived at Cap d'Ail. Grand-mère Hélène was there, but I hardly saw her, there were so many people. There was singing and guitar and harmonica music under my window forever, it seems. I wonder whether people ever sleep, there.

Every time papa stopped the car, the parents went around, looking for newspapers, looking at posters on walls, questioning people about the latest news.

We are now in the house at Cier, with the smell of freshly cut hay, and cow dung. Grand-mère Alice and Marie-Rose were there when we arrived. We had to say bonjour, but quickly Annette and I put on some of the of the black wooden shoes at the back door , and went into the pré, she to climb the trees, I to catch grasshoppers.

When we had arrived, grand-mère had given papa a pile of mail, which he had taken upstairs. We were back in the kitchen when he walked down, pale, his face pinched. He called maman, and they both went upstairs. When they came down, they told us that they would both leave the next morning. Papa had to join his regiment, and maman had to help him get organized.

Everyone had forgotten that I would be turning eight years old the next day.

**ANNETTE** : Despite the heat outside and the fire in the fireplace, the house remains cool. There is a thick, blackened chain hanging in the fireplace, and some tripods sitting all around. Onto the chain hangs the black roundish pot in which there is always some warm water. On the tripods, more or less close to the fire, are the pots in which our dinner is cooking.

The trees in the « pré » are full of ripe fruit : what a pleasure ! The closet on the landing contains prize books papa, uncle Henri and tante Clo won when they were in school. They have a hard, red cover, and the edge of their pages is gilded. Most are a lot of fun, and often also interesting. The attic is full of treasures hidden away in dusty trunks. Flo and I have discovered a rattan pram for two which we took down. We can play with it.

All that makes up somewhat for the fact that we are being dumped here in Cier with grumpy grand-mère Alice. Papa is going to war. I hope nothing bad happens to him.

## Chapter two

### the « PHONY WAR » and the debacle

1939 - 1940

**FRANCOISE** : It was predictable. We knew that if the war did start, Pierre, although a forty-one year old reserve officer with three children, would be among the first called to arms. We had seen the number of his regiment posted on the walls of the towns we had travelled through. When, once in Cier, we found his order, he should already have been in Joigny. We left early the next morning for Soissons, leaving the children with Alice and Marie-Rose.

The trip was difficult, the roads encumbered by military convoys and panicked civilians. Anxiety was gripping me, and I wanted to be near Pierre as long as possible. I also wanted to prepare not only Pierre's pack, but also the house, just in case. I hope the war won't last long, and will end with our victory, which is what everyone expects. Pierre, although he doesn't say so, must fear for his beloved France, our beloved France.

I want to always know where he is, and follow him in my thoughts. In order to trick the military censors, we have devised a system : he will include in his letters, which will be carefully expunged by the censors, innocuous, sentimental-sounding sonnets. The first letter of the second word of each verse will spell the name of the town where his unit is camping.

How will life be without him ? What terrible things will he have to experience ? He is so sensitive ... He is brave also, it is true, and has already known war. He was at the front when his brother died in April, 1918.

As for me, I feel better in Soissons than in that uncomfortable house. In Cier, it is impossible to wash oneself properly. The bidet I had bought last year has, again, disappeared. I shall have to buy a new one, once more. What in the world do they do with it ? Does Berthe use it to feed her pigs ? I have to buy one every year !

How I would like to throw away all the horrible knick-knacks that catch dust all around that house, to clean everything, to install a decent bathroom, and to paint the walls, after pulling away the ugly wallpapers. The house could have some class, with its thick stone walls, its old granite kitchen sink, and its large fireplaces. I am sure there must be some beautiful old oak beams behind the plaster ceilings in the kitchen and the family room. But I must respect my in-laws' property, their lack of taste : all those trinkets won at fairs, priedieus, religious pictures, strange souvenirs such as that dog's head, and the crocodile, a gift from us admittedly, a souvenir from Africa, which is hanging over the landing, probably covered with inches of dust, under an Indian blanket.

It is strange that Alice, who came from a middle class family, should look more like a peasant than her husband, only one generation removed from the plough. She is smart, and

funny ; she is affectionate ; in fact, too much for my taste ; I don't like kissing, and she would do it every time one comes in or leaves, even for a few minutes.

In face of the war and what it is sure to bring, all this is so futile. I shall miss Pierre terribly.

**PIERRE :** I join my regiment (third Regiment of Colonial Artillery) at Joigny. The commander and I eye each other with some reserve. Between the professional military man and the reservist, the thoughts are often : « How will that colonel Blimp behave ? Will he be tough ? » and on the other side : « One more civilian who doesn't give a damn and takes us all for fools ».

I am in command of the sixth battery, the same number as when I was a second lieutenant, in 1918. Our canons are ready, the famed « 75 », but it is a 19th century weapon ; when we cross the Vosges mountains a few days later, we cannot fail to compare our 4 kms/hour with the 40 kms/hour of the German Panzer divisions in Poland.

We start to go eastward on a beautiful early September morning. It is a military convoy train, and we are told of our destination only little by little. The only event worth mentioning is not very glorious : three of our horses, poorly tethered, escape from the moving train, galoping through the countryside. We recapture them, wounded and useless.

Slo-slo-slo-slowly, we reach a small station in the Vosges around three a.m. Everyone is half asleep and my horse, stupid as this wonderful conquest of man often is, takes fright, and backs up ; he is going to turn towards me and I move away but I don't hold him well and he galops away along the rails.

« Who just broke his neck ? » asks a railroad man nearby.

« It is me, the captain ». He must have a great opinion of my riding abilities !

We keep moving slowly for several days. Most of the local men have served in the German military, and certainly make silent comparisons. At long last, we get to the front. We are less than three kilometers from the frontier, and shell the German village of Kroppen.

I am assisted by a lieutenant who is the typical professional officer, honest, very loyal, very straight. He helps me mostly with the paper work, inevitable, even at the front. I immediately notice a few things : we have no flashlight and we shall need some to plan our firings while in the shelters, assuming that those will hold. This also : by law, the soldiers were supposed to arrive with brogans, but here they are, some wearing espadrilles, others town shoes. They probably felt that coming was enough of an effort for them to make. I must take care of all that and round up from friends enough money to buy my men proper shoes, and flashlights.

I like my men. They are between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, healthy and with good morale. The only day they become rowdy is when the food takes too long to arrive.

After a few days, because the captain of the next battery doesn't get along with his officers and cannot control his unit, I am asked to take charge of it. There, the officers are very young : a school teacher with leftist opinions, energetic and direct, and a professional second lieutenant, handsome, energetic also, but sassy ; I shall have to rein him in. Sadly, my change of battery has also put me under the leadership of a shifty and disagreeable major : One of his relatives who snubs him is, like me, a graduate from the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées. He takes his revenge on me.

We are on the edge of a beautiful cluster of tall trees. I must prevent my men from cutting them down. First, it would be sad and besides, we need their protection from the enemy planes that often fly over us. The booming sound of the first shells we receive awaken old memories in me.

October fifteen, we are warned : Germany, having invaded Poland, will now attack us. We must get ready. We do, but nothing happens. Such alerts occur repeatedly. Is the enemy waging a war of nerves ?

One day, we are told to get in front of the Maginot Line. Shall we attack ? I shall learn later that, between Basel and Karlsruhe, there were only two German divisions. It would have been worth the try , even considering the obstacles of the Rhine and the Vosges. But

Gamelin is not Napoleon, nor Foch. While not being a military genius, he might have sensed that the enemy was not very aggressive, and that a French attack would disturb him greatly.

On this peaceful front, my men remain healthy but become drowsy. In order to supposedly maintain their morale, they are being pampered, distractions get organized, balls are bought, they play and get practically no training. The only thing that invigorates our bodies and our souls is the very cold winter.

After a month and a half at the front, we are sent away for some rest. In the village of Kirrberg, I am billeted with some kind people. Thanks to them, I am able to send for François, who will pass for one of their relatives and stay a few days. He has served in the German army, and I can sense his surprise at the laxity of French discipline.

**RIZOU** : I miss papa, but he will be gone a long time. He is far away in Germany, and there are many Germans, so it will take him a very long time to kill them all.

### Rizou on Flo' s lap



**FLORENCE** : Papa and maman are gone. Should I worry for papa ? War kills and maims. Papa's brother, maman's father, Anne de Guigné's father, all died because of the war. Anne must have prayed a lot for her dad. I shall too.

When I think of war, all I can see in my head is what I see in my history book, the Romans' defenses : sharp posts standing up in trenches, covered with branches, on which their enemies and their horses impaled themselves. I know war is no longer like that, but they still use horses. Joan of Arc was on a horse. Would I dare, like her, lead an army ? I don't think so, but she was older than I.

Meanwhile, Annette and I play with the pram for two. Rizou doesn't want to « play baby » in it, so I do, and Annette pushes me around. Rizou prefers to be a pirate, and wants to come with us on the « tambour », a sort of ruin in the garden, even though he needs our help to climb on it. Yesterday morning, when Marie-Rose complained that the mouse trap was still empty, he told her to hang a sign saying « mouse house » on

the trap ! He pretended he had seen the mouse and when we asked him what it looked like, he said it was checkered in black and white ! The other day, I don't remember what Annette had said or done that had made grand-mère Alice angry, but grand-mère was running after her around the kitchen table. It was very funny and very sad. Grand-mère doesn't run well. Marie-Rose killed a shrew in the wood shed. The poor little thing had done her no harm. And yet, Marie-Rose is not a bad person. I don't understand all those things. I suppose that eating meat is as bad as killing a shrew, and I do eat meat. Am I bad ? And the cows, said to be herbivores, certainly swallow some tadpoles when they drink from the trough at the top of the street. Confusing !

I am keeping some of those tadpoles in some water in a corner of my room. I would love to see them turn into frogs. When it rains, there are lots of great books, especially one with games and tricks. They are the prizes papa, tante Clo and oncle Henri won in school.

Suddenly one day, as we were playing in the yard, maman arrived. It was funny to see her looking so pretty, in a dusty rose suit, with high heel shoes, a hat with a veil, and gloves. I had grown used to see all the women dressed in dark cotton shifts, with black clogs

on their feet. It was a bizarre contrast. She came to take us back to Soissons, where school will start soon.

**ANNETTE** : What a cold winter ! Papa is gone, maman is in a bad mood and Marie-Rose whose fiancé is also at the war, is not much fun either. Flo is not too bad, but what a scaredy cat ! I have to beg her for hours before she'll climb with me on the garage roof. I have told her that the bogeyman lived in a house at the bottom of the boulevard (there is a hat on the hedge) and now she won't pass that house any more. Now, she is complaining of the noise made by planes at night.

When Marie-Rose's fiancé gets a leave, they will get married, and maman will become impossible again, with her obsession of cleanliness and order. I hope she'll find a new maid quickly !

At school, we were given each a soldier to correspond with. What can we put in those letters ? We know nothing about them, nor they about us. The worst is that we are supposed to knit for them. I don't have much patience for knitting, and to make it worse, we have to do it with yarn a horrible caca color. Khaki or caca, it's all the same. A ski mask is not too hard to make, but socks are a pain, and the worst are gloves ! My soldier has, I swear, the biggest feet in creation. We must do it, though, especially since we hear it is even colder there than here.

The other day, maman came while Flo and I were eating our breakfast in the kitchen. She told us that in times of war, we must be careful, and put as little sugar as possible in our café au lait, and butter on our bread. I thought Flo would faint ! She did not cry though, and yet she cries so often that we call her « Flo (flow) of tears ». Maman is beginning to stock cans of food in a closet that she calls her « scarcity » (disette). We mustn't open it.

There is a map of Europe on the living-room wall, behind the radio. There are different colored pins for each army, and I don't see them moving a lot. That is probably a good thing. I am less afraid for papa. My soldier says that he likes this calm. But monsieur Deshayes is now in a camp for prisoners of war.

**FLORENCE** : This war is beginning to spook me. There are planes flying and making noise at night ; they give me nightmares, which keep coming back. In one of them, at first everything is normal, we are all at the swimming pool, the sun is shining, we are having fun. Then, suddenly it is dark and everyone is gone ; I am alone holding onto the side of an empty pool, and I don't know where everyone is, or what I should do. In the other, I am with tante Clo, it is dark, there are trains with cars looking like metro cars, but the train is smoking. There are men holding big dogs, and tante Clo tells me to hide behind the bushes without making any noise. Both dreams scare me, but I don't tell anyone.

Now that I am eight, I am too old to play with my doll. In any case, Rizou dropped her and her beautiful eyes broke. Maman had them fixed, but they no longer shut when she lies down.

It is very, very cold. The other day, Rizou and I were walking down the back street. He began to cry that his hands were hurting, so I gave him my gloves to put over his. If God does have that big ledger, I hope this is duly noted. I felt almost as good as Anne de Guigné.

In school, Renée Collet and I are the best students in our class ; Colette D. is the worst. She has repeated several times, and is twelve years old. She comes to school with her blonde hair in curlers, so that she will be « pretty » on Sunday. (When does she wash her hair ?) So, the other day, Renée comes to me and says :

« Can you believe how dumb that poor Colette is, she still believes in Père Noël ».

I said that it was incredible, of course, but I still believed in him too ! I am furious that the parents have lied to me all those years, and I was stupid enough to trust them. I hate them ! The teacher was mean too : the other day, she said :

« I would rather have ten Renée Collets in my class than one Florence Pène ».

Even if I was talking, that was not a nice thing to say. And I had thought she liked me.

One good thing : we went to Paris and had dinner at tante Clo's. I love her dinners. They start with radishes, on which we dab a tiny bit of butter before dipping them in some salt. Then there is delicious food from Lenôtre, with sweet little milk breads, and there is always some pastry for dessert. I love pastry but maman doesn't. At home, the end of the meal is either some cheese or a piece of fruit.

**FRANCOISE** : Strange winter, strange war. There does not seem to be much activity on the front. Having experienced war before, I am beginning to collect food for a possible period of scarcity. The washerwoman's husband will build us a hutch where I'll have a few rabbits, so that we can always have some meat. He will also build a small enclosure in the back garden for a few chickens, so we won't lack for eggs. I shall plant lettuce and vegetables in our flower beds.

At the high-school, I am having the students rehearse a play that we will show, the proceeds going to the troops. The student actors will make their own costumes out of crepe paper. I love doing this. If I had not had ugly legs, I would have liked to become an actress.

I also volunteer for the Red Cross, where we gather and pack food for the POW's. I saw one of the women help herself to a bar of chocolate, claiming that, working there, she deserved it. A well-heeled woman. Such selfish lack of ethics is shocking, and very sad.

Pierre's news is disappointing. He has a hard time keeping up the morale of his idling troops. He is being sent right and left without knowing why. He was on the front in Alsace, then became an instructor at Mourmelon, before being sent to the General Headquarters of the First Army. There, he met General Giraud, who did not impress him much. After that, he was sent back to his regiment near the Belgian frontier, where he is now. I am glad we found this poetic way for me to always know where he is. So far, the censors are still blind.

The Belgians, Pierre says, won't let French troops enter their territory. I hope they won't have to find out whether the Germans ask for their authorization.

Marie-Rose will marry as soon as her fiancé is on leave, so I am looking for a replacement. I heard of a good candidate, Jeanine Molaye. Her parents are good people who would trust us with her. We will see.

Madeleine Deshayes is quite distraught, her husband being in a POW camp. She says they are terribly cold and hungry there. Annette Touzé and Jeanne Roy still have their husbands at home, the first because he must administer his district, the second because he has to operate on his patients. My Pierre is the only one facing danger.

The children are all right : Annette always rebellious and sassy ; Flo easier but slow, messy, dreamy, and fearful ; Rizou cute but a complainer, and very stubborn.

**PIERRE** : The campaign in Norway, more active than our front, displays the vigor, the brutality with which the Germans are waging it. In fact, the Allies have the advantage but when the main front collapses, they have to back up rapidly.

On the morning of May 10, early, we can clearly see German airplanes attack the airfield at St Omer. From where we are, the fireworks made by the tracer bullets seem harmless.

As we move towards Belgium and Holland, we hear ominous news. Our goal is presumptuous : to reach Breda beyond Antwerp. Giraud's army is the core of this move. It contains the best, most numerous, and best equipped troops. I am impressed mostly by the First Light Division, which exhibits remarkable behavior and equipment. It will fight bravely although the Panzer Divisions facing it are more powerful. We don't yet see the heavier armored divisions, one of which, the fourth, comes under de Gaulle's command at the end of the month.

We have crossed Antwerp and the river Scheldt (Escaut) when the total collapse of the Ninth Army (CORAP) in the Ardennes forces us to rapidly pull back. It is a southward



rush. The whole population is like a raging torrent. First, the civilians : young Belgian men who apparently could, should, be bearing arms ; why aren't they ? I see many of them on bicycles, carrying a red blanket : is it a signal of some sort ? Children block our way, pointing north. They should instead show the way to their king, who soon abdicates.

The southbound move is as fast as our northward progress had been. We cross Abbeville which is afire and we barely avoid capture as we cross the Somme at Pont-Marie.

We have just passed when a German group reaches the sea, cutting the Allied troupes in two segments, the northern one surrounded by the enemy. If our leaders had some nerve, they might attempt to reunite both segments but the Belgian army capitulates. Gamelin is replaced with Weygand. The latter is more concerned with maintaining some calm in the country than with winning any battle. The French cede territory everywhere.

We keep rushing south, Giraud has been captured, the news gets more and more disheartening. Several divisions are surrounded on the Cher. And yet the Cher is not a difficult obstacle to overcome ! And what is left of what is pompously called a division ? barely a few hundred men.

We reach St Junien, near Limoges, around June twenty. We have heard de Gaulle's call to Resistance, on the eighteenth. The professional military officers mostly jeered, while a good number of the reservists were moved by it.

**RIZOU** : to Anne Touzé :

« You must be sad, not to have children ? »

Touché. She cries.

**FRANCOISE** : Rizou has learned many songs, and renders them with a clear and well pitched voice. The other night, we had been invited to dinner by the « préfet » and his wife, in Laon. Rizou's reputation had preceded him, and he was asked by the préfet's wife to sing something. Was this little four year old impressed by the surroundings ? the slightly stuffy atmosphere ? What did he feel ? He declared that the only song he knew was the Marseillaise, and proceeded to sing it, with great success.

Our hosts told us that the Germans were approaching rapidly, and I should leave immediately with the children. Annette Touzé insisted that it would be criminal to expose the children to an imminent invasion, Pierre had asked her to make sure they were not. What business is it of hers ? She told the same thing to Jeanne Roy. Does she want to protect all our children because she does not have any ? What nerve !

To make things easier, Pierre's beloved Peugeot burned yesterday with the garage in which it was for a revision. Without a car, how could I escape ? I shall look for a second hand car. However, a check signed only by me (and not also by Pierre) is not valid. How can I pay ? What am I going to do ?

Even if I manage to bring the children and Marie-Rose to Cier, I must find out what Clotilde plans to do with her mother, who should also be sheltered. If things are as bad as they say, I must secrete certain things in a safe place, and find a car.

**CLOTILDE** : It looks like things are becoming quite bad. Françoise tells me that everyone encourages her to leave and put the children somewhere safe, Cier in this instance. She offers to take my mother with them. It is true that seeing the German army in Paris would crush her, not that it would be fun for me or anyone else. She would be well taken care of in Cier. Françoise's maid could probably give her the necessary attention , and I would be able to sleep an extra hour every day.



Clotilde getting out of the factory.

How can I organize this ? Françoise does not understand what my life is like : up at dawn (and long before dawn in winter) I wash and dress my mother and give her the medications she needs before my long bus ride to the factory. There, for five and a half days every week, I am the only woman (except for the secretaries) among all the back-biting men. Bank hours are the same ones I am at work, and it is difficult for me to withdraw money from my account, and even to deposit some. The shops are closed on Sunday, so I must do all my shopping on Saturday afternoons. I am fortunate that Léonie does the food shopping.

How can I get my mother to Soissons ? Pierre's car is destroyed, so Françoise cannot come and get her, and mother cannot take the train alone. I don't drive. However, Léonie might be able to take the train with mother. If the Germans are now at Amiens, they might get to Soissons to-morrow, and Paris next week, unless our military leaders wake up.

**FRANCOISE** : Through a friend of a friend, I was able to buy a small blue second hand car. This was very lucky. How long will it last ? Alice and Léonie will take a train to Cier, where Léonie will be glad to be safe and near her relatives. I shall drive the children there to-morrow and sign them up in the local schools. Annette will have to be a boarder at the high-school in St Gaudens. She has to bring an incredible amount of clothing and underwear, every piece of it marked with her name. This is very time consuming. Flo and Rizou will go to the Cier one-room school. I want to go back quickly to Soissons and prepare the house for a probable invasion. And it is not because the Touzé woman wants to get rid of me that I shall behave like a coward.

**FLORENCE** : It was still dark and chilly when maman woke us up and told us to get washed and dressed quickly, and quietly wait for her by the front gate. The three of us were there, blankets around our shoulders and probably not quiet enough, when a soldier came to check us out. He brandished his flashlight under our noses, and then, reassured that we didn't look like agents of the famous « Fifth Column », he left. Maman and Marie-Rose came and maman drove us to Cier.

There, we found grand-mère Alice and Léonie. Léonie left right away, to go in her family. I am glad, because she pinches our bottoms, to be friendly. I hate that.

Rizou and I go to school on the other side of the village. All the classes are in one large room. The little ones, Rizou among them, are in the front row, the big kids who prepare their « certificat d'études primaires » are in the back, and I am about in the middle. I wonder why the teacher never asks me to read out loud (I did it often in Soissons) ; is it because I speak « sharp », as they say here ? Marie-Rose heard a girl ask her mother the other day, speaking of me :

« Why does she say mon-mon to her mamaing » ?

There are other strange things here : the teacher, before letting us in, checks everyone's hands and hair for cleanliness. It was never done in Soissons. In Soissons, we studied the big river Seine and the big city Paris ; here, the big river is the Garonne, and the big city, Toulouse. Here, we study local plants and animals. I never did that in Soissons.

Our first cousin Armand Lagille has come to live with us and also goes to school. He is nice, and we play together. We go fishing in brooks with baskets and broken bottles, which we are told is illegal. The other day, our little fish were fried for dinner !

One of the big boys had to draw chickens on the blackboard the other day. He drew very well. His name is Marcel Milan. He has dark curly hair, and is very handsome. Milan and Florence, this is a sign. We were predestined. I think I am in love. Once I went to watch someone's cows with him. He showed me how to ride behind a cow, holding onto her tail, feet against her behind. Doesn't it hurt her ? And what if she drops some dung right then ?

Marcel wasn't one of the children I was playing with last week. We were playing hide and seek at some house. I was in the hay loft hiding behind a bale when a boy came and put his hand in my pants. Furious, I ran out, and told the others what he had done. They seemed shocked by my reaction, not by what he had done !

Marcel, whose father works in a silkworm farm, gave me two cocoons. He told me that if I kept them nice and safe in a warm place, I might one day see them fly away. I had put them on some cotton on the shelf above the kitchen fireplace, in a safe corner. One day, they were gone ! I asked everyone, and nobody knew where they were. Armand looked uncomfortable though, so I bothered him until he confessed that he had planted them ! He thought a bush would grow, with silk things on the branches ! And he is eleven years old !

When Armand left to go back home in Savoie, the teacher made me clean up his desk, where papers, pencils and erasers were swimming in the juice of rotten plums. Yuck ! Are all boys like that ?

Yesterday, the teacher had the radio on during class, and suddenly burst into tears and sent us home. There, I found grand-mère, Marie-Rose, and maman (who had come back) crying in the kitchen. I had never seen a grown-up cry before.

I hear they all cry because France has capitulated. We have lost the war.

I am not sure what is going on, but maman took Annette and me to the attic. She showed us a stone in the wall which can be removed, and the small bag with some jewels she has hidden behind it. She showed us also that she has hidden our silver flatware in another bag, in the old bread oven, behind the « garage ». We must talk to no one about this.

# Chapter three

## Foreign occupation – the beginning

1940 – 1941

**ALICE** : What sadness, what shame ! How hard it is to swallow. All our suffering, all our sacrifices, my poor Henri's life among many others, all those poor boys who have lost their limbs, their face (the « gueules cassées »), their lives, all that was for naught. The grief of the women who loved them, that was also for naught. The terrible blood letting, more than half of France's young men lost in that « war to end all wars » but, at that price, had regained Alsace and Lorraine and some pride, that was for naught.

We have now lost everything : not only Alsace and Lorraine, but the whole northern half of the country and, worse yet, we have lost honor. Pétain is older than I, the silly man ! He wants to govern the country ? He makes it « a gift of his person » !? What a gift ! What can he do under German rule ? He was a hero during the last war but now he is nothing but a babbling old fool. What is happening to us, my God ? Or rather, where are You ?

Here in Cier, the people don't care, as long as their men are coming back. Their personal interest is all that matters to them. This infuriates Françoise as much as it does me.

Pierre is back. He is the most unhappy of us all. Thinner than ever, he is in a somber mood. He feels that he has lost face, that the whole country has. He was ready to fight, and was not really permitted to do so.

Françoise, more relaxed now that Pierre is back, was just as morose when she came back from Soissons. There, she had found her house completely wrecked, her designer furniture damaged, dirt everywhere, even feces in vases and light fixtures. Why do soldiers do such terrible things ? She had had to clean all this up and was exhausted when she arrived. The cleanliness and aesthetics of her abode are very important to her.

They will soon leave for Soissons again, so that the girls can start the school year. I shall stay in Cier with Léonie who is coming back. I hope that some quiet time here, memories of better days with Louis and the children, will bring me some peace. I must accept the will of God with humility. Clotilde understands this.

**FLORENCE** : Papa came back, and how disagreeable he is !

I had noticed a new atomizer in the « bathroom ». Marie-Rose told me that it was a gift from maman to papa, to greet him upon his return. Curious to know its price, I picked it up to look underneath. It was heavier than I had expected, and it fell. Catastrophe ! What to do ? I thought of picking up the pieces and dropping them in one of the fishponds. I could then pretend I had never seen the darn thing. However, if I wanted to be as good as Anne de Guigné and brave as Joan of Arc, I thought I'd better fess up. So I picked up the pieces and

went to the vegetable garden where everyone was. The women were sitting down, mending, knitting or reading, but papa was near the entrance, fitfully working the soil with a spade. I opened my hands to show him. He said nothing but hit my face so hard that I fell down flat. ... Papa who, unlike maman (whose slaps are daily fare) had never laid a hand on me !

He deserved punishment, and I decided to no longer speak to him. But it is not easy to pout for too long, and even though he said nothing, I could see that he was sorry. When, a few days later, the parents asked me what had happened, I told them, and they didn't seem to believe me. I think that it is a good idea to tell the truth. I shall no longer lie. If you tell the truth, you don't risk getting mixed up and forgetting what you said before, and you have a clear conscience. It then becomes their own business whether or not they believe you.

To-morrow, we go back to Soissons. Maman says she had some terrible cleaning up to do there, after the soldiers went through Soissons. I shall miss Marcel.

**ANNETTE** : Life has become quite different. We are not allowed on the ground floor, where two German soldiers are living. This keeps me out of what was supposed to become, at last, my own private bedroom, down by the front door. So, here I am, having to share again a room with Flo and Rizou, a bed with Flo who kicks me during the night. Rizou's small bed with high sides fits against one wall. I am glad that we have in our new room the sculpture I like, « la belle inconnue », and a copy of Boticelli's « le Printemps » on our wall.

The middle, larger room, which was the one Flo and I slept in before, has become the family living-room. We are to keep our radiators shut so our only heating is in that room : a small charcoal stove which is very difficult to get started. When it does work, it creates so much smoke that, coughing, our eyes smarting and noses dripping, we have to open the windows. We don't get much heat from it, but the Germans downstairs do burn charcoal in the furnace and a little of their warmth wafts up the stairs.



Pierre, Françoise, Flo, Claude Touzé ; Mr. Touzé and Annette in the back.

I am now in eighth grade. Flo has, once more, ended the school year with the « prix d'excellence ». Not only that : the principal of her school had the fourth graders take the entrance exam for sixth grade, Flo was the only student in the school to succeed, so the parents were begged to let her enter sixth grade. She just turned nine years old.

Something has changed for the better : Maïten, my friend from Abyssinia, lives with us. She has a job as a teacher apprentice in Soissons. At long last, someone I can talk with ! In the evening and on Sundays, we often gather in Jeanine's room, where nobody will bother us. Both Maïten and Jeanine are a little older than I, but we get along, and can talk about boys and things. We can also read the women's romantic magazines Jeanine buys, that maman doesn't allow us to have.

