

*Eleanor's
Story*

An
American
Girl in
Hitler's
Germany

ELEANOR RAMRATH GARNER


PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

*To my grandchildren,
Tommaso, Giacomo, and Samuel
Kathryn and Ingrid,
and to the generations to come.*



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PROLOGUE

AT THE END of the Great War (later known as World War I) in 1918, the victorious Allies forced Germany to pay immense reparations and rearranged Europe, limiting Germany's borders and taking away large amounts of land, people, and natural resources. This put an enormous financial burden on Germany, which led to inflation, unemployment, and finally economic collapse. Thousands of Germans had to emigrate to find jobs elsewhere.

Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist German Workers' (or Nazi) Party, promised economic solutions and the restoration of patriotic values. German President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor in 1933. Germans wanted to rebuild their lives, and, indeed, a remarkable economic recovery took place. But when Hitler was declared dictator of Germany a few months later, the shadowy racism of his Nazi Party became apparent. Joseph Goebbels, the efficient propaganda minister, controlled the news media to assure that Hitler and Nazi Germany were viewed in the best possible light the world over.

Hitler and his operatives in the Third Reich felt that Germany was overpopulated and needed what he called *Lebensraum*, living space. In 1936 they began a crusade to take back territories that had been denied Germany after World War I, such as the Rhineland, then annexed Austria in 1938, followed by the Sudetenland and soon the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1938–39. The other European powers did not respond.

In addition to expanding Germany's borders, Hitler and the Nazis wanted to "purify" the German populace. They targeted Jews, Gypsies, and other groups and systematically began to separate them from the rest of the population.

Greed for even more land and resources pushed Hitler to invade Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later. Hitler directed a series of blitzkriegs, lightning campaigns, in 1940 and 1941 against other European countries, including Holland, Belgium, and France, and ordered the bombing of Britain to the west and the invasion of Russia to the east. After Japan, Germany's ally, bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Hitler also declared war on the United States. England, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union were now allied against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

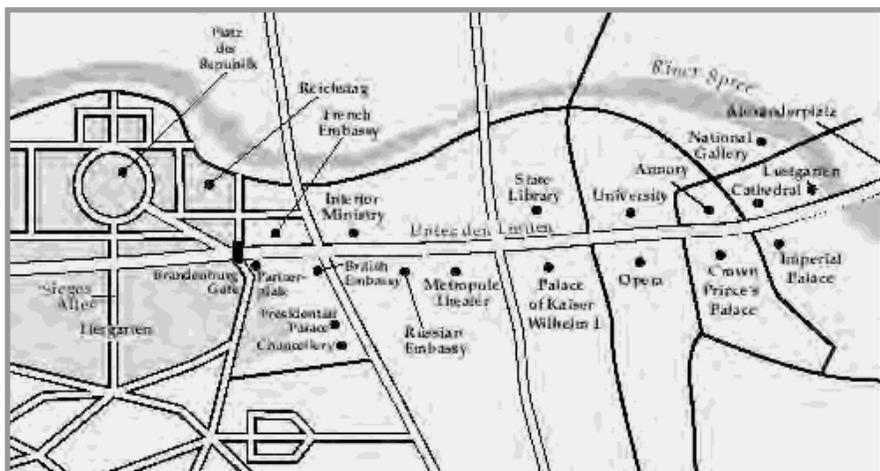
With the Soviet defeat of the German army to the east at Stalingrad in January 1943, and confrontation of the overwhelming Allies to the west, combined with the relentless Allied bombing of German military and civilian targets, Germany began to collapse. The Germans surrendered on May 7, 1945. The Third Reich had ended in a horrendous bloodbath. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans in August 1945 finally ended World War II.

The aftermath of this terrible war revealed unbelievable horrors that seared the soul. It wasn't until the Allies discovered the extermination camps in 1945 that the world, including most Germans, were shocked beyond belief to learn to what extremes Hitler's hatred and racial obsessions had driven him. More than 6 million Jews, along with other so-called undesirables, like homosexuals, Gypsies, Communists, Poles, resistance fighters or anybody who opposed the regime, were executed in these death camps.

