

The False Sense of Peace

All will be well. All will be well. All manner of things will be well.

—JULIAN OF NORWICH, FOURTEENTH CENTURY

AS EARLY AS 1937 Ernst had volunteered to enroll in the reserve army, which throws a light on the strength of his commitment to National Socialist policies; Lilo had encouraged the decision, partly for patriotic reasons, but she was aware, too, that joining the army reserve would also prop up their finances. Despite the memories of the carnage of the First World War, including his own father's wretched death, Ernst was delighted to be able at last to wear the uniform of the German army. He felt that they had learned to put personal wishes aside, for behind everything stands Germany, and this thought should energize them. He had always been a doer. The meaning of life, as he frequently expressed it, was "in work, in struggle, in commitment."¹ In National Socialist Germany this meant commitment to the armed forces.

Ernst was called up for active service in July 1939. From now on his school duties were at an end, but while he was still in training he was able to get home on leave fairly often. He loved flicking through the photo album Lilo had sent. He was disappointed that he couldn't make it for her birthday on August 4, 1939, but was glad to turn up as the proud father at Heinke's baptism shortly afterwards:

1. Ernst to Lilo, February 18, 1937.

THE FALSE SENSE OF PEACE

My little one!

As so often things have turned out differently from what we'd planned. I was on guard duty on Sunday and couldn't leave the barracks. Today was the oath-taking ceremony. I did a swap with a comrade who was on duty today and this gives me time to write to you without any distractions and to congratulate you on your birthday.

So I wish you most heartily all strength and good health for the year ahead. I will continue to stand beside you as the loyal comrade in your life and help you as you help me. When one is in the army one learns how little loyalty to one's partner tends to mean. But you can rely on me. It is sad that I can't be with you on the fourth. But I still think I can be with you for a quiet hour on the Saturday.

Father will, I'm sure, be setting up the birthday table for you. Please excuse it if the presents don't all arrive at the same time. In this parcel are two lanterns for the occasion. Let's hope we can still experience a nice evening amidst your flickering candles. I'm so pleased at the piles of sweet things that will be sure to be there. I know your weakness for such delicacies.

I'm just off the telephone. The dress is being dyed blue, and I'll bring it with me on Saturday.

Should I bring a scarf or buttons or anything else? I fear it's too late for that. My little one, if all else fails, then take the half-past-one car and we'll buy something together. You should look your best for the baptism [of Heinke]. Can you bring me 10 Mark? As I said, I'd love it if you could come on Saturday. But with all the preparations you may not make it. Will you be with the Schlotfeldts and Mother for lunch? It's all arranged with the pastor, isn't it? All my love, Ernst.²

Hans, Ernst's brother, and Hans-Dieter, Lilo's brother, were also conscripted. Ernst's initial officer training took place in nearby Heide, then in Lübeck. He couldn't be bothered with all the military drills: standing to attention, waiting for an order, breaking into a run, and being ordered about. It left no time at all for reflection. Ernst was critical, too, of some of his fellows, who seemed more interested in drink and women than anything else. He was part of a nation actively preparing for war, but like most Germans assumed that, as had been the case with the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland, France and Britain would not see it in their interests to challenge the Reich. It would not come to war. Hitler's masterly diplomacy, backed by Germany's military strength, would win out again. In April Britain, France,

2. Ernst to Lilo, August 2, 1939.

and Russia had agreed to support Poland if it were invaded, but the nonaggression pact with Stalin on August 23, 1939, which envisaged the partition of Poland between the Reich and Russia, bolstered the conviction that the Western powers would not intervene. Ernst, writing from his army training in Heide, was supremely confident that it would not come to war, though Poland would *seinen Lohn haben* (get what it deserved).³

Lilo was more worried, and sensed by the beginning of September 1939 that things were moving to a crisis. She had no radio of her own yet, but after hearing the Führer's speech she concluded, "Now things will take their course." She could only pray and hope for the best as far as Ernst was concerned. In his absence she found herself doing jobs she had never tackled before—taking an axe, for example, to knock the stopper out of the water cask that needed cleaning. She was distressed to see how badly the school at Wrohm was faring under its replacement teacher. She and Ernst planned various visits on leave from Lübeck and then in 1940 from Potsdam.⁴

Like many, probably most Germans Lilo had been thrilled by Hitler's foreign policy successes, but was anything but happy at the outbreak of war. She saw everything now with the eyes of a mother and a wife. The declaration of war by France and England immediately after the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, was a cruel shock. Even at this early date Lilo began to contemplate the possibility that she might have to live on without Ernst. War, she knew, would cost the country millions of Reichsmark, and although the German losses in Poland of ten thousand men were minor compared with those of the Poles, it still made her shudder. The Führer's speech had given her no comfort because she was conscious of the heavy sacrifices ahead.⁵ Before the end of the month, however, the brave resistance of Poland had come to an end, overrun in a highly mobile *Blitzkrieg* by the Reich's two thousand tanks and its overwhelming air power. The Russian army, meanwhile, surged into eastern Poland.

