

Sample translation from THIN ICE (TIN IIS) by Tiny Mulder

I

“Suppose we had another child in the house,” Pa said. It wasn’t a question, it was an announcement. So we stared at Ma. She blushed like a rose and let out a shy laugh: “No, it’s not what you’re thinking.”

“Well, what then, who then, how then?” cried Jan, my younger brother, who was nine years old and always running off at the mouth.

“It’s a girl, and aside from that, we know why, but not who or what,” said Ma. “You tell them, Dineke.”

But Jan spoke first. “Forget it. Two sisters is plenty for me.”

Dineke, my older sister, planted her elbows between the dirty dinner plates on the table and said, “It’s a Jewish girl. About nine years old, I was told.”

“Ohhhhh!” It just slipped out of my mouth. When I think back now, I can still feel the chill that went through me. The way I stopped breathing and my toes curled in my shoes.

We knew that Jews were being taken away to Poland. The Jews who were still around weren’t allowed to go anywhere. They had to wear yellow cotton stars on their coats, with the word “Jew” in black letters.

The first time I felt that chill was in Hermes Park. All of a sudden there were new signs by both entrances. “Forbidden for Jews,” they said. And when I went to the village to buy groceries for Ma, I saw signs like that at the cinema, the De Engel Hotel, the gym, and the swimming pool. It made me feel like throwing up.

Imagine if I hadn’t been born to Harm and Jikke Jagersma, but to Mr. Oldenburger the baker, who lives on Tramstrjitte. Then I might be named Eva, like Evy Oldenburger. And I might go to Hermes Park with my friends Jopy and Hinke one Wednesday afternoon, without suspecting a thing. I could just picture it.

Jopy and Hinke pick me up at my house. “Will you come out and play with us, Evy?”

“Play where?”

“In the park.”

“Yay! Ma, can I..”

“Go ahead, but be home by five-thirty.”

“Hooray!”

The three of us run to the park gate and are about to go inside. Then Jopy shouts, “Hey! What does that sign say?”

“Forbidden for Jews,” Hinke reads aloud with emphasis. And they look at me and softly say “ohhhh” with round mouths and eyes. I feel scared. And sick. I want to throw up. I run back home to Ma and Pa and shut myself up in the toilet with the door hooked shut. No park, no swimming pool, no gym, no school party.

That was as much as I could picture, and I still can’t begin to imagine how Evy had felt. My hair was just as dark as hers and my eyes just as brown. When I saw Evy on the street with that Jewish badge on her coat like an evil eye, I felt ashamed. All of us at school were so terribly nice to Evy all the time that it wasn’t really nice anymore.

One day Evy didn’t show up at school. She won’t be back, Mr. Bos predicted. He

had a whole story about it, but we didn't know what he meant. He talked, but without saying anything. No one knew where Evy was.

In Poland, some people said later, in a labor camp. We'd heard about those camps at home. Mrs. Goudman had told Ma about them. Ma went to see Mrs. Goudman now and then. "She's so alone, now that all her children and grandchildren have gone to Poland," Ma said.

At first, Mrs. Goudman received news about the children once in a while: cards from Camp Westerbork, where Jews had to stay until the Germans sent them on trains out of the country. Later, there were letters from Poland. "We have to work hard here, but it's no worse than we expected," wrote Jaap. And Essy sent a card: "We've already run into Uncle Bram and Aunt Else here. What a coincidence!"

"And just in the course of my short visit," Ma says, "Mrs. Goudman must have repeated five times, 'My children are so strong and healthy, and my grandchildren too, and there are worse things than hard work.'"

Later the letters from Poland stopped coming. "Oh, well, there's a war on," Ma said to her. "You can't always expect regular mail." And Mrs. Goudman decided that they obviously had to work extra hard in the summer, so hard that they had no time to write, and that wasn't the worst thing either.

I thought it was weird. If I were in Poland, I would definitely send Ma and Pa a card every week. Even if I were bone-tired and had no news, I'd make sure to sit down and write a couple of lines: "Dear Ma and Pa, Dineke, and Jan, How are you? I'm doing fine. Love and kisses, Klaske." No matter how tired you are, you can write at least that much.

It was nauseating: Mrs. Goudman never said what she meant, Ma never told her what she thought, Ma never told us what she suspected, and we never said "that's odd" or "how peculiar." It was like some horrible game of charades. I had no idea what was really going on in Poland—but the silence was driving me crazy! To think of that nice, handsome Jewish boy Jaap Goudman, who had always caught my eye when he passed with his thick black curls and tailored jacket. Why hadn't he sent his mother a card?