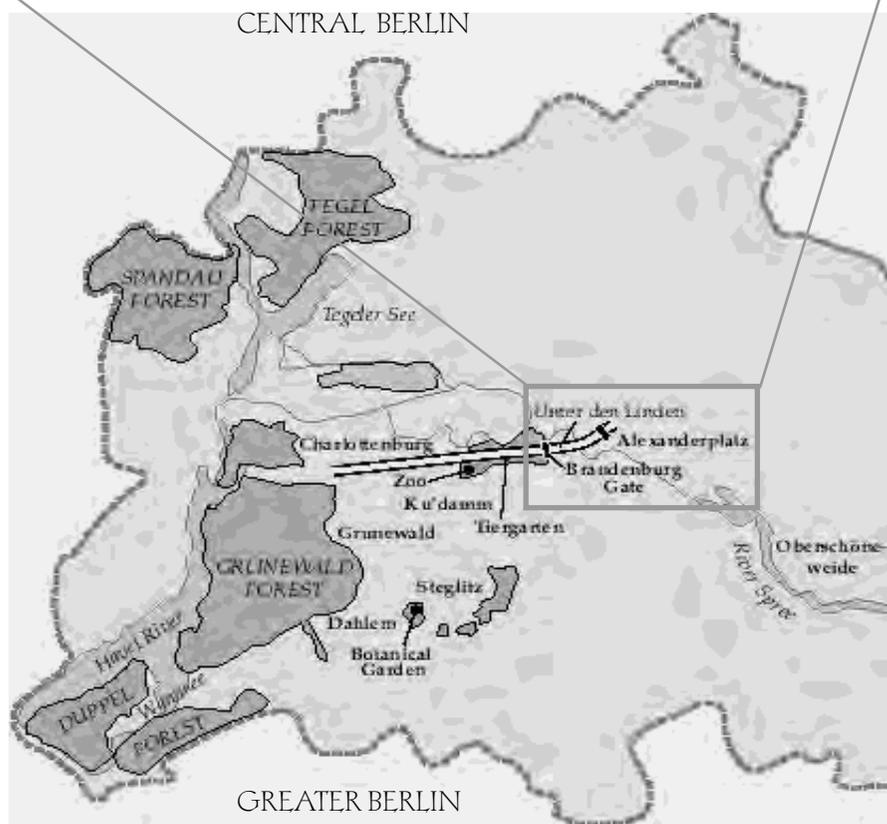
Staggering statistics emerged out of this horrendous war. An estimated three-fourths of the world's population participated in or suffered from the effects of the war. Of those, 25 million military personnel died and almost 40 million civilians were killed, including those in the Nazi death camps. Countless millions more were maimed or wounded.

Statistics are numbers, but numbers represent individual lives, people who lived and breathed, who laughed and cried, who loved and suffered. Each one of the millions who died and every person who miraculously survived has a story. Mine is only one of them. This war lives on in infamy. It should never be forgotten, lest we forget our humanity.

Berlin, 1938



CENTRAL BERLIN



GREATER BERLIN



Allied Occupation Zones of Germany, 1945-1949

Berlin itself also was divided into the four sectors.

CHAPTER

ONE

STRATFORD

SEPTEMBER 1938—AUGUST 1939

IN THE FALL of 1938, when I was eight years old, Adolf Hitler came to my neighborhood.

He didn't come in person, of course, but the thought of him came into people's minds in Stratford, New Jersey. At the beginning of October, news reports on the radio declared, "Adolf Hitler, Germany's leader, has taken over the Sudetenland province of Czechoslovakia." Our neighbors across the street had immigrated from Czechoslovakia a year earlier. Their kids suddenly turned angry and started being mean to us.

I usually walked alone to school, since my brother, Frank, preferred to go on ahead with his friends. One morning soon after that report, the Czech kids came up behind me and chanted, "Hitler in his casket, brown and yellow basket..." Then they ran off, laughing.

I was bewildered. *Why are they saying that to me? Who is this guy Hitler anyway? And what does he have to do with me?* Then I got angry. *I'm not German. I'm American.* After that episode, I walked with Frank and his buddies to school. Frank was better able to cope with the teasing. He and his pals stood up to the kids across the street.



One warm Sunday afternoon that fall, my parents' friends gathered at our house, as they often did. These old friends, who had immigrated in

the 1920s from Germany, as my parents had, were like our extended family. Frank and I called them Tante and Onkel, aunt and uncle.

Mother set the table under the apple tree and served homemade plum cake and streusel kuchen with whipped cream. Along with coffee, she set out some of the wine Father made from the grapes in our yard.

