

Promises to Keep – One Act
By Claudia Haas
Claudiahaas12@gmail.com

“I think it’s wonderful what you are doing for Anne, but I think it’s a pity that nothing is mentioned anymore about Margot. She is also worthy of being mentioned.” Margot Frank’s friend Frijde in a letter to Otto Frank.

“Times change, people change, thoughts about good and evil change, about true and false. But what will always remain fast and steady is the affection that your friends feel for you, those who always have your best interests at heart. - Margot Frank

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May 1, 2025
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SYNOPSIS: Maybe you've done *The Diary of Anne Frank* and you'd like to know more or delve deeper into the relationship between Anne and Margot. The Diary tells us so little about Margot. It's well-documented that as soon as Margot laid eyes on Anne, she appointed herself "Protector of Her Sister." What has recently come to light, is Margot was far from the mousey inhabitant in the Secret Annex. She was highly athletic, competitive and by all accounts – brilliant. She also had a boyfriend which thrilled Anne. *Promises to Keep* explores Anne's and Margot's complicated sisterhood and ends with a little-known fact: at Auschwitz, Margot was offered a choice – a choice that would have saved her life.

RUNNING TIME: 40 minutes (If you need more cuts for time, you may cut the Hanukkah scene)

CAST (LARGE): 11 (9 female, 2 male)

(SMALLER) 8 (with doubling, 6 female, 2 male)

BETTINA (female) 16; Margot's aunt as a child in Prologue and later a protective spirit of her nieces. Margot's middle name was "Betti" in honor of her aunt.

EDITH (female) 14; Margot's mother as a child (in Prologue).

GUARD (female) 18-20; no-nonsense but not sadistic.

MARGOT (female) 15-18; bookworm, peacemaker, outdoor enthusiast.

JACKIE (female) 15; part of the rowing team, kind, close friend to Margot. Optimist.

GABY (female) 15; part of the rowing team, a bit oblivious to the times, fun-loving.

BELLA (female) 19; rowing team coach; a realist.

ANNE (female) 12-15; Margot's spirited younger sister; posthumously a famous diarist.

JANNY (female) 16-17; Margot's Jewish classmate, practical

JAKOB* (male) 15-16; Margot's first boyfriend; spirited and determined.

PETER (male) 16-18; good-hearted, likes to work with his hands, cautiously optimistic.

*FOR MALE VOICE, USE JAKOB OR RECORDING

CAST (WITH DOUBLING): 8 (6 female, 2 male)

BETTINA

EDITH/ANNE

BELLA/GUARD

GABY/JANNY

PETER

JACKIE

MARGOT

JAKOB/MALE VOICES

PROMISES TO KEEP

TIME: Prologue 1914 – A bedroom in BETTINA’S and EDITH’S home

Scenes: 1941-1945

Epilogue: Auschwitz/Bergen Belsen 1945

PLACE: 1941-1944 Episodic Scenes: Riverbank in Amsterdam, Frank’s apartment in Amsterdam, apartment courtyard, Secret Annex, Auschwitz/Bergen Belsen

Use area staging with suggestive pieces instead of formal sets for the scenes so they can flow.

NOTE: Because this is a remembrance and not a documentary, don’t think about creating authentic prison garb for Auschwitz. An ill-fitting tunic or sack will do. Similarly for BETTINA and EDITH at the beginning – you don’t need to put them in Edwardian dress. A simple light-colored top and skirt with a ribbon for a belt will do. The Prologue is a memory and think of it as looking through gauze.

DIALOGUE NOTE: //’s indicate overlapping dialogue

Promises to Keep

Prologue – Spring 1914

(Lights up on EDITH and BETTINA in their bedroom. BETTINA should be in something light colored and simple that she will be in for the remainder of the play.)

EDITH

Why do countries have to go to war? You should be having a ball for your sixteenth birthday.

BETTINA

I don't mind a bit. I was worried Mother and Father were going to try and make a match between me and Ezra and I am not ready. I want to see the world – especially Paris.

EDITH

Father says we're invading France. They probably wouldn't welcome German visitors.

BETTINA

People believe this will be a quick war – maybe done by 1915. And then I will be seventeen and you will be fifteen and we could explore Paris together.

EDITH

I like staying close to home. The war scares me. If we can invade other countries, then other countries can invade us. Mother says that we each have a guardian angel and if we pray to them, they will send those prayers to the heavens. I like that idea.

BETTINA

I like it, also. I do know that I would do everything in my power to keep you safe. I'll fight off anyone who tries to harm you. Mother says I have a fighter's heart – ready to dive into an argument no matter what the cost. You are her easy child. You obey. I question. Both ways have their merits. We can learn a lot from each other. Look out the window. It's a starry night. Let's go outside and visit them. When I see the night sky, I think anything is possible.

(EDITH starts to exit. Lights dim. We hear the GUARD. BETTINA freezes.)

GUARD'S VOICE

Prisoner 67024. Step forward!

EDITH

Bettina? What is it?

BETTINA

I heard ... it's probably nothing. Come on. The stars await.

(EDITH and BETTINA exit. Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 1 – October 1941

(Lights up on a riverbank in Amsterdam. The sweet smell of grass is mixed with the aroma of fish. BELLA is waiting to be joined by the rowing team. JACKIE and GABY, quickly appear. BELLA wears a Jewish star. When MARGOT appears, she will also wear the Jewish star.)

BELLA

Where's Margot? She's usually the first one dressed.

JACKIE

She's saving a frog she found in her sack. She's always saving something.

(MARGOT appears.)

MARGOT

Sorry. I found this tiny frog and I had to bring him to the trees where all the frogs congregate.

JACKIE

Are you sure it's a "he?"

MARGOT

He was lost. So definitely a "he."

GABY

How do you tell a boy-frog from a girl-frog? Do you turn it upside down?

MARGOT

Boy-frogs are smaller because they don't carry eggs. And their warbler is bigger. *(Giggles.)* What? I read. *(Beat.)* Science books.

JACKIE

You should have put him back in the river. It's so toasty today. He might have loved a swim.

MARGOT

The water is too warm, he would have jumped out.

GABY

Did you kiss him? If you kissed him, maybe he would have turned into a prince!

MARGOT

My first kiss will not be with a frog!

