

**ESCAPE FROM
PARIS**

CAROLYN HART

ESCAPE FROM PARIS

*With a
New
Introduction
by the
Author*

CAROLYN HART CLASSICS



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INTRODUCTION

I was a child during WWII and the war dominated our lives. Family members served in the Army or Navy. We followed the faraway course of the fighting in huge black newspaper headlines. Food and gasoline were rationed. We bought war bonds and grew Victory gardens and collected scrap iron. Everything was spoken of in terms of the duration. To a child, the duration was all we knew. We grieved when the lights went out in Paris and when the Luftwaffe bombed England.

The war remained vivid in my memory and, as an adult, I wrote several WWII suspense novels including *Escape from Paris*, the story of two American sisters who risk their lives to rescue British airmen, and *Brave Hearts*, which chronicles the courageous efforts of Americans trapped in the Philippines after the Japanese invasion. Both novels are forthcoming from Seventh Street Books in Summer 2013.

Escape from Paris was originally published in a much shorter version in 1982 and 1983. To sell the book, I had to cut forty thousand words. To my great delight, Seventh Street Books is publishing the original uncut manuscript, which has a newly amended 2013 copyright. It has been thirty years in coming, but now *Escape from Paris* is available as it was written.

I hope readers will share the struggles of brave men and women who defied the Gestapo during the bitter winter of 1940. They knew fear, found love, grieved loss. Their lives and deaths remind us that freedom survives only when the free are brave.

Carolyn Hart

NINETEEN-FORTY

Thursday morning
March 7

He sat alone in his office, his massive shoulders leaning forward, his withered legs covered by an afghan. Slowly, mechanically, he fit a cigarette into the holder, lifted it to his mouth. As he drew the silvery trail of smoke into his lungs, he coughed, the persistent cough of the bronchitic. His pale blue eyes moved from the papers in his hand to the map spread out on his desk. The map was blue, too, the awesome immense blue of the Pacific Ocean. A cluster of silver markers represented the American Western Fleet at its home base of San Diego, Calif. His gaze moved across the map. Other occasional markers represented American ships now at Wake, Guam or Midway, but, in the vastness of the mid-pacific, there was nothing to meet the Japanese immediately should they dare to attack Manila or Hong Kong or the Dutch East Indies as many Far Eastern experts feared.

Roosevelt looked again at San Diego harbor. Taking a red pencil in hand, he scored a direct line from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii.

Saturday afternoon
April 20

“Oh, Harry, the war’s just a joke! Hitler’s got what he wanted. Nothing else is going to happen. Why don’t you stop taking that gas mask with you? No one else carries them now and you look such a fool.”

He moved heavily for he was past his youth, a middle-aged plumpish bank clerk who had waited late to marry and chosen a coquettish ill-tempered girl twenty years his junior. She had snatched him up for he was a social cut above her, but now she was bored and the tight sharp lines beside her mouth grooved deeper every year.

Harry Carlisle stolidly buckled on his gas mask. It was regulations to wear it and it would be a fine thing if the block warden didn't set the example.

Her voice, higher, shriller, followed him down the spotless walk, past the rosebushes he treasured. Time now to spray or the aphids would be doing their work. The aphids were mixed up in his mind with the Germans and the sound of Janet's voice. If there had been children . . .

He opened the gate. She followed him down the walk.

" . . . bunch of doddering old men . . ."

He clenched his jaw and kept on walking.

" . . . making themselves out to be soldiers and wardens and all those fancy titles and you won't even take time to get out now for a bit of cards. And this silly stupid phony war, that's what they're calling it, I read it in the Daily News, the phony war, it's closed everything down and there never was any fun in this town anyway! I wish we'd never come here."

He lowered his head and walked up the lane, the sweet chill rush of an April breeze cooling the flush in his cheeks. He could still hear Janet.

"Even if there is war, it won't come here. Nothing ever happens in Coventry. And nothing ever will happen in Coventry."

