Chapter Three
Hannah and Her Children, 1940–1942

Finally Antwerp

Hannah: I had never met Tante Roizele but I knew that she was an unusual woman, goodhearted and very wise. She had taken the children into an already large household; cared for them, sent them to school, and provided them with a large family of uncles, aunts, and second cousins who were more than willing to play many games and make them laugh. The children stayed with the family for four long months, not easy for children who had almost never been away from home and only recently had lost their Papa. Needless to say, we had a joyful reunion. Chaya’le did not let me out of her

Photo 3.1  Tante Roizele, Antwerp, 1930s

C. H. Roth, The Fate of Holocaust Memories
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sight. She asked unending questions, “Where is Papa? Where is he now? Why didn’t he come with you?” I had to explain over and over why Papa was not with me. She did not want to believe me and needed to hear again and again that her Papa was not here because he was dead. Gradually, she stopped asking. Gitta’le was quieter, more reserved than her sister, but also very tender with me. She understood so much better than Chaya what was going on. She was of course, almost four years older than her sister.

I must say I was overwhelmed. The Horowitz children, all young or middle aged, were fun loving, warm, and noisy adults. They loved to tell jokes and play pranks with the children. This was a joyful household. I was deeply touched by their kindness. Tante Roizele said to me, “When your children arrived I was amazed to see how well behaved, quiet, and helpful they were. And I said to my own grown children, ‘I want to meet the woman was who has raised such fine children!’ And now I see her; you are indeed everything I expected, and more!”

But I was not well when I arrived. The physical hardships of the journey triggered a kidney infection. Tante Roizele, seeing the state I was in, put me to bed. My room was in the attic three flights up. It was a steep climb, just as Papa had said it was, but I was comfortable there. In order to see me, the girls had to run up and down those narrow stairs, and this was not a quiet affair. But I told myself, “Hanschen, don’t be a fool. You have not come here for a rest.”

Hannah, Gitta, and Chaya

Hannah: Exactly twelve days after my arrival, we awoke to a sky black with German bombers. The Yekkes [Germans] invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. It was May 10, 1940. The Blitzkrieg had begun.

Gitta: The sky was the most beautiful blue and you could see the planes and you even saw the bombs falling from way up high. People came out of their houses, and everyone was looking toward the sky.

Hannah: We actually saw the bombs. It did not seem real. I was terrified because I knew the Yekkes. I said, “We can’t stay here,” and to myself I muttered, “We must leave this place immediately!” Other than the family I had no connections here and I felt trapped. “We must get out of here,” I said to Uncle Herman. Uncle had a friend whose name was Jacques, and this Jacques had a car; he too wanted to escape at all cost. He said to Uncle, “If you pay me for driving you, and for the benzine [gasoline], I will take you, your sister-in-law, and her two children. But, I must warn you, it will be very cramped in the car because I have my wife, my two children, my sister and my mother-in-law, and they will be traveling with us.” We were four and they were six. How all ten of us would fit into that ordinary car, I could not imagine, because the car was not even a station wagon like you have today, it was just an ordinary car. But in the end we all fit in, and we left in that one car.