In November she took the train for a surprise visit to Spantekow in Pomerania for her father's birthday, which proved a huge success.⁶ Ernst had advised her against it, not only thinking of her pregnancy, but also making dark hints about military movements that might hinder her re-

3. Ernst to Lilo, August 23, 1939.

4. Lilo to Ernst, September 1, 1939; September 4, 1939.

5. Lilo to Ernst, October 8, 1939.

6. Lilo to Ernst, November 5, 1939.

turn. However he was full of enthusiasm and admiration for her grit in undertaking the journey.⁷ Soon they were eagerly planning her travel to Lübeck over the weekend, very much a young couple in love. She described to him her “golden” little toddler, clapping her hands in her blue dress while her mother sang for her. She wished Ernst were there to see it.

He wrote to Lilo on 30 November, the day Soviet troops marched into Finland, from “Adolf’s Heights,” a training camp near Münster. It was bucketing down rain, but after his experiences in the Labor Service, the Land Year, and the Hitler Youth expeditions he had led, nothing rattled Ernst. The mood of his comrades, he enthused, was excellent.⁸ No wonder. Germany seemed to be carrying everything before it. Their mood would have been even better had they known that the stubborn resistance of the Finns would vitiate the poorly planned Russian campaign.

After the blitzkrieg in Poland there were no substantial military actions on the ground in the west despite the overwhelming predominance of Allied forces over the German ones at the time. A so-called phony war dragged on, Lilo found the uncertainty hard to take:

*This weird stalemate will give way soon to decisive action. My Ernst, what does fate hold for us? On the great scale of things the fate of individuals is insignificant, but for that individual a whole world of peace and happiness can collapse and the next moment suffering and distress take over. This struggle against England is for both nations a life and death affair, and will cost us endless sacrifices.*⁹

Ernst’s response was to ask why she was so down in the mouth, almost fatalistic. One had to trust in God, and in the *hohe Güter* (higher values). She should face the future with confidence for his sake, for that of the children, and for that of the nation. These tensions between the wife at home and the husband having to gear up psychologically for war were widespread and were soon to become a concern of the Gestapo.¹⁰ Ernst

7. Ernst to Lilo, October 30, 1939; an unusual feature of this letter is that Ernst admits to being exhausted, after vigorous training and long rides on his horse, Prince, through the countryside. He loved horseback riding and waxed lyrical about the autumn colors of the woods he rode through; Ernst to Lilo, November 7, 1939; at times, though, he almost froze to death during winter rides on his horse, his bones feeling as though they would snap when he dismounted; Ernst to Lilo, February 19, 1940.

8. Ernst to Lilo, November 30, 1939.

9. Lilo to Ernst, November 5, 1939.

10. Ernst to Lilo, January 9, 1940; cf. Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 543.

had a traditional concept of manly virtues: "We men belong at the Front."¹¹ There is no doubt, however, that he longed for the war to end quickly so he could be back with his beloved wife and his children. He had sensitivity and empathy for Lilo and could not hear enough about his little daughter.

As Advent got underway in 1939, Lilo found it difficult to get into an anticipatory mood. The outbreak of war had brought with it such uncertainty about the future. "War is the worst thing ever on earth." So many men would never return. She felt an inner sadness, and was unsure if Ernst would make it home for Christmas. It would be easier for him to cope with the separation, anyway, because of the company of others in training like him.¹² She kept herself busy knitting socks for little Heinke, who had a heavy cold, choking on the mucus, but Lilo was relieved when Dr. Meier assured her it was not whooping cough, and that Heinke's general health was excellent. "The news of the death of a Sp[antekow] schoolmate in Poland has been preying on me. Wrohm, too, has a casualty, the son of Sobronitzky. Klausen (Mühle) lies in a Berlin field hospital with a fracture in his thigh, after ten days as a prisoner. Frahm has been discharged, as has Erwin, because of stomach ulcers."¹³ The casualties from the Polish campaign were very much on her mind. To her great relief, however, Ernst did get leave and they could celebrate Christmas together. She wrote him, back in training camp again, on New Year's Eve, their last happy evening together vivid in her mind:

