

[TEST TONES] We ended on the note of, you received the information--

About Clara.

--about Clara, and now there's a question of-- and this is after your own baptism, but your mother doesn't know about this-- that you think that Clara was going to visit your mother, at this point.

I think she was expected and could only drag it for so long to pretend she would still come. Why isn't she coming? How come? Not this week and next week? I just have to break the news down.

And what was that like?

Oh, that was terrible. Then she really physically broke down. And I suppose my family will forgive me if I say that, but I do believe she had a preference for Clara. Maybe circumstances which I have never known, although she had been that horrible encounter and this eloping and all of that, but she had a closer relationship to the eldest than she had with me, so that was double hard on her.

Sure, Clara is half your mother's age. She's--

And maybe the first child, that makes a big difference, too?

So did you stay with your mother the whole day, the day that you went and--

We did, yes.

And did you know that--

And she knew, like I knew, then. We had the place for Clara. Because then, of course, I told my mother, you have a place for Clara and she doesn't want to go and she wants to be together with Jack, but that is impossible. We can find a place for one, then we will find, later, a place for him, but the two together, it's too dangerous. We cannot do it.

So she knew that, too, and that she had blown the chance of being saved. So that was terrible. And I think I might have gone once or twice back more often, because all she would be doing was crying and probably the priest had told us to try to support her and to be back more often, which we did then, taking all the risks.

And the priest, of course, knew that this had happened. You told him so he would know.

Yeah.

Because, otherwise, he wouldn't understand.

No, he wouldn't understand what was going on, so we told him, yeah.

Now, did she become sort of incapable of doing the work that she was doing because of her--

I think, very shortly after that. Within two to three months, she really fell sick. Now, whether that was related to the horrible shock or whether it was already starting physically going down. But I haven't got enough details on that, because she was arrested in July and early '44, we had to take her out from where she was. See, when I got the message-- and that really, this is like a lapse of some months there, which I'm not 100% sure when we got the message that we had to come immediately because she was very, very sick.

So we left in the evening and the shock was so great when we had only been maximum two weeks, so maybe 2 and 1/2 weeks without seeing her, because things were getting tighter and more dangerous. We couldn't believe the change in

her. I mean, it was just unbelievable anyone can change that fast. And she was so weak she couldn't walk. So we carried her from there.

The two of you linked your arms?

Two, like that, linked arms, carried her all the way to Grez-Doiceau.

[GASP] For four miles?

She couldn't walk. It was horrible.

Was she conscious?

Oh, yeah, she was conscious. She was in terrible pain. She was yellowish. She was just not the same woman at all, lost a lot of weight. So we got her to the doctor. She stayed that night. Got her to the doctor the next day, who happened to be someone we knew in the parish because you couldn't even go to a doctor. I mean, what are going to say, which name, where do you live? There was no question of going near a doctor. But we knew him, so we just had to confide in him.

She couldn't explain what was wrong, so here we go again, and I translate and he tells me and I tell her and he asks questions and I answer. And right there, just by pure hand examination-- and that was a bit cruel-- he came out and he said, it's cancer of the liver. She has three months to live. No x-ray, no nothing, because that didn't even come in question. The Hanquet family had it against him, that he hadn't even called Marie in for her to break the news to me. Do you know what I'm saying?

He just came out and said it to you?

Just like that. So that was unheard of, let me say.

And you were alone with your mother?

Yeah. And Marie was waiting in the waiting room, but he could have called her in, at least get the more mature person. She knew me, she could have broken it in a different way, but it was just flat out like that.

Did he say that to your mother, as well?

Yeah, but she didn't know what he were saying, so it was just for me.

Oh, of course, she didn't know what he was saying, yes. But she could have seen a response on your face?

She could have seen the response on my face, but I don't even think I told her what it was. What was the difference? And then particularly, when you put a date on it, and you say three months, and you know, I have never seen a doctor who has given such a good diagnosis. Three months after that, my mother was dead.

So it's not as if she heard three months and--

So probably, then June--

So she dies in August? August--

'44.

So it's June that you brought her? June, July, August.

She only lasted three months. Yeah.

But when you told her about Clara-- so this is August or September-- so she's--

How long is it in between there?

Well, when she gets very ill, if it's June or May--

A few months, then.

Well, it could be-- October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May-- it's eight months, seven or eight months before she gets really, very, very ill, so you keep seeing her on a regular basis, because it's bad. The war is on.

And it goes kind of gradually, and she's tired and she finds it difficult to do her work and he calls in the friend from next door more often to help her out, until it becomes impossible. She can do nothing any more, she's so sick. This is when I bring her over to the doctor.

