Eva and Otto

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Part VIII.

Hope Renewed

The other day I sought an expression of what I feel we, you and I, mean to each other. And I could find no other than to say: we are at home in each other. To be able to say that in all honesty is ultimate happiness to me, and I cannot conceive of any other.

—Eva’s letter to Otto on January 7, 1945

Ottoli, I’ll have to learn many, many things for our child, many of the light, happy things of life, stories, songs, plays. But I don’t think I have to learn love.

—Eva’s letter to Otto on February 4, 1945
31. 1945: Signs of Spring as the War in Europe Grinds to an End

For unknown reasons, Otto’s letters during 1945 are missing from the wartime correspondence that Eva and Otto so carefully retained. But Eva’s letters illuminate their separate paths through the end of the war.

Eva’s first letter of 1945 to Otto, written on January 4, was notably upbeat. She announced that “the mail has been wonderful since yesterday” and listed the dates of the letters she had just received from him. She also had news for Otto about significant new obstacles that would prevent her from accepting Eichler’s proposed new “job” for her in Europe—obstacles that, in her heart, must have lifted her spirit:

I have not heard anything definite yet, but it looks as if we better do not count too much on [the new job in Europe] for the present. There is a general regulation according to which wives of service men serving in the same theater of war may not be employed by a government agency overseas (in the same theater of war). At least that is how I was made to understand—there were, of course, other difficulties in addition to this.

I may be told more about it soon, and will let you know then. But as I see it, we better discount it for the time being. It’s a pity in many an aspect, because I would have loved to be again with Roger (Bertholet) and his wife. But the problems were not negligible either, and probably growing as things look here now. Anyway, there is nothing that anybody can do about it, and so we have to take it.
Eva admitted the personal benefit of this. “As far as our personal interest is concerned, I still think that we have more of a chance to come together again at the earliest possible moment if I stay at home and wait for you.” In noting another factor weighing against her return to Europe at that time, the question of citizenship, Eva stated: “Of course it would be better to have that settled first, and I have a strong impression that that is one of the real difficulties preventing me from going. . . . I still have one more year to go [to be eligible for U.S. citizenship], you know that, and there are no possibilities whatsoever to shorten that period, none at all, because that is the law.”

Regarding Otto’s visit with René Bertholet, Eva said, “I was so glad to see that you had a good time with Roger. I had to smile a little when I saw his OK as far as our personal plans for the future [having children] are concerned, but it is nice all the same. When you see him again, give him my—well, not love, but friendliest regards, and my love to his wife.”

In her January 7 letter, Eva told Otto that Fritz [Friedrich] Adler had sent her a letter that Otto had written to Adler.1 She noted, “He was obviously very pleased, and I was much more than that, deeply moved that you had written him, and how you had written.” She explained:

Among our friends, close and less close, he certainly has the greatest stature and moral personality. I become more and more convinced of that the more I have to do with him. And that’s why I am doubly glad that your letter to him has found such an easy tone of implicit mutual understanding, and that you make so plain that you see the great dangers of our time just where he sees them.

You see, one of the main things he believes in is to speak out what is, and not to fool himself and others, to see all one does and to judge it from the deepest principles we believe in. And you do just that in your letter, you show that you have a sense of proportion, that you don’t overestimate trends and possibilities.

Eva also described her feelings about a book she had just read in which the author spoke of love. She offered her own thoughts about that subject:

When one lives with each other, struggles together, goes together through the wondrous experiences of moments of purest
happiness, and periods of deepest sorrow, only then one’s own person becomes an entity, and the other’s person becomes an entity, only then the entities become one.

The other day I sought for an expression of what I feel we, you and I, mean to each other. And I could find no other than to say: we are at home in each other. To be able to say that in all honesty is ultimate happiness to me, and I cannot conceive of any other.

Eva ended the letter with her description of a recent visit with friends, including a young woman, Nora Nackel, and her six-and-a-half-year-old daughter. She explained that she had agreed to the visit despite the fact that she was “somewhat scared”: “you see I am as yet not sure of my reaction or rather my capacity of controlling my emotion when I am with other people’s children, and I hate to show too much of it.” Having brought the child a gift, “a lovely book with delicate designs, and a story to it, about ‘the elegant elephant,’” Eva happily reported to Otto, “My ‘elephant’ proved to be quite a success, and for the first time since many, many months, I was perfectly at ease with a child, and so was she.”

