Liberated from Camp de Gurs, Eva and her small group found themselves standing together on the country road just outside the barbed wire “before any thinking and planning could take place.” They were nineteen women and three children, friends and colleagues through their anti-Nazi activities. They shared an urgent objective:

We pooled what little money we still had, and started walking. Where to? How, by what means of transportation? We had no idea, just knew that we had to get away from the approaching German troops, had to get shelter somewhere with French people.¹

The women walked to Oloron, the town where six weeks earlier they had arrived with other women from the Vel’ d’Hiv and had been transferred from trains to trucks destined for Camp de Gurs. No public transportation was operating at that time. But, Eva later noted, “Good fortune was with us.”

We found a bus driver who had a bus with some gasoline, and he was willing to take us inland a little ways. So he took us, and drove us from village to village, only to be told that all the shelter facilities were filled with French refugees from northern France, since Paris and the north had been evacuated.

His gasoline gauge was getting low; he had to keep enough gas to get back. So, he decided to leave the main road and get into more isolated country where our chances might be better.
And there it was: a peaceful little hamlet, and the mayor running towards the bus and greeting “his” refugees for whom they had prepared, and who had come from Paris.

Eva and her small group were relieved to find this village that appeared eager to accept them. But they faced another critical hurdle: the mayor did not know that his refugees were of German origin:

We thanked our driver with all our hearts, and followed the mayor to the hall that had been made ready with clean straw sacks, and some other facilities. It was late in the afternoon, the sun was about to set; we were very tired, and so glad and grateful. Then—I will never forget this—a loud roar of war planes overhead, and our mayor, with flying coat tails, running for shelter, crying out: “Oh, les Boches, les Boches!” [derogatory name for Germans]. The planes flew on, we were alone, went to our straw sacks, did not say much, but wondered what would happen tomorrow morning when we would have to register, and when the mayor would realize that we too were, at least technically, “Boches.”

Again, our good French helped: one other girl, Marianne, a social worker, and I went to see the mayor in the morning and explained our situation. He was totally taken aback—he had prepared for, and expected, French refugees from Paris; and instead, we had come. Finally, he decided to trust us, and after a little while, shaking his head over this strange group of women—teacher, social worker, lawyer, writer, a grandmother with a broken leg, three children—he accepted us, and told us that he would be pleased and proud to have us stay as “his” refugees. We registered, and were safe.

For Eva and the other women who had experienced the confinement and squalor of Camp de Gurs, the following days in the village were a “brief period of unreal peacefulness, and even a feeling of belonging.”

The people in the village were very poor; we helped in the fields, we talked, we liked each other. At the Memorial Service for the
war victims, after the Armistice Treaty was signed, we could participate in the sad ceremony; we were with them; they and we felt that we had lost as much or more than they had.

But Eva continued to have a sense of foreboding about what lay ahead. On June 23, 1940, several days after her arrival in the village, she wrote to Stern who was then in Montauban:

We found a very friendly acceptance in a small beautiful village, where we stay in a kind of hostel, and do our own cooking. What will happen later on, is completely shrouded in fog. If you and your friends consider solutions for the future, please think of us also.2

And in a diary entry, written in the village the next day, Eva lamented: “A new leg of the journey—how close before the last? The events press upon each other so that one can hardly comprehend them. This is not how I imagined freedom—connected to a universally hopeless situation.”

The peaceful refuge in the village did not last. After about a week, the mayor awakened the women with bad news:

Our mayor was in the habit of listening to the British radio, and he told us the war news. One morning, very early—we were all still asleep—he tapped at our window; two of us went out, and he told us that they had just announced the definitive lines of demarcation for the German occupied zone; his little village fell within this zone, and this day, at noon, the German occupation troops would come in, and he felt he had to tell us that from that moment on, he could no longer protect us.

