

**On 11 December 1938 Ruth Maier of Vienna describes bidding farewell to her sister,
who is travelling to Britain on a Kindertransport¹**

Handwritten diary of Ruth Maier, entry for 11 December 1938

Nine o'clock in the evening.

Dita is gone. She is on the train now, right now, at this moment. She is laughing, unpacking her food, or maybe she is feeling homesick.

It is awful to keep a diary. Terrible. Because on the previous page, it still says: Dita is leaving tomorrow. And today: Dita is gone. And so it continues. One ought to feel ashamed.

So, yesterday at eleven o'clock on the express train. Now there is an empty place here in our 'home'. Mama says 'Dittl' to me, and Grandmother weeps and Mama weeps. 'Oh, parting, parting, parting, who thought of parting first?' That's what it says in *Danton's Death*² ... It is a banal truth that life is nothing but 'saying farewell'. Saying hello and farewell, perhaps. To every minute, every second! ... Just no sentimentalities, Ruth! It does no good.

The scenes from yesterday can only be described in pictures. Out there in Hütteldorf,³ dark and pitch-black. The Jewish stewards used electric torches to provide some light. And children, up to the age of 17, boys and girls with rucksacks and little suitcases. Again and again, just one more kiss goodbye. And another one, and one last one. Next to me, a woman was sobbing to herself, not quietly: she wailed, she moaned. Sighed deeply. Her whole face was aquiver ... Little 4-year-old children screamed. Madness! They still had to be carried in people's arms. And the mothers! The fathers of the little children are in Dachau ... A young woman turned backwards; her husband went to her side. Someone murmured: 'Both of them at once, both of them.'

'Mama,' I said, 'Mama, look, that is our youth, the Jewish youth, and they will be upstanding, they have learned in a hard school, they have suffered as few others have, and they will build a new life with their own hands. Some, the little ones, will get their hands bloody.' That's what I'm thinking to myself now. The little ones, who were torn away from their parents, may cry at night. Yes! When I saw them, Jews, nothing but Jews, whose children are being torn from them before they have had their fill of kisses, I thought, 'Must they not be special in some way, the Jews? They must endure so much suffering. So much suffering! Because they are Jews! That's why.' It sounds so beautiful, 'upon departure, heart-breaking scenes took place'. No, the heart does not break so quickly. Mama says, 'If one of the many there had howled, a single one, then they *all* would have started.' No, no one howled or cursed. They just cried. I saw only tears,

1 HL-Senteret, Oslo, published in English translation in *Ruth Maier's Diary*, pp. 112–114. This document has been retranslated from the German original.

2 'Ach Scheiden, ach Scheiden, ach Scheiden, wer hat sich das Scheiden erdacht?' Verse from a Hessian folk song. In the play *Dantons Tod* (Danton's Death) by Georg Büchner, Lucile sings the song after parting from her friend Camille, not knowing that he will be executed and she will never see him again.

3 A neighbourhood in Vienna.

nothing but tears. Dita stood there with others in a little bunch, in the dark. All I saw was her white-and-blue shawl. As we walked past this little cluster of Jewish refugees, she suddenly called out 'Mama.' And waved. They went past us. It was close! They wanted to give each another one last kiss, Dita and Mama. Their lips were quite near, but then the steward pulled them apart. 'Don't make it even harder for yourselves.'

Jewish refugees. They will be assigned to various English families. Dita will surely write soon. May she lead an honest life. May she be worthy. It sounds old-fashioned now. And yet: 'I will strive to be worthy.' And Dita too. I will not see her for a long time. And how will things look then? A year from now! By then we'll already be in America. We have affidavits. Who was it who recently said: 'We're going with our permit to Affidavit!' Yes, I let my thoughts drift, impose no constraint on myself ... yes, the image rises up again. A high railway embankment, a slope overgrown with grass. At the top, railings. Over there, the train with the lighted windows. Boys inside, the Jewish children. And when the parents saw that, the railway carriages back there with children in them (we were not allowed onto the platform), they all crept up there like animals. They shouted across, and the boys inside lowered the windows, whistled, gesticulated. 'Mama,' one of them shouted. Yes! It is all quite clear to me. In the darkness out there in Hütteldorf. We stood together. Dita had the number 258. 'Look,' I said, 'now you're only a number.' 'Oh, no, I'm still Judith Maier.' ... Yes, and when the number 258 was called out, in there like a flash, and march. Life is beginning! Yes! Otherwise, among us young people, the transition to 'life' takes place gradually, carefully, without any surprises. Now! We are thrown out. Today, still at grammar school. Tomorrow, servant girls, yes, let's not submit to sheer invention. True, Mama always says: 'Oh, come on, you're part of the household then, after all, they know who you are.' I don't care a bit. I'll be a servant girl. A proletarian! Why not? Then I will at least be one of them. Lock, stock, and barrel!

And the sky was so clear, and the kisses were endless. And the woman next to me trembled and wailed. And little children wept in the dark. It was cold and damp. Dita marched past. The blue-and-white shawl blazed with colour. Brave. And the young people, they will fight.

Jews, Jews, Papa, Heinrich Heine.