

You Go to England. An Adventure! We Will Follow.

He wears the label that his parents make
around his neck. Descends the steps at Croydon.
A note plays onwards, a song sings out

She smiles to be with her foster father
as if on a simple walk
sheds tears to part from her foster father
he leaves her at school in a puddle of tears

Karen doesn't find out she is Jewish
till she's at college and a relative tells her.
Her mother and aunt rescued
by train from Prague in 1939

Lise gives a box of biscuits from Vienna
to her foster mother, and drinks
her first cup of tea in England. Surprise –
it's served with milk. *I like it*, she says.

A note plays onwards, a song sings out.
Old Mr Kollisch won't recall when he is beaten up
by a group of Hitler Youth – including his friend.
He is thirteen then. He won't refute it either.

She sees the feathers flying from the duvets
ripped from their beds by stormtroopers.
We must save her, whispers her mother,
and on the train the bread is white, perhaps
poisoned? *Don't let the little kids eat it.*

Father dresses him in lederhosen and *you know*
the hat. *You represent Vienna* – he says
and waves him off. His first day in his East End
school in such clothes: the worst!

Alone on a train, frozen emotions,
what should she feel? It is December and so
cold, she doesn't take her coat off for two weeks.

Always looking forward, uncomplaining.

In Glasgow – black suits, bowler hats, funeral
appearance. Loads of men in this get up.

The railtrack runs in a straight line from
the Seder table, parting the Red Sea.

He sees the synagogue burn on Kristallnacht
his father is arrested and taken to Dachau
he does not talk about his experience.

A note plays onwards, a song sings out.
Nazi soldiers at the Dutch border make
a thorough search of her suitcase – placing
in full view her unmentionables, she is fourteen.

Karl has to wake up very early to milk the cows
where he is placed at Favel's farm. He loves
the cream that rises to the top of the bucket.

Margarete corresponds with Einstein.
She writes him a poem, he keeps it.

When the train stops in Holland she sees people
standing along the platform. They are smiling!
They give the children oranges. Oranges!

A song sings out, a note plays onwards.
We don't hire Jews! shouts the boss in Leeds
as he chases Millie from the sewing factory.

A sister and two brothers on the train,
one boy's arm is broken, in a cast.
The Nazis say he's smuggling, take an X-ray—
find nothing. They stamp his cast with swastikas.

Inge is twelve. She is with her friend.
I want the top bunk, says Inge.
I want the top bunk! says her friend.
Oh let's just sleep together!

Her mother comes to London, remembers
the dentures on the railing of the row house

where she's to live with her new family.

For eight years he doesn't know –
are his parents dead or alive? His father still
has the postcard he sent him
in his pocket when they meet again.

Black suits, bowler hats, bloom where
you're planted. Babies in hammocks on the train
Susie sits with nine other girls. No one speaks.

Ladies give them hot chocolate as the train
crosses the Dutch border. She's so cold
she doesn't take her coat off for two weeks.

Ilse is eight, and shows no sign of emotion
hands by sides, put on a train to England.

He loves to sit beside his foster mother
singing hymns in church. *You don't have to kneel*
Otto, she says. *I know that much— we'll help you*
remember who you are.

Always looking forward, uncomplaining.
Haniš and Karel's doctor father
cannot bear to say goodbye. In England
there is MUD. They cut hay, with a scythe.

Crying and crying, this child is the only
one left at Liverpool Street Station.
Black suits, bowler hats, a song,
a puddle of tears. Who makes buttons?

The train's arrived. We're here, to here
we now belong. *Kann es wahr sein?*
Bring the buttons button-cousin, do us up.

*A poem constructed by Sophie Herxheimer
from words offered by first and second generation kindertransportees
at a workshop in London on May 14th 2024*