3.1. “Would You Like a Star Too?” by Ida Vos (translated from the Dutch by Terese Edelstein and Inez Smidt)

This vignette is taken from “Hide and Seek,” Vos’s autobiographical story about a young child’s experience under Nazi occupation in Poland.

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Today for the first time Rachel must go to school with a yellow star on her coat, a big yellow star, with the word Jew written in the middle of it. Thus everyone can see that she is Jewish. The Germans have ordered the wearing of the star, and Rachel finds it horrible.

All her mother did yesterday evening was sew stars on their clothing. "I see stars," Mother said, and they even had to laugh about it.

"I'll take you to the tram," says Papa. "Come on, hurry up, otherwise you'll be late for school."

They put their coats on. How big the star is. Esther's star is even bigger than Rachel's. "It looks that way because Esther has such a small body," their father explains. "That's why her star seems larger."

When they arrive at the tram stop they see many other people with stars on, grown-up people and little people. "All Jews," an old man says. "Yesterday I did not know they were Jews, although I suspected they were."

"You must hold your schoolbag under your arm as you usually do, not against your star," Father admonishes her.

Rachel blushes. Father saw that she was trying to hide her star.

"It's difficult, but if you don't hide your star now, you'll get over the embarrassment more quickly. When the war is over, we'll make a huge fire and we'll throw all the stars of the whole world into it."

"Boy, will that stink!" Rachel exclaims.

"It stinks right now," Leo says. "I smelled the star when I put my coat on."

"Children, here comes the tram," Father calls.
The moment has come. For the first time Rachel will have to go on the tram with that horrible star.

"Come in!" the driver of the tram calls out to them. "It really is springtime in my tram now. All these children with yellow daffodils on their coats. I wish I could wear one."

When they are all inside, many people begin to clap, just as an audience does at the end of a play.

Rachel does not understand. A man nudges her. "Bow, the clapping is for you, for your stars."

Rachel does not dare to move. What is that? Are the people clapping for that big yellow star?

The children look at one another. "They are clapping for us," Leo says, and he begins to bow.

"Thank you, people. Thank you very much."

A few people do not clap, but look straight ahead instead. Leo approaches one of those people.

"Ma'am, would you like a star, too? Tomorrow I'll bring you one. Would you like a star, too, mister?"

"Go away, you little Jew boy," the man replies, and to the woman sitting next to him he says, "You can't cut them down to size. Not the big Jews and not the little ones, either."