

A PUFFIN BOOK

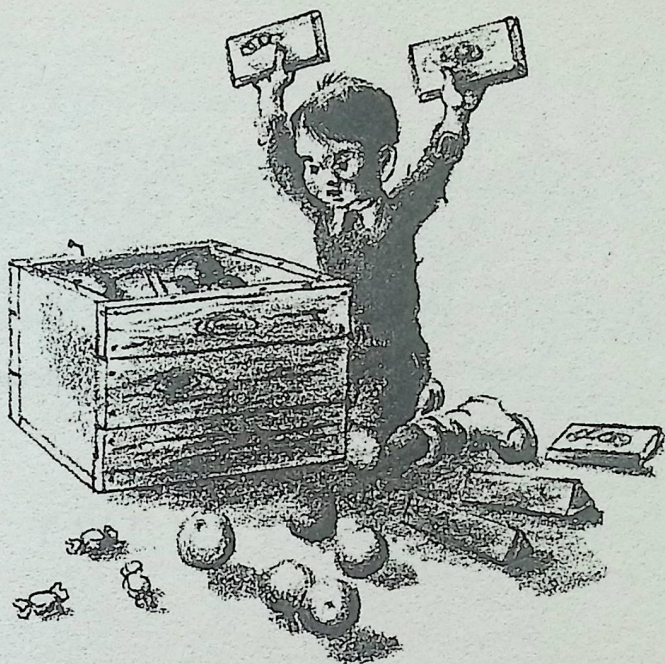


CLAIRE HUCHET BISHOP

Twenty and Ten

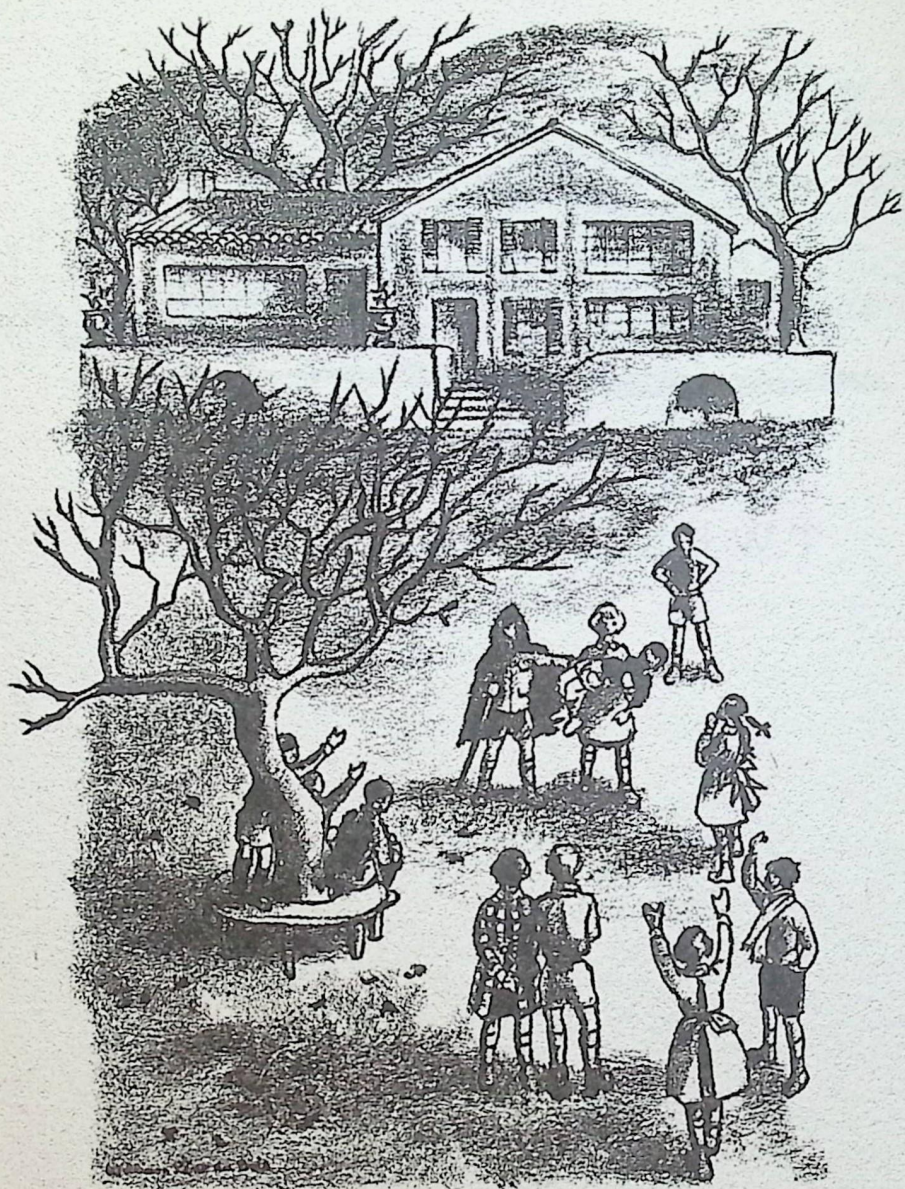
illustrated by
WILLIAM PENE DU BOIS





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1. Make-Believe

It all started when we were playing at The Flight into Egypt. Make-believe. It was in the schoolyard, at recess time, right after the Christmas vacation, beginning of the year 1944.