Mother, Father, and their friends all joked and laughed. Then their discussion turned to the economy and how hard it was to get and keep a good job in these tough times. But as it did many Sundays that fall, the conversation led to the subject of Hitler.

Frank and I weren't allowed to interrupt our elders and ask questions, so we just listened as the grown-ups talked noisily. We sat together on the hammock, quietly swinging back and forth, and stuffed ourselves with cake. We didn't understand everything they said, but we heard about Germany and the changes going on there. We heard about Hitler, who promised a stronger, better Germany and who was inviting the immigrants back with offers of employment.

"Adolf Hitler promises a better economy and new jobs..."

"Hitler is power hungry. He had himself declared dictator!"

"But he's restructured the army and stabilized the economy."

"The things his Nazi party is doing scare me. And that swastika flag is pompous! The old one was much nicer."

I liked it better when the grown-ups told jokes and laughed.

Their talk about the German flag reminded me of the time I had seen it myself. A year earlier, in the spring, we had just finished dinner and turned on the radio when we heard the announcer crying.

"Oh, the humanity and all the passengers," he wept. "The wreckage is flaming up again!... I can't talk, ladies and gentlemen."

The *Hindenburg*, the giant dirigible, was flying passengers here from Germany when it exploded during a thunderstorm as it was trying to moor in Lakehurst, about fifty miles from my home. We went there the next day. I still get goosebumps thinking about what we saw.

We stood at the edge of the field and stared at the collapsed skeleton of the airship, what had been Germany's pride and joy. Wisps of smoke still rose from the remains. The red and black symbol on the fins of the

airship—“the Nazi swastika!” Frank whispered to me—lay twisted and charred among the wreckage. The heavy, bitter smell of smoke and ashes hung in the air. As we stood behind the rope barrier, I clutched my arms as shivers ran down my spine. I thought of the people aboard the airship who had died. I shuddered.



My attention was drawn back to the grown-ups' conversation. They had stopped discussing politics and were talking about their families in Germany. I tried to remember what Germany had been like. When I was two and Frank four, when my family still lived in Philadelphia, Mother took us to Germany on the ocean liner *S.S. Bremen*. She left me with Omi Ramrath, Father's mother. I had never seen her before. Omi lived in Eslohe, a small farming village surrounded by mountains, in the Sauerland region of Germany. Frank stayed with Mother's parents, Grossmutter and Grossvater Rump, who lived in Münster, in Germany's Westphalia province.

At first, I was terrified that my mother had abandoned me. I was separated from my brother, in a strange country, in a strange house, and with people I didn't know. All around me I heard the language I had heard before only in our home.

But gradually, over weeks and months, I forgot about my parents in America and began to enjoy being spoiled by Omi and my two aunts, Tante Maria and Tante Adele. I became the center of attention in the village too. Everyone called me Mäti, the pet name my parents had given me. I often toddled down the street by myself to the butcher shop, where I begged for a piece of sausage, then on to the bakery for a cookie.

Grossmutter and Grossvater Rump sometimes brought Frank to Eslohe for the day. He and I played in the sandbox, climbed the fruit trees, burrowed through hay in the barn, and fed the pig, cow, and chickens. The grown-ups sat in the gazebo, drinking coffee and eating cake. I always cried when Frank had to leave again in the evening.

After Frank and I were in Germany for two years—I was four and he was six—our grandparents put us on a ship in Bremerhaven. With only a steward to watch over us, we traveled the nine days across the ocean

back to the United States. When we arrived, I barely remembered Mother, and Father had become a complete stranger. I called him uncle.

I didn't understand until later that Mother and Father had a good reason to send us away. Mother explained how Father used to be an electrical engineer but lost his job because of the Great Depression. He and Mother didn't have any money to support us, so they sent us to live with our grandparents.

While we were gone, Mother's brother, Onkel Franz, and some immigrant friends moved into an apartment in Philadelphia together to help pay the rent. Mother and Father both pumped gas and mended tires at a service station until Father finally got another job and made enough money to send for us. Onkel Franz, my godfather, moved back to Germany when we returned.

I wasn't happy to be back in America and resented the strangers who called themselves my parents. Mother and Father made us follow lots of rules. I couldn't wander around as I had in Eslohe, and my parents always scolded me.

"You're so spoiled!" Mother often scolded, her dark eyes fixed on me. It took us all a long time to adjust to living together again.

