

Anne Frank.

by: Melissa Müller

When Edith opened the letter she was stunned. The summons to labor service was addressed not to Otto but to Margot. Margot was ordered to report to the Central Office; from there a train

would take her to the transit camp at Westerbork. She was to bring two blankets, sheets, food for three days, a towel and toilet articles, a plate, a cup, and a spoon. She was also allowed to take a suitcase or backpack with one pair of solid winter shoes, two pairs of socks, two pairs of underpants, two undershirts, and one pair of overalls. The suitcase had to have first and last name, date of birth, and the word *Holland* written on it. This was important because it would be sent by separate train. Those called up were to take with them and have ready at hand all their ration cards and their identity papers. How could the Germans do this! Hadn't they promised not to split up families?

Edith forced herself to stay calm. Thinking quickly, she decided to tell Margot it was Otto who had been called up. There was no need to worry, though. Under no circumstances would he obey the summons; they had long since made plans for just such an emergency. Edith told Margot she had to run over to the van Pelses on Zuider Amstellaan to discuss something with them. In the meantime Margot should break the news to Anne gently. And she was not to open the door if the bell rang, no matter what.

The afternoon crept by at an unbearably slow pace. Margot had to tell her younger sister the bad news. Unsurprisingly, Anne's reaction was emotional, but she let herself be comforted. Her father would not go under any circumstances. Anne sat motionless, passive, as though in shock. Then her mother came back, accompanied by Hermann van Pels. The two grown-ups were deliberating about what to do, but the girls were not allowed to listen. They would not be told of the plan until the last minute. Meanwhile they all waited impatiently for Otto to return. When the doorbell rang, they jumped: Don't open it.

Hello didn't know what to think. Why wasn't anyone opening the door? Hadn't they agreed he would come back? He had so looked forward to the afternoon. Annoyed and disappointed, he

went home. What could have happened? Why hadn't Anne told him before lunch that she was going to be out?

In the apartment Hermann van Pels and Edith were making plans. The Franks had to disappear the next morning, whether their hiding place was ready or not. The van Pelses would follow one week later. The hiding place was so obvious it would never occur to anybody to look for the two families there. They had originally planned to go into hiding on July 16, even if there was no immediate threat to their safety. By then, they would have completed their preparations. But now the Nazis had forced their hand, and ready or not, they had to go into hiding ten days ahead of schedule.

Otto finally returned home around five o'clock. It is not hard to imagine the greeting he received from Edith and the girls. Otto responded in his usual placid manner, concealing his true feelings. Of course they were going to go into hiding—immediately, tomorrow morning, twelve hours from now. No need to panic; everything had been prepared long ago. Their lodger, Mr. Goldschmidt, and all their friends and neighbors would think that they had managed to escape to Switzerland. Otto would see to that. They would leave behind, as though inadvertently, an address scribbled on a scrap of paper, which would put everyone on the wrong track. Before Anne and Margot went to bed they were to pack their schoolbags with whatever personal belongings they wanted to take along; there would be no time for that in the morning. Probably they would all have to hide for several weeks, perhaps for several months, until the war was over and they could reemerge. The cat, unfortunately, would have to be left behind.

Anne wanted to know where they were going to hide but Otto would say only that it was in a safe place and that the family would stay together, as he had promised. She would find out where in the morning. "In a town or the country, in a house or a cottage, when,

how, where? . . . These were many questions I could not ask but I couldn't get them out of my mind," Anne would write in her diary on July 8 (ver. B).

It was hard for Otto to keep calm. Some plausible fiction had to be invented for their lodger, and Otto's employees, Johannes Kleiman and Victor Kugler, had to be told. After all, it had been Kleiman, as early as the summer of 1941, who had suggested to Otto that the empty rooms in the annex behind the office at 263 Prinsengracht would make a comfortable hiding place. Otto, though outwardly optimistic, had prepared for the worst. For the past several months Kugler and Kleiman had been moving everything necessary—furniture, dishes, bedding, food supplies—into the annex, little by little. As Jews, the Franks and the van Pelses were not permitted to take furniture out of their apartments. The Franks' helpers had even installed a bathroom with a sink and a toilet in the annex. The office staff would make sure that no one would ever suspect the existence of this hiding place.

When all the arrangements for the next morning had been made, Hermann von Pels took his leave. He had to go quickly because he could not be seen on the street after eight, and he still had to let Jan and Miep Gies know what was happening. Otto had revealed his plan to Miep weeks before. "Are you prepared to take responsibility for us when we are in hiding?" he had asked her. Taking responsibility meant first of all shopping, finding food in an economy where food was in short supply. It meant always being on call for her friends in hiding and never ever breathing a word to anyone. Taking responsibility meant keeping a secret that was a matter of life and death. Miep responded without a moment's hesitation, as if Otto had asked her to take care of some routine matter in the office. Yes, of course, she told her employer without asking a single question. She respected Otto Frank; he was her friend, and not only her friend but also her employer, the most fair-

minded employer she could imagine. He was a man to whom anyone would be loyal. It never occurred to her to say no.

When Hermann van Pels told Jan and Miep what had happened that afternoon, they didn't hesitate. As soon as it was dark, they would pick up clothes, shoes, towels, and other necessities at the Franks' and store them temporarily at their place. (Neither the van Pelses nor the Franks could do this, of course, because they could not leave their apartments after 8:00 P.M.) Then, over the course of the next few days, they could take these items to the hiding place on Prinsengracht.

Naturally, Jan and Miep were terribly nervous. They knew what would happen if the police caught them. Although they wanted to run from their apartment on Hunzestraat to Merwedeplein, they walked normally so as not to attract too much attention. They had had enough presence of mind to put on their raincoats, unusual garments for a warm summer evening but ones in which they could conceal all sorts of bulky items. They would have been conspicuous marching through the streets with suitcases in hand.

Late that evening Otto wrote a short letter to his sister, Helene, in Basel, wording it carefully so that it would get by the German censors without giving anything away. Miep would mail it the following day. "Dearest Lunni, because we will not be able to write later, we are sending you our birthday wishes now so that they will be sure to reach you in good time." Helene's birthday was not until September 8. "We wish you all the best. We are well and together; that is the main thing." The Franks' relatives in Basel were to understand that Otto, Edith, and the children were going into hiding but would under no circumstances be separated. Edith could not get word to her brothers in America. Since Hitler's declaration of war against the United States in December 1941, there had been no mail service to the States. But Alice Stern Frank