GABY

I'm saving my first kiss – for tonight! Hans has tried twice and I turned away. But I think tonight I will allow it.

BELLA

Kissing can be a fun sport but let's focus on rowing. I need to talk about today. It was an excellent practice. We are well-situated for the upcoming competitions. Which makes what I need to difficult. I received a notice. It states, "As of October 1941, Jews may not be members of associations sporting clubs with non-Jewish members." As such, this is my last time with you. I shouldn't have done so today but I wanted one more time with my championship team.

JACKIE

Margot!

BELLA

Yes. I am sorry but the ban also includes Margot.

(MARGOT is stunned. BETTINA appears in the background. BETTINA stretches her arms towards MARGOT. MARGOT feels something. BETTINA disappears.)

JACKIE

What did Margot ever do except be an amazing and supportive player?

BELLA

I agree and I'm sorry. I have put in a petition for a new coach and a new participant/

JACKIE

/If Margot doesn't row, I don't row/

GABY

/Agreed. Let's show these Nazis what we're made of. They can't intimidate us! Agreed?

GABY AND JACKIE

Aye!

GABY

None of this is fair!

BELLA

No. And it won't be for a while.

JACKIE

I am now completely miserable. I don't want to have to say good-bye.

BELLA

Then don't. Talk a walk by the river. Talk about your family, your hopes. Spend the afternoon as if these were normal times and we just had the best rowing practice ever – because we did.

GABY

Well, I do have this date ...

BELLA

Everyone is free to leave when they need to. I want you to remember that you are all – astonishing. Stay – astonishing.

(A group hug with BELLA and BELLA exits.)

GABY

Who knows? Maybe we'll all be back together next year?

(Beat. Nobody believes that. More hugs and GABY exits. MARGOT is quiet. BETTINA appears. MARGOT shivers.)

JACKIE

Margot?

MARGOT

A storm is coming.

JACKIE

It's just some clouds.

BETTINA

I'll help you weather the storm.

(MARGOT hears her. JACKIE does not.)

JACKIE

Shall we just sit for a while and catch up?

MARGOT

I would love to but I think for right now – I need to go. My Hebrew class starts soon and I'd like to be there. I told them I would be absent until rowing was done and now – it's done.

JACKIE

Just because we can't row together doesn't mean we can't visit. When will I see you?

MARGOT

Check with your parents.

JACKIE

I don't need to check with my parents about meeting with friends.

MARGOT

Times are changing. Check with your parents. (Beat.) I have to go.

(JACKIE and MARGOT hug good-bye and JACKIE exits. Lights darken. In the dimming light we hear the GUARD.)

GUARD

Prisoner 67024! Step forward!

(MARGOT gasps and looks at BETTINA. BETTINA takes MARGOT'S hand and steps forward. MARGOT does the same. The two stand at attention as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2 – 30 Minutes later

(Lights up in MARGOT'S and ANNE'S shared bedroom. Family photos are everywhere – including one of BETTINA. ANNE has cut out pictures from a magazine of the Dutch Royal Family, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers. ANNE is deciding where to hang them on her wall. Photos of other movie stars may also be hung up. MARGOT enters.)

ANNE

Margot! I need your help.

MARGOT

You're supposed to be resting. What are you doing up and about?

ANNE

I'm bored. After being in bed and staring at my wall for five days, I decided to change it. What do you think? Fred and Ginger in the center or up high?

MARGOT

I'm going to Hebrew class. Fred and Ginger are not important right now. Getting to class is. Where are my books?

ANNE

Try under Fred. You're a bit grumpy today.

MARGOT

A bit. *(Beat.)* The rowing team disbanded. Jews can no longer do sports. It's not enough that we had to change schools and we can't leave the country – now – we're being robbed of the outside. I saw a new sign in the park today. "No Jews or Dogs allowed."

ANNE

Let Fred and Ginger cheer you up. Let's take a dance around the room.

MARGOT

I don't want you exerting yourself. Next thing you know, you'll be back in bed.

ANNE

Dancing makes me happy. Does your Hebrew book make you happy?

MARGOT

It gives me a sense of belonging somewhere.

(MARGOT kicks something by the bed or a table.)

Ouch!

ANNE

And your book just bit you. It was out in the open all along. Hiding in plain sight.

MARGOT

It serves me right for getting all riled up. Getting mad accomplishes nothing. I know better.

ANNE

Getting mad can be invigorating. I love to rail and complain and clear the air with nothing hanging in the air waiting to be said.

MARGOT

And then you exhaust yourself and wind up in bed. Besides, some things are better left unsaid.

ANNE

If I kept things inside, I'd explode. You need to put stuff on your wall. It looks lonely. Can I at least hang up the photo of Bettina on your wall? She's so lonely in that corner. Mother won't display her in the living room or the dining room. Poor Bettina. She's always in the background.

MARGOT

Funny you should mention that. I thought of her today. And when I thought of her, I saw her. I even fancied I heard her.

ANNE

Oh! That's exciting. Was she a ghost?

MARGOT

No. More like a far-away vision – like a ray of sun hitting your cheek. It was comforting.

ANNE

Was it scary? Did she touch you with icy hands like this?

(ANNE touches MARGOT who shivers.)

MARGOT

Oh! Chilly fingers! I told you – it was comforting!

ANNE

Her smile is just like yours. When you smile. Let me check. Smile.

MARGOT

Stop! It's getting so late! I've already missed half of my class.

(ANNE sits MARGOT down and climbs in her lap. She tries to lift the corners of MARGOT'S mouth into a smile. MARGOT does smile.)

ANNE

You can go next week.

MARGOT

I'm not going to class, am I?

ANNE

Not today. You need to watch over your frail sister. And *you* desperately need dancing. Let's make-believe that Mother and Pim are hosting a ball tonight. And we are practicing for the dance. I'll be Fred. You're Ginger.

MARGOT

I should be Fred. I'm taller.

ANNE

But I like to lead.

(ANNE hums ("The Blue Danube?")) and they do a waltz or a spin around the room jumping over books and magazines. They are light on their feet and credible dancers. In the background, we spy BETTINA – approving - maybe dancing or swaying. MARGOT stops and looks around.)

(ANNE twirls MARGOT one more time and they curtsey. BETTINA curtsies in the background. The lights fade on MARGOT and ANNE but stay on BETTINA for a moment. BETTINA sends them a kiss. Lights out.)