The armistice between France and Germany had just been signed on June 22, 1940, establishing an “occupied zone” in northern and western France (including all ports on the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean), to be occupied and governed by the Nazis, and an “unoccupied zone” in southern France that was to be governed by the French under the Vichy government. Among the provisions of the armistice was the notorious Article 19 that required the French government to “surrender
on demand” to the Nazis any persons of German origin on French territory. This was a direct and immediate threat to the lives of Eva, Otto, and other ISK members of German origin who had been working against the Nazis in France. They were now vulnerable not only to the Nazis but also to any French citizen who might choose to collaborate with the Nazis and turn them in. Once again, Eva and her small group faced imminent danger. But their spirits were lifted by the farewell they received from the villagers:

So we packed up again and left. Someone had given us an old baby carriage for our grandmother with the broken leg—this time, we knew we would have to walk until we reached shelter in the zone to be unoccupied—and the village people were standing in front of their homes, wiping tears with their aprons or skirts, one or the other coming forward with a few eggs, half a bottle of milk—a silent, moving offering and sharing.

The experience of being sheltered in this village with such acceptance and kindness had a powerful and lasting impact on Eva and others in her group. These highly endangered women, whose years of demanding anti-Nazi work had failed, gained renewed hope from the humble and generous human spirit they encountered in this small village. Eva later reflected:

If I have any regrets about things not done in my lifetime, it is that I was never able to find that little village again, and give thanks to the people, or to their children or grandchildren, who had been so unbelievably good to us. I wrote a good deal in my diary during those times, but, probably for a good reason (perhaps not to endanger them) I never mentioned the name of the village, and it has completely slipped my mind.

This feeling of regret by Eva led us—her children and the authors of this book—to take a journey in 2011 in which we were able to identify this village as Castagnède and convey Eva’s gratitude to one of its inhabitants, an elderly woman who had witnessed and recalled these events in 1940 when she was seven years old.
Temporary stay in Escou

Again this group of women urgently needed to find shelter. They found someone with a small truck who was willing to take them to Escou, a small village in the unoccupied zone about thirty-five miles southeast of the village that had first given them refuge. As Eva recalled, Escou was “crowded with refugees. It was not friendly, but we were safe. We could not do much—often we sat by the river, washing our clothes.” On June 27, Eva wrote to Stern in Montauban:

We had to move on, because yesterday morning we were told in our village that it would from now on be part of the occupied zone. So we landed here, as a very temporary stopover. Today I sent you a telegram to ask if there would be room for us where you are.

A stay for any length of time here is impossible. It has gotten totally dark now—in the abandoned house where we found shelter; there is no lighting, and I can’t see anything any more. This letter should leave tonight.

While in Escou on June 30, Eva wrote an entry in her diary, again directing her thoughts and feelings to Otto:

For the first time in weeks I walked alone yesterday for two hours through the fields. After a sad, restless day I walked through the green fields, framed on one side by the rugged mountains against the setting sun. Deep peace over the land, and beauty. Thoughts unravel, present themselves one after the other without understanding. Dark is the future in every respect, and especially when I add that enormous difficulties stand in the way of your return. Will life be bearable? In the long term, I don’t know, I also cannot imagine. But in the immediate future, I believe that even against the worst possibilities, which I absolutely must consider, I am prepared.

Now we sit here and wait with many good people, in an empty house, on straw, in the beautiful countryside. The days are very hot, very long; the evenings peaceful and nice. But
the waiting is agonizing, waiting for the paper, for the mail, for news. And even when news comes that we can move on to M [Montauban], perhaps, what then! Life has become joyless.

As Eva waited in Escou for an answer from Stern, she and the other women in her group spent time walking outside the village, hoping to come across other refugees who might have information that could be useful to them. On July 1, five days after writing to Stern to ask about room for her group in Montauban, Eva received an affirmative response from him by telegram. She immediately wrote back: “How great was our joy when we got your telegram this morning, in answer to ours. We will try to come as soon as possible. Do you know that we are 19 adults (women) and 3 children?”