We would have another girl in the house. A Jewish girl. And we couldn't talk to anyone about it.

"Absolutely no one!" Dineke threatened us, narrowing her eyes.

"Grandma and Grandpa are allowed to know about it," said Jan.

"Grandma and Grandpa most certainly are not!" Ma came over to make sure we were paying attention. Under her high, smooth forehead, her eyes were as hard as black marbles.

"Why not?" Jan wanted to know, because he never believed anything without a good reason.

"Because that child is not allowed to be here. Not here, not with her parents, not anywhere in this country. The Krauts want to send her to Poland. But she won't be going there. So she has to stay in hiding—at our house," Pa said, and he looked so serious. And threatening, just like Dineke.

"Oh, so that's why you read that Bible passage about the good Samaritan to us tonight," Jan blurted out.

Pa nodded. "Correct."

"How is it all going to work?" I heard Ma mutter to herself under the rattle of the cups and dishes as she cleared off the table.

After Ma turned out the light in my bedroom, I slipped out of bed and lifted the paper

blackout curtain just a little. It wasn't quite dark yet. I opened the window a crack. It smelled like damp earth and dahlias. The long-limbed branches of the poplars waved at the thin disc of the moon like old friends in a nightclub, and the friendly wind ran over my warm forehead like a cool cloth. Could Evy see the same moon in Poland? Was she too worn out from whatever it was she had to do there? "Children have to work there, just like grownups, but that's not the worst thing." That was another thing Mrs. Goudman kept saying.

How would we manage with a new little sister in the house? Did it mean Grandma and Grandpa couldn't visit anymore, and how could we keep them away? What was I supposed to say to Jopy and Hinke?

"Forbidden for Jews, terrible news." I chanted the rhyme to myself over and over again, quickly, solemnly, in my best speaking voice, flatly, angrily, fearfully, to myself, to the thin disc of the moon and a new star, to Jesus.

My little sister can sleep with me in this big bed. Will she be scared? Bet she will.

Even more scared than I am. Dear God, why does it have to be this way? Do grownups understand? 'Cause I sure don't.

II

“Klaske!” Ma shouted from upstairs when I got home from school. She was hard at work cleaning every inch of my bedroom. Once I reached the landing, I could see she’d turned my bed upside down. Blankets were draped over the chair; sheets and pillowcases were heaped next to the top of the stairs. She was carrying two pillows. The door to my closet was wide open.

“It’s best if she sleeps with you, all right?”

“Sure. I’d already thought of that, actually. So she won’t be so alone.”

“Good. I fetched an extra pillow from the guest bed. How about you make some room for her to hang her clothes next to yours, and clear off a couple shelves for her.”

“*Her*. What do you think her name is?” I said.

“No idea.”

“Rachel or Leah or Ruth.”

Ma joined in. “Esther or Sarah or Rebecca.” Then she quickly added, “That’ll never do. We’ll just have to call her Afke, after your aunt.”

I stacked up my shirts and underwear. Imagine if I wasn’t allowed to use the name Klaske anymore and strangers named me after some aunt I’d never met. What if they called me Sybrandsje, or some other awful name, and made me share a bed with a girl I didn’t even know?

“When’s she coming? Afke?”

“Tonight,” Ma said. “Once it’s dark out, Dineke will go and pick her up.”

“From where? What else does Dineke do? How much does she know?”

“Those are three of the thousands of questions we’re not supposed to ask.” Ma shook out a clean sheet over the bed and tucked it under the mattress with broad sweeps of her arms. “Almost done with your clothes? Then you can finish making the bed. I need to start cooking dinner.”

I pulled a pillowcase over the pillow. I bet she has black hair, like me and Ma. On the other hand, Evy’s brother had red hair. Jews don’t all have dark hair. Is Evy really in Poland? If this girl is staying with us, then maybe Evy...

I couldn’t keep my mind on my French homework. Ma was darning my stockings—yet another hole in the heel, and no new stockings to be had. Pa was puffing foul-smelling smoke from his pipe. Jan was drawing. We were sitting around the big table, where the lamp brought out the warm colors of the plush tablecloth. Dineke had already left. It felt to me as though we weren’t snug at home, but in a waiting room at a train station, about to set off on a journey to an unknown destination.

“It’s a cloudy night,” Pa had said, after seeing Dineke off at the door.

It would be pitch-dark out there. Not one lamppost was shining outside—they hadn’t been for years. There wasn’t any light from the houses either. Everyone lowered paper blackout curtains like ours before lighting their lamps. If even one thin ray of light was visible outside the house, the police would come by and you’d be fined.