Tuesday morning

May 14

"Boys, I want you to promise that you won't go outside!"

They stared at their grandfather. Jan was blond and blunt-faced like his father. Dirk was small and slight and dark, like his mother.

"Promise me now, boys!" His voice was high with strain. He had

huddled near the stairwell with his grandsons since the bombing began shortly after dawn. Radio Rotterdam announced that German warplanes were attacking. All civilians were warned to take cover and all soldiers ordered to join their units.

Jan kept darting to an upstairs window, wriggling away from his grandfather's staying hand.

"Oh, Dirk, the sky is full of them, black planes and silver ones and you can see the bombs falling like black fish."

"Jan, come back down those stairs immediately!"

Just before noon, a piercing shrill whistle shocked them into stiff silence, then Grandfather Groeneveld pulled both boys to him and pressed them against the stairwell wall, shielding them with his body. The explosion rocked their house. Glass splintered and tables shook. A thick grayish dust sifted through the rooms.

The three of them edged to the front window, its glass shattered now and the white lace curtains shredded. Oh, Dirk thought, wouldn't his mother be mad! They looked across the street.

The chimney of the Veelen house stood in a shallow crater. A tongue of fire flickered then whooshed into a fan of flame as a gas line ignited.

Dirk stared at the crater solemnly. Mrs. Veelen always gave him a pastry when he went to play with Conrad. If she and Conrad and Corrie were in the house when the bomb struck . . . His face furrowed.

"Come back now boys, away from the window."

It was one o'clock when the radio announced that the main hospital had been struck. The extent of damage and the number injured were unknown.

It was then that their grandfather, gray faced, his hands trembling, had warned them to stay in the house. He had to go. Their mother, his daughter, was a nurse at the hospital.

Wave after wave of bombers swept over Rotterdam, the bombs falling so fast, the explosions coming so thickly that thunder merged into thunder. Once again, the shrill high piercing whistle warned them a bomb was coming near.

The house shook again. A picture of the Maas River that hung against the wainscoting in the hall tipped suddenly sideways then fell, crashing heavily against the floor.

Jan jumped up. "Dirk, you stay here. I'm going to go down to the fire station. I can help."

Dirk tried to grab his older brother's hand. He did slow him, but Jan was almost fifteen and big for his age, broad-shouldered, strong. He shook Dirk off. "I tell you, Dirk, you stay here. I've got to go and help."

Dirk stood in the empty hallway. He almost darted out the door after his brother, then, again, he heard the pulsating roar of planes, hundreds and hundreds of planes. He turned around, ran frantically upstairs to the window of his room that overlooked the street.

Jan was almost at the end of the block.

"Jan! Jan, come back!"

The roar of the planes drowned his voice. Above the rumble of engines and crump, crump, crump of faraway bombs, Dirk heard a rattling pinging metallic clatter. Little puffs of dust rose in a line down the street. Jan stumbled. The dusty line of the machine gun bullets picked up beyond him. He lay face down, unmoving. Even from where Dirk clung to the second-story window ledge, he could see the stitching of blood across his brother's back.

The Germans. That was what the radio had said. Why did the Germans want to shoot Jan?

Friday evening
June 14

It was a small collection of vehicles. Not nearly large enough to be called a convoy, about twenty men in five light vehicles with only machine guns for armaments. The dusty cars reached Paris in the early evening and drove directly to the Hotel du Louvre. The officers had maps. They knew their way. There was no hesitation. The officer in charge, Helmuth Knocken, was a thirty-year-old athletic university graduate who had gotten into police work almost by accident. He had dabbled in journalism first. He ordered the files carried in, oversaw the

setting up of a makeshift office. It was a small group of men, wearing the uniforms of the Geheime Feld Polizei, the secret military police, instead of their regular black SS uniforms, which would have revealed them as members of the Geheime Staats Polizei, the state secret police. Or, as it was usually called, the Gestapo.

