

11. Will We See You Again Soon, Peter?

Annemarie blinked. Across the dark room, she saw Ellen, too, peering into the narrow wooden box in surprise.

There was no one in the casket at all. Instead, it seemed to be stuffed with folded blankets and articles of clothing.

Peter began to lift the things out and distribute them to the silent people in the room. He handed heavy coats to the man and wife, and another to the old man with the beard.

"It will be very cold," he murmured. "Put them on." He found a thick sweater for Mrs. Rosen, and a woolen jacket for Ellen's father. After a moment of rummaging through the folded things, he found a smaller winter jacket, and handed it to Ellen.

Annemarie watched as Ellen took the jacket in her arms and looked at it. It was patched and worn. It was true that there had been few new clothes for anyone during the recent years; but still, Ellen's mother had always managed to make clothes for her daughter, often using old things that she was able to take apart and refashion in a way that made them seem brand-new. Never had Ellen worn anything so shabby and old.

But she put it on, pulled it around her, and buttoned the mismatched buttons.

Peter, his arms full of the odd pieces of clothing, looked toward the silent couple with the infant. "I'm sorry," he said to them. "There is nothing for a baby."

"I'll find something," Mama said quickly. "The baby must be warm." She left the room and was back in a moment with Kirsti's thick red sweater.

"Here," she said softly to the mother. "It will be much too big, but that will make it even warmer for him."

The woman spoke for the first time. "Her," she whispered. "She's a girl. Her name is Rachel."

Mama smiled and helped her direct the sleeping baby's arms into the sleeves of the sweater. Together they buttoned the heart-shaped buttons—how Kirsti loved that sweater, with its heart buttons!—until the tiny child was completely encased in the warm red wool. Her eyelids fluttered but she didn't wake.

Peter reached into his pocket and took something out. He went to the parents and leaned down toward the baby. He opened the lid of the small bottle in his hand.

"How much docs she weigh?" Peter asked.

"She was seven pounds when she was bom," the young woman replied. "She's gained a little, but not very much. Maybe she weighs eight pounds now, no more."

"A few drops will be enough, then. It has no taste. She won't even notice."

The mother tightened her arms around the baby and looked up at Peter, pleading. "Please, no," she said. "She always sleeps all night. Please, she doesn't need it, I promise. She won't cry."

Peter's voice was firm. "We can't take a chance," he said. He inserted the dropper of the bottle into the baby's tiny mouth, and squeezed a few drops of liquid onto her tongue. The baby yawned, and swallowed. The mother closed her eyes; her husband gripped her shoulder.

Next, Peter removed the folded blankets from the coffin, one by one, and handed them around. "Carry these with you," he said. "You will need them later, for warmth."

Annemarie's mother moved around the room and gave each person a small package of food: the cheese and bread and apples that Annemarie had helped her prepare in the kitchen hours before.

Finally, Peter took a paper-wrapped packet from the inside of his own jacket. He looked around the room, at the assembled people now dressed in the bulky winter clothing, and then motioned

to Mr. Rosen, who followed him to the hall.

Annemarie could overhear their conversation. "Mr. Rosen," Peter said, "I must get this to Henrik. But I might not see him. I am going to take the others only to the harbor and they will go to the boat alone.

"I want you to deliver this. Without fail. It is of great importance." There was a moment of silence in the hall, and Annemarie knew that Peter must be giving the packet to Mr. Rosen.

Annemarie could see it protruding from Mr. Rosen's pocket when he returned to the room and sat down again. She could see, too, that Mr. Rosen had a puzzled look. He didn't know what the packet contained. He hadn't asked.

It was one more time, Annemarie realized, when they protected one another by not telling. If Mr. Rosen knew, he might be frightened. If Mr. Rosen knew, he might be in danger.

So he hadn't asked. And Peter hadn't explained.

"Now," Peter said, looking at his watch, "I will lead the first group. You, and you, and you." He gestured to the old man and to the young people with their baby.