After the child went to bed, Eva spent a quiet evening talking with Nora and her mother Marianne Welter as well as Marie Juchacz and “another woman . . . about 50 years old, beautiful, tall, looking somewhat like Minna [Specht] or Mary [Saran]. She had been a teacher at one of Marie’s schools for labor social work in Berlin, and is now a professor at the school of social work in Cleveland.” Eva described the evening:

And there we were, sitting around a little tea table, talking, mainly about social work and its problems that the woman from Cleveland sees in all their sharpness, about this country, about many, many things. It’s hard to put into words what made for the atmosphere of the evening. It was probably un ensemble [a combination] of elements. . . . But the fact was that I was as relaxed, and interested, and alive as I had not felt for a long time, and that, had it not been so very late when I got home, I would have written you about it right that evening. Because you know, Ottoli, nothing becomes quite mine before having told you about it, having shared it with you.
Later that same day, Eva wrote to Otto about a concert she had attended. It was “beautiful—so much more alive than the same music over the radio or on records. I especially enjoyed the ‘Kleine Nachtmusik’ which I had never heard before at a concert hall, but which I, we both, know so well and love. You were with me, I saw your face, your expression, at the tender, gracious movements of Mozart.”

In her January 15 letter, Eva praised Otto for writing letters to their friends, noting that they had each called her and “everyone seems to be extremely pleased that you write them, and how you do it—in spite of everything you say, you have a capacity of expressing what is on your mind and heart, and people feel that strongly.” She gently encouraged him to write more to her: “Only you understand that a real letter from you to me, I mean a quiet letter on the ‘longish’ side would be something wonderful.” She then told Otto that a letter he had previously sent had touched her deeply:

> It is almost as if I feel your heart beat, feel the mood you were in when writing the letter, see you, your face that I love so, your hands, those strong expressive hands. . . . Do you remember our first night in Chevreuse when my first gesture of love and confidence was to put my hand in yours?

Eva informed Otto that many men in the shop in which he had worked in New York had left for the army during the past year. That shop made wood patterns for war production. Eva noted that one of Otto’s coworkers had said “flattering things” about the kind of man Otto was, and when his mission in Europe was complete, he should tell his superior officer that a vital war job was “eagerly awaiting” him in New York.

Eva then described an incident that moved her deeply. It involved her work helping impoverished elderly refugees from Europe, many of whom could not speak English and needed financial assistance:

Kate Duncker, you know, one of my old people, was ill and had to be taken to a city hospital on Welfare Island.² I went there to look after her and to make the necessary financial arrangements. I had never been there before—the most terrible misery concentrated on this one island where obviously only the poorest of the poor, those who have nothing, nobody left, go. I talked to
the social investigator, an elderly rather sickish looking colored woman, with a beautiful, warm human face. She took down all the facts, how old they were, what they lived on, when they got here, what they had been doing before, who I was and why I was interested, what my committee [the Emergency Rescue Committee] was and so on.

When we were through with the routine, she told me what and how we would have to pay. And I got up and made ready to go. She gets up too. And instead of the conventional “good-bye,” she looks straight into my face, takes my hand, shakes it with warm frankness, and says in a deep voice which still rings in my ears: “We know what sorrow is, your people and mine. I should not talk about it, better forget it; but with you it is different—you are sympathetic, you must have gone through much—have you been down South? Some things are terrible, over there, where our boys fight—but here too.” I will never forget the expression on her face when she said this first sentence, the sound of her voice, the feel of her bony, strong hand in mine.

In a brief letter on January 20, Eva referred to news of the Russian offensive and again expressed her hope that Germans would finally rise up and stop the war. “Although one better reckons with a long hard fight, it is not entirely unreasonable to think that the explosion inside Germany really could happen any minute now. Oh, how I am waiting for that. Because I am more convinced than ever that the longer it lasts, the worse will be the chances for a reasonable peace, and so my ardent desires for the killing to take an early end are linked with the little hope that is left for the winning of the peace.”

Eva asked Otto in a V-mail message on January 22, “Did you know that Hanni had been deported . . . Terrible!” And in a short letter on January 25, Eva told Otto about “a tragic, pitiful letter from Aunt Rahel, mother’s sister, written shortly after the news of mother’s passing had reached her.” Eva confided, “Oh, Ottoli, I so often feel a guilt because I could not do anything to help mother when things became so terrible. But it was really not possible these last years. You understand, Ottoli, more than anybody else, why I am attached to the work with my ‘old’ people [relief work for refugees]. In a way I try to make up to them who are helpless and alone what I could not do for mother.”
In her January 28 letter, Eva expressed concerns about Gaby:

You never told me whether or not you heard directly from Gaby. I wrote her a long letter to her address in Marseille that John gave me. But that letter of course may take very long to get there. Will you let me know when you hear from her? I so want to know that she is alright, and happy, if possible.

Eva then noted the news on the radio that Beuthen and Kattowitz had been taken and that the industrial region of Upper Silesia seemed to have been given up. “I really can’t see how they can go on for long, the Nazis, I can’t. But then we have thought that it could not go on for quite a while, and somehow or other it always did continue, so we better don’t count too much on an early end even now when so much points to it. But I do wish it were near, with every fiber of me!”