“Time for bed, Jan,” Pa said abruptly. Jan went on drawing without a second’s pause, and Pa didn’t bother to try again.

“They’ll be here soon,” Ma said.

Jan held up his drawing. A horse with crooked eyes and an overstretched neck. Ma hung my stockings over the back of the chair. The French sentences waltzed across the page, impossible to follow.

"There they are," said Jan.

Ma jumped all the way to the kitchen door.

Jan laughed. "Um, no, Ma. I mean the Tommies."

In the distance we heard the familiar, monotonous drone of flying machines. The British Royal Air Force, the RAF, delivering their bombs to Germany.

"I just hope it's not an air raid," Pa said anxiously.

The droning went on for a while, a dull rising and falling hum. We strained to hear whether they were coming our way. Pa went outside, but was soon back inside again. "They're passing to the north of us."

Then all of a sudden, there was Dineke, with a little girl holding her hand. My first thought was, she's not nine years old, maybe seven.

"This is Anneke," Dineke said.

For a moment, no one said a word. No matter how old I get, I'll never forget that scene: a thin, black-haired little thing with a doll under either arm, a knapsack on her back, and watchful brown eyes that scanned the unfamiliar room full of unfamiliar people. Then Ma put her arm around the girl's shoulders: "Come on in, Anneke."

Anneke. Anyone could be named Anneke. So we won't have to call her Afke, I thought in relief.

It was strange, the way all of us were sitting there staring at the girl. Pa seemed to notice the same thing. "Come here and let me have a good look at you," he said. "So you're our new daughter. You can take a good look at us too." He unbuttoned her coat and pulled off her wool hat. I wondered why on earth she was wearing such a warm hat and such a thick coat at that time of year.

"Why don't you put those dolls down on the table? Then we can get you out of that coat," Pa said. She let go of the dolls reluctantly, and as soon as her coat was off, she picked them up again.

"Now, if you come and sit on my knee," said Pa, "I'll tell you who all of us are. OK?"

Anneke nodded and let him lift her up. The dolls dangled on either side of her blue knit dress. One had a dress just like Anneke's. It was a doll with curly blonde hair on its porcelain head and sleepy blue eyes. The other was a harlequin, checkered red and yellow. Pa shifted in his chair so that Anneke and the dolls could sit comfortably on his lap.

"You can put your dolls back down on the table," he said. But Anneke clung to them even tighter.

"You want to hold onto them?" Pa asked.

For the first time, Anneke opened her mouth. "They're such a comfort to me," she said. It was funny to hear those adult words coming out of that little mouth, but no one laughed.

"You've already met Dineke," Pa said. "And that girl over there with brown eyes and hair as dark as yours is Klaske. And that's our boy, Jan. Would you like to call us uncle and auntie? All right, then. That's Auntie Jikke and I'm Uncle Harm. Can you remember that?"

Anneke looked at us one by one as if trying to stare straight through us, and nodded.

"Do you like hot chocolate, Anneke?" Ma asked.

"Yes, I do," she said.

"So do we!" Jan cheered.

Hot chocolate! Ma had squirreled away a box of cocoa powder, and the only time she ever let us have any was on holidays.

“Six hot chocolates!” she said and went to the kitchen.

Anneke whispered something in Pa’s ear.

“Of course, sweetie. Quick, let’s go. Do your dolls have to go too?”

Pa led Anneke out through the scullery door. “She has to use the toilet,” Jan whispered.

“Just like you and me and everybody else,” Dineke pointed out. “That child is as tired and sleepy as anything. It hasn’t been easy for her. This is her fourth address.”

“Address?” Jan asked.

“Yes, her fourth hiding place. They call it an address.”

“And her pa and ma?” I hoped that wasn’t one of the hundreds of forbidden questions.

“They’re in hiding too. Don’t ask me where, because I don’t know, of course.”

“And Anneke doesn’t know either.”

“No, and she can never be told, just like her parents can never be told where Anneke is.”

“That’s crazy,” Jan grumbled. “Stupid Krauts.”

“Is she really called Anneke?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” Dineke answered.

Pa and Anneke came back into the room, followed by Ma with six cups of hot chocolate.

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Anneke when Ma put the cup down in front of her.

“She’s not ‘ma’am’ to you,” Pa said.

“Oh, I mean Auntie Jikke.” Anneke put down the harlequin next to the cup of hot chocolate. As soon as she was done drinking, she tucked it under her arm again, its pointy hat sticking out on top, limp legs in loose white pants dangling down below. A comfort.

