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Introduction to Diary

Anais Nin

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INTRODUCTION TO DIARY, VOLUME III

Anais Nin

Dec. 1939

I left a Paris lit in a muted way like the inside of a cathedral, full of shadowy niches, black corners, twinkling oil lamps. In the half mist hanging over it, violet, blue and green lights looked like stained glass windows all wet and alive with candle light. I could not have recognized the faces of those I was leaving. My bags were carried by a soldier whose shoes were too big for him. I suffered deeply from the tear of separation. I felt every cell and cord which tied me to France snapping in me, the parting from a pattern of life I loved, from an atmosphere rich, creative and human, from intimacy with a people and a city. I was parting from a rhythm rooted very deeply in me, from mysterious enveloped nights, from an obsession with war which gave a bitter and vivid taste to all our living, from the sound of anti-aircraft guns, of airplanes passing, of sirens lamenting like fog horns on stormy nights at sea.

Thousands of umbilical cords snapping and tearing. I could not believe that there could be, anywhere in the world, space and air and light where the nightmare of war did not exist.

On the train to Irun. On the way to take the hydroplane: from Portugal. It seems as if I will never tear myself away from France, each mile of the journey, each landscape, each little station, each face, causes a painful tearing away. I carry with me only two brief cases filled with more recent diaries. At the last moment, when I had taken all of them out of the vault in the Paris bank, and packed them in two suit cases, I found out that the cost of excess weight far exceeded the money I had. I had to choose between paying excess for two valises filled with diaries, or buying winter coats for Helba and Gonzalo. So the greater bulk of the diaries went back into the vault. And now, in the train, I feel despondent, I feel ashamed to be saved from catastrophe, to abandon my friends to an unknown fate. For the second time America looms as a refuge. My mind is still journeying backwards in time. I think of the

Ligne Maginot which crossed near Louveciennes, in the Forest of Marly. We stumbled upon it one day on a hike. The young soldier took us through a part of it. He was very proud of it. A cement labyrinth with only cannon holes for apertures. He showed us a vast empty pool, which he explained would be filled with acid to dissolve the body of the dead. I think of my concierge who lost her husband in the first war and might lose her son in the second. I think of the Pierre Chareau's in danger because they are Jews, and those who escaped from Germany and are now once more afraid for their lives.

At Irun there was a period of waiting, a change of trains. I took a walk. There was a wall behind a Church, at the top of a hill. I turned my back on it to look at the Church. I felt pains in my back. I turned around. Suddenly I observed that this wall was pitted with gun shots. A Spaniard said: "Thousands of Spaniards were executed here." Vestiges of destruction all around me. Children still playing in the ruins of buildings.

The train again. Portugal. I cannot smile at the sun. I cannot smile at the white buildings and the women in black, at the wild flowers and the singing in cafes. I am in mourning for France.

The hydroplane is poised on the water. The refugees cheer it. Escapel. A woman takes me to the ladies' room to search me, to see that I am not carrying a revolver or a camera or gold. To get inside the hydroplane we walk on the surface of the wing and enter through an opening in its belly. The metal was the same color as the sea. It seemed too heavy to fly, and as it coursed along the water with only one motor starting and then another, gathering speed but bumping against the waves, I felt as if in a nightmare in which one cannot fly upward even in the case of great dangers menacing you.

Strange that when it finally started flying the separation from the past seemed easier to achieve. Height and distance from the earth seems to stabilize the spirit, to liberate it from its sorrows. One enters the consciousness of the cosmos. The face of France grew smaller. Europe grew smaller.

Now there are only sky and clouds.

We landed at the Azores. The legends say this is part of the Atlantis which did not sink. Black coral rocks, black sand from volcanic eruptions. Pastel colored houses clinging to the rocks. A soft grey drizzle. The houses lean against each other and look shaky and frail, like Utrillo's houses. The women pass by in long dark capes, their faces hid-

den in large hoods supported by a frame, like nuns' hoods inflated by the wind.

When we left the Azores after refueling, the hydroplane again seemed too heavy. The sea was stormier, and it had difficulty taking off. The waves buffeted the windows. It rose after a great struggle.

Night. The stars and the moon impassive, unaffected, undisturbed, eternal. A little of their impassivity flows into me. They are consoling. They reduce the intensity and acuteness of human sorrows. Distance shrinks them. One rises above them physically and psychically. I feel less strangled, less oppressed. I transferred to the moon and the stars some of the trust in God I once had, and realized that serenity comes from an acceptance of death, the knowledge that man's life span is short, so there is an end to pain.

After dinner they pulled down the bunks. I lay down and opened my brief cases. I lie awake, rereading the last letters I received and writing in the diary. The essence of all I have lived the last ten years lies in those brief cases. I ran away with a part of my treasures, my memories, my artist's obsession with preserving, portraying, recording, to make eternal. All of us may die, but we will continue to smile, talk, make love in these pages.