

## *Anschluss!*

Karl Muller looked down from the window of his family's apartment, high on the fifth floor, to a scene unlike anything he had witnessed in all his thirteen years.

‘Victory to the German Reich! ... Sieg Heil! ... Jews out!’

The raucous shouts floated up to the curtained window behind which, hidden from view, the Muller family crouched. Below in the Vienna streets, green army lorries thundered past, packed with steel-helmeted soldiers who sat stiff and motionless, clasp machine-guns. Uniformed motorcyclists zoomed by in formation, churning the sprinkling of late snow to a dirty slush. Huge blood-red flags with black swastikas, the Nazi symbol, swayed and rippled.

The cries redoubled. ‘One Reich, one people, one leader ... Anschluss!’

In a sudden hush, broken by the peal of church bells, an open-topped car drove slowly down the centre of the road. In it, erect, right arm outstretched in the Nazi salute, stood the Nazi leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler.

Karl, with his parents and his little sister Rosa, watched

silently as an animal roar erupted from the crowd. Could this really be the man who was taking over their city, their country? This ordinary little man, with a ridiculous moustache, turning to left and right like a mechanical doll?

Despite the heat from the tiled stove, Karl felt suddenly cold. Hugging his dog, Goldi, he gazed over the red-tiled rooftops and slender church spires, to the Prater funfair. He had visited the fair countless times, whirling round on the giant Ferris wheel with its view over Vienna, stuffing himself and Rosa with ice cream while the grown-ups listened to the band. At home and at school, his life had been ordinary, uneventful, sometimes boring.

But now the unthinkable had happened. The Nazis had taken over Austria. They called the take-over the Anschluss. What was it going to mean, Karl wondered – to him, and to everyone around him?

Rosa tugged at her father's jacket. 'Papa, what are they shouting?' she asked. 'I want to join the parade. I'm wearing my dirndl.' She twirled to show off her coloured skirt and embroidered blouse, the Austrian national dress she liked to wear.

Her father patted her head. 'No, darling,' he answered slowly. 'We can't join in. They don't want us.'

As Rosa, disappointed, turned to her mother, a dazzling flash of light from below forced them all to step back from the window.

'What's that?' asked Rosa, her hands over her eyes.

'They're flashing mirrors up to blind us,' said Papa. 'Maybe they don't want us to see their beloved Hitler.'

'Surely not,' said Mama. 'How could they know which are our windows?'

‘The ones without Nazi flags, I suppose,’ said Papa. ‘You know Jews aren’t allowed to display the swastika. As if we’d want to!’

‘Those people screaming down there can’t be ordinary Austrians,’ said Mama. ‘Our friends and neighbours–’

‘No?’ Papa replied bitterly. ‘People seem to have forgotten decency, justice–’ He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. ‘Overnight, they have become supporters of Hitler and his bully-boys.’

‘But Papa, aren’t there people who are against the Nazis?’ asked Karl.

Papa shrugged hopelessly. ‘The Social Democrats? They’re probably hiding away in their homes, like us.’

Karl had never seen his father like this, bitter and sad. He longed for the reassuring tones Papa had always used when he was a little boy, with little problems and fears. But this – the Nazi parade, the swastikas, the hysterical screaming – was a problem that even Papa was powerless to deal with.

Karl felt as if somewhere, deep in some hidden place, a sleeping monster had stirred and was beginning to wake.



Karl and Rosa’s grandmother appeared from her bedroom, pulling a lacy shawl around her. ‘What’s happening out there? It’s so noisy ...’ She tucked her long grey hair into a knot at her neck. ‘Why are you all hiding behind the curtains?’

‘It’s a parade,’ Rosa told her importantly. ‘But we can’t be in it, Oma.’

‘It’s Hitler’s victory parade, to mark the Anschluss,’ said Mama matter-of-factly. But Karl could hear a tremor in her

voice. 'It must be nearly over now.'

'I don't understand,' said Oma. 'Isn't there going to be a vote about us joining with Nazi Germany?' Her eyes, which her diminishing sight had turned a pale milky blue, were bewildered. 'I thought a lot of people were going to vote against it – there were posters everywhere, and signs painted on the footpaths—'

'That vote isn't going to happen.' Papa led her to the settee. 'Our spineless government caved in to Hitler's bullying and cancelled it. Now Germany has taken us over, and we're under Nazi rule.'

*Nazi rule.* With a chill, Karl remembered his father reading aloud the news from Nazi Germany – Jews beaten and attacked, driven from their homes, sent to prison camps.

'But this isn't Nazi Germany,' said Oma. 'Our Austria is a country that cares for all its citizens, whatever their religion.'

'Suppose the Nazis change things—' said Karl anxiously.

A knock at the door made them jump. Papa rose. Mama hurried in from the kitchen. 'Don't answer,' she hissed. 'It might be the Nazis, come for us.'

They all stood frozen, waiting.

There was a second knock, still soft.

'If it was them, they would bang on the door and shout,' whispered Karl. 'And look at Goldi.' She was standing quietly, waving her bushy tail.

Papa opened the door a crack. 'It's all right,' he said. 'It's only Rudi.'

