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Opening extract from

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit

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Chapter One

Anna was walking home from school with Elsbeth, a girl in her class. A lot of snow had fallen in Berlin that winter. It did not melt, so the street cleaners had swept it to the edge of the pavement, and there it had lain for weeks in sad, greying heaps. Now, in February, the snow had turned into slush and there were puddles everywhere. Anna and Elsbeth skipped over them in their lace-up boots.

They both wore thick coats and woollen caps which kept their ears warm, and Anna had a muffler as well. She was nine but small for her age and the ends of the muffler hung down almost to her knees. It also covered up her mouth and nose, so the only parts of her that showed were her green eyes and a tuft of dark hair. She had been hurrying because she wanted to buy some crayons at the paper shop and it was nearly time

for lunch. But now she was so out of breath that she was glad when Elsbeth stopped to look at a large red poster.

"It's another picture of that man," said Elsbeth. "My little sister saw one yesterday and thought it was Charlie Chaplin."

Anna looked at the staring eyes, the grim expression. She said, "It's not a bit like Charlie Chaplin except for the moustache."

They spelled out the name under the photograph.

Adolf Hitler.

"He wants everybody to vote for him in the elections and then he's going to stop the Jews," said Elsbeth. "Do you think he's going to stop Rachel Lowenstein?"

"Nobody can stop Rachel Lowenstein," said Anna. "She's form captain. Perhaps he'll stop me. I'm Jewish too."

"You're not!"

"I am! My father was talking to us about it only last week. He said we were Jews and no matter what happened my brother and I must never forget it."

"But you don't go to a special church on Saturdays like Rachel Lowenstein."

"That's because we're not religious. We don't go to church at all."

"I wish my father wasn't religious," said Elsbeth. "We have to go every Sunday and I get cramp in my seat." She looked at Anna curiously. "I thought Jews were supposed to have bent noses, but your nose is quite ordinary. Has your brother got a bent nose?"

"No," said Anna. "The only person in our house with a bent nose is Bertha the maid, and hers only got like that because she broke it falling off a tram."

Elsbeth was getting annoyed. "Well then," she said, "if you look the same as everyone else and you don't go to a special church, how do you know you *are* Jewish? How can you be sure?"

There was a pause.

"I suppose . . ." said Anna, "I suppose it's because my

mother and father are Jews, and I suppose their mothers and fathers were too. I never thought about it much until Papa started talking about it last week."

"Well, I think it's silly!" said Elsbeth. "It's silly about Adolf Hitler and people being Jews and everything!" She started to run and Anna followed her.

They did not stop until they reached the paper shop. There was someone talking to the man at the counter and Anna's heart sank as she recognised Fraulein Lambeck who lived nearby. Fraulein Lambeck was making a face like a sheep and saying, "Terrible times! Terrible times!" Each time she said "terrible times" she shook her head and her ear-rings wobbled.

The paper shop man said, "1931 was bad enough, 1932 was worse, but mark my words, 1933 will be worst of all." Then he saw Anna and Elsbeth and said, "What can I do for you, my dears?"

Anna was just going to tell him that she wanted to buy some crayons when Fraulein Lambeck spied her.

"It's little Anna!" cried Fraulein Lambeck. "How are you, little Anna? And how is your dear father? Such a wonderful man! I read every word he writes. I've got all his books and I always listen to him on the radio. But he hasn't written anything in the paper this week—I do hope he's quite well. Perhaps he's lecturing somewhere. Oh, we do need him in these terrible, terrible times!"

Anna waited until Fraulein Lambeck had finished. Then she said, "He's got 'flu."

This provoked another outburst. You would have thought that Fraulein Lambeck's nearest and dearest were lying at death's door. She shook her head until the ear-rings rattled. She suggested remedies. She recommended doctors. She would not stop talking until Anna had promised to give her father Fraulein Lambeck's best wishes for a speedy recovery. And then she turned back in the doorway and said, "Don't say best wishes from Fraulein Lambeck, little Anna—just say from an admirer!"—before she finally swept out.

Anna bought her crayons quickly. Then she and Elsbeth stood together in the cold wind outside the paper shop. This was where their ways normally parted, but Elsbeth lingered. There was something she had wanted to ask Anna for a long time and it seemed a good moment.

"Anna," said Elsbeth, "is it nice having a famous father?"

"Not when you meet someone like Fraulein Lambeck," said Anna, absent-mindedly setting off for home while Elsbeth equally absent-mindedly followed her.

"No, but apart from Fraulein Lambeck?"

"I think it's quite nice. For one thing Papa works at home, so we see quite a lot of him. And sometimes we get free theatre tickets. And once we were interviewed by a newspaper, and they asked us what books we liked, and my brother said Zane Grey and the next day someone sent him a whole set as a present!"

"I wish my father was famous," said Elsbeth. "But I don't think he ever will be because he works in the Post Office, and that's not the sort of thing people get famous for."

"If your father doesn't become famous perhaps you will. One snag about having a famous father is that you almost never become famous yourself."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. But you hardly ever hear of two famous people in the same family. It makes me rather sad sometimes." Anna sighed.

By this time they were standing outside Anna's white-painted gate. Elsbeth was feverishly trying to think of something she might become famous for when Heimpi who had seen them from the window opened the front door.

"Goodness!" cried Elsbeth, "I'll be late for lunch!"—and she rushed off up the street.

"You and that Elsbeth," grumbled Heimpi as Anna went inside. "You'd talk the monkeys off the trees!"

Heimpi's real name was Fraulein Heimpel and she had looked after Anna and her brother Max since they were babies.

Now that they were older she did the housekeeping while they were at school, but she liked to fuss over them when they came back. "Let's have all this off you," she said, unwinding the muffler. "You look like a parcel with the string undone." As Heimpi peeled the clothes off her Anna could hear the piano being played in the drawing room. So Mama was home.

"Are you sure your feet aren't wet?" said Heimpi. "Then go quickly and wash your hands. Lunch is nearly ready."

Anna climbed up the thickly carpeted stairs. The sun was shining through the window and outside in the garden she could see a few last patches of snow. The smell of chicken drifted up from the kitchen. It was nice coming home from school.

As she opened the bathroom door there was a scuffle inside and she found herself staring straight at her brother Max, his face scarlet under his fair hair, his hands hiding something behind his back.

"What's the matter?" she asked, even before she caught sight of his friend Gunther who seemed equally embarrassed.

"Oh, it's you!" said Max, and Gunther laughed, "We thought it was a grown-up!"

"What have you got?" asked Anna.

"It's a badge. There was a big fight at school today—Nazis against Sozis."

"What are Nazis and Sozis?"

"I'd have thought even you would know that at your age," said Max who was just twelve. "The Nazis are the people who are going to vote for Hitler in the elections. We Sozis are the people who are going to vote against."

"But you're none of you allowed to vote," said Anna. "You're too young!"

"Our fathers, then," said Max crossly. "It's the same thing."

"Anyway, we beat them," said Gunther. "You should have seen those Nazis run! Max and I caught one of them and got his badge off him. But I don't know what my Mum is going to say about my trousers." He looked dolefully down at a large tear in the worn cloth. Gunther's father was out of work and there was no money at home for new clothes.