My beloved Ernst,

Now the old year is fading. New Year's Eve always has a quite special memory for me: our engagement! You dear, good Ernst, I had never thought it could be so wonderful to be your wife. I know that there are so few men who are what you are. I am so proud of you, and infinitely grateful for the wealth and the love which have come into my life through you. Everything I have become in the years of our marriage I owe to you. It is a great, infinite happiness to be able to go through life at your side. I often ask myself, how have I deserved such a marvelous husband? It is an unmerited happiness and therefore I am so often fearful for our future, for your life. God has brought us together, and blessed our marriage, has gifted us Heinkele and a second new life. I look forward to the New Year with a warm

11. Ernst to Lilo, May 29, 1940.

12. Lilo to Ernst, December 1, 1939.

13. Lilo to Ernst, September 25, 1939.

*heart and pray to God to return you safely to me and the children.
So I wanted to write to you today, to listen to Goebbels, and then
head off to bed. . . .*¹⁴

Letters and parcels flowed between them almost every second day.

By early 1940 she was heavily pregnant with her second child. At times, especially when Heinke was sick, she found it difficult to cope; Ernst's letters were brimful of love; he was deeply concerned that she shouldn't be carrying anything heavy. She should contact the doctor the moment she felt concerned. He hoped very much to be there for the birth. They telephoned one another several times, and in these days a telephone call was still very much an event.¹⁵

Her second child, Hartmut, was born on March 10, 1940, but Ernst was unable to get leave to be with her. However a few days later he did manage it, to their great relief and joy.¹⁶ It was very late at night when he arrived. Lilo had already fallen asleep.

*Then suddenly there was Ernst standing at the foot of the bed. 'Lilo,' he enquired quietly. He had come in the back door, and already made himself comfortable and I hadn't noticed a thing. And then he knelt down beside my bed and said, 'Lilo, I am so happy!' It was the high point of our lives, full of happiness and deep thankfulness. Indeed it was the high point of our marriage.*¹⁷

Things began to go downhill after that, Lilo reflected much later.

For all her anxieties, though, she knew that in the village her task was to start building their family life together, to care for the new baby, to support Ernst as he helped to make Germany strong, and to welcome him back home again once the dust had settled as her husband, the father of her children, the popular schoolteacher in Wrohm. So she got on with her homemaking.

Then, after the eight-month break, the so-called phony war came to an end with the German invasion of Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France on May 10. Another quite extraordinary and speedy victory was the result. Hitler strode through Paris on June 23, and by June 25 the

14. Lilo to Ernst, December 31, 1939.

15. Ernst to Lilo, March 6, 1940.

16. Ernst, to Lilo, March 14, 1940.

17. Lilo to Eva Falkemeier, April 24, 1946; Eva was the wife of one of Ernst's comrades; he had stayed with them, and Eva was to become a lifelong friend of Lilo's after the war.

armistice was signed. Ernst experienced these almost incredible victories in the West in the officer training camp in Potsdam, near Berlin. He had moved there after his initial period in Lübeck. His letters to Lilo from Potsdam, from the end of May until August 1940 paint a vivid picture of the German army's training of its conscripted officers. At twenty-eight, Ernst was older than many of those taking the course, and was far more conscientious than most. The mix of practical and theoretical instruction kept him on the go, day and night. Film shows and sports, such as handball games, offered some relaxation.

It was midsummer and the weather was warm, their rooms at times stiflingly hot. He was highly impressed, though, with the accommodation: four men to a room; in his there was someone from Munich, from Berlin, from the Rhineland, and himself from Schleswig-Holstein. The field beds were of superior quality, with springs and mattresses; each boasted a bedside table, a washbasin with mirrors, and a shelf for toiletry; he appreciated the excellent showers, hot and cold. There were four large cupboards in the workroom, four writing desks, a cupboard for their boots, and a waste paper basket. The rooms were cleaned for them. He found the food somewhat uninspired, though: little in the way of vegetables or fruit; he mentions noodles, and potato soup without meat. Lilo, though, was quick to supplement this with parcels of goodies from Wrohm.