Knocken's first act, the next morning, was to send one of his men to the French Prefecture to demand the dossiers of all German emigres and Jews.

Monday morning
October 28

Marie Rothchild set the delicate china pot on the tray, arranged the napkin and salt and pepper shakers. It wasn't the kind of breakfast that she used to fix Max, savory rolls with raspberry jam or strawberry preserves and thick sweet chocolate, but she could still bring him a cheerful immaculate tray even if the coffee was ersatz and the bread a dry piece spread with a thin, thin layer of honey. She did have a precious egg for him this morning. She went through the living room and put the tray down for a moment to pick up the newspaper that her maid had bought at a news stand on her way to the apartment. She sighed, thinking about Berthe. How they could afford to keep her since their expenses had risen so drastically, as had everyone's with the desperate necessity to spend so much just to get a modicum of food? But Berthe had been with them so many years and she was old and had no. . . .

The darkness of the type caught her gaze and the headline. Marie stopped and held the paper close to her near-sighted eyes.

STATUT DE JUIFS

Law about Jews . . . but what on earth . . . her hands began to shake . . . the Vichy proclamation . . . a Jew was a man with three Jewish grandparents or two Jewish grandparents and a Jewish wife . . . her eyes skimmed frantically ahead . . . barred

from all government jobs... must resign in two months if a teacher... oh my God, a teacher... or employed in press, radio or cinema...

The dainty breakfast tray forgotten, Marie began to run heavily across the living room. She knocked against the end table by the sofa and a Meissen bowl slid and began to fall.

"Max!" her voice was high and frightened, like a child's. "Max, look what they've done!"

He caught her in his arms at the door to their bedroom.

"Marie, what is it? What's happened?"

She held the paper out to him and tears began to stream down her face. "It isn't even the Germans, Max. It's our own government. Oh Max, what is going to happen to us?"

Tuesday evening
October 29

The correspondent waited beside the potted palm at the entrance to the Raffles Hotel Bar. The bar was crowded but then it was always crowded between 5 to 8:30 p.m. That was pahit time, happy hour, and everybody had a gimlet or a stangah and maybe two or three. Many of the men were already in white dinner jackets. You didn't drink or dine or dance at Raffles without coat and tie or a uniform. The correspondent lit another cigarette. He looked sleepily around. He was the only man in a suit. Be damned if he'd wear a dinner jacket. Then he spotted Maj. Caldwell striding toward him. They had to wait a few minutes before there was an open place at the bar. Major Caldwell led the way.

"What would you like, Peterson?"

"Whiskey."

The major jerked his head at the Malay bartender. "Boy, satu whiskey ayer and satu gin. *Lehas!*" He turned toward the reporter. "Well, Peterson, tonight I'd like to get to know you better."

The correspondent nodded and took a long drink.

“Seems that last article you wrote was a bit short on facts.”

Peterson smiled his sleepy smile. So that was why the major had invited him out for a drink.

“The one about preparation for war . . . or the lack of them?” he asked silkily.

The major’s face stiffened. “That one. Lot of damnfoolery there, Peterson.”

The correspondent looked lazily around the bar. There was a loud hum of conversation now, a lot of well-bred laughter, a sense of ease and comfort. “Doesn’t look like a war footing around here, does it?”

The major slammed his hand on the bar. “We don’t need a war footing. The Japs would be fools to try and invade Malaya.”

The reporter’s tone was mild. “China is crumbling. The Japanese are moving into Indo-China. It’s only a matter of time until they move on the Dutch East Indies.”

“Let them fight in China. Let the little brown men fight each other. Those Japanese beggars won’t attack us. Or if they do, they’ll learn a thing or two. They haven’t fought Europeans yet.”

“You don’t think there’s any danger to Singapore?”

“Of course not. You newspaper johnnies worry too much. After all, everyone knows Singapore’s impregnable. Singapore will never fall.”