Well, now comes the question, what do we do? She can't stay here. She can't go back. It's unheard of. What is he going to do with a sick lady? So we have to find a place where to take her.

So Marie had this friend who wasn't married either, he was also very, very religious and Catholic, who agreed that she would take care of her. But that was another-- you know, I have gone through a lot, when I think of it, and I can talk about it now, but just imagine to hand over your sick mother, knowing it's three months, to a stranger, and you have no way of communicating. So it was like, from bad to worse, as we say.

And how did you get your mother to this woman? Her name is?

Sabine.

Sabine?

That's her real name.

No, your mother's name was Sabine.

The friend? Madeleine.

Madeleine.

Madeleine [? Strobel. ?]

So your mother is staying at the house for two days?

She has met her once or twice. When she came to see Marie in Graz-Doiceau, and if my mother had brought her over, now and again, just for a few hours, she had met her. So they all knew those were such close friends to Marie, we had no fear, so they had met once or twice, but that's about it. So she agreed. And I can't remember, don't even ask me how we did it, but we walked her over there. And that is a distance, if you have seen from Grez-Doiceau to a totally different state, you would call it here, right?

Right.

And we spent the day with her there, to get to settle things.

Now, she's really very sick.

She's very sick.

There's no treatment? Nothing is--

No treatment. Just painkillers.

But she does get painkillers, because there is a fair amount of--

Yeah. There is a friend doctor, again, now in the place where Madeleine is, who agrees to come, because we're not registered, we have no this, no nothing, and he just kind of brings medication now and again. And then, the priest from the place came to visit her on a very regular basis.

From Madeleine's parish?

Yeah.

I see.

So then at least she had-- and I don't know how they talked, but they did talk.

So now, did you then go to see Henry and tell him what was going on, or did you somehow get a message to the Alardos?

I got the message to the Alardos. But while she was with Madeleine, they never managed to get Henry there.

They didn't?

No. And see, things are getting tighter and tighter, right?

Yes.

But now, in the mean--

I cannot remember how they got the message, whether we wrote or whether someone went to tell them, but he knew that my mother was very sick and wasn't in good cheer anymore but had to be with another friend.

And he had seen her in between--

In between, he had seen her.

So both of you were watching some deterioration, your mother getting tireder and looking probably real--

But he didn't come as often anymore, either, because as I say, things were getting more difficult. So going to visit her while she was sick in my Madeleine's place, I'm the only one who went with Marie. I must have--

No, Henry didn't go, no. But that was even further away from him.

Yes, yes, it was very far.

Yeah.

And how conscious is your mother? Is she--

She was conscious.

She was conscious?

Oh, yeah.

Now, she still doesn't know that you've been baptized. You say nothing.

I didn't talk about that any more.

And she never asked you anything, right?

No, but somewhere along the line, I don't know whether I asked her whether she would consider it, but that must be later, only when she started talking about the book she was reading and more openly about what she had experienced when she was, over the time she spent in the parish priest house.

So she begins to talk with you about becoming more comfortable--

Yeah, but closer to her death, that was. When she really talked is when she expressed her last wish, which was to die where I was. She did not want to die where Madeleine-- she knew she was dying, obviously, if she could talk about that, but that was her wish. I want to die where you are.

And what do you think that meant, to you and to her? Do you have any idea?

I suppose it was difficult enough to die, so she wanted at least one of her daughters to be there. That's how I interpret it. And I wanted her to be where I was, if she was going to die.

When was it that she began to talk with you about her--

Towards, really towards the end.

But still, when she was with Madeleine?

Sure, she was still at Madeleine's. We went almost every two weeks, but the trips were getting really dangerous this time. Public transport was more and more out of the question, so what you could do is get what you call these combined taxis, where five, six people take the same thing, and you would go, like, from Grez-Doiceau to Wavre, but then in Wavre you would change, take another one for another stretch, then there you had to change. But the last few times we went, they would stop any vehicle. Everyone goes down and they would search the vehicle.

So the last two times, when that happened, Marie said, you know, no matter what, we've got to stop our visits. You're going to be arrested. She said, the minute that the vehicle stops and they make the people go down, I only look at your face. It's like you write on your face, take me, I'm Jewish. The fear, I go like a sheet, white, and I'm just not myself anymore. And that's probably true, because I was petrified. I mean, I was constantly giving away my safety and being more and more aware of what could happen, because as the time goes by, you know, so we had decided we can't do it anymore. And it wasn't easy to get vehicles either, and it was pretty expensive, so we had stopped going for at least two, three weeks.

