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Saturday, Nov. 13

Yesterday evening, I read Winnie-the-Pooh, which Jeanine Guillaume had brought me. I smiled right down to my heart and even laughed out loud. It captures so well the world of little English children that I so love. It reminds me so much of Miss Child. And also the cleverness of certain finds. That ~~halfway~~ cheerful, serious tone that both laughs at children and stands before them in admiration, that understands that compared to us, children are infinitely superior. It was pure ecstasy for me.

In the morning, after my German lesson, I walked up Rue Rodier and at Lamarck, under [sic] a pouring rain that ran all the way down the stairs of the Sacr -Coeur.

Denise and Fran ois and Ms. Detraux came over for lunch. I absolutely had to read Winnie-the-Pooh to someone. When I started in, I saw clearly that no one was interested. And I continued, knowing all the while that I was forcing the others to pay attention, knowing that I was boring them. I got over the revulsion that made me feel I was being boring. But I didn't understand why the others didn't know about Winnie-the-Pooh. It's always the same eternal problem: sharing my enthusiasm with someone else. There is no joy for me other than the joy that I can share with someone else. Now I am deprived of everyone I could share it with, above all Jean.

Even so, Miss Detraux listened and admired the lovely drawings of Winnie. Kneeling at the foot of her chair, I explained the story to her. I didn't explain it very well – I did a poor job of rendering the charm of the story because it is impossible to translate into French and Miss Detraux is much farther from that world than Mother or Denise. But I kept on talking and my cheeks were on fire. The others continued talking around us.

It isolated me, it isolated us. I forgot everything except

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my efforts to communicate the book's charm.

Afterward, Mother, who was a little sleepy, asked me, smiling, "And what happens to Winnie?" But I knew that if she was asking me the question, it was more because my enthusiasm had moved her than because she was interested in Winnie. I was the reason for her interest and not the book. Surely part of it was a desire to

please me. And she was amused. But she didn't understand the book the way that I would have liked her to.

I went to the Galignani bookstore. I didn't find Winnie-the-Pooh but I did find Through the Looking Glass, the sequel to the story of Alice, and a book of children's poems by the same author who wrote Winnie-the-Pooh, also beautifully illustrated.

Afterward, I went to have tea at Mrs. Crémieux's. She got home at the same time as me.

We will never be able to comprehend the desolation of a life like Mrs. Crémieux's life. I know well that I can only get a rough sense of it. No one can really know. At one point, she said to me, "You can't imagine, Hélène. There are moments when I think I am dreaming. I open the door and say to myself, "My husband will be there. I tell myself it's impossible for him not to be there." My God, the sorrow that made me feel.

~~Constantly~~ The phone rang several times, once to tell us that there would be a deportation on Monday. In moments like those, we couldn't start talking again. Something kept me from picking up the conversation. However, you have to. There's no point in making her think about those kinds of things.

She searched in her notebook, the notebook that was in Mrs. Schwartz's drawer. All of that is slice of a dead life, a life that is over – the desk, Mrs. Schwartz, her grey eyes sparkling with kindness every time she looked at me, smiling a faint smile. Françoise, laughing,

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coming and going with a piece of paper in her hand. Mrs. Robert Lévy, so tall and beautiful and crisp with her good spirits and her optimism. Mrs. Cahen who always [illegible] in the middle of her quarrels with the [illegible]. Jacques Goeldohel who would come in to check the file. Mrs. Horvilleur, already so irritated and overcome with sadness.

All of this awakens in me but it's like something that no longer has a voice – a *dumb show*. It's upsetting because you can't hear the voices any longer, you can only see the images.

And yet that catastrophe wasn't a form of punishment because all we were doing was trying to ease the unhappiness of others. We knew what was happening; each new measure, each deportation, wrung more suffering out of us. They called us collaborators because the people who came there had just seen a member of their family get arrested and it was only natural for them to have that reaction upon seeing us. Office of the exploitation of others' destitution. Yes, I understand why the others thought that. From the outside, it looked a bit like that. Going to work there every morning as though it were an office, except the visitors who came there were people who had come to find out if someone had been arrested or deported. The forms and letters we filed away bore the names of women, children, elderly people and men whose [illegible] were very upsetting. An office! There was something

sinister about that. I even remember that once or twice, out of habit, the same habit that made me take that route to work at the same time every morning, I momentarily saw this life as an “office life,” as something normal and ordinary. I remember being happy to see my friends. However, if this impression is guilty (and who wouldn’t have had the same impression since, outwardly, this life looked exactly like an office life), I swear that as soon as I set foot on that first step, the impression vanished. I was fully aware that the matter I would be handling was human suffering. I knew very well that

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this wasn’t an ordinary office life, that the others were wrong to be angry with us. I completely understand why the outward appearance of this entire administration provoked disgust. Because the first day I ever went to Rue de Téhéran, when Father was arrested, I remember the horrible impression it made on me. Seeing men meeting in an office when what they were working on was suffering that was being inflicted voluntarily, rationally, by the Germans on other people.

Why did I start working there? To be able to do something, to be very close to the tragedy. And to help the internees – we did all that we could. Those who knew us well understood that and judged us fairly.