Since the kitchen, downstairs, is out of bounds for us, we eat our dinners with the Roys in whose house Germans are also billeted, at the Touzés. Every family brings the food they can. After dinner, the parents sometimes chat or play bridge too long, forgetting curfew time. Then, we have to stay and sleep at the « préfecture ». Madame Touzé always has a dripping nose, and wipes it with her table napkin !

The Touzés have adopted a boy Rizou's age, Claude. He is cute, with a round face, skin the color of caramel, eyes as black as his hair. The two boys do play well together, and with the Touzés dog, a scottish terrier, Clovis.

The house has become something like a factory : in the wash space of the basement, we make soap : real soap, not the plasterlike thing the stores sell as soap, nowadays. Tante Clo provides us with the lye, and maman finds the fat somewhere. In the heating space of the basement, we make briquettes : old newspapers are soaking in water with some flour or glue, and we pack them tight into one or two inch balls. When they are completely dry, they serve as combustible in our small charcoal stove. We also melt butter when we find some and pour it into jars , because it keeps longer that way. When there are eggs, we dip them in

paraffin, which also permits them to last for a while. Butter and eggs have become very precious.

**PIERRE** : One hears much talk about General de Gaulle who is gaining prestige, not only for his call to resistance on June eighteen, 1940, but also for his stand after Mers el Kébir. Poor vanquished France, on whom everyone likes to pounce now. Soon, Japan will start, and then Hitler will tighten his grip more and more. Among other ways of diminishing us, he envisions the creation of a « Flemish » state comprised of Belgium, Holland, and northern France down to the river Ailette. This would be an efficient way to amputate the country from its richest provinces ! The most shocking and saddest thing is that after the war, Roosevelt, whose name is now that of one of Paris' most beautiful streets, pursued that plan !

Back in Soissons, I work again as a Public Works engineer. My boss, M. Boutet, shattered by our defeat, has been transferred to Mâcon. I am asked to replace him and become chief engineer for the « département » in Laon as of January, 1941. The German officer/engineer supervising our service is correct, and our rapport is courteous enough. I am glad for the opportunity to practice speaking German, even though his French is not bad.

The general situation is not improving, however. Each district (« préfecture ») must make a list of the Jews living within it, and stamp this appellation : « Juif » on their ID's. Françoise now has a new ID, bearing only the second half of her maiden name, Lévy-Neumand. Now, every « préfet » has the right to intern « his » foreign Jews. Since the beginning of October, Jews are no longer authorized to work in public administration, the media, or the film industry.

How far is this going to go ?

1940 will have been a very sad year, a year of shame and humiliation, and now of restrictions and limitations. I am afraid 1941 is beginning under frighteningly dark skies.

**FRANCOISE** , although armed with her new ID, was getting more and more concerned : the definition of who was officially Jewish was someone having three or four Jewish grandparents, or only two if one was married to a Jew. How long would her Pyrenean family name and long standing French citizenship, as well as her newly acquired Catholic religion protect her ?

Her mother Hélène and two of her uncles were still in Paris. Should they leave and hide somewhere ? Where ? Françoise's sister, Elizabeth, also married to a Catholic man, lived in the so-called « free zone » of France, and thus was safe for now. Françoise did not care what may happen to her brother Alain.

It was difficult to evaluate the potential danger. It was painful enough to live under the control of those Teutons who daily paraded proudly on the streets. Their red and black flags with the swastika were hanging from every monument, and for every official request, one had to go and crawl at the « Kommandantur ». She hoped she never would have to do so.

She and Pierre had decided that for the duration of the occupation, they would attend no theater performance, do no dancing, would seek no amusement of any kind, not even painting for Françoise, to express their sorrow and grief.

Of course, the theater project at school had to be pursued, since the money was needed for the POW's.

**FLORENCE** : When I have children, I shall not be as stern as maman.

These days, my piano teacher has me woking on a Chopin waltz. I like it very much, lively and gay at times, and sometimes as sad as I feel. How could Chopin create such beauty ? He must have been quite unhappy a lot of the time !

If I am sad, it is for several reasons : Annette spends her time with Jeanine and Maïten, and remembers me only to gripe about the way I bother her at night in bed. I try very

hard to squeeze myself between the bed and the wall (where it is even a little less cold, between those frozen sheets, in that frozen room) but I know that I move in my sleep : when we sleep at the « sous-préfecture » because of the curfew, it often takes me some time to figure out where I am when I wake up in the night, with my feet where my head should be. It is very scary, not to find the light and not to know where you are.

Annette is too old for me now that she is fifteen. Rizou, who is five, now has Claude with whom to play and in any case, he is too small.

I am sad also because I am no longer a shining star at school. I no longer await eagerly the report cards we are handed weekly. I now have a different teacher for each subject. The latin teacher is a terror. He is said to have once taken a boy out of a classroom by his hair, after having thrown his school book bag out the window. The English teacher is nicer.

Part of the building is occupied by German troops. On the first day of school, soldiers were lined up along the path we would follow to enter our classroom after roll call. They were offering pencils, fountain pens, erasers, compasses, all sorts of wonderful and very tempting things. Maman gets very angry when I lose my fountain pen. Those men looked nice, and it was difficult to refuse, but I knew that refusing was what honor dictated. Thank heavens, my friends didn't take anything either.

Every day, some groups of German soldiers, spiffy in their grayish green uniforms, parade down our back street, goose-stepping, and singing beautiful songs, in harmony. I know I should hate them, but they make beautiful music. The French soldiers we saw before didn't look and of course didn't sound, half as good.

Life in general is very sad : the windows are painted navy blue, for civil defense, and decorated with bands of glued paper, in case of bombings. The stove doesn't give us any heat to speak of, we don't have much to eat, and every one is sad, worried, and grumpy.

Thank heavens for Chopin, and God : I go to catechism on Thursdays. It is very easy, and not very smart. We only need to learn questions and their answers by heart. I read them once and I know them. On Sundays, the parents stay in bed while we go to mass. The cathedral is beautiful but oh, so, so, so cold ! After mass, Maïten offers us some pastry from the shop across the cathedral, and some of their delicious « sucre tors », their specialty.

**RIZOU :** Things are better in Soissons than in Cier. In Soissons, there is a man who makes God sing. (the organist).

**CLOTILDE :** It is interesting to see how easily one can learn a foreign language. I don't see much of the occupying forces (even though they control what goes on in the factory, of course). However, I already know : « nein, schnell, verboten, heraus, erzats » and other such words, which we often hear with harsh tones.

My work is made more difficult by the fact that my boss is dumb. It is no fun to be surrounded only by men, whom I find lacking in many ways. One of them has been courting me but since I am higher than he in the organizational chart, I suspect him of being more interested in my salary than in me.

The edicts against Jews are worrisome. I don't have any particular love for them, but they should be allowed to live like anyone else. Since October thirty, every store owned by Jews must have a sign stating it in the window. It will be a problem for Françoise's cousin and her husband, Denise and Alex Lévy, who sell work clothes in the fourteenth « arrondissement ». Alex has found someone he trusts who will affix his name to the business, and has asked me if I might take his investment portfolio under mine eventually. He also asked whether, if the need arises, he and his family could hide in our house at Cier. I checked with maman and we accepted, of course. If I ever add his investments to mine for the duration, I hope no one checks how or why I suddenly became so prosperous.



I also worry about Françoise and the children. Of course, Françoise didn't register as Jewish as she was supposed to, but everyone in Soissons knows her origins. Even if people don't talk with malevolent intentions, all it takes sometimes to ruin a family is a careless word. By the way, I feel somewhat guilty. The other day, I had lunch with Pierre and his German counterpart in a nice Paris restaurant. When Pierre went to the bathroom, the German officer asked me whether the rumor was true that Françoise was Jewish. I knew he and Pierre had normal, cordial relations, and felt I could trust him, so I acquiesced. I hope this will have no negative effects.

I find it very difficult to protect mother from the cold. She suffers from it intensely since she cannot move much. Even though I move more than she, I suffer also. The chilblains on my fingers have already caused two of my fingernails to fall off. It hurts, and nothing helps.

Every night, I pray and read a page of the « Imitation of Christ », from which I get guidance and comfort.

**RIZOU** : While I am small, I wouldn't mind being a girl, but when I am big, I want to be a man so that I can kill Germans. First I want to kill Hitler. All I need is a gun.

I also want to piss further than Claude who beat me to it again yesterday. He gets on my nerves. I also want to trip a car. I often put my foot on the edge of the sidewalk but when a car comes, there is always someone to pull me back ! It is a pain to be small. I want to grow up fast and have beautiful legs, with muscled calves, like Annette.



Annette et Florence challenging René Roy

# Chapter four

## RESISTANCE : BEGINNING

1941 - 1942

**PIERRE** : Very early, I try to find a way to fight the occupying forces. My main motivation is patriotic ; soon I also feel ashamed by the Vichy anti-Jewish edicts.

André Boulloche is now one of my engineers and gives me the name of someone I can get in touch with. I have to go to 67, rue de la Boétie and ask a Mr. Dacré for Lawrence's « The Seven Pillars of Wisdom .»

Entering an unknown building for the first time, to meet someone who will help you enter a resistance organization is somewhat unnerving. Everything seems mysterious, potentially treacherous. Who knows what ? Who guesses and is ready to denounce ?

Dacré, prudence personified, leads me to Blocq-Mascart. This man is older than I, has a very semitic, and intellectual, look. He is relaxed enough to have his office in the building « Kraft durch Freude ». He too, gives me the names of other people to get in touch with. One of them is Deconinck with whom I shall work until my arrest. It is through Deconinck that I get to know Roland Farjon, a handsome and elegant industrialist, whose alias was Dufor in the resistance. I shall have more to say about him, alas.

My first missions are to gather as much information which might be useful to the Allies as possible, and to build a team of trustworthy and motivated men in my department, « Aisne .»

The framework is easily found : I am the chief engineer of Public Works and as such, distribute the « Ausweis », precious travel permits. My staff cover the whole « département » and have good relations with the local population. Discreetly, I try to find out who among them are likely to join me in this subterranean fight. In fact, they all would be sympathetic but some are afraid, others too old. Despite this, I soon gather a good team. We are helped by the fact that we travel all around, for the benefit of the Germans : what a marvellous cover !

Every week, I go to Paris to give Deconinck the information we have gathered. As the purveyor of the « Ausweis », I have the authorization to travel by car or train, and go out of my department.

**HÉLENE** : Françoise is so harsh ! Where does she get that trait ? My mother Ida was quiet and totally submissive to her husband Jules Bloch who was, truth be told, a power of nature. He forbade me to marry the young man I loved, a Goy. But as domineering and

authoritarian as he may have been, he was not like Françoise, who talks without thinking, unaware of the wounds she might inflict.

The other day, I had not even entered her house and was still on the threshold when she exclaimed :

« What is that ridiculous little hat you are wearing ? »

and declared she didn't ever want to see it again. She often criticizes the way I dress. Clothes do matter much to her. This is more like my sister Eugénie. Françoise also grumbles as soon as I take my knitting out, which « makes a mess. » Why should a home always be impeccable, like a museum ?

Since they live in the Provinces, Françoise and Pierre have access to food that we, Parisians, never see. Françoise is generous and sometimes gives me some butter, a few eggs, potatoes, or other marvels. Of course, I share these treasures with people who are more unfortunate than I. How did Françoise find out ? She scolds me for feeding those foreign Jews who are in hiding and have no ration cards. I tell her that what she gives me becomes mine, for me to do what I want with it. This infuriates her.

She is hard on her children also. I asked Flo the other day what she thought about it. She said that things were fine as far as she was concerned, but if she were Annette, she would have run away long ago. It is true that Annette is very independent and sassy with her mother. Wouldn't some gentleness work better than Françoise's discipline ? I agree with J.J. Rousseau, and think that nature is good, and we should often let things happen on their own.

I must confess that this is the way I raised my children, and the results are not that wonderful : Françoise is hard and narcissistic. Alain, pretentious and unstable, sires lots of children he is unable to feed. How many times have I had to pull him out of trouble, with my meager resources ? He and Françoise hate each other. Thank heavens Elizabeth, the oldest of the three, is easier to be with. She is not nearly as pretty, intelligent, stylish, or fun, as her sister, but she is more even tempered.

She and her husband, a decent man, are inviting me to go and live with them. I am tempted to accept. Paris is becoming dangerous for Jews.

## FRANCOISE :

To : Elizabeth Lagille  
Moutiers, Savoie

My dear Elizabeth,

I write you quickly, before all that we are allowed to use for correspondence between the « free » and the occupied zones become pre-printed cards, with minimal information (such as « mother is ill », or « we are all well »), which one either accepts or rejects with check marks. I hear that will start next month.

Life in the occupied zone is becoming ever more difficult. I think that you know our distant cousins, the Franckels. They are now wearing the yellow star. Fortunately, his reputation as a great dermatologist makes him indispensable to the German army, so they can remain at home. However, that yellow star restricts their every activity. They are forbidden all public spaces. ( Some people remain decent : one former patient of Dr. Franckel, crossing him on the street, embraced him, saying how sorry he was about the current situation). Their older son is a POW in Germany. The younger one, Biqui, a brilliant high-school student, is a delightful kid. He also must wear the hated star.

We are beginning to wonder what we should do. Everyone in Soissons knows that I am Jewish, and some people have made obnoxious remarks that worry me a little. Pierre has been promoted to chief engineer, working at Laon. Laon is in a « forbidden zone », where regular civilians like us are not allowed. It would be easier for us to become anonymous in a large city. Should we move ? Pierre, as you may have guessed, is involved in dangerous activities. Anything can happen to us at any time. What to do ?

If I am arrested and questioned, I want to be able to say that I have no idea of what Pierre is involved in ; he is sick and in a sanatorium in « Savoie », and I also suspect him of having a mistress. This is where you can be very helpful to us : If Pierre sends you cards that

are addressed to me, can you please send them back to me, so that they bear the postal stamp of Savoie ? This might, one day, save our lives. I am sure you will agree to do it.

I hope that you all are well, taking advantage of the beautiful scenery around you. I hear that maman might move in with you ? This would be great, and she has always loved the mountains. She has not registered her name on the lists of Jews, of course, but she is too careless, and lets strange people take advantage of her good heart.

Love and kisses,  
Your sister Françoise

**FLORENCE** : I got scared last night. Even Annette was not too proud ! There were no grown-ups at home and the three of us were in bed, ready to go to sleep when the door bell rang. Annette and I went downstairs in our pajamas and slippers. We saw a German soldier at the door, a big rifle on his back, showing in sign language that he wanted to go upstairs. He was old and didn't look too mean, and in any case, we had no choice, so we showed him in. All he wanted was to check that all the curtains were tightly shut, to satisfy civil defense rules. We breathed a big sigh of relief !

At school, now we have to learn some stupid songs like « Marshall, here we are, facing you, France's savior, we swear ... ». Under my breath, I replace « marshall » with « general », thinking of de Gaulle. We are also made to do large group exercises in the yard. The walls along the street are covered with posters full of propaganda, lies such as : the hereditary enemy of France is perfidious Albion (meaning England) and Germany is a friend. I tore up one of them. Someone saw me and reported it to the police. It went all the way up to Mr. Touzé, who told the parents. They didn't seem to be angry, but told me to be careful.

I don't like our sewing classes, and will never know how to put a good-looking patch into a worn sheet. The first-aid classes, however, are interesting and might become useful. Another new thing I like is the distribution of vitamin cookies in school. Some of the big girls in the class don't like them and give me theirs. I eat them all.

Last night, at dinner, the parents asked us some strange questions :

« Do some of your classmates make comments about Jews ? Does anyone talk about your being of Jewish descent ? ». Annette said that, indeed, some of her classmates had talked of her having a Jewish nose. I said that I had heard nothing.

« The Cahen girl, who is in your class, does she still go to school ? » I didn't know ; She is not one of my friends, and I noticed nothing. The parents have heard some unpleasant remarks, especially coming from their dentist, Mr. D.

Meanwhile, the rabbits in their cage are very cute. It is sad to think that they are there to get eaten when big enough. When maman isn't home, I take a little brown one, my favorite, into her salads in the garden. He likes lettuce much better than carrots.

The most important thing at home now has become the radio. After dinner, we turn it on, very low because it is forbidden to listen to the BBC. This is what we listen to because the official « Radio Paris » gives us all the lies the Germans want us to believe. « Les Français parlent aux Français » is the program on the BBC. It is hard to hear it because it is so low, and because it is jammed by the Germans. We listen to the news, and then there are all sorts of strange messages, like : « the blue bicycle has arrived », or « the rabbit has three legs », etc. We have decided that if papa ever wants to send us a message, it will mention Jericho. This is because when papa wakes up in the morning, he blows his nose very noisily, and we tease him, saying that he would make the walls of Jericho fall down.

**CLOTILDE** : Life is not easy these days. Between the three of us, mother, Léonie and me, our three ration cards, two A's and one V allow us (when and if it is available in the store) almost one pound of meat and two ounces of fat (butter would be the best, but rarely shows up) per week. The allowances of bread are slightly more generous, but what is called bread looks like it is made with more saw dust than cereal. The so-called soap feel more like

plaster and washes nothing, and what passes for coffee is really roasted barley and has no taste. Now we need coupons to buy clothes, shoes, practically everything. One has to wait in line for every item, and I am thankful for Léonie who often shops for us. I am also fortunate to have Pierre who, through his friends in the countryside, can add some goodies to our regular fare.

Mother, who was always a good cook, eats every horrible looking thing Léonie has managed to find, and is still hungry. She is sad, and cold. I wanted to knit a cardigan for her, but now one needs special coupons for yarn. These are distributed only to pregnant women. One day, during recess at the factory, I was sharing this concern of mine with the other women there, all of them secretaries. One of them, a pretty young thing, exclaimed :

« I have coupons, and I don't need them, my sister-in-law has given me enough clothes for my coming baby. I can give you mine. » This was awfully nice, and I told her so, but then I began to worry about the color. My mother has worn nothing but black since Henri's death. How would she react if I made her a sweater in layette colors ? She would not wear it ! So it was with some apprehension that I went to a yarn shop, with several months worth of coupons, asking for 500 grams of knitting yarn. The shop-keeper assumed that I was pregnant, since I had coupons. She sadly exclaimed :

« Ah, my poor lady, I would really love to help you, but all I have is black ! You surely don't want to dress your baby in black ! » I assured her that my baby wouldn't mind at all, trying not to show how relieved I was. What a lucky break that was !

When she is less cold, mother might also be less sad. I must say that I am not very joyful either : I am totally exhausted. Now, I not only have to wash and dress her morning and night, before and after my day's work, but she also needs shots in the middle of the night, and never seems pleased with all I do for her. On top of that, my boss at work is very difficult, and the German control of everything we do is getting to feel heavier and heavier. My God, please help me accept Your will.

The Lévy's are now installed at Cier. I am a little afraid of potential damage, considering that they have three young children. I have also temporarily absorbed Alex' investments in my portfolio, hoping that my sudden wealth won't attract any undue attention. I can surmise that Pierre does things that are not quite legal, but don't ask questions. I know the occupation by the enemy is very hard for him to swallow.

One piece of good news : Antoinette Dalin, private secretary of the police « préfet » of Paris has given me tickets (in the préfet's loge !) for a play by Paul Claudel. I shall invite Flo to join me.

**FRANCOISE** : Since June second, besides all the professions already forbidden them, Jews are now also prevented from practicing any liberal, commercial, artisanal, or industrial profession. How can anyone survive ? feed a family ? Last month, 3,700 foreign Jews were arrested in Paris, by French police. How shameful ! Now, Jews are expected to sign up on lists, even in the so-called « free zone ». I am glad maman is in Savoie, she is so careless. She loves mountains, and should be happy there. My poor legs still painfully remember the hikes she used to take us on in the Alps when we were children !

I would never sign up on any of the lists of Jews, of course. We will see what happens. Some friends have asked me to transport and deliver some dangerous documents for them. I am glad to do it. They belong to a group different from Pierre's. I am so pleased he is involved. I was afraid that, legalistic as he is, he wouldn't respond to de Gaulle's call to resist. Can we really help ? make a difference ? I hope so. The only piece of news that now gives me some hope is that Hitler has attacked the USSR. If the Russian winter vanquished Napoléon, it might do Hitler in also ?

At home, life is not easy. Annette, 15 years old, doesn't have her periods yet. Dr. Roy tells me not to worry. Still very independent, she is less disagreeable these days. Maïten's presence is good for her. Our farmer friends make it possible for us to eat better than most, at normal, and not black market (which I abhor) prices, and we can help Clo somewhat.

What shall we do this summer ? The children enjoy Cier, where they would eat normally, but the Lévy's are there, and what a crowd that would be ! They have a new baby, Rolland, and Bruneau who is a little younger than Rizou, besides Claudie, a little younger than Flo. If we go, we won't stay long. In any case I don't want to stay too long away from Soissons where that she-cat in heat, Anne Touzé, would chase after Pierre.

**FLORENCE :** For once, the sweaters grand-mère knitted for us are nice, even though Annette's and mine look alike. Beige with vertical lines of different colors, they are the right sizes and will keep us warm next winter. I shall be in seventh grade. I shall also prepare my First Communion, which will be the most beautiful day of my life.

I want to reach Nirvana, complete detachment. If maman dies, I won't care. If papa dies, I shall be indifferent. If Annette, Rizou or anyone dies, it will mean absolutely nothing to me. Detachment, and peace.

This past summer of 1941 was spent in two parts. The Soissons part was as usual : swimming practice, hide and seek at Alain's, weeding in the Touzés' garden, because their gardener is a prisoner of war. One day, we had been asked to pick currants : red, pink and white, and even black currant. I worked at it conscientiously. At dinner, the currants were distributed for dessert, with less for the children, assumed to have helped themselves while picking. I was furious because, working for the community, I had not eaten a single one ! I guess I had been too honest. Being good is not always rewarded.

The Cier part of the summer was different because the Lévy's were there. It was very tight, and Annette and I had to share a narrow bed in the small room that opens up to the attic and looks over the pré. Grand-mère kept grumbling about the noises that prevented her from sleeping at night. No wonder !

When I get up at night to take a leak, once I have figured out where I am and where everything is, I have to find the match box in the dark and light a candle, afraid that it is visible by the people in the room below, because the floor boards have some space between them, in spots. The door squeaks when I open it, and I try not to make the stairs crack too much, tip-toeing down. The worst door is that one, leading to the landing : the latch makes a terrible noise. The landing is not too hard to go through, but the stairs leading to the kitchen have to be handled carefully : some of the steps creak badly. There are a few unstable boards in the kitchen floor, but that door, leading to the corridor, is all right. However, the door to the water room grates noisily against the floor, and its hinges squeak. Then, I have to turn the keys of the back door of the water room, without letting the keys rattle too much. Once outside, it is bad luck if there is some wind or rain, because the candle might just die on you. You have to cross the « garage » and finally get to the toilet, thank heavens now a real one with a flush, and no longer the horrible hole in a board over a mess, that stank so badly in the old days. Once done, you have to do the whole thing in reverse. How can one not awaken everybody ?

I looked for a solution. In the attic, I found some old earthenware pots that I thought could serve as chamber pots. Sadly, I soon had to admit that if they were dry in the morning, it meant that they leaked : evaporation doesn't work that fast. Denise, who slept in the room below us with the children, had questions about the wet streaks along her wall... I then tried to do my thing on the outside windowsill of my room, but once more, Denise understood what that wetness was. It is a good thing she is not as stern as maman. Claudie has told me that after she gets too angry, she even apologizes to her children ! A mother apologizing to her children ! It is hardly believable.

Despite all those problems, we had fun. Annette tried to have Bruneau do abdominal and other exercises with us, but she didn't have much success with that.

The power was often cut off, and then we used the old oil lamps, or candles. We had problems also with the water that often did not run, so the « garage » was always full of pots, basins, and containers of all sorts to collect rain water. I often had to go up the road to the

trough with watering cans to fill up. They were heavy on the way back home ! I felt like Cosette, in « les Misérables. » .

For the meals, there were many of us around the big, heavy, carved oak table, which matched the old buffet I find very beautiful, with people sculpted in it, looking so real. Even though we were in the country we were hungry, perhaps because the Lévy's, in hiding, had no food coupons. One day, opening the metal box containing our precious reserve of cookies, we found that they had been too close to the box containing our precious reserve of kerosene, and they stank. We ate them just the same, and divided the last one in twelve parts. When we discovered that our precious reserve of honey had been invaded by ants, we ate it. It was interesting, the ants tasting acidic, mixed with the sweet honey. They gave us some protein, just like when we ate the apples of the pré with the worms inside.

On Sundays, we have a reserved place in the church near the altar, and it bothers me. Practically everyone else is in the nave, the women on the ground floor, their heads covered with hats or more often black lace « mantillas ». The men are in the back on a sort of platform, and spend their time eying the girls and snickering. The old harmonium whizzes while some women screech out of tune. It makes me want to laugh, and block my ears.

The train ride back to Soissons was long, hot and unpleasant. If you tried to cool off and put your head out the window, your face was blackened by the smoke, and you risked getting embers in your eyes. The toilets had neither water nor paper, and stank, but it was fun to see the ground, through the hole, speeding past. There were often people standing in the corridors. The stop at Vierzon, between the two zones, was long : policemen went all along the train, verifying everyone's papers.



Now, in Soissons, Maïten is still with us, but the two German soldiers are gone, and we can use the downstairs again. Maman is sad that they have damaged her beautiful and rare dining-room table, and her rugs, made from Ethiopian monkey skins.

#### Rizou and Bruneau Levy playing soldiers in Cier

The other day, René Roy had told us some ghost stories, so, the parents being out, we decided to frighten Rizou. I climbed on René's shoulders, and held a heavy chain and a flashlight. Annette covered us with a big white sheet, and shut the lights. I tried to make ghostly, scary noises. Rizou, not quite six years old, instead of running away screaming as we had hoped, started fighting and kicking the ghost ! What guts ! And poor René !

Since I am on the topic of Rizou, I must mention that he is a sleep-walker, and it can be funny. Once, in his sleep, he started to ride his scooter, which we had brought inside to protect it from the rain. Another time, we turned on the light when he got up, and saw this : he took one of his slippers, peed in it, then put it on his pillow. He then did the same thing with the other slipper, and went back to bed. We were so stunned that it took us a while to realize what had happened, and to put his wet slippers on the floor by his bed !

**FRANCOISE** : Last night during dinner, as we were talking about current events, Maïten declared that she could not understand how everyone was not doing something to fight the Occupant. Of course, this nineteen year old was judging and goading us. I am often blamed for talking too much and out of turn, but I held my tongue. Not that Maïten would want to do us any harm, but all it takes is a careless word sometimes, to cause the worst damage. These times are truly dangerous, and the opinion Maïten has of us does not matter.

This year, 1942, is even harder materially than the preceding ones. There is a glimmer of hope, however, that Hitler won't end up conquering the whole world. German and

Japanese soldiers are still fighting vigorously but the Italians, vanquished in Abyssinia, don't seem too inclined to fight. What gives us most hope is that Hitler has attacked the USSR last June. Having to fight on two fronts can only weaken him. Besides that, the United States are at long last getting into the act, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor last December.

I have looked into places where we might eventually move, Soissons becoming dangerous. We are not allowed to follow Pierre at Laon, in « forbidden zone ». When Clotilde began working at the « Matériel Téléphonique » in Boulogne Billancourt, I found an apartment for her and her parents at Porte de St Cloud. This was much more convenient for her than the « rue de Tolbiac » from which her daily commute to work had been too long.

Now, I am looking in the same neighborhood. Boulogne has suffered some heavy Allied bombings aimed at the Renault factory, which killed hundreds of civilians in the city. Many people have fled it, where it is now possible to find empty apartments. There is a beautiful one in a building designed by le Corbusier, on rue de la Tourelle. It is all glass however, and these days, the idea of setting it up for civil defense, and of heating this aquarium, has led me to look for a more reasonable solution. A much smaller one is at the other end of the same street. It is clean, an important consideration when paint is a rare commodity. On the seventh floor, it overlooks the stadium « Parc des Princes ». It is part of a large building complex... complex enough, indeed, that this might be very useful if escape is necessary. There are only two bedrooms, but my mother-in-law doesn't look like she will live much longer, and Clo might be glad, then, to take Annette in with her for company.

If we do indeed leave Soissons, it seems to me that we must give our new address to no one, for safety's sake. I do not fear the meanness of people as much as the stupidity or negligence of those who would not understand the possibly catastrophic results a carelessly uttered word might have. I think we can trust only the Roys, their friendship and their discretion.

**CLOTILDE** : Mother is gone, rather painlessly, thank God. Where is her soul now ? She certainly deserved to go to Paradise. Mystery of life, mystery of death. Everything in the hands of God. Even though she never loved me as much as she loved her sons, I still feel her protective presence around me. Henri's death had wounded us all deeply, her most of all. It had not destroyed her quick and witty mind however, until her latest strokes.