Eva began to work with the others on plans to get to Montauban. Public transportation had still not been reinstated, and Montauban was over 150 miles northeast of Escou. The group walked from Escou to Oloron (approximately 4 miles), hoping there would soon be a train to Montauban. They were able to take the first train out of Oloron to Montauban. In a telegram to Stern from Oloron on July 7, Eva wrote “We are leaving for Montauban by train today at 17 o’clock.”

Two months of refuge and work in Montauban

Eva and her small group were among thousands who found refuge in Montauban, a small city north of Toulouse. The socialist mayor of Montauban at the time, Marcel Guerret, opened the doors of his city to refugees from many areas of Europe. Montauban already had a long history of offering refuge to politically oppressed populations, and it holds an important place in the history of the resistance in World War II.

Eva’s brother Erich had also arrived in Montauban in June 1940 after being interned by the French government as a German “enemy alien” in a men’s camp in Orléans. When the German armies neared his internment camp, Erich and some of the other anti-Nazis of German origin were released by the French. He was able, with great hardship, to get to Montauban. Erich later described how “after long weeks of separate wandering, men and women exiles find themselves reunited in the beautiful small town of Montauban in the south of France.”
He recalled that “parts of this wonderful old Huguenot settlement date back to the eleventh century” and added that “normally some twenty to thirty thousand people live in the lovely old houses of this town. Suddenly the population swells to eighty thousand with the arrival of refugees from northern France, Belgium and Holland, as well as political activists from all manner of countries. Spaniards, Austrians, Poles, Italians, Russian socialists who had to leave their homes after the 1917 revolution, and Germans.”

With gratitude and admiration, Erich described how the people in Montauban made room for this flood of refugees: “They offer accommodation and household goods. Hardly a soul grumbles about the refugees. Those foreigners who have crowded into their living space and who are now competing for the rapidly shrinking supplies of food. What an example.” He noted that “never during our weeks in Montauban did we hear nationalistic or chauvinistic sentiments expressed. There was no hate. . . . Dire need, distress and human misery increased as millions of people were forcibly uprooted by the events of war. . . . [T]here arose a spirit of helpfulness and solidarity.”

Eva and her group of women arrived in Montauban on July 7, 1940. It was the first time since their internment in the Vel’ d’Hiv two months earlier that they were able to reunite with their other ISK colleagues in a place that gave them at least a temporary sense of freedom from fear of capture by the Nazis. Eva later recalled the warm greeting they received from Stern at the train station in Montauban:

Stern met the train with a beautiful peach, as an offering of thanks, and he just marveled at how we looked after all this ordeal we’d been through. . . . We all lost weight. . . . We got tanned because of the sun . . . and we were slim. I remember how Stern said how beautiful I looked when we arrived in Montauban.

In a letter Eva wrote several months later to Willi Eichler, the leader of her ISK group, she described this reunion with her ISK colleagues in Montauban:

There, in Montauban, gradually all met, or gave word of their whereabouts. The men had had very strenuous flights behind
them; for instance, my brother and others walked on foot for 200 kilometers across France, the Germans behind them; at times there were bombs, at times they crossed the German lines, carrying the little baggage they had on their back (towards the end they were so exhausted that they had to throw away part of those belongings). But all were in good spirits, somewhat emaciated, but upright and in a good frame of mind.

Then Jeanne [Johanna Bertholet], Gaby [Cordier], Mousy [Hélène Perret] and a French friend arrived there, after having fled Paris and occupied France on their bikes. They also were very courageous and beautiful.