As for those on the outside who thought that we went there to get protection (via that famous legitimation card), I was never able to see things that way – I would have refused to work there. When we started working there in July 1942, just after the roundup on the 16th, all of our friends were leaving Paris panic-stricken. Mr. Katz told Mother that if we really wanted to stay – and God only knows if [illegible] were pushing us to leave – we would need to have an occupation. Back then they were talking about picking up all the young unemployed people without any distinction. When we received our cards, that was one more thing we had. Also, he told us, “If someone from the Gestapo stops you in the street, you show them this.” But back then the card didn’t have the value that it acquired later on (and has now lost). We barely thought about that. We only thought about the sacrifice we would be making by working for that kind of association. Since then, I’ve changed. I have cleaned up a lot of things inside myself at the cost of terrible losses. For those who thought that we were there to protect ourselves, the roundup on July 30th clearly proved them wrong.

Moreover, who better than us to understand the instability and insecurity of our situation. I remember what Mrs. Schwartz used to say.

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Why did I stir up all of these memories? Now that I think about it again, the past takes on the appearance of a *dumb show* once more. All of that is dead.

Yet I understand why I was disoriented, *out of joint*, thinking about it – why all of that seemed dead to me. I forget that I am mining a posthumous life, that I should have died with them. If I'd left with them, my new life would have seemed like a continuation of the old one. I wouldn't have had this impression.

I left Mrs. Crémieux's at 7:00 under a torrential downpour. First we waited for the 92 then we ended up taking the metro. Leaving the station at Trocadéro in the dark, I ran, landing in random puddles, battered by the rain and the cold.

At Rue Fourcroy, once she had taken my arm and was under my umbrella – a big, old, grandmotherly umbrella – Mrs. Crémieux said to me, “Hélène, what are they doing these days?” What could I say –

It's terrible to not be able to offer any consolation –

Sunday
Nov. 14

I left very early to go see Ms. Ch – for Charles. There are still concerns on that end and Mother has given me the full responsibility. ~~At xxx of xxx~~ It's undoubtedly a sign of respect but it makes me feel lonely. Before I left, I went to say hello to Charles; he threw his arms around my neck and afterward, while he was talking, he left his arms on my shoulders. I was stunned by these signs of affection. I couldn't believe they were meant for me.

From there I went to Neuilly to pick up little Odette to take her back to the house – a little 3-year-old girl with cornflower blue eyes and golden hair like

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an English baby. She didn't say anything. It was clear that she only loved one thing – being held in your arms.

I took her back to Ch, then left for Denise's, where I arrived exhausted. Luckily she started playing the piano. But suddenly it brought me back to a not-so-distant past when she would practice the piano and I would hear her from the stairway as I went upstairs, and it reminded me even more of the tenderness with which she would surround me. And I understood one of the reasons for my loneliness – it's her absence. I still hadn't “realized” she had gotten married.

I was delayed in the morning by a phone call I made to Denise Mantoux, who was visiting Paris. I'll see her next time. But she told me that her brother Gérard was there and would love to see us again. The Mantoux – the past that rises back up the surface is already so far away. I don't know if it will make me happy.

Yesterday evening, after dinner, I was reading The Good-Natured Man by Goldsmith when the doorbell rang. It was a young man who Miss Detraux had sent over to ask us for our opinion regarding two children he had collected following the arrest of the father (a doctor), the mother and the two youngest children, a 12-

month-old and a 2-year-old. The father was arrested in the street because when they wanted to check his papers, he made a move to flee. Later they went to get the family, who was packing their bags – sadly it was too late. Apparently the German who came to arrest the wife said to her, “Why not tell me where the other two children are? Families are meant to stay together...” Yes, when you separate husbands and wives starting in Metz –

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because now, they deport families. What do they think they are doing? Creating a state of Jewish slaves in Poland? Do they think for one second that the poor families who have settled here – in some cases five centuries ago – do anything other than constantly think about coming back?

Afterward, I couldn't keep reading. I had to go to bed. The problem of evil once again seemed so immense and hopeless to me.

Tuesday, Nov. 16

On the Boulevard de la Gare, they opened a branch of Lévitán (the center where the Drancy internees, who get “preference” because they are “spouses of Aryans,” sort and box the items that the Germans have stolen from Jewish apartments and which will be sent to Germany). Currently there are two hundred people there, men and women all together in the same room with one sink. Everything is done together. Men and women are carefully stripped of their modesty.

Among them are Mr. Kohn and Edmond Bloch – who is seriously disabled – how does he do it? Mrs. Vare, the banker's wife – By the way, what difference does class make? Everyone suffers – except surely those who are extremely fragile and thin, like the first one I mentioned, suffer more.

Go to Neuilly for nothing –

Get to St. Denis at 11:30 –
cried after dinner –

Wednesday, Nov. 17

I just came back from the children's hospital where a nurse had called me in because of a child. A ~~person~~ woman with a lot of heart and intelligence who wanted to save Doudou. I explained to her that nothing could be done, that he was stuck – [illegible] her hesitation regarding the [illegible] – and it pained me. I understand her perspective so well and it's so hard to explain it to other people. Officially, given its non-clandestine nature, it's a monstrosity. But first of all, who would have taken care of the internees and families without it? And who can tell how much good many of its members

translated by Nina Fink

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<http://training.ehri-project.eu/d06-h%C3%A9%C3%A8ne-berris-diary-entry-november-1943>