I have to write all about it now, lest I forget later on, the way most grownups do forget the very important things, such as not talking about a treasure or not asking what one is thinking about. If I write now all I remember about "it," perhaps when I am old, let us say twenty, somebody may find these pages and make a book. But that is a very long way off: I am only thirteen, and I was eleven when "it" happened.

My name is Janet. There were also George and Philip and Henry and Denise and Louis and many others. Twenty in all. And we were all fifth-graders except Louis, who was only four years old but was allowed to be with us because he was Denise's little brother. And this was permitted because the war was on and France was occupied, and the children were herded all together where it was safest for them to be. In our town the boys' school and the girls' school were combined and each grade was sent somewhere in the country.

We, the fifth-graders, boys and girls, were given that lovely old house on the top of a mountain. It was called Beauvallon, Beautiful Valley, because we could see the valley for miles and miles from up there, and it was very beautiful.

Anyway, we were all up there, the fifth-graders and Louis, and Sister Gabriel was with us, and we were very happy because we just loved her. She was young and gay and quick. She never walked, she flew.

Now, as I was saying at the very beginning, we were playing at The Flight into Egypt. I was Mary, and George was Joseph, and Louis was the little one.

The other boys and girls asked, "And who are *we* going to be?"

I said, "The Egyptians, of course. Can't you see? The three of us, Joseph, the little one, and myself, we are DPs, refugees, Jewish refugees. We have fled into Egypt."

"Why?" asked Denise.

"Because King Herod wanted to kill the little one. Don't you remember? Sister Gabriel told us all about it," I said proudly.

"What do we Egyptians do?" asked Philip.

Then it was that Henry said flatly, "We sell."

"Sell?" I cried.

"Well, what do you think?" went on Henry. "Jewish refugees have got to eat, just like the others, don't they?"

I didn't know what to say because I didn't want to make

Henry angry. He is so very good at make-believe games. Also, it was really because of him that I was Mary. Joseph, I mean George, said he did not want a fair Mary. He said it was all wrong, since Mary was dark. And I was furious, because I knew all the time he said that because he prefers Denise, who is dark. So I said Mary *was* a blond, and the proof was that I had seen a picture of her made by a man called Memling, and she did have blond hair in that picture.

Then Henry stepped in and said, "George is right, and Janet is right too, because sometimes Mary is dark and sometimes she is fair. Mary can be French, Spanish, Russian, Negro, Indian, Chinese, anything, anything at all."

Denise said, "How do you know?"

And Henry said, "I know." And that was that, because Henry is very, very clever. Then he added that since we had had a dark Mary for the Nativity (Denise), we could have a fair one for The Flight into Egypt, and I could be Mary. (Henry does like me.)

"Don't you think it is only just?" asked Henry grandly.

George nodded; he could hardly do anything else.

So I was Mary, and I didn't want to make Henry mad. When he suggested that the Egyptians had to sell to the Holy Family because refugees have got to eat, I had to think very fast for an answer.

"Henry is right," I said cautiously. "All refugees have got to eat. My idea was that we—the little one, Joseph, and

myself—we would make the journey first.” I pointed to the whole playground. “Then when we get to Egypt, you Egyptians *give* us everything: the baker bread, the butcher meat, the housewives diapers for the little one—”

“Phew,” interrupted Henry, “that’s no fun. What is the matter with Joseph anyway?” he asked, turning toward Joseph-George and getting right into the game as he knew so well how to do. “Can’t you pay for the stuff, Mr. Joseph?”

“‘Course,” said Joseph. “I can work. I am a carpenter.”

“Look, fellow,” said Henry, “already there are not enough jobs to go around in this village.”

“Henry!” I stamped my foot, I was almost cross. “Henry, you cannot talk to Joseph that way, to *Joseph!*”

“Be quiet,” ordered Henry. “Are we playing or not?”

“Yes, of course. I guess I’m just stupid. Go ahead. Only,” I added, “don’t make it too long, because Louis, I mean Jesus, is awfully heavy in my arms. I think that all you Egyptians could at least offer me a chair.”

Philip made the gesture of pushing a chair toward me, and I thanked him.

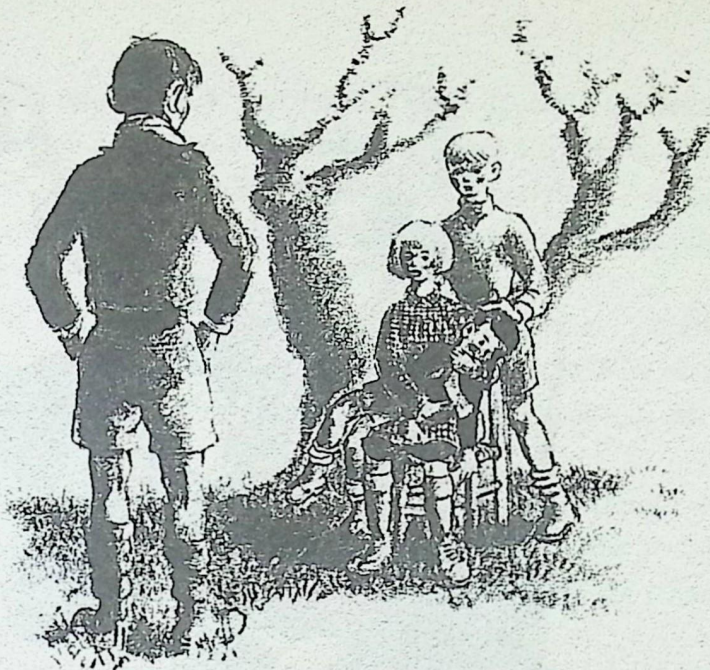
“All right,” said Henry, “now we men can talk this over. Mr. Joseph, what about your ration cards?”

