Opening extract from

I am David

Written by

Anne Holm

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I AM DAVID

ANNE HOLM

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH BY L. W. KINGSLAND

HERITAGE
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Foreword

Else Annelise Jørgensen, pen name Anne Holm, was born in Denmark in 1922. After finishing school, she trained as a journalist and spent much of her life travelling around Europe, also spending some years in America. She spoke German, Italian, French and English, was politically motivated and wrote about the impact of Cold War on ordinary people in much of her journalism.

I Am David, called simply *David* in the original Danish, was first published in Britain in 1965. It has won many awards, including the prize for the Best Scandinavian Children's Book in 1963. Never out of print since first publication, it is considered a classic all over Europe.

The novel begins in an unnamed concentration camp somewhere in Eastern Europe. As late as 1953, there were still more than 2.5 million people in forced labour camps in the Soviet

Union. David represents the experiences of these forgotten people, helping young readers to access and understand the consequences of decades of fear and mistreatment that affected families and communities.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about David is his unshakeable sense of morality. Despite knowing nothing about the world around him, he recognises good and bad, judging according to his own conscience, rather than the rules of the only home he has ever known. Not only is this a story about growing up, it is about finding a place in an unrecognisable world.

Covering a great distance and learning as he goes, David's journey helps readers to map the impact of war on the landscape of Europe. Unlike other children's literature shaped by war, *I Am David* remains detached, asking us to decide what we think. Our understanding grows with David's, and we are left feeling as though we have gone on the journey with him.

Holm died in December 1998. Her work reminds us about the importance of history and our responsibility to remember. As this terrible time passes out of living memory, *I Am David* helps us not to forget the impact of cruelty on individual lives.

I

David lay quite still in the darkness, listening to the men's low muttering. But this evening he was aware of their voices only as a vague meaningless noise in the distance, and he paid no attention to what they were saying.

'You must get away tonight,' the man had told him. 'Stay awake so that you're ready just before the guard's changed. When you see me strike a match, the current will be cut off and you can climb over – you'll have half a minute for it, no more.'

In his mind's eye David saw once again the grey bare room he knew so well. He saw the man and was conscious, somewhere in the pit of his stomach, of the hard knot of hate he felt whenever he saw him. The man's eyes were small, repulsive, light in colour, their expression never changing; his face was gross and fat. David

had known him all his life, but he never spoke to him more than was barely necessary to answer his questions; and though he had known his name for as long as he could remember, he never said anything but 'the man' when he spoke about him or thought of him. Giving him a name would be like admitting that he knew him; it would place him on an equal footing with the others.

But that evening he had spoken to him. He had said, 'And if I don't escape?'

The man had shrugged his shoulders. 'That'll be none of my business. I have to leave here tomorrow, and whatever my successor may decide to do about you, I shan't be able to interfere. But you'll soon be a big lad, and there's need in a good many places for those strong enough to work.'

David knew only too well that those other places would not be any better than the camp where he now was. 'And if I get away without being caught, what then?' he had asked.

'Just by the big tree in the thicket that lies on the road out to the mines, you'll find a bottle of water and a compass. Follow the compass southwards till you get to Salonica, and then when no one's looking go on board a ship and hide. You'll have to stay hidden while the ship's at sea, and you'll need the water. Find a ship that's bound for Italy, and when you get there go north till you come to a country called Denmark – you'll be safe there.'

David had very nearly shown his astonishment, but he controlled himself, and hiding his feelings merely said, 'I don't know what a compass is.'

The man had shown him one, telling him that the four letters indicated north, south, east and west, and that the needle, which swung freely, always pointed in the same direction. Then he had added, 'The half minute the current's cut off is intended for you. If you try to take anyone with you, you can be sure that neither of you will get away. And now clear off before you're missed.'

David did not know what possessed him to say it – he had never asked the man for anything, partly because he knew it would be of no use, but chiefly because he would not – when you hated someone, you did not ask him for anything. But tonight he had done it: when he reached the door, he turned round, and looking straight into that coarse heavy face said, 'I'd like a piece of soap.'