Then when I was six, we moved from Philadelphia to this house on Union Avenue in Stratford. Mother said housing in big cities was expensive, so after looking for a long time, Father finally found this old house to rent. He liked the house because it was near his job at RCA in Camden.

I liked the house because it was roomy and comfortable, all covered with brown shingles. On cold or rainy days we played on the glassed-in front porch or watched Father in his workshop in the big basement. But most of all I loved the big garden out back. We had fruit trees, Concord grapevines, and thick hedges of sweet-smelling honeysuckle. The only thing I didn't like was the cesspool that regularly overflowed.

Mother dug her vegetable garden near the cesspool. "Plants grow much better there," she explained. "Rich soil."

Next to our house stood a tall, twisted old apple tree that grew nothing but wormy, puckered apples. But Mother made them into delicious

applesauce that she stored in jars in the cellar for winter. Father built a wooden table and attached it to the tree trunk, so when it was hot we could eat in the tree's cool shade. On warm weekend mornings we ate breakfast there too.

I loved the tree. Sometimes when I felt sad or rejected, the tree helped me feel better. When I pressed my ear against its rough bark, I was sure I could hear its heart beat.

High up in the tree's thick branches, Frank built himself a tree house. "Girls," he declared, "are *not* invited."

My job was to provide cookies and stuff for him and his friends up there. Whatever I could snatch I put into a basket, and then Frank hauled it up into the tree house by rope. I was definitely not happy about this job, so we often argued about it.

Once we moved to the house, Father started to give us lots of chores. Before he left for work in the morning, he gave Frank and me instructions. "Help Mother with household chores," he told us. "Sweep the driveway" or "Clean out the garage." During the summer, we had to fill a basketful of weeds every day from the vegetable garden. If we didn't finish our chores by the time Father got home, then he whipped us or grounded us.

I was afraid of Father, and I tried hard to please him. But sometimes I forgot to do a chore after school because I got so caught up in playing hopscotch or jumping rope with my friends. Before I knew it, Father was home and all heck would break loose. He never bothered to listen to why I hadn't finished my chores anyway. When I tried to explain he hit me across the mouth to shut me up.

If Frank or I complained about being punished, Mother just scowled. "Do as your father says!" she said. She never interfered when he disciplined us, or comforted us afterward. When she caught us doing something wrong, she would threaten to tell Father. But sometimes she wouldn't actually tell him. Then I hoped that she was on our side after all.

Frank and I noticed that many of our friends in the neighborhood had dogs. We begged Father for one.

“No dog!” snapped Father each time we asked.

So Frank and I made up a dog. We called him Pudel and created adventures for him, just like Rin-Tin-Tin. Pudel always got himself into dangerous situations, and we took turns rescuing him.

Frank arranged our midnight Pudel meetings. They were secret. If Mother or Father found out, we knew they would quickly put an end to these nighttime sessions. At midnight Frank tiptoed into my room and woke me up. I could never figure out how he managed to wake up exactly at twelve without an alarm clock, but he always did it.

We took turns beginning and ending a story, always in whispers. Sometimes we finished the story by sharing a stolen cookie or piece of chocolate.

I loved the secret world we shared, and I loved Frank, knobby knees and all. He was tall and strong and handsome, with his light brown hair cropped short. I hoped to marry him when I grew up. But when I told Mother about my plans, she said, “That’s nonsense! Sisters can’t marry brothers.”

“Why not?” I cried. At six years old, I just couldn’t understand.



As Frank and I rocked in the hammock, listening to the conversations going on around us, I noticed dirty smudges on his knees and across the front of his sailor suit. Then I spotted some grass stains on my own white organdy dress and tried to brush them off. *Uh-oh*, I thought, *Mother isn’t going to be pleased about how we’ve messed up our Sunday-best clothes*. She always had us dress up for these occasions.

Mother looked elegant in her flowery dress, her brown curls neatly brushed. Her eyes sparkled as she smiled and talked with Tante Lina and Onkel Carl. She got up and refilled the grown-ups’ coffee cups, then motioned to me to carry a plate of sweets around.

When the plate was almost empty, I took it inside and put more plum cake and cookies on it. As I passed the mirror in the front hall, I caught my reflection, my suntanned face covered with freckles—“fly dirt,” Frank called them—and my straight blond hair pulled tightly into

short, thin braids. With my free hand I fingered the ribbon on a braid. *I wish my hair was as curly and beautiful as Shirley Temple's*, I thought for the hundredth time.