Before closing this letter, Eva told Otto about a concert she would attend in which Lotte Lehmann would be “singing songs of Schubert, Hugo Wolf, Brahms.” Eva noted that Lehmann “reminds me of our mother, partly because mother used to sing all these songs and they are part of my warmest and most harmonious childhood memories; but in a way she also looks a little like mother. . . . You will be with me, Ottoli, as you always are when beauty and sorrow and love touch my heart.”

In her letter of February 3, Eva informed Otto that she had sent a parcel with the things he had requested: olives, chocolate, coffee, nuts and almonds, soup. She teased Otto about sending her clippings without any accompanying word. “I mean, with you I can be honest, and not try to pretend that a ‘clipping letter’ brings exactly as much happiness as a real letter. But now, please, don’t conclude that you should change anything. Do just as it is best for you, and you know that next to your being with me, your letters mean life to me, and when there can be no letters, then a sign that you are safe and well, of recent date and as often as possible, is the next choice.” She closed this letter by describing a difficult visit with a friend and her seven-month-old baby:

When I held the little fellow in my arms, [his mother] busied herself outside the room, and so I did not have to hold back my tears. Chéri, do you really believe I will ever again hold our own child in my arms? I say “again,” and in reality I never even laid
eyes on our child’s face, only on the little bundle in the nurse’s arms. It gives me confidence and strength to know that you believe in it—sometimes I need much strength, much strength.

Eva shared another poignant experience with the child of a friend in her letter of February 4. The little girl, Marianne Mayer, was to stay over with Eva as their parents went out, but shortly before they were to leave, Marianne declared that she did not want to stay:

Not that she did not like me—she did not know about that. But she did not know me yet; maybe she would stay some other time when she had gotten to know me better. . . . I went in to her, she was in the bedroom reading some books, and told her that it was quite alright, we would be together some other time when we knew each other. I don’t know what it was—all of a sudden she warmed up, and said that after all she would like to stay.

So she did, and I don’t think she regretted it. We prepared dinner together—she making a “soufflé-omelette,” I the rest. Then she asked me whether I knew a mystery story, or could make up one; she would begin to tell me one. I was frankly scared, my head was quite empty; finally I remembered some story in Colliers, and believe it or not, I successfully told my mystery story. Then it was the turn for jokes, and then games (find out what object of the room the other has in mind); then for her to pick out what bed she was to sleep in . . . then the bathtub, and finally, tired, sleepy, I kissed her goodnight, tucked warmly in clean sheets.

And I have to come to you, Ottoli, to share it with you, it all, the sweetness and bitterness, the uncertainty, the fear, the feeling of warmth and protection when I see her in your bed. Ottoli, I’ll have to learn many, many things for our child, many of the light, happy things of life, stories, songs, plays. But I don’t think I have to learn love.

In Eva’s short letter of February 8, she reported on a note she had received from her brother Rudi, who was fighting with the Union of South Africa along with other British Commonwealth forces. Eva was corresponding regularly with Rudi by V-mail and sending him packages.
She was worried when she had not heard anything from him for a full month. “It’s just a short note, saying that he was in quite a tough spot, but that now he has plenty of time, is looking forward to books I said I would send—do you think he may have been wounded? He had been in the frontline all the time, last time wrote about his ‘foxhole,’ and how they had tried to cheer it up with the help of our Christmas cigars and coffee. . . . Anyway, it gave me the creeps, and I am only glad that his letter is of so recent a date.” Eva also commented on news she had just heard: “still ‘heavy resistance, bitter fighting’ on all fronts, despite the tremendous advances still a long war ahead. When, when are they going to give up, to break up!”

Eva turned to the beauty of a winter morning in the Bronx in her letter of February 9:

This morning especially I would have wanted you to be here. There had been plenty of snow during the night and when looking out of our bedroom window, it was as in a fairy tale. Not that we did not have much snow before. But this had been, for the first time, the quality of snow clinging to the branches, to the telephone wires, to every little outstanding thing outside, and so nature became alive in a pure way, every line more clear, more distinct, more beautiful. And with that a clear pale blue sky, the smoke out of the factory chimney . . . also clean and white, everything transparent—it was so beautiful I cried a little, and thought of that other Sunday, last year, where you persuaded me to take out my mountain boots, and where off we went, to our Bronx Park, into the loneliness of snow and trees and ourselves—do you remember?

Eva then told Otto, “Nothing new at all about the changing of my job, nothing from here, not a word from Bill [pseudonym for Eichler] or Roger [Bertholet]. I think the whole thing is stalled for the time being, and nobody seems to be able to do anything about it. Maybe it’s just as well.” She ended the letter with an update on the avocado plant. “It is now standing on the window sill, before my desk, and almost as tall as the window. And my big problem is where to put it within a few weeks, when it will have outgrown the window . . . you remember how we wanted something to grow out of the ‘Kern’ [seed], and how patient
you were when I was already about to throw it away, or not to water it anymore? And when all of a sudden it began to live, just at that time you had to go.”

