



Chapter Two

ANNA'S FIRST THOUGHT was so terrible that she could not breathe. Papa had got worse in the night. He had been taken to hospital. Perhaps he . . . She ran blindly out of the room and found herself caught by Heimpi.

'It's all right! Your father has gone on a journey.'

'A journey?' Anna could not believe it. 'But he's ill – he had a temperature . . .'

'He decided to go just the same,' said Heimpi firmly. 'Your mother was going to explain it all to you when you came home from school. Now I suppose you'll have to hear straight away and Fräulein Schmidt will be kept twiddling her thumbs for you.'

'What is it? Are we going to miss school?' Max appeared hopefully on the landing.

Chapter Two

Then Mama came out of her room. She was still in her dressing-gown and looked tired.

'There's no need to get terribly excited,' she said. 'But there are some things I must tell you. Heimpi, shall we have some coffee? And I expect the children could eat some more breakfast.'

Once they were all settled in Heimpi's pantry with coffee and rolls Anna felt much better, and was even able to calculate that she would miss the geography lesson at school which she particularly disliked.

'It's quite simple,' said Mama. 'Papa thinks Hitler and the Nazis might win the elections. If that happened he would not want to live in Germany while they were in power, and nor would any of us.'

'Because we're Jews?' asked Anna.

'Not only because we're Jews. Papa thinks no one would be allowed to say what they thought any more, and he wouldn't be able to write. The Nazis don't like people to disagree with them.' Mama drank some of her coffee and looked more cheerful. 'Of course it may never happen and if it did it probably wouldn't last for long – maybe six months or so. But at the moment we just don't know.'

'But why did Papa leave so suddenly?' asked Max.

'Because yesterday someone rang him up and warned

him that they might be going to take away his passport. So I packed him a small suitcase and he caught the night train to Prague – that's the quickest way out of Germany.'

'Who could take away his passport?'

'The police. There are quite a few Nazis in the police.'

'And who rang him up to warn him?'

Mama smiled for the first time.

'Another policeman. One Papa had never met – but who had read his books and liked them.'

It took Anna and Max some time to digest all this.

Then Max asked, 'But what's going to happen now?'

'Well,' said Mama, 'it's only about ten days until the elections. Either the Nazis lose, in which case Papa comes back – or they win, in which case we join him.'

'In Prague?' asked Max.

'No, probably in Switzerland. They speak German there – Papa would be able to write. We'd probably rent a little house and stay there until all this has blown over.'

'Heimpi too?' asked Anna.

'Heimpi too.'

It sounded quite exciting. Anna was beginning to

imagine it – a house in the mountains . . . goats . . . or was it cows? . . . when Mama said, 'There is one thing more.' Her voice was very serious.

'This is the most important thing of all,' said Mama, 'and we need you to help us with it. Papa does not want anyone to know that he has left Germany. So you must not tell anyone. If anyone asks you about him you must say that he's still in bed with 'flu.'

'Can't I even tell Gunther?' asked Max.

'No. Not Gunther, nor Elsbeth, not anyone.'

'All right,' said Max. 'But it won't be easy. People are always asking after him.'

'Why can't we tell anyone?' asked Anna. 'Why doesn't Papa want anyone to know?'

'Look,' said Mama. 'I've explained it all to you as well as I can. But you're both still children – you can't understand everything. Papa thinks the Nazis might . . . cause us some bother if they knew that he'd gone. So he does not want you to talk about it. Now are you going to do what he asks or not?'

Anna said, yes, of course she would.

Then Heimpi bundled them both off to school. Anna was worried about what to say if anyone asked her why she was late, but Max said, 'Just tell them Mama overslept – she did, anyway!'

In fact, no one was very interested. They did high-jump in Gym and Anna jumped higher than anyone else in her class. She was so pleased about this that for the rest of the morning she almost forgot about Papa being in Prague.

When it was time to go home it all came back to her and she hoped Elsbeth would not ask her any awkward questions – but Elsbeth's mind was on more important matters. Her aunt was coming to take her out that afternoon to buy her a yo-yo. What kind did Anna think she should choose? And what colour? The wooden ones worked best on the whole, but Elsbeth had seen a bright orange one which, though made of tin, had so impressed her with its beauty that she was tempted. Anna only had to say Yes and No, and by the time she got home for lunch the day felt more ordinary than she would ever have thought possible that morning.