I am not sure I have done enough for her. At the end, I did not dare call a priest for her last rites. Flo says that what guided me were the three cardinal virtues, faith, hope, and charity, so it is all right. My confessor tells me that in any case, I am forgiven. Am I ?

I am completely worn out, barely able to walk, less so to talk, and practically not to think. Luckily, the big boss of the factory, aware of it, has told me to rest. I am to take up to six months leave, and am promised that I shall have my job when I come back. I need this.

This month of July, 1942 has not been easy : mother gradually weakening, then dying while I had some serious problems to solve at the LMT. I look forward to living at my own rhythm and no longer my father's, or my mother's. I need some solitude and peace, and therefore have refused to take Annette in with me.

On top of my personal problems, I am ashamed by the servility of the French government towards the Occupying Forces. This month, more than 13,000 Jews, including many children, have been rounded up in and around Paris, and have left, direction unknown.

Now, even in the « free » zone, life is dangerous. In Cier, when the postmistress was asked by some French policemen whether there were any Jews in the village, she answered that yes, the people at the Pènes' probably were. Fortunately, one of the gendarmes later went to warn the Lévy's and they left before the next morning.

It makes life hard for them, I am sure, but I must admit that for me, it is a relief. I shall rest and relax better without their presence. Françoise again offers me a companion, but this time she suggests Flo, who is calmer than Annette. We shall spend her vacations together, first in a small country inn by the Seine, then at Cier, where one of the LMT engineers will join us for a few days.



Pierre is surely involved in some dangerous activities, and I pray for him daily. Mother's death makes him sadder than he wants to show.

## Chapter five

1942-1943

**FLORENCE** : I had my eleventh birthday yesterday, and it is too bad. I expected to die at ten, like Anne de Guigné. I should have managed to get sick. She probably died of TB. I think it doesn't hurt. Why didn't I get it ? I never even asked to be alive !

For once, my birthday was celebrated, in our new apartment, in Boulogne. Tante Clo gave me a bouquet of eleven tea roses, each one a little more open than the previous bud,

each representing a year of my life. I love that. Maman gave me a pocket book made of straw, big and clunky. She probably thought it would make me feel grown-up. The intention was nice.

It is true that everything is clunky these days : there is no leather to be had, so pocket-books are made of straw like this one, or ribbons. Shoes have heavy and noisy wooden soles. Women can no longer get silk stockings, so they paint their legs, trying very hard to draw a straight line in the back, as if it were the seam of the stocking. When it rains, the paint melts and makes a funny mess ! I am glad to be too young for all that stuff.

I have not written in a long time, and I have a lot to tell.

Big event, June 28, 1942 : my first communion.



Florence, her parents, Annette, the Roys, Touzés and Dalins

Those usually happen in May, but there were rumors that POW fathers would be coming back, and the date was postponed, and postponed again. During the preparations we went through, I was doing my best to do everything the right way, and yet the priest blurted one day :

« Of course, Florence Pène can do nothing like everyone else ! ».

That was mean. I was glad, then, that I had refrained from asking him how come the Jews were suddenly supposed to be so bad, since it seemed to me that Jesus had been one.

On the other hand, the little old ladies who had taught us catechism were very nice. They took me apart near the end of the training, thanking me : I had been the only one from my school, they said, who had played with the girls from the public school. I don't understand why I mightn't have or why others didn't, but it was nice in any case for them to say that.

I loved the communion itself. I want to give my life to God.

### Flo and Alain Deshayes

The dress I was wearing had been Annette's, so it was too short for me, but it was all right. Maman had got a very large carp from the washerwoman's husband for lunch, and there were guests : the Roys, the Touzés, the Deshayes (without monsieur Deshayes, still in Germany) and the Dalins. We ate in the garden. Annette was wearing some of maman's shoes, that she found hideous (but she had no dressy shoes of her own). She always takes her shoes off as soon as she sits down. Rizou and Claude soon began running around the table



and playing in the garden. At one point Rizou went under the table and, finding Annette's shoes, showed them to everyone, asking :

« whose shoes are these ? ». Poor Annette turned bright red !

My piano recital went very well, but my report card was not good. The parents sent me on vacation with tante Clo. They asked me to do my best to try and make her feel good. We spent our first week in a country inn near the Seine where there were more mosquitoes than blades of grass. We spent our evenings smashing them against our walls and ceilings with our espadrilles. During the night, their spouses, children and friends came and took their revenge on us ! We were very hungry there, since they fed us at most what our tickets allowed us. Meanwhile, in the middle of the dining-room, there was a family having, every day, all sorts of wonderful things to eat : chicken, meat, lard, eggs, butter and all. Everyone else was looking at them, salivating sadly. Those folks surely used the black market and never looked embarrassed. Every day after lunch, tante Clo and I took the same walk along a path full of weeds, visited with a goat tethered at the end of it, and then sat by a pond. There, I made up all sorts of stories, trying to distract and please her.



Clotilde smoking in Cier, under the arbor

After that, since the Lévy's had left Cier, we went there. The Cierrois knew that tante Clo was sad, and kept bringing food. She had no appetite so I ate everything. She drank a bottle of wine with her lunch, and I, a bottle of cider. After that, we fell asleep under a tree. I think we were drunk ! When papa came to pick me up three weeks later at the St Gaudens train station, I had grown so fat and red that he didn't recognize me ! Tante Clo was better also, but not fat. She stayed in Cier longer.

I came back home with papa, to Boulogne where we live now. It is an apartment on the seventh floor. There is a long balcony, overlooking the Parc des Princes. There are only two bedrooms, one for the parents, one for the children. So once more, Annette, Rizou and I sleep in the same room. There is a courtyard in which we can play. There are many stairwells, each with a letter. Our main entrance is in stairwell J, our back entrance in stairwell K, and the garage under stairwell G.



Clotilde and Florence near Cier.

All the basements communicate with each other and are reputed in the neighborhood to be the best air raid shelters around. So, during air raids, they fill up with all sorts of people, and we all stand up in the corridors, in the dark, until the « all clear. » In the middle of the courtyard is the building where several concierges select the mail, and control the telephone

communications. In each stairwell, there is an elevator, and it is a lot of fun to go up and down in it. During air raids, power is shut off, and we have to climb and go down all those stairs by foot.

Of course, the first thing maman did was to register us at school. Rizou will walk to the local public school. Annette and I will take the métro at Porte de St Cloud, to go to the lycée Jeanson de Sailly. We normally would go to lycée la Fontaine, a beautiful, new building at Porte d'Auteuil, but it is occupied by German soldiers. So is the lycée Claude Bernard, next to it. So the three lycées operate in the same old, musty building at « rue de la Pompe ». It takes us a while to get there.

Annette and I have also registered in the SCUF, or « Sporting Club Universitaire de France ». In Paris, there are covered swimming pools, so we can train even in winter.

Maman has shown us the red rag we are to hang at the end of the balcony in case there are Germans or anyone possibly dangerous at home, to warn papa not to come up. Because he comes, usually week-ends, but must be very careful. This reminds me of the messages with Jericho in them. I know that I must be very attentive : never say anything to anyone about maman being Jewish, or our hating the Germans, or papa doing I don't know what. The Roys are the only people in Soissons who know where we are.

The big piece of news is that maman is pregnant ! She discovered it just after having signed papers for that small apartment !

**FRANCOISE** : We would like to believe that we control our fate, but it is often an illusion. I chose this apartment for its cleanliness, its light, and the fact that there is no building across from it. Even more attractive was the complexity of the buildings, which might facilitate an escape if the need arises. I thought that its small size would not be a big problem, since Annette might go and live with her aunt and keep her company. Clo has rejected this arrangement, and now I have discovered that I am pregnant ! So, the apartment is clearly small now for a family with four children.

It does not seem reasonable to have a child in these troubled times, and it won't make our life easier. But despite my fatigue and nausea, I am already attached to this small creature, and even wonder whether it might be a harbinger of better days, and peace. Battles are raging in North Africa, the Russians are fighting ferociously at Stalingrad, the United States has, at long last, become involved, and our nightmare may end, some day. Will my baby bring this end ?

All the news is not good. In July, in the heart of Paris, from 13,000 to 20,000 Jews were rounded up and brought to the « Vel d'Hiv », from where they have disappeared, no one knows where. Now, the Germans are enlisting all young people for « voluntary » work in Germany. The only good thing about this is that the general population is now aware of how evil this Occupation is. We, resisters, are no longer the only ones angry at it.

Pierre comes to Paris almost every week-end and stops by, usually nightly. Otherwise we meet during the day, in the city.

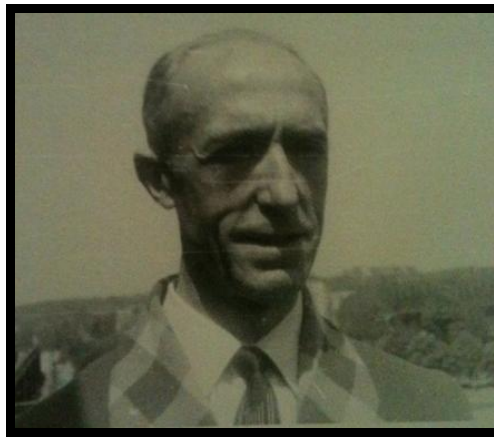
The girls have to take the métro to get to school. They have no text books, and few note books, with grey paper that smells bad. In order to buy nibs for their fountain pens, I must give some small pieces of gold from broken jewelry. The same thing goes when I need a tooth filling. It is difficult to find decent clothes for all of us.

Fortunately, thanks to our friends in the countryside, and to my having bartered our wine and tobacco tickets with a friend who gave me his tickets for sugar and oil in exchange, we eat better than most. Jeanine has followed us to Boulogne. Her room is just above us. I rent an extra room in a different stairwell (G). Pierre can sleep there when need be, and that is where I keep our reserves of split peas (our staple food) and potatoes. I refuse to use the black market, which we could not afford in any case. My pregnancy doesn't stop me from climbing on my bicycle and going food shopping every day. The children are healthy.

**PIERRE** : We soon notice some impressive structures the Germans are building at the north entrance of the Margival tunnel. Made of reinforced concrete, they cover the bottom half of the slopes. We know the contractors : they also work, or have worked, for us. We thus learn to penetrate surreptitiously and immediately draw maps of what we have observed inside. Bertin is the best at that game. Thanks to him, we are able to send a complete plan of the structure to London. I shall see later, while interrogated in St Quentin, a copy of that plan opened on the desk of the policeman who was questioning me. He had clearly hoped to thus unsettle me. However, thanks to that map, the Allied bombed and destroyed what had been meant to become the general headquarters of the German Atlantic Defense System.

Every week, we gather and send more information. The members of my team become more and more efficient. We know everything, and transmit it ... and as we saw above, some of it gets intercepted.

We soon get involved in some sabotage. We have not been sent any explosives yet, so at the beginning, we request the help of the same contractors again. They give us some of the explosives with which the Germans supply them. Some specialists come from Paris to handle the most urgent and difficult sabotages, They destroy the power station at Beautor. We also take advantage of their presence to ask them questions. With their coaching, we become decent saboteurs. Bertin is, once more, excellent at it.



Pierre

In the shadows, with danger all around us, we thus learned all the specialties of professional spies. Later, ignorant people, or professional spies, often criticized the « imprudent behavior » of the resisters. What was imprudent was to resist. When one became involved, he was like a boat in the storm : there was no place for him to recoup ; professionals are protected by their organization, but our communications with London were difficult and risky. If we were caught, there was for us no safety net. No exchange of operatives was possible. If we lost so many agents, it was of course, especially at the beginning, due to our lack of experience, but mostly to the nature of our activity.

Our sabotages were aimed at everything that could help the Nazi war machine, particularly railroads, canals, high tension power lines and their supporting pylones. It was paradoxical for engineers to destroy what they, or other engineers, had so carefully constructed before the war.

At Vervins, Merlin causes railroad catastrophe upon catastrophe. One day, he pushes the artistry one step further : after a derailment he had caused, a big German cannon was stuck in the ground. Merlin managed to derail the train that came to pick it up, and was on the spot to see the second accident and quietly gloat.

Near the end of 1942, the BOA (bureau d'opérations aériennes) is created, to reconnoitre and prepare clandestine landing sites. We survey the local landscape which,

fortunately not too hilly, gives us many choices, especially around Laon, Marle, and Moncornet. Our teams get organized, carefully learn the rules, and we begin to receive our first weapons. Some of them make us smile : the « Albion » hand gun doesn't have a very discreet name ! I must admit that if one is caught with a weapon, it is not more dangerous to hold an Albion than a Parabellum.

We are impatient to practice using our new weapons. We decide to do it in an underground quarry near Coucy le Château. It is near a German camp and we are slightly edgy when we shoot our first rounds.

We also receive plastique and can use it for more frequent sabotages. We attack pylons, railroads, tunnels, canals. We are careful and I don't know of any of us being caught before 1943.

We do have some frights, not all of them caused by the enemy. Bertin hears of a friend being a resister in a group led by someone whose name he does not know. This worries us. We decide to investigate and, if the said man seems dangerous, to eliminate him. It turns out that the dangerous man was named Taille, which is an old alias of mine !

Occasionally – but it is not our main activity – we help downed Allied airmen escape. This brings back two recollections : a British aviator who was very angry that we could not send him immediately back to London. Had he expected us to have a prosperous shop in town, with a sign saying : «Help for downed Allied aviators » ? One other day, I was driving through Laon with a British air officer next to me when a German officer with whom I had a decent working relationship, in full uniform, came to me. I introduced the Briton to him under a false name. The poor aviator, thinking I was betraying him, blanched.

**ANNETTE** : Maman is thirty-eight years old and it is ludicrous that she be pregnant. It is strange that, at the same time, mesdames Roy and Deshayes (whose husband was freed) also are, and they are as old ! I wonder when people stop making love.

I am having almost as much difficulty at school, having come from Soissons to Paris, As when I arrived from Abyssinia, with practically no knowledge of French. I shall have to study hard, especially since this year, comes the « bachot » !

Our high-school is one of three that have been grouped at Jeanson de Sailly. In theory, the schedules are such that girls and boys don't see each other, but there is some electricity in the air. Many of my classmate are snobs, well dressed and clearly well fed, obviously using the black market. Some of the girls are nice, though. My favorite is Véra Nicolsky, grand-daughter of the Russian Orthodox bishop of Paris. She is interesting, cultured, and a lot of fun. There are several of us taking the métro together after classes. We usually stand around one of the poles, that we hold onto. We laugh a lot and, sadly, Françoise Winckler cannot control her bladder. They all leave before my station, and I stay alone next to a puddle of urine ... It makes me look great !

Flo and I have started some serious swimming training, often at the « Ledru-Rollin » swimming pool. We have to cross the « Pont d'Austerlitz » by foot. The night is dark and our flashlight, a dynamo type (the only type allowed) doesn't give much light. We are usually late, and running, and I always fall down flat on a big pile of gravel that sits at the corner of the bridge. The training is good, as is the preparatory exercise routine. During air alerts, there is no power, the métro doesn't work, and we go by foot practically all the way.

Last summer, I was an aide counselor at camp in the « Massif Central », and I loved it. We walked a lot, and sang as much. It was great. Thanks to those counselors and the Roumens family, who live in our apartment complex, Flo has joined a group of girl scouts, and she likes it a lot too. The Roumens live in the most elegant stairwell of our complex, the H, which has only four floors, and two apartments. They have four children, three girls and one boy. Suzanne is about my age, and Simone is just a little older than Flo. They are very religious, and Petainists. One day, Simone was wearing a « francisque », Pétain's emblem, on the lapel of her jacket. She was astounded when Flo grabbed and ground under her foot the said « francisque ». What was Flo thinking ?



**CLOTILDE** : We have some hope, at long last. The Germans were beaten at Stalingrad, after a long and bloody battle. The BBC (although I have no affection for Britain or her inhabitants, I listen to it, very quietly and all doors and windows closed) mentions more than a million dead ! All those young lives lost ! I cannot help but think of Henri.



Clotilde

I am back at work, after six months of torpor caused by my extreme fatigue, and sadness. I loved my mother, although our relationship never was what I would have hoped for. She was loving, in her grumpy way. She was intelligent, warm hearted and fun when in good health (her imitations of politicians had us all in stitches) but her life has not been easy.

My life is somewhat simpler now of course and in some ways, it is good for me to be back at work. Despite the problems there, I like a structure. My colleagues seem a little less aggressive, almost pleased to see me back.

Every Sunday, I have lunch at Françoise's. Pierre is sometimes there. Last Sunday, we were celebrating my birthday with some treasures Françoise had found for the special occasion. There even was some champagne ! Suddenly, the sirens began wailing. Air raid. Bad luck, it is not the lone British plane that dive bombs cleanly. It is a large number of American planes, much too high to see anything, which will, once more, drop their bombs every which way. Françoise, eight months pregnant, did not want to walk nine flights of stairs. I was celebrating, and did not want to go to the shelters either. So we stayed for the show, with sound effects : the nearby antiaircraft canons were very noisy, and then the bombs started making their own, slightly duller, sounds. We could see bombs falling onto the « Porte de St Cloud », and smoke clouds rising. Would I still have an apartment when I crossed back to Paris ? We could also hear, behind us, bombs falling onto Boulogne. We learned later that once more, several hundreds civilians were killed. The Germans use this with glee to feed their anti Allies propaganda.

Françoise is preparing for the baby's birth, and has decorated the crib a cousin of hers has loaned her. She had a large board made which, put over the bathtub, will serve as a changing table. I am glad for all this, with a small pinch of regret : I see now that I shall never have children, and it saddens me.

**FLORENCE** : Annette and I usually come back very late from our swimming training. Now that Annette is seriously preparing for her « bac », I often go by myself. The trainer is always at the end of the pool when I get there, screaming :

« Keep going ! » and, as tired as I am, I do keep going. I have thus discovered that if I go beyond that wall of fatigue, I do have renewed sources of energy and can, indeed,

continue. What is stranger yet is that I later hit a second wall of fatigue and that if I then keep going, I become sort of invincible. It feels like I could go forever. When I walk back home, if my eyes were not smarting, I would think I am not real but have become like an angel. It feels as if I am floating in the air.

When I get home, everyone is in bed, so I eat by myself, a bread pudding Jeanine has prepared for me, with left-over bread, some fruit, milk, and some sugar. We have enough sugar thanks to some exchange maman has made. We do have enough milk also, since we have one J3 ration card (Annette), two J2 (Rizou and me), and a pregnant woman. I eat the whole pudding !

The other day, we had noodles. Why did I decide to put some salt into it ? The salt shaker hadn't been shut properly, and all its contents fell into the family platter. The parents (papa was there that day) said that one couldn't throw away food these days, and I had to eat it all. It didn't kill me, but it was pretty disagreeable.

Another day, poor maman, with her big belly and her hat a bit askew, came back from market with a big smile because she had found some food : « sea veal », a strange thing, grey, gelatinous, that stank of ammonia. We were hungry, ate it, and survived.

At the swimming pool, the water is very cold, and so are the showers. It is a good thing I have that, though, because it is not easy to wash at home. In our room, there is a little space with a sink. It smells musty because the facecloths never dry, without heat. When one wants a bath, one has to fill the largest cooking pots with water and heat them on the stove, then bring them (and it's your death if you spill a drop on the floor on the way !) into the bathroom, and empty them into the tub. The water then might reach one or two inches high, and becomes cold rapidly. One has to be fast !

My trainer often want me to beat records. For a record to be official, there must be at least two official time keepers there. So he sets a date for us all, and then if there is an air alert, the métros are stopped, and nothing happens. Despite that, I sometimes beat a record. I also win medals. Rizou has pestered me, wanting them as military medals. I gave them to him, although I didn't want to. I have an important race coming, because the current French champion in our age category (« minimes ») will be there. It will be my first race in free style. So far, I have competed only in the breast stroke.

Once, on my way back from swimming, there was an air raid, and the métro stopped, so I stepped out on the street. It was just in front of a large hotel occupied by German forces. Lots of soldiers were, like me, watching the action from the sidewalk. A small British plane came down in flames. All the soldiers screamed their joy. I was angry, and sad, and could do nothing about it.

**RIZOU** : I am so happy : I have a little brother ! I shall have someone to play with ! He doesn't know how to talk or walk yet, but I'll teach him. Flo doesn't like to play with cars or soldiers, and she isn't always nice. A boy will be much better .

**ANNETTE** : Maman is such a spendthrift when she is concerned ! For her delivery, she has chosen a fancy « clinique » very close to home. I don't know what to think of that new baby. Our life was complicated enough without him. I can already see what will happen during air raids : maman will stay put, and guess who will carry baby and all (the bottles, the diapers, the bread and sugar, the money and jewelry) down all those stairs into the shelters, and then back up ?

Thank heavens, Jeanine is still with us, even though her parents want her to go back home, away from danger. Her room is above us, on the eighth floor. The regular way for us to get there is to take the elevator down our seven flights, walk to her stairwell, take the elevator up seven floors there, then walk up one more flight to her floor. It is much faster to climb from our balcony onto hers, on the outside. It has happened that people queued up at the Parc des Princes below saw us do that, and stared. Yes, « us », because Flo does it too !



**PIERRE** : What a delightful baby. Françoise and he are well, and this feels like some sunshine. It will now be ever more difficult for me to keep away from home !

**FLORENCE** : Olivier is adorable. What a difference from Rizou who, when I first saw him, was a little bundle of anger, hair pasted with sweat to his crimson, scrunched up face, screaming to high heavens. Olivier smiles. I was shown how to change his diaper and swaddle him. He is so cute, I love to do it. He always seems happy, except a half hour before feeding : he is hungry, and maman never gives him more than what is written on the bottle for his age, and only at the prescribed times ! Poor baby !

**FRANCOISE** : The family has a charming new member. Olivier skipped Annette's seventeenth birthday, May 4, but was born May 9, for Ste Joan of Arc's day. Is that a sign ? Will he bring us the peace we yearn for so ardently ?

It is clear to us that we are under constant surveillance, so for his baptism, I must find a god father who is neither a Jew nor a resister ; do we know such a person ? There are plenty of god-mothers possible, between Clo, Annette, and others.

**FLORENCE** : It is nice to see maman looking happy, for once. The « clinique » is very near : rue du Belvédère, which is the street onto which the Roumens' apartment opens. I was coming back from there yesterday when a man on a bicycle talked to me. I didn't understand what he said, but there was a big, white sausage rising from his saddle. Scared, I ran as fast as I could. I never told anyone about this.

Maman has decorated Olivier's crib with a beautiful medal which belongs to me, and she never asked me for it. It had been given to me by a young man (related to the owners of the book shop) who, back from a POW camp, had invited me to tea one afternoon in Soissons, as if I were a young lady. He had told me it was so cold in the camp that they were putting layers of newspaper under their pajama-like uniforms, for warmth. He also said that they were so hungry that they fought over vegetable peelings. He sounded truthful. Well, he gave me that medal, and maman should have asked me before using it. It is just like when she gave my beautiful doll to Jeanine's sister. The girl was very ill, and I would have said yes, if I had been asked. Maman should have asked.

**PIERRE** : Organizing the escapes caused many problems for us. At the end of 1943, the big chiefs, especially Churchill, were getting excited, even carried away. We received repeated orders to recruit more members rapidly, as if it were an easy task. In a heavily occupied territory, it is essential to be cautious. It was indispensable to watch potential members before sounding them out. Urged and pushed, we became a little less careful, and some traitors infiltrated our groups, causing ravages.

Around the same time, late 1943, we received an even stranger order : to send, in uncoded language, the names and addresses of people likely to shelter people who would be parachuted behind German lines. We protested vigorously against such an order. It was confirmed by London. We protested again, but the order was maintained. Dragging my feet, heavy hearted, I sent a list of several of my engineers. Of course, those men were soon arrested. Fortunately, they were not mistreated, and were freed after a few weeks.

This was not the only instance of mishaps between us and London. In September, there had been a parachuting where several resisters, including André Boulloche, when dropped, were awaited on the ground by the Gestapo. Their chief, an air force colonel,

swallowed his pill of cyanure so as to avoid arrest. Jarry hurt his foot as he landed hastily but ran away. Bouloche also managed to escape.

Everything leads one to think that there were enemy agents in London : crazy orders on the one hand, treason on the other, were their weapons.

**FLORENCE** : Wondering how babies came about, I questioned my best friend, who said she'd ask her big brother. What she told me is horrible. I am sure papa and maman have never done such disgusting things !

We spent our summer in Cier. Now that grand-mère Alice is gone, tante Clo has given maman permission to do what she wanted with it. So, it was, first, an autodafé, and then forced labor.

First, the carnage : the crocodile that used to hang over the second floor landing ; the Indian piece of cloth that was above it ; the beautiful tropical birds under their glass cover ; the rattan pram for two ; the dog's head and a million more treasures were piled up in the garden. The heap was taller than maman, who set fire to it.

Then, forced labor : armed with sponges, knives, scrapers, vinegar, water, and mostly a lot of elbow grease, we scraped off layers of ugly wall paper from all the walls of all the rooms. We broke off the plaster that was covering the oak beams maman knew would be on the ceiling of the dining-room. We scrubbed, cleaned, painted. We soaped the old floor boards, we beat the old rugs out on a line.

We also collected fruit for winter : plums spread on large, wooden planks where the sun dried what the bees left of them, and apples, sliced thinly and cored, then strung on lines, to dry in the attic.

It was not a fun way to spend vacations, but we had the fruit in the « pré » to comfort us, and I probably deserved that : my report card was so bad that I'll have to repeat eighth grade.

# Chapter six

## THE FIGHT INTENSIFIES

1943 – 1944

**PIERRE** : I was given control of the « Ardennes » department, as well as « Aisne ». This brought me closer to Point, a hair dresser whom I already knew. This nice young man had a tragic end : At the Liberation, he was assigned a position as a police officer and fulfilled his duties very well. When a new edict stipulated that some diplomas were from then on required to occupy his post, since he did not have them and did not want to be fired, he committed suicide.

On October fifteen, 1943, I had an appointment with Roland Farjon at the corner of rue d'Anjou and Bvd Malhesherbès. As I approached, I saw three men, their right hand in the pocket of their trenchcoats. One of them came to me :

« Are you Taille ? »

« Taille ? Who is that ? What do you mean ? »

« We were sent by Dufaure . »

Dufor is Farjon's alias. Fortunately, the German policeman, whose French is otherwise excellent, pronounces it « dufaure », unlike the way this name, so common in my beloved Pyrénées, is usually pronounced. I understand and say :

« I don't know any Dufor, I am waiting for a woman. » Then, I start awaiting my imaginary date, while holding an attaché case full of compromising papers. Never has time passed so slowly, and it is not hard for me to show impatience, like the stood up man I am pretending to be.

After what felt like a century, I left, trying hard not to seem in a hurry. We learned later that Farjon was arrested October thirteen, and that in his note book, his appointments had been written plainly, including that one, with me. I changed metro lines again and again, an easy thing to do in that dense area, before meeting Bertin and Bouilloche in a restaurant.

When I was arrested on April four, 1944, I heard one of the Germans arresting me say :

« Es ist bleich. » (He is livid) This aroused their suspicions. Therefore, in two similar instances, separated by a mere seven months, I reacted very differently. Why ? What caused

that difference ? Health ? atmosphere ? temporary fatigue ? One should never say : « In such or such circumstances, this is the way I would react. »

The signs are barely perceptible, but I feel more and more endangered. When my engineers were arrested in December, 1943, I went to protest at the « Kommandantur ». I was treated correctly : my request was normal, since I was seeking the well-being of my employees. As I was leaving however, the elegant SS officer with whom I had been talking felt compelled to say :

« We are very familiar with the underground in the department. We know who the leaders are. We don't arrest them yet, so that we can watch what they do ».

I have rarely been as happy to cross a threshold as when I left that SS lair.

I often notice that I am being followed. I don't know that my engineers are treated decently, and fear that one of them might talk under torture. My apartment in Boulogne is visited several times by people pretending to be insurance agents, but playing their role poorly. Danger is clearly present, everywhere. I gradually feel compelled to become completely clandestine, hide totally.

I must first warn my bosses. I pretend to have a sudden and serious case of tuberculosis, requiring a stay in a sanatorium in the Alps.

I hid just in time ! I had not left for more than a week when some Gestpo agents burst into my office in Laon, messing everything up, and stealing every leather article they could lay their hands on. They left, furious that I was not there, and that nobody had my address.

I first hide in the maid's room we are renting in stairwell G, in our apartment complex, in Boulogne. A cot is all I need. I then find shelter with a publisher, then at an old lady's, madame Babut, later with Pierre Turbil. There, the maid was surprised, one day, to see me setting fire to a large bundle of compromising papers. At long last, Françoise finds for me a small apartment I can rent in a blue collar neighborhood, rue Amelot. This will be my headquarters until my arrest.