SCENE 3 - December late afternoon, 1941

(It's a late December afternoon. Darkness comes earlier. Winter clouds are moving in to stay. MARGOT and JAKOB are walking home from Hebrew class. JAKOB has a stick that he moves through "the brush" as they walk.)

MARGOT

If you had a ball, we could play stickball.

(Right on cue, JAKOB produces a ball. MARGOT grabs the stick and they "play." There are a couple of volleys and MARGOT whacks the ball into the brush near the river.)

MARGOT

Oh no? Is it lost? I didn't mean to whack it so hard!

JAKOB

Ha! You are deceptively competitive "Miss Margot with the Muscles." I'll find it.

MARGOT

I lost it. I'll find it.

JAKOB

I'm usually pretty amazing with stickball. I better practice more if I am going to play with you.

MARGOT

I love being active in the winter. It keeps you awake and on your toes. I don't even mind not being able to take the streetcar anymore. The time outside is how I rejuvenate myself.

JAKOB

You used to skate a lot in the winter. I remember seeing you at the rink.

MARGOT

You ... noticed?

JAKOB

Yes.

MARGOT

It was my winter activity. I had a sport for every season. Thank goodness for these classes or I'd have little to do all winter. I love the challenge of learning Hebrew. I could do without the discussions.

JAKOB

I don't know. Lively discussions for lively times. Found it! Let's walk along the river. It's quieter so we can talk. And I have an ulterior motive.

(MARGOT reacts to that as JAKOB pulls out a spoon.)

MARGOT

A spoon and a ball. You do carry a lot around.

JAKOB

I like to dig around the riverbanks looking for the perfect river rock. Whoa! And look at that. I just got lucky. Look how smooth it is – perfect for etching. That one in the water looks promising.

MARGOT

You'll get wet and catch cold.

JAKOB

It won't be the first time. But it looks cracked. Just as well. My mother will go off the rails if she sees me bringing more rocks into the house. It's getting too dark to see anything else.

MARGOT

Darkness comes quickly in December. Our outside time is dwindling. Not that it matters. We're barely allowed to be anywhere outside anymore. The days are so short – it's like the sky is shrinking just as our world is shrinking.

JAKOB

We have to appreciate all the seasons. This is the season of rest. The world sleeps so it can be renewed and enchant us in the spring.

MARGOT

I love the optimism.

JAKOB

It's rare for me these days. I must be feeling good right now. I found the perfect rock, the best walking companion, and the class energizes me. I like the resistance talk.

MARGOT

Resisting is useless.

JAKOB

Resisting is never useless. In order to make things happen, you need to dream it first.

MARGOT

Do you think we will ever be free again?

JAKOB

Yes, and I intend to be here when it happens. When I go home, I will etch "Next Year in Jerusalem" into the rock.

MARGOT

The seder wish.

JAKOB

Or "May 1942 bring freedom."

(Beat.)

MARGOT

And just like that, the sun is down. My apartment is one block from here. See where someone put a candle in the window? That's where I turn.

JAKOB

Someone is lighting the way for us.

MARGOT

I'm just off the courtyard. Thanks for the company.

JAKOB

It was a pleasure. You are – different than any other girl I've known. Your eyes – filled with sorrow and hope at the same time. They're ... beautiful.

(MARGOT is stunned. She tries to smile but feels goofy. She turns away. It's wonderfully awkward.)

MARGOT

... thank you. And you... have beautiful teeth Nose! Yes! Nose. Very Romanesque. Classic...

JAKOB

Shh. Any chance of seeing you tomorrow? We can... do homework.

MARGOT

I should check... but I suppose... alright ...yes.

JAKOB

I'll wait here until you're inside the door.

MARGOT

Good luck sneaking your rock into the house.

JAKOB

No worries. I'm a Master Sneak.

(MARGOT exits giving one last wave as the lights go down.)

SCENE 4 – A Few Weeks Later in December

(Lights up on MARGOT and JAKOB studying in the dining room of the FRANK home. An active discussion is happening.)

MARGOT

Our faith says “no!” We are not allowed to sacrifice ourselves for love. Our bodies are from God and only God can call us home.

JAKOB

They didn't sacrifice themselves for love. The play is about violence and the harm it does,

MARGOT

They had a choice.

JAKOB

Did they see that? She was already married. How could she then marry Paris?

MARGOT

They could have run away together.

JAKOB

That was the plan.

MARGOT

It didn't work. So not the best plan.

JAKOB

Plans don't always work. How many people made plans to escape the Nazi occupation and could not get out?

MARGOT

But they didn't kill themselves.

JAKOB

You know better than that.

MARGOT

We're getting off track. The question is, was it moral to do what Romeo and Juliet did? According to Jewish law, it's wrong.

JAKOB

They were a product of their times. Lord Capulet threatened his daughter with violence if she didn't obey his wishes. The play is about what happens when you are confronted with violence.

MARGOT

She woke up in the tomb. Alive. She had a choice and she chose to die. I don't know if sacrificing yourself is ever the answer.

JAKOB

All through history, people have performed sacrifices to right a wrong or to restore a right. Jews have done it for thousands of years.

MARGOT

Sacrificing a lamb is not the same as taking your life.

JAKOB

Abraham was willing to slay his son.

MARGOT

It was a test. In the end, he didn't.

JAKOB

The point is – he would have. Part of the word “sacrifice” is based on “sacred.” What they did could be considered sacred. They had to die to restore the peace.

MARGOT

But they didn't kill themselves to restore peace. They died to get out of a tricky situation. What if they told the truth and presented themselves to their parents as a united front?

JAKOB

Would those parents have listened? They had preconceived notions about each other. Just like some people have preconceived notions about us as Jews. In the end, peace was restored.

MARGOT

And how long did the peace last? What happened later to the Capulets and Montagues after the loss of their children?

JAKOB

The epilogue tells us that the Capulets and Montagues finally made amends.

MARGOT

Grief has a long arm. If I was to write a sequel to *Romeo and Juliet*, maybe I would have Lord Capulet realize his part in his daughter's death and kill himself. Then, I'd have Lady Capulet go mad with grief and the Montagues could/

JAKOB

/Wait. Stop. Where is all this coming from?

MARGOT

I know that if I lost my family, the pain would never leave.