The daily timetable ran as follows:

6:30–11:00 a.m. training outdoors

11:30 a.m. lunch, followed by some time for a siesta, at least in theory

2:00–6:30 p.m. theoretical instruction

7:00 p.m. meal

Asked by Lilo if he was enjoying his time at the camp, he said he would infinitely prefer either being at Wrohm with his wife and children and at his teaching, or at the Front, so he could help to *den Feind schlagen* (defeat the enemy), but he found positive sides to the experience, too. He had learnt a lot, and had developed the leadership skills he had already gained in the *Landjahr* program and in his work with the Hitler Youth. The instructors were good on the whole. They could be pretty free with criticism and abuse, however, if one messed up.¹⁸

18. Ernst to Lilo, July 4, 1940.

Most of his young comrades capitalized on any free time to swarm into Berlin and tried their luck with the women there; he saw his time in Potsdam much more conscientiously as a patriotic duty. He did enjoy the manly activities; it appealed to the teenager in him, *einer jugendhaften Ecke in meiner Seele* (a youthful “nook” in my soul); as a young guy he had been stirred by Karl May’s sagas set in the Wild West.¹⁹ He was reminded of them at times, not least during the cross-country horse riding. His heart was always back in Wrohm, though.²⁰ Virtually every letter of his talks about the children; he kissed them affectionately in his imagination; he was forever sending them presents and children’s postcards.

There was too much of the usual military spit and polish for him at Potsdam. More useful were the various theoretical sessions and those on draftsmanship. In the evenings, apart from occasional sentry duties, he was kept busy studying material from the day’s classes and preparing himself for the next day. He hardly had time to hear the radio news, and rather resented the lack of time for reflection. He was, as he wrote to Lilo, an idealist, someone who liked to distance himself from outward things. “It’s a pity. I would like to go down into the depths of the soul and offer you lovingly the modest sacrifice of a great and strong manly love. But never mind, dearest, the war will soon be over.”²¹ One is struck by his rather overblown language, and by his strong sense of duty.

The summer of 1940 was, of course, a time of supreme confidence in Germany. France had been conquered, and Ernst predicted that England would feel the full force of the Luftwaffe by early July. The Britons wouldn’t know what had hit them.²² The letters constantly remind us, though, that these two young people are first and foremost lovers. Ernst’s greatest delight came from reading her letters, the longer the better, and he was frustrated that he found so little time to write back to her.²³ Neither of them tired of reiterating the depth and exclusivity of their love for each other. “I cannot go to sleep without thinking of you. Any moment of freedom from study leads my thoughts to you, beloved Lilo,” he wrote from Potsdam. “No man

19. Ernst to Lilo, June 22, 1940; novels by Karl May (1842–1912), set in the Wild West and featuring the characters of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, were very popular with young German boys.

20. Ernst to Lilo, August 4, 1940.

21. Ernst to Lilo, June 12, 1940.

22. Ernst to Lilo, June 18, 1940; June 22, 1940: . . . *das den Briten Hören und Sehen vergeht*.

23. Ernst to Lilo, May 21, 1940; May 26, 1940.

could love a woman more warmly and inwardly than I do.” One superlative follows another as they tried to do justice to their feelings.²⁴

“I am unspeakably happy,” he wrote: “I so long for you.” The letter he had just received from her had triggered off a wave of joy. “My beloved, you know how passionately I love you. I could not go on without your letters, without knowing with utter certainty that this woman loves me in life and death, for better or worse.” When he is away from Lilo, he takes her heart along with him, and can feel it beating. “I am full of yearning and need love so much. . . . Deep love has to find fulfilment, oneness.”²⁵

They were passionately committed to each other, and for Ernst this meant strict monogamy. Though the sexual urge often threatened to overpower him, his deep longing for Lilo enabled him to resist it. He had nothing but contempt for those who sought *billige Entladung* (cheap release) from casual sex. He was glad that he found others in the Potsdam training academy who felt as he did, and they talked openly about their sexuality, agreeing on the need for self-control and absolute loyalty to one’s wife.²⁶

A few precious days leave allowed Lilo and Ernst to meet again, but it only sharpened his longing to be with her. “My one and only lass, I so fiercely long for your love. . . . I need you desperately right now. You know I cannot live without you. . . . I’m coming, darling, I’m coming very soon.”²⁷ As soon as he was back in Potsdam, he longed either to return home or get to the Front. He hated missing her birthday in August. He’d had enough of the training exercises, and the elaborate farewell ceremonies annoyed him with their wastefulness and drunken carousing.²⁸ His last letter from Potsdam on August 8 looked forward to returning home to Wrohm.