Eva later described their crowded lodgings in Montauban: “They had given us a small apartment. There were a lot of us there. I think we got some ration cards, which we had to share among many of us. I remember it was always noisy, all these people—and at night, we didn’t have lights, and I wrote until my eyes could hardly see anything.” 13 Eva’s sister-in-law, Herta, recalled that their apartment was in “an old abandoned house, which was said to have once been a brothel. . . . Twenty people in two small rooms, sleeping on the floor, one next to the other.” 14

Eva remained in Montauban for approximately two months. On July 23, 1940, she returned to her diary for the first time since the June 30 entry she had written in Escou. She reflected on her parting with Otto in Paris in early May and the German invasion the following day:

On the first quiet evening here after a month, I just read through these lines again, alone. Years seem to have gone by since that last afternoon when we sat in the Tuileries, boarded the metro at night in the dark city, went into our quiet parlor, packed your things. The next morning, I brought you to the station. As we parted, nothing in me said that it would be for this parting. Then as I lay awake in bed the next morning, the horrible news came, something like a numbness spread throughout me like a cold, wet towel was laid heavily on me. Basically, this inner state has, still today, not subsided. What has happened in the meantime has not resolved anything.
Eva then expressed her despair over the apparent futility of their years of anti-Nazi political work in light of recent events, noting that the stresses of her life “make it hard to carry any joy.” She confirmed that she knew the struggle was necessary but confessed to Otto, “I don’t believe in its success and I hardly believe in its significance, when measured against what I actually want in life.” She explained that for a long time, she could express the significance of her work “only in a negative sense”—that its success was not “impossible or precluded by natural law.” She lamented that her pessimistic view had been “terribly confirmed through recent events.” But she felt the need to continue the struggle even in such dire circumstances: “I still deem it to be right. But it offers no courage.”

Eva described the painful contrast between the beauty of Montauban and the oppressive responsibilities of her work:

I cannot warm up to the city here. Beautiful were the first few days finding again many believed to be lost; beautiful were the wide-open views of river, bridge and fields. But too painfully present is the contradiction between this peaceful tranquility and the reality of the world in which we live. Internally my gaze turns away from the tranquil fields—their sight pains me.

Today I yearn for them again, because from morning until late into the night people and their concerns surround me, and because my life is filled to bursting with work, the usefulness of which I question, but which I do because I feel obligated to do. The work is a burden, for I cannot always do it accompanied by the warm trust of friends.

Obstructions, differences of opinion, and hard, not always fair, decisions make life more difficult—as does the awareness of great responsibility, of the horrendous consequences of avoidable mistakes, and of the clear recognition of one’s own inadequacy.

At the end of this diary entry, Eva described an experience that took her away momentarily from the stresses of her work in Montauban. Ultimately, her thoughts turned to a memory of a time with Otto that provided a sliver of hope:
Our bike tour on Sunday was nice after these noisy days. Joy about overcoming fear; about the wind that is powerfully drawn into the lungs; about the peaceful fields. . . . My fear sometimes constricts my throat. But for fear, too, I often don’t have time and that is good.

In the quiet hours, however, you are with me. I think about the note that you scribbled before you went to the internment camp about a year ago now: “I so much still want to live with you, my E.” Me too. If nothing remains for me of you, no letter, no picture other than the two small images that stood before me when you were away, that memory will stay with me. And a tiny hope for the future.

Eva’s work with the ISK in Montauban focused on the urgent need to procure visas for ISK members who were in grave danger if they were not able to escape from Europe. This danger was real. What they had left behind in their apartments in Paris would now be fatal evidence to the Nazi occupiers. As Eva later explained in a letter to ISK leader Willi Eichler,

Discussions and conferences about the future brought agreement about the need to prepare emigration speedily. There was alarming news from the camps: German Commissions also in the unoccupied territory who had accurate knowledge of the personal files (from the Paris police), and also anticipation of general new internment. There was no possibility of contact with Paris, so that we did not know what had happened with the apartments; apartments had been prepared to prove to the French our loyalty in the fight against Hitler, and now it was not the French but Himmler who ruled in Paris.