I placed the full tray on the table outside and settled back into the hammock with Frank. I noticed that Father, in his polo shirt and white trousers, was smiling and relaxed. I turned to Frank and whispered, “Don’t you think Father looks like an Indian chief, with his hawk nose and reddish skin?” Frank nodded and smiled, punching my arm.

Father enjoyed company and entertaining, and he liked being the center of attention, especially with women. He also loved to drink alcohol. Frank and I liked it when Father drank. He never got drunk, but he relaxed and wasn’t so mean. He actually became fun to be with. Sometimes he told stories of when he was a young boy in Germany—tales he shared over and over again.

I loved stories. Fairy tales, adventures, the stories of Huckleberry Finn, stories about Indians and about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

When Father read to us, he preferred to read the more grown-up books. “Fairy tales bore me,” he said.

So from him we learned about Hawkeye of the Mohicans and the Count of Monte Cristo. Often I didn’t know the meanings of many words, but I understood enough to be fascinated by the characters and their adventures. Frank and I became the characters we heard or read about.

My favorite story was about the wolf boy, Mowgli, from *The Jungle Book*. Mowgli, who was abandoned by his real parents, was raised by wolves and became master of the jungle. I envied Mowgli for having a wolf mother. Shortly after hearing the story when I was around six years old, I created a wolf history for myself.

On our dining room wall was a picture of a lonely hut that I always liked to look at. I told a friend, “This is the house I was born in. My mother didn’t want me when I was a baby. She left me there, and then a wolf found me and raised me as her own.” I could see my friend was impressed, her eyes big as quarters, so I continued. “My wolf mama carried me around in her mouth. And I had wolf brothers and sisters to play with.”

Mother overheard me and stormed in, furious. “Stop telling lies!” she yelled. “You know what happens to liars?”

I nodded. Yes, I knew all right. “If you lie,” she often warned Frank and me, “you’ll grow horns like the devil!”

I had seen pictures of this horned, goatlike devil in *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. As Mother was sending my friend home, I carefully stole looks at myself in the mirror and studied my forehead. I thought I saw little knobby things that could indeed be the beginning of horns.

When she came back into the room, Mother glared at me with her dark, piercing eyes and said, “Don’t lie ever again!” But it hadn’t seemed like a lie to me. It had seemed true. After that, though, I kept my stories in a safe place inside me and didn’t share them with anyone, except sometimes with my brother, who was also my best friend.

Frank was the leader of our neighborhood pack in Stratford. As his sister I was allowed to be the only girl private in an all-boys’ army. Frank could order me around all he wanted to—well, most of the time—but he got angry if the others tried to do it too. He always came to my defense, and he even took time out to retie a ribbon to the end of my braid.

The boys finally accepted me as part of the gang last summer when I managed to steal a watermelon from one of the nearby farms. Stolen watermelons always tasted best.

We re-enacted the Civil War, fought Indians, and warred with neighborhood bullies. We looked for and found arrowheads in the nearby fields, where the Delaware and Sankhikan tribes had lived a long time ago.

The empty lot next to our house was a perfect hiding place from our parents—the weeds there grew over six feet tall. We dug an underground fort in this jungle. When it was finished, since I was the smallest—and the girl—I was given the honor of sitting inside while the boys jumped on the roof to test its strength. With creaks and then a snap, the roof collapsed, burying me under piles of dirt and old rotten wood. I was scared and angry. The boys hauled me out.

“I’m telling!” I screamed, rubbing dirt from my eyes and hair.

Frank quickly offered a deal. “Eleanor, if you don’t tell Mother and Father, I’ll let you go in my tree house.”

A visit to the boys-only tree house was an offer I couldn’t resist. “Okay,” I sniffed. “I won’t tell.”



“It’s a school night,” Mother said after our immigrant friends had left and we had cleaned up. “Make sure to finish your homework, and then off to bed.”

At our old, red brick schoolhouse on Princeton Avenue, two grades shared a classroom, so Frank and I were always in the same room. I learned a lot just by listening to the lessons of the next higher level.

After school, we played, did chores and our homework, then sat down to dinner. But dinner, too, was often a chore. Father ordered us to speak in German at the dinner table. “That way,” he said, pointing at us, “you won’t forget the language you learned in Germany.” For every English word we spoke at the table, we lost a penny of our nickel allowance for the month. A penny bought a whole bag of candy that’d last all afternoon. So I definitely had to think twice before opening my mouth. I silently rehearsed in German, “Please pass me the sugar” or “May I have the saltshaker, please?” Often I just went without rather than risk making a mistake.