JAKOB

So, you are understanding of suicide.

MARGOT

I think about wars. About what happens if you lose your family. Even if you did everything in your power to save them, are you then justified to kill yourself? Or are you condemned to live a life of sorrow?

(JAKOB reaches for her hand. She lets him. She smiles at him and it is not goofy.)

JAKOB

You're making me think. I like that. I better run before your parents feel obligated to ask me over for dinner. Again.

MARGOT

They like you.

JAKOB

They're good people. Who have a special daughter.

(Maybe close to a kiss – but no, not yet.)

JAKOB (cont'd)

See you tomorrow.

MARGOT

Is that a promise?

JAKOB

Yes. And I always keep my promises.

(JAKOB takes his books and exits. MARGOT does a little skip as she exits. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 5 – February 16, 1942

(Lights up on MARGOT and ANNE. It is Margot's birthday.)

ANNE

Did you have a good birthday?

MARGOT

I did.

ANNE

No one from the rowing club came this year.

MARGOT

Jackie sent her condolences. Neighbors talk when they see a non-Jew go into a Jewish home. I understand.

ANNE

I don't.

MARGOT

We have to understand. I want to keep what friends I have left.

ANNE

No Jakob.

MARGOT

No.

(Beat.)

ANNE

Sixteen! Almost a grown-up! Now you must know things. Things I want to know. Like ... what's it like? Being a woman? You sort of have this woman's body now – is it different?

MARGOT

No. *(Beat.)* I don't know.

ANNE

You must know. I can't ask Mother because she'll just say, "Oh, Anne." And Pim has no idea. Who's going to talk about these things if you won't? Just tell me about kissing. I think about it a lot. Mainly with Peter. Not with Hello. Even though I think Peter doesn't want to kiss me but Hello does. Do I have to wait until I am sixteen to be kissed? Are you waiting?

MARGOT

Oh Anne.

(There's a knock on the door. ANNE opens it.)

ANNE

It's Jakob!

JAKOB

I'm sorry I'm late. There was this wagon. And they were picking up men in the street – and I thought – I look old enough to be a man so I just ran and hid in an alley. I was afraid to go home and afraid to come here.

MARGOT

Is it even safe now? You should have gone home.

JAKOB

Is it ever safe? I wanted to see you.

(He puts a gift in her hand.)

It looked better this morning. Before I squashed it by holding it tightly for hours.

MARGOT

Romeo and Juliet.

JAKOB

In English. I thought – why not do both? Practice our English while discussing the ethics of Romeo and Juliet’s actions.

MARGOT

How did you ever find a book in English in Amsterdam?

JAKOB

You have to love booksellers – they have hidden treasures that the Nazis will never know about.

ANNE

You need some cake.

MARGOT

No! You need to get home before curfew.

JAKOB

The courtyard is empty. I thought we could take a walk.

MARGOT

How is that safe?

JAKOB

I’m a Master Sneak, remember? The police are gone. They must have gotten tired of “rounding up people.” No one was about when I came here. Come on ... a short stroll?

(ANNE appears with a hat a jacket for MARGOT.)

ANNE

You don’t get out enough.

MARGOT

But if we see anyone...

JAKOB

I’ll disappear.

(MARGOT and JAKOB exit into the courtyard.)

MARGOT

You’re right. Nobody’s around. It’s spooky.

JAKOB

Look up.

MARGOT

Stars.

JAKOB

Courtesy of the blackout. It's rare to have no clouds and no lights.

MARGOT

So – be grateful for the blackout?

JAKOB

Be grateful for a starry sky.

MARGOT

Anne and I have spent so much time on this square. Bicycling. Hide-and-seek. Long talks as we climbed trees. We should try one of those long talks.

JAKOB

You start.

MARGOT

What do you want to be when you grow up? Before all these “interesting times” happened.

(Somewhere in this dialogue they find a place to sit.)

JAKOB

I used to think about being a rabbi. Does that surprise you?

MARGOT

It would have been my first guess.

JAKOB

You have good intuition. Now I am thinking I would like to teach.

MARGOT

History?

JAKOB

How'd you know?

MARGOT

It makes sense.

JAKOB

And what about you? You are so good at everything. The world is wide open for you.

MARGOT

Maybe nursing.

JAKOB

I can see that. A teacher and a nurse is a good combination.

(Police sirens.)

JAKOB

Get down.

(And they crouch down and are very still but the sirens pass. JAKOB tentatively takes MARGOT'S hand. The sirens fade away. The hands come apart.) So, You just got your first lesson in being a "Master Sneak." You get an "A" as usual. It's what I did all day. *(Beat.)* If necessary, I will do it for as long as it takes. I ...

MARGOT

Jakob?

JAKON

There's this group ... of resistors. They provide new identities, hide Jews – I don't want to tell you much about it. These days, it's not good to know too much. I may join them.

MARGOT

It sounds dangerous.

JAKOB

It's no more dangerous than walking across the city trying to wish my girlfriend a happy birthday.

MARGOT

Girlfriend? You never said that before.

JAKOB

And you never said "boyfriend." Today, I decided things needed to be said. In case ... I disappear. I made up my mind. If I am called up, I won't go to a labor camp. And I won't be stuffed into a wagon. I have to settle things with my family first but I want you to know that if the time comes that you don't hear from me, don't think the worse. And do not think I don't want to see you. I want you to know that I will be safe ... under some starry sky. Resisting.

MARGOT

You could die.

JAKOB

I could die anyway. Keep this for me. When times are tough, take it out. Read it. Believe it.

MARGOT

“Freedom in 1942.” Do you believe that?

JAKOB

It’s only February. There are ten more months to go before it is 1942. It’s possible. Maybe it won’t happen until 1943, but it will happen. I want you to keep it safe for me. One of these years, it will happen. And when it does, our families will share the seder table. Hold on to that hope. Promise me?

MARGOT

I Promise. It’s probably curfew. You had better go.

(BETTINA appears in the background. MARGOT waves as JAKOB exits and freezes with her arm in midair as if beckoning him to come back. BETTINA approaches and reaches out her arm to MARGOT – BETTINA turns to go inside and MARGOT follows her.)

Blackout.

SCENE 6 – July 6, 1942

(ANNE and MARGOT are packing.)