Neither Anna nor Max had any homework and it was too cold to go out, so in the afternoon they sat on the radiator in the nursery and looked out of the window. The wind was rattling the shutters and blowing great lumps of cloud across the sky.

'We might get more snow,' said Max.

'Max,' said Anna, 'do you hope that we will go to Switzerland?'

'I don't know,' said Max. There were so many things he would miss. Gunther . . . his gang with whom he played football . . . school . . . He said, 'I suppose we'd go to a school in Switzerland.'

'Oh yes,' said Anna. 'I think it would be quite fun.' She was almost ashamed to admit it, but the more she thought about it the more she wanted to go. To be in a strange country where everything would be different – to live in a different house, go to a different school with different children – a huge urge to experience it all overcame her and though she knew it was heartless, a smile appeared on her face.

'It would only be for six months,' she said apologetically, 'and we'd all be together.'

The next few days passed fairly normally. Mama got a letter from Papa. He was comfortably installed in a hotel in Prague and was feeling much better. This cheered everyone up.

A few people inquired after him but were quite satisfied when the children said he had 'flu. There was so much of it about that it was not surprising. The weather continued very cold and the puddles caused by the thaw all froze hard again – but still there was no snow.

At last on the afternoon of the Sunday before the

elections the sky turned very dark and then suddenly opened up to release a mass of floating, drifting, whirling white. Anna and Max were playing with the Kentner children who lived across the road. They stopped to watch the snow come down.

'If only it had started a bit earlier,' said Max. 'By the time it's thick enough for tobogganing, it will be too dark.'

At five o'clock when Anna and Max were going home it had only just stopped. Peter and Marianne Kentner saw them to the door. The snow lay thick and dry and crunchy all over the road and the moon was shining down on it.

'Why don't we go tobogganing in the moonlight?' said Peter.

'Do you think they'd let us?'

'We've done it before,' said Peter, who was fourteen. 'Go and ask your mother.'

Mama said they could go provided they all stayed together and got home by seven. They put on their warmest clothes and set off.

It was only a quarter of an hour's walk to the Grunewald, where a wooden slope made an ideal run down to a frozen lake. They had tobogganed there many times before, but it had always been daylight and the

air had been loud with the shouts of other children. Now all they could hear was the souging of the wind in the trees, the crunching of the new snow under their feet, and the gentle whir of the sledges as they slid along behind them. Above their heads the sky was dark but the ground shone blue in the moonlight and the shadows of the trees broke like black bands across it.

At the top of the slope they stopped and looked down. Nobody had been on it before them. The shimmering path of snow stretched ahead, perfect and unmarked, right down to the edge of the lake.

'Who's going down first?' asked Max.

Anna did not mean to, but she found herself hopping up and down and saying, 'Oh please - please . . . !'

Peter said, 'All right - youngest first.'

That meant her because Marianne was ten.

She sat on her sledge, held on to the steering rope, took a deep breath and pushed off. The sledge began to move, rather gently, down the hill.

'Go on!' shouted the boys behind her. 'Give it another push!'

But she didn't. She kept her feet on the runners and let the sledge gather speed slowly. The powdery snow sprayed up all round her as the sledge struck it. The trees moved past, slowly at first, then faster and faster.

The moonlight leapt all round her. At last she seemed to be flying through a mass of silver. Then the sledge hit the hump at the bottom of the slope, shot across it, and landed in a dapple of moonlight on the frozen lake. It was beautiful.

The others came down after her, squealing and shouting.

They went down the slope head first on their stomachs so that the snow sprayed straight into their faces. They went down feet first on their backs with the black tops of the fir trees rushing past above them. They all squeezed on to one sledge together and came down so fast that they shot on almost to the middle of the lake. After each ride they struggled back up the slope, panting and pulling the sledges behind them. In spite of the cold they were steaming inside their woollies.

Then it began to snow again. At first they hardly noticed it, but then the wind got up and blew the snow in their faces. All at once Max stopped in the middle of dragging his sledge up the slope and said, 'What time is it? Oughtn't we to be getting back?'

Nobody had a watch and they suddenly realised that they had no idea how long they had been there. Perhaps it was quite late and their parents had been waiting for them at home.

Chapter Two

'Come on,' said Peter. 'We'd better go quickly.' He took off his gloves and knocked them together to shake the caked snow off them. His hands were red with cold. So were Anna's, and she noticed for the first time that her feet were frozen.