For a moment there had been complete silence in that bare grey room. Then the man picked up a cake of soap that lay by the side of the wash-basin in the corner and threw it on the table. All he said was, 'Now go.'

So David had gone, as quickly as it was possible to go without appearing to be in a hurry.

The men's muttering was fainter now – some of them must

have fallen asleep. The camp's latest arrival was still talking. David recognized his voice because it was less flat and grating than the others. Whenever the newcomer dozed off to sleep, he was seized with a nightmare, and then they would all wake up again. The night before, this had happened just before the guard was changed, but if he took longer to fall asleep this evening, then it might be possible for David to slip out before the others were wakened again.

David was not yet sure whether he would make the attempt. He tried to work out why the man had told him to do it. It was certainly a trap: just as he was climbing over, the searchlight would suddenly swing round and catch him in its beam, and then they would shoot. Perhaps something pleasant was going to happen tomorrow and the man wanted him shot first. David had always known that the man hated him, just as much as David hated *him* in return. On the other hand, nothing pleasant had ever yet happened in the camp that David could remember, and he was now twelve years old – it said so on his identity-card.

And then quite suddenly David decided he would do it. He had turned it over in his mind until his head was in a whirl and he still could not understand why the man had told him to escape. Suppose it were a trap and they shot him, it would all be over

quickly anyway. If you were fired at while trying to escape, you would be dead within a minute. Yes, David decided to try.

There could not be many minutes left now. Over in the guard-room he could hear them moving about and getting dressed, and he could hear the guard yawning as his pace grew slower. Then came the sound of new steps and David pressed himself even more closely against the wall. It was the man; the faint sleepy yellow light from the guard-room shone for a moment on his face as he passed the window. He went up to the guard, and David suddenly felt quite empty inside and was sure that he would be unable to move when the time came. Then he saw before him the endless succession of days, months and years that would pass if he did not. The waiting would kill him in the end, but it might take years. And it would grow worse and worse, all the time: David clenched his teeth so hard that he felt the muscles of his throat grow taut. Then the man struck a match.

Nineteen, twenty . . . the half minute would be up when he had counted slowly to thirty . . . David set his foot in a gap higher up the barbed wire . . . When would the searchlight come? They could not be certain of hitting him in the dark . . . and if they did not hurry he would be over.

A moment later he had touched the ground on the other side,

and as he ran he said angrily to himself, 'What a fool you are! There's plenty of ground to cover yet – all this great flat stretch without so much as the stump of a tree for shelter. They'll wait till you've nearly reached the thicket . . . they'll think it more amusing if you believe you've almost got to safety.'

Why didn't they hurry up? The thought pounded through his head as every moment he expected to see the ground lit up in front of him. Then he stopped. He would run no more. When the beam of light caught him, they should see him walking away quite calmly. Then they would not enjoy it so much, they would feel cheated. The thought filled David with triumph.

When he was little, it had been his most burning desire to get the better of them, especially of the man. And now he would! They would be forced to shoot him as they watched him walking quietly away and taking no notice of them!

David was so taken up with his victory over them that he had gone a dozen yards past the spot where the thicket hid him from the camp before he realized that no one had fired. He stopped short. What could have happened? He turned, found a place where the thicket was thin enough to peer through and looked across at the low buildings outlined against the dark sky, like an even darker smudge of blackness. He could faintly hear the tread of the guard, but it came no nearer and sounded no different

from usual, only farther off. Nothing at all appeared different.

David frowned in the darkness and stood for a moment undecided: it couldn't possibly . . . ? He trotted on, following the edge of the thicket towards the big tree, running faster the nearer he got, and when he reached the tree he threw himself down on the ground, searching frantically with his hands round the trunk.

There was the bundle. David leaned up against the tree shivering with cold although it was not cold at all. The bundle was a piece of cloth wrapped round something and tied in a knot. He fumbled with the knot, but his fingers were clumsy and would not respond – and then he suddenly realized that he dared not undo it. There would be something dangerous inside the bundle . . . He tried to gather his thoughts together sufficiently to think what it might be, but his imagination did not get beyond a bomb.

It would make little difference, he thought desperately – a bullet or a bomb: it would soon be over, either way. Frantically, his fingers awkward, he struggled with the knot.