ANNE

Curlers? Check. Royal Family? Yes. Fred and Ginger? Definitely. All of my clothes? Or some of my clothes? All of them.

MARGOT

You’re taking too much. We’re supposed to make it look like we are on an outing.

ANNE

That’s ridiculous. It’s pouring rain. Who goes on an outing in the pouring rain?

MARGOT

Jews going into hiding.

ANNE

Even in hiding, one should try to look one’s best. I bet Mrs. Van Pels will dress for dinner. I should take all my pictures. I’ll tape them on the wall of our new bedroom and it will be just like we’re at home. Pim says it’s probably for about two months and then the war will end and everything will be normal again. It will be strange. Living with other people. I am so glad I already had my birthday party and won’t be celebrating it in hiding.

MARGOT

Maybe your fourteenth year.

ANNE

That's eleven months away. The weather report in your head is always cloudy. Who knows? Maybe we'll be home in August. Hello is coming in a few hours to go for a walk with me. I wonder what he'll think when no one answers the doorbell. I wonder if he'll worry or think that we are really in Switzerland or that maybe/

MARGOT

/Anne. Shh. Don't chatter so much.

(A beat as they close their satchels.)

ANNE

It's strange that they would call up Pim. Isn't he too old for labor camp? Although he is smart and maybe the Germans think he can help them in some way. But why would Pim help them/

MARGOT

/Anne! They didn't call up Pim! They wanted me. The notice was for me. I am supposed to report in ten days to the main train station with work pants and heavy boots and nothing else. And if they don't get me – they will arrest the entire family. I am so sorry. You're losing your time in the world because of me. You should be in school and outside playing and I've ruined your life.

ANNE

Shh. It will be an adventure. You'll see.

MARGOT

I'm so sorry. So sorry.

(The lights dim. ANNE and MARGOT put on coats and take one last look at their bedroom and exit. Lights change and we see MARGOT walk into a new room. It is the "hiding room" with a bed and a small desk where we will be for the remainder of the play. MARGOT looks around. A door slams. MARGOT freezes. The GUARD appears or we just hear her.)

GUARD

PRISONER 67024!

(We hear another door slam – it may sound like the slamming of a jail cell. BETTINA enters the room where MARGOT is frozen.)

GUARD (cont'd)

67024. Step forward.

(MARGOT does so – obedient as always. Then she sinks to the floor or on the bed. BETTINA kneels next to her to comfort.)

MARGOT

I can't.

BETTINA

I will help you.

MARGOT

It's too much. I thought I could bear it all. I thought I was strong enough...

BETTINA

Shhh. I will be strong for you and you will be strong for Anne

(Blackout)

SCENE 7 – February 26, 194

(Lights up on ANNE's room in hiding. She now shares a room with Fritz Pfeiffer. ANNE is writing at her desk. MARGOT is reading. There's a knock at the door. PETER peers in.)

PETER

May I?

MARGOT

Come on in.

(PETER enters with a makeshift small bookcase he has put together.)

PETER

Happy Birthday!

MARGOT

Thank-you. Seventeen. The year I should be taking my exams for the university.

PETER

Next year.

MARGOT

We say that a lot, don't we? "Next year."

PETER

Well ... what do you think? It's made out of scrap and I pulled tons of nails from it so there are holes but it's sturdy and it will hold your books.

MARGOT

For me?

PETER

I thought you needed your own. You do have a lot of books.

ANNE

I have a lot of books. And I have to share my bookcase with Dr. Pfeiffer which isn't fair.

MARGOT

I share mine with Pim and Mother!

ANNE

But at least you're related to them!

MARGOT

What does that have to do with sharing a bookcase?

ANNE

Just making a point.

MARGOT

It's *my* birthday!

PETER

(Taking the bookcase back.)

On the other hand.... I could use an extra bookcase/

MARGOT

/No! It's perfect. I love it and thank-you. I have so little that is separate from my parents. And you really did a fine job. Especially considering what you had to work with.

PETER

The scrap lumber was just sitting in the warehouse. No use letting it go to waste.

ANNE

I'd like mine painted.

PETER

Excuse me, but are you hiring me to create one for you?

ANNE

My birthday's five months from now. June twelfth. Maybe you should start now.

PETER

I don't paint wood.

MARGOT

Even if you did, where would you get the paint?

ANNE

Why is everything so difficult these days?

PETER

There's an obvious answer.

MARGOT

Thank-you, Peter. It was very thoughtful of you.

PETER

You could put your picture of your aunt on it. That would make it personal.

MARGOT

Except Mother doesn't want the picture in her room.

PETER

I thought she was her sister.

MARGOT

She was. Aunt Bettina. She never made it past age 16. I don't think Mother wants a daily reminder of her loss.

ANNE

Margot sometimes sees her.

PETER

You see ghosts?

MARGOT

I get feelings – small snapshots outside the corner of my eye. But that was in Amsterdam when everything was going topsy turvy. I wish she had grown up. I wish I knew her. M

PETER

There seems to be a special bond between siblings. I would see that on the playground. Two brothers would be fighting but if someone else chimed in – they'd stick up for each other. It must be nice – to have an ally.

MARGOT

There is something special about sharing the same genes. And a great advantage to being the eldest. I know something Anne will never know.

(Directed at Anne.)

MARGOT (cont'd)

I remember you from the very beginning. Mother brought you home all teeny-tiny, swaddled in blankets. You had this gaze that said, "I trust you." And as young as I was – I told you – I will always take care of you. I will always make sure you are safe.

ANNE

You're just getting sentimental because it's your birthday. Tomorrow you will go back to being "Margot, the sister that corrects my behavior."

MARGOT

I don't!

ANNE

You totally roll your eyes when I talk at dinner.

MARGOT

Because you totally say things to get reactions out of people – and not great ones at that.

PETER

On the other hand, maybe being an only child is a good thing. Oh. I almost forgot. Your presence is required in the kitchen. Miep brought a cake.

MARGOT

An actual birthday cake?

ANNE

See Gloomy Gus – good things happen on birthdays. Even in hiding.

(PETER, MARGOT and ANNE exit as lights go down.)

SCENE 8 - December 21, 1943

(ANNE, MARGOT and PETER are in ANNE'S room. They just celebrated the first night of Hanukkah.)

PETER

That was so thoughtful of Miep and Jan to bring treats for Hanukkah.