“We don’t have any,” answered Joseph.

“That’s bad,” mused Henry, stroking an imaginary beard.

“But, as I told you,” retorted Joseph, “I can work.”

“Not so fast, not so fast,” admonished Henry. “I already



told you: work is no good. And now you have no ration cards."

"We've got to eat," went on Joseph doggedly.

"Sure, sure," said Henry. Then he dropped his voice.

"But you have got money, haven't you?"

"Henry!" wailed Denise. (She was very sentimental.)

"Don't butt in," snapped Henry. "I know what I'm saying. That Mr. Joseph is trying to get work away from us Egyptians. And he has no ration cards. And he pretends he has no money, but he is double-crossing us, because, as a matter of fact, he is rich."

We all said, "Oh!" We were petrified. (That means



William Pène du Bois

turned into stones.) And Louis, I mean Jesus, in my arms, started to cry. Then I was really cross and I shrieked, "See what you have done! Now the little one is crying. You are horrid, Henry, horrid! Everyone knows that the Holy Family was very poor!"

"Is that so?" queried Henry as cool as could be. "Well, what about that myrrh, frankincense, and gold the Wise Men brought them? That's worth a lot. What about it, Mr. Joseph?"

Everybody was quiet, quiet. We were just holding our breath and waiting for Joseph-George's answer. But it did not come. Joseph-George only looked crestfallen. So I had to speak up.

"Dear Joseph," I said tenderly, "you are so unpractical. Just as when we went up to Bethlehem for the census and you had made no hotel reservation in advance. Now, what do you think happened to the Wise Men's gifts? All gone, of course. How could we have taken that long journey and come this far without paying our way through? I have handed over our treasures right and left. And now I have nothing: not a bit of myrrh, not a grain of frankincense, not a mite of gold. See—hold the little one a minute please—" And I got up and gave Joseph the little one.

Then I turned my pockets inside out, and I shook my dress, and I cried, "Look, Egyptians! Nothing! Nothing!"

"It's a trick!" announced Henry.

I hardly knew what happened next, it happened so fast. Joseph-George put down the little one quickly, glaring at *me*, of all people, with blazing eyes. Then he marched toward Henry with closed fists, muttering, "Unpractical! A trick! Money! Ration cards! Work! I'll show you!"

And suddenly we were all fighting like cats and dogs. Some of us on George's side and others on Henry's, but soon we did not know which was which. It was a regular free-for-all, the boys pummeling one another and the girls pulling one another's hair.

The soft white wings of Sister Gabriel's headdress flapped hurriedly across the yard.

"There, there, children!" she called. "Shame on you! No, I don't want to hear about a thing. Think of you getting into a fight when I was just coming to tell you—"

"What? What?" we cried eagerly, crowding around her.

"You will see. In the classroom. Quick. Now you shake hands with one another and file in on tiptoe."

We did. In the classroom a young man sat on a chair. He looked very tired. He was not shaved. His clothes were covered with dust. We slipped noiselessly to our benches and waited in dead silence until Sister Gabriel made a sign with her head for the young man to speak.

When he opened his mouth his voice had a croak, as it does when one has not slept. "Boys and girls," he said, "I have to speak to you just as if you were adults. You know



that the Germans occupy France. You know also about the refugees and the DPs?" We nodded. "Now, do you know that there are people who not only are refugees and DPs but have absolutely no place to go, because if the Nazis find them they will kill them?"

A shiver ran through the class.

"Do you know who those people are?" asked the young man.

You could have heard a pin drop, and we were amazed when we saw George raising his hand. He got up and said, "The Jews."

We had no idea what he was talking about, but the young man looked very startled and asked, "How did you know?"

George became very excited and shrieked, "Because there was Herod, and the Egyptians, and I was Joseph, and—"

He was all red and confused and he dropped to his seat and hid his head in his arms. We almost burst out laughing, but we did not dare because the young man was very serious and sad. To our surprise he said, "That boy is right. It is the same story—always—throughout the centuries. This time Herod's soldiers are the Nazis. That's all."

He waited a little while, then he asked quietly, "Boys and girls, do you know what happened when Jesus' family was hunted by Herod's soldiers?"

We all sang out at once, "They fled into Egypt."

"Yes," said the young man, "and they remained hidden

there, did they not? Now, once more, Jesus' family is hunted and will be killed if we do not hide them. Will you, boys and girls, help? Will you take with you, here, and hide, ten Jewish boys and girls whose fathers and mothers are dead already?"

Of course we all cried, "Yes! Yes!" We were absolutely thrilled. This was not make-believe any more. It was the real thing.