When we were trying to eat, Father gave us arithmetic problems to solve. Since arithmetic wasn’t my best subject—actually, it was my worst—I often struggled to come up with the right answer. If I hesitated or made a mistake, Father shook his head and angrily called me “dumb cow,” “stupid old owl,” or “dumb chicken.”

I knew that the animal insults were part of German culture, but they still made me feel bad. I hated it when he called me those animal names. They made me feel even dumber than I already thought I was. Sometimes to make myself feel better, I tried to think about happy things.

One of my favorite thoughts was of the special Christmas package from Grossmutter Rump; it arrived every year at the end of November. We marveled at the July postmark on the box. It had taken the box five

months to reach us. Because it took so long to send a package by freighter from Europe, every year Grossmutter had to make the Christmas cookies in July. “To get myself into the spirit,” she wrote us, “I sing Christmas carols while baking.” Frank and I lifted the great box to see how heavy it was. We shook it and sniffed it. But we had no clue about what was inside, other than the cookies.

My family started celebrating Christmas on St. Nikolaus Day, the sixth of December. That night, as Mother and Father told us, St. Nikolaus comes by on his donkey. Frank and I put on the windowsill a plate filled with old bread for the donkey. If we had been good that year, St. Nikolaus would leave a gift or some candy in the dish. But if we had been bad, he would leave a switch instead.

Last year he left us a switch. We tried hard to determine which of our naughty deeds deserved such a horrible punishment. But we never figured it out.

This year Frank and I tried to stay awake and catch a glimpse of St. Nikolaus, but we fell asleep well before morning. When we awoke, we were thrilled—and relieved—to see that he had left candy.

A couple of weeks later, on Christmas Eve, we waited for the Christkind to bring the Christmas tree with shiny silver tinsel and real waxed candles. And there, tucked under the tree with other gifts, was Grossmutter's special box. At last we were allowed to open it. When we lifted the cover, we smelled the pine branches from the German forest mixed with the aromas of *spekulatius*, *stollen*, and *pfeffernüsse*, all traditional Christmas goodies. The wonderful box held gifts for everyone.

Opening Grossmutter's package was always the best part of Christmas. It made me feel loved and connected to my family across the sea.



In March 1939, Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. This time, our neighbors across the street avoided us and ignored Mother's greetings. Their kids called us names and continued to taunt us.

I was angry and embarrassed. *How can they blame us for something we didn't do?* I wondered. *We're Americans with immigrant parents, just like*

they are. We didn't invade their country. Hitler did. I felt strange, as if they were telling me that I didn't belong.

Soon after, the hostilities escalated and erupted into violence. I watched from inside the gate on our front lawn as Frank and his friends fought the kids across the street. This wasn't a make-believe battle, though, like those we had waged in years past. Rocks now flew back and forth. Then a stone hit my forehead, barely missing my eye. My head stung, and blood gushed down my face. I panicked and started screaming. Mother ran out of the house waving Father's BB gun, scaring the kids away. She hauled Frank and me into the house.

"Don't get pulled into fights with those kids!" she lectured us. She began bandaging my cut.

"But Mother, they blame us for what Hitler's doing—" I started.

"Just ignore them!" Mother sighed. "If you tried reasoning with them and it didn't work, just ignore them."

The trouble didn't stop there. The Czechoslovakian immigrants reported Mother to the police for possession of a weapon and for threatening kids with a gun, even though it had been unloaded. The police came to our house, took the BB gun, and gave Mother a stern warning.

After that, our neighborhood didn't feel as safe and friendly anymore. I worried that things could turn violent again.

But by the end of May, the sunny days and the scent of the white blossoms on the apple tree greatly picked up my spirits. As I walked to school on May 25, my birthday, I noticed the tiny green leaves unfolding on the trees and listened to the birds singing in the bushes nearby. *Today I'm nine years old, I rejoiced with them. Third grade will be over soon, and then comes summer vacation!*

All day long I thought about my birthday party after school. Mother had already sent out invitations, but I felt sorry for those girls who hadn't been invited. So on the way home from school, I told them, "Why don't you come over anyway?" They were delighted and raced home to change into their Sunday dresses.