On February 12, Eva reported that “they just announced over the radio that the meeting of the three [Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin at Yalta to discuss the reorganization of postwar Europe] is over, and from what I can gather without having seen their declaration, it does not look so bad, at least as far as their decision is concerned to stick together.” In a brief letter on March 1, Eva commented with caution on more good news about the progress of the war. “Today Krefeld, Trier were taken, and it really does not seem as if anybody were following Goebbels’ and Hitler’s frantic appeal to fight till the death. Oh, if this were only true! . . . As long as they are determined to fight for every ruin, as they did in Aachen, it can still be a terribly long, agonizing fight.”

Signs of spring, longing for an end to the fighting

In her letter of March 4, Eva sent Otto special thanks for a letter in which he “wrote of spring coming, ‘the kind of spring you and I love so much,’ of the ‘wide field with the winter seeds eagerly pushing up,’ of how you miss me ‘so that it hurts.’” She then shared another special experience with music. “We went to the Frick collection on Sunday afternoon where there was a beautiful piano concert of Mozart and Schubert (we must do that once, when you are home again—it is one of the most beautiful accomplishments in New York, these concerts at the Frick collection).”

On March 6, Eva wrote, “Cologne has fallen, and you can imagine how I feel. But still, they keep on fighting and one cannot understand why, how. Sometimes it drives me crazy to think of this senseless, useless waste of human lives and values. Didn’t you think that Eisenhower’s appeal yesterday found the right tone? I think it did, and I wish with all my heart that it will be listened to, and followed.”

In a short note to Otto on March 7, Eva thanked him for his “good, warm, loving, lovely letter” and added:

Glad you had news from Gaby. I did not hear from her yet at all, but I hope she did get my letter that I wrote as soon as it
was possible. No, I am not afraid any longer, you know that.
Give her all my love when you see her, and tell her about us.
And tell her also how very much, how deeply I wish for her the
same happiness as we found it.

On March 10, Eva wrote, “The news these days since the [Allied]
crossing of the Rhine has so electrified me that I just could not sit down
quietly and write you as I so wanted to do.” She promised to write him
a “real letter” tomorrow. The following day, Eva began a longer letter by
telling Otto that she had found it difficult to sit down and write, even
though “all day long I was with you, all my thoughts, all my heart.” She
explained:

It was one of those days where the sadness about things in gen-
eral and particular, keeps so hold of one’s heart that one can do
nothing against it—anyway when one is alone, and the only
person on earth towards whom one could and would let oneself
go for a little while, and sadness and sorrow would melt away,
and one could breathe freely again, is not there; and to put that
burden on him in a letter seems cruel, and one cannot do it be-
cause it can be put on paper only when it is somewhat passed.

So I had to let go, read the “Times” for hours . . . listened
to the radio, reports, and music. And just now I had a good cup
of coffee, and a long look at your picture, and things begin to
be right again.

Eva described the news of the Allied crossing of the Rhine: “the tremen-
dous accomplishment of these few men who made this extraordinary use
of the ten minutes before the bridge was blown, but also the limitations
of the crossing at this particular spot, the hardships of the terrain on the
other side.” She again lamented the fact that the German soldiers still
put up resistance:

If only they would realize that they are being driven to certain
death by this group of gangsters who want to put off defeat only
to put off the day when they will have to pay for the terrible mis-
er they have brought upon the world. . . . Of course, nobody
knows how efficient the terror machine still is. In some article
of today’s papers, I read a sentence to the effect: “A soldier will fight on as long as he knows that fighting means possible death, and stopping to fight means certain death.” And that is probably terribly true, because the sense of self-preservation is certainly the strongest instinct in every human being. But the moment ought not to be far where just this sense of self-preservation should bring them to stop it all.

Eva described for Otto an Emergency Rescue Committee meeting “where the head of the displaced persons Division of UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] who had just returned from Europe addressed the meeting. . . . It was very impressive, but a terribly sad story which he had to tell.” She also referred to “a report from Anne O’Hare McCormick of the NY Times who is back from Europe, and who gave her impressions not in figures or economics or military strategy, but rather in terms of people, especially children, what war and occupation and liberation and war again has done to them, the look on their faces, these old little people of five and six years of age who have seen things that one should not see in a life time.” Eva concluded: “I wish with all my heart that the military defeat of the Nazis were here, that at least killing and destruction on a mass scale stops, that then one can again, probably under the most appalling conditions, but yet again think in terms of construction, of giving help, of making good, of bringing back life.”

As Eva looked to the end of war to bring back life, she wrote to Otto on March 18 about signs of spring emerging in the Bronx Park:

Today is a real spring day, not damp, not sticky, warm, yet so that one looks for sunny spots outside with pleasure. We [Herta and I] went to the Bronx Park, and on very few bushes, one or two trees, the buds began to burst, tiny little leaves were showing. Here and there some spots of fresh green grass, but as a whole everything is still in the process of preparing itself for spring, working from deep inside, but the outside still grey, dry. Yet you feel new life coming everywhere, and I miss you, Otto.