But there was no bomb in the cloth. It was a square handkerchief tied cross-wise over a bottle of water and a compass, just as the man had said. He barely managed to turn aside before he was sick.

Afterwards he felt carefully all round the square-shaped bundle. A bottle, a compass – there was something else. David's

eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness: in the bundle there were also a box of matches, a large loaf of bread and a pocket-knife.

So the man had intended him to escape after all! A search-party would be sent out for him in the morning, but not before. The night was his, and it was up to him to make the most of it.

All this had taken only a few minutes, but to David it felt like hours. His hand closed tightly round the soap – he had not let go of it for a moment since he first got it. He recalled the hours he had spent that evening lying on his plank-bed listening to the muttered conversation of the men and thinking over what the man had said. He remembered, too, that it would be only a matter of time before he was caught again; but that, like everything else, no longer seemed important. All that mattered now was his bundle and the freedom of the night that lay ahead. Slowly he tucked the piece of soap into a corner of the handkerchief, laid the bottle, bread and knife on top, tied the ends together, took a firm grip on the knot and looked at the compass in his hand.

Then he ran.

When he looked back afterwards, all he could recall of the five days that followed was running and looking all the time at the compass to make sure he was travelling in the right direction.

Every night he ran, and he ran all night long. Once he slipped into a water-hole and the mud caked on him as it dried. Once he was so torn by branches that blood oozed from the scratches on his face, hands and legs. He would never forget that night. He had come to a close thicket of thorn bushes, and the needle indicated that he should go straight through it. He had hesitated a moment and then tried running a few yards along the edge of it, but the compass needle immediately swung round. Perhaps he could have recovered his direction a little farther on, but he knew so little about compasses that he dared not risk it. And so he plunged into the thicket, elbows up to protect his face. The first branch that struck him hurt painfully, and so did the first gash along his arm, but after that he noticed nothing and just crashed his way through. The nights were usually completely quiet, but that night he could hear a whimpering moan the whole time. Not until afterwards did he realize that the sound had come from himself.

He ran all the time, sometimes fairly slowly so that it took him hours to go a short way, sometimes so quickly that he felt his blood pounding. Every morning with the first glimmer of daylight he lay down to sleep. It was not very difficult to find somewhere to sleep in that sparsely inhabited district. David had no idea what the countryside looked like: for him it was only a

place where he must run through the night and hide by day.

Two other incidents remained in his memory: they were moments when fear grew to a sharp-pointed terror that seemed to pierce him right through. The first happened just as it was growing dark one evening. David was awakened by something warm and hairy touching his hand. He lay still, tense with fear. It was some minutes before he could bring himself to turn his head, and then he saw – a sheep.

But it spelled danger, nevertheless, for where there are sheep there must also be people, and that evening David did not stop to recover his breath for some hours afterwards.

Yet he was glad enough to come across more sheep later that night. David was used to hard work and satisfied with very little food, and he had been as sparing as he could with the bread and water, but after two whole days the bottle was empty and the bread eaten. He could manage without bread but it was dreadful to be so thirsty. In the end he could think of hardly anything but water. But where was he to get it?

At that point he almost stumbled over two shepherds who lay asleep on the ground wrapped in their cloaks. His heart, which had been thumping so loudly all through the night, missed a beat, so terror-stricken was he. But he stopped himself just in time: bare feet make no noise and the two men had heard nothing.

David was about to step back, slowly and cautiously, when he caught sight, in the moonlight, of a bucket with a lid and the embers of a burned-down fire. Food! And where there was food, there was probably water, too!

That night David went no farther. He kept watch till daybreak, far enough off to give him a chance to escape should that prove necessary, and yet near enough to be back in a moment as soon as the two shepherds were out of sight in the morning. There was little doubt that this was their regular camping-place for the night, for they left their bundles and the bucket behind. Perhaps they would soon be back, but that was a risk David decided he must take. Without food, or at least without water, he would not be able to last many more hours. He was familiar enough from his experiences in the camp with what happened when a man was left without food and water.