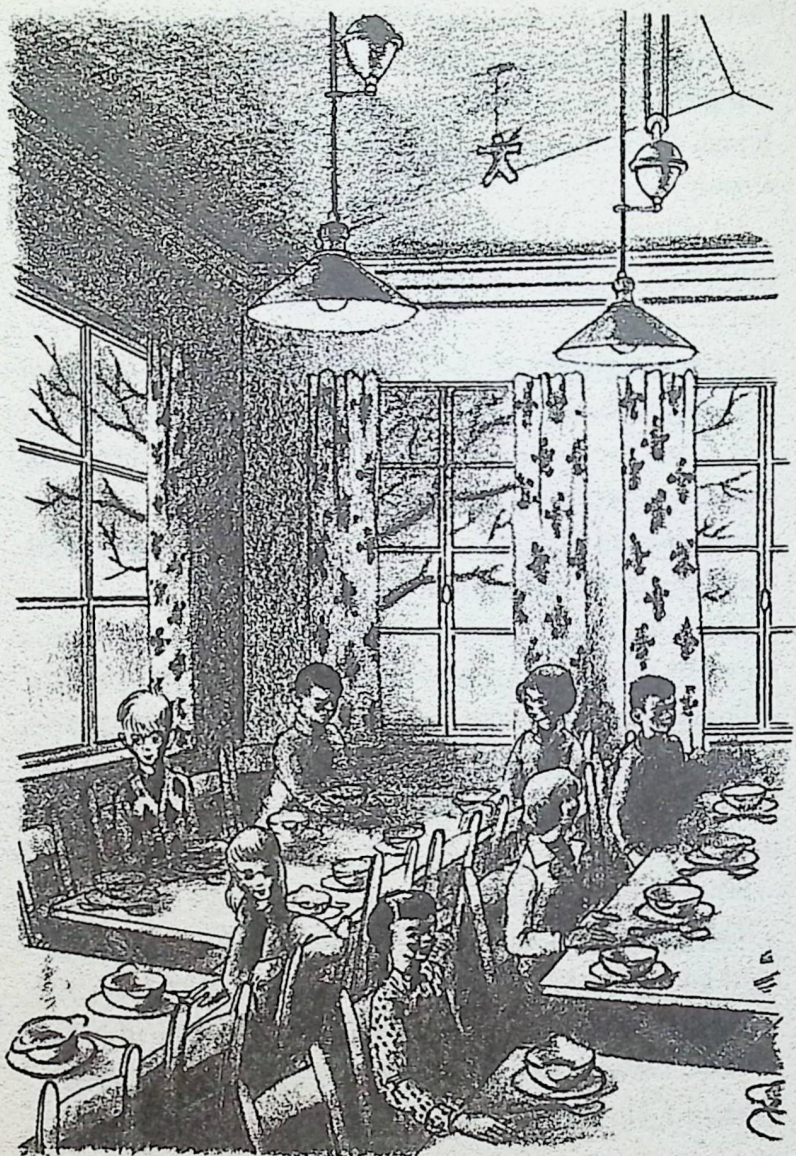
Sister Gabriel spoke up, "I did not expect less from you boys and girls. But you must understand what this means. The Nazis are looking for those children. If we take them we must never let on that they are here. Never. Even if we are questioned. We can never betray them, no matter what the Nazis do to us. Do you understand?"

Well, of course! Had we not played at being the Egyptians? By then, anyway, we could hardly wait to see the new children. And we were delighted when the young man turned to Sister Gabriel and said, "They are hiding in the woods now. We have walked all night. May I bring them in?"

Sister Gabriel nodded.

The young man went over to her; he took her hand and touched his forehead with it, bowing at the same time, and he said, "You know that *you* can be shot for this?"

Sister Gabriel smiled quietly. "Bring them in quickly," she said. "They must be so tired."



2. Gold

There was just time for the Jewish children to get washed before the lunchbell rang, and it was in the dining room that we saw them first. There were a few of them sitting at each table so that we all could have a chance of getting acquainted.

As we filed in Philip said, "What's the fuss about? They look just like us. Nazis are crazy!"

"What do I smell?" chanted Henry, sniffing. "Leek and potato soup!" He smacked his lips and rubbed his stomach. "My favorite! My, am I hungry!"

"So am I," said George.

"I collapse," announced Philip, imitating a rag doll.

I said, "There is not nearly enough to eat with those ration cards. I wish it were like *before*. My older brother told me all about it. He said that *before* he had so much to eat that sometimes he could not finish. He actually left something on his plate!"

"Don't make up stories," whined Denise, holding Louis by the hand. Louis started to jump up and down. "I want to eat up to here"—he pointed to his throat—"up to here, just once, just once!"



"Quiet!" said Henry impatiently, turning to us. "Look at the bowls! What is the matter? There is even less than usual. Something is wrong."

"Children!" called Sister Gabriel as we reached our places. "You probably have already noticed that there is less soup than usual in your bowls. Let me explain. We have ten new boys and girls. They have no ration cards."

"Can they get them tomorrow?" asked Philip.

"No," said Sister Gabriel, "they cannot. They can never

ask for any ration cards, because if they do the Nazis will find out where they are."

George said, "How can they eat without ration cards?"

