

SIX

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

I CAN HEAR FOOTSTEPS. Someone is coming near the woodpile. Klara squeezes my hand so hard I think she might break it. I hear voices. French. Not German. A dog barks. Someone is pulling at the wood. They must not know how to open it. Which must mean . . .

“Here! Here!” A man’s voice, still French, not German. A dog barks frantically, near us. I think I might faint. Klara starts to cry. I turn to her.

“We aren’t going to give up,” I whisper fiercely. “You hold on to my hand. Don’t let go, no matter what.”

The dog is going crazy now. Howling. And then, the woodpile swings away. The light almost blinds me. It takes a minute before I can see. I look up. A French

gendarme is staring at us, his dog barking wildly. He looks confused now that he's found us.

I pull Klara up. I shake out my legs. Klara seems paralyzed. I shove her a little and point to her legs. She follows my example as if sleepwalking, moving a little.

I smile at the gendarme as I look around, get my bearings. He raises his gun as if my smile is some kind of threat. Madame Debard rounds the corner of the house, with three of her own dogs. I see her say something to them. Her dogs immediately head for the gendarme's dog and attack him. Madame Debard is motioning to me, run, run. She points toward the trees, the woods just beyond. Klara's hand is still in mine. Madame Debard hurries over to us and begins to scream at the gendarme.

"Get your dog away! He'll hurt our dogs. Bad dog. Help me here!"

The gendarme can't concentrate on everything. We jump away from the dogs as if frightened. And then I grab Klara's hand even tighter, pull her, and we run.

"Hey!" the gendarme screams after us. I glance back. Guy is there now and has managed to trip in front of the gendarme so he can't chase us. I'm just glad I don't see any Gestapo. They'd have shot us by now.

And then, a shot whistles past my ear. Klara shrieks and falls. I kneel down. "Are you hit?"

"No! But they're shooting at us!"

“Get up!” I scream at her. “Our only chance is to run. Get up!!”

She scrambles up, and I pull her toward the trees. There is a manure pit with wooden planks over it just ahead of us, but I don't want to be a target up on the planks so I pull Klara around it. Many voices are screaming now. I look over my shoulder. I see two gendarmes running after us. But still no Gestapo. Klara and I are almost at the trees. More dogs are barking. Guy is running after the gendarmes, the dogs with him. Klara and I reach the trees. I look back. Two gendarmes are running across the planks. And then they aren't. They've fallen through the planks into the manure pit!

I pull Klara into the woods. We crash through the undergrowth and the trees, running so hard all I can hear is the blood throbbing in my ears. We are gasping for breath, crashing into tree branches, cutting our legs on sharp leaves, twigs, thistles. I don't care. I won't slow down.

Finally Klara jerks her hand out of mine and collapses on the forest floor. Her chest heaves so hard she can't even speak. Neither can I. I sink down beside her.

Finally, when I have enough air in my lungs to speak, I say, “Did you see?”

“What?”

“They fell into the manure pit!”

“No!”

“Yes!”

She actually starts to laugh.

“I don’t think they’ll be coming after us right away,” I grin.

“Unless there were more than those two,” she says. “There could have been. The others could have been searching the house or something.”

It is almost dark. I try to think what we should do next. Should we try to find another farmhouse? Should we try to get to the village of Le Chambon, to Pastor Trocmé’s house? Should we try to get to another town altogether? And then I have an idea.

“We need to get to another farmhouse,” I tell Klara. “I think I know one not too far from here. I visited it once with Rudi. But it’s on the other side of the Debards’ farm. We’ll have to go back, then circle around. Otherwise I’m sure to get us lost.”

Klara doesn’t argue. We have to do *something*. So we begin to go back, staying as far away from the farmhouse as possible. We walk quickly, but it gets darker and darker. I begin to worry. And I realize we aren’t going to make it out of the woods before night-fall. The moon will rise and give us some light later, but now it is too low to be of any help.

“Klara,” I say, “we’d better rest here until the moon comes up. Then we can try again.”

We find a soft spot, covered with pine needles, and

we rest up against a large tree. It's a warm night, at least. Not warm enough to be outside all night in comfort, but we won't freeze to death.

For a moment neither of us speaks.

"Close call," I say.

"Thank you," she says.

"What for?"

"Getting us out of there. I'd *never* have had the nerve."

It's a clear night, and before long the stars are shining and I can see the moon rising over the treetops.

"Ready?" I ask her.

"Ready."

Fortunately, we are quite close to the edge of the trees. I lead Klara out of the forest so that we are standing on a grazing meadow for sheep, rolling hills stretching out ahead of us. I can see the farmhouse we are heading for, lights blinking, in the distance. It will take us at least an hour to walk to it.

"We shouldn't talk," I say. "We don't want the dogs to hear us and start barking. Let's go."

It's amazing how well I know the area now. And lucky for us too. I have to concentrate on keeping us going in the right direction, but I do well, and finally we arrive at the farmhouse. The dogs start to bark from the barn. One from the house barks. I knock on the door. An older man answers, white hair, bright blue eyes.

“Hello. Anna isn’t it?”

“Yes. Hello, Monsieur Chave. This is my friend Klara. You see, we were hiding with Madame Debard, but we got discovered.”

“Oh!” he exclaims. “Come in. Come in. Matilde. Come down!”

His wife appears and immediately fusses over us as if we were half-drowned cats. She heats us up some soup and makes us tea and puts blankets over our shoulders to warm us. Then she settles us into a double bed just off the kitchen, and tells us that we’ll stay with them until this whole terrible business is over.

I cuddle under the quilt, warm and full. I turn to say something to Klara. But she’s already fast asleep.

But I can’t sleep. My blood is still racing. I’m worried about the others. Have the police caught any Jews? There are so many of us here. And what about Madame Debard and her family? Were they arrested for hiding us? I suppose I won’t know until the morning. News travels fast here. Until then, I can only hope. And pray.