But then we got some message-- I don't know how these messages used to reach us-- that this was really the end and we needed to come, and that she probably was at the very end of it. Well, now we go and here she is. She's expressing this wish that she would like to die in Grez-Doiceau with me. Are we going to do that?

So first, we kind of discussed it together, get the approval of everyone in the family, Elise had to have her word, and Paul had to have his word, and Marie, because everyone was like, oh my goodness, how do we-- first, how we will bring her, how are we going to get her here? Secondly, what a risk we're taking. And I cried. What can I do? I cry,

because I really thought she should have at least that last wish in her life.

So anyway, everyone decided, let's do it. If that's all she wishes for, and she's got nothing more to live for, let's do it. We'll try to bring her back. So we go, we set out again, Marie and myself, and we go to [INAUDIBLE] and she's really at her very end now. And while they are discussing how are we going to transport her without being arrested-- and she needed a bed, she couldn't even sit in the car-- that's when I got to talk with my mother and that's when the truth came out.

Just then?

Mm-hmm.

And tell me what she--

Because we stayed at least two days that time, because this was a big enterprise, and I suppose Marie and Madeleine consulted with all the people around them to see how they would organize this transport, so we stayed more than we would usually stay, so we have plenty of time to talk. So she starts telling me-- and I don't know whether you'd be interested you know.

No, I'm very interested, absolutely.

[CHUCKLES] Even if you're not Catholic, you're interested.

Absolutely. Well, because it's a fascinating turn here, isn't it?

She starts telling me that when the priest came to visit her just to spend some time-- she was always in a bed, and she just got skin and bones now-- he bought her books to read. And one of the books he had bought was the story of Our Lady of Fatima, the one who appeared to some of the kids.

And as we head out, she tells me the whole thing and I listen. And she says, now, the mother of the one who had the visions, who saw Our Lady appear, had made the promise that if such and such a thing would happen, he would believe in the apparitions. She had really read this story very well. And she said, but you know, she got what she wanted and she still didn't believe.

Now I tell you, if I get to Grez-Doiceau to die in Grez-Doiceau, I will believe. But I will keep my promise. Well, that was the most stunning thing I've ever heard, because we have never talked about these things anymore, so I just kind listened. I said, would you really? And I'd ask a few questions because I'm not convinced, myself, of what she's telling me, or whether she's just pretending or whatever. And she tells me, she keeps going. And this is the first time now that she talks to me about when she lived in [PLACE NAME] with the priest.

She said, you know, in the beginning, I was very hostile and I resented having to go to mass and sit through all that, but the more I went, and when I saw the priest at the altar and the transformation in him, he was never the same man at the altar that he was in the house. I thought, there must be something supernatural there, because he was totally transformed and I slowly started to think about it, and maybe there was something, which I didn't understand, but I promise that if I get there, I will be baptized like you. So I, of course, in my pain and in my sorrow, I do communicate that to Marie, and she said, well, let's first get her there. How are we going to do that?

So this is when we came up with the only safe way would be to hire the hearse. You have to think about it then do it, that was the most traumatic thing again. That was worse than being from Paris. But you know, they were right, because if we hadn't done it that way, we wouldn't have made it-- not her and not me and not Marie. We would all have been arrested, Marie included. And it's a good thing that these were all small places and everyone knows everyone, so Madeleine and the priest arranged with this hearse man, he what come, we put her bed in the place where you would put the coffin, and two chairs, and that's the way we traveled. It took us at least three hours, if not more, to get to Grez-Doiceau.

So you were never stopped?

Not a hearse.

Not a hearse.

We had the black draping over it, we did the whole thing. It was very, very, very shaky to go into that, to sit in there. Thank God I had Marie with me, but even so, to think what we were doing. Do you know what I'm saying? And she was awake most of the time and she would ask, are we almost there? Do you think we will make it? I cannot believe it. And we made it.

Now, Henry did not see your mother there?

No. So we arrived 31st of July. Now is that ironic? Also the 31st of July, like Clara, who was deported that day, but a year later.

Yes.

And we gave her my bed. We put her in my bed, and she immediately starts. She said, now, now that I've had my wish, I'm going to do what I said. I'm keeping my promise. I can't believe we made it.

And so she wanted me to get our parish priest, the one who was really a friend of the house, and she knew him well, too, and so from there on it started. And then I was still not convinced, because it's a big step to take, you know, and first of all, what we made sure was to get a message to Henry to come that same day, because it was imminent. And he actually made it on the 31st.