Everyone brightened at the sight of Uncle Rudi, Papa's younger brother, smart in his camel hair coat.

'I had to come,' said Rudi. Karl could see that his uncle, an

actor usually full of jokes and chatter, was making an effort to sound solemn. 'On such a day, the family should be together.' Rudi embraced his elderly mother tenderly and greeted the family. As soon as Rosa ran to him, he became his old self, swinging her up in his arms. 'And how's my favourite niece?'

Giggling, she patted his luxuriant chestnut hair and curly moustache. 'I'm your *only* niece, Uncle Rudi,' she said as he set her down. 'Did you see the parade?'

'I heard it on the radio,' he said. He turned to Papa. 'They're welcoming Hitler and the Nazis like saviours.'

'You heard what they're shouting about Jews?' asked Papa.

Rudi shrugged. 'It will pass,' he said. 'Our history is full of these troubles, and we're still here.'

Mama, glancing around at the solemn faces, said briskly, 'I think we should forget the Nazis and eat. Come, Oma.'

But, Karl thought, how could you forget the monster, nameless and terrifying, that was out there in the once safe and familiar streets of their city?

## *The Iron Ring*

Rudi switched on the radio, which sat, squat and square, on the polished sideboard. ‘... children are strewing flowers along the route of his car. The people of Ostmark are full of love and admiration for our leader, Adolf Hitler, himself an Austrian ...’

‘Ostmark?’ said Karl. ‘What’s that?’

‘It’s the new Nazi name for Austria,’ grunted Papa.

The voice on the radio spoke reverently, excitedly. ‘Germany and Ostmark, united, will go forward to a glorious future, destroying our enemies—’

Papa switched it off. ‘Mark my words, ours is the first country Nazi Germany has swallowed up, but it won’t be the last. And when Hitler has all Europe in his power, he’ll set about destroying those he hates – Jews, Gypsies, Socialists, and everyone who defies him.’

‘You’re such a pessimist,’ said Uncle Rudi, putting his arm affectionately around Papa. ‘I tell you, the Nazis won’t last.’ He ran his hand through his untidy hair with an actor’s casual gesture. ‘At the theatre, everyone thinks that man’s a joke.’

He leapt to his feet; laying one finger across his upper lip, he extended the other arm stiffly and strutted up and down

the small living-room in an imitation of Hitler. Goldi, thinking this was a new game, trotted after him, barking.

Karl laughed, but Papa remained serious. 'You make a joke out of everything, Rudi,' he said. 'But the Nazis are no joke. What happened in Germany could also happen here.' He stopped as Rosa appeared from the kitchen, carrying a platter of warm rye bread.

Uncle Rudi said, a little too heartily, 'Something smells wonderful.'

As the family sat round the heavy oak dining-table, it seemed to Karl that Papa's and Uncle Rudi's words still hung in the air like a chilling echo, not quite concealed by the family laughter and argument – Papa praising Mama's feather-light potato dumplings, Uncle Rudi waving his arms about as he talked, and Goldi, her tail thumping hopefully, waiting beside Rosa's seat for bits of salami.

They all tried to ignore the occasional shouts and snatches of Nazi marching-songs that could still be heard from outside. Instead, Uncle Rudi told them about his part in a new comedy at the Burgtheatre; and Oma repeated the familiar story of how, in the Great War, the Austrian army had awarded her husband, Karl's grandfather, the Iron Cross for his courage in rescuing a wounded man from the mud of the trenches. 'I was proud of your dear Opa, but so worried about him. He came back a changed man. They called it shell-shock.' She paused, remembering. 'It was a terrible, needless war.'

'Tell us the story of the ring, Oma,' begged Rosa.

Oma put down her knife and fork. 'Well, darling, during that war the government asked all women to give gold and jewellery to help our country's war effort. You know we only

had the small shoe shop which your Papa runs now, so I gave the most precious thing I had.’ She lifted her hand. ‘My gold wedding ring, that your Opa had worked and saved for.’

‘Didn’t you get it back, Oma?’ asked Rosa, knowing the answer.

‘No, darling,’ said Oma. ‘They gave us rings of iron in exchange.’ She held out her claw-like hand, the iron ring loose on her bent finger.

As they ate and talked, Karl felt his earlier icy fear recede in the warmth and security of the family meal. After lunch, perhaps he would go round and have a game of football with his cousin Tommy, or visit Lisl, his closest friend. She and Karl had always told each other everything, and it had never mattered that she was Christian and he was Jewish.

Maybe Uncle Rudi was right, he told himself, the Nazis would disappear, the unnerving cheering and jeering would stop, and life would return to normal again.



They were still at the table when they heard violent banging. Goldi raced to the door, barking. Karl’s stomach lurched. This time there was no mistaking who it must be. Fear pervaded the room.

Papa rose and gestured to Karl, who, fighting down the terror that rose inside him, led Oma and Rosa into the small study beside the dining-room. His mother went to stand beside Papa and Uncle Rudi. Karl gripped Goldi tightly to him as she gave a low growl.

There was another volley of crashes against the door, and a voice shouted, ‘Open up, Jews!’