By August 19, though, he was back in the training camp at Lübeck, very much out of sorts, as it appeared he had to start training new recruits, mainly students and those just out of school, and it was back to life in barracks. As a newly fledged officer, Ernst also had to acquire a ceremonial sword, which did not particularly impress him either, especially as it hit the pocket hard.²⁹ In early November, though, he managed a weekend visit to

24. Ernst to Lilo, June 9, 1940.

25. Ernst to Lilo, May 9, 1940; February 3, 1940; February 13, 1941.

26. Ernst to Lilo, June 12, 1940; he uttered similar contempt for the sexual vagaries of the men in the Lübeck camp: Ernst to Lilo, October 17, 1940.

27. Ernst to Lilo, July 31, 1940.

28. Ernst to Lilo, July 22, 1940; July 31, 1940; August 2, 1940; August 7, 1940.

29. Ernst to Lilo, August 19, 1940; September 4, 1940.

Lilo in Spantekow, where she was visiting her family; and he enjoyed the chance to play with the children.³⁰

By December 1940 Ernst found himself in France, posted to Pornic, a little fishing village in the Bretagne, as part of a coastal defense unit. It was all very comfortable and uneventful, although he found it strange to be living in enemy territory. The inhabitants went about their business as if nothing had happened, or that was his perception at least. They talked to him quite naturally when he was out and about or shopping.³¹ He practiced his French every day and read Alexander Dumas.

He would walk along the coast and waxed lyrical about sun and sea. The fields, with their shrub-covered boundary lines, reminded him of his home landscape in Schleswig-Holstein. Every town had its National Socialist welfare center for the troops, with free food, and German girls behind the counters. He describes how he and his fellows were overcome by a “marvelous sense of togetherness” when they listened to a speech by the Führer.³²

His thoughts were already turning to Christmas. He imagined himself with Lilo in Wrohm, listening to music together. He couldn’t bring himself to ask for leave, though, as most of his comrades had spent their last Christmas on the Front, but he assured her of his fervent longing for her, and sent home packages of oranges, stockings, and other gifts. Every letter from her lifted his spirit, he wrote. He looked forward to leave in February, imagining the baby in his cot, and his sweet little toddler peering over the fence. Every day he was with Lilo, heart and soul. She was his anchor, the midpoint of his life, in her he found *Geborgenheit* (a deep inner security), and this love sang through his work and surged through his days.³³

Like his comrades he went on a shopping spree for goods unobtainable in Germany, but was disturbed by the *Haltlosigkeit* (lack of moral boundaries) of his companions, making particular reference to masturbation and brothel visits.³⁴ He realized how much of the special electricity of their own

30. Ernst to Lilo, November 14, 1940.

31. On the varied and changing interactions of French people and their German occupiers cf. Vinen, *The Unfree French*, 99–132.

32. Ernst to Lilo, December 11, 1940.

33. Ernst to Lilo, November 14, 1941.

34. Ernst to Lilo, January 12, 1941.

wedding night derived from their self-control over the years, both of them coming to it as virgins.³⁵

He trusted that Lilo agreed with him that participating in the birth of a new Germany and a new world order made their separation and their personal sacrifices worthwhile.³⁶ On Christmas Day 1940 there were the traditional decorations in the rooms; the Christmas tree; mulled wine; plates of nuts, figs, chocolate, and biscuits. They sang the traditional carols, and reminisced about past Christmases, and even the young lieutenant managed a few words. Then Ernst himself spoke for ten minutes about Christmas at the Front and read out a traditional story. The military chaplain held a service in the nearby Catholic church, which Ernst found brought tears to his eyes. Back in his own room, he thought of the family at Wrohm and opened his presents and read his letters.³⁷

The routines of army life are described in lively detail in his letters home. They conducted regular patrols, went for forty-kilometer (!) marches; a five-hour ride through the wintry countryside really toughened one up. Ernst loved working with horses, and being fit was the precondition for feeling on top of things, the very elixir of life. It was hard, though, after a tiring day, to mount sentry duty for part of the night. His prize in a pistol-shooting competition had been a copy of the *Die Westfront (Western Front)*, a “wonderful” soldiers’ magazine, which he promised to send on to Lilo.³⁸ He was sure the war would be over by the summer. The Führer would see to that.³⁹

Ernst’s promotion to lieutenant came through in January 1941, which improved their finances. At a reception for a theater group, he sat for the first time with his fellow officers and was pleased to see that there was nothing stiff or formal about the occasion.⁴⁰ Films were often available, though he was seldom enthusiastic about them. One based on Gottfried Keller’s *Kleider Machen Leute (Clothes Maketh the Man)* was more enjoyable.

The news from Wrohm was not that good. Life in the village had always been Spartan, but the winter of 1940–1941 had been particularly

35. *Welch Maßen Seligkeit können zwei reine Herzen einander bereiten! Welch Spannung [?] lag in unserer Unberührtheit!* Ernst to Lilo, March 23, 1941.