MARGOT

Our second Hanukkah in hiding. I wonder if we will ever have a real Hanukkah again. A menorah in the window... a week of lighting the way for others...

ANNE

Margot! Don't get all weepy today!

MARGOT

I'm just stating/

ANNE

/What you always state! That we are all miserable. I won't have it. Not tonight. Let's have "The Perfect Hanukkah." One hot and cold spiced brisket coming up!

(Anne puts a scarf or something over her arm. She becomes a "server extraordinaire" of a magical restaurant. She hands out two pieces of paper as menus. She'll use "something" – a book, a paper holder as a tray. All through this inter-change of a "make-believe" Hanukkah, the three will use "found objects" in the room to use as dining props.)

ANNE

Welcome! I have a special Hanukkah menu. A delectable beef brisket. It's just coming out of the oven. It's delicately spiced and rubbed with rosemary.

PETER

Is there any thyme? I love a brisket surrounded by thyme.

ANNE

And – poof! I just added the thyme. Magical briskets can be anything. I can smell the thyme coming from the kitchen. Can you?

PETER

May I have extra prunes and apricots?

ANNE

But of course! And a few sauteed tulip bulbs. They're all the rage in Amsterdam now. All the restaurants that matter are serving them.

MARGOT

Is that true?

ANNE

Miep says there are a lot of food shortages. People are making soup from tulip bulbs.

MARGOT

We should be grateful that we have all that cabbage.

ANNE

We are moving away from our perfect Hanukkah dinner. What would you like with the brisket and tulip bulbs?

MARGOT

Some latkes. Extra-crunchy please.

ANNE

Would you like your usual serving of twelve of them!

MARGOT

I only ate twelve that one year. I was growing.

PETER

Can you really eat twelve latkes?

MARGOT

It was just that one time. Anne, Peter doesn't have to know all my secrets.

ANNE

After dinner, we have a platter of sufganiyot (*pronounced "soof-gay-nee"*) stuffed with the berry jam my grandmother made. Margot, would you like twelve of those?

MARGOT

I may want twelve but I can only fit in one.

PETER

I'll eat twelve!

ANNE

I'm afraid I can only eat eleven.

PETER

Since when does the staff get to eat the food?

ANNE

It's Hanukkah. Everyone partakes. It's the first day of the miracle.

MARGOT

We've been here eighteen months. That's – what – about five-hundred and forty days? Maybe today is the "Five Hundred and Forty-First" day of the miracle. The miracle that we're still here.

(ANNE, PETER and MARGOT hold hands in friendship as the lights fade to black.

OPTIONAL: Away from the action we could see BETTINA light a Menorah as the lights fade. For a moment, all we see is the glow of the first candle (and the helper candle – the Shamash in the middle).

SCENE 9 - April 11, 1944

(Lights up in ANNE'S room. PETER is doing English homework. MARGOT is doing Latin. ANNE is cutting photos out of movie magazines.)

PETER

English makes no sense. Look at this: "Dick threw the ball." Threw is spelled "t-h-r-e-w." And the next sentence is "Jane went through the door." It's pronounced the same as "threw" but it's spelled "t-h-r-o-u-g-h." Why would you spell two words that sound exactly differently?

MARGOT

Because they have different meanings and with the spelling you can tell the difference.

PETER

It just seems like it's making extra work for me.

MARGOT

I don't think they thought of you at all when they made up the language. If you think English is hard, try Latin. The word order is arbitrary, the verbs make no sense and all the nouns are gendered.

PETER

So why do it?

MARGOT

I'm trying to keep my brain alive.

ANNE

It serves you both right for waiting until Sunday to finish your homework.

MARGOT

This is for extra-credit.

ANNE

Who are you trying to impress?

MARGOT

No one. I'm doing it for fun.

ANNE

Remind me to give you lessons in what "fun" is. Look at Judy Garland. Her hair is shorter. What do you think? She does look older. Maybe I'll try that haircut when we get out.

(There is a loud crash. Sounds of footsteps. MARGOT and ANNE move next to each other in an embrace. PETER puts his finger to his lips and motions them to stay quiet.)

MARGOT

Someone's inside the warehouse.

PETER

Shh! Don't move.

(More noises – doors rattling, another crash... PETER takes Anne's scissors.)

PETER

Maybe we're being robbed again. Whatever you do, whatever you hear, do not move. Do not go to check anything out. Just stay put. Leave the door closed. No matter what happens – do not leave here until the morning when Miep arrives.

MARGOT

What do you mean, "whatever happens?"

PETER

What I said.

(PETER exits.)

MARGOT

I have to get out of here!

ANNE

You can't!

(Another crash. The SISTERS hold each other. We hear a loud voice (MR. VAN PELS.)

MALE VOICE

GET OUT! OUT NOW!

MARGOT

Why is he yelling?

ANNE

To scare them?

MARGOT

Now they will know someone is here!

(There is a moment of absolute silence. Then maybe some shouts and then footsteps. And then silence. ANNE and MARGOT are frozen. After a moment, ANNE slowly gets out of the bed and lays down on the floor putting her ear to the floor to see if she hears anything else. MARGOT looks at her questioningly – asking with her gestures if ANNE hears

anything. ANNE shakes her head “no” and tries to listen some more. More silence. Then footsteps. PETER enters.)

PETER

They're gone.

MARGOT

They'll be back! They know someone's here. Why did your father have to yell?

PETER

To scare them. We decided to not be sitting ducks while the warehouse was robbed. If any more ration coupons are stolen, we're sunk.

MARGOT

Now we're all in danger!

PETER

They were overturning crates. The bookcase was rattled. We can't chance that.

MARGOT

They'll go to the police.

PETER

I doubt it. Can you imagine? “Excuse me Officer, but when we were robbing a warehouse, we heard someone in the building.”

MARGOT

This place has been compromised. We need to go somewhere else.

PETER

We've been safe here for almost two years. We'll be fine until the war ends.

MARGOT

I spent my seventeenth and eighteenth birthdays here. There is no end. How long can our helpers help? It gets harder every day. We have been inside for so long; I wonder if I can ever be outside again. Once, I relished the outdoors. Now, I think of it as death. The next time we go outside, it will be to die.

ANNE

Stop! Thinking like that will get you nowhere. You can't give up now.