"They will die," said Henry matter of factly.

"That's right," went on Sister Gabriel. "Unless we share with them our own ration cards. That is what we are doing today. That is why there is less soup for each one of us. From now on the slogan is: *We all eat, or nobody eats.*"

We sat down in silence. We did not feel like talking. Soon we could tell by the very sound of the spoons that everybody was getting to the bottom of each bowl pretty quickly—too quickly.

Henry sat across the table from me. He was counting the spoonfuls and swallowing very slowly to make it last: nine, ten. . . . He sighed, and I heard him mutter to himself, "Perhaps three more." He threw a glance at his new neighbor, who had already cleaned his bowl. He was a small blond boy, doubled up on his chair, and he had large dark circles under his eyes.

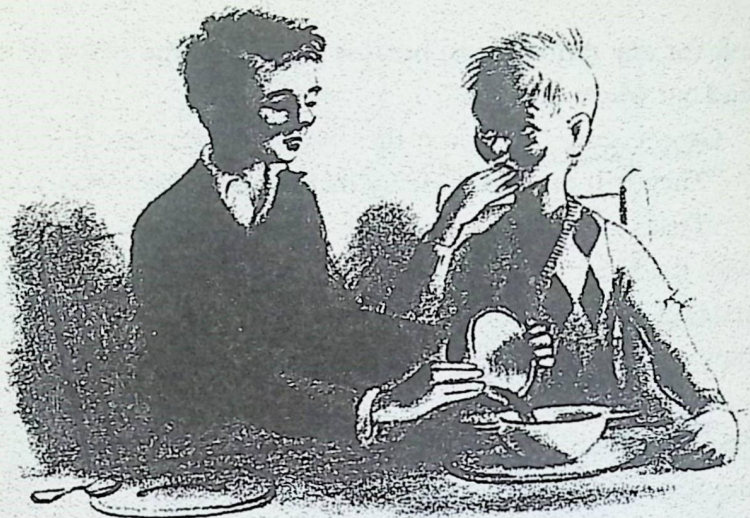
"What's your name?" asked Henry in a low voice.

"A—A—Arthur," said the boy.

"I am Henry. Look, Arthur. Do me a favor. Eat the rest of my soup."

Arthur shook his head vehemently.

Henry compressed his lips and said, "Please. To tell you the truth, I hate the stuff."



Quickly I put my hand on my mouth: I was going to scream. Didn't I know how fond of that soup Henry was, and what an appetite he had?

Arthur's eyes became very large, as if he were about to cry, and before he could say a word Henry had emptied his bowl in the other's and, breathing hard, had sat back in his chair, looking straight in front of him. I was speechless. Presently Arthur finished the soup. Then I saw him fumble in his pocket and slip something into Henry's hand under the table. "For you," he said. "A woman gave it to me on the road last night."

"No," said Henry, and he too shook his head vehemently.

"Yes," went on Arthur quietly. "Can you guess what it is?"

I could tell that Henry was trying to feel under the table

without looking. Suddenly I saw his face relax and beam with pleasure. "Thanks, pal," he said.

Of course I was dying of curiosity, and I was so glad that right after lunch Henry came over to me in the yard and said, "Now, we are real Egyptians, aren't we?"

"Is that why you gave Arthur your soup?" I asked.

"How did you guess?" Henry smiled.

"Oh!" sneered Denise, who had overheard us. "Henry just wants to show off. This morning he was the one who tried to sell goods to the Holy Family. To sell! And now—did you by any chance get myrrh, frankincense, or gold in return for your soup?" she mocked.

"Mind your own business!" barked Henry. "Anyway, you have no idea how I was going to end the game this morning if I had been free to do so. Besides—" He stopped and seemed to make a big discovery. "As a matter fact," he went on slowly, "I did get something back. Gold. Pure gold."

"Oh, show us! Show us!" Denise and I both cried. But he would not.

It was only in the evening when it was already somewhat dark that Henry made a sign for me to follow him. And there, behind a big tree, he showed me Arthur's gift. I put my two hands on my chest: it was a small piece of chocolate! We had not seen any for months and months, and, surely, Arthur had not either. It was a priceless gift.

I could not possibly ask Henry to let me have a taste. Such

a precious thing! And, after all, it did belong to Henry. He had earned it. So my heart leaped when I heard him say, "Wet your finger in your mouth."

I knew right away what he was up to. I did it. Then he took hold of my wet finger and ran it back and forth, back and forth, on the piece of chocolate. "Suck your finger now," he said. I did. And I kept doing it for a long time after I had licked all the chocolate off of it. Henry bit off a piece of the chocolate about half the size of a pea and ate it. We did not speak. We were very quiet.

