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One evening we heard a lot of gunshots and fireworks in the nearby village of Clayton. One of the guards who was walking outside the fence called out to us, “The war is over! The war is over!”

Next morning, May 7th, we all had to assemble. The commander himself told us that Germany had capitulated and the war with England was over. We were all relieved and now the question on everyone’s mind was, how soon will we be sent home?

I wondered if my family was OK and if our village had been badly damaged. Not knowing was almost unbearable. One thing was certain; there would be no celebrating or fireworks in Germany.

Next morning on our way to work we had a lot of stones thrown at us, mostly by kids. The British population seemed different. Naturally, they had won the war. After we had arrived at the building site it was decided that it had been a mistake to bring us out and we were taken back to the camp.

On our way back, as we were going up a steep country lane, a young boy about 12 years old threw a stone at us. The driver stopped the lorry. Two of our men jumped off, threw the boy onto the back, gave him a good spanking, and then dropped him off again. The driver smiled, made the victory sign, and drove on. Except for an occasional incident while waiting at stop signs, the ride back to the camp went smoothly.

During the day we spent a lot of time sitting in our tents, thinking and talking about what it would be like to be sent back home. Little did we know that most of us would spend another three years behind

barbed wire. All day and into the early hours of the next morning we could hear fireworks and celebrating in the village of Otley.

The face of that young girl kept coming into my mind. I wondered what her name was, where she lived, and how old she might be. Since she crossed the building site so often I assumed she must be living close by. If only I could find a way to communicate with her. My heart told me I had to do something. Why, I don't know. I knew nothing about the girl. And why would she want to have anything to do with a German prisoner of war?

My growling stomach told me that I had to find ways to get more food for myself. One Sunday we were all given a piece of raisin cake. It tasted delicious and I saw an opportunity for some extra food. I made a bet with one of the men in our tent called Bruno that I would jump off the water tower, which was situated in the corner of the camp, if he gave me his piece of cake. During my school years I had always been a little daredevil.

Accompanied by a few more who had listened in on our conversation we walked over to the tower. After I climbed up to the top and looked down I realized it was probably a very foolish thing to do. But I had had good parachute training and was fairly confident that I wouldn't get hurt. During my fall I was concentrating on what I had to do when I hit the ground. When I landed I thought my legs had ended up in my chest. For a few moments I couldn't move. But I was all right, and very reluctantly I was handed my piece of cake.

Since I was getting weaker physically and always felt hungry I devised another way to get a good source of food besides the watery porridge, which we got every morning for the so-called breakfast.

Just for something to do, I walked a lot around the camp. One morning, on one of my walks, I noticed that the empty canisters, in which our porridge had been made, were put outside behind the kitchen. The tubs into which the porridge was poured contained 80% water. However the original containers still had a residue of good porridge left in them. So I made sure that no one was looking and then I jumped the fence enclosing the kitchen. What a feast I had, wiping my hand around the inside of the container and licking the good porridge from my hand.

For a long time I managed to do this almost every day, early in

the morning, without being detected. It helped me to keep up my strength.

One day, we were informed that changes were to be made which would benefit us. We now had a shop where we could purchase items such as pencils, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and paper. There was also a Cassell's German-English/English-German dictionary. We received seven pieces of plastic money a week to spend. This would buy a pencil in a week, a toothbrush in two weeks, and so on. I figured it would take me six weeks to buy the dictionary and I made up my mind to save up for it. The dictionary was more important than the toothpaste or toothbrush, and I already had scrap paper and a pencil from Bill. Then I had another idea. If I sold my piece of cake on Sunday, it would speed up the process.

One Friday morning at the building site, Bill called me into his office. He told me that the night before, after we had gone home, they had dug a trench across the public walkway. He wanted me to build a wooden bridge over it because the walkway had to be kept open for public use for the time being. Bill had drawn a sketch on a piece of paper and he gave me instructions on what to do. He had already delivered the wood that I needed with a dump truck and he left me to it. The bridge had to be just wide enough for one person to cross safely.

In the afternoon it started to drizzle. At around 4:00 p.m. the bridge was ready to be used, except for the railing. As I looked down the walkway, I noticed someone with a raised umbrella coming towards me. It was the young girl I had named 'Pretty' because I didn't know her name.

Quickly I made up my mind that this time I was going to get a good look at her. As she got close, I turned my back to her, pretending that I didn't know she was there. She had to say something because there was no other way for her to get round. For a few seconds she stood behind me. I did nothing. Then she said in a quiet voice, "Excuse me, may I come by?"

I thought what a sweet voice she had. I stood up and my eyes met hers for a brief moment. She had a beautiful face. I could not miss her deep blue eyes. Standing next to me I noticed that she was about half a head smaller than myself, she had a good figure and I could

even smell her perfume. Her hair was dark and she had high cheekbones. I felt a great urge to touch her cheeks. Now that I was so close she looked more beautiful than I had imagined.

I motioned to her to go across. I even managed to say, "Please." I was tempted to offer my hand and help her across, but I didn't dare. As she walked on, I saw her glance back at me and smile. My heart beat faster and I felt as if I was walking on air for the rest of the afternoon.

That evening, after I lay down to sleep, I couldn't get that lovely face and those beautiful eyes out of my mind.

The more I thought about the young lady I called 'Pretty', the more I realized how much I liked her. I wished that I could talk to her. But then I wouldn't know what to say, not being able to speak the language.

I kept myself busy writing words on anything I could find to write on, including toilet paper. We were issued about two feet of it every day. I also acquired a candle and some matches from Bill. He brought them to me when I told him that I needed them for writing after dark. Nearly all of the men I shared the tent with, except Walter, worked in brickyards. They were a lot more tired than I was, and the candlelight didn't stop them from going to sleep. I was glad because I used to sit up till very late at night, teaching myself English and writing it all down.

One weekend I sold my piece of cake, which gave me enough plastic money to buy a red pen and a scrap book. Now I could write my German words in black and the English equivalent in red ink. After a while I had quite a collection of words.

The manhole frames were coming along very well, but there were many still to be built. Bill seemed very pleased with the progress. As the so-called 'chief timber-man' on the building site I was more or less free to be anywhere on the site I wanted, without being questioned. The guards, as well as the civilian staff, got to know me well. But still I had to be very careful what I did. I was afraid that if anyone suspected that I intended to fraternize I might be transferred to another work commando and never see my 'pretty lady' again. My mind was continually working on ways to communicate with her. So far, besides saying, "Excuse me" and "Please" we had only had eye contact.