Now that I no longer work as a Public Works Chief Engineer, I can spend all my time and energy in my underground activities. I go from appointment to appointment, I send orders, I make proclamations, I receive others.

I cannot always be totally prudent : I sometimes show up, usually nightly, rue de la Tourelle, to kiss my wife and children. They know how to warn me if there is danger upstairs.

**FRANCOISE** : Danger is lurking, closer and closer. Pierre must hide. I find an apartment for him in a section of Paris where no one will know him. If he is arrested and I am questioned I shall pretend that I know nothing of what he is up to, thinking him in Savoie, for his health.

#### Françoise on balcony at Boulogne

I have taken his initials off every piece of his clothing, as well as all his medals. He can no longer be Pierre Pène, nor Taille, Périco, nor Moreau. He must disappear, we must burn all the bridges. In fact, he sometimes sneaks in to see us, especially the baby who is, he says, the best Gestpo agent, attracting him into dangerous territory !

I have shown Jeanine and the girls where to hang a red rag to the railing of the balcony, if there is some danger at home. They also know where money and jewelry are hidden in the house at Cier. If the girls are orphaned, they will need it. Meanwhile, I can count on their discretion.



**FLORENCE** : This winter 1943-44, we have learned to recognize the barely perceptible « click » that means someone is listening in, on the telephone line. Sometimes, when we hear it, we even say :

« M ---- to whoever is listening on. » We have begun to be alert, and watch on the street whether anyone might be following us. We know that death is around every corner, and may strike at any time. Not only because of maman being Jewish or because of whatever it is that papa is doing, but also because of the bombings.

Boulogne Billancourt is sometimes bombed by the Allies, in an attempt to destroy the Renault factory, which works for the German war effort. One day, as Annette and I were coming back from our swimming practice, the metro stopped because of an air raid. Once the dull « boom booms » stopped and the sirens wailed the « all safe », the metro could start again, but the people, jammed in it, were very tense. Would they still have a home ? a family ? Someone said :

« It was just like last time, it fell again on the Porte de St Cloud. I can tell from the sounds. » It was true. We stepped out into smoke and dust. Bathtubs and chests of drawers were hanging perilously out of gutted buildings. The shelter under the public garden on the other side of the road had received a direct hit, and bodies were being pulled out of it. A bomb had fallen in the stadium we passed. Another one, onto a building right behind ours which, thankfully, was intact.

Another day when we had not gone into the shelter (we did only when it was American planes coming), we saw a parachute descending slowly, slowly, right in front of us, into the « Parc des Princes », under the eyes of all the German soldiers in the building of « lycée Claude Bernard. » Poor guy ! He must have had some receiving committee ! When we didn't go into the shelter and it was night time, the flares that sometimes fell from the planes before the bombs made a beautiful show. The anti aircraft canons always made a lot of noise. They must have been very close, probably in the Bois de Boulogne.

Once, in the corridors of the basement which was crowded during an air raid, I was with Rizou, and no one else from the family. We could hear the bombs falling. The people, scared and tense, began telling stories of friends, neighbors, relatives, who had been buried under rubble, or drowned in a shelter, or maimed in some way in a bombing. A man began to say loudly :

« It is very nice to tell stories, but it might be wiser for us to prepare for death. »

Rizou then grabbed my hand :

« But, Flo, if I die, I won't be able to read my atlas any more !

True to say, that eight year-old slept with his atlas (which he was holding under his arm, in the shelter) and a book of poetry, and knew most of the contents of both books by heart. In Soissons, his bed companion had been an edition of « le Petit Larousse Illustré. »

When there was an air raid during school hours, we went into the basement of the school building, where we also stood in the dark until it ended, those horrible sirens wailing. I liked it, when it was on a day we were supposed to have a test, for which I had not studied ! At school, I had discovered a pretty but very dark small chapel, where I went during recess, and prayed for our survival. During night raids, it was a lot of fun, in our shelter, to see everybody in their curlers, slippers, and pajamas !

**DIDIER, formerly Rizou** : Here is a personal recollection : I still see a building across from ours, which had been gutted during an American air raid. They wanted to destroy the Renault factory in Billancourt, and were crushing innocent buildings at Porte de St Cloud, a few miles away from the production lines ! They were always very imprecise because of their main concern, still current, to save their own precious and costly lives, therefore dropping their murderous bombs from altitudes of thousands of meters. I stepped out of the basement where we sought shelter during raids. I saw flames, remnants of floors and walls, broken pipes, pieces of furniture hanging perilously high, and bloody body parts.

**FLORENCE** : A few days ago, maman looked funny, a little like when she had told us to lie to grand-père Louis. She started :

« I know that you are both too young, especially you, Flo, to go to a dance. However, it is your cousin Biqui Fraenckel inviting you. He is very nice, and a brilliant student. Like his parents, he wears the yellow star. I don't want to hurt his feelings by refusing, therefore you will go. »

Go to a dance ? What an adventure ! But what to wear ? We shall have to be creative !

These days, Jeanine is very busy, between cleaning, cooking, and taking care of Olivier. Maman is busy too with Olivier, when she is not out foraging on her bicycle. Annette is preparing her « bachot. » So can you guess who is sent to go to the city hall (a very long walk !) to wait in this line for these coupons, then in that line for those papers, then somewhere else... and then wait in line at the bakery, then wait in line at the dairy, etc ? Yes, me. And you can believe me when I say that grown-ups don't mind passing in front of children!

**FRANCOISE** : One night, around midnight, I am suddenly awakened by the door bell. I get up, go to open the door, and am surprised to find my sister-in-law and a physician friend of ours. They look very mysterious and lead me into my bedroom, with its unmade bed. Like actresses in a murder movie, they whisper that I must leave immediately with my children. It does sound simple. When one considers what it entails, it is not so easy : what with the food coupons, which are delivered by the town of residence ? It takes time to register in a new place. More important is the education of the children. Annette prepares her « bac ». Leaving now would mean a wasted year for her. Let us keep our cool. What really is going on ?

A man went to Laon, to Pierre's office. Claiming to be a friend of his, he demanded to see his successor :

« I must know Mr Pène's address, in his personal interest. I must absolutely go and see him. » However, the new Chief Engineer does not know Pierre's address, nor does anyone in the office. The man goes downstairs, and gets two more men from the car he had left there. The three enter the same office, this time showing their cards of Gestapo agents.

« Give us monsieur Pène's address. We must arrest and eliminate him. Otherwise, we shall take one of his family members. »

Everyone in the building gets very nervous. They promise to try and find that address, which they will provide to-morrow. Our faithful chauffeur Hombrouck immediately goes to Soissons, where he warns the Public Works Engineer. The engineer goes right away to Paris, where his sister lives. This woman, as a physician, is allowed to drive at night, and goes to my sister in law's. That is the only address anyone knows in Picardy, where Laon and Soissons are. This physician knows that I am Jewish, and therefore in danger.

I don't want to make any decision without consulting with my husband, but I take care of the most urgent task, which is to find shelter for the three older children. The Easter vacations will start soon, so their absence won't harm their studies too much. Our friends, the Dalins, find a place for the girls in a nursing school in Versailles. Other friends, the Roumens, help me send Rizou into a summer camp where he will be well fed and treated. Jeanine rejoins her parents. That same evening, Pierre and I have dinner together in a small restaurant and I tell him what is going on and what I have done so far about it

**ANNETTE** : Madame Dalin has found a nursing school where we are hidden, as Jewish children. Madame Dalin has suspicions, however, that more is afoot. Being the private secretary of the « Préfet de Police » for Paris, she cannot afford to harbor the family of a « terrorist. » So, with her baritone voice, she questioned me :

« Honestly, Annette, is your father a resister ? »

I could only mumble :

« I don't know, I don't know. »

She kept repeating her question, and I could only repeat my answer, again and again, many times. The minimum age for students, in that school, is seventeen, and I can pass as one. Flo is only twelve, so she must not be too visible. Luckily, during the Easter vacation, very few students are at school.

Our parents may disappear at any time. They probably will, and so I shall become head of a household with three young children in my charge ... and I don't even have my « bachot » yet ! Madame Dalin says she will find a job for me in an office, but I am very scared of what the future holds.

**FLORENCE** : Annette and I are hidden in a nursing school in Versailles, and I am too young, so I must be sort of invisible. If the parents die, Annette says she will work, and I shall go to the « Ecole de la Légion d'Honneur. » I am furious. If Annette works, I want to work too.

**RIZOU** : I have been abandoned. I don't know what is going on. I am in the countryside, with some other boys, and priests. Father Renhas is nice, and in fact, no one is mean, but I miss my family, and I would like to know why I am not with them.

The other day, we walked in a forest and there were German soldiers in a clearing, with their tanks and their trucks. They did not look too mean. Then we arrived in an abbey where the monks gave us a potato puree, a real one, with real butter ! It was so good !

I play with the other boys but I am very sad. Why was I left out ?

**FRANCOISE** : When Pierre became head of the Unified Resistance Movement for the Paris area (the previous one having been executed), his existence was in even greater danger than before, especially since it seemed obvious that there were traitors high up in the chain of command.

One Tuesday, Pierre and I had a dinner date. Feeling that our times together may soon come to an end, we wanted to have as many of them as we could.

I arrive on time, 7 :30, in a modest and discreet restaurant. I wait. At first, I don't worry about his being late, even though he is usually very punctual. At eight, however, I become concerned. At eight thirty, I am panicked, and barely touch the dinner I have, at last, ordered. Anxious, I call my sister-in-law, who is having dinner at some friends' house. We decide to meet in the metro, where we can share our anxious feelings. I want to go rue Amelot, but can't : I must be home before curfew. There, I spend a terrible night, imagining Pierre under torture, unhappy at having been taken, humiliated, and famished.

The next morning, having bathed and fed the baby, I entrust him to my concierge and leave. I arrive rue Amelot around 10 a.m., anxious but still hopeful. I watch the area carefully. It looks calm enough, so I enter the portal and the concierge immediately exclaims :

« Oh, madame Moreau, if you only knew what happened ! This monsieur Moreau, so nice, what do you think ! They were there with four buses, and they took everything. They went into every corner. They were very angry. I told them to leave these things that didn't belong to them but to monsieur Moreau who is so well mannered, so they showed me a can of butter and said : « You see, he has contacts with America ! »

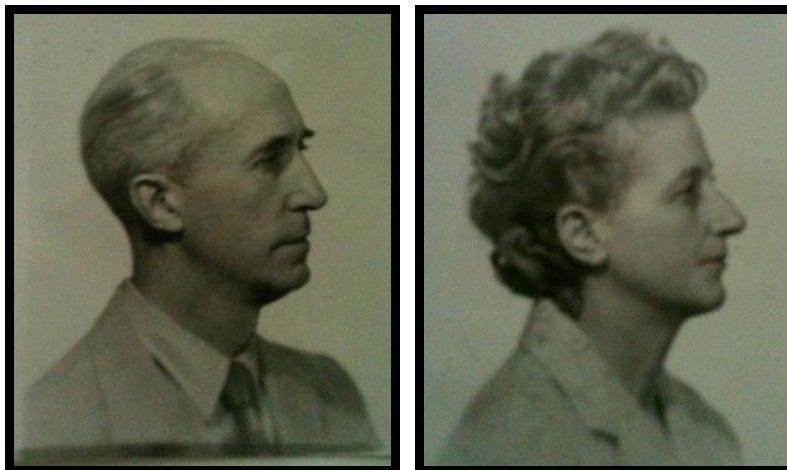
So, it is true. Pierre has been caught. What will they have found on him and in his place ? He had just received a large sum that he was to distribute to his agents. Was he able to do that in time ? What about his attaché case with all the secret papers ? And how did they get him ?

I go back home. I know I must. I know that I shall soon receive a visit from those men. If I hide, I won't be able to try and help my prisoner. The first thing I must do is warn those friends of ours who might get into trouble

# Chapter seven

## PIERRE'S ARREST

April 4, 1944



Pierre et Françoise

**PIERRE** : The Resistance group I belong to is the OCM (Organisation Civile et Militaire), which is apolitical. One must admit that it includes a good number of middle class members, even upper middle class, but there is no rule, and there are some good blue collar comrades. During January, 1944, I become a member of the Executive Committee of the OCM and soon afterwards, am in charge of the direction of the Paris area. My chief of staff is Rol Tanguy. I have several well known people under me : Le Percq, Lefauchaux, and the colonel de Margueritte who is ready to replace me if I get arrested or killed.

There is not total trust between Rol Tanguy and his FTP group, and me. One day, Rol, as chief of the troupes, brings me a call to insurrection, redacted by the Communist Party. In it, the Parisians, unarmed, not organized, and underfed for several years, were asked to rise up against the strong occupying German forces. One glance at this proposal was enough to see how unreasonable it was. If I let that order out, it meant leading the bravest among the Paris inhabitants to their massacre ! History proves that a popular insurrection



can only fail if it is not backed by a strong foreign army. Without hesitation, I put this paper at the bottom of the pile, and never heard about it again.

Life is more and more difficult for the people of the capital. Food is scarce, shop windows are miserable (the first time I went to Switzerland, the contrast was striking !). In public places, one senses the general sombre mood. German soldiers are taunted more openly in the metro. The occupants, meanwhile, lose their cool, and become more brutal.

My liaison agent, Jacques Briffaut had insisted that he wanted to check and improve my false papers. We had made a date for April fourth at the metro station Sèvres-Babylone.

From there, we walked rapidly towards the Catholic Institute, rue d'Assas. As we entered the small courtyard, we saw the concierge look at us with frightened eyes, and Jacques believed he saw men beside her. We climbed up to the second floor, and found ourselves facing three men, pistols cocked. We turned back, and there were three others behind us, just as threatening.

I didn't really get frightened. I thought : If they sent six men for us, they don't mean to kill us instantly. We are handcuffed and pushed into a black Citroën. Passersby walk peacefully, seeing nothing, or wanting to ignore what they see. A traffic policeman stops the car, and our French chauffeur is irate that anyone would dare disturb his German masters. Seeing their Gestapo cards, the policeman lets the car go.

Rue des Saussaies. Some office, room 533, on the sixth floor. We are searched, our coats swiftly turned inside out and checked for weapons which, fortunately, we don't have. Then the questioning brutally starts. The leader of the team speaks French perfectly. Accompanied by a big brute and an elephant, he wears the SD (Sicherheits Dienst) insignia. They want me to admit that I am Dardenne. Totally confused, I could easily get out of this situation if I were not carrying that damned attaché case full of compromising documents, among others a list of the last sabotages we recently executed.

I also have a large sum of money. I say that I earned it on the black market, but this lame excuse earns me some punches in the face. All right, I tell myself, the lies you tell them shouldn't be too obvious. Soon, things become clearer : I am not Dardenne but fell into the trap that was intended for him. However, I am a good catch, my documents are proof of this.

Jacques and I are kept apart. I am sometimes left alone in a room named « Bereitschaftszimmer », or preparation room. When they take me out of it, I see the concierge of the Institute rue d'Assas ; he doesn't seem to resent the fact that he has been arrested because of me. One thought obsesses me : not to give anything so that my friends who don't yet know of my arrest will have time to hide somewhere and change identity. I know that the Nazis want to get as much information as quickly as possible, before word of my arrest gets out.

Now, handcuffs in my back, I am questioned about myself. Punches rain down on me. I can take those. Then I am made to kneel down and get kicked in the stomach. I soon find a method : I let myself drop when the kick comes close, thus deflecting it.

Dissatisfied with my attitude, my torturers decide to go one step further. They will take me to the uppermost floor, for the tub treatment. We all know that the day of the arrest is the toughest : The Nazis absolutely want to get the organizational chart, and the addresses of the leaders, right away. On the next day, the prisoner's absence will have been noticed and everyone will have found a way to protect oneself, a new hiding place.

So I am roughly pushed into a small room upstairs where I am told to undress. Then, handcuffs in my back, feet tied together with a leather strap, I am splashed with cold water. It was still cold, on that early April morning. I am made to sit on the side of the tub, my back towards the water. They were three or four men, I remember only the tall and thin leader, who spoke perfect French. I learned later that he goes under the name Rudi van Merode and is actually French. He was able to escape to Spain, at the Liberation.

The pachyderm, showing a typically Teutonic sentimentality, will, at the end of the session, lament the fact that my wrists have been bloodied by the hand cuffs.

« So, will you talk ? » Rudi asks. No answer. I am tipped backwards into the water. I struggle, suffocate, and when the men see that I am close to losing consciousness, they pull me out and shake me. This game is repeated one, two, three times, I don't know any more.

My thoughts get scrambled, my returns to consciousness foggier and foggier, and I am afraid of losing control.

Wouldn't it be better to give them some information, false but believable, while I can still think straight, rather than perhaps losing control and endangering my comrades ? So, I pretend to give up. Rudi grabs his notebook and carefully writes down the very fanciful « facts » I give him.

They clearly know the real names and aliases of several of my comrades, notably Blocq Mascart and Piette. They want me to describe them. I give the face of one to the body of the other, and the demeanor of a third, and good luck to them ! As poorly as I feel, this game amuses me and I shall be very pleased later to see that my arrest was followed by no other.

« Where do you give your appointments ? »

Rudi says « tu » to me, and I am not brave enough to react.

« All sorts of places. »

« How do you write them down in your notebook ? »

« I write down the times (in fact, I write down two hours before the real time) and remember the places. »

« What do you do if you miss an appointment ? »

« We have a rain date. »

« What do you do if you miss the rain date ? »

« In the French Resistance, we don't miss two appointments in a row. » This pompous, stupid and grotesque answer satisfies him. He goes on :

« I see an appointment today at 2 p.m. Where is it ? »

« At the Montparnasse station. »

« Let's go. »

There is just enough time. I get dressed quickly and run downstairs, jostled, hit, stumbling. We get to the station. Rudi :

« Look and find your friend, and if you make fools of us, you are in trouble. »

I am not worried. The appointment is two hours later, 400 meters further. I am still joking :

« Oh, I think that's he ... oh, no, I was mistaken. »

Rudi grumbles. We wait another half hour and then I am taken back rue des Saussaies. I feel relieved, but Rudi says :

« You didn't tell us anything. We will start again to-morrow. »

« I said all I knew. »

« Enough. »

I shiver because if they only verify my « confession » ! ...

They have not lied. The circus starts again, I go from « Bereitschaftszimmer » to questioning, with people just as unpleasant. I suddenly feel very blue. If they do this again to-morrow, what shall I do ? Will my system be able to withstand this ? Have I been consistent ? What confrontation might confound me ? What else might happen ? What new humiliations, what brutal treatments will I have to suffer ? I now know what hell is like.

A Frenchman, elegant and relaxed, walked through, very much at ease in this den of iniquity : another traitor. How much French blood has been shed because of him ? As the afternoon passed, we were under the guard of soldiers in the same uniforms, but looking much more humane. It turned out they were Italians.

Thrown into a large area filled with bales of hay, I find Jacques Briffault, who tells me of his failed escape (we all know that the first day of arrest is the easiest one for an escape : the administration has not yet corraled you into a specific unit, you are not yet in the charge of some determined inspectors). Like me, he wanted to poke fun at the Nazis and pretended to have a rendez-vous at St Germain des Prés. Placed in the middle of the square, he picks the right moment, and runs. He is a very fast runner, goes pretty far, gets shot at and is missed. He was going to make it when a stupid Frenchman pushing a cart full of wood threw it against him. He fell and, after being hit hard, was taken back to rue des Saussaies.

In the same police van, we are driven to the Fresnes prison. It was night already and there was much pandemonium, several vehicles having arrived at the same time. Large police dogs were running behind their masters, along the corridors. Jacques and I were separated. We will never see him again, since he died in a death camp. I am told that near his end, he said how happy and proud he had been to work with me. I feel very honored.

**FRANCOISE** : Pierre had told me that the Gestapo might wait a week between their visit to Laon and the one to Boulogne. So, I am not surprised not to see them the next day, nor the next. I ask the concierge to change the records of telephone calls I made recently. Everything is ready, those gentlemen can come.

At six p.m., I am at the place of a resister friend. At seven, I am at my sister-in-law's. At nine, I go to see the person who received for us our dangerous mail. At ten, I get back home with my baby, the only companion I have left. The telephone rings. It is the concierge :

« Madame Pène, two men asked for you. »

« Ah, I see who it must be. »

« Oh, you think so, madame ? They looked all right ! »

I go to bed and fall asleep rapidly, exhausted by the anxiety of the last two days, and wanting to keep my cool. Suddenly, at midnight, the doorbell rings, loud, aggressive. It must be them. Quick, my bathrobe.

From behind the closed door, I ask :

« Who is there ? »

« German police. »

« Well, go down to show your papers to the concierge, and come back with him. »

« Open your door just ajar, with the security chain on, and we shall show you our cards. » I open and three big guys rush inside. They scream, go through everything.

They tell me that my husband is a terrorist, that he is the head of the French resistance in the Paris area, etc...

Then they start asking me questions. They pull out an ID. I have to be careful. If it is Pierre's ID as Moreau, I must not recognize it. No, they show me his « Pène » card. How silly of them ! They violently accuse me of knowing what my husband's activities are, and of being the blonde who goes to rue Amelot on Wednesdays and Fridays. I play dumb innocence. It is made easier by their unnecessary precision : I go to see Pierre on irregular days.

I explain :

« My husband is sick ; he is in Savoie, and sends me postcards from time to time from there. »

« Sick ? Ah we know all about that mail from Savoie ! »

« Yes, he is sick, he was given leave of absence, it was published in the « Journal Officiel » . This fact seems to impress them ; even so, they tell me that if I were a man, they would beat me.

The pachyderm is searching through everything. A big, dark one keeps screaming and the third one, very tall and very ugly, asks the questions with a rough tone of voice. I answer all of them without any problem. They are puzzled by a leaflet of propaganda which I had left there on purpose. It says : « You may think that the Germans are barbarians, but what would you say of the Russians ... » All they can see is the word « barbarian » attributed to « Germans. » I smile inwardly, and explain that it is really pro-German propaganda, and I read it to them. Afraid of seeming foolish, they don't know how to react.

This gives me an edge, which increases when a silly incident occurs : After the concierge's call, I had torn some papers and thrown them in the toilet. It became clogged, and I had planned to take care of the problem in the morning. However, these gentlemen took turns in the bathroom, and the result was a disgusting flood. Afraid for their reputation, they were embarrassed and, after they left, I saw that they had tried to minimize the problem, shutting off the water and pushing the flood out of the corridor with a broom.

Despite all, they go on :

« Get dressed fast. We are taking you. We can leave the baby in some hospital. »

« You can talk about the Russians being savages », I answered, « what can be worse than taking a ten month old baby from his mother ? »

« They would kill him. »

« Isn't that about the same as what you plan to do ? »

« Not at all. He will be in a hospital where everyone is as Gaullist as you. Enough now. Hurry up. »

I still dawdle as much as I can. Olivier, awakened by the commotion, opens his expressive and pure eyes, in his little face, still pink from sleep. Poor little chap. Pleased with the diversion, he smiles. Can they resist this freshness ?

They keep questioning :

« Where were you at seven ? »

« At my sister-in-law's. »

« Where does she live ? »

« Twenty-two, rue le Marois. »

How lucky can one be ! I learned later that after coming for me in Boulogne, they had gone to Clotilde's, from whose place they had seen me leave. What stories would I have had to invent if they had asked me where I had been at six or at nine, since I wanted to protect my contacts ? I would have found something, but nothing is as safe as truth, when it can be verified. It makes me seem innocent.

They are growing impatient and threaten to take me in my bathrobe if I don't get dressed faster. However, I can hear them, in the next room, pondering over what to do with the baby. I dawdle even more. Finally, they call me and say :

« If you promise to be at rue des Saussaies, room 533 at eleven to-morrow morning, we leave you enough time to find someone to take care of the baby. » They even take the trouble to write in my notebook, from which I have erased everything that might potentially be dangerous to anyone, my appointment with the Gestapo the next day. They don't notice that many things have been erased, replaced with laundry or shopping lists.

**CLOTILDE** : My forty-fourth birthday, 4/4/44, was even worse, the pain more personal, than the last one : my brother has disappeared. Françoise, very anxious, called me last night : Pierre had missed their date in a left bank restaurant. She thinks he has been arrested and is being tortured. I fear that she might be right.

Poor Françoise who is also worried about the members of her family who had fled into the « free zone ». On November eleven, a well chosen date, the Nazis have invaded that zone ! She says that she will soon receive a visit from the Gestapo, and that it might happen to me too.

Poor Pierre ! I hope that he won't have to suffer too much.

**PIERRE** : The first night is hard. Despite the tub treatment I have suffered, my heart still beats well, but I keep thinking of the new torture I was promised for to-morrow.

My life as a prisoner begins. I am put in a different cell, on the fourth floor, with a strange fellow who could well be a stool pigeon. An inveterate liar, he claims to be at the same time a Communist and a Free Mason, which to me seems incompatible. Is he trying to relax my defenses by impersonating the two labels most hated by the Nazis ?

The food is ignoble and insufficient ; the windows are nailed shut and opening them would lead you to the punishment cell, with only bread and water. We are allowed to go outside for fifteen or twenty minutes every ten days. The stench that reigns in an airless cell twelve by seven feet where four men are enclosed can be imagined ! Yes, the supposed stool pigeon is soon joined by an Alsatian, then by a Parisian worker who seems to sincerely wonder what he is doing there.

One can communicate with neighboring cells through the water pipes. Next to us are three downed Allied aviators. Our guards are men who have head wounds, and are therefore

kept away from the front. They are all slightly insane : another proof of the Nazi sadism, which puts us, defenseless, in the hands of semi-crazed people.

At night, messages are sent through the closed windows, out loud :

« So and so wants so and so to know that he has not talked, » or

« The comrades of such street were able to escape. » That word « comrade » signifies, at that time, Communist. It is a dangerous label to wear. In the prison van, once, I was with two Communists : a man in a small cell, a woman in the central corridor. They were conversing and ended every sentence with the word « comrade, » as if to emphasize their adherence to the Party. It was impressive.

Night comes. The prisoners fall asleep, a sleep full of nightmares, interrupted by long periods of insomnia, when they try to prepare for questioning. However, the messages have left behind them an appeasing halo of courage, fervor, and resolve.

For several weeks, I receive no package. I shall learn later why : even though my wife runs to all the prisons, she is told, at all of them, that I am not there. This is part of the psychological torture imposed to the resisting part of the population, and to the prisoners.

**FRANCOISE** : Once my visitors have left, I go to my concierge's wife, whom I trust. I ask her to go, with great care, and a believable pretext that we imagine together, to the apartment rue Amelot. I don't know whether I can trust the concierge of that apartment. She must be told that if we are confronted by the German police, she is to pretend that she never saw me. If she acts that way, she will be rewarded, but will come to regret it if she doesn't. She must also know that the life of a baby is involved. I must use all possible enticements.

I then go to my sister-in-law, in my slippers so that I won't make any noise during curfew, and ask her to take care of her young nephew. I relate to her in detail the questions I was asked, and my answers. If she is questioned also, she must answer the same way.

At eleven the next morning, I arrive rue des Saussaies, carrying Pascal's « Pensées. ». If I am allowed to keep it, it will help me stay calm.

As I enter, A guy screams at me, telling me to leave my ID. A little further, some other screams demand to know what I am doing there. I see some French people who seem very much at ease among the Nazi friends whose dirty work they abet, and this upsets me. I don't want to be taken for one of them, so I say :

« If I am here, it is not for my pleasure, but because I was ordered to do so by three Gestapo guys. »

« Gestapo guys, guys, guys » , the guard keeps screaming. « Ah, I shall teach you to say 'guys'. You will be tamed, here. Shut the door and stay here. » He then makes a telephone call, probably to room 533, still yelling « guys, guys. »

After an hour, I am taken to a repulsive cell on the ground floor, after having gone through another one in which four poor men, haggard, besotted, with long beards, don't dare say a word. Pierre, like them, must have that anxious look. Where is he ? shall I be confronted with him ? I can hear beatings in the next cell. What condition is he in ?

Two women are brought into my cell. One, whose husband has refused to go to the STO (service du travail obligatoire) in Germany, was taken with him. They didn't have time to warn any friends, and don't know what may happen to their young son. The other one is a poor girl whose lover, a German soldier, is suspected of having sold his revolver, and they want to make her talk. Back from questioning, she says :

« They won't get me to talk. I would rather stay in jail. » I ask her if she has known him for a long time.

« No, two months, but he is a good boy, and so clean. What will they do to him ? They will rough him up hard. Even with me, they weren't easy. They are big brutes. »

The day goes on. They come to get her. I am alone again. I am hungry and tired. The cell smells bad, from the pail full of feces in the corner of the room. I am loathe to stretch on the filthy mattress, despite my fatigue. I read Pascal, hoping it will help me remain calm.