“Now let’s get you to bed, Anneke,” Ma said. “You can sleep with her, with Klaske. Is your nightgown in here?”

Ma picked up the knapsack hanging next to the china closet. Anneke nodded and slid off Pa’s knee.

“You come and join us in a few minutes, all right, Klas?” Ma asked. “Come on, Anneke.”

As soon as they’d left the room, I said, “She looks like Ma and me.”

No one spoke. Jan put away his pencils and paper and went upstairs.

“What was that you just said?” Dineke asked. “Say it again.”

“I said, ‘She looks like Ma and me.’”

“Got it!” exclaimed Dineke. “Thank you kindly.”

“Why are you being so polite to me? And what did you get?”

“I’ll tell you later. Maybe. First let’s see if it works.” Talking in riddles.

I went up to my room and saw Anneke sitting up in bed in a light blue nightgown with red roses. She had pretty clothes. The dolls were lying on the far pillow, the one on the wall side, and all the things she had brought in her knapsack lay strewn across the blanket. Ma and Anneke were rummaging through them together for her panties, shirts, dresses, blouses, skirts, socks, and shoes.

“My brown sandals are missing,” Anneke cried out angrily, with a fierce look her eyes. “Clara must have snatched them. And ohhh, my pink blouse is gone too. It’s just like Henny to steal it!” Her face had turned red, and her eyes looked like they were about to pop out.

“Now, hold on!” Ma said. “You don’t know that for sure, little snippet.”

“Oh, yes I do! She stole everything, even Joast’s train.”

“Who are you talking about? Who were those children?” Ma asked.

“They were staying with the aunties. There were at least eight Jewish kids there, and a couple of others.” Anneke rattled on about Clara and Henny and Job and Kees and Joast. She threw down the clothes and pulled out a red hairband. “Where’s my blue one? Oh, there it is.”

“All right, settle down now,” Ma said softly. She put her arms around Anneke and stroked her head. “Little dolly. We’ll take good care of you.” Ma had tears in her eyes. I felt like crying myself, so I started to sort through the clothes.

“Will I have to leave again soon?” Anneke asked.

“Not on your life. You’re staying with us now,” Ma said. Anneke grew very quiet and snuggled up against her. I folded her clothes and put them away in the cupboard.

Then Anneke shot out of Ma’s arms again. “And they took the packages Mom and Dad sent me, with cookies and doll clothes.”

I undressed, put on my pajamas, and crawled under the covers. “Coming?” Anneke slipped into place beside me and put a doll on either side of her head. There we lay, four in a row. Ma gave us each a goodnight kiss before she left.

But Anneke wasn’t ready to sleep. In a high, angry voice, she told story after story about the aunties, and an aunt and uncle, and all sorts of kids she apparently couldn’t stand: this one stole, and that one hit her and pinched her ears, and little Joast was such a sweetie. Had Joast been taken away from his mom and dad too? Oh, yes, a long time ago. Did Anneke have any brothers and sisters? No.

I would have liked to know how she’d been separated from her mother and father. How does that work? But it seemed like a terrible time to bring it up. It was probably past eleven. I could hear the rattle of Ma doing dishes in the kitchen. The wind banged at the window a few times as if it wanted to come inside, and we could briefly hear the sound of a passing aircraft, just one, a Kraut. Anneke’s chatter had stopped. I lifted my head carefully and looked to the right. She was asleep, with her dolls on either side to comfort her. Dear God, please let her stay with us. Don’t let them find her. Don’t let us... Come to think of it, what could happen to us?

Sample translated by David McKay, www.openbooktranslation.com.

Brief summary from *10 Books from Friesland*, brochure published by the Dutch Foundation for Literature

Tiny Mulder

Thin Ice

Resistance under occupation, witnessed by a teenage girl

Collaborate, accommodate or resist – in occupied territories ordinary people confront this moral dilemma. In *Thin Ice* an adolescent girl describes the choices made by her and the people around her in the occupied Netherlands during the Second World War. The novel depicts the frightening and often heroic consequences of those decisions, while at the same time everyday life goes on as usual.

Klaske Jagersma is fourteen when the war becomes a reality even inside the family home. Her parents decide to take in a Jewish girl, Anneke, to save her from deportation. Further secret guests follow as the Jagersma household becomes a refuge for those who have gone into hiding and for downed Allied pilots. Moreover, Klaske herself, after the example of her older sister Dineke, becomes involved with the resistance. Teenage girls do not quickly arouse suspicion, so she is able to make an important contribution.