So we sent lists to our friends in America, in order of priority, where we did not only consider the degree in which they were endangered, but also the question who would be especially competent for work to come. We renewed contact, insofar as they did not already exist, with friendly refugee groups (for instance the official leadership of the German Social Democratic Party). And we also decided that our Swiss friends [Bertholets]
should return, in order to help more actively with the preparation for emigration from there.

In France we were more and more handicapped. Even the shortest trip was forbidden, and travel permits were issued only in exceptional cases and with help of protection. So one either had to stay put and could not go and see anyone, or one had to accept the risk of unauthorized travel (danger of new internment). Also, there was very sharp censorship within France; and all overseas mail is gathered in Bordeaux, that means it goes through German controls—at least one has to expect that.\(^\text{15}\)

A postcard from “Paul Bois”: Otto is alive

During this period of intense work in Montauban, Eva received her first sign that Otto was still alive. During their time together in Paris when Otto was doing his dangerous resistance and sabotage work, Eva, Otto, and their group of ISK colleagues had made a plan to be used if Otto fell into the hands of the Nazis. Otto would write to a mutual friend, Yvonne Oullion, if he wanted to reach Eva but could not write directly to her.

On August 3, 1940, Eva received a postcard via Yvonne, who by then was living in Castres near Montauban. The sender was Otto using the pseudonym “Paul Bois.” The card was stamped “Oflag IV D [abbreviation of “Offizierslager” (Officer’s Camp) IV D].” Handwritten on the postcard were the following words (translated from French):

May 26, 1940
My dear Yvonne—
As you see, I am a prisoner. Don’t worry, I am in good health and confident despite everything.
I still don’t know for certain where I will be taken, you can write to me when I am able to give you an address.
My best wishes to Paulette, Pierre and the other friends.
Affectionately,
Paul
Eva immediately recognized Otto’s handwriting. That night, she wrote in her diary:

Perhaps all was not in vain. You live. I hold the postcard with your writing in my hand, read it, again and again, and am deeply grateful. Your handwriting has not changed; it is calm and sure. I would like to have a small spot for myself now, where I am not surrounded by constant worries, noise of others. I would also like to look further into your, our fate. I am very tired. But you are there. And tonight, my thoughts can come to you.

In her next diary entry on August 10, Eva yearned to write to Otto but was unable to find the necessary quiet time:

Postcard sent by Otto to ISK colleague in Paris from Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, using the false identity “Paul Bois.”
That a part of this precious, silent evening—completely alone in the house, after a long swim in the river—must be spent with yearning is a shame. I had wanted to write to you, here, and by mail; there is much to tell. But already the door is opened, the room is full, there is talk of matches, salad, tomatoes, bread—interruption. Now everyone has gone to rest and I, myself, very tired, would like so much to be with you. But the contact is gone. Outside a clock strikes eleven. Many loud people move through the streets, the narrow streets, where their steps and voices echo urgently. This town is never quiet; never have I experienced it quiet.

The painful decision for Eva to marry Stern in order to obtain a U.S. visa

While Eva was in Montauban, a decision was made by her ISK colleagues that she should seek an early visa to escape to the United States. Because of Eva's language ability and the competence she had shown with her work in Paris, she was considered the person most capable of working effectively in America to obtain emergency U.S. visas for them and other endangered refugees. Eva's *Pflichtgefühl* (sense of duty) compelled her to agree.

Eva and her ISK colleagues also decided that she would need to marry Stern in order to obtain a U.S. visa. Stern had already obtained a U.S. visa; and if Eva were married to him, she would be eligible for a visa as his wife. In Eva's diary entry on August 11, she described the impact of this decision. She planned to leave this diary with her brother before she departed, and she hoped that Otto would someday read her explanation.