Suddenly, very late, the door opens : the tall ugly guy who had questioned me calls brusquely :

« Haven't we been kind enough with you ? Why have you complained about us ? » I open my eyes wide, surprised.

« Come, you will understand » he says as he takes me to the man of this morning, who screams again « guys, guys, guys. » It is my turn to explain :

« You asked me to be here at eleven this morning. I get here at precisely eleven. The guards scream at me because I don't have a summons. Did you give me a document, or tell me your names ? How did you want me to mention you ? I said 'guys of the Gestapo,' and I don't see what is so bad about that. »

« You will have to learn that one doesn't enter German offices every which way, as you would French ones. »

Now that he has given me his little speech, he adds :

« Now go, and be without fail at room 533 to-morrow at eight. »

When I step out of that lair, I suddenly feel strangely relaxed, seeing normal streets with elegant women, made up, and able to laugh. Anxiety about Pierre's fate nevertheless prevents me from totally enjoying my freedom.

The next morning, I go back to rue des Saussaies, but am less prompt. It is ten after eight when I give my (false) ID again at the entrance desk. This time, I took Montaigne's Essays with me. A guard, more correct than yesterday's, shows me how to get to room 533. I wait in a non-descript room, where two policemen in mufti are seated. People come and go. It turns out that the one who will question me is there, but they want me to lose my nerve. In fact, I feel I might lose my composure. I ask for permission to read a paper that lies there. My daring surprises my future judge who hesitates, then accepts. I am then moved to another office, a simple staging maneuver.

At last, the questioning starts. Most of the questions are the same as last night's ; but they are asked differently, and could make me fail, and contradict myself. I know my role by heart, and fare well. Then the judge insists :

« There is no need for you to deny it, your husband has told us that you knew of his activities. » This is standard procedure. These men really have no imagination ! I answer :

« No, my husband cannot have said that, because it is not so. »

« Yes, he said it. So, who is lying : you, or he ? »

« He cannot have said it, because it is not true. »

« Yes, he did, knowing full well that it would lead you to jail. »

This trap is too obvious.

« If my husband said such a lie, he must not have been himself. What terrible treatments did you subject him to ? »

« Not at all, he was interrogated here, in the same seat you are in right now. »

He seems so sincere that I feel somewhat reassured. One of his buddies jumps up and suddenly asks :

« Where did you live in La-hon ? »

« It is not pronounced 'La-hon', but 'lan', » say I, wanting to show how calm I am. He repeats his question, to which I answer :

« I have never lived in Laon, and you know it very well. »

The questioning starts again, with the first policeman. At the end, it seems to me that he believes in my innocence. As a matter of fact he says :

« All right, you can go. »

« Can I know, first, where my husband is, and if I may bring him a package ? »

« It depends ; was he arrested at home or outside ? »

« I don't know, you are the ones who told me of his arrest. »

« He is in the Fresnes prison, and you may bring him a package of about nine pounds. » He even tells me what I can put in the package.

**FLORENCE** : Papa is in jail. I would like to go there also, and find out what it's like. It is probably not much fun, but I would like to find out for myself. It might happen in any case.

We are back home now : It would be a tragedy for maman if we missed one day of school too many ! Jeanine also is back. Rizou is still at his summer camp.

Yesterday, maman and I took a heavy suitcase for papa. We carried it in the metro, then on the train, and then had a long trek in the hot sun on our way to the Fresnes prison. The hall was large and well lit. At the reception desk, maman was told that papa wasn't there. While we were waiting for our turn, two men passed, carrying a stretcher on which was a body, covered with a sheet. At one end, high heels were sticking out, and at another, some frizzy red hair. It clearly was not papa. I don't think maman saw it.

On another day, we had gone to the prison of « Cherche-midi ». It was dark, and sad, with dull, greyish, bored, and tired looking people waiting, like us. There also, we were told that papa was not there.

When we get out of the metro at Porte de St Cloud, we are surrounded with half destroyed buildings, with pieces of furniture or bathtubs that look very lonely and silly, on the edge of broken walls. Were the people in those apartments when the bombs fell ? These bombs are dropped by the Allies, and the Germans are happy to use this for their propaganda. There are posters in the metro, against « Perfidious Albion », France's hereditary enemy. Whom to believe ?

**PIERRE** : What I had been promised by my torturers of the first day does not take place. I am questioned several times, I see dear Rudi again, but the only violence I am subjected to is verbal. Rudi often says :

« What does all this matter, since in any case you will be executed. » A secretary who hears him say that one day looks at me, her eyes full of pity. She is more moved than I. Who knows what can happen ? I shall worry for good when I am tied to the execution post. I am of an anxious nature, but Rudi's approach does not frighten me. It might be too extreme.

Time passes, monotonous. The news that reach us is gilding the lily. When the sirens blast for an air raid, all the Germans run to the shelters and then the Marseillaise bursts forth. It sometimes resounds also while the guards are around, but they shut us up effectively with big kicks into our doors.

One day, in the underground corridor of the prison, I see coming toward me Roland Farjon, whose lack of caution almost caused my arrest last October. I pretend not to see him, that is our code of behavior : never show that we know one another, in order to avoid dangerous confrontations. And yet he came towards me, smiling, hand outstretched. How could I not shake it ? His behavior surprises and worries me. I shall understand later.

In our cell, we are getting used to one another. My companions spend a great deal of time fighting the bugs that have invaded our paillasses. I am the only one who seems not to have any fleas... until the day they examine my cot while I am being questioned : they find sixty bed bugs in my blanket !

**FRANCOISE** : For several long weeks, I keep going to Fresnes. I am repeatedly told, at the information desk, that my husband is not there. At last, one day, I am told that an André Moreau is allowed a package with some clothing. Pierre is alive ! The next day, I go with three packages : one with clothes, one with some food, and the third with fruit. I don't want to miss any opportunity. Alas, when I arrive, Moreau has disappeared, and Pierre Pène is still absent.

I try many other venues : Red Cross, Quakers, lawyers, etc... All I want at this time is to know where Pierre is and bring him something. Sometimes I think I am reaching my goal, and then everything collapses.

There is no trace of Pierre at rue des Saussaies either. But I didn't dream it ! I saw, when I was there, a dossier with his name on it, and his ID, in room 533. Why has his name disappeared ? They probably want to assassinate him without any trace. I am full of anxiety.

An acquaintance suggests I try a new approach :

« You might go and see monsieur Palmeri, 101 ave Henri Martin. He has connections with the Gestapo. He is a wealthy pimp from the Pas-de-Calais. » Pas de Calais ? It so happens that I had been wondering whether my husband might be in the hands of the German police at Arras. But why would such a person want to help me ?

« He probably would want payment ? »

« I don't think so, and you wouldn't have enough money to interest him. Go in my name. I did him a favor some time ago, and who knows, he might want to show some thankfulness, » he answers.

I am somewhat loathe to follow suit, but feel I must do all I can to relieve some of Pierre's suffering. On a bright, sunny day, carefully dressed so as to fit in the elegant neighborhood, I leave on my bicycle. The building is plush, the stairwell huge, in 1900 bad taste. The concierge tells me to go to the third floor. I ring. The door is opened just a crack, held by a security lock, and a chain. A chamber maid peeks through, asking what I want.

« I am sent by Mr. X, and desire to see Mr. Palmeri ».

She shuts the door, and disappears.

I am ready to leave when a man, with the looks of a bouncer, appears. Broad shouldered, his face that of a brute, he is armed, and holds the leash of a large dog. The lock and chain are still in place. I repeat my request, adding that I want to locate a political prisoner.

The door is slammed shut again, and then is opened once more, just enough to let me through. The entrance hall is vast, its expensive furniture false gothic. I am led into a dining-room with an immense photo of a French poodle above the fireplace. A large marble table separates me from a foppish man, about thirty years old. His carefully groomed, « boss of the underworld » look, so alien to our world, discourages me. What common ground can we possibly find ? However, I express my request. When I mention the name of my adviser, he explains :

« Ah, that good old X, How is he ? » He listens to me, and then asks :

« What are you exactly after ? You want to know where your husband is, and to help him. Is he in serious trouble ? Do you know what he has done ? »

I prudently answer :

« I don't know, but I get from the Gestapo the impression that he is in real danger. »

« In that case, there is only one way to solve your problem, but it depends on your husband's ideas, and yours. I have great influence at rue des Saussaies. I don't care about politics. German or British, for me, it's all the same. I can get your husband out and put him in another resistance group. »

Naively, I answer :

« I don't understand. »

« Yes, he would then give the name of his comrades. »

I gasped and got up a little too quickly for someone who wanted to appear calm.

« I thank you, sir, I see that we can't agree. »

I sense that he pities my stupidity, my narrow mindedness. And, surprisingly, he lets me go out. The chains and locks open and close behind me, under the watchful gaze of the guard, and the dog. Thoroughly disgusted, I pedaled frenetically back home where, still angry and frustrated, I shared my reaction with Annette and Jeanine.

**ANNETTE** : Poor maman was in a state ! She was still shaking with anger and indignation when she told us of her adventure. It was a good thing that calm Jeanine was there. Her parents, sensing danger, want her back home, but she chooses to stay with us. The parents even sometimes use her as a « mail box », since our mail is certainly watched closely.

I am worried. We don't know where papa is. I hope that we can find him before the Nazis execute him, since that is probably what they plan to do. It is so frustrating to have to work at preparing for my « bachot » ! I can't help as I would like to.

The party at Biqui's was rather boring. The ugly old dress I had to wear made my chest even flatter than it is, and I was wearing grotesque old shoes of maman's. Hélène



Fraenckel, Biqui's mother, had made edible sandwiches. The records weren't fantastic, but I still got a few good dances. We all had to be careful not to make too much noise, so as not to attract attention. The evening was rather glum.



Françoise and her children on the balcony in Boulogne

**PIERRE** : Near the end of May, I am dragged out of my cell and driven around through Senlis, then to St Quentin. There, the « Bereitschaftszimmer » is not better than a closet. When they lock me in, I suffocate and start struggling. I rapidly realize that no one will help me and that being upset will bring about my ruin, so I manage to calm down. When one must, one can adjust to all sorts of things.

My questioners are intent right now about one thing : how to get the code we use to liaise with London. One day, they take me into a room where several men are seated around a table. A young man who looks very British interrogates me about this, but I can honestly say that I don't know the code. I don't even know the Morse code very well ! They don't seem convinced and keep tormenting me with that code. What bad luck, when one is guilty of everything or almost every thing except one, to be suspected also of that one !

In one of the jails I spend time in, my cellmate is a young Communist, a kitchen-boy in civilian life. We share our experiences and, persuaded that we don't have long to live, are preoccupied with our attitude at the last moment. How can one be sure to keep one's dignity until the end ? He says :

Jeanine and Olivier on the balcony in Boulogne



« Singing the Marseillaise. » The poor chap died in deportation.

Here I am in the St Quentin closet. I am almost myself when I am pulled out and taken into an office. The man there, slim and elegant in his SD uniform, has pitiless, hard silver-blue eyes. In front of him are spread all the blueprints and documents about the Margival tunnel, that we took so much trouble to put together. I do not appreciate that preamble, but the questioning is not too rough.

I will have been in that villa, where that

questioning took place, three times: first in December, 1943, to protest the arrest of several of my engineers ; then as a prisoner being interrogated ; and last after the Liberation as a « Commissaire de la République », visiting it with our Americans allies. That is when we discovered traces of many executions on the walls and floors.

**FRANCOISE** : I want to make an official request, so I go to the Ministry of Public Works. The Secretary General equivocates : It would be more harmful than helpful for him to intercede. I don't agree. I know that if the Nazis would execute any functionary as easily as anyone else, they would be more careful about their method of doing it if there had been some official intervention.

A well meaning friend says :

« We have received no notice of your husband's death. If we do, I shall let you know, because I see that you are brave. »

These words make me shiver. Am I really brave ? I don't know, but I can imagine how terrible it would be to hear : « It is finished, there is no more hope. »

I am surprised that Pierre's liaison agent has not contacted me yet. He knew how to get in touch with me without calling me at home. I remember with some anxiety his tense demeanor during our last meal together, Pierre, him and me. I would like to hear what he knows about his boss' disappearance. I go to the restaurants where he is likely to eat, being very watchful about possible followers. No luck.



The four Pène children on the balcony in Boulogne

One day, at last, a friend, Denise, tells me she has received the message we had agreed on. The young man gives me a rendez-vous near the Sorbonne. I go to Clotilde's and ask her :

« When I go to that date, I would like you to follow me. Be very attentive. I shall hop out of the metro several times, just as it gets ready to depart. If you lose me, you can find me at metro station Odéon, side Bvd St Michel. Watch to see whether I have a tail. I would also like to know what you think of André. »

At the metro station Auteuil, Clo has already lost me. I wait at Odéon. I see her come from afar. Before she reaches me, I start walking up the boulevard St Michel. I see André across the street. I join him. He says :

« I have been following you and you have a tail. »

« Yes, I know. I have planned it. It is for control. »

We chat a bit and when I feel secure enough, we slow down so that Clotilde can join us. We all share what we know ; alas, very little. His boss has disappeared at the same time as his friend Jacques, with whom he had had an appointment at Sèvres-Babylone. Hache, another resister, has also vanished.

Hache whose real name is Mairesse, a young, energetic and lively doctor, father of three children, had left the Provinces when he became too actively hunted down there. He then came to work in Paris, with my husband. Another young wife will be distressed with

worry. Another one of the best who is now in the hands of the German Police. More and more losses.

We learned later that Mairesse died in the terrible train which left Compiègne on the second of July, 1944 : the train in which 900 people died for lack of air and water. We later had to be the ones to tell his wife that she now was a widow, with four children, since the little girl so desired by her father, was born after his death. How terrible. And we had to be the people bringing despair to that young woman, who reacted with anger and recriminations.

But let us go back to Paris, Clotilde and I with André who seems so sad about Pierre's arrest, so sincere, that we trust him. After we have all talked about what we know, he suddenly declares that he has to leave. He asks that we check whether he is being followed, and that we let him know if he is. He has a vague feeling of suspicion. He walks towards Notre Dame. There are big crowds rushing to kiss the bishop's ring : it is, indeed, Easter Monday, we had forgotten all about it.

A man with spectacles is following André. We get behind him and discreetly warn André. He goes towards the gardens. The follower hesitates at the entrance, afraid of a trap. He comes and goes, turns around, hesitates again, and then leaves. André, in his turn, leaves. We go home.

Clotilde keeps coming regularly for lunch every Sunday. These meals are now lifeless, filled with discussions about what we might be able to do to get in touch with Pierre, and what we might still hope from the attempts I have already made.

One day, though, we don't know why, we feel less oppressed. The doorbell rings. Who could it possibly be ? It is my sister-in-law's concierge. He is out of breath, and hands me a note. The piece of paper, cut up and blackened out in spots, had been given to him by two Germans who wanted to see Madame or mademoiselle Pène, but didn't have the time to go to Boulogne.

How moved we were to recognize the husband's and brother's hand-writing :

« I am well but concerned for my wife. Be brave. I think of both of you and love you. »

He was alive !

**PIERRE** : Back at the Fresnes prison, I am pleasantly surprised to be in the same cell with the same men. This reinforces my suspicion that one of them might be a stool pigeon.

Two of my children were born in May. When their birthdays come, Annette's on the fourth and Olivier's on the ninth, I reminisce. I talk of past celebrations. I express my feelings. Later, I am filled with remorse and anxiety : was I too careless ? did I make a hopeless mistake ? The thought of escape comes then as the only possible salvation. It might, at last, free me from all that has happened since April four. What a thought : freedom !

Late in May, when I come back from St Quentin, I find a package waiting for me : at last, news of my beloveds !

The Russians are advancing, and « Radio Fresnes » multiplies their successes a hundredfold. Planes fly over us on their way east, more and more often, more and more numerous. They also drop bombs in the Paris area. This rejoices us, when we are not worried for those we love. I also wonder whether my wife and children have enough to eat, now that I can no longer help them. Do they have some money ?

One day, I am taken out of Fresnes and driven to Senlis. On its outskirts, a large villa has been transformed into a prison. I don't know it at the time, but it is my chance for freedom.

# Chapter eight

## PIERRE ESCAPES

### Night of June 9 to 10, 1944

**PIERRE** : On the ground floor of the villa is the guardroom ; on the second floor, the guards' sleeping quarters ; the prisoners' cells are on the third floor and in the basement. During our first days, we are kept on the second floor, tied to our beds with a handcuff. The guards are not hostile towards us. Some of them, leftists, compare us, with some sympathy, to Schlagetter, a German patriot shot by the French after WWI in Rheinland. One of them is upset to see how meager our food portions are ; and yet, when compared to Fresnes, this could pass for a three star restaurant ; here also, unlike at Fresnes, we are placed in a shelter during air raids.

**FRANCOISE** : One day, I am told that I can send another package to Pierre. I add to its contents a short note, with news of the children. I know that whatever I write will be carefully examined by the police, so very casually I suggest that my husband might write some poetry as he did when at the front. Pierre understands and sends me a poem, which seems inoffensive enough not to alarm our censors. Reading from top to bottom the first letters of the second words of each line, I know he is in Senlis ! We have tricked our gaolers.

I immediately contact a friend, Mr. Turbil who, as a contractor, is allowed to travel. He has been able to arrange the escape of his son François from the Compiègne prison. He promises me total secrecy, and offers to reconnoiter the place. He will tell me how he will plan to proceed, and warn me at the appropriate time so that I can hide somewhere with my children. An artist, a friend, offers us his small country house, thinking we want to get away from the bombings in our neighborhood.

The surveillance I have felt seems less weighty and I get involved again, doing a few things for the resistance. I check all my papers, to make sure there is nothing too compromising at home. In my appointment book, I use a code which no one would understand but me.

On the evening of June nine, we go to bed as usual.

FLORENCE : (Extracts from a letter)

June 14, 1944

My dear little Rizou

You must be worried not to have received news from us in a while. I apologize, but you will see later that I have the best of all possible excuses.

I enjoyed your letter very much, even though your spelling leaves a lot to be desired. ... Have your crises of despair stopped ? Do you now know that we love you, you big boy, almost nine years old ? ... Do you remember to say your daily prayers ? ...

I am sending you five pictures ; you can do what you want with them, but keep your favorite for yourself. ....

Since I have nothing else to talk with you about (four pages later), I shall now tell you what happened to us these recently :

Saturday morning, at four thirty, (they are early risers !) the doorbell rings. Someone rushes to open. Men's voices. Why did I think, in my sleep, that they were plumbers ? They talk with maman for a long time, and, armed with flashlights, enter our room. Maman : « It is the children's room. » (I am told that they came into the apartment saying : « Something bad has happened. ») I realized then that my plumbers were really Germans in civilian clothes.

In the corridor, they tell maman to get dressed, and we must do the same. Maman grumbles. « Yes, yes, you have to, no more pity, after what your husband has done. » She protests : « But, don't you see ? the baby ? and his bottles, and ... » - « If you please, madame, get dressed. » All this again and again.

I get up. I have to get dressed. I begin. Annette rushes in : « dawdle, dawdle, maman says not to get dressed. » If you say so. I look for my stuff in the dark (a fuse has blown) and don't find it. I take a very long time, looking for handkerchief, socks, comb, shirt, etc...

The Germans keep arguing with maman, and complain that we are not getting ready fast enough. Finally, when we see that maman is dressed, we do the same, in front of them who are there, flashlights in hand.

Ready at last, Olivier included, we are led downstairs to a black car. Meanwhile, maman is led by two of the men who want to find Jeanine. Maman plays dumb, and pretends not to know which is Jeanine's room, once they are on the eighth floor. She shows one, saying : « It might be this one. » They break it open, revolver in their hand. No bed there. They bang into every door, until Jeanine's neighbors open.

The police : « Who sleeps next door ? » - « A young woman, in her early twenties. » Maman : « Oh, it can't possibly be Jeanine, who is much younger ! ». The Germans ask the man for a hammer. He hands his keys. At last, Jeanine opens her door, dressed, ready. They take her with us in the car. There, we are forbidden to talk. Maman gives us some instructions, with gestures.

Around five thirty we arrive into an apartment they use. We have a German guard, and are forbidden to talk. We are led into the kitchen, into the bedroom, into the dining-room. There, table, chairs, a bed, some old swords, a few flags : three British, three French. A picture of Germans running off, chased by a French tank.

We stay there a long time, without eating anything. The men have loaned Olivier three toys. We play cards. Maman argues about politics with the head policeman, and asks for our freedom. She pleads so effectively that around four p.m. we are driven back home. Two men have remained with us in the living-dining room until last night. That is where they have eaten and slept. We weren't allowed to talk with anyone, or to go outside.

They have kept maman. Tante Clo also is there. Léonie has grumbled so much that they didn't take her. They have kept all her keys, so that she can't get into the apartment.

Present my apologies to father Renhas. I had planned to write him today, but I have to run to school now, so I can't.

Love and kisses,

Flo

**FRANCOISE** : On June tenth, I am suddenly awakened by the doorbell. I am surprised to see that it is four a.m. As I put my bathrobe on, the bell rings again, impatient. Annette, faster than I, is already at the door, waiting for me. I open the door. Three German policemen in mufti are standing there, and two of them rush into the apartment while their chief tells me :

« Something bad has happened. »

My thoughts go to Pierre. Have they killed him ? I stiffen, not wanting to faint. My face must express my anxiety. The chief explains :

« Your husband has escaped. »

What relief ! I can smile again. Now he says :

« Get dressed quickly ; we are taking all of you. » Meanwhile, the others are running all over the place, they open closets, clearly looking for a man. They also echo their leader :

« Hurry up, get dressed. »

I do everything I can to prevent them from taking the children or Jeanine, but despite all my dawdling and pleading, we end up in a black car, with our three guardian angels. I try to give the children some instructions behind the Germans' backs. Jeanine has, at their request, given them her set of keys, one of which is a key to the extra room in which we hide food, compromising papers, and sometimes Pierre himself. This worries me and I try to think of possible explanations if we are questioned about this. They forbid us to talk.

Annette is concerned about the phone numbers of some resisters we know, and I whisper that I have dropped them in the toilet. I am shushed again.

« But I am playing hand games with the baby » I say, moving my hands.

« Take him on your lap and shut up. »

I am obsessed with two thoughts : I hope that the girls will say the same thing as I about their father, and that Jeanine won't say anything compromising about the key to the extra room. I am also worried about my appointment notebook, which I have not had time to destroy.

We arrive at a dusty apartment near the « Avenue de la Grande Armée ». There is a light blue képi in the entrance, so it must belong to a French officer. We are led into a dining room where the table is covered with sabers and French and British flags. Jeanine and I are each placed in a corner of the room, our face turned toward the wall.

Time passes very slowly. The baby gets impatient. I let him play with the flags and the scabbards. He quickly becomes dirty. Our guard nods off. I can hear people walking in the corridor. Annette thinks she has seen her aunt behind a glass door, and I believe I saw madame Farjon, Dufor's wife. If it is she, it means that our husbands have escaped together.

Since our guard has fallen asleep, I can repeat my instructions to the children. Jeanine is afraid that he might be feigning sleep, and can hear us. Despite all, it is worth going for it. I tell her what to say if she is questioned about the key. I explain to the girls where I have hidden some money, and where my appointment book is, just in case I can get them to be freed. I have to think ahead.

The hours pass very slowly. The baby falls asleep, the girls are hungry. They have taken a deck of cards and are playing with Jeanine, no longer in her corner. I open the door and, in the corridor, see the chief who is walking up and down with madame Farjon, whom he is questioning. He sees me, and doesn't get angry, as I had feared.

« It's your turn, come and talk with me. »

We are in a long and narrow room ; we sit down, a small round table between us. The shades are down, and a very long session begins. Lasting at least three hours, it soon turns into a political discussion. I plead for my children :

« I can understand my being taken as a hostage, but it is inconceivable that the children and the maid be interned », adding that this would be very bad propaganda for them. The population of three high-schools, that of my daughters' included, are using the same building at lycée Jeanson de Sully, and when the reason for their absence is known, it will cause a scandal. Furthermore, the basement of our building serves as an air raid shelter for the whole neighborhood and, there also, they would cause a scandal if they don't liberate the children.

« You keep digging an ever more profound moat between you, Germans, and us, French. Do you think that your brutal methods will lessen the Resistance ? On the contrary, every arrest you make is a call to resistance to the prisoners' friends and relatives. » I pursue in the same vein.

I can feel that my questioner becomes shaken. He can tell that I know nothing of my husband's escape and am of no use to him in that respect. He still tries to make me talk about Pierre's activities and contacts. He is astute and often manages, through tortuous maneuvers, to ask the important question when the conversation has veered, he has accepted being contradicted, and one is relaxed. He is not at all the rudimentary brute. Personally, this suits me since I know how to keep my guard up but have no idea of how I would react if under physical torture.

After being brought out to meet the Farjon ladies and my sister in law, I am taken back to my children. Soon, Dr. Schott comes to tell me that he has obtained the liberation of the children and the maid. Drunk with joy, I thank him and entrust the baby to Jeanine. He seems to understand and leans his pretty little head against hers.

**ANNETTE** : Maman is incredible. While the policeman was questioning her, we could listen behind the door, since the man guarding us was asleep. There she was, telling him that they were savages, worse than the Communists, putting children in jail ! What a reputation their cruelty would give them ! Although knowing nothing of whatever it was that her husband was up to, she understood that she be taken as a hostage, but why the maid and the children ? That would be criminal ! (and I learned later that the rumor had spread at school that I was dead)

He answered that he had other grievances against her. He was probably thinking of her Jewish origins, which they most certainly know about. This didn't stop her from raving and ranting, accusing him of savagery and injustice. She kept repeating herself again and again, as is her custom. This lasted for such a long time that the poor guy, certainly as tired and hungry as we were, placed a telephone call. He obtained from his superiors the authorization that Jeanine, Flo, Olivier and I be taken back home. There, we would be under the control of two guards who would catch papa if he tried to get in touch with us.

It was late afternoon when we got home. As soon as we were inside, the two tall men explained the rules to Jeanine and me. They would occupy the living-dining area. We weren't allowed to go on the balcony, go out, nor talk to anyone. Jeanine would do the daily food shopping with one of them behind her (and this makes poor Jeanine, concerned about her reputation, very uncomfortable).

One of the men, probably in an attempt at some friendliness, took Olivier on his lap. The baby, at that time, used to love to pretend he was speaking ; he started a long lecture in gibberish ; still tense, we couldn't help but laugh. The policeman may have thought that he had said something insulting, and, afraid of ridicule, threw Olivier, still smiling, down.

So there we were, not knowing what to do about that key, or maman's address book. And how could we possibly prevent from coming upstairs, the young resister who was due to come and pick up a bicycle tire ? How could we prevent telephone calls and mail from reaching the apartment ? I was worrying about all this when the telephone rang. I rushed to it. It was the young man for the tire. I was able to say very quickly :

« Don't come up. Germans are here, maman is in jail. » By then, one of the men had come out of his lair and, pistol in hand, poked me away from the phone with his elbow, screaming :

« Don't you ever pick up the phone ! It is for me to do it ! ».... How could I prevent any other call ?

Fortunately, the noise Dr. Schott had made looking for Jeanine's room on the eighth floor had alarmed some people. Suzanne Roumens rang our doorbell, asking whether we were all right. I was able, before the policeman came out, to tell her quickly :

« In a half hour, climb on the roof of escalier H. » By the time the man appeared, I was saying loudly that everything was fine, and Suzanne left.

Our guards had not noticed that if our long balcony, which they had forbidden us to use, was facing east over the « Parc des Princes », the kitchen window was facing west, overlooking the stairwell H, which was at an angle, and, unlike the others, had only four floors. I wrote a note in which I asked Suzanne to tell the concierges to interrupt all telephone calls and to hold all mail meant for us until further notice. I wrapped the note around the key that worried maman so much. When Suzanne showed up on the roof, I threw it to her. During that time, Flo was watching the corridor, with order to sing if the men showed up.

I was still concerned about the address book maman had left it in the living-room, on top of the radio. That room was now the Germans' living quarters. What to do ? Jeanine and I were trying to think of a ploy when Flo, passing by, heard us, and told us that she had taken care of it. What ? Yes, while the men were explaining the rules to us, she had gone behind their backs, taken the little note book, and thrown it, as maman had instructed, in Rizou's toy chest.

The concierges heeded my request. After spending three days with us, hearing or seeing nothing, the men left us. What relief !

But now I am in charge of three children, as I had feared... and I don't even have my « bac » yet ! It is a good thing that Jeanine is here with me. What next ? I am scared.

**DIDIER, formerly RIZOU :** It is only later that I learned of the rough questionings, the beatings and water torture my father had been subjected to by the German police. Since they had obtained no useful information from him, they tried to think of a ruse, and found one : they transferred him to a villa they had transformed into a jail in Senlis, north of Paris. There, he would be put in the same cell as Roland Farjeon, scion of the Baignol & Farjon family, makers of the pencils of my childhood.