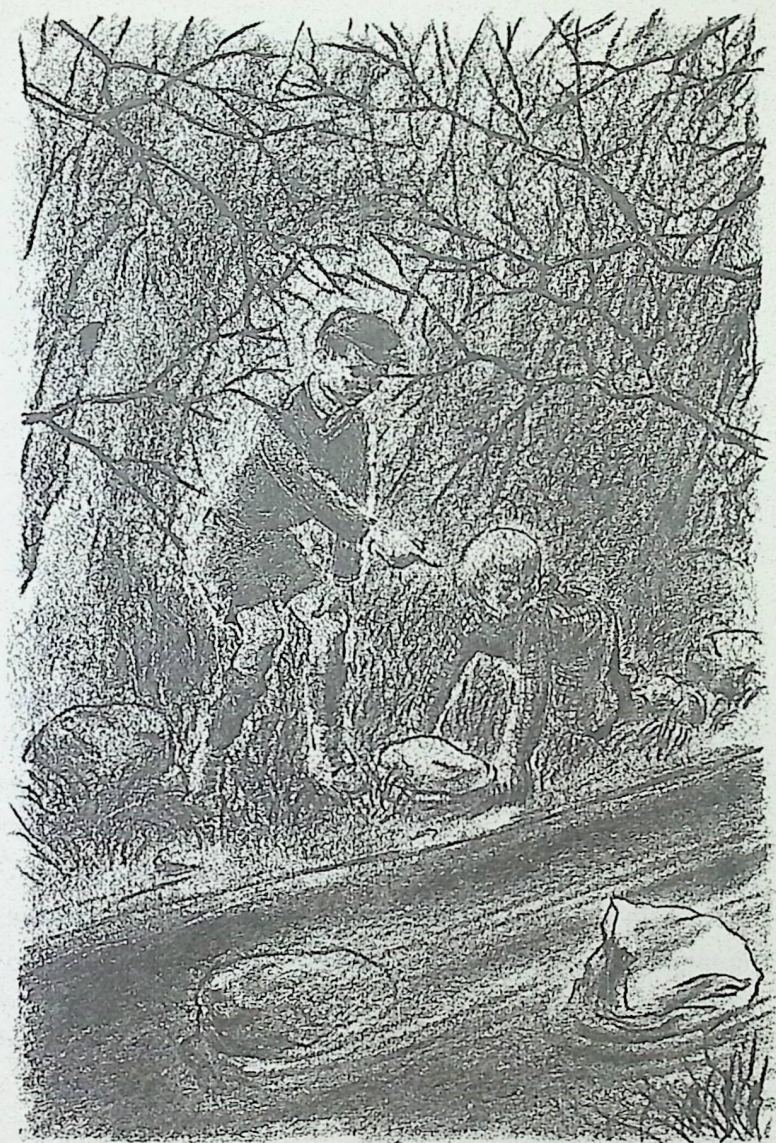
Then Henry said, "If we are careful it will last a long time."

He said "we," so it meant he was thinking to let me have another turn sometime. But I did not let on at all for fear he might change his mind if I did. Yet I had to protect "our gold" as much as possible and I said, "Henry, aren't you afraid it will melt in your pocket?"

"Didn't think of it," said Henry. "Of course there is paper around it. Nevertheless, you are right. Besides, Sister Gabriel might find it, and there would be all sorts of questions. Guess we'll have to eat it all, right now."

"Never in your life!" I said, gasping. "It's a treasure. What about hiding it somewhere? A place only you and I will know about?"

"Right," said Henry. "Come on quickly before anybody misses us. I know a place."



We raced behind the house. There the hill starts to go up abruptly. It is covered with thicket, brush, and is very stony. It is real wild country, and I would have been afraid there at twilight if Henry had not gone ahead. We came to the brook that trickles down the slope, among rocks and boulders. Henry stopped and bent over. He took out a slab of rock from the side of the bank. This left a clean, cool, sandy hole. In it we laid the piece of chocolate, and we closed the "safe" again with the slab.

I whispered, "How are we ever going to find it again?"

"Look," said Henry, "it just faces that triangular stone in midstream."

"Henry," I promised, "I will never come here without you."

After that we ran back as fast as we could. But, all of a sudden, Henry grasped my wrist. I stood still. As I did so I heard a noise such as we had made when our feet kicked the stones while we ran. Only, this time, *we* were not making it. Then it died out, and we went on down, Henry not letting go of my hand.

Back in the schoolyard, and as we were going into the house, I asked softly, "What was it? Perhaps just the echo of our own footsteps?"

"No," whispered Henry, slowly shaking his head. "I think it was somebody."

3. The Cave

Next day, at recess time, as he went past me Henry whispered, "Go up there and wait for me." Of course I knew what he meant, and, when no one was looking, I went around the house and raced up the hill. It was bright sunshine, and I was not afraid. I found the place with the triangular stone in midstream and I sat down and waited. I was not going to open the safe without Henry. I waited and waited, and I began to feel a little uneasy. Once or twice I thought I heard a noise. So I was much relieved when Henry came up. Arthur was with him. "I brought him," said Henry. "I think he should be in with us on this." I was glad. I liked Arthur.

So we all three knelt, and Henry very carefully removed the slab. Without looking inside the safe he said to Arthur, "You have the first look."

Arthur did. He did not say a word.

"What do you think of our safe?" I asked. "Isn't it a grand hiding place?"

Still Arthur did not say a word.

"Take it out, Arthur," Henry said. "After all, it was *your* treasure first."

Arthur raised his head and looked at us. His face was all pinched, as if he had closed it shut, and he said in a choking voice, "There's nothing there."

"Nothing!" Henry and I gasped, and we bumped our heads trying to look into the hole, both of us at the same time. Arthur was right: there was nothing there. The piece of chocolate, our gold, was gone.