MARGOT

Is this a life? Staying silent and still all day for two years? Living on cabbage? Jumping at every sound and siren that fills these rooms? And then there's the waiting ... is this the day we are caught? I can't stop the thoughts. Why do you think I go back to my Latin lessons everyday – the language is so complicated it pushes everything else away.

ANNE

So “veni vidi vici” is your saving grace?

MARGOT

A bit of irony there – I came, I saw, I conquered.” But what did I conquer?

PETER

You conquered your fears.

(Police sirens are heard. PETER, MARGOT and ANNE freeze. Footsteps. We hear a VOICE or VOICES. MALE VOICES that are indeed the Police.)

VOICES

POLITIE! POLITIE! *(Pronounced “pohl-ih-tee.”)* HALT! HALT!

MARGOT

They did go to the police!

PETER

Not enough time has passed. How could they have gone to the police and suddenly have the police here in less than five minutes? Somebody outside saw something when they were breaking down the door. Somebody else called the police.

VOICE

POLITIE!

(MARGOT and ANNE jump. PETER shakes his head “no” and puts a finger to his lips to keep the SISTERS quiet. There are lots of noises but most frightening of all is the rattling of the bookcase. THEY bang on walls, come back to the bookcase and bang on it again. Finally, satisfied that no one is inside. THEY leave.)

ANNE

We were passed over, weren't we?

MARGOT

We were. It's a good reminder of what we celebrate.

ANNE

(To Peter.) I'll see you soon.

(With a nod, PETER exits.)

ANNE

Do you mind? If I go?

MARGOT

How can you go after all this?

ANNE

How can I not? If what you think is true and our time is limited, I'm going to make the most of it. I know Mother disapproves. And Mrs. Van Pels thinks it's forward of me to go to his room. But it's the only private area for us and really – we just talk. And there's a window. Where you can see the sky.

MARGOT

I'm terrified of the sky – of the outside. Something inside me says, the next time you are outside it will be as a prisoner.

ANNE

Shh. Maybe we're having all the hard times in our life right now. Maybe all the best days are ahead of us.

MARGOT

I like that. Somehow, I feel like we're switching places today. You're the protective sister and I am the emotional child. When I wasn't watching, you grew up. You grew smart. And I should have said this long ago, I am grateful for you.

ANNE

I ... thank you. But do remember, by order of birth, you are required to be the protective older sister. I still want to act out. How do I look?

MARGOT

Beautiful. You're always beautiful.

ANNE

Even when I drive you cuckoo?

MARGOT

Even then. You're right. That's your job as the younger sister.

ANNE

And do you remember your job?

MARGOT

To keep you safe.

ANNE

Remember that, wise-sister-of-mine.

ANNE

Let's salvage what's left of this evening.

MARGOT

Enjoy but Anne – don't enjoy yourself too much.

(ANNE exits. The GUARD appears.)

GUARD

Prisoner 67024! Come with me!

(MARGOT runs out of the room. Blackout.)

SCENE 10 – Evening of June 6, 1944

(Lights up on ANNE writing. MARGOT enters - jubilant. ANNE quickly hides her writing.)

MARGOT

I saw Dr. Pfeiffer in deep discussion with Pim and thought this would be a good time to spend some time with you. *Can you believe it?*

ANNE

I know! It's not a hope anymore. No more waiting. They're finally here.

MARGOT

The Allies are on the continent! They're coming. They're coming to free us. The hope was starting to hurt.

ANNE

But not hoping is akin to dying. We're not going to die. We'll be walking out of here soon. Together. Without wearing a Jewish star.

MARGOT

I will row and skate – I must be way out of shape.

ANNE

You can do morning exercises with Dr. Pfeiffer.

MARGOT

I'm not that out of shape. Just skinny.

ANNE

We're all skinny. But I'm not so skinny that I won't be able to flirt!

MARGOT

There's ice cream and hot chocolate waiting for us. Think Anne... we may be back in school in September.

ANNE

I wonder if we will be behind.

MARGOT

I bet we'll be ahead of everyone. All we've done for two years is study. Of course, I missed my university exams so officially, I will be one year behind in school. But I won't gripe. I never expected that we would see freedom. And now, we will be allowed to be in the parks! We will be allowed to be everywhere!

ANNE

I wonder if things will be harder than we think on the outside. We don't know where any of our friends are. I have had some dreadful nightmares about them.

MARGOT

Now who's getting gloomy? Look at all the help we have had for two years? Surely, there are others helping our friends. I like to think that somewhere there are people helping Jakob and all those we left behind.

ANNE

You're right. We must keep our best thoughts in the coming weeks until this is finally over. What will you do when we're free?

MARGOT

Take a long, hot bath. Wash away all my gloomy thoughts. What about you?

ANNE

Run and yell and skip and laugh loudly and eat ice cream until I am sick!

MARGOT

Do you still want to publish the diary?

ANNE

I do. I have a lot of work to do on it. Some of my earlier entries are pretty childish. But I think it may be of interest to other young people. We'll see. What will you do with your diary?

MARGOT

Hide it! It's so personal.

ANNE

Are you thinking of Jakob?

MARGOT

And others. I do wonder if Jakob and I will be the same people together that we were two years ago.

ANNE

Probably not. Even if we spent the last two years on the outside, we still would have changed because we have gone from childhood to almost adults. So, of course, we have changed. But we still carry who we were inside us. So, the affection could still be there. What did you used to say? “Times change, people change but what will always remain fast and steady is the affection your friends feel for you.”

MARGOT

It’s hard to believe you remember that.

ANNE

What nobody realizes about me is that I can chatter and pay attention at the same time. Maybe you and Jakob will have grown differently but your earlier affection will stay the same. We shouldn’t talk about the future too much. We have to play catch up - finish our education and do a lot of smooching.

MARGOT

What about Peter?

ANNE

He’s sweet. But.

(PETER knocks at the door.)

ANNE

Come in.

PETER

Is this a private party or can anyone join?

ANNE

It’s a celebration.

PETER

Everyone’s gathered around the kitchen table. They’re all laughing and making jokes. And – believe it or not – making plans to see each other when the war is over. We’re family now. Your father already has a map on the wall. We’re going to track the Allies progress into Europe. They’re thinking Paris will be liberated first. Our mothers are already planning lunches and outings. Do you have any plans?