My father did not know that Farjon had been « turned around » by his questioners who had used the fact that he was more anti-communist than anti-nazi. Their hope was that my father would trust his former chief in the Resistance and talk freely with him. Once he had talked enough, he would be assassinated on June ten, as we learned later.

If things did not turn out as they had planned , it is because Farjon was now unsure of the future. The « miracle » of D Day had occurred. He kept playing the German card until the end, but the landing on the shores of Normandy was inciting him to think of escape. This made him accept my father's suggestion of an escape, on the night between June nine and June ten (date of the planned execution of Pierre). There is such a thing as luck.

**PIERRE :** One day Roland Farjon shows up, as dashing, handsome and self confident as usual. He shared a cell on the third floor with Henri Simon, while we were in the basement. One morning, I am taken to his cell, while Simon is taken out, never to be seen again ... probably executed in some woods.

As soon as we are together, Roland and I talk about a possible escape. Roland, who had flirted with the Germans, flirted much too much, was now, since June six and D-day, somewhat uncertain about which way the future lay. An escape didn't sound too bad.

We were in a cell on the third floor, at least twenty five feet high, the stories having high ceilings. The windows seemed to be the only possible path possible. They had vertical bars. We soon found out that the French workers who had implanted them in cement had done a poor job, perhaps on purpose, knowing that the prisoners would be French. The German overseers, usually so conscientious, did not check the job very carefully.

On June eight, with the sharp handle of our forks, we attack the embedding which cedes easily. Thanks to the physical shape I have been able to maintain, I am able to bring my hands, tied in manacles, from my back to the front, and back again if I hear anything behind our door.

We each have a sheet. We cut them in strips lengthwise and tie them together into a long rope that we hide under our mattress during the day. During a quiet period of the day,



we take one of the bars out ; we then place it back, filling the hole with a mix of bread crumbs and cement powder that we have picked up from the floor. If we are lucky, we might be able to make it. It should be easier to escape from here than from Fresnes. The guards walk rounds around the building at irregular intervals. We cannot see them, but we hear them.

On June nine, we decide that midnight will be it.

That is when we discover a new danger we had not been aware of : the main power line to the villa is practically below our window. We shall have to be careful to avoid it on our way down. At midnight, we remove the bar from the window. The night is chilly, we each wear a sweater, and take off our shoes that we hang around our necks with the laces, so as not to be too noisy in our fall.

Roland says :

« You are the older one, you will decide when we go. » We also agree at that time that if one of us has a problem on the way out, the other one must run for himself and take no more risk. We also agree that Roland, being younger, has a better chance of making it, and therefore should go first.

We tie our homemade rope to the bar that is left in the window. The time seems propitious but we have no certainty other than the patrol just ended their round. It is on a whim that I decide when we should go. Roland goes down, apparently without trouble. It is my turn to grab the pieces of sheets and slide down. Passing in front of the guards' window, I think that I see, no, I see, the light being turned on. I think that we are being caught, and I must hurry. I hurry so much that I let go of the rope at perhaps fifteen feet from the ground, and fall down, under the guards' window, mercifully in a bush.

Nothing happens. This is bizarre, since I am persuaded that in my anger and frustration, I have let go a very loud scream.

Roland saw me fall down and runs away, as we had agreed he should. I get up and, without bothering to pick up my shoes which had fallen before me, I run after him. I don't want to be left alone and wounded ; for I begin to feel that my wrist hurts. It is, indeed, sprained and broken, but the wound is so recent that I am able to lean on it to jump over the outside wall of the property.

We start walking along the road, gentler than the woods for the feet of the un-shod pedestrian I am. Being on the road also makes it easier for us to see oncoming convoys, even though they travel with barely any headlights on, so as to avoid detection. Nobody is after us ! We learned later that our jailers, furious at our escape, laid mattresses the next morning in the sun, saying :

« Farjon and Pène have tried to escape, but we caught them and, fatally wounded, they laid on these mattresses. » How childish !

I tell Roland that I saw the light being turned on as I passed the window of the guards. He answers that it was already lit when he went down. He has never heard the horrible scream I am sure I let out when my mind was racing. How fragile and doubtful any testimony is, no matter how sincere it might be !

Fear accompanies us along the road : a can rolls on the road, pushed by the wind : is it not a rifle being charged ? Some watch dogs bark furiously at Verberie. We decide to walk around the village. We come across a fence that, my wrist hurting, I am not able to vault. Roland helps me. The night is cool and dark, the sky overcast. After Verberie, we get back on the road, and can see, at a distance, some human shapes blocking it. Some workmen are coming from that direction, on their bicycles. We ask :

« What is going on out there ? Who are those people ? »

« They are Germans, checking papers. » Frightened, we seek refuge in the woods on our right. Tired as we are, we shouldn't have to face such a situation.

After a long walk through the woods, we come across an old wood cutter who, after examination, seems trustworthy.

« You can guess what we are ? »

« Yes. »

« Where are the Germans in Croix St Ouen ? Do they have patrols ? Would it be possible to reach the Farjon factory ? »

« Yes, it is in the outskirts. » It does not take us very long to get there, where Roland is recognized and welcomed.

We are exhausted ; one of the factory workers, a nurse, makes a splint for my heavy and painful wrist. We are fed and we can rest a little, while a truck is readied to take us to Paris. It normally transports charcoal for the pencil making factory. We are both put in a very large crate under an enormous load of charcoal. It is agreed that knocks on the crate will alert us when there is a roadblock. Three men will be in front of the truck : the chauffeur, the factory manager, and an assistant.

« Do you think we shall make it ? » one of us asks. The chauffeur answers :

« We shall depend on the protection of Notre Dame de Boulogne. » This is because the Farjon business started in Boulogne sur mer.

We are driven through Chantilly, this being a safer route. Our crate has air vents, and, happy to be free, we sing gaily. Then, the truck stops ; three knocks on the crate. Silence. What now ? Then the truck starts again and our joyful exclamations rise again. The rest of the trip is calm and we are dropped off at a lonely place on the « boulevards des maréchaux » encircling Paris, in front of the gaz plant.

This is when the search from hiding place to hiding place begins. No one wants to keep our dangerous persons too long. One person gives us a meal, another, a pair of shoes. My feet are one bloody wound, after that long walk in my socks, and I am so sore that I can hardly move. We each go our own way and shall not meet again.

I reach, at last, Dr. Morax, avenue Pierre 1<sup>er</sup> de Serbie. A renowned ophtalmologist, he is not afraid of offering me shelter. He disinfects the scratches on my hands, and calls the surgeon Funck-Brentano.

That is when I learn that my whole family have been arrested. What to do ? My first impulse is to go and give myself up so as to get them freed. Morax dissuades me :

« They will have you, and will keep yours also ». I am too tired to argue, but feel very guilty. Why do my beloveds have to pay for some decision they had nothing to do with ?

What were my motivations, for entering into the Resistance ? Were they totally pure ? Was there no vague ambition, desire for glory ? I honestly believe that I was not moved by any selfish motive.

Doctor Morax' apartment was not the best refuge for someone like me. Madame Morax, an extremely beautiful Jewess of Egyptian origin, needing to hide for more than one reason, had left her home a few days before. One morning, as I was ambling in the large apartment, the door bell rings, and I hear the chambermaid talk with several men. Tempted at first to go and see, I mercifully abstain. They were French policemen come to arrest madame Morax. The chambermaid remained very calm, and invited those gentlemen to come and visit the place, but she could swear to them that madame Morax was not there. They did not pursue the quest. Her cool, far superior to mine, had persuaded them.

**FRANCOISE :** The German secretary drives me to Fresnes prison, sermonizing me on the way. We cross one gate after another. How big it is ! How many doors get locked behind me ! I am deprived of my pocketbook, the belt of my dress, and, freed of all possession, I arrive in a waterless cell. All there is are a cot with a mattress and two blankets. That is all. I have accepted this. Let's not get discouraged now. I read the inspiring things previous occupants of this space have written on the walls. Tired, I lie down, sheetless and without night clothes, dressed as I am, on the mattress.

I hear some knocks against the wall. This is mysterious. I have not yet learned the meaning of this language. No water, no bread. I don't miss them too much at this point. I begin, however, to understand what it means to be incarcerated ; this makes me ever so happier that I managed to deliver my children from it.

So, here we are, my sister in law and I, both in solitary confinement, far from one another.

The day after my arrest, my door is opened brutally and I find myself among other women who were arrested, like me, the day before. One of them looks so frail that I give her

some sugar cubes Annette had found at the bottom of the baby bottle bag and given me when we were separated. It is my only baggage, all I own. I didn't expect the woman's immediate reaction : she hugs and kisses me. Her eyes are popping out, her face full of bruises.

Despite the screams of our matron who tries to stop us from talking, she can tell me, softly, that she has been brutally beaten, and dunked in cold water seven times, but has not talked. Justly proud of her courage, she tells the other women :

« Be brave, be gay. » A plump Austrian woman whines another song :

« What will they do to us ? » A third, with fine features, has a bandaged head. Another is a poor peasant woman, calm and silent. Others.

We are put in individual cells resembling beach changing cabins, with a grill ceiling and a peep hole in the door. Despite the « no talking » rule, we use the next three hours exchanging names and addresses, in case one of us is lucky enough to be freed quickly. An awful « Feldwebel » shouts at us to shut up. His blood-shot blue eye stares at me through the peep hole. It scares some of us, the prudent ones, who beg us to be silent. The Austrian woman is shaking with fear. The tortured one rather dramatically tries to boost everyone's morale. I find our situation rather risible and laugh, the « Feldwebel » reacts, his hand over me, threatening. He paces up and down and when I think he is far away, his ugly face turns up in my changing room.

I am saved by « Grey Mouse », the poor old matron, mother of eight children, the nicest person in the whole prison. She came to get me for the undressing. Following her, I exclaim, in a half-French, half German gibberish :

« How big this place is ! How many poor people are imprisoned here ! » and in the same kind of language, she answers :

« Yes, poor prisoners, but sometimes they get out, while we, the guards, we stay ! » I thus learn that she had been drafted, leaving her eight children behind ! Poor Grey Mouse, who, under strict rules, can do nothing to alleviate the suffering of her prisoners.

After being frisked and registered, I am taken to the ground floor where I am given a private cell. While some people, such as my husband, prefer to have company, I am rather glad to be alone with photos of my children, that « Souris Grise » has allowed me to keep.

**CLOTILDE** : So, I, too, will have to get a taste of German incarceration. My brother, imprisoned two months ago and at the point of being executed, has escaped from his jail in Senlis. Still stunned by this piece of good news, I am riding in a Citroën car, under the watchful eyes of three German policemen. The interpreter, next to me, laments the destruction of my neighborhood, wrought by Allied bombers. I don't pay enough attention to remind him that it was hit before, in 1940, by the Germans.

I am brought into a luxurious apartment occupied by them where I find myself with Roland Farjon's mother and wife. I can see in the distance that my sister in law Françoise is also there, with her children. The chief, called by everyone « Doktor », gives an order. A dozen young Germans in civilian clothes, with brutish faces, come in and salute him. He gives each one of them two photos, a profile and a full face of each of the escapees. A guttural order, a click of heels, the young brutes go away, a pack of hounds searching for my brother. I fervently pray that they don't succeed.

For many long hours, I am waiting, next to the interpreter who makes conversation, while the « Doktor » questions the Farjon ladies in another room. Then, with an important air, he announces :

« Get ready and come along. » So there I am again in the black Citroën with the younger madame Farjon. When we get to the place Denfert-Rochereau, I know that our destination is Fresnes. I have gone there often, with packages I hoped to bring Pierre. I had never succeeded and the doors had always remained shut tight in front of me. Today, they open easily, in one direction only.

The building we are led into after interminable corridors and many gates that open for us and are locked behind us, reminds me of a swimming pool. There is a large hall where the

basin would be, and around it staircases and footbridges leading to cells instead of changing rooms. There is no corner where one may hide : the light bridges allow the wardens to see everything that goes on, from the ground floor, up to the sixth floor. We are walking single file with a matron, in front of the solidly locked doors of the second story cells. One door opens, and seizes me. I can barely hear the kind « good luck » madame Farjon says. There is only one bed in the cell, so I shall be alone. It will be solitary confinement ; for the first time, I hear the squeal of the keys in the locks that secure the door behind me. How maddening this sound will become, underlining every small incident of our daily lives as prisoners !

I have barely been able to look around when there is a little knock on the wall, and a young and faint voice, coming from I don't know where, says :

« Hello, comrade in cell 102, what is your name ? If you want to answer, climb on your stool near the fanlight and talk very loudly. »

These instructions are clear, but I am tired, and sad at my lost freedom, and don't really feel like chatting. Another thing : I have not thought of looking at the number of my cell when I got in, and am not sure I am in 102. It is not easy either to do the required bit of exercise, the matron coming in and out of my cell several times.

She brings me a piece of bread, after having told me that there was none ; a spoon ; a mess tin. I inspect my cell : there are two small shelves on the wall ; a faucet of cold water that stops working the next day, and won't be fixed for another month ; a board that can be folded against the wall and serves as a table ; a stool and a metal bed frame, with a dirty mattress, a filthy sheet, and two blankets. Across from the door, there is a window, with solid bars across it. It is wide and high, and would be wonderful if one could open it. However, its frosted glass prevents one from seeing through, and it is strictly forbidden to open it.

My neighbor Colette does not hold a grudge for my silence of my first day, and soon informs me of the local customs : it is possible to talk together thanks to an opening above the faucet. Chatting from cell to cell was certainly not the intended purpose of that orifice, but there was no way I could explain its existence. I did not search very hard to do so, its current use being so welcome. The heating vents allow one to communicate with the floors above and below. One can also scream near the window, but in that case, everyone hears what you are saying. No secrets ! Of course, we are severely forbidden to communicate, so all this must be done carefully.

We usually try to do it during meal times : our soup and the execrable liquid that is here baptized « coffee » are brought by the matrons in large containers ; those travel on a cart that moves along rails. Between the noise of the wheels, the rails, and the keys in the locks, the matrons are deafened. We take advantage of that. That is when we can exchange messages, give results of questionings. It is then that one simple word, one complaint, one piece of advice, express all the misery, pain, and courage, that are hidden under the apparent calm of the prison.

**RIZOU** : I have been abandoned. I don't think anyone loves me. I believe papa is dead. I was told, yesterday, to pray for my parents. It must be because they are dead.

Why else would I stay in this summer camp ? We are in a big house, with a field in front where we can play and, in the back, a kind of space with German soldiers and their tanks. They don't look too mean. Why did we take that long walk in the woods, and stop in that place with monks, who fed us a wonderful purée, made with real butter ?

(Annette : Papa had told us that we had to be prepared to receive a visit from the German police ; in that expectation, we should not keep Rizou, too young to understand what could and should not be said or done. He was too likely to brandish a fake saber to « kill all the Fritz » or a cardboard revolver, screaming « Down with all the Germans ! « )

(Simone Roumens : He was too young to be told what one shouldn't say. Suzanne was taking care of him. When two men came looking for him – not knowing that they were friends, Dr Roy and another – she panicked and took him to a hiding place. The abbot was a native of the area, and thanks to that, the children were well fed. When people killed some

game, they gave meat to the camp. They had meat twice a week, quite a miracle at that time.)

One of my buddies told me not to be sad, he too had no news from his family. He doesn't know that it's not the same : he doesn't have a sister preparing her « bachot », another swimming in competitions, and an adorable little brother !

**PIERRE** : Paris, at that time, was invaded by refugees from Normandy. Lots of people had fled too fast, dressed in rags, not knowing where to go. That was a good thing for outlaws like me who didn't look different from the rest of the crowds.

I knew that I should not stay too long at Dr. Morax' apartment. First, I didn't want to endanger him. Second, I might have attracted attention in that elegant neighborhood. I had to find other refuges, and it was not easy. Some people who had hidden me before thought that it would be more dangerous to protect an escapee, not understanding that the risk was the same : prison, or even death.

I found a few places : a friend of H el ene Franckel's ; a colleague of my brother-in-law's, by the name of Maroteau ; a couple of kind brush makers in Chennevi eres ; a nice old lady, madame Babut, and others. I am ashamed to have forgotten the name of some of them.

I am permanently tense. Whenever I enter a place, I check whether there is anyone I know there, and how I might eventually escape if needed. I don't ever laugh anymore. I no longer know how to laugh.

**FRANCOISE** : As methodical as they may be, the Germans have a very arbitrary way of treating their prisoners. None of the four of us, all arrested for the same reason, is treated the same way as the others : some in solitary, others not ; some receive packages, others not ; the number of questionings is also variable. The number of books loaned is also determined more by who your matron is than by your degree of culpability.

My cell, which at first had looked clean, is in fact full of vermin. The mattress is very hard, and I have a hard time getting any sleep. The walls are covered with writings, left there by my predecessors. During those interminable days, having nothing to do and seeing no one, I have plenty of time to read them and imagine their personalities.

Next door to me is a Communist woman, Florence, condemned to death. She has been here for a year, and has a remarkable morale. Despite this, she has some days of sadness : she resents being locked in, far from those she loves, without any news from them, and idle. Her mother died after a rough questioning. Her sickly sister depends on her. What will happen to that sister, with a husband in a POW camp in Germany, and a fragile young son ?

On the other side, my neighbor, Suzy, has been told she will be sent to a camp in Germany. She has been in jail for three months. We both think that, since I am held as a hostage, I shall be freed before her. That is why she gives me messages and addresses, and I don't give her mine. And one day, she disappears. She was freed, the day after her brother in law Jeanneton, a leader in the Resistance, has been executed.

From my cell I can hear another prisoner, Jeannette. Every morning, she desperately calls her Jeannot, who does not answer. Each one of us, besides her boredom and her hunger, is also concerned with her beloveds, but tries to hide her pain. This is a situation where every word has an enormous impact on many others, whose only solace is precisely that contact with others. We are all fragile, and must be careful of what we say.

Solitude and boredom are hard to take, but hunger is worse. As soon as I was in my cell, my neighbor Florence warned me :

« Give your bread back if you don't eat it ; it can then be distributed to those who want seconds. » As a matter of fact, I was not able, during the first days, to eat the dark and compact bread that was distributed to us. The black water we are given, to which some

bromide has been added, is called coffee. It makes me vomit, and I never get used to it. It is also very difficult for me to sleep, as I can feel all the fleas and other vermin in my mattress, to which I cannot give chase in the dark.

Despite all, I enjoy the soup, which has been improved since the arrest of a Red Cross colonel. It contains some noodles or beans besides the cabbage. When I eat it in my rusted mess tin, I feel that I am getting some nourishment. I wish we could have some of it in the evening also. It might save me from those hunger cramps, dizzy spells, a million lights behind my eyes, and, most demeaning, my dreams of food. But every evening, all we get is that water with bromides. That is all. So, I often get up during the night, incapable of resisting, and take a bite off the piece of bread I was saving for the morning. I pay for that lack of determination with interminable mornings, waiting for the food chariot, that won't come until eleven a.m.

After five weeks, I receive my first Red Cross package. Miraculous Red Cross, how well it operates. To me, it had so far been only a beggar asking for donations, and here it is, now my benefactor ! How thankful I am to it in my cell !

Another visit, too rare, is also always welcome : the chaplain. When he first comes in, wearing a German uniform, I tighten up, of course. However, before noticing his cross, I see his expression of kindness and gentleness. What a contrast with that green uniform ! In this place where one hears only screams and threats, his soft voice feels so good.

The most moving part of life at Fresnes is the « bonjour » and the « bonsoir » the prisoners exchange daily. They mark time, and warm our hearts.

**CLOTILDE** : Every morning except on Sundays, around six, a matron makes the rounds, and warns the women who will be interrogated on that day. They will be driven to the rue des Saussaies in a prison van.

Paradoxically, I am rather glad to be still incarcerated : it must mean that my brother is still at large. It seems to me that I would get liberated only if he gets caught.

The rides in the prison van are the only times men and women can see each other and exchange messages. In the evening, the women who have been questioned and not too badly harmed give us their impression of the outside world. « Radio Fresnes », immediately starts its own process of interpretation : every piece of news is modified, transformed, agrandized, and the Allies are always victorious. At that time, we thought that as soon as France got liberated, prisoners like us would be freed. Alas, all my prison friends were sent to German camps around August fifteen.

Some evenings were joyful, since in my part of the prison, there were some very lively women. However, most evenings have left with me an impression of dull boredom and sometimes very deep sadness. One of my comrades keeps screaming, as she is being taken to the punishment cell :

« Vive la France, vive la France. » This sets the matrons laughing hysterically. What a horrid concert, those devilish laughs mixed with the calls of that poor woman, maddened by too much suffering. Totally powerless, we only become a little more hateful.

Sadness is contagious. When one suffers from it, it is important to keep it to oneself. In jail, feelings are exarcebated. Gaiety can become rambunctious, and sadness easily becomes despair.

**ANNETTE** : I am sure I have failed at my « bac » exam. This year, because of the events, it was earlier than usual ... and, also because of the events, it was hard to concentrate on my studies ! I am responsible for three children, I am still desperately trying to get a package to maman at Fresnes, and don't know where tante Clo is. I went to her apartment again yesterday. Her concierge told me that he can hear boot steps above him at night, in her apartment. He suspects that Germans go there, and pillage the place.

Furious, I decided to go and find out, and if possible, stun the perpetrators. I would go with Flo. Trying to find an appropriate weapon, I settled on a cast iron lemon squeezer, with a long enough handle. In our slippers, so as not to make too much noise during curfew, we slithered along the walls and, once there, stood at attention behind the door of tante Clo's building. It was a long wait, and no one came. At midnight, disappointed, we retraced our steps back home, still silently and carefully.

I sometimes have to bring a bicycle to papa, or to go and get one from him, to put away at our place. This means that I go through Paris, riding on one bike, and holding the other one aside. I love that challenge. Sometimes, Simone Roumens follows me, to make sure no one is tailing me.

Papa and I have found a way to communicate : mademoiselle Quivy, tante Clo's friend, has a brother who is a general practitioner. Papa pretends to go and consult him, and gives him a note. The doctor gives that note to his sister, who, when she goes to buy her bread, gives it to the baker's wife. When Jeanine or I go to buy our bread, the baker's wife gives us the note. We can answer through the same channels. Mademoiselle Quivy became tante Clo's friend because, when they were studying physics at the Sorbonne, around 1920, they were the only girls in a class with lots of boys.

**PIERRE** : Little by little, I contact my Resistance friends. It is not easy, given the understandable suspicion someone who has been arrested is under. He might now play a double game, they fear. But I feel that I must tell them what the Germans know of their life, their activities. All this must be done in the very special atmosphere in which, a tracked down man, I am now living. Always on the alert, watching every face one passes, being aware of any possible tail, ready to hide or escape. This is my new reality.

One afternoon, on my way to an appointment with H el ene Lefauchaux, I walk along the avenue de l'Observatoire. Suddenly, a group of Germans is coming towards me, only fifty feet away. « My god, I know them, they are the men who questioned me in Senlis, from where I escaped ! » They look relaxed, enjoying the charm of this early summer day in the « Ile de France. » What am I to do ? If I cross the street, they might notice me, there are not enough pedestrians around. If I keep going straight, I shall get very close to them ; how dangerous ! I opt for this scary method. My legs are trembling as I almost touch the policemen and, devastated, find Marie H el ene in the small bistro where she is waiting for me.

**FLORENCE** : Sometimes, Biqui Fraenckel invites me and we spend some time together. We often go to the Bois de Boulogne. The other day, he even rented a row boat, and we rowed around the lake ... or rather, he rowed. Of course, he is not allowed to do any of this. With his yellow star, he is not allowed to take the metro, go to a movie, or to the swimming pool. He showed me how he has mounted his star onto snaps, and takes it off when he wants to. If he ever gets caught, it is jail for sure, or more probably death !

Whenever I am with him, I always seem to have problems. He intimidates me. He is so intelligent. I don't know why he thinks that I am too. So, I am afraid of saying stupid things especially since I am only twelve, and he is seventeen, and a brilliant student. He is ugly, but very nice and interesting, and makes me feel important.

**FRANCOISE** : Naively, I ask Sophie (the nickname we give our matron) for a bar of soap. Clotilde and mesdames Farjon came with small suitcases containing some clothes and toiletries, while I have nothing. Sophie answers :

« You'd better get used to being dirty. When one is a spy, one is dirty ». She is nicer than she seems, however, and, two days later, brings me some soap. I wash my underwear, but it does not dry in the humid air of the cell, and smells. The toilet also stinks. I must somehow open my window.

I try a first time with, as advised by my neighbor Florence, my spoon handle. It breaks. I try with the handle of my tooth brush and, miraculously, succeed ! Wonderful sun ! My window stays ajar, and as soon as I hear anything, I close it quickly. That fresh air and sunshine, it is almost happiness.

But ... my door opens ! I shut the window quickly. The « Feldwebel » hollers. He has come to get me for questioning. In the judge's chambers, he screams that my window was open. Dr. Schott does not care. Sophie is called in, and asks whether my window was open. I say that no, I was leaning against it and hit it when I moved suddenly, surprised by the opening door. Sophie does not like the Feldwebel, whose arm is in a sling, despite his beautiful baritone voice. He is always screaming at the matrons, and Sophie dares stand up to him, with her small, high pitched voice.

A soldier is sent to my cell, with nails and a hammer. I show him the photos of my children. He is a father ; I soften him.

« My son is far away, fighting. War is sad, » says he, and his nails remain only partway in the wood. When he is gone, I patiently work on that wood and after two days, I can open my window again.

« Radio Fresnes » works at full speed and if one believed it, the Allies should be in Paris to-morrow ! One morning, one of the women says, after her « bonjour » :

« Vive de Gaulle, down with the Germans ! » The soldier guarding us at that time replies :

« It is still a bit early for that, lady. »

One day, the silence around me feels unusual. Suspicious, I carefully sit on my bed, book in hand. I can tell someone is spying on me. The door opens suddenly and the blonde matron we call « Bécassine » says :

« You have opened your window. »

« No, and you know it, since you were observing me. »

« What ? » and, enraged, she attempts to open my window. She cannot. She leaves and come back with a tool she then uses as a lever, and finally succeeds. She rushes out to get a hammer, nails, and a padlock. Angry at the thought of being without any air again, I say :

« You will see what fun it is to remain in this humid atmosphere, when it is your turn, after the war, to be in jail ! » This time, furious, she says :

« Take your blankets and come to the punishment cell. »

She keeps yelling as she takes me there. We pass the Feldwebel to whom she tells the story, and gets him ranting also. He takes the blankets away. I find myself in a cell which is dark during the day, but lit at night. The waterless toilet smells terribly bad. There is no bed, no mattress, no blanket. Just a stool with one leg missing. Neither water nor bread. Some courageous and inspiring writings on the walls. All I can do is read and re-read them. I am cold. I don't even feel hungry anymore. My head is full of concerns : my husband, my children, the war, the bombings.

Sophie appears the next day, and puts me into another cell. In this one, I am entitled to a bare metal bed frame, a pitcher of water and yesterday's piece of bread, that she found in my cell. I am not allowed to get the soup. She begins sermonizing me, to which I react tartly. She then brings me a tooth brush from the Red Cross ! It is nice but doesn't warm me up. I suddenly have a heart attack : I shake, my teeth are chattering, I jerk, I suffocate. Is this my end ? I must not ! Pierre would never forgive himself, and the children still need me.

A matron comes in, tries to make me get up, takes my pulse, puts a rag under my head, and leaves. Some warmth comes back to me. Another matron comes in. Seeing how bad I look, she says :

« Even though it is forbidden, I shall bring you some soup. » As the chariot rattles in, a voice comes from upstairs :

« Is there somebody in the punishment cell ? »

« Yes, I am Françoise. »

« Would you like to send a message ? »



« Yes, Françoise tells her sister in law Clo that the children are free and that her brother is all right. » I had barely said this that I hear Clotilde, saying that she sends me love, and asks about Jeanine.

Three days and three nights later, Sophie comes back with the Feldwebel. She wants to look tough, but is not so bad after all. He hollers and threatens me but I swear I shall be good, and I am taken back to my cell. Precious small cell where there is water and a bed, as hard as it may be. Around me, the news spread :

« Françoise was in the punishment cell, and she is back. » Every one has something kind to tell me. I am touched, grateful to be at home, in my family.

**ANNETTE** : The other day, I was riding my bicycle, bringing an other one to papa. As I was passing in front of « la Coupole », I suddenly saw, on the terrace, the two Germans who had stayed in the apartment with us after our arrest ! I must have jerked in surprise, because they also noticed me. They stopped me, and asked what I was doing. I told them some crazy story of a sick friend, and ... they let me go ! I took all sorts of complicated routes to go and meet papa.