Mother set a beautiful table under the apple tree, with a hand-embroidered tablecloth, cups and plates for the invited guests, and

colorful favors. I didn't dare tell her about the other children I had invited—deep down I realized I had made a big mistake. When they arrived, Mother made it very clear that she was angry with me. Her dark eyes glared as she sliced the cake into smaller and smaller pieces, trying to make it stretch to feed everybody.

When the party was over, she turned to me, furious. "This," she hissed, "was your last birthday party." I knew she meant it. She always kept her word.

Shortly after my birthday, Father called Frank and me into the living room. "Sit down," he said. "I have something to tell you."

Frank and I looked at each other, and I knew we were both thinking the same thing: *Now what have we done?* I mentally ran down a list of things that might have gotten us into trouble with Father. But his face didn't show anger, so we knew it had to be something even more serious.

"We're going to Germany in the fall," he announced.

"For a vacation?" I ventured.

"No, not exactly, Eleanor. I was offered a challenging job as an engineer in Berlin at the AEG, the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft," he said proudly. "The offer was made by a famous professor named Dr. Biermans." Father's eyes sparkled as he continued. "It's in my field of electrical engineering. It's a great opportunity. And the AEG has offered us housing and a very generous exchange rate of four German marks to the dollar."

I was stunned. Questions swirled in my head. *We're leaving Stratford? Our friends? Will we have to go to German schools? What about our house? Our furniture? Will we come back?*

Sensing my rising panic, he quickly tried to reassure me. "Don't worry. I accepted the position with the understanding that I will return to the United States in two years." I knew that Father now had only a drafting position at RCA, even though he was trained as an engineer. His excitement showed us that he felt this offer from Berlin was too good to pass up.

Frank and I remained silent. Father added, "Anyway, it will give us all a chance to visit your grandparents."

Because of the many letters and photographs sent to and from Germany, I had long been aware that Mother and Father often missed their

families. Travel to Europe was expensive and took nine days by ocean liner. Many immigrants never saw their families again. This was an opportunity my parents might not have had otherwise.

After the initial shock wore off, Frank and I began thinking of the move across the ocean as another adventure. We looked forward to the voyage. *Anyway*, I reminded myself, *in two years we'll be coming back, hopefully even to the same house*. And I was excited about seeing my beloved Omi, Grossmutter, and Grossvater.

After Germany invaded Austria and then Czechoslovakia, our immigrant friends had talked often about the possibility of war in Germany. When Father told them about accepting the new job in Germany, all of them tried to convince him to stay in America.

"Don't go, Josef," one said. "Hitler isn't going to be content with just annexing Austria and Czechoslovakia."

"Oh, I don't believe it," Father replied. "That's just the newspaper reporters trying to sound dramatic. Germany can't afford to get involved in another war."

"Mark my words," warned another friend. "He'll go after Poland next."

Father shrugged. "Why would Hitler want to jeopardize Germany's strong economy now by starting a war? It wouldn't make sense."



Frank and I eagerly looked forward to the big community picnic in Laurel Springs on the Fourth of July. Knowing that it would be the last time we would participate in the festivities for a couple of years made it even more special. For days before the event, Frank and I went with the gang to watch booths going up in the park, musicians practicing on the bandstand, flags being unfurled and hung, and preparations being made for the fireworks. We galloped for hours through all the busy confusion.

On the big day, our whole family went to the picnic. Frank and I lost no time disappearing into the crowd with our friends, as far away as possible from the critical eyes of our parents. We sang the "Star Spangled Banner" and "America the Beautiful" and marched to "Stars and Stripes

Forever,” proudly waving paper flags. We were Americans! We stuffed ourselves with hot dogs and hamburgers.

This was one evening we didn't have to be home at dusk, and Father was in a more lenient mood. So as night settled in, we lay back on the cool grass, our heads cradled in crossed arms, and watched the magnificent fireworks display.

“Much better than last year,” Frank said. We all agreed.

Through the long, warm days of July and early August, Frank and I played with our neighborhood buddies, exploring and creating more adventures for ourselves.

We were Robinson Crusoe, marooned for years on the tiny island of the tree house.

We were Huck Finn, making a raft of logs and tying it together with ropes. We crammed ten kids on board and floated the raft on Kirkwood Lake. None of us could swim.

