

"Silence"

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1933: My mother says it will all go away very soon. She says it's not important, that it doesn't *matter*. "Those men don't know what they're doing, Karl," she tells me when I point to the men marching in the street. They wear brown coats and carry red and black flags and yell things about someone called Hitler. Men that look like them are always in pictures in the newspapers. Mother says they're called Nazis, that they work for the angry man with the small mustache who just got elected into the Reichstag, that they like to blame Jewish people for how awful it's been in Germany since the war. She doesn't say they're wrong about that, but we're not Jewish, so it doesn't *matter*. In my class at school, the Jewish kids keep to themselves. No one asks them, not even the ones who used to be popular, to join in our games at recess. Some of them used to be my friends and I guess they will be again because everyone says this is only temporary.

1935: No one Jewish goes to my school anymore. Laws have been passed separating Jews from other Germans. Hitler makes speeches proclaiming this as a good thing, as the beginning of a new era for Aryans. My father had to fire all of the Jewish employees he oversees at the factory where he works. He says he did it without complaint. "What was I supposed to do?" he asks when he gets home. "They would have done the same to me. They know it's only temporary. These laws, they're nothing. Germany will come to its senses. The Jews can handle it. It's not like they should expect good things after all this time." Father smiles sadly and shakes his head. He does nothing about the situation with the Jews, and neither do I. Once I see two Jewish kids getting roughed up in the park by boys I know from school. It would be easy enough to go over and tell them to cut it out. But if I did, they'd never look at me the same way again. They would think of me as disloyal or just downright strange. So I keep my head down, just like my father

does at work. The Jews can take care of themselves; it's not as if they haven't faced worse before.

1938: At two o'clock this morning I woke up, blinking and confused. I had only been asleep for a few hours but there was so much light shining into my room I could have sworn that the sun had risen. I opened my curtains and automatically wished I hadn't. The light wasn't coming from the sun. There were fires everywhere, flames dancing along the street and creating waves of cinders in their wake, and there were mountains of broken glass. Fire licked at sharp shards of glass, melting them into ash-streaked clumps, and men were screaming in the distance, waving clubs. A group of police officers, all wearing swastikas, had herded a family--our neighbors, the Feldmans--into a truck, ignoring the rioting around them. The smell of burning was everywhere; it was as if the entire city was ablaze. I couldn't do a thing to stop it; it was beyond my control. I went back to bed, praying that it would all be gone in the morning.

1941: The world is at war. Our army has invaded half of Europe. I have friends who went to serve on the front lines. Hardly anyone comes to school. We don't even learn. All we ever say is "Heil, Hitler." There are people, even teachers, who have tried to go against the government. My geography teacher is involved in something underground, or at least that's what I've heard. Yesterday two soldiers took him out of the classroom in the middle of the lesson. Other students protested, but I stayed silent. It was better that I did. The students who tried to talk got called out, too. I just stayed where I was, silent, watching, feeling sick. At least I'm still safe. I'd rather be *guilty* than dead, dead like the Jews who are taken to Poland to do "labor." Those who try to help get taken away too. They don't make a difference, and they're the brave ones, so how could I possibly do any good, right? Silence is all that I know.