**FRANCOISE** : When one is due for interrogation, one's door is brutally opened : « Tribunal ! ». The chief, Dr. Schott, is plump, bald, and wears glasses. He is intelligent, and more sly than cruel. He knows how to put you at ease, gain your trust : a cat watching a mouse. His velvety paw is very dangerous. One must be always on one's guard.

He boasts of being very well informed, thanks to a member of the group, a friend of my husband's, Farjon. This is certainly a trick he devises to put me on edge, I think at the time. Alas, we will find out later that it is true.

I still maintain that I know nothing of whatever my husband has been involved with. Dr. Schott says that he has other grievances against me, some terrible things. I answer :

« Tell me what, and show me your proof. » I seem so self assured that he becomes less so. He asks whether we own any real estate, so I mention the house at Cier. This will worry me during the following night : might Pierre have gone there to hide ? Two days later, two men come to ask me questions about that house. My answers are so vague that they go and get more information from Clotilde. As soon as I was liberated, I warned Pierre of my blunder, so that he won't seek refuge there. I find out that he, too, mentioned it to his jailers.

**ANNETTE** : Papa felt that we should go and hide somewhere. The atmosphere in Paris was becoming more and more tense, the occupiers getting harrassed almost freely now. Their reactions were sometimes quite brutal, and he feared that we might be on the top of the list of people to execute in retaliation if, for example, a German officer were killed by a mob. He was also concerned about my having been seen with two bicycles by our former guards. Our guardian angel is, this time again, mademoiselle Quivy. She owns a small cottage in the countryside, and will let us use it. It is in the Chevreuse valley, between Bures and Gif sur Yvette.



Olivier on Florence's lap at Bures sur Yvette

So we set out : Jeanine on one bicycle with Olivier sitting in the basket behind her seat ; In my basket are some clothes and food ; Olivier's baby carriage was tied with a piece of string to the back of Flo's bicycle, and contained Oliviers diapers, baby bottles, blankets etc. When we

started going downhill, Flo complained that the carriage was bumping into her bicycle, so she and I exchanged our loads. We covered many miles that way, going uphill and downhill, in beautiful country, once we had left the big suburbs.

The house is very small. There are two rooms, with a space inbetween that we use for cooking and for washing, because that is where there is a sink. Jeanine and Olivier sleep in one of the rooms, Flo and I in the other. What is great is the garden, where there are ripe tomatoes and raspberries. What luck ! Olivier seems to like eating only red things. We do what we can to feed him : Flo and I leave at dawn on our bicycles, looking for a farm that sells a few edibles. Many Parisians come and do the same, so the lines are very long, under a hot sun. Sometimes, there is nothing left to be sold when we get to the head of the line, and then everybody goes looking for another farm. One good thing is that there is a small store in Gif, whose owners have a little girl who loves to play with Olivier. This makes the owners happy to see us, and they sometimes will sell us an egg, or a little bit of butter.



Annette and Florence in front of the house at Bures, 62 years later

**FRANCOISE** : One day, I have barely gotten up when my door is brutally opened : « Tribunal. » I follow Sophie. The judge, for the first time, is alone. What does he want with me ? He scolds me because I stole a pencil from his desk during our last questioning, while he was not paying attention. I had hidden it and thought I had used it only when I was not being observed. But I had been seen. This is one of the worst things about being in solitary confinement at Fresnes. You are always alone, and never alone. We never know what we can do, even our intimate ablutions, without being watched. The Feldwebel may be looking at us, or even enter, whenever he feels like it.

After his sermon about the pencil, my judge says :

« Look at me ; why do you think I am here ? » I don't answer, so he adds :

« I want to tell you that you are free. »

« Have you got my husband ? »

« No, you are free. »

« And my sister in law ? »

« She also, as well as the two ladies who were arrested at the same time as you. »

When my sister in law is brought in, I tell her that we shall stay in jail until the end of the war. She starts yelling at our judge, complains about his having arrested her, and gets more and more upset. So I tell her the truth. And she laughs, and we laugh together, crazy with joy.

Back in our cells, our joy is tempered by the sadness about leaving our comrades behind us. They seem really happy for us. They want us to remember the names and addresses of their relatives, and what to tell them. I know that my memory is weak, and try very hard. Sophie agrees to give some of my belongings to my neighbors. Florence, the Communist, tells me :

« Break your window ; they will replace it, but the woman who will come after you will be able to push it away a little, when the putty is still soft. » I try very hard, but am unable to break it.

When I see mesdames Farjon, I see them as unfortunate friends in captivity, who will be much more unhappy when they learn the role their son and husband has played. We are well aware that we are being liberated as bait for our beloved escapees. Our freedom will be more apparent than real. We know that everything we do and say will be carefully spied upon, all our telephone calls, all our mail. We shall have to trust our wiles. And the Allies should reach Paris pretty soon.

So, that July twenty-second, there we are, in the metro. How wonderful it is to be in the midst of a crowd, after that solitude. My sister in law has lost much weight. Madame Farjon is pale. I am covered with bites. We are, at long last going to be able to put clean clothes on, and how much I look forward to hugging my children !

I ring at the door, I ring, I ring again ... nothing. I knock on the door, nothing. I feel very heavy as I walk down the many stairs. I can really feel how much the weeks in jail have weakened me. The concierge is happy to see me, and he knows that Jeanine and the children have left for the countryside, but doesn't know where. The next door neighbor is not at home, nor her mother.

Since I cannot go home, Clotilde suggests I go to her place with her. There are only a few hundred yards between our homes, but they feel much longer. There, we are disappointed again : there is nobody there. Léonie is not there, the concierge neither. Clo has a key, but the door is padlocked.

How maddening ! and we are becoming very hungry, but have no meal tickets. A kind merchant gives us a slice of bread, buttered and sugared. How delicious ! It is the grey so-called bread of war time, but how much better it is than the bread at Fresnes ! It is fresh, and crusty. We feel better.

I go to a café where I use the telephone. « Lisette », meaning Pierre, is well. What joy ! He tells me where the children are, in the Chevreuse valley. Three days later, I go there.

**FLORENCE** : This morning, coming back with a few vegetables and a little bit of rice, I enter the house, and maman was there ! thinner than ever, and pale, she was happy to see us, and so were we.

**CLOTILDE** : Mesdames Farjon, Françoise and I were freed on July, twenty-second. The German policemen were probably hoping that by letting us out, they had a chance of catching the men who escaped. We spent only six weeks in jail, but it was an enlightening experience, a deep one.

My getting back home was less than joyful : while I was gone, everything in my apartment has been stolen. I still have furniture, but that is about it. The jewels my aunt had given me, my bed and table linens, my radio, my best clothes, and of course the small amount of cash I had hidden, everything was gone. What a welcome !

My concierge was friendly, telling me stories of boot noises at night above his head. But when I told him that the Germans had been stupid to take a chain in fake gold and leave a precious old cameo, he blanched and looked so pitiful that I strongly suspect him of having been the thief. As a matter of fact, one week later, he had disappeared !

Tired as I was, I did not need the extra aggravation ... but we are free ! and so is Pierre !

**ANNETTE** :

August six, 1944

My dear Maïten,

Pardon me for not writing sooner, but madame R. must have told you that maman and tante Clo are out of jail. We are in the Chevreuse valley, in a cottage which a friend of hers, D.Q. has loaned us.

Maman is recovering some strength, and gaining back some of her weight. Tante Clo is still very pale. Her apartment was ransacked ... by the Germans or by her concierge ?

Olivier is adorable today because it is cool. He doesn't like heat. It was the first time tante Clo was seeing him since she was freed. Maman was very happy to see her darling baby again ; he recognized her, pulling her earrings. Now, she can enjoy playing mommy again.

I am impatient to see you again, to get your advice. I don't know what career I should pursue. Medicine would have been my choice, but I can see from my results at the « bac » that I don't have what it would take. This is too bad.

Maman, Flo and Olivier are with me, sending you lots of kisses.

Annette

P.S. You will know more about maman's life at Fresnes when we meet again. We go back to Paris every week, to pick up our mail. Otherwise, we are still in hiding at Bures sur Yvette, 9 rue Aristide Briand (Seine et Oise)

## Chapter nine

# LIBERATION AND LIFE AT ST QUENTIN

1944-1946



The « Commissaire de la République » at his desk in St Quentin

**PIERRE** : Paris is vibrating with passion. One hears random gun shots ; a man, a woman, falls, and is carried away in a handcart. I happen to be in front of the « Préfecture de Police » on August fifteen : the policemen are protesting and on strike. The Resistance had ordered them to do so, after they had been ordered by the Gestapo to be disarmed and interned.

On another day, the Grand Palais is burning, with the thousands tons of sugar it contained. Sometimes, a « Feldgrau » in uniform is shot at. The German soldiers, angry,

react by shooting also. Some streets are « blocked » with rapidly erected and often ridiculous barricades ; those would be easily destroyed by a tank, or even an armored car.

Good news is rushing in, and we become hopeful : we know that a terrible battle is going on at Caen between German and British troops. We hope that our allies cannot lose ! We know that Patton has broken through at Avranches, that the breach is narrow and that the Germans are counter-attacking fiercely at Coutances. They want to cut him off and prevent him from reaching Brittany. But they won't succeed. As to the Russians, they clearly deserve their nickname of « steamroller. »

**FRANCOISE** : We learn that the « Geheime Feld Polizei », the German military police that was handling our dossier has left Paris. We thus decide that it is safe for Pierre to come back home. We are beginning to feel almost free, despite the street fighting that is going on, so exciting.

We find red and blue dye and, with some of Olivier's diapers we have colored, we create flags that we hang along our balcony. We thus attract some gun shots from the school across from us beyond the stadium, still occupied by the German army.

Tragedy strikes : my cousin Hélène Franckel, for whom we have much admiration and affection, calls :

« Biqui is fatally wounded. » I am appalled. She goes on :

« He has several gun wounds in his gut, and every one of them is lethal. » What terrible news. I call on the next day, hoping that the news will be better, but Biqui is dead.

During those troubled days, it was a real challenge to find a coffin. Annette, Clo and I cross Paris on our bicycles to get to the funeral. There we are, dressed in black, while the city is full of joy and excitement, the women clothed in « bleu-blanc-rouge », waiting for the first tanks of the Leclerc division.

**PIERRE** : I now have to think of reaching my post as « Commissaire de la République » at St Quentin. Leclerc is at the gates of Paris, with his armored division. I am very tempted to wait and greet the conquerors, but I must leave on the same morning the tanks are due to enter the city. During the night, we hear canons that are posted at the Longchamps racetracks, and are shooting. They are aimed at the left bank of Paris, and their arc goes right over us.

Despite the canon balls' noise, the first half of the night had been enchanting : the whole city was singing, the church bells were ringing, a mood of insane enthusiasm was possessing the whole place : Parisians were blossoming, after four years of bondage and misery. On the next day, the soldiers who entered were welcomed with enthusiasm, almost carried away from their armored vehicles by Parisian women. German soldiers were surrendering in droves ; anti-riot police had to protect them as they were marching on the streets.

**ANNETTE** : Monsieur Turbil invites the whole family to a luxurious dinner. The first time we are all together in a long time. And what a wonderful place, the « Rôtisserie Périgourdine ! »

**PIERRE** : It was not easy to reach my post. I was to be in charge of four « départements » : Oise, the closest, then Aisne, Somme, and Ardennes. I had no address of anyone I could contact, and that was not a good time to look suspicious. One could get shot very easily.

I had been assigned a companion, a young man who for some reason always pretended to be my principal private secretary. At dawn on August twenty five, we leave on bicycles. My wrist is still painful and bothers me. We want to avoid the numerous check



points on the roads, so we take a small path along the railroad. After a few kilometers, we encounter some German soldiers who take our bicycles, and we must go on by foot. We trudge along and, at last, reach the Oise « department . » We are now faced with a new problem : The place is still occupied by the German army. How can we contact the local Resistance chiefs, without looking suspicious to them ? If I don't want to be shot by any German, I would find it much more humiliating to be shot by French resisters !

A roadman directs us towards the mayor's house ; the mayor then locates a place for us to sleep tonight. Early the next morning, we find ourselves surrounded by a group of young resisters who accompany us. Around Beauvais, the official center of the « department, » we are told that cars cannot go through : Allied planes shoot down everything that moves. Despite all, we find one, the only one that will penetrate the town on that day, and we meet Perony, who is to become the new « préfet. »

Now we have to unseat the current « préfet, » Mr. Malik. He is a dignified man, playing his official role well. He remains upright. I tell him that we have come to replace him. He asks :

« Do you have an official document, confirming what you say ? »

« Yes, of course » and I look in my pocket ; in all my pockets, in the lining and shoulder pads of my jacket. That is when I remember that after my escape, I had asked for a second-hand jacket, to replace the one I had ripped on barbed wires. Where can that letter be ? Despite this ridiculous episode, Malik understands that it is not in his interest to resist us, and lets Perony take his seat.

Beauvais will soon be liberated. The Allies are advancing ; they have freed Peronne, and then Amiens, which has been seriously damaged. When we get there, we feel a very heavy atmosphere ; there is no leadership ; the police was brutal during the occupation, and the population resents them ; there is a fierce hunger for revenge. Trouble is brewing. We install the new préfet, Cornut-Gentille, who is able to restore some calm after a few days.

We then reach St Quentin, which has not seen much destruction. I go on my own, to confront Homo, the préfet named by the Vichy government. More flexible than Malik, he does not pull any punches, and just says :

« History will be the judge. »

The liberation has been rough in St Quentin, where fighting among Frenchmen has resulted in thirty deaths.

**FLORENCE** : What a thirteenth birthday I had !



Florence at 13

There was much electricity in the air, for several days. Barricades were erected, made of furniture and all sorts of other things, at Porte de St Cloud, and elsewhere. One could hear shots coming from everywhere. Annette kept going, riding one bike and holding another with one hand, careless about danger, to bring what papa or someone else needed. The radio was blaring all the time : one day, it announced that the Préfecture de Police was hoisting a French flag on its roof, another, that another building had been taken by the resisters. All those marvellous news.

When we hung flags we had made out of Olivier's diapers along the balcony, we were shot at, so we took them down. We were told that the first French tanks were just on the other side of the « Pont de Sèvres », so maman wrapped us in flags and we walked down the « route de la reine », but never saw them. We had seen papa again, and the Turbils had even invited us to a luxurious lunch which I couldn't attend, having a swimming race that day.

« Our » Germans, we had been told, had left, so we felt almost free, at long last, and so happy.

That is when the telephone rang : Biqui is dead.

In all the excitement, the exhilaration, the enormous hope for better days, the fires burning all around the city, all the bells ringing, the feeling of one enormous heart beating again in joy, the indescribable relief, Biqui is dead. A young German and he filled one another with bullet holes.

On August twenty-fifth, at last, they entered Paris ! All the women had pulled out (or dyed) everything they could wear in blue, white, and red. They climbed on the tanks and kissed the soldiers. I did too. What joy ! What hope for a better world ! What enormous happiness ! No more war, ever !

On the twenty-sixth, the day before my birthday, a Saturday, de Gaulle was due to celebrate a Te Deum mass at Notre Dame de Paris. We went to the « Place de la Concorde » to see the American troops parade. The people around us were very curious to see the jeeps, new vehicles they had read about. I was more interested in the soldiers. The German soldiers, at the end, had become either old or very young and much less snappy than at the beginning of the war. These American soldiers were young and strong ; their uniform, with the short « Eisenhower » jacket, was very becoming ; no goose-step there, but relaxed men, clean, self assured, with a strange sort of swaying gait, who were chewing gum. Their national anthem, the Star Spangled Banner, is very beautiful.

Suddenly, shots rang, coming from one couldn't tell where. While Annette was standing, trying to find out who was shooting down at us, we hid under the treads of a tank.

I am very happy that we are free, and, unexpectedly, all alive, and very sad that Biqui is dead.

**FRANCOISE** : Pierre had to leave and help in the liberation of his territory, but I could, at last, bring Rizou back home. In good physical shape, he comes with the following report :

« A very intelligent child ; excellent memory ; very interested in geography, he knows all sorts of statistics ; far ahead of other children his age ; he expresses himself well ; he loves stories, and is good at miming them ; he takes his responsibilities as team leader seriously and efficiently ; does what he is asked to do, but grumbles a good deal ; he knows how to throw a punch when he needs to defend his dignity ; somewhat proud ; he sings well and enjoys it ; he makes up intricate games, and leads them with authority ; very strong physically ; neat ; doesn't like manual work ; polite. » It is good to have him back.

We are free at last, we can be together again (although Pierre had to leave for his new post), and we are filled with great hope for a better future.

There are several things that temper our joy.

First, the death of the wonderful child Biqui was, and the sorrow of his parents, and of his older brother, just back from a POW camp.

Then, there is the problem : what game has Roland Farjon played ? What responsibility does he have in the arrest of so many comrades, several of whom never came back ? Was Dr. Schott right when he told me that he had been the cause of Pierre's failed arrest in October, 1943, and of many others ? His former companions refused to shake his hand after the Liberation. He understood, and committed suicide.

The saddest of all is the news we learn of the death camps. André Boulloche's parents and older brothers died there ; Jacques, who was arrested with Pierre, also ; and many others. Some who come back from there are like empty, broken.

**PIERRE** : In my new job as Commissaire de la République, I had an enormous task ahead of me : everything needed to be seen to : the roads were in a pitiful state ; the railroads leading to Paris were apocalyptic ; many buildings had been destroyed ; there was no food.



Besides all that, the population was eager for an active political life, after so many years of oppression. They were more eager for it even than for freedom !

Some form of purge was inevitable, passions running so high. I was struggling to keep it within legal bonds and avoid summary killings at street corners. I may have been successful at preventing any violence worse than shaving the heads of the women accused of having slept with Germans. What a sad and unpleasant spectacle that was.

In the Somme « département » especially, containment was difficult. During some ceremonies, it happened that women, recognizing the policeman who had arrested their husband or their son, would attack him, all claws out. Cornut-Gentille had to intervene physically more than once to establish some kind of peace.

This is, for me and my four « préfets » a period of unrelenting work. There is no rest on Sundays ; the only difference is that, on Sundays, I start work at 8 :30 instead of 7 :30. Besides all the desk work, we must do a lot of entertainment.

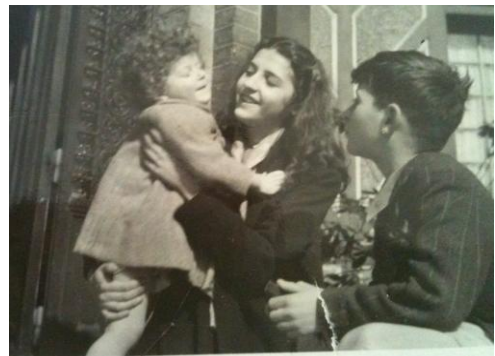
**ANNETTE** : A large villa has been requisitioned in St Quentin for our family to live there with papa. I shall start my pre-law studies in Paris, and live at the apartment rue de la Tourelle with grand-mère Hélène. I shall come home to St Quentin on week-ends, and have my own room on the third floor.

Right now, I spend much of my time at Hotel Lutetia to volunteer with the Red Cross. We help the people who come back from the camps. We write down their name, address, the names of their family members, and as much information as we can gather, since most of them are completely bewildered and lost. We also help them find food and clothing for now.

It is very sad work. The men who come back from POW camps, like Biqui's brother, are very tired, pale, skinny and sad, but still behave like people who have suffered and will get better. The men and women who come back from the « death camps » are scary. They are even skinnier and weaker, but what is worse, they seem to be broken inside ; as if they no longer wanted to live ; as if they have been dehumanized. It is terrible.

**FLORENCE** : We have moved to St Quentin.

Florence, Risou and Olivier arriving in St Quentin.



The house is large and beautiful, with a nice garden. It is well decorated, maman appreciating particularly the paintings on the walls, especially an André Lhote in the small living-room, the one with the baby grand piano. By the front gate, there is a small house where the guardian-maintenance man lives with his wife, the concierge. There are also a cook, a chambermaid, a gardener and two chauffeurs, faithful Hombrouck being one of them. Jeanine has found a job and a small studio apartment in Boulogne, where she prefers to stay.

Annette has a room reserved for her when she comes, on the third floor, and I have, at last, a room of my own ... hurrah ! Annette, who has got her « bac », is now a student in Paris and comes back week-ends, when she catches up with her eating (she spends the money the parents give her for food on outings, and books). I shall never hope to be as quick, graceful, resourceful, brave, nor helpful and good-hearted as she, but now, I am taller.

There is a wonderful thing in the kitchen : a refrigerator, where there is always some « crème fraîche » ! Despite that, maman still has a hard time finding adequate food for the guests we must entertain. The other day, an American officer we had invited brought Olivier an orange. The baby, who had never seen one, took it for a ball and started throwing it around !

I am now in tenth grade. Our lycée must have been destroyed, because we are housed in an old bank, at the bottom of a street covered with old paving stones. It is very difficult to walk on them when they are covered with ice, which happens very often this winter.

On the first day of class, a girl asked me :

« Is it your father, P. Pène who signed all those posters we see around town ? » I had to admit that yes, it was my father. Her reaction was :

« Oh, then, you will never get a zero ! » I understand now that some people will hate and resent me whatever I really am or do, just because of facts I have no control over. I shall have to behave very well, be as friendly as I can, and remain cool, above gossip and petty feelings.

**PIERRE** : In the middle of December, 1944, the von Rundstedt offensive starts, in the Ardennes. The American army is backing down. General Gavin and his 101 airborne division resist at Bastogne. Fortunately, on both sides of the forty kms breach, at Sedan and Givet, the Allies are resisting well, British on one side, American on the other. The Germans seem afraid of pushing too hard into the breach, which is protected by only four bataillons of poorly trained FFI's.

I am very afraid of a panic taking over the population, and creating a stampede. The temperature is now well below freezing, sometimes down to twenty below zero degrees C, and the suffering would be indescribable. I go to Givet every other day and try to comfort the people, and, back in St Quentin, cut short the alarmist rumors that might spread.

I cannot contact the « Ministre de l'Intérieur », so I have to take things in hand. I close the frontier with Belgium, to avoid the same stampede as in 1940. I have hesitated before making that decision, which might cause some diplomatic tension.

On the first days of the battle, bad weather makes it impossible for the American airforce to intervene. One day, the sky turns blue and American planes destroy the enemy forces. The battle is won.

We see the return of the deportees from the terrible camps : Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Dora, etc ... We wait anxiously for our companions, among others, Mairesse, that wonderful young doctor. One of his friends tells me :

« Mairesse ? He never got to any camp : he died on the train that left Compiègne on July thirty-one, 1944. »

How terrible ! How am I to give that piece of news to his wife, to his widow ? When I do, the poor woman at first doesn't believe me. She then vituperates the Resistance :

« I have always been against his joining it, but he never listened to me ! And now, here I am, alone, without any resources, and four children ! » How could I try to comfort her ? I am devastated, and so is she.

**FRANCOISE** : The « Renouveau » is an institution where children of people who died in the camps are housed, fed, instructed, and hopefully helped to get oriented towards a normal life. I have been asked to help raise money for it. My heart bleeds for those children, and I have decided to organize a « kermesse ». It has become a real headache : every faction wants the best booths. The Communists feel that, having had more war victims among their ranks, they deserve the best ; the MRP behaves the same way. Mrs so-and-so does not want to work with Mrs. something else. Everyone is angry at someone else. This is exhausting. It is a good thing that I spent a week in Switzerland at the « Moral Rearmament, » geared to helping one become a better person. I have learned enough there to keep my calm in the most difficult instances.

Besides the fights among the would-be volunteers I try to organize, I deal with the orphaned children themselves, who, at least the older ones, are bitter and vengeful. Despite all, they need and deserve our, my, help, and I intend to give it to the utmost.

**RIZOU** : My parents were not dead, and I am back home. It is good. I was especially happy to be with Olivier again, he is so adorable. He can walk, now, and begins to talk.

**FLORENCE** : It is extremely cold, this winter. Papa wants to make sure that the snow doesn't melt on our roof faster than on any other roof in town. In any case, we have practically no heat, and very few clothes. It is a good thing that our Californian cousins sent a coat that fits me. It has short sleeves, but it is a coat, and helps. Yesterday, taking my socks (ankle socks is all I have to cover my feet) off, the skin of my toes came along with them.

We sometimes invite some American officers. One, lieutenant Mac Mahon, comes pretty often. Another one, older, a captain, was eating his chicken with his fingers, the other day ... ! a captain !

Too bad, there is no winter swimming pool here, so I am no longer in shape.



Florence the swimmer

I do better at school, though. I have to, my father being an important person here now. There are some very nice girls in my class, and a very smart one, whom we call « Buddah », because she is round, and good.

I have kept the best news for last : the terrible battle in the Ardennes ended with an Allied victory after all, around Christmas time. It was a very scary time. What if the Germans had come back ? They would have known whom to kill first !

**PIERRE** : After the war, the « Commissaires de la République » had enormous power. The situation was still so unstable that it was considered possible that they be cut off from the central power by military movements or popular agitation. Under such circumstances, they would have to be able to govern themselves ; therefore, we held the three powers in our hands : executive, legislative, and judiciary. In other words, I was the last authority when someone's fate had to be determined, if for example he was accused of having sent a person to a death camp.

I was particularly troubled by a case which I was very glad to relinquish when the situation calmed down in the country and our contact with the capital was assured. Here it is, in brief : there is a bicycle leaning on the sidewalk, in Amiens. A man is running, ready to mount it ; the bicycle's owner arrives, grabs it, and yells at the other man ; This attracts a small crowd ; the first man says :

« Please, let me flee, the Gestapo are after me, and if they catch me, I am as good as dead. » The bike's owner answers :

« If it is so, hurry up, take the bike and flee. » One of the onlookers interjects :

« If he is sought by the police, he is guilty. Let him get caught. » He does so well that the Germans arrive, and arrest the young man. He is deported, and never comes back. Does the man who intervened deserve the death penalty ? I leaned toward harshness : handing a Frenchman over to the German police was for us, at that time, a serious crime. How relieved I was when I no longer was the decider !

**ANNETTE** : Peace has been signed ! Peace and freedom ! France's freedom first, we have wanted it so much. I can't believe that we are all alive. The odds were against us. I am relieved to see that I am no longer the « mother » of three. All I want is to forget all those nightmares, and dance, dance, dance.

Life with grand-mère Hélène in Boulogne was quite pleasant. We got along famously. She was not as intense as maman about order and cleanliness, and never scolded me. She let me do what I wanted, and life was fine, and fun.

One day, maman arrived, yelling furiously, complaining about the mess. Grand-mère's soft answer was that she had not cleaned because she had spent the day peeling chestnuts, to please Françoise who loves them so. Maman kept screaming and criticizing. Poor grand-mère had already been besieged that morning by her no-good son Alain who, once more, was asking her for money.

When I arrived from St Quentin the next day, I found a frozen apartment, and in it, grand-mère, unconscious on her bed. The doctor I called said that she had had a stroke, was in a coma, and was doomed. One week later indeed, in late November, 1945, she died. How sad. She was beautiful, gentle, and good. I loved her.

**PIERRE** : De Gaulle has to leave in early 1946, and that does not help the situation. We have to impose restrictions again, and reinstate food coupons. The people do not understand and get excited, and one morning, they invade the Commissariat de la République. Some of the women remind me of the pictures of the mobs that brought back king Louis XVI to Paris in 1791.

We are able to close the gates only after a group of protesters has penetrated. My « préfet » Samama and I let them into my office. We explain the situation to them and calm them down. It turned out to be a mild episode, which nevertheless reveals how deep the wounds have been, that these people have suffered. Their moral wounds would take longer to heal than the physical destructions to be repaired, however slow those are : Some people wait for the government to establish its plans and give the promised aid. Some people whose residence has been destroyed have waited so long that, losing patience, they build anything.

Little by little, our powers diminish, those of the « préfets » increase. We had all been resisters, but we were governing regions that had been created by Vichy. Politicos were resentful of us, whom they pretended to respect and even fear, but whose influence they resented.

Political opinions in France at that time were contradictory : the people expressed nothing but scorn for the Third Republic, but all their desires were for the calm, comfort, and old ways of those days. The new Minister of the Interior did not like us, nor did the Prime Minister Félix Gouin. We stopped existing as Commissaires de la République as of March thirty-one, 1946.

**FLORENCE** : Good-bye, St Quentin. We are back at rue de la Tourelle in Boulogne. Now, I can attend my real high-school, in the beautiful building, lycée la Fontaine, built shortly before the war, which is no longer occupied by German troops. It is great. There is a large art room upstairs, with a painting that covers a whole wall : with tall grasses and flowers, it makes you feel as if you are a small bug, a lady bug perhaps, or one of my friends, the grasshoppers, ready to hop in that tall grass. We also have music classes. The other day, Nadia Boulanger came to talk to us ! She made us talk, and listen to some music, old and new. It was wonderful.