What had nearly proved a catastrophe ended as a stroke of good fortune. There was some soup left in the bucket, and in one of the bundles he found a chunk of bread. He broke the bread unevenly, leaving a small piece behind, and then filling his bottle with soup he replaced the lid and knocked it off again with his elbow. He did not know whether sheep ate bread and soup, but he wanted to make it look as if they had been there.

After that night he took care to run at a more even pace and

to stop more often, but for shorter periods, to recover his breath. He must not again risk being so tired that he saw nothing and stumbled on blindly.

David edged cautiously forward on his stomach. It was the second time he had found himself close to a town, and for the second time the compass was directing him to cross a main road. He dared not disobey it; it was almost as if some part of the man himself were travelling with him.

He ought to have asked how long it would take him to reach Salonica. He had only two mouthfuls of soup left now and a single bite of bread.

And there were people about. That meant he had not nearly so much of the night at his disposal – he would have to wait until they had gone to bed. He told himself that he should have known all along that he would occasionally come across towns . . . He forced himself to lie absolutely still.

But he was not sleepy any longer, and when he was not sleepy lying still became almost unbearable, for then it was difficult not to think – and David knew that he must not think. He had learned that – then. The only thing to do was to take no notice: you could look and listen, but you must not let what you heard or saw penetrate your thoughts. You must not let your thoughts

dwell upon anything more important than whether it would rain or turn out fine, whether you had long to wait for your next meal, or how long it would be till the guard was changed. And you must not be too interested in those things either – you must merely make use of them to fill your thoughts and prevent other things from slipping into your mind.

Since the evening of his escape, the things that had formerly occupied his thoughts were no longer there, and others had taken their place. He gave his mind to hurrying along as fast as possible during the night, to stopping as soon as the darkness began to lift so that he could find a good hiding-place before day broke, to looking after his bundle and avoiding the temptation of taking an extra bite or another drop to drink, to going in the right direction all the time so that the compass needle did not shift its position. These things served to fill his thoughts to the exclusion of other matters. But when it came to lying still and yet being wide awake – that was dangerous! So he began to think about a feeling he had had several times during the previous night – that the ground he was travelling over was changing, becoming more up-and-down . . . that mountains would bar the road to Salonica.

Don't think, don't think! David clenched his hands, gripping a tuft of grass. He mustn't think at all, for if he did, there was only one thing to think about – that he would not be able to run any

farther. Why had they not caught him the night he crossed the bridge? He could not swim, so the bridge had been his only way over the river, and he had been quite sure he would be caught there. Yes, that had been the only restful moment in all those long days and nights – crossing that bridge and feeling certain they would catch him.

But no one had come.

David's feet were no longer part of him. When he himself cared no more, his feet followed their own path independently, stealing along noiselessly, confidently, guiding his body so that he kept to the shadows and avoided obstacles, stopping him in time, or urging him on whenever he felt he would rather lie down and wait till he was caught.

And his feet had carried him over the bridge.

He clenched his teeth. 'Salonica!' he whispered and went on repeating the word over and over again to himself until it seemed to fill his brain. 'Go south till you reach Salonica. Think of nothing else!'

At that moment the sound of a car pulling up caused him to stiffen. Was he far enough from the road?

Then he heard voices. He was so terrified he nearly jumped out of his skin. He was quite unused to the sound of voices by this time; the last he had heard were the guard's and the man's.

But these were different, and they were coming nearer! David relaxed completely so that he would make as little noise as possible, and as he did so he thought that in a moment all would be over – everything.

The men sat down a little way off and lit cigarettes, and it gradually dawned upon David that they were not looking for him at all. He began to listen to what they were saying. He found it difficult to follow them since their speech differed from the man's, but after a while David was able to distinguish words that were familiar to him.

They drove a delivery van, like the men who brought supplies to the camp. They were arguing now, but with no great heat: one of them wanted to drive on, and the other wanted to visit someone first in the town David had seen nearby. In the end he got his way; the first man said he would go with him, but only for half an hour as it was a long way home.

Like an echo of his own thoughts, David caught the word 'Salonica'!

The next thing he was fully aware of was that he was sitting in the van as it began to move off.