ANNE

Margot is going to take a bath.

PETER

A worthy plan.

MARGOT

And Anne is going to go outside and scream.

PETER

I may join her.

MARGOT

Imagine an outside that's safe. An outside of tulips and roses and dahlias. A rushing river. A sky that goes on forever. We're going to hear all those sounds I took for granted: frog warbles, bees buzzing, and the rivers roaring as they crest in the spring. An outside that means life – not death.

(We hear the Dutch National Anthem. MARGOT and ANNE gasp.)

MARGOT

I haven't heard this in years.

ANNE

Someone is a brave broadcaster.

PETER

They're listening to the BBC. They've been playing the National Anthems of all the occupied countries. I think they're trying to tell us that freedom is coming.

(As the Anthem plays, PETER, MARGOT, and ANNE sit close together. Maybe they join hands. Maybe BETTINA appears in the background and listens. The Anthem wafts over the teens as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 11 – September 1944, Auschwitz

(Lights up on a bare stage - Auschwitz. JANNY is onstage. MARGOT, and ANNE are together. Have scarves around the women's heads as if they were bald; burlap or potato sacks over the prisoners. JANNY approaches MARGOT.)

JANNY

Margot? It's you. I'd know these eyes anywhere.

MARGOT

Janny! How long have you been here?

JANNY

A few weeks – maybe a month. It's hard to tell time. When did you arrive?

MARGOT

We left Westerbork on September 3 – so maybe a week? Why were we asked to stay here and not report to work? Do you know anything?

JANNY

There's talk that they're dismantling the camp and sending everyone somewhere else. The Russians are getting closer. I've heard the shooting. Maybe they want to send us to a munitions factory. Let's hope so. I hear you get more food and warmer clothes if you are selected.

MARGOT

Do you think that could be us?

JANNY

It's possible.

MARGOT

Did you hear, Anne? We may be chosen as workers. With extra food.

ANNE

I'm ready to work..

(GUARD enters.)

GUARD

Prisoner 63211. Step forward.

(JANNY does so. GUARD circles her.)

GUARD (cont'd)

Strong. Fairly healthy. Eyes clear. Skin clear. You'll do. You're going to be transferred to Liebau Labor Camp to work in a munitions factory. You will get one extra meal ration, a coat, and work boots. When you're dismissed, you are to pack your bags immediately. The train leaves tonight. Prisoner 67024! Step Forward!

(MARGOT steps forward.)

GUARD (cont'd)

Thin – but healthy. Eyes clear. Skin clear. You can do the work. You are also to pack your bags for transfer to Liebau. Prisoner 67023!

(ANNE steps forward.)

GUARD (cont'd)

Very skinny. But that's to be expected. Eyes somewhat clear. The skin is not good. Covered in a rash. You won't do. Dismissed. You two are to meet me back here in 30 minutes.

MARGOT

My sister is a good worker. Ask anyone. They are all impressed with her ability to work hard and keep a cheerful temperament.

GUARD

She's covered in a rash. Probably scabies. She'll infect the other factory workers. She will be transported to Bergen-Belsen. I only want the two of you.

MARGOT

I can't. I won't leave my sister.

JANNY

There may not be another opportunity. This is your chance.

MARGOT

I'll take my chances. I won't leave her alone.

ANNE

I won't be alone. You know I always make friends. Go!

MARGOT

I can get you through this. We've been lucky for two years.

JANNY

Don't count on luck, Margot. This is your chance.

MARGOT

No! Anne and I have made it this far together. It's just a little bit longer. The Russians are close by. We'll be fine.

ANNE

Go! I don't want you to stay.

MARGOT

I don't care what you want. We're stronger together.

JANNY

There may not be another opportunity.

BETTINA

Go to Liebau. Leave this wretched place. I'll stay here and look after Anne.)

MARGOT

No. I will watch over Anne. It's a promise I made to myself a long time ago. I won't leave my sister.

GUARD

Your choice. You and your sister will be transferred to Bergen-Belsen tomorrow at dawn. Dismissed.

(GUARD exits. JANNY and MARGOT hug and part ways. BETTINA leads ANNE and MARGOT away.)

BLACKOUT

EPILOGUE

February, 1945, Bergen-Belsen

(MARGOT and ANNE are seated. They share a blanket or sheet around them. MARGOT falls asleep and her head falls into ANNE'S lap. ANNE's strokes her head and also falls asleep landing on MARGOT in a huddle. BETTINA enters. She comes to them and holds out her hands. ANNE and MARGOT each take a hand and slowly exit upstage – disappearing. As THEY exit, we hear MARGOT'S voice.)

MARGOT'S VOICE

“Times change, people change, thoughts about good and evil change, about true and false. But what will always remain fast and steady is the affection that your friends feel for you, those who always have your best interests at heart.”

(BETTINA, MARGOT and ANNE are gone. There is an empty stage for just a moment.)

Blackout

END OF PLAY (Notes follow)

NOTES

1. Music and stage directions are optional.
2. Bettina died at age 16 possibly from appendicitis in 1914.
3. Margot did have at least one boyfriend. Anne noted that in her letters to her family in Switzerland. She also talked about her own boyfriends. Jakob is an imagining taken from Margot's letter to Anne while in hiding where she described what she needed in a boyfriend. We would know so much more if Margot's diary survived.
4. Heinz Geiringer was Margot's first study partner at the Jewish Lyceum. Margot tutored him in Science and Heinz tutored Margot in art. Heinz died in Mauthausen just days before liberation. (Told to me by Eva Schloss, Heinz's sister.)
5. Peter Van Pels worked hard to stay alive. He was used as slave labor in Mauthausen (as was Heinz). When Mauthausen was liberated, Peter was in the infirmary. He died three days after liberation.
6. Janny is modelled after Bloome Evers-Emden – one of Margot's friends at the Jewish Lyceum. It was Bloome who recalled that Margot was chosen to work in the Liebau Labor Camp and turned it down to stay with her sister. "Janny" and all those chosen to for work at Liebau survived.
7. "Bella" is modelled after rowing coach Roos Van Gelder. There is little information on what happened to him but I believe he survived. The newly-surfaced photos of Margot's rowing team were passed on to Van Gelder's nephew who donated them to the Anne Frank House.