Papa is now going to become a governor of the duchy of Baden, in Germany. It is one of the sections of the French zone of occupation of Germany. I shall never shake a German hand.



The Roumens children, Suzanne as a novice

# Chapter ten

## LIFE IN UMKIRCH

1946 – 1952

**PIERRE** : Named in 1946 Governor of part of the zone of French occupation in Germany, the duchy of Baden, I was to occupy my new post in Freiburg im Breisgau. I did not feel vengeful, and if I had, seeing the obvious misery of the local inhabitants would have changed my frame of mind.

Freiburg is a pretty town at the foot of the Black Forest. It reminded me somewhat of Grenoble, also in a mountainous environment, and full of students. Several beautiful old monuments were still standing, despite a terrible bombing in November, 1944 : the cathedral, and near it, the « Rathaus », and two gates, the « Martinstor » and the « Schwabenstor ». The way many old cathedrals have resisted air attacks, when the bombs did not fall directly on them, is remarkable. The binder, either cement or lime, was of poor quality but the stones were cut so perfectly that they held to each other by simple adhesion.

The area is a tourist's paradise : two mountains, the Schauinsland, and the Feldberg, offer ski areas for several months. There are many lovely lakes, and the thick forests descend all the way to the bottom of the valleys.

The inhabitants are similar to those across the Rhine : solid and hard working, sometimes hard-headed, they are not essentially anti-French. They have seen the French many times through their history ! The local resources are the forest, tourism, and precision tool industry : clocks, and therefore, unfortunately, the precise mechanisms needed for the war (V1 and V2). Those plants, dispersed through the forests, were often bombed.

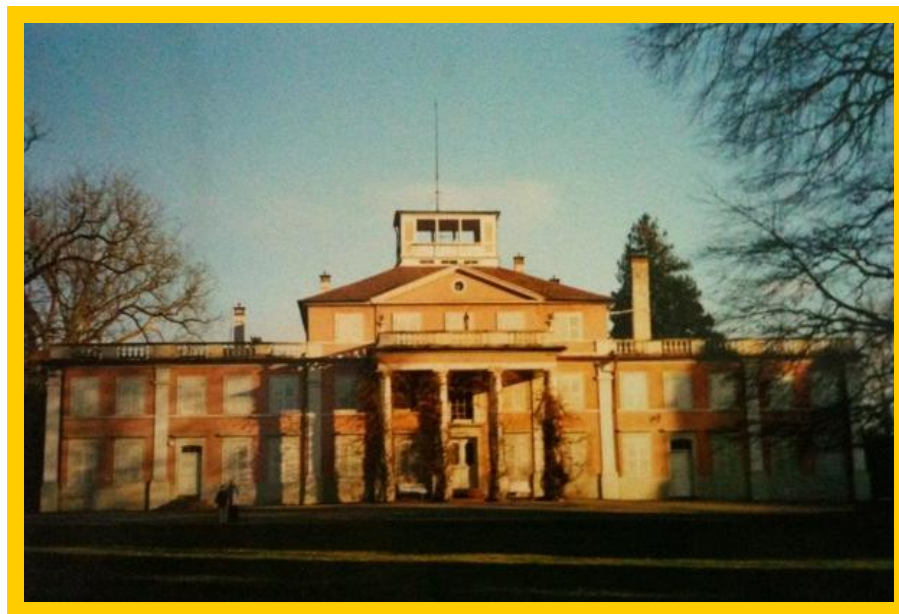
Pierre and Françoise in a Mercedes that had belonged to Hitler

**FRANCOISE** : Pierre left ahead of us in order to evaluate the « kolossal » job he was now facing. He later had me join him, so that I could choose the place we would live in. His predecessor had occupied a large Victorian villa, which I did not like. I knew that Pierre's occupation would necessitate many receptions, and the prestige of France was in the balance.





Pierre's young aide-de-camp did not understand why I rejected all the pretentious villas he was suggesting but, in desperation, he finally proposed that we visit a château, ten kilometers out of town, invaded by mosquitoes. For me, it was love at first sight. I loved that harmonious building, and its pinkish coloring, in the middle of a neglected park with a pretty pond. Its owner, prince Friedrich von Hohenzollern, was not displeased. He liked the rent he would receive, and he had another, smaller, nearby château where he could move, with the furniture of their personal rooms.



The château – Umkirch.

I immediately proceeded to gather all the furniture I found, in the attic and the basement as well as elsewhere, according to style. Many pieces needed repair, which local cabinet makers were very glad to provide for a fee. For our own apartment, now empty since the princess had kept her own furniture, I ordered several pieces in « Bidermayer » style. I had gardeners recreate a garden, lawns and flower beds. I bought dishes and other indispensable objects, despite the ill will of merchants who did not like being paid with their valueless currency of the time.

I have to tell this story : Annette and I having arrived by train from Paris, had been picked up by Pierre's chauffeur in Alsace. We had not resisted some wonderful fresh red berries, on sale at the open air market in Strasbourg. On the road, after crossing the Rhine and customs, we had a flat tire. Forced to stop, thirsty, we began to eat our fruit. The wind was messing up our hair, and the fruit reddening our hands, when we were surprised by a noisy cortège. Authoritative horns, an impressive motorcade, an officer standing in a small car ahead of a monstrous Mercedes, followed by another car. The last vehicle turned around to offer us help. Since our chauffeur had finished replacing the tire, we thanked him and asked who the important personage was, who had just been driven by. It turned out that it had been the husband and father of the two tousled, messy women we were. This episode gave me an inkling of the task ahead.

We decided to organize a big ball.

**PIERRE** : On July twenty-seven, 1946, big ball at the château. We have a hundred and four guests. Twenty African guards , a group of German police to direct guests, German firemen called to handle the lighting of the pond ; one hundred and twenty people eat in the kitchen. The outside of the château is lit, the French flag highlighted in the night. A very lively

evening, despite some breakdowns of the lights. Three excellent orchestras, one of them children ten to twelve years old. I had a grand time. Our guests leave at five a.m. !

August four, we are taken by boat along the Rhine, through the heroic passage from Bingen to Koblenz. I had expected it to look more forbidding. However, this was an unforgettable trip on the « Liselotte. » I am disappointed by the « Lorelei ». Anchorage at Bacharach ... Annette, diving head first, arms along her body, in water that was not deep enough, hits bottom, stumbles, gets up, staggering, bloody.

**ANNETTE** : On the grounds of this pretty château (which Napoleon had ordered built for his god-daughter Stéphanie de Beauharnais whom he had married to a duke of Baden) there are, besides the pond, a small swimming pool and a tennis court. The tennis court is surrounded by rose bushes that climb on the wire-mesh fence. When Flo and I play, we lose all our balls in the roses. The swimming pool was empty one day ; the maintenance man was planning to scrub its bottom. Why did I go in ? It was very slippery, I fell, and sprained my shoulder. That is why, when I dived from that boat on the Rhine, I kept my arms along my body and not ahead of me. My head hit the bottom of the river. I broke a tooth, and I am as good a paralyzed. I can barely move, and Flo helps me eat, dress, and all.

This is very regrettable, especially since I discovered, at our great ball, that there are some excellent dancers here.



Annette getting ready to dance

**PIERRE** : August twenty, 1946 : we take a « Goeland » to Nuremberg, where German war criminals are to be judged. Two cars are awaiting us, Françoise, Annette, and me. After the hustle about invitations, we enter. I am at the table of the Government Commissioner, at the end of the row of the accused. All of them are there, except for Hess...

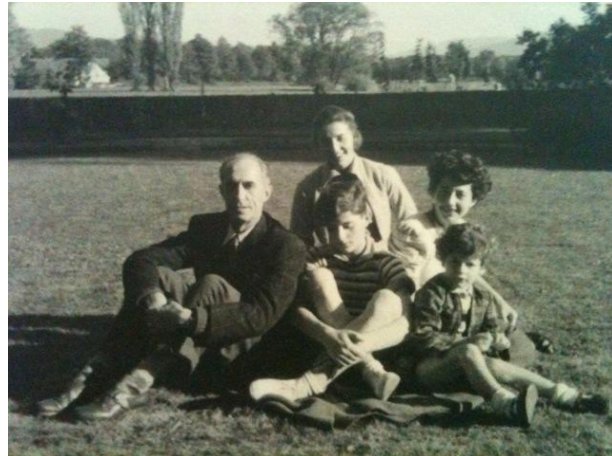
The proceedings are held with dignity. The tribunal is across from the entrance, a little to the left, directly across from the accused. From left to right, two Russians in their uniforms, two Americans, two Britons, the presiding officer included, and two Frenchmen in judicial robes.

Goering's lawyer asks whether he may question him. Granted. Goering speaks. His clothes are too large for him, but he has lost none of his mental clarity, his cool, or his fighting spirit. After his lawyer, the prosecutor, the British Lord Chancellor. Goering manages to make him stumble a few times. After that case, there is a monotonous statement by the lawyer of the SD's, who depicts those terrible criminals as almost a benevolent charity.

Every day, more mass graves are discovered. Even in Baden, there must have been some small death camps. Three thousand missing people have been found ; they have settled in Germany and have no desire to return to France. One thousand and seven hundred French men who went back to France have asked to bring there their German wife or girl friend.



Pierre and his children on the lawn in Umkirch



**FLORENCE :** Last night, an uncomfortable experience : our parents were traveling somewhere, so Annette and I were the ones supposed to go to some concert in Freiburg. As usual, Annette made us arrive late. How horrible it was to discover that the whole theater was full of people standing up, waiting for us to sit down !

There are many other situations where the Germans show themselves to be awfully obsequious. As to my resolution never to shake a German's hand, it didn't last more than one week ! We were to visit a museum with papa, who had warned us :

« The curator of that museum was a courageous anti-nazi, and you will have to be polite with him. » We shook his hand, and whatever you have done once is much easier the next time.

Olivier is still deliciously adorable. There is going to be a big ball at the end of the year, and since Gilou's father is papa's principal private secretary, they will be invited. I hope there will be some holly hung somewhere, so that he will have to kiss me if we walk underneath it at the same time !

Switzerland is very near, and we sometimes go there. It is like going to paradise. One can find everything there ! It is unbelievable. Nothing is broken down, it is clean, and the people are well and warmly dressed, and look normal !

Rizou and I are driven to school every day by one of the chauffeurs, in the « children's car. » There are five cars, which frequently break down. The three chauffeurs are good mechanics. One of the cars, a very big Mercedes, belonged to Hitler ! It is armored, and convertible, and has a small platform on which he could stand to salute his admirers. It also has an adjunct motor, which makes noise and permits it to go very fast. When we get somewhere in that vehicle, there is always a crowd coming to stare at it.

Papa is driven to his office by one of the chauffeurs, while ten soldiers of our guard salute him. He waits in the car for Annette who, of course, is late, and runs down, shoes in one hand, hair brush in the other. Papa is furious. The guards can let their arms down.

We take German classes with a young German student. What a difficult and silly language !

We, the children, don't have any official role to play, and yet this situation is very restricting. First, papa is very careful that we not waste gas, which is paid for the State, so there we are, ten kilometers from the town and from our friends whom we cannot see after school. Second, we are constantly observed, envied, criticized, commented upon. If we make a mistake, or say the wrong thing, it can do harm to papa, or to the reputation of France and the French. I keep this in mind constantly. I have to be careful.

**FRANCOISE :**



Françoise in a ball gown, between General Koenig and Mr Wohleb

At the château, Christmas is a very important event, preceded by the four weeks of advent. A large crown of greens is hanging over the dining-room table. On every Sunday of the « advent », one more red candle is planted in that crown, one at each of the four cardinal directions. In the back of the second, smaller, dining-room, is a set of lighted shelves, where sits the set of dishes offered by Napoleon to his goddaughter Stéphanie de Beauharnais, for whom he had this château built. One immense tree stands in the entryway, the stairs wrapping themselves around it. It was tastefully decorated under my supervision. There is a smaller tree in the large ballroom, the one with the grand piano. That is where we will distribute small gifts to the children of the village.

So, everything being ready, we are waiting on the one hand for the village children ; on the other hand, for one of the chauffeurs who went with Rizou to France, to pick up my cousin Denise Lévy at the train station in Strasbourg. Olivier had probably been given something to drink by one of the servants, and kept playing his little toy accordion, while singing :

« Ah tu sortiras, biquette biquette »... and starting from the beginning of the song whenever he got stuck on the second verse, again, and again, and again, endlessly.

All the gifts were ready, the trees lit up, Olivier singing, waiting for the children, when the telephone rang. It was the chauffeur, calling from Strasbourg :

« There was an accident, Rizou is hurt ; he is alive, since he was screaming. » The poor chauffeur had been hit on the head at the same time as Rizou had been hurt. They had stopped in the dark because of a technical problem. Rizou was on the road while the chauffeur was looking under the hood. A car drove by, with only one light on, which they had taken for a motorcycle. It dragged Rizou into a ditch, while the impact made the hood fall on the chauffeur's head, knocking him out for a minute. When he came to, he found the boy in the darkness thanks to his screams. The poor man, scared, didn't know what to do, and gave the boy to the first driver who was kind enough to stop, with instructions to take him to a hospital. When I asked for the name of the man, or of the hospital, the chauffeur didn't know.

All sort of thoughts went through my head : what if it was a murderer ? or just a person wanting to take revenge on a French boy ? or wanting to take advantage of the fact that he had the governor's son in his power ? And now, with a crowd arriving, how am I going to find him ? And, sure enough, that time was precisely when the village priest and nuns arrived, with the children, all shy smiles and best clothes on. I managed to make telephone calls throughout the ceremony of singing and gift giving. By the time Denise arrived and the children were gone, I knew where Rizou was going to be operated on, his leg having been broken.

**DIDIER, formerly RIZOU** : My father, who had had heavy responsibilities in northern France, did so again, when he was in Germany.

It was not easy to handle his rapport with the French military, over which he supposedly had power. After a victorious war, the military usually hold much power, and Pierre held rank above that of the three star general in the place.

He also had to find ways to feed the population, which had suffered even more than the people in France. The local economy had been destroyed, and he had to help it start again. He had to cleanse the area from their Nazi leaders : this led him to deal with cases such as that of General von Choltitz, who, as governor of Paris, had refused to obey Hitler's orders to destroy that city ; it was more difficult to decide what to do about Heidegger, a professor at the university of Freiburg, who had openly collaborated with the Nazi regime.

My father, who had fought in two wars against Germany (and lost his brother in the first one) and been tortured by the Gestapo, was one of those French people who wanted to put an end to those periodical and deadly fights with our neighbors. In these cases, as in many others, he showed tact and moderation.

Another of the problems he was facing was the refugees from eastern Europe, who were fleeing Communism. They had to be fed, and find work. Some sort of German administration had to be set up, without Nazis. The ruins had to be cleared out, and buildings

to be erected again. All this had to be done during a highly unstable period between France and her allies.

One must consider two distinct periods after the war in Germany : until 1948, life didn't change much, and the ruins weren't even cleared away. Everything changed when the Soviets set a blocus around Berlin, the American airlift started, and the beginning of the Cold War. The old mark, which was despised so that most payments were made in kind, suddenly changed into a new mark, guaranteed by the Allies. It was exchanged with the old one on a one to ten basis. This reform, together with the « Marshall Plan », was the start of the « German miracle. » Immediately, the ruins were cleared away, new construction began, shop windows filled up, miraculously, it seemed.

My father, who had had up to that point all civilian and military powers, began sharing them with, and eventually relinquishing them to, the « Minister Präsident » Wohleb with whom he got along very well.

**OLIVIER** : My room was on the third floor, like those of my three siblings, and the chambermaids. There was an enormous quilt on my bed. Every night, a chambermaid whose name I have forgotten came to say good night to me, kissing me and saying :

« Schlaffen sie gut und träumen sie süss. » (sleep well, and sweet dreams). I loved that word : « süss », which made me think of sugar.

I was very happy at Umkirch.

#### Olivier as a little prince

There was a lot of room. The only thing that bothered me was to be treated differently because of my father's position. Sometimes, when there was company, I went to the kitchen, about three hundred feet from the château. There, a « chef » was surrounded with helpers. I was small enough not to be noticed and stood near a large stone « font » full of salt. I dipped my fingers in it and licked them.

One day, maman came back from Prague with Annette and ladies who had brought me, on their laps, a beautiful car which was too big to fit in the trunk. I liked it ! I was a little afraid of the pond, and wasn't allowed to go by myself to the « mysterious island » with the row boat. I sometimes played with Inge, the gamekeeper's daughter. She was a little older than I, and as blond as wheat.

At Christmas, « Père Noël » was not alone ; there was also St. Nicolas. If a child had not been « good », St. Nicolas would beat him with the bundle of sticks he had brought. One day, next to the bundle of sticks, there was a large car for me, with a real motor. The chauffeurs had built it, and I thought it belonged to them. Papa called it « vitalo » (rushintothewater) but I never fell into the pond with it.



**ANNETTE** : I take classes in an art school for « displaced persons », mostly weaving and ceramics. The teachers and students come from the Baltic countries, mostly Lithuania. I feel for those poor people who, fleeing Communism, have lost everything. It is a good thing that they have this school, whose director is Vytautas Jonynas, a renowned artist. I try to get them things such as scarves and gloves, whenever I can put two nickels together. A student in sculpture has just arrived, Antanas Moncys.



Annette in traditional Lithuanian dress

He is quite handsome, tall and blond, with a beautiful basso voice. They all seem to sing well, and do some folk dances which I love.

There is also a young lieutenant, Paul Guillaut, who courts maman and Flo almost as much as me, but who must soon leave and fight in Indochina.

Simone Roumens came for Christmas. Her thick, curly hair came too close to one of the candles on the smaller tree, and caught fire. Instead of rolling on the ground as we kept yelling at her to do, she ran all over the ground floor. It finally stopped. All is well that ends well. We learned later that those people who helped us during the war, the Roumens, hid after it, an admiral who was a relative, and was condemned to death for having openly

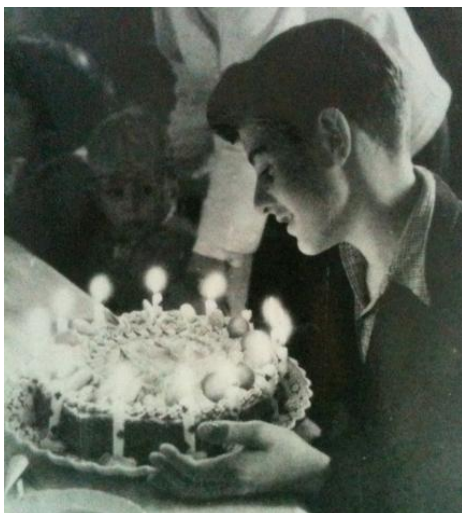
collaborated with the Germans. They protected him for years, until his death.

**FLORENCE** : Having finished high school at the « Collège Turenne » in Freiburg, I now attend the university in Strasbourg. I have an ugly little, dark room, in which I start a fire in the small stove only in the evening. I share a cold bathroom (the window is always open, and there is only cold water) with my landlady. I am not allowed in the kitchen. In Strasbourg, in winter time, the thermometer often comes down to ten or twenty below freezing. It is fortunate that, after the war, I am sort of used to it, but I pile up everything I can over my bed. I travel every week by train, from the Freiburg station, which is demolished. Once in Breisach, I cross the Rhein by foot, and take a bus to Strasbourg. All this is no fun.

One day in 1948, when I arrive in Freiburg, I fear I have fallen asleep and am in Basel ! there is a new, clean, nice station ! What a change, in one week !!!

One good thing is that in Strasbourg, there is a winter, indoor swimming pool, where I often go. My classes are interesting, and so is the town.

**DIDIER** : I was bored to death in that « paradise », living a life of luxury without being rich. Appearances corresponded to nothing, and I was as poor as a church mouse.



Didier's birthday

My sisters had fun together, and cared nothing about me. There was, of course, my adorable little brother Olivier. He was cute, nice, obedient, intelligent, a fairy tale child. We got along very well. He was my baby bear « Lokis, » a name I had heard from our Baltic friends, the « displaced persons. »

My parents liked taking risks : the risk of a marriage between a Goy and a Jewess ; the risk of six years in exotic locales, Madagascar, then Ethiopia ; the risk of the fight to the death in an extremely dangerous resistance against a pitiless occupier ; now they took the much less dangerous risk of sending

little Olivier to the local village school. He was submerged among little Badische peasants. Those children were probably amazed to be with that little French boy, who was the



governor's son, therefore eminently worthy of respect, in that country where submission to authority was ingrained very early.

I sometimes tried to fight boredom with a young German soldier, who was part of our guard detail, with whom I played ping-pong endlessly. I also was a boy scout, played basketball, and started skiing on the local hills, trying to find some entertainment in that golden cage.

**OLIVIER** : One day, I was offered a live baby boar whose mother had been killed in a hunt. We named him Adolph. He didn't live long, being allergic to the cow milk he was fed. I loved him. He was a really wild creature, doing whatever he wanted. He infuriated maman, pissing in the living-room, and refusing to get out of it. He climbed up the pant leg of the legionnaire who took care of him. He was a free being !

At school, the teacher was an impressive person, stern, and a very good pedagogue. I was good in math. I was always the second best, after a girl whose name I have forgotten. The daughter of peasants, she was pretty, I thought. One day, she walked with me to the château. That made me very happy.

We skied at the Schauinsland. I was very scared, the first time I stood on those planks ! I was seven. I gradually acquired some confidence. By the end of the afternoon, I was very sure of myself. Told to get back to the hotel, I « shussed » down, and fell. Broken tibia. I was brought to the best local surgeon :

« He is the governor's son ; he speaks German. » They made me count, in German. I woke up after the surgery.

**SEPTEMBER 9, 1950**, big event : Annette marries Paul Guillaut, who is back from Indochina. Our parents were a little apprehensive of potential antisemitic prejudices in the army, and of the custom of a dowry for officer's would-be wives.

#### Annette marries Lieutenant Paul Guillaut

Paul was named « Booby » (little boy) by the German soldiers he had worked with after the war. His father had been a great hero of the Resistance in southern France, and was tortured and killed. His Alsatian, bilingual mother, pretty and intelligent, was a lovely housewife and mother. Paul himself, as young as he was at that time, had shown great courage and initiative during the war.

The ceremony took place at Umkirch. Four hundred guests. The village's brass band came to play under our windows, early that morning, to our great surprise. A dancing platform was erected in the garden.

(While Françoise had got everything organized at Umkirch, Annette and Flo had gone to Paris to buy the necessary dresses for the three of them.) The relatives and friends walked in a procession from the château to the village church. The bride and bridegroom were much in love, and very cute.

Annette, who had won challenging ski competitions never put skis on again. She also left aside the talent she had for drawing. She later discovered yoga.





The village fanfare came unexpectedly to the wedding !

**FLORENCE** : Life in that pretty château was lovely in some ways, very comfortable, but terribly boring : we were far from our buddies who lived in Freiburg. Papa was rigid about use of the cars and the gas, still rare at the time, and paid for by the French Republic and her tax payers. We should never be driven anywhere without necessity. We had no bicycles, and five miles was a long way to walk.

We practiced some sports, but a small swimming pool is not a good place to practice your strokes. I enjoyed rowing on the lake, and liked horseback riding even though I didn't like getting up as early as it required. Gilou excelled at all sports, but was never able to teach me to play tennis well, and couldn't cure me of the fright ski slopes inspired in me.

We entertained fascinating people : great scientists like Max Planck ; musicians like Stravinsky and Olivier Messiaen ; performers such as Gaston Baty, Jean Marais, or Philippe Noiret ; some writers, among them Vercors and Bernanos (the latter had come with father Bruckberger, who was singing « boire un petit coup, c'est agréable... ») ; princes and princesses, archbishops, generals, ministers of state, painters, and many others. I know it now because I see their signatures in the autograph books I used to have our guests sign after dinner. However, very sadly, I was too young, too ignorant, and too much in love with Gilou to be able to take advantage of it intelligently. I must add that many of those dinners were deathly boring, especially when the guests were engineers.

One of our experiences was fun : the visit, in Switzerland, of Mr. Reinhart's art collection. He invited us on a day when it was closed to the public, and after a delicious lunch, took us around his collection. Seeing our interest and Annette's intelligent reaction to many of the paintings exhibited, he took us around his house also : paintings of Lukas Cranach in his bedroom, sculptures by Maillol by his outdoors swimming pool. On the way to his indoor pool, a long corridor with a real stuffed lion behind bars, who could roar when our host pressed a certain button ; a bowling alley for his artists friends, jets of cold water he could activate from the walls of the pool, to surprise his guests, etc... The art collection itself was impressive, spanning several centuries, from primitive German to nineteenth and even twentieth, mostly French, painting and sculpture. In his private quarters, he had some works by young Swiss artists. That visit was a lot of fun. Olivier spent our trip back wondering how such small creatures as moths could have attacked the fierce lion, so much larger than they.

**MAY 22, 1951**, a new family event : Annette has become a mother. Christine Guillaut was born.

A very cute, tiny baby ; a happy mother. A pensive and tender Pierre who spent long periods of time, silent, meditative, by the crib.



Christine's birth

**FRANCOISE** : Marie-Rose (yes, the same Marie-Rose who had been our maid in 1939-1940 whom, now that she was divorced with a five year old daughter, I had hired as a supervisor of our household staff) betrayed me. I had trusted her fully, given her all the keys. She became the lover of one of the chauffeurs and, with him and a few others, had organized a group of people who stole from me regularly. This discovery, which I made by accident, shook me so much that I caught a pneumonia which laid me flat for several weeks.

Before that, and after I recovered, I was able to paint again, and even to exhibit, with some success.

We spent six years in Baden. For my husband, the governor, it was fascinating. He had had to enliven again a place that had been destroyed, and demoralized when its demented cruelty was uncovered ; to prevent the black market from taking control of the local economy ; to extirpate all tendencies of a return to nazism ; to create ties of friendship between France and Germany ; and, last but not least, to start a democratic regime that would last longer than Weimar.

In this task, he succeeded so well that, twenty five years later, Pierre was decorated with the German « Ordre du Mérite » , at a high level. My role, as wife of the governor, was secondary, but I did my best to fulfill it, and I think I did it well.

After six years of occupation in Germany, we gave two large receptions before leaving, in 1952. How surprised we were to see local politicians, professors, and artists cry to see us leave. They had grown attached to us and our « beautiful family », as they liked to repeat to us. It is true also that they feared their giant neighbor on the east, the USSR.

Pierre was sad to leave that job, so high powered and full of honors, and where he could feel really efficient. As far as I was concerned, I was tired of all those receptions, that showy aspect. I did not regret the beautiful château, and was glad to return to our small apartment at rue de la tourelle in Boulogne, with the two boys sleeping in the second bedroom, and Flo on the living-room couch.

How remarkable that we all survived those dramatic and varied events. It might be considered miraculous. We did so, partly thanks to Pierre's and Françoise's prescience : they had felt, early on, how events might turn, and had prepared for them. We did survive the German occupation of France also thanks to the frequent help of many friends and relations who, whatever their opinions may have been, took great risks in doing so.



The parade for Pierre's departure from the State of Baden 1952  
Freiburg im Breisgau



# Some sources

I have verified historical facts and dates, as well as food allowances during the war etc... in wikipedia.

Besides my own recollections of events and conversations, I have used the following documents, which I have translated, and often literally quoted.

- PIERRE :** « Account, after infarctus. »  
« Mobilization – War : 1939 – 1940. Journal. »  
« Arrest – Torture – Jail. »  
« Escape. »  
« The plunge into total secrecy. »  
« Arrival into Germany : Journal. »
- FRANCOISE :** « A grand-mother's journal, or recollections without chronology. »  
Recollections of the war years – untitled.
- CLOTILDE :** Memoir of prison days. Untitled.
- ANNETTE :** Letter to Maïten Garicoïx, written from Bures/Yvette.  
Annette has read and corrected everything I have attributed to her.
- FLORENCE :** « Child's remarks » collected by Françoise.  
Letter to Rizou, dated June 14, 1944. Excerpts.
- RIZOU :** « Child's remarks » collected by Françoise.  
Report from the camp attended spring to summer, 1944.
- DIDIER (Rizou) :** « Pieces of a life, or hunting for a lost childhood. »  
Transcript of a gathering at Annette's with Simone Roumens, by Mireille Pinard.
- OLIVIER :** « Some recollections from Umkirch. »

I have done my best to make events coherent and understandable, as briefly as possible. I have also made a point of showing how differently each one of us lived those events. I have tried to give a brief history of Pierre's and Françoise's antecedents, but have not spent time on physical descriptions. I am told that my English is not perfect. I hope I shall be forgiven for that.

Florence Pène – Rosenberg.