I have a very heavy heart and I wish you were with me—here in this fresh, green silence surrounded by high, old trees. Below, water trickles. Occasionally distant, soft human voices from the sun-cast silhouettes that walk over the narrow wooden bridge in the garden. I've known for a week already that you are alive; and yet I have hardly been able to allow this feeling to calmly, thankfully spread through me. This uncertainty, which goes back two and a half months, is too heavy; I am so inhibited when I have to write you a strange card with a pseudonym. And
too uncertain of what might happen here if you come back and I am no longer here.

The decision to go away with St. [Stern] is hard for me in another unexplainable way. If you were in some area close enough for me to reach you, I could talk through with you calmly the whole complicated situation. I am convinced that my worries would resolve themselves. A consensus is impossible: I must decide alone for the both of us, for the three of us, for work. So at least allow me calmly to explain to you in these pages, which you will read before you see me again, how it appears to me.

Several things are getting mixed up: the formal and the substantive aspects of the matter. Formally: I should certainly get away from here soon for many reasons, including, which should not be omitted, making the departure of those staying behind easier. Judging by the state of things today, that is better to accomplish from there [America] than from here. If this final reason didn’t exist I could relatively calmly and safely stay here in a quiet place with friends and wait for you. But simply living and waiting is not enough for our life—about that we have been in agreement for a long time. Thus the need to get away.

The opportunity to leave, perhaps very soon, offered itself through my connection with St. [Stern]. Without it, my chances don’t look good. It appears I am obligated not to turn down the offer. That means: that I will not wait here for you; that you will come to see me with joy in your heart and you will hear that I am gone, and gone with St. [Stern]—This also means that a number of people, whose opinions I value, will completely misunderstand me, us. Ultimately this means that the possibility for the two of us to live together somewhere peacefully and openly will become enormously complicated.

Eva then expressed her concern that Otto might not fully understand the reasons for her decision to marry Stern:

Must we accept all this? As of yet, I don’t know. Moreover, what I have just enumerated is not quite everything. Connected with it is also the fact that I am not going away with just anyone, but
rather with St. [Stern]. Is it conceivable that this fact, provided I take up the offer, would appear to you in another light? I don't know. I only know that it will very much depend on what you went through during the months of our separation.

I can only wish, fervently wish, that your faith in me will remain unshaken, that you will not have forgotten our conversation from back then before you went away. If something serious were to befall you, you had said that you would be comforted for me since I would, I should, go to St. [Stern]. And I responded to you precisely then, I would stay by you even more firmly, bound with you; you should never forget that you are at home with me, that if things are going poorly for you, my concentration on you constitutes for me an inner necessity, because it is the only possibility for me to participate in your story.

You sensed, Otto, that I was serious with what I said to you. Do you still feel today that nothing has changed? If I were certain about that, if I could give you this certainty, then I would go down the hard road much more easily.

In a brief diary entry on August 12, 1940, Eva described her writing to Otto in her diary the preceding day as a “conversation.” She seemed comforted by it:

Tonight I thought long about our conversation, then slept peacefully. The silent afternoon had already resolved much. The night hours then on the bridge after the difficult conversation left me cheerful and relaxed. I believe we will succeed, within these constraints, in remaining so close to one another. I am very grateful.

Eva’s receipt of her own U.S. visa

Against all odds, Eva was able to obtain her own U.S. visa on September 16, 1940. This was made possible only because of an extraordinary process that had been initiated in the United States by the Jewish Labor Committee and the American Federation of Labor. That process allowed for the expedited issuance of emergency temporary visas to lists
of political refugees whose lives were imminently threatened by Hitler following the German invasion of France in May 1940. Eva’s name was one of the last to be added to these lists.16

In terms of Eva’s immediate personal future, this precious visa meant that she did not need to marry Stern. But she still felt the need to say more to Otto about the fact that she had been willing to marry Stern. In a diary entry on September 1, Eva wrote:

The difficult explanation—hard for you, hard for me—about why I had decided to go away with Stern is now without any particular purpose. I will certainly have to go, but alone and with friends, and not in the close, formally binding, combination with him. That is a good thing, good for us three. It surely would have gone well after the difficult shock from this decision and after clarification and calmness had entered the picture. Certainly not without burden. But also with much good. It is better so. The closeness is preserved. But its borders are discernable in every breath of air, and account for the beauty of our relationship.