The men had driven towards the town, and David had allowed his feet to carry him mechanically after the van. It had stopped

on the outskirts of the town, and when the two men disappeared into a house, David's feet gathered speed until he reached it.

And now he had a lift! There had been lights in the houses but no one had seen him. The van door had not been locked, and although the back of the van was well filled with packing-cases, there was room enough for David to squeeze himself between two of them and squat on the floor. And now he was on his way . . . It was pitch-dark inside, both because it was night and because the packing-cases covered the little window in the partition that separated the back of the van from the cab where the men were sitting. Even if they opened the door from the outside, they would not be able to see David without moving all the packing-cases. It was a strange feeling, sitting quite still and being carried along. David had seen cars and lorries, but he had never ridden in one, nor in any other kind of vehicle, and just as it occurred to him that he had no idea how he was going to get out again, he began to feel sleepy – dreadfully sleepy. He strove to keep awake as long as he could, but the even purr of the engine and the swaying and jolting of the van proved too much. He was asleep.

He had no idea how long he slept. He woke because the engine sounded different, as if it were starting up. But surely it could not have been very long? He had lost the habit of sleeping

at night. With infinite care, in almost imperceptibly small jerks, he pushed aside the packing-case nearest the cab where the men were sitting, until he had made a narrow opening through which, when he put one eye to it, he could see a strip of the little window. No, it was still night: it was dark where the men were sitting, too.

If he could only get out before it was day, before they opened the van and found him . . .

He suddenly knew what it felt like to be in one of the cells they had talked about in the camp – locked in, doubled up in inky blackness without being able to move, without being able to die.

'Johannes!' he whispered. 'Johannes . . .'

Ever since he was small, for three whole winters and summers, he had known that he must not allow himself to think, and above all that he must never think about Johannes. And now he had done it.

David let his head sink upon his chest and tried to fight against the flood of memory that poured over him, the terror, the hatred, the frightening questions that burned like fire within him. And through it all, Johannes . . . Johannes smiling; Johannes who, if his voice had grown lifeless and grating like the others, had never changed inside himself; Johannes to whom you could say anything – and Johannes who at last had fallen to the ground and remained lying there, dead.

Never since that day had David thought about him. That night, when they were all in bed, he had gone out into the yard and looked at the spot where Johannes had fallen. He had been standing there for a long time when the man had come along and seen him.

'He died of a heart attack,' he said. 'Clear off now and get to bed!'

Since that day David had never thought about anything but mealtimes and the changing of the guard. At first it had made him ill, but later he had grown used to it. Why should it have come back to him just at this moment when all that mattered was getting to Salonica?

The voice came from somewhere far away. 'I'm going with you to Salonica.' David was not even sure it was Johannes' voice, so far away did it sound; but he knew it must have been because he suddenly felt exactly as he had done when he was small and Johannes was with him.

'Thank you,' he whispered.

And after that it was easy. He found a packing-case that had not been properly nailed down. It contained some kind of food, round and firm, that tasted like a bit of cheese David had once had in the camp. He cut off a piece with his knife, as big a piece as he could get into his handkerchief. The men stopped the van

while it was still dark and left it without opening the door at the back. So David jumped out and found himself in the middle of a large town, and, being careful to walk in the shadow of the houses – for there was no call to be foolhardy even if Johannes were with him – he had no difficulty in finding the harbour where the ships lay. There was a water-tap on the way, too: David watched a man turn it on and drink, and when he had gone and the street was quiet again, David was able to walk over to it and fill his bottle.

The ship he was to find needed no searching for either: it lay right in front of him and on its stern he saw the word 'Italy' painted in large white letters. And it was made fast to the quayside with a great thick rope, ready for David to climb up as soon as the man on watch had gone to the other end of the ship. All David needed to do was to find a length of twine to tie his bundle about his waist while he was climbing. The watchman did not hear him; no one heard him, and down in the bottom of the ship there was a great dark room filled with so many packing-cases that he could barely squeeze himself in.

At first David was anxious to discover if there were any windows down there, but then he realized that he was now below the water-line and so of course there weren't any . . . The time had now come for him to open the last of his treasures, his box of matches.