Eva then told Otto about a letter she had received from Bertholet, before Bertholet had seen Otto. The letter “interested me very much, especially
the part in which he tells me of his work with Regina [Kägi] and of his urgent need to participate in something constructive, something helpful, bringing relief for the greatest misery, after these awful years of destruction and war.”

This appears to be the work that Bertholet and Eichler wanted Eva to do with them in Europe, and it presented a profoundly difficult choice about her future: whether she should continue to commit her whole life to assisting others in great need or pursue her personal desire to have a child with Otto. She carefully reminded Otto what was most important to her and again sought his reassurance:

I so understand him [Bertholet], and I would want to help in this if there were any possibility. But it does not seem as if there is for the time being. So it will have to be postponed for a later date, and maybe then we know also what your assignments are going to be, and we can again plan together. That is, in spite of all my urge to help, the thing that is closest to my heart. You don’t blame me for it, Ottoli?

In a letter the following day, Eva thanked Otto for the “wonderful,” “loving,” “generous” letters she recently received from him. She wrote, “Yesterday I told you of the first signs of spring that I noticed in Bronx Park. Today I have your letter in which you describe spring where you are. I know it is the same thing with you: these first, tender beginnings of new life, one wants to live them together.” She happily described the continuing growth of the avocado that “will soon be the tallest in the family.” And she asked, “Did I tell you that once I picked a tiny little leaf plant, like a little rose, from the rock garden in the Bronx Park? I just could not resist, and it was very, very little, not bigger than the tip of my little finger. I planted it, and now there are all around it three or four new little ones, and they all stick happily together. Oh, Ottoli, you don’t mind my telling you about these things that might sound ridiculous in this world of war and terrible happenings. But yet, they are part of our world too, and I feel that you understand in what spirit I write you about them.”

In a brief letter of March 27, Eva told Otto that “this has been a day not only of much work, but of great excitement—the news from the front, Eisenhower’s statement that the [German] Armies on the West Front are broken, and in addition to that for an hour in the late morning
unconfirmed announcement of impending peace—all that made for a rather hectic day.” She went on:

But I just can’t close it without coming to you, without sharing with you what I feel now, when, even to my pessimistic eye, the end of organized Nazi resistance is in sight. With it the end of untold misery and destruction. This is something so great that for a moment it overshadows the tremendous problems of the future—you understand me, don’t you, dearest? Oh, how I wish I were near you now, to live this with you.

Eva’s eye was not pessimistic enough. The ultimate Allied victory was by now a virtual certainty, but the fighting, death, and destruction would continue.

Eva’s sister-in-law, Herta, was ill and facing an operation on her thyroid in New York in early April. Eva took care of her while Herta’s husband Erich worked in Hartford. In a letter on April 1, Eva wrote, “This morning, Easter Sunday, warm, clean spring air, sunshine, tomorrow my birthday, a week from today yours, and heart so full of longing and love for you that sometimes I think I can’t hold it any longer.” She told Otto that Erich was staying with Herta “so it was alright for me to go away, go where we two are closest to each other. And that’s where I am sitting now, after a long walk to all the places we love: in our Botanical garden.”

It is indescribably beautiful, with a shy, tender, clean beauty, full of promise and life. And I miss you more than I can say. My eyes and my heart are still full of this new green that is so fresh that it seems almost golden; full of the wonder of one tree near the river under which I stood for a while; proudly, delicately, it stretches its arms, with innumerable buds, standing erect, like candles. And one of those buds, just one on the whole tree, had just released its treasure to freedom and life of its own: a full bunch of well-formed leaves stretched towards the sun, still a little crumpled, still sticking together, but full of strength and vitality.

And then our rock garden; it is still closed; but I went around it and through the gate, and above it I saw those bright yellow daffodils coming out of the grass; a bush, far away, full of
deep violet blooms, another one overflowing with festive white flowers. And then all the little things... a little bird resting confidently on the side of the path; one, two butterflies, very, very small, but oh so alive; the sun coming through the green veil of the trees; the air so good to breathe, deep, deep. And Ottoli, with every one of these emotions, you are inseparably linked, you and our life together and our love for each other and our love for the wonder of life. You will come back to me soon, Ottoli?

Eva told Otto that she was going with Erich and Marie Juchacz that afternoon “to Carnegie Hall, to the Matthaeus-Passion, conducted by Bruno Walter—Erich and Herta’s gift for my birthday.” And she added, “Tonight, when everybody has gone to bed, I will open your gift which has been on my desk for over a week. I will read your letters, and be with you.”