36. Ernst to Lilo, December 14, 1940; December 15, 1940.

37. Ernst to Lilo, December 25, 1940.

38. Ernst to Lilo, December 25, 1940.

39. Ernst to Lilo, January 1, 1941.

40. Ernst to Lilo, January 10, 1941.

severe, with knee-deep snow, which cascaded from the roof. Lilo had to shovel the snow away every morning. It lay on top of a thick layer of ice in the yard. She had to lug endless buckets of water to the washtub for the weekly laundering, which had been not at all easy when she was pregnant with their second child. The clothes froze in the bucket where they had been soaked overnight, emerging stiff as a board; frequently the pipes froze. The toilet was just a bucket, which stank in the summer and froze in the winter; she then had to use boiling water to dispose of the contents. Sometimes the bucket was frozen to the ground and immovable. The house itself was bitterly cold in winter, especially the bedroom. The heating didn't work properly. "The icy east wind draws the last bit of warmth out of the rooms . . . ; one's hands freeze trying to clean them. The houses just don't thaw out any more." It was hard to get coke (coal residue) or peat for the stove. The water tank burst. All food, of course, was rationed.⁴¹

Writing from the milder Bretagne winter, Ernst was appalled at these conditions, the grim weather in Wrohm, and the heating problems.⁴² The snow had one good side, though. Sledges and ice skates soon appeared, and Lilo hugely enjoyed the chance to indulge again in sledging and ice-skating.⁴³

As a lieutenant now, Ernst had to lead his platoon in his first major field exercise at the end of January 1941, and he prepared for it meticulously, knowing that he had to be ready to make the right decisions at the right times in order to offer effective leadership.⁴⁴ The training ground was icy, and turned into a sea of mud as the thaw set in. He described getting up at five in the morning, riding out for two hours in pouring rain, then practicing sharpshooting. Throughout the day he was busy, supervising various activities, and ending up by overseeing the cleaning of the rifles at seven o'clock in the evening. It was nonstop! In February his company's stay in the Bretagne came to an end. There was a festive meal and the usual toasts and speeches.⁴⁵

Lilo meanwhile was getting through the winter in Wrohm. Money was tight, and she sent Ernst meticulous accounts of what she had spent. Every penny was watched. Food, heating, children's clothes and shoes, dental

41. Lilo to Ernst, January 23, 1940; January 30, 1941.

42. Ernst to Lilo, February 5, 1941.

43. Lilo to Ernst, January 11, 1941.

44. Ernst to Lilo, January 14, 1941.

45. Ernst to Lilo, January 19, 1941; February 5, 1941.

bills, the church tax—all swallowed up money, as countless letters testify. There was no phone in the house. On one occasion she had to rush to her neighbors' house in her nightie, a coat flung over it, her stockings trailing, to catch a phone call from Ernst.⁴⁶

Visits to the dentist or to Ernst's mother in neighboring villages were negotiated by bike. She had endless problems with her poor teeth, and this was to continue throughout the war, involving painful root extractions. Train travel, third class, took her on the occasional longer trip to Hamburg or even to far-off Pomerania, to her family in Spantekow and Swinemünde. Changing trains with a small child and her luggage could be something of a nightmare.

Lilo was responsible during her husband's absence for the large schoolhouse garden; as spring began to warm the soil, she saw to the planting, weeding, and harvesting of the potatoes, onions, carrots, beans, peas, asparagus, and spinach; in the autumn she preserved large quantities of plums, peaches, cherries, and strawberries; she made compote and jam; with the big crop of apples she made jelly, and she dried apples for the winter, which was no picnic in the wet summer of 1940. Shortages of sugar, too, could be a problem. Some apples were given away to friends, or sold. Lilo was helped with these various challenges by her father, her old school friend Ruth Krügler, and some neighbors, but initially sympathy was limited, as only one other village family had a man away in the army. The planting, weeding, and harvesting ate up Lilo's time, and at times it got her down. There was simply far too much to do.⁴⁷

In the warmer months, though, the vegetable garden was a godsend. On the whole, house and garden were like a whiff of heaven for her:

It's Saturday evening. So peaceful outside, wonderful air, the last rays of the sun reach the dining room, a few bees drone away in the cherry blossoms. I've just been walking through the garden, just as you used to love doing. What I would give to wander through it with you and inspect the vegetable beds, the shrubs, the trees. I'm really enjoying working in the garden much more now. How wonderful it will be when we look after it together. The first flowers are out on the strawberry plants, the cherry blossom is a bit meager this year, but the little plum tree at the front with the big apricot plums is blooming, the early potatoes are shooting up and tomorrow we'll have the first asparagus shoots in the soup. I've been hoeing the carrots. The