Sunday afternoon
November 3

She felt a little catch in her chest. It was not the first time. Perhaps she should mention it to Dr. Friedheim. But there was no hurry. Such a lovely afternoon. Not lovely outside, of course. A nasty raw rainy day. But what could you expect in November? Here, in the drawing room, it was so cheerful. Herr Weiss was going to play the piano. She had known him for so many years. He still seemed a youngster to her though none of them were youngsters now. It was hard to believe she had been eighty on her last birthday. Eighty years old. She was so lucky. Her pension from the Berlin Opera and this lovely old folks home to

live in here in Mannheim. Everyone was so nice to her. Just yesterday one of the visiting doctors had held her hand and said, "Fraulein Selig, I remember you so well in the role of Erda in *Das Rheingold*. Such a magnificent voice you had."

Well, her voice had been magnificent. A rich soaring contralto. In her mind she sang again and she could see herself standing on the stage. That last time, that very last time, the entire house had stood and applauded her. She began to smile.

The glass shattered in the French windows that opened onto the rose garden.

Fraulein Selig gasped and clutched her chest.

It all happened so quickly amid the tears and the shouts and the screams, the hard faced soldiers prodding the old people out into the rain toward the waiting line of open trucks.

"Men this way. Women that way."

The Levys clung to each other. Last week they had celebrated their fiftieth anniversary. He was patting his wife on the arm. "Don't cry, Sarah, don't. We must all be going to the same place. I will see you there." But she had clung to him, sobbing and screaming until one of the guards pulled her away, flung her toward their truck.

When they reached the railroad station, Fraulein Selig tried to help look for the trucks with the men. She was taller than tiny Frau Levy, could see farther. Only women stumbled from the trucks lined up by the tracks. The last of the trucks pulled away. They must have taken the men somewhere else. Then soldiers herded them up ramps into open cattle cars. She helped Sarah Levy, kept her from losing her balance. Crushed into the boxcar, they huddled together and late that night the trains began to roll.

"Where are we going?" One of the old ladies cried out into the night.

No one answered.

It took four days to reach the French border. The word rippled through the boxcars from lip to lip.

"France. They've taken us to France. It will be better here. They say we are going to a relocation camp in France."

It was raining again and cold, bitter cold, with the rain sweeping down with the wind off the Pyrenees when the train pulled into the little town of Pau. The train backed up behind another train. Each had a long, long string of boxcars packed with German Jews.

Men. Women. Children.

It was a long wait in the open unheated wet cattle cars before the trucks pulled through the mud to the car holding Fraulein Selig.

“It will be better,” one of the old women said, “when we reach the camp.”

The road, slick gray clay, snaked up away from the village to a vast swampy plain with the Pyrenees towering above.

The truck slithered through the gate in the first barbed wire fence, then past the second barbed wire fence. Soldiers patrolled between the fences. More soldiers peered down from a dozen round wooden watch-towers. They had to climb down from the trucks and walk across a thick sea of mud toward the barracks. Row after row of low wooden barracks stretched across the muddy plain. Mud pulled at Fraulein Selig, clung to her shoes. Oh, her nice shoes. Her finest shoes. She tottered, would have fallen but Frau Levy caught her arm.

They stopped in front of the barracks that would be their new home. Women’s Barrack 17. It was built of uncured lumber that had already warped in the continuing rains. There were no windows, no paint. The shrinkage had left cracks big enough to put your fist through.

The matron of the nursing home looked at the barracks in despair. No heat. No water. No beds. No bedding. It took all of her will to turn and face her old people. “Come in . . . come in. This is where . . . we’ve been put.”

Fraulein Selig was bewildered. Everyone had said it would be better because it was in France. The French didn’t hate Jews. She knew that. She had sung in Paris many times. Many times. She looked back at the trucks turning on the road to return to the village. Why, they couldn’t go away and leave them here. It was barbarous. There must be some mistake!

It was hard to get to sleep that first night. She was cold, so cold.