Otto’s birthday gift to Eva was a book of Rilke’s poems. He also arranged to have Emil bring twelve deep red roses to Eva with a card from Emil that read “Rote Rosen von Otto [red roses from Otto].” Eva thanked Otto for both gifts in a letter of April 3 and told him, “Till late in the night, I read a page here, a page there, and felt close to you as if you were bending your head over the same pages with me.” She also told Otto that the performance of Bach’s Matthäus Passion was “indescribably beautiful”: “For the first time I understood the full tragedy of the story of Christ... Before going to the concert, I got out the Bible and read... with great profit, only wishing to have you near. Oh, and that music—it really does not seem of this earth any longer—the last chorus: ‘Sleep thou sweetly sweetly sleep. Rest, thou weary tortured body.’ It sweeps you away, away to all those you love, and who could not stay with you—We must hear it together when you are home again.”

After taking Herta to the hospital on April 4, Eva told Otto in a letter that day, “I don’t like hospitals, never did, and especially not now.” She thanked Otto for his recent letters and told him how pleased she was that Otto had seen Kramer (the ISK’s pseudonym for Hans Jahn) and that he had sent her greetings. She sent Otto regards from a friend who was having her twenty-fifth birthday that day and noted, “Do you realize that was my age when we met, and that it is exactly ten years ago
that that happened? What tremendously rich ten years you have given me!” She rued the fact that the war still raged. “It’s going at tremendous speed, but why, why, are so many still fighting? To prolong this agony is really criminal.”

In her letter to Otto on his birthday, April 8, Eva expressed her love and hope for their future together:

You must feel how intensely I am with you since this day began, how all my capacity to love, and all my thoughts and feelings are concentrated on and in you, how I wish I could be with you, were it only for a moment, just hold your face in my two hands. . . . Let us hope, and have confidence in our future together, and in the meantime keep our chins up, and give our best to each other, and to the things we believe in.

And above all, keep well, my dearest, bleib mir gesund [stay healthy for me], as mother used to say, our mother who loved you so. This morning I looked at both their pictures, your mother’s and mine. Your mother would also have loved me Ottoli, had she known me, her eyes seem to tell me that. You have her eyes . . . you know, those honest, straightforward, good eyes that I love so.

Eva shared her dismay about the war:

The war goes on. It is amazing on the one side, the progress that is being made everywhere, and the relatively ineffective resistance. But on the other hand it is terribly depressing that it has to go on that way, that piece by piece has to be gotten by fighting, that there is not enough strength left to get any substantial help from within, other than passivity. . . .

I just talked about it with some friends . . . and we all agree that even with the most pessimistic outlook none of us had thought this could have happened. We obviously, all of us, have greatly underrated the strength of this total terror machine, and also the degree of fatigue and hopelessness that must pervade those who wish it were over but have no strength left to do something about it.
Eva closed this letter with many questions for Otto about friends in Europe, including whether he had heard from Gaby again. She attached to the letter a petal “from one of the roses that I got from you for my birthday.”

In an April 10 letter Eva noted, “Hannover taken, Wien [Vienna] almost, Bremen approached—how long can it still last?”

The death of Roosevelt and the end of war in sight

On April 12, 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt died at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia. This was also the anniversary of the death of Eva’s first child. In a letter to Otto on April 12, 1945, Eva wrote:

What I would give not to be alone tonight! The terrible shock of Roosevelt’s death; the war drawing to its end; and this night, the night of April 12 to April 13, in which a year ago our deepest hope was fulfilled and, almost before we had realized it, finally taken away. There is not proportion between these three things, and yet every one of them is scarcely bearable.

I don’t know; perhaps I’m just an egocentric, petty woman who cannot forget her small sorrows at a time when the world is shaking. I don’t want to be that; and yet, the agony of the thing that happened to us a year ago is as burning and alive as if it had happened yesterday. And that I don’t want to unburden it to anybody, makes it harder yet. That is the reason, Ottoli, why I talk to you about it. Just tell you what you know anyhow. Get comfort from you, compassion and understanding. My heart, my soul need that sometimes, because they are so hurt, and alone.

Roosevelt—I think he was a good man in addition to being great, and that is why so many of us will sense a feeling of personal loss. For him the end may have been wonderful: to have accomplished so much, to have given himself so entirely, to be sure that he has done his share, that the end of the killing is near—he could very quietly close his eyes and go to rest. But for us, for all the people, for the solution of the problems to come—I don’t see yet how the loss can be compensated.
And where may you be this night, Otto? Perhaps you are so busy that it passes without letting you come to yourself. But if you have time now, I know you too will think back, and you will think of me. Then you must know that you are not alone this night, that I am with you with my thoughts and heart. My heart, full of sorrow, but also full of deep grateful love. And of good will. Do you feel that, my Ottoli? Let me rest with you, let’s both be again at home in each other.

In a short letter on April 14, Eva noted that “it cannot be long now before the end of the war will be declared—what are we going to feel far from each other at that moment, Otto, my dearest?” She told Otto, “I did not write you yesterday, but you know that I lived every moment of that day a year ago, with you, and it hurt very much to be so alone. But I stood it, somehow, and life goes on.”