46. Lilo to Ernst, March 26, 1940.

47. Lilo to Ernst, April 28, 1941.

*meadow beyond the garden is a carpet of yellow flowers. How happy we could be! My heart is heavy when I think of you, but during the day the sparkling eyes of the children chase away these thoughts.*⁴⁸

Lilo was very open about her own health: her sleeplessness and discomfort during pregnancy, especially when Ernst was absent before the birth of her son in March 1940; after the birth her breasts were hard as stone and sore, and constipation plagued her. She was ecstatic, however, about her little boy. Her own mother had shown her very little love, and she was determined to pour out love on her children. Although nothing could replace Ernst, she needed something to love, and the children benefited. Lilo appears to have been a very caring mother. They snuggled into bed with her first thing in the morning. She was inordinately proud of both children, as she confessed in countless letters to Ernst, and not only gave them affection and security, but observed their behavior and language closely and found ways to stimulate them.

“I wish you could experience our little girl,” she wrote, “for this lovely time won’t come again.” Heinke was beginning to talk a little already, was more and more active, so sweet, the “wee mouse”; it was fascinating to see her becoming more mobile, propping herself up on the sides of the cot or the wall, drinking from the bottle on her own, so lively and full of life, dashing everywhere, arms stretched out in front of her to keep her balance; sticking everything into her mouth; rushing out of the house onto the street; playing with her bricks and her balls; and kissing her Dad’s photo and saying “Papa.”

No doubt about it, the wee lass is my sunshine. You’ve no idea what a gem she is. She runs around on her own more and more as one day succeeds another, hands me all her wooden building blocks, which I have to take back from her. When little brother gets the bottle of milk she thinks it’s for her and can’t believe that it’s not. She has a great appetite, with a special love for tart, gobbles up a huge piece of it.

At times, of course, she could be difficult, yelling in protest when she had to come out of the bath; her brother, Hartmut, was more contented and better behaved, a great eater, and “so sweet.” His smile was like a ripe, red apple.⁴⁹ His sister was very good with him. Hartmut yahooped for joy when he found he could walk on his own. He was hyperactive, with an enormous appetite

48. Lilo to Ernst, May 24, 1941; she gives a detailed description not only of the vegetable garden but of the glorious flowers a month later; June 19, 1941.

49. Lilo to Ernst, February 29, 1940; March 26, 1940.

for food and for life.⁵⁰ He stuffed tomatoes into his mouth as if they were apples.

Letter after letter offered vivid accounts of the children, their clothes, their language, and their antics:

Ach, if only you could have seen your sweet little boy. A real young lad in his checked shirt, red pants with shoulder straps and red knee socks. And our wee kitten (Muschi) who is already embarking on her own childhood way and reports to me her experiences at the top of her voice. This evening she headed off with 'Auntie' Johannsen to milk the cows. What fun that was! She talks platt (lower German) with Frau Johannsen, understanding everything the latter says.⁵¹ What joy it gives her, collecting the eggs, giving water to the bull! She sings a song and as a reward gets an egg. And then this morning she was at kindergarten. Oh, with what aplomb she set off. She joined in the play happily, and loved the swings. I am expecting a lot from the kindergarten. It's so nice there, learning to wash their hands, sit on the potty, have breakfast etc. Yes, Pappy, we already have a grown up daughter, you know? She's miles ahead of the other children. What a wealth children bring; each day produces countless joys.

When Lilo saw the kids naked in the bath, she felt like gobbling them up in sheer delight! The two-year-old Heinke was unusually aware of others. She noticed when her mother was upset, and tried to comfort her.⁵²

Lilo saw Ernst's energy and intelligence reflected in Hartmut, in the little toddler's gestures. Hartmut was never still, always rushing around, *ein unbeschreiblicher Quirl* (an incredible live wire), sticking his finger into the entrance of the beehive, and paying for it with countless stings.⁵³ He chased the ducks, hens, and geese around the yard, and was beginning to enjoy picture books, saying *wauwau* when he saw a dog. He loved knocking down the wooden building bricks. He could be quite a handful at times.⁵⁴ Heinke at two and a half was fascinated by fairy tales such as "Little Red Riding

50. Lilo to Ernst, April 13, 1941.

51. Lilo reports on Heinke: *Plattdeutsch kommt sie auch schon an. 'Mama, luren'; und 'hört Heinke tau'; 'und na' Hus gon.' Wenn ich aber mit ihr platt schnacke, ist es ihr doch recht komisch.* ("She is already talking in the local dialect. 'Look, Mama'; 'Listen to Heinke'; 'and go home.' But she looks askance if I talk to her in dialect.) Lilo to Ernst, June 20, 1941.