"Inge," he said. Annemarie realized that it was the first time that she had heard Peter Neilsen call her mother by her first name; before, it had always been "Mrs. Johansen"; or, in the old days, during the merriment and excitement of his engagement to Lise, it had been, occasionally, "Mama." Now it was Inge. It was as if he had moved beyond his own youth and had taken his place in the world of adults. Her mother nodded and waited for his instructions.

"You wait twenty minutes, and then bring the Rosens. Don't come sooner. We must be separate on the path so there is less chance of being seen."

Mrs. Johansen nodded again.

"Come directly back to the house after you have seen the Rosens safely to Henrik. Stay in the shadows and on the back path—you know that, of course.

"By the time you get the Rosens to the boat," Peter went on, "I will be gone. As soon as I deliver my group, I must move on. There is other work to be done tonight."

He turned to Annemarie. "So I will say goodbye to you now."

Annemarie went to him and gave him a hug. "But we will see you again soon?" she asked.

"I hope so," Peter said. "Very soon. Don't grow much more, or

you will be taller than I am, little Longlegs!"

Annemarie smiled, but Peter's comment was no longer the lighthearted fun of the past. It was only a brief grasp at something that had gone.

Peter kissed Mama wordlessly. Then he wished the Rosens Godspeed, and he led the others through the door.

Mama, Annemarie, and the Rosens sat in silence. There was a slight commotion outside the door, and Mama went quickly to look out. In a moment she was back.

"It's all right," she said, in response to their looks. "The old man stumbled. But Peter helped him up. He didn't seem to be hurt. Maybe just his pride," she added, smiling a bit.

It was an odd word: *pride*. Annemarie looked at the Rosens, sitting there, wearing the misshapen, ill-fitting clothing, holding ragged blankets folded in their arms, their faces drawn and tired. She remembered the earlier, happier times: Mrs. Rosen, her hair neatly combed and covered, lighting the Sabbath candles, saying the ancient prayer. And Mr. Rosen, sitting in the big chair in their living room, studying his thick books, correcting papers, adjusting his glasses, looking up now and then to complain good-naturedly about the lack of decent light. She remembered Ellen in the school play, moving confidently across the stage, her gestures sure, her voice clear.

All of those things, those sources of pride—the candlesticks, the books, the daydreams of theater—had been left behind in Copenhagen. They had nothing with them now; there was only the clothing of unknown people for warmth, the food from Henrik's farm for survival, and the dark path ahead, through the woods, to freedom.

Annemarie realized, though she had not really been told, that Uncle Henrik was going to take them, in his boat, across the sea to Sweden. She knew how frightened Mrs. Rosen was of the sea: its width, its depth, its cold. She knew how frightened Ellen was of the soldiers, with their guns and boots, who were certainly looking for them. And she knew how frightened they all must be of the future.

But their shoulders were as straight as they had been in the past: in the classroom, on the stage, at the Sabbath table. So there were other sources, too, of pride, and they had not left everything behind.

12. Where Was Mama?

Mr. Rosen tripped on the loose step outside the kitchen door. His wife grasped his arm, and he regained his balance.

"It's very dark," Mama whispered as they stood in the yard with their blankets and bundles of food gathered in their arms, "and we can't use any kind of light. I'll go first—I know the way very well—and you follow me. Try not to stumble over the tree roots in the path. Feel carefully with your feet. The path is uneven.

"And be very, very quiet," she added, unnecessarily.

The night was quiet, too. A slight breeze moved in the tops of the trees, and from across the meadow came the sound of the sea's movement, which was a constant sound here and had always been. But no birds called or cried here now, in the night. The cow slept silently in the barn, the kitten upstairs in Kirsti's arms.

There were stars here and there, dotting the sky among thin clouds, but no moon. Annemarie shivered, standing at the foot of the steps.

"Come," Mama murmured, and she moved away from the house.

One by one the Rosens turned and hugged Annemarie silently.

Ellen came to her last; the two girls held each other.

"I'll come back someday," Ellen whispered fiercely. "*I promise.*"

"I know you will," Annemarie whispered back, holding her friend tightly.

Then they were gone, Mama and the Rosens. Annemarie was alone. She went into the house, crying suddenly, and closed the door against the night.