"Who could—" started Henry, and then we three jumped, because we heard the noise of stones kicked by footsteps, and I saw something blue behind a bush and then it disappeared. "There! There! Catch her!" I screamed. I knew at once it was Denise.

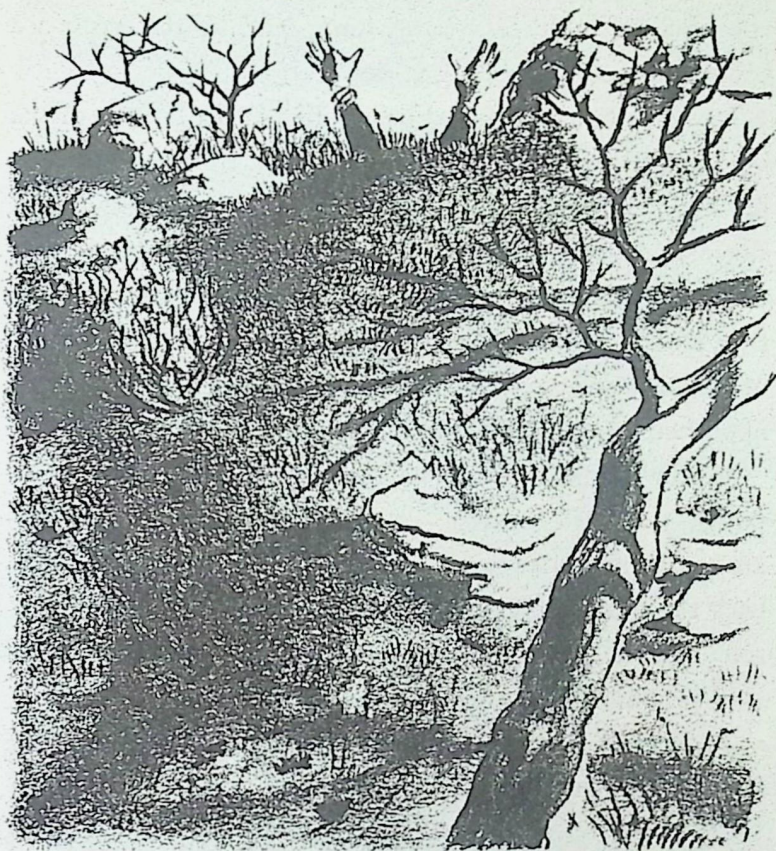
We all started in that direction. And, sure enough, it was Denise, but though we ran as fast as we could, she was way ahead of us, and she kept leaping like a goat, always out of reach.

Suddenly she shrieked, moved her arms frantically, and disappeared as if swallowed by the earth. When, all out of breath, we came to the spot where we had seen her last, she was nowhere. We looked and looked around. Then we started to call:

"Denise! Denise! Don't hide! Come out! We have got you! Come on!"

From far away we heard a tiny voice, "Come here and get me. I'm hurt."

"Where are you?" we called.



"Right here, in the cave."

"The cave?" we exclaimed. "There is no cave."

"There is," said Denise's voice. "Right under that boulder where you stand. That's where I slipped and fell into the cave."

We went all around, trying to find the entrance to the

cave, but we could not see anything, and all the while we could hear Denise sobbing underneath.

It was Arthur who solved the riddle. At the bottom of the boulder there was a crack. We had paid no attention to it because it was much too small for anyone to go through it. But, as a matter of fact, it could be done—that is what Arthur discovered. You only had to place yourself in a certain position, and if you did, your body fitted the bumps and angles of the crack and you could slip through, which was what had happened by accident to Denise.

Arthur already had his legs through when Henry pulled him back, saying, "Just a minute. Listen, Denise, we are coming to your rescue under one condition: you give us back the treasure. If not, you can just stay down there and rot." (Henry can be harsh sometimes.)