He took care to shield the flame with his hands as he had so often seen the camp-guards do, and to use no more than one or two matches, since he must be sparing with them.

He saw case after case, stacked right up to the deck above . . . and there were sacks as well. He found a corner where there were only a couple of sacks, and where he could stay well hidden even if someone came into the hold. But that was hardly likely to happen – not before they reached Italy. The sacks and cases were all clearly bound for Italy. Just as the second match died out, David caught sight of a large half-filled bottle standing on the edge of a case. He put his bundle down on the sacks, stretched on tiptoe to reach it, uncorked it and thrust his finger inside the neck. He sniffed his finger cautiously. Perhaps he could drink it. David took the bottle down and settled himself comfortably on his sacks. It would be a good thing to have if he were to be at sea for any length of time.

The noise of the engines woke David, but not until the ship was well under way did he lose the strange dream-like sensation that had been with him ever since the moment in the van when he had suddenly recalled Johannes. Then he knew what had happened. Sitting bolt upright on his sack, his eyes at first wide open and then closed in the darkness, he knew that Johannes was no longer with him – he had stayed behind in Salonica!

David struggled with all his might against the fear that grew within him. He told himself over and over again, 'He promised nothing more: he only said he would stay with me till we got to Salonica.'

But it did not help. All the coldness and darkness and infinite loneliness of the world filled David's mind until it seemed ready to burst. Then he knew no more.

And so the days passed. David lost count of them, for it was dark all the time and there was nothing to distinguish day from night. Once when he woke he picked up the strange bottle by mistake for his own, and after that he took a drink from it every time staying awake any longer grew too much for him, for he discovered that drinking from it very soon made him feel sleepy. It tasted good, too – a little strong perhaps but not unpleasant – and then he could sleep a while longer.

Sometimes he told himself that he had only to scramble over to the door, open it and go up the steps till he met someone – and all his troubles would be over. He wished desperately that he could stop being alive . . . but his feet would not budge, his legs refused to carry him the little distance he had to go before he could give himself up. He wanted to do it, but his body would not take him.

When at last he was discovered, he was taken completely by surprise: he woke up to hear a voice just above his head saying,

'*Mamma mia*, what are you doing here?'

David jumped up like lightning, but made no attempt to run. The man had very black hair, like all Italians. 'Nothing,' answered David in Italian.

The sailor opened his mouth to shout – but thought better of it and instead scrambled over to the door and shut it. Then he came back. He was not sure why he did this. Perhaps because the boy was so quiet – a very thin, very dirty boy who stood as still as death and who had the calmest face he had ever seen.

He ought to call someone and get the boy hauled up into the light of day. Then, by the light of his torch, he looked down into the boy's strange dark eyes and knew he could not. Because that was just what those eyes expected him to do. The Italian sailor tried to shake off the feeling that the boy was going to die. His grandmother's eyes had looked like that the day before she died. But he might be wrong, of course: for one thing his grandmother's eyes had been brown and this boy's were – well, it was not easy to see in that dim light – very dark grey, perhaps, or green.

So he said the first thing that entered his head. 'Have you been drinking my wine?'

'Yes. I'd no more water in my bottle. I didn't know it was wine. Thank you.'

The Italian shook his curly black head. Never had he met such

a child! 'First he swigs my wine without knowing what it is, and then he thanks me for it as if it weren't sheer robbery!' And he was so quiet. A boy caught when he was up to mischief usually made off as fast as his legs would carry him . . . turned and twisted and looked all round for a way of escape. He did not just stand still and look you in the face!

'Where did you think you'd get to?' he asked helplessly.

'To Italy.'

'Hm. Well, I suppose I shall have to hand you over to the captain . . .'

But the Italian knew very well that he would not be able to. 'I don't think you're all there,' he said. He dare not lay hands on him: he could not bring himself to do it. 'On the other hand, we shall be in Salerno this evening. It's hardly worth the trouble of dragging you along to the captain and having all the fuss . . . You can jump overboard just before we get in, and then I shan't have had anything to do with it . . . I'll see about getting you out of here.'

'I can't swim,' the boy said quietly.