The lid of the casket was closed again. Now the room was empty; there was no sign of the people who had sat there for those hours. Annemarie wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. She opened the dark curtains and the windows; she curled once more in the rocker, trying to relax; she traced their route in her mind. She knew the old path, too—not as well as her mother, who had followed it almost every day of her childhood with her dog scampering behind. But Annemarie had often walked to town and back that way, and she remembered the turns, the twisted trees whose gnarled roots pushed the earth now and then into knotted clumps, and the thick bushes that often flowered in early summer.

She walked with them in her mind, feeling the way through the darkness. It would take them, she thought, half an hour to reach the

place where Uncle Henrik was waiting with his boat. Mama would leave them there—pausing a minute, no more, for a final hug—and then she would turn and come home. It would be faster for Mama alone, with no need to wait as the Rosens, unfamiliar with the path, slowly felt their way along. Mama would hurry, sure-footed now, back to her children.

The clock in the hall struck once; it was two-thirty in the morning. Her mother would be home in an hour, Annemarie decided. She rocked gently back and forth in the old chair. Mama would be home by three-thirty.

She thought of Papa, back in Copenhagen alone. He would be awake, too. He would be wishing he could have come, but knowing, too, that he must come and go as always: to the corner store for the newspaper, to his office when morning came. Now he would be afraid for them, and watching the clock, waiting for word that the Rosens were safe, that Mama and the girls were here at the farm, starting a new day with the sun shining through the kitchen window and cream on their oatmeal.

It was harder for the ones who were waiting, Annemarie knew. Less danger, perhaps, but more fear.

She yawned, and her head nodded. She fell asleep, and it was a sleep as thin as the night clouds, dotted with dreams that came and went like the stars.

Light woke her. But it was not really morning, not yet. It was only the first hint of a slightly lightening sky: a pale gleam at the edge of the meadow, a sign that far away somewhere, to the east where Sweden still slept, morning would be coming soon. Dawn would creep across the Swedish farmland and coast; then it would wash little Denmark with light and move across the North Sea to wake Norway.

Annemarie blinked in confusion, sitting up, remembering after a moment where she was and why. But it was not right, the pale light at the horizon—it should be dark still. It should still be night.

She stood stiffly, stretching her legs, and went to the hall to look at the old clock. It was past four o'clock.

Where was Mama?

Perhaps she had come home, not wanted to wake Annemarie, and had gone to bed herself. Surely that was it. Mama must have been exhausted; she had been up all night, had made the dangerous journey to the boat, and returned through the dark woods, wanting only to sleep.

Quickly Annemarie went up the narrow staircase. The door to the bedroom where she had slept with Ellen was open. The two small beds were neatly made, covered with the old quilts, and empty.

Beside it, Uncle Henrik's door was open, too; and his bed, too, was unused and empty. Despite her worry, Annemarie smiled slightly when she saw some of Henrik's clothes crumpled in a chair and a pair of shoes, caked with the barnyard dirt, lying on the floor.

He needs a wife, she said to herself, imitating Mama.

The door to the other bedroom, the one Kirsti and Mama were sharing, was closed. Quietly, not wanting to wake them, Annemarie pushed it open.

The kitten's ears moved, standing up straight; its eyes opened wide, and it raised its head and yawned. It pried itself out of Kirsti's arms, stretched, and then jumped lightly to the floor and came to Annemarie. It rubbed itself against her leg and purred.

Kirsti sighed and turned in her sleep; one arm, free now of the kitten's warmth and comfort, dug itself across the pillow.

There was no one else in the wide bed.

Annemarie moved quickly to the window, which overlooked the clearing that led to the path's entrance. The light outside was still very dim, and she peered through the dimness, trying to see, looking for the opening in the trees where the path began, looking for Mama hurrying home.

After a second she saw a shape there: something unfamiliar, something that had not been there the day before. A dark shape, no

more than a blurred heap, at the beginning of the path. Annemarie squinted, forcing her eyes to understand, needing to understand, not wanting to understand.

The shape moved. And she knew. It was her mother, lying on the earth.