News about the war was the focus of Eva’s brief letter on April 18:

This terrible report about Buchenwald which I enclose made me sick day and night; and when I think of all these things, I just don’t know how everything is going to go on. I must talk more about it some other day, but I want you to get the report as soon as possible. Then tonight the news that Ernie Pyle was killed in action. And I am wondering why it is that the best ones have to go. And late tonight, reports on the radio about stiffening resistance everywhere—can you explain to me how that is possible? I give up to understand.

In her letter of April 20, Eva wrote that “they announced the capture of Hoyerswerda” where Otto had been held in the Nazi prisoner-of-war camp in 1940. She told Otto, “My thoughts are with you more than ever. How long is it to last still? And why, why do they fight on?”

She also described an exhibition she had attended the night before “in memory of the fighters and victims of the Ghetto—you remember, it was two years ago that they opened their desperate fight in Warsaw. Horrible pictures which keep you awake all night, bring despair, and shame, to your heart.” And she asked, “How will we all ever be able to atone for this that we could not prevent from happening?” Eva praised those who presented the exhibition, including “a moving address by La
Guardia. . . . But the pictures—they haunt you, together with these Buchenwald reports. . . . Tell me Ottoli, how is it possible that human beings like you and me—they were children not so long ago—could lose themselves in such abject depths?”

In Eva’s letter of April 22, she reported that she read the morning paper. “It makes me sick and almost despairing of mankind”:

Of course we knew that there were concentration camps in Germany with unprecedented horror and cruelty. But never before has the story been told with all its details and on this mass scale, as it is now. All the reports sound only too true, and the delegation of Congressmen and publishers that has been invited to visit these camps, by Eisenhower, is another indication that there is no exaggeration, and that it is just the truth that is being told, and brought home.

Eva then observed something missing from these reports that she found deeply disturbing:

In all these reports, nobody or scarcely anybody, says that many of these camps, especially Buchenwald, had been organized by the Nazis against their political enemies from within. . . . Not that this would change the atrocity of these deeds; but the fact that some Germans suffered with them together with the others is another proof that there were decent human beings in Germany who tried to do something against these criminals. And their tragedy, our tragedy, is that they were unsuccessful in their attempts, and that these attempts are meeting with a dead silence from the civilized world.

The reporters seem to be convinced that the large part of the German population did not know what happened in those camps. . . . That they are being shown now, without sparing them, is, I think, the only right thing to do. Because they have to realize what has been done in their name in order to understand the feelings of the world against them. But I wish the full story would be told, to them and to the world, and credit given where it is deserved.
Eva described the current fighting in the streets of Berlin. She also observed that “the Ruhr pocket was finished off rather quickly. But there one had the impression that the civilian population and parts of the Army were sick and tired of this murderous senseless fighting, and did something about it. While at other spots the SS terror still holds them all in their grip. Oh, how I wish it were over, over once and for all!”

Eva noted that her brother John, on his way back to his base, “saw Gaby for several hours in Paris, and as happy as their reunion was, he says it was very hard because their feelings towards each other are still so very strong.” She asked Otto again,

Did you hear from her [Gaby] again? She is in Lyons now, says John, working at a newspaper, and I am afraid she might not have gotten my letter that I had sent many months ago to her Marseille address. Anyway, I have not heard from her directly yet, and I wish I would. Tell her, when you write or meet her that I wrote her a long letter, and that I'll write again as soon as I get a good address, and that I hope in the meantime to hear from her, and that she may be well.

Eva shared some important news with Otto in her letter of April 23:

I must tell you what happened today. On my way to the office, in the subway, I was, as usual, reading the “Times.” On page 5 another of those horrible accounts about Buchenwald which I begin to read. . . . And then, at the end of the second paragraph, the news that electrifies me, that Kautsky’s brother [Benedikt Kautsky] is alive. . . . I was thrilled as I had not been for a long time. . . .

It is great on so many accounts: first I knew how Kautsky was worried about him, did not believe him alive anymore. He was last supposed to be in Oswiecim (Auschwitz), and everybody knew that most of the prisoners were killed there. When months after the liberation of O. [Auschwitz] by the Russians no word of or about him had come out, Kautsky gave up hope. And now this news.
But on a more general ground: he is the first leading Austrian or German Anti-Nazi who is thus found alive—and is it too daring to hope that he will not be the only one? And then also: even though many of them will have perished, at least he is there who was with them, and who can testify as to their presence, to their sacrifice. But what this man must have gone through in the years from 1938: Dachau, Oswiecim, Buchenwald—it is terrible beyond imagination.\(^5\)