They allowed the family to hire the taxi all the way from Dinot, brought him over, he visited for two hours, the taxi waited, and then they went back. Now, that was another heart wrenching thing, because he was heartbroken to leave his mother. He knew he wouldn't see her again. They had prepared him.

But still.

But still, the reality was just awful. And I think I told them that that was her wish and we were going to do it, because Henry was well into this Catholic business, too, as much as he lived with the Alardo family.

So you told Henry?

I told Henry. I said, look, we're waiting for the priest to come, and as soon as he gets here, we will have her baptized because that's her wish. That's what she just expressed and we're going ahead and do it. But he couldn't wait, so he had to go back.

And he knew that you had been baptized?

Oh, yeah, he knew.

Right. So Henry leaves, and the priest comes?

And the priest comes. And I'm still not sure, because I say, this is a big step to take for someone like my mother, so I did have a prayer book by my bedside table, so she took that and she wanted to read that, and so I just, in my sorrow and pain, handed it over. And I handed it upside down. She said, I can't read it, it's upside down, so I gave it the right way. And I said-- the priest wasn't in the parish, so we had to send a message. He was visiting someone elsewhere, outside of the parish, so we had to wait. And she was really waiting and waiting. She said, no, I want it to be done. I want it today. So he finally came. He couldn't understand, he was bewildered. The mother, she's in Grez-Doiceau. She wants to get--

he just couldn't put things together. He knew she was over there in [PLACE NAME], so what was all that about? But anyway.

He didn't understand? What was it he--

He had no clue that we had brought her back.

I see.

No one knew that we were going to do that, then we would succeed to do that. He thought she was still with Madeleine. Then he gets a message, wherever he's visiting-- come right back. Regine's mother wants to be baptized.

Didn't make sense.

Didn't make any sense. But anyway, that's what happened. And then I did ask her several questions, and are you sure, and you think you want to do that and negative, just to contradict, to see whether really that was what she wanted. But she had it all thought out, because she had decided who would be her godmother, who she would choose, the reason why she chose these people. I couldn't say we're not going to go ahead with it.

So you were more skeptical about your mother than you were about yourself, weren't you?

Yeah, I didn't think that would ever be possible, not after what I had gone through when I told her.

Did you then tell her that you had been baptized?

Yeah.

Now let me ask you a peculiar question. Since your mother apparently didn't read anything but Yiddish, so what was she reading?

She must have been able to read the words in Flemish.

So somewhere she got that?

Somewhere she got that, and she read that and Our Lady of Fatima.

But you didn't know that?

No. But when she told me the story, I knew she had read it.

Right, because Madeleine couldn't even-- if Madeleine had read it to her, she wouldn't have understood it, unless--

No. Because now, even for the baptism, for the few questions that the priest had to ask, I do the translation here. I said, Mother, are you sure now? This is what the priest is asking. Is that really what you want? And she would repeat, and she said, yes. And I would translate in French again. So it's very strange.

So she somehow was able to read--

Mm-hmm. Flemish would be maybe a little bit closer to the German, which has some connotation with the Yiddish, so I believe that that's how, having all these months and hours where nothing else she had to do, she wasn't even getting up, she must have struggled through it. I can't think of anything else, because see, those were the times I wasn't there. And I got the shock of my life. And that happened in really the last three days of her lifetime. Now, no one in the family, of course, believes me, but that's OK.



They don't believe you?

No.

But Henry does. You told him at the time.

Yeah, Henry did believe it then, and I think he kind of accepts that that's what's happened, but the others think that that was me making up, you know, I arranged all that.

And there's no paperwork associated with a baptism?

No.

Right. It just happens?

Yeah. Well, you can get a certificate if you want to, but we had other things to do because [CHUCKLES] 31st. Now, the 1st of August when the bells are ringing for mass, my mother dies. So she just lasted a few hours in a total state of happiness. She was aware of where she was. She said her pain had gone. She even expressed what she would like to eat. She had thought out who was going to be her godmother, and we were around her, and then about 6:30 in the morning, the 1st of August, she's gone.

And probably the 2nd of August, Clara had perished a year before?

The 2nd. A year before. And the sad thing, too, for me, was that this is now August, and September, we are liberated. To think what it would have meant to her to see that we were liberated, but she didn't make it.

And that she would have seen her two sons and her husband alive.

Yeah. That was the hardest thing for me, too. To think, my father is going to come back and his wife is dead, and she will never see the other sons again. That was real hard. And I'm very grateful to the family that they brought Henry, and I'm sure he is, too. He owes them a lot.

OK. I'll have to change tapes.