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A program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation

1. A New Teacher

Monday, November 21, 1938

“I wish school would burn down. Don’t you, Rudi?” says Emil, my best friend, his leather bag bumping on his back. “Why didn’t that mob set fire to it when they burned the synagogue?”

It’s more than a week since anyone went to school. This has been so boring for a boy like me.

Eleven days ago, Nazi gangs ran down our street and all over town, smashing windows and setting fires and other bad stuff. It was very scary even though I wasn’t allowed to look through the curtains and see anything.

Mutti wouldn’t let me go out for days. My older sister, Lotte, was allowed out a bit, of course; she’s fifteen. No one told me anything about what had happened.

They just kept saying, “Don’t worry, Rudi, it’s all fine.”

But Mutti has two deep lines across her forehead now, and she looks nervous all the time. She watches the clock all day when Papa’s out at work.

Papa is a newspaper journalist and Mutti told him, “Be careful what you write; don’t give them any reason.”

When I asked, “Any reason for what?” no one answered me.

It’s not fair.



It’s been horrible being stuck at home for so long.

We have a second-floor apartment with three bedrooms and a big living room facing the street. Papa has a little study next to the bathroom, and the kitchen looks out over the back and more apartment buildings. My bedroom faces the street too and I like playing with my toys in there. But when you’re indoors all the time, you feel sort of squashed up and everyone gets bad-tempered.

At least I had Hanno to play with. He’s my little dachshund, and he’s the best dog in the whole wide world. I’ve had him since he was a puppy. He’s two years and one month old now. He goes everywhere with me, except school, of course.

Hanno’s coat is very smooth and a sort of chocolate brown. His ears feel like the velvet on Mutti’s best dress. His legs are quite short, but he can walk and run long distances—all the way to the park and even as far as Emil’s apartment, which is near the main square.

Hanno is very clever. I’ve been training him to do tricks. He can almost count to three now, I think. His best trick is collecting the letters. He sits on the mat at the front door and

as soon as a letter drops through, he picks it up in his mouth and carries it to me. He hardly ever gets it wet or chews up the corners.

When I stare into Hanno's brown eyes he stares back without blinking, and I'm pretty sure he can read my mind. Emil and I tried an experiment once.

I thought and thought about cinnamon cookies—Hanno's favorite, Mutti makes a ton every week—and Hanno ran into the kitchen and pointed his long brown nose up toward the cookie tin, barking like a lunatic.

"See?" I said to Emil.

"Amazing," said Emil, with his wide grin.



"If school burned down, what would we do all day?" I say now as we walk on the road that runs by the river.

Our city's called Frankfurt am Main because it's on the River Main. It's quite a lot to spell out. I could do it by the time I was five, but Emil still can't even spell *Frankfurt* and we're nearly nine now. That's why Emil hates school.

"S'easy," he declares. "We'd play all day in the park with Hanno. Race you!"

Emil's taller than me and he can run like the wind. I follow, my schoolbag bumping on my back, and arrive puffing behind him at the school gates.

But then my stomach does a flip. Konrad Müller is there with his gang. They're much bigger than us, and they're all

Hitler Youth. Jews can't join the Hitler Youth, which is a bit unfair because they have a uniform and go camping and everything. They bully Emil and me and the other Jewish kids.

"Germany has changed," Papa says every day, tapping the newspaper, his hand running back through his dark, wavy hair. "Hitler's made this country stink."

"Then let's go to Palestine!" cries out Lotte, her brown eyes flashing.

We all have brown eyes and olive skin that tans deep brown in summer. My dark brown hair is wavy like Papa's, but Lotte and Mutti have straight brown hair. We're all quite short, not like Emil's family.

Lotte's in her own youth group. They used to go camping too. They want to build a Jewish homeland but they had to stop meeting ages ago. Lotte came home in an awful temper one day and yelled, "We're banned! Can you believe it?"

She still sees some of her friends from the group, and when she comes home she talks nonstop about going to Palestine.

Papa says, "Be quiet, please, Lotte. Germany is our homeland and that's that."



"Push off, Jewboy!" snarls Konrad now, and punches Emil in the stomach.

Emil doubles over, groaning.

The gang crowds around and starts to chant, “Fight! Fight!”

I open my mouth to stick up for Emil but nothing comes out.

Emil straightens and puts up his fists, but his face, usually dark like mine, has gone as white as the ice on the river.

Konrad lets out a nasty laugh and his gang shouts even louder.

Then a whistle goes and I see our teacher, Fräulein Becker, striding across the playground, blond hair in two braids swinging around her face, cheeks red from blowing so hard on her whistle.

My legs go weak with relief.

“Time for class. Go inside, please, boys. Emil, Rudi.” Fräulein Becker points to us. “Walk beside me. I need you to carry some books from the office.”

Phew! Saved from the Hitler gang again.

Emil gives me a grin behind Fräulein Becker’s back, but I frown at him.

Why can’t he keep clear of trouble, like Hanno and I? If I see Hitler Youth I duck down a street or hide behind the garbage cans until they’ve gone. Hanno knows when to keep quiet, but he’s really brave. He’d never run off and leave me, no matter how scary things were. Hanno and I are a team and we look out for each other.

Fräulein Becker piles our arms with books, and we follow her into class.

It's silent in the room, which is strange because usually everyone's calling out and tossing things to each other. Even stranger, Konrad and his gang are sitting in the front row, arms folded neatly on their desks, looking up at a teacher I don't recognize. The teacher has very pale skin, a bit like Konrad and his gang, and he's wearing an armband with a swastika on it.

Uh-oh! I think. He's a Nazi.

Emil and I dump the books onto the teacher's desk, and then the man with the swastika swipes at our bare legs with a ruler. We yelp—it really hurts—and Konrad lets out a snort of laughter.

"You Jewish boys!" shouts the teacher.

He points to the yellow stars sewn on our jackets. All Jews have to wear them now—Lotte says it's utterly despicable.

"Get to the back row and I don't want to hear or smell you again today."

I look over my shoulder at Fräulein Becker. Her face has gone very white. I can see she's feeling upset too. Fräulein Becker doesn't mind that we're Jewish.

Emil tugs my arm and pulls me to the back row. When we sit down I throw him a worried glance. But nothing gets Emil down for long. He gives me a long, slow wink.

Great! Emil always has a plan. I can't wait for recess.