'*Mamma mia!* Then you *aren't* all there! I won't have anything to do with it. I'll give you a lifebelt and you must try to drift ashore.'

'Thank you.'

The Italian went his way shaking his head.

David slept no more. He was hungry – but then he had been hungry the last four times he had wakened – and he had run out of food. That was a strange man. It was really very kind of him not to let the captain arrest him; he could not know that David was so tired he could hardly hold out any longer. And now he must take to the water! He did not know anything about lifebelts, but the Italian seemed to think he could drift ashore in one. So perhaps he would run on his way for yet another night, perhaps several nights, before they finally caught up with him.

But although David felt certain he knew what the end would be, his body set about getting him ready. Automatically he stuffed his ragged shirt into his no less ragged trousers, tied his bundle securely and sat down to wait.

It was some time before the man returned. When he did come, David made no move. Perhaps the sailor had had second thoughts about the lifebelt . . . but David was beyond caring.

The Italian had brought the lifebelt, however, and a piece of bread as well. David ate half of it on the spot while the man was showing him how to use his arms to make sure he drifted in the right direction. David watched and realized he would be almost up to his neck in water. He frowned – the talk about direction

had put him in mind of his compass . . . suppose getting wet were bad for it? He had better tie his bundle round his neck, like that.

The man lowered him over the side of the ship on the end of a rope and told him not to splash about in the water until the ship was some way off, otherwise he might be heard. The water was not particularly cold. David looked back at the ship as it sailed swiftly on. For a moment he thought he was going to drown . . . it might very well be an easy way of sending people to their death, a belt like that . . . It looked like a car tyre, he thought. But he did not drown, and he found it was not even necessary to fling his arms about as he had been told to do, for the ship had created a strong wash that drove him nearer and nearer to the dark line of the coast.

But before long David realized it was not quite so easy . . . Several hours passed before he touched land, and by that time he was so cold it might have been the depth of winter and so exhausted he was quite incapable of feeling: only his feet had the will to carry him farther.

David stumbled, staggered, crawled: onwards in the darkness, uphill all the time, the going hard and stony: it must be a mountain slope . . . Then he came to a road and staggered across it without even remembering to see if there were people about . . . then farther uphill where something was growing in low straight lines

. . . then over another stretch of mountainside with hard sharp-edged stones that hurt his feet. And then he could go no farther.

But there was no one to disturb his sleep that night, and when he woke he was no longer tired. He was not even cold – he was pleasantly warm, in fact. He lay awake for a while with his eyes shut, basking in the warmth of his own body while he listened as usual for sounds about him. But all was quiet. Then opening his eyes he sat up and looked.

David was familiar only with various tones of grey and brown, and of course the blue of the sky. Well, yes, he had once seen a little red flower that had strayed inside the camp wall. Apart from that, colour was something he had only heard of: he had seen only a pale and muddied reflection of it – in the ugliness of the camp and the equally ugly quarters of the guards.

He did not know how long he stayed there on the mountainside, sitting motionless, just gazing . . . Only when everything grew strangely misty did he discover that he was crying.

Far below him lay the sea, a sea bluer than any sky he had ever seen. The land curved in and out along its edge: in and out, up and down, all green and golden, with here and there the red of flowers too far off to be clearly seen. Down by the sea a road ran along the foot of the mountain, and near it lay villages whose bright colours gleamed dazzlingly. There were trees with many

changing tints of green, and over it all shone the warming sun – not white-hot and spiteful and scorching, as the sun had shone upon the camp in the summertime, but with a warm golden loveliness.

Beauty. David had once heard Johannes use the word. It must have been something like this he meant . . . perhaps that was why he had come back and gone with him to Salonica, so that he, David, could sail across the sea till he came to a place where things were beautiful.

His tears continued to flow, faster and faster, and he brushed them angrily away so that the mist before his eyes should not veil that beauty from him.

Suddenly he knew that he did not want to die.

He did not want to be caught, he did not want to die. His legs had carried him to the place where the van stood waiting, and when the weight of loneliness had grown too much for him Johannes had kept him company to Salonica. The strange man with the black head of hair had helped him to reach land with a lifebelt. And now that he had learned about beauty he wanted to live . . .