We played chicken with the daily train that rumbled through town on its way to Laurel Springs. We ran onto the tracks and then jumped off at the last minute. The first of us to jump away was chicken.

My family drove up to Kuhn's Farm in the Poconos for a week, as we had each summer. I loved the Poconos. The simple farm was on the edge of a great, dark forest, which was full of all kinds of dangerous wild animals—snakes, bears, mountain lions—the perfect place for adventurers like Frank and me.

The last few years, we had gone up there in our old Model-A Ford with the rumble seat in the back. Frank and I sat securely strapped in our special seat, surrounded by pillows and luggage, with the rush of wind in our faces and a wide open view of passing scenery. We felt as if we were flying. This time, though, we drove up in Father's Ford V-8, which he had bought last fall. We cranked down all the windows, but the trip just wasn't as much fun as before.

On a couple of weekends my family went with our Danish neighbors, the Holms, to their summer cottage in Stone Harbor. Frank and I buried each other in the sand, jumped the waves, and pedaled the Holms's paddleboat in the harbor. But one Sunday, as Frank and I were

digging a moat around a huge sand castle, trying to stop the waves from collapsing the walls, a big horsefly stung Frank right on his eyelid. His lid puffed way up and turned red and purple. He had to keep an ice pack on it for hours.

“I’m not going back there anymore,” Frank declared. We didn’t.

I had one last visit to see my favorite immigrant relatives, Tante Lina and Onkel Carl in Routledge. I loved going there because Tante Lina hugged me often and made me feel special. But I was happy to go there for another reason too. I couldn’t wait to run over to Bobbsy Kurash’s house, down the street from Tante Lina’s. Bobbsy, his sister Eleanore, and his brother Hans—whose parents also had immigrated from Germany—and I roamed the neighborhood and played cowboys and Indians until darkness forced us back home.

Just before I had to leave Tante Lina’s, Bobbsy came over and offered me a small ring from the five-and-dime store. “Eleanor,” he said, “I’m going to marry you someday.” I was flattered and proudly wore the ring home to Stratford.

Toward the end of August, Mother and Father put our furniture in storage and packed our clothes and books and stuff into large steamer trunks, which they shipped to New York Harbor. We said good-bye to our immigrant family and Stratford friends.

A few days before we left, I buried a tin cigar box filled with treasures at the base of the apple tree. Of the many small treasures I had collected through the years, I selected for this special box a smooth round pebble from the Pocono Mountains, a pink seashell from the ocean, and a scrap of black glittery material that I thought was especially pretty. As I buried the box, I looked up at the tree. “I’ll be back,” I said. “I promise.”

Then one day all the hurrying was over, the house emptied of the familiar things that had made it our home. I walked through the garden one last time, hugging my magic apple tree, breathing in the sweet fragrance of honeysuckle, and waving good-bye to the towering jungle weeds of the empty lot next door, where Frank and I had spent so many happy hours at play. And then I bid one last farewell to the old house. As I listened to my footsteps echoing through the empty rooms, I was

suddenly gripped by an odd feeling of foreboding, a vague sense that something bad was going to happen. I pushed the feeling to the back of my mind and ran outside to the car.

The day before we were to board ship, we visited the New York World's Fair. We walked down the Avenue of Nations, with its spraying fountains, then past the British and Russian pavilions to the magnificent Perisphere and Trylon, which symbolized progress through peace. On the inside of this immense building, we stood with other visitors on a slow-moving circular platform and looked down below at the pristine World of Tomorrow, which included jet airplanes, streamlined cars, beautiful houses, lush gardens, and green forests. As I peered over the rail I was struck by how peaceful and safe it looked down there, everything clean and bright. *That's where I want to live*, I told myself.

On August 29, 1939, we boarded the *S.S. Hamburg*, a huge German luxury ocean liner. As the ship pulled away from the wharf and through New York Harbor, Mother, Father, Frank, and I stood by the rail. We watched the Statue of Liberty vanish into the mist. As the city disappeared, Father turned to Mother.

"You know," he said, an uneasy edge to his voice, "when we were walking up the gangplank earlier, I heard a voice behind me say 'Don't go!'" Father rubbed his forehead. "It was so loud and clear, I turned around to see who was talking to me."

"Well?" Mother asked. "Who was it?"

Softly he replied, "Nobody was there!"

Father was always so sure of himself and wasn't given to what he considered flights of imagination. Hearing him talk like that made me anxious. *What did it mean?*