She and Frau Levy hugged one another but still they shook most of the night. The rain and the wind didn't stop. It rained and rained. Every day it was harder to cross the thick slimy glutinous stretch of mud to the crude shacks that served as latrines. The steps leading up to the latrines were steep and slick and there was no handrail.

Her chest ached all of the time now and her fine hair, her hair that had always been so thick and golden and she had worn it piled high on her head, her hair hung lank and tangled. The mud pulled at her, clung to each shoe, her big frame straining with effort. She reached the steep uneven wooden steps and started up. She slipped on the third step. Her hands reached out but there was nothing to grab, nothing to stop her. She struck the bottom step as she fell. Pain exploded in her right hip.

Two of the guards did carry her back to Barrack 17. She lay in the corner near the door, unrecognizable with mud streaked over her, even her hair thick with mud.

The matron tried to help her, tried to move her gently, but the pain was too bad and she fell back on the wooden floor. Dimly, she heard the matron arguing with a guard.

"We have to have a doctor. Her hip is broken. It's broken, I tell you!"

Fraulein Selig turned her face toward the wall so the matron wouldn't see her tears. It hurt so badly and she had relieved herself in her clothes and now she was all dirty, so dirty, and her hip hurt so badly . . .

Wednesday morning
December 25

The posters had been put up on Christmas Eve. On Christmas morning the placards were everywhere for early morning churchgoers to read.

ENGINEER JACQUES BONSERGENT OF PARIS HAS BEEN CON-
DEMNED TO DEATH AND SHOT FOR A DEED OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST A MEMBER OF THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES.

Wednesday afternoon
December 25

The boxcars had been shunted off onto a side line two days ago. Only priority goods moved on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. A skeleton staff stood on duty and the bleak railroad yards were almost silent.

Hans Krueger shivered in his thick overcoat. Lousy luck he had to draw this watch on Christmas Day. Oh well, there would still be plenty of good food when he got back to the barracks. He turned, began the long lonely walk back along the side of the train. The wind gusted suddenly and he gasped. God, what an awful smell! He walked a little faster. The rank odor was what happened with people jammed in the cars like animals with no toilets, nothing. But it wasn't his doing. He felt eyes on him as he walked but he looked straight ahead. That was the only thing that kept them alive, the fact that there were so many of them and they huddled close together like cows for a little bit of warmth. Some were dead, frozen into stiff, hard, brittle clumps. He'd seen one car yesterday with a half dozen frozen bodies in one corner. After that, he knew to keep his eyes straight ahead. It was uncanny how quiet they were, hardly a sound, only the scuff of his boots through the cinders and the icy remnants of snow.

He was almost at the end of the train when he paused, unsnapped his canteen and lifted it to his mouth.

"Bitte, wasser. Oh bitte, bitte."

Hans stepped closer, the uncapped canteen in his hand.

Two dark eyes peered out at him.

There was a rustle and a stir within the boxcar. Suddenly a dozen, twenty small faces looked out at him and there was a sound of sighing and hesitant whispers for water.

He was lifting his canteen toward the outstretched hand when a voice shouted behind him.

"Krueger!"

He swung around.

The sergeant major gestured roughly for him to come back up the line. *"Nein, Krueger, nein. Juden."*

Tuesday night
December 31

Rick Stoddard leaned up against the bar and listened to the melodic Hawaiian music. Damn, this was the life. Beautiful girls everywhere, the greatest beaches in the world, shore leave almost every weekend.

He took a deep swallow of his beer. "Hey Al, you gonna re-up?"

Al shrugged. "Maybe. How about you?"

Rick tilted up the bottle, finished the beer and ordered another. He was nineteen but he tried to sound worldly, "The Oklahoma's an all right ship."

"Yeah."

"The Old Man's decent. We get shore leave every weekend when we're in port."

"Pearl's a pretty easy berth," Al agreed.

"That's what I think. Yeah," he said decisively, "That's my New Year's resolution. I'm gonna re-up."