Otto’s assignments with the OSS at this time are unclear; only sketchy information can be pieced together. A travel order to Otto dated April 24, 1945, directed him “to proceed for a period of approximately seven (7) days to Brussels, Antwerp and Paris, for the purpose of carrying out the instructions of the Commanding Officer.” Another travel order directed him “to proceed on or about 30 April 1945 from their present station to London, England, reporting upon arrival to the Commanding Officer, Hq & Hq Dot, O of Strategic Services, for station and duty.” His specific assignments are not described. Otto also traveled with his commanding officer into Germany as the war was coming to an end. As Otto later recalled, “In the meantime, our troops had crossed the Rhine. Soon after that, I went with my C.O. [Commanding Officer] on a special trip to Aachen, Köln [Cologne], and Godesberg. We drove our jeep through the rubble of those towns—the destruction was horrendous.”\(^6\)

In a brief letter on April 28, Eva told Otto that Erna Blencke was pleased to get a letter from him “and found it very interesting, also what you told her of your trip.” Eva wrote:

You can imagine that I am, we all are, eager to hear more about it—the destruction seems to be terrible. . . . Did any friends survive? The news of the military development since yesterday is amazing—the junction which of course everybody had expected, but yet, when it was officially announced, one quite realized the bigness of it. The dash into Austria, the capture of Augsburg, the revolt in München [Munich], the surrender of Dittmar.

On May 1, Eva wrote, “I had thought that today would be peace day. That does not seem to be so. But it surely can’t last any longer,
and this total disintegration must be followed, it seems to me, by total collapse. Did you hear more about what happened in Munich?” She then returned to her most pressing personal questions: “And when am I going to hear from you? When will there again be a common future, a planning together for us? I am very eagerly waiting for your letter, for what decisions the next days and weeks will bring.”

VE Day

In a V-mail message on May 2, Eva wrote, “Dearest, this is just a note. The news these days—Mussolini killed, Hitler dead, Berlin fallen, peace with Himmler or fight goes on, Italy surrendered—it is almost too much to remain quite sane. And I miss you.”

On May 7, 1945, a day earlier than the official VE Day, Eva marked the Allied victory in Europe by writing to Otto:

That we cannot live these hours together is something that is and will remain heavy on my heart. But I know we are so one in feeling and reacting that our thoughts most likely have been going along the same lines—an immensely heavy load off one’s chest that at least in one part of the world the killing is over. That the horrors of the concentration camps are of the past, really and irrevocably, that the gates and the barbed wire have opened to those most courageous fighters; and that those who perpetrated these crimes will not go unpunished, that at least some of the worst of them have already disappeared, don’t breathe any longer the same air as we do.

But also the tremendous tasks ahead, and the ever-mounting difficulties that are opposed to a lasting peace based on a mutual confidence, and on a solution to the economic problems on an international scale. But I am getting very impatient, quite upset as a matter of fact, with all those who say resignedly that we are heading towards the next world war. Of course I know all the problems, but if only part of human endurance, and suffering, and capacity to go beyond oneself, would be employed towards creating peace rather than perfecting war, I think it could be done. And anyway one has no right to give up—there would
be no sense in living if it really were that hopeless. I know that you think, you feel the same way, and I know I love you more than anything else in the world.

This was my VE Day: it began with your wonderful, loving letter . . . with the long quotation of Rilke with which I largely agree. . . . When I got off the subway, electricity was in the air, paper flying from all the windows, people gathering in the streets, a man saying: “This seems to be it alright; but my boy is in the Pacific, so what does it mean to me?” And I rushing to the office . . . someone had just heard it over the radio, it was official, they had surrendered. One has an urgent need to communicate with others who feel as you do in such moments. . . . I tried to telephone one or the other of our friends: Estrin, Marie, Hans, Erna—But no line available.

So off we went to Times Square. People were coming, streaming in from everywhere. . . . Their faces were glowing with an inner light. With the exception of some, here and there an older woman, with tears in her eyes, and strain all over—and you could see that her boy won’t come back.

When we came back to the office, there was a little let-down about the announcement not being official although the surrender was official—but now they just announce that Pres. Truman, Churchill and Stalin will make the official announcement simultaneously tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

So now everything is clear, and I am home, listening to the radio, being very much alone, but really not alone because you fill my heart, you are so present, I am proud of you, and if you would walk in right now, my love could not be greater than it is now.

Eva told Otto that she would “just drop a line” to her brothers John and Rudi: “how I wish for them that this means going home for good!” And she returned to her pressing question: “What it will mean for you and me, I don’t dare to guess; but I do hope that the next days or weeks will bring me an answer.” Ending the letter, she wrote:

Dearest, this is a great day, a day of the deepest importance, a day which throws into man’s lap opportunities and a challenge
as had not been given him for very, very long. Although I realize only too well that the individual’s effort is less than a grain of sand—you have given so generously of your best. And I am proud of you. My deepest wish is for the times to come now that we may be able to throw our bit in together, in unison, and that our common life may have a continuation, may go on after us. I love you.