St. [Stern] is very close to me, you know it. Spiritually, I feel ever more strongly a deep connection. When I read his words, it is as if finally I had expressed what I feel, as it corresponds to the contents of my feelings. Beautiful were many hours spent together here: Once in the meadow under the peach trees; often in the evenings on the bank of the softly murmuring spring; later on the arched bridge, when at night we looked at stars and the rising moon and the city that had become still. Beautiful was the short path through the night on the day that the first message came from you.

You will later read letters about the in-between station, Montauban; between not yet concluded past, to which one is connected by all fibers, and future, still so hazy that it is hardly possible to grasp it as negative. And you will retroactively experience with us the melancholic beauty of these hours and days.

In this same diary entry on September 1, Eva wanted Otto to understand her feelings about Gaby Cordier, who had worked with Eva and Otto in Paris and, more recently, with Eva in Montauban. Apparently, Gaby
and Otto had experienced a relationship in Paris that had strained Eva’s relationship with Gaby:

My relationship with Gaby makes me happy at times in and of itself, and because I know how deeply you will be pleased about our friendship. There is nothing, no trace of bitterness left behind; I enjoy her way of mastering things. I take part in her life; she takes part in mine too. If you came back today—there would be an open, comfortable relationship between the three of us without tension. Where she is so close to me now, how well I understand what she brought close to you at that time! Perhaps I have just become more advanced and mature during these difficult months.

In the last part of this diary entry, Eva referred to cards she had sent to Otto—cards that she had to send under Yvonne’s name rather than her own:

The cards for you, they weigh on me. I cannot write freely, because I do not know whether anything reaches you or how it reaches you. Here in these pages I am so much more connected to you because I speak to you as if you were with me; in reality it would be much more important that you felt the authenticity of my being connected to you in the little that might reach you today. But until at least one answer arrives from you, I believe that I cannot write any differently. Perhaps you sense my closeness from my handwriting, from the fact that I am there. And my sadness, which I can prove to you no other way.

On September 3, 1940, two days after this entry and shortly before she was to leave for Marseille, Eva received dismaying news. A Red Cross package she had mailed to Otto—addressed to him as “Paul Bois” with Yvonne as sender—was sent back to Yvonne with a small handwritten note in French and German: “Return to Sender.”

In a diary entry on September 3, 1940, Eva wrote:

A mountain of sadness presses on my heart. Nothing has reached you, and you are today in greater uncertainly about my fate than
I am about yours. And if I try to speculate what all the reasons for the “addressee not found” note could be, I become dizzy. Do I really have to leave here, in this uncertainty that tears me apart? I do not know, cannot say anything else to you, only that I am terribly, hopelessly sad.

Eva now had to leave Europe and Otto—to move across an ocean to a strange new continent. It is difficult to imagine how she could survive this emotionally. After four months of separation from Otto, the uncertainty about his fate, and the hope she felt when she first received his postcard, she would need to carry the bitter uncertainty of “addressee not found.” And she would bear the burden of helping to rescue her ISK colleagues who were left behind. Her decision was based on her ISK-driven commitment to the needs of others; it was a decision made with the knowledge that she would likely never again see the man she loved. Of all the choices that Eva had been forced to make between her personal desires and the duty to others, this was the most painful.

Eva left Montauban by train for Marseille on the night of September 11, 1940, and arrived the next morning. She was picked up at the station by her brother Erich, who was then working in Marseille with Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee. After several attempts over the weekend to get her visa at the office of the American consulate, Eva obtained it on Monday, September 16, 1940. In her diary entry on September 15, she described her feelings about her visits to the American consulate in Marseille:

The green branch from the garden of the American consulate—it is beautiful. But everything else is oppressive, difficult. I cannot get used to the thought of going away, cannot get rid
of the feeling that I can do valuable work here and if I do not do it, then I leave you and our friends in the lurch. If it were only about me, I would not go away, certainly not.