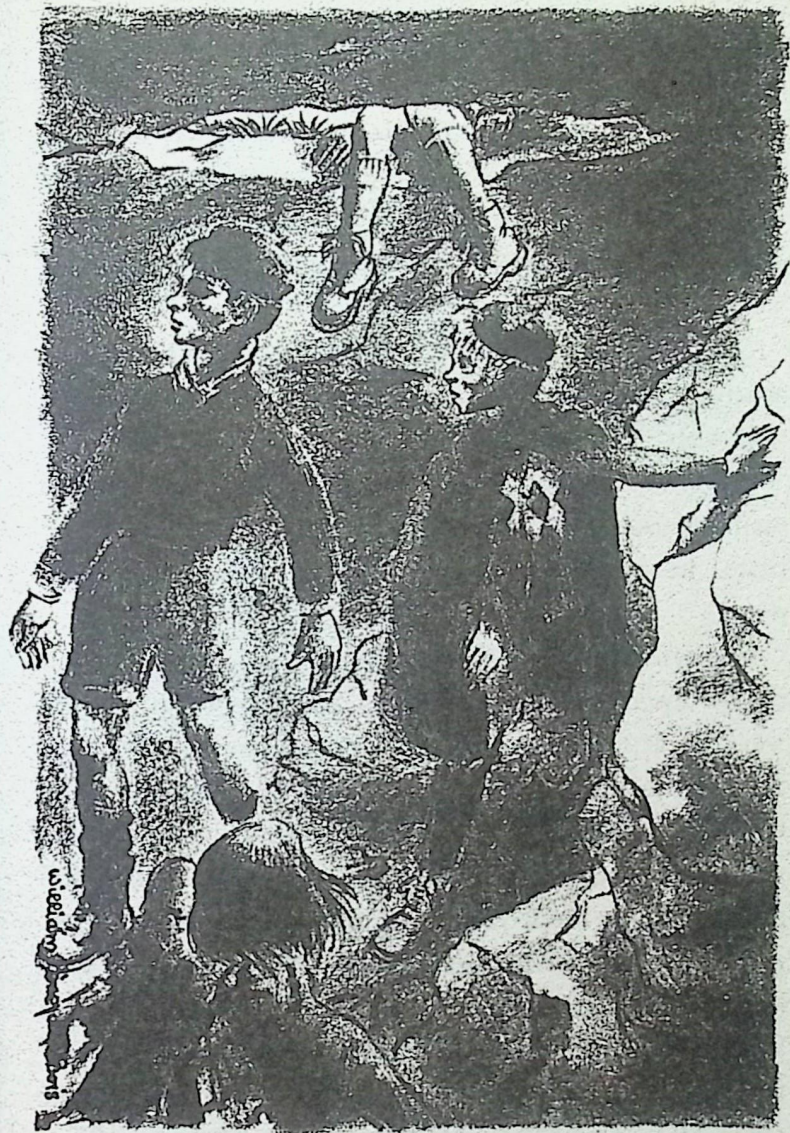
"I promise! I promise!" wailed Denise.

Then Arthur went down. We heard him say, "Isn't this something! Henry, come down!"

"Is there room for me too?" I called.

"Sure," said Arthur.

So Henry and I slipped down the crack. And, lo and behold! we found ourselves in a natural underground cave, very spacious, with a dry, sandy floor. At least fifteen people could have stood in that cave. It was such a marvelous discovery that we nearly forgot about Denise, who lay there whimpering. Arthur remembered first and went over to her.



But Henry said, "Just a minute, Arthur. Denise, the treasure first."

Denise gave Arthur the chocolate, and of course we could see that she had nibbled a little piece out of our gold, but it was fortunate that she had not swallowed it whole. So we did not say anything. Besides, she was badly frightened and we were too excited about the cave.

"It's a marvelous place," commented Henry, looking around. "We shouldn't say anything to Sister Gabriel. It has to be a secret."

He looked down at Denise and seemed suddenly to make up his mind about something. "Let's sit down and celebrate," he said. "Let's all, the four of us, eat up the treasure now."

Denise's eyes shone. "Cross my heart," she said, "I won't tell anyone about 'our' cave. And I am sorry. I really didn't want to eat the treasure all by myself. I wanted one lick. I haven't had any chocolate for so long. I just wanted a taste. One lick. Like Janet had."

Then we knew for sure that she had spied on us and that it had been her footsteps we had heard the evening before. And I knew that she had wanted that lick so badly, not only because, like the rest of us, she had not tasted chocolate for so long, but also because *I* had had one lick, and she was jealous that Henry had shared the gold with *me*. But I didn't say anything because she was truly sorry, and she was hurt,



and also I kept thinking that if Henry had chosen her instead of me, I would have been so mad that I might have done worse than Denise did.

Arthur summed up everything nicely. "Let us all be friends."

We shook hands, and the four of us ate the treasure, very, very slowly, one tiny bit each, in turn.

Then Arthur went up again to see if the coast was clear.

Henry took Denise by the shoulders and I by the feet, and we lifted her through the crack. Arthur grabbed her and pulled her out. Then I hoisted myself through. Henry came up last.

Denise said she could not walk, and we were very annoyed because it meant we would have to carry her and Sister Gabriel would discover what had happened.

Henry became quite cross. "You would spoil our plan, wouldn't you?" he told Denise reproachfully. "Helpless! Always helpless one way or another! I cannot stand a girl who—"

But Arthur put himself between them and said very gently to Denise, though I could see he too was annoyed, "Just try to put your foot down. Lean on me. Just try."

"I can't!" wailed Denise.

"Just try," Arthur went on with that encouraging and at the same time very determined tone of voice. "Here, Henry, help her on the other side. Now take it easy, Denise. We won't let you go."

Denise did as Arthur told her, and suddenly her face brightened. She could put her foot down. And she found out that she *could* walk. She had been a little bruised and very frightened.

We all came back to Beauvallon very happy, and, as we crossed the yard, Henry put a finger on his lips and said, "*Motus*," which is the French word for "mum."



“If we take these children, we can never betray them, no matter what the Nazis do.”

During the German occupation of France, twenty French children were brought to a refuge in the mountains. One day a young man came to their school with a request: Could they take in, and hide, ten Jewish refugee children?

Sister Gabriel spoke up. “The Nazis are looking for those children. If we take them we must never let on that they are here. Do you understand?”

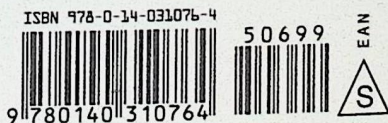
Of course the children understood—but how would they hide them if the Nazis came?

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