Klaske, the narrator of the story, takes a full part in events, but she is also the sober, sometimes even ironic spectator. Her observations and comments enable us to feel the psychological tension that events create in those involved. The choices made turn out to have their unpredictable sides. The adolescent Klaske secretly finds the danger she faces in her underground activities attractive. No less unforeseen is that her mother feels as if she is handing over a child of her own when she returns Anneke to her real parents after the war. Even more than adventure and heroism, *Thin Ice* is about uncertainty and anxiety. The central characters value human empathy above dogma and ideology. Tiny Mulder works her own memories of the war into the novel. She too was active in the Dutch resistance and her parents hid people in the house. Her intention in writing *Thin Ice* was to reach young people in particular, but the novel was read by many adults and grew to become one of the most highly rated books ever written in the Frisian language. It was reprinted five times and also published in Dutch.

Tin iis (1981, 6th edition 2014), 305 pp., 101,320 words

Tiny Mulder: her life and work

Life

Tiny Mulder – novelist, poet, and hero of the Dutch resistance in the Second World War – was born in a small village in the northern Dutch province of Friesland. Around her nineteenth birthday, the Second World War broke out in the Netherlands. She had hoped to become a journalist after graduating, but wartime conditions made that impossible. Through her work at the local rationing office, she met Piter Wybenga, her supervisor, who became one of the leaders of the Frisian resistance to the Nazi occupation. When he invited her to join his resistance cell in 1942, she said yes at once and was soon helping downed Allied pilots, helping Jewish people go into hiding, and doing whatever other jobs came her way.

After the war, Tiny Mulder became a reporter for the leading Frisian newspaper and worked as an interpreter for the military authorities. In November 1945 she covered the trial of the Dutch Nazi leader Anton Mussert, whom she described as a “small, strange, distant man.” She attended the first meeting of the United Nations, with Eleanor Roosevelt, in London. In 1947 she went to America and wrote a critical piece about racial discrimination: “The Negro Question in the United States.” She worked part-time as a journalist for forty years, including periods as a correspondent in England, Scotland, America, Canada, and Denmark. In the early 1950s she set up the children’s section of her newspaper, which she wrote for many years.

For her work in the resistance, Mulder received the United States Medal of Freedom with the Silver Palm in 1946. From the United Kingdom, she received the King’s Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom. In 2010, she was posthumously awarded the Yad Vashem title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Work

Tiny Mulder was also a leading Frisian author, widely known and well loved for her work in many genres. Besides her novels, she published numerous collections of poetry and short stories, children’s books, radio plays, and a collection of interviews. She also translated plays and children’s books, such as *Alice in Wonderland*. For many years, she reviewed books for her newspaper, and she often discussed books on the radio.

Mulder wrote two novels: *Thin Ice* (*Tin iis*), the better known of the two, was published in Frisian in 1981 and in her own Dutch translation in 1987. Her second novel, *A Wonderful Age*, followed in 1991. *Thin Ice* was originally intended as a children’s book, but adult readers were so enthusiastic that the second edition was presented as an adult novel.

In the book, Mulder describes her own experiences as a wartime courier, but it is also a tribute to her parents, who allowed a young Jewish girl in need of a hiding place to stay in their home. One unique aspect of this book is its focus on the experiences of women in the resistance. It conveys the courage of all the housewives and mothers who took in Jewish children and often cared for one or more people in hiding. The book remains popular to this day; the Frisian edition went into six editions and is now available as an e-book and audio book, and the Dutch translation was also very successful.

Mulder’s writing also received excellent reviews; critics appreciated her literary craftsmanship and personal engagement. She was the eleven-time winner of the Rely Jorritsma Prize, awarded annually to a small number of the best Frisian-language stories

and poems. In 1986, she won the biennial Gysbert Japicx Prize, the greatest honor for Frisian-language writers, for her entire body of work. Her biography was published in 2004.

Biographical sketch compiled by David McKay, based primarily on
<https://www.sirkwy.frl/index.php/schrijvers-biografieen/97-m/432-mulder-tiny>

See also:
<https://www.historynet.com/tiny-mulder-teenage-world-war-ii-resistance-heroine.htm>

For more information, please contact David McKay <mckay@openbooktranslation.com> or Alexandra Koch <a.koch@letterenfonds.nl> at the Dutch Foundation for Literature. Tiny Mulder's publisher is Elikser; contact Jitske Kingma <jitskekingma@elikser.nl>. Reinier Salverda, the longtime director of the Frisian Academy and a professor of Dutch language and literature at University College London, would be happy to provide a statement about Tiny Mulder's literary and cultural significance if desired.