The drive along the sea today was wonderfully beautiful; the wide, open view, the single seagull, gray against the gray sky.

In a diary entry on September 28, she looked back and sketched briefly her experience in Marseille:

Sunday [September 15]: in the morning a walk through the harbor area, a marvelous ride in the streetcar along the ocean, a swim in the ocean, a film at night (much too long), interesting, but not moving. . . . Monday, the 16th, I get my visa, Tuesday the Portuguese travel visa. . . . Decide to leave Thursday night, the 19th. A very painful farewell.

In a letter to ISK leader Willi Eichler, Eva later reported in more detail on the perils of escaping from France. She also described the difficulties faced by the two other ISK colleagues who had been granted U.S. visas, Willi Rieloff and Hans Jahn, and the menacing uncertainties faced by those seeking to escape from southern France:

Willi [Rieloff] was still in [French internment] camp, and had to be helped to get out. Kramer [Hans Jahn] and I went immediately to Marseille after a temporary halt of the issuance of visas, and picked up our papers.

That did not work without difficulties. Before one could obtain the visa, one had to furnish proof of being well known (proof of being “famous” or a “Labor Leader”). The Spanish transit visa could be obtained only with great difficulties; one had to get in line at one o’clock in the morning, and yet often one did not get in at 9 a.m.

We were in Marseille without a permit since we had travelled there without permission; often there were razzias [raids] at street corners where simply everyone caught of German background was arrested and put into a camp. . . .

Then there was no Exit Visa; that meant one had to climb across the Pyrenees, and the most recent news of this entry
Part IV. Eva and Otto Forced on Separate Paths

into Spain, after many had done it successfully, was that Jacob [Wachter] and three other friends had sent telegrams from a prison in Spain, and asked for help.18

The ports in Marseille were now under German control. Even though Eva had her U.S. visa and Spanish and Portuguese travel visas, she needed to find a way to escape from France without an exit visa. In a biography of Eva’s brother Erich, Antje Dertinger described the dangers facing Eva:

Like many other exiles, she [Eva] had not attempted to apply for the compulsory exit visa from France. Due to the collaboration between the French authorities and the Germans, even in the unoccupied zone, such an application could easily have led to arrest, internment, or even deportation to Germany. The illegal route over the mountains offered no guarantee of safety either. It remained risky because Franco’s Spain was sympathetic to Hitler, and German agents were on the constant lookout for political refugees at the border. There were Gestapo lists of wanted people at every Spanish border post. Since the Portuguese transit visa was only valid in combination with a Spanish “Entrada” stamp, it was essential for all refugees to pass through a Spanish border post to obtain this important stamp on their papers.19

Eva added a brief diary entry on September 19, 1940. It was the last entry in the diary she had started on May 18, 1940, at the Vel d’Hiv in Paris—the diary written for Otto from whom she had now been separated for over four months. It was the day before she left France on her escape over the Pyrenees. She still did not know if Otto was alive:

Farewell to these pages—and to much more. These pages should tell you, my dearest one, that despite all the external commotion, I have spent these months with you, and they should give you certainty that it will continue to be so. The farewell is dreadfully hard for me because it does not leave me with the certainty that we will see each other again. And yet it must be. Farewell, my Otto!
Eva made this final entry in her diary before using all of the pages in the little book. Twelve blank pages remained. When Eva said “farewell to these pages,” she meant that literally. She did not take this diary with her when she departed from Marseille. She left it behind for Otto, entrusting it to her brother Erich with instructions to send it to Otto if and when his location could be ascertained. Along with the diary, Eva also left a small photograph of herself for Otto. On the back of the photo Eva wrote the words “pour toi” (for you).