52. Lilo to Ernst, May 29, 1941.

53. Lilo to Ernst, September 2, 1941.

54. Lilo to Ernst, October 24, 1941.

Hood” and by the poem “The Giant Timpetu.” She couldn’t hear the stories often enough.⁵⁵ Ernst’s colleague, Frau Butenschön, gave the two children, “my dear Sommer children,” a charmingly illustrated collection of lullabies, *Guten Abend, Gut’ Nacht!* (*Good Evening, Good Night!*).⁵⁶

The books Lilo and Ernst bought for their own children included the Nazi propaganda picture book *Soldatenspiel* (*Playing at Soldiers*), illustrated by Curt Junghändel. Its brightly colored illustrations show helmeted five-to-seven-year-old children, both girls and boys, flourishing rifles, swords, and grenades, manning a field gun, building bridges, and attending field hospitals; but most of the children’s books were gentle and child-centered, like Erwin Jäkel’s *Für dich und mich!* (*For You and for Me!*), though it did exude a rather moralistic tone. The same was true of Ernst Füge’s *Hullebulletöpflein*. This tells the story of a poor woman who is gifted a magic pot but in the end is doomed to ruin by her exorbitant greed. Hans Probst’s pop-up book portrays *Die Weihnachtsengelein* (*The Little Christmas Angels*); and in Hagdis Hollriede’s *Weiß dir und mir* (*Lovely House*), seven little girls peep out of their house clutching dolls, flowers, and kittens and dream of their (predictable) future roles as mothers or nurses.⁵⁷ Other books possessed by the young marrieds were Theodor Storm’s best-selling fairy tale *Der kleine Häwelmann* (*The Little Havelmann*). Then there was the charming fantasy, *Der Zuckertütenbaum* (*The Sugar Cone Tree*): after Christmas Ruprecht, Saint Nicholas’s offside, comes to the land of the dwarfs with his magic onion and plants the new sugar cone tree. A dreamy, romantic note is struck by Lely Kempin’s *Die Heilige Insel* (*Sacred Island*), which has a pre-Raphaelite young girl wandering naked through an enchanted island; we see her sitting on a rock, her long hair flowing in the wind. Like countless other families they had a (cheap) edition of Wilhelm Busch’s *Max und Moritz*, two rascals engaging in roguish and marvelously illustrated adventures.⁵⁸ Elsa Butenschön gave the children an attractive little book, which took the reader through each month of the year, *Heinzel wandert durch das Jahr* (*Heinzel wanders through the Year*).⁵⁹ Wartime, then, did not

55. Lilo to Ernst, September 18, 1941.

56. Busch-Schumann, ed., *Guten Abend, Gut’ Nacht!*

57. Junghändel, *Soldatenspiel*; Jäkel, *Für dich und mich!*; Füge, *Das Hullebulletöpflein*; Heinrich and Sextus, *Der Zuckertütenbaum ein Bilderbuch*; Kempin, *Die Heilige Insel*; Probst, *Die Weihnachtsengelein*.

58. Hollriede, *Weiß dir und mir*; Busch, *Max und Moritz*.

59. Bohatta-Morpurga, *Heinzel Wandert durch das Jahr*.

mean a diet of war books. The children were introduced to a wide range of imaginative literature.

Her loneliness began to take its toll on Lilo, though, and when her maid, Herta, handed in her notice in the spring of 1941, it really rattled her. Evidently others in the village had put Herta up to it. It coincided with the fear that Ernst would not get leave at Whitsun. She wept buckets, and wrote bitterly: "Oh, well, let's get on with it. I'm used to misery and in Wrohm can savor all the 'advantages' available to a single woman. What a nice prospect! The house, the garden, cooking, washing, preserving." On top of that she had to keep a vigilant eye on two lively little children and cope with the raids of the "Tommies" at night. The British bombers on their path to Hamburg sometimes dropped a bomb or two on Wrohm. She got no sympathy, though, from Ernst's mother in Tellingstedt. Just a shrug of the shoulder!⁶⁰ Village life was no bed of roses. It never had been. But it was about to get much worse.

60. Lilo to Ernst, May 17, 1941.