It was chilly going back. The wind blew through their damp clothes and with the moon hidden behind the clouds the path was black in front of them. Anna was glad when they were out of the trees and in a road. Soon there were street lamps, houses with lighted windows, shops. They were nearly home.

An illuminated clockface showed them the time. After all it was not yet quite seven. They heaved sighs of relief and walked more slowly. Max and Peter began to talk about football. Marianne tied two sledges together and scampered wildly ahead on the empty road, leaving a network of overlapping tracks in the snow. Anna lagged behind because her cold feet hurt.

She could see the boys stop outside her house, still talking and waiting for her, and was just going to catch them up when she heard the creak of a gate. Something moved in the path beside her and suddenly a shapeless figure loomed up. For a moment she was very frightened – but then she saw that it was only Fräulein Lambeck in some sort of furry cloak and with a letter in her hand.

'Little Anna!' cried Fräulein Lambeck. 'Fancy meeting you in the dark of the night! I was just going to the post box but did not think to find a kindred spirit. And how is your dear Papa?'

'He's got 'flu,' said Anna automatically.

Fräulein Lambeck stopped in her tracks.

'Still got 'flu, little Anna? You told me he had 'flu a week ago.'

'Yes,' said Anna.

'And he's still in bed? Still got a temperature?'

'Yes,' said Anna.

'Oh, the poor man!' Fräulein Lambeck put a hand on Anna's shoulder. 'Are they doing everything for him? Does the doctor come to see him?'

'Yes,' said Anna.

'And what does the doctor say?'

'He says . . . I don't know,' said Anna.

Fräulein Lambeck leaned down confidentially and peered into her face. 'Tell me, little Anna,' she said, 'how high is your dear papa's temperature?'

'I don't know!' cried Anna, and her voice came out not at all as she had meant but in a sort of squeak. 'I'm sorry but I must go home now!' – and she ran as fast as she could towards Max and the open front door.

★

'What's the matter with you?' said Heimpi in the hall. 'Someone shoot you out of a cannon?'

Anna could see Mama through the half-open door in the drawing room.

'Mama!' she cried, 'I hate lying to everybody about Papa. It's horrible. Why do we have to do it? I wish we didn't have to!'

Then she saw that Mama was not alone. Onkel Julius (who was not really an uncle but an old friend of Papa's) was sitting in an armchair on the other side of the room.

'Calm yourself,' said Mama quite sharply. 'We all hate lying about Papa, but just now it's necessary. I wouldn't ask you to do it if it weren't necessary!'

'She got caught by Fräulein Lambeck,' said Max who had followed Anna in. 'You know Fräulein Lambeck? She's ghastly. You can't answer her questions even when you're allowed to tell the truth!'

'Poor Anna,' said Onkel Julius in his high voice. He was a gentle wispy man and they were all very fond of him. 'Your father asked me to tell you that he misses you both very much and sends you lots of love.'

'Have you seen him then?' asked Anna.

'Onkel Julius has just come back from Prague,' said Mama. 'Papa is fine and he wants us to meet him in Zurich, in Switzerland, on Sunday.'

'Sunday?' said Max. 'But that's only a week. That's the day of the elections. I thought we were going to wait and see who won, first!'

'Your father has decided he'd rather not wait.' Onkel Julius smiled at Mama. 'I do think he's taking all this too seriously.'

'Why?' asked Max. 'What's he worried about?'

Mama sighed. 'Ever since Papa heard of the move to take away his passport he's been worried that they might try to take away ours – then we wouldn't be able to leave Germany.'

'But why should they?' asked Max. 'If the Nazis don't like us, surely they'd be glad to get rid of us.'

'Exactly,' said Onkel Julius. He smiled at Mama again. 'Your husband is a wonderful man with a wonderful imagination, but frankly in this matter I think he's off his head. Never mind, you'll all have a lovely holiday in Switzerland and when you come back to Berlin in a few weeks' time we'll all go to the Zoo together.' Onkel Julius was a naturalist and went to the Zoo all the time. 'Let me know if I can help with any of the arrangements. I'll see you again, of course.' He kissed Mama's hand and went.

'Are we really leaving on Sunday?' asked Anna.

'Saturday,' said Mama. 'It's a long way to Switzerland.'

Chapter Two

We have to spend a night in Stuttgart on the way.'

'Then this is our last week at school!' said Max. It seemed incredible.

