

# 1

1933

Carla knew her parents were about to have a row. The second she walked into the kitchen she felt the hostility, like the bone-deep cold of the wind that blew through the streets of Berlin before a February snowstorm. She almost turned and walked back out again.

It was unusual for them to fight. Mostly they were affectionate – too much so. Carla cringed when they kissed in front of other people. Her friends thought it was strange: their parents did not do that. She had said that to her mother, once. Mother had laughed in a pleased way and said: ‘The day after our wedding, your father and I were separated by the Great War.’ She had been born English, though you could hardly tell. ‘I stayed in London while he came home to Germany and joined the army.’ Carla had heard this story many times, but Mother never tired of telling it. ‘We thought the war would last three months, but I didn’t see him again for five years. All that time I longed to touch him. Now I never tire of it.’

Father was just as bad. ‘Your mother is the cleverest woman I have ever met,’ he had said here in the kitchen just a few days ago. ‘That’s why I married her. It had nothing to do with . . .’ He had tailed off, and Mother and he had giggled conspiratorially, as if Carla at the age of eleven knew nothing about sex. It was so embarrassing.

But once in a while they had a quarrel. Carla knew the signs. And a new one was about to erupt.

They were sitting at opposite ends of the kitchen table. Father was sombrely dressed in a dark-grey suit, starched white shirt and black satin tie. He looked dapper, as always, even

though his hair was receding and his waistcoat bulged a little beneath the gold watch chain. His face was frozen in an expression of false calm. Carla knew that look. He wore it when one of the family had done something that angered him.

He held in his hand a copy of the weekly magazine for which Mother worked, *The Democrat*. She wrote a column of political and diplomatic gossip under the name of Lady Maud. Father began to read aloud. “Our new chancellor, Herr Adolf Hitler, made his debut in diplomatic society at President Hindenburg’s reception.”

The President was the head of state, Carla knew. He was elected, but he stood above the squabbles of day-to-day politics, acting as referee. The Chancellor was the premier. Although Hitler had been made chancellor, his Nazi party did not have an overall majority in the Reichstag – the German parliament – so, for the present, the other parties could restrain Nazi excesses.

Father spoke with distaste, as if forced to mention something repellent, like sewage. “He looked uncomfortable in a formal tailcoat.”

Carla’s mother sipped her coffee and looked out of the window to the street, as if interested in the people hurrying to work in scarves and gloves. She, too, was pretending to be calm, but Carla knew that she was just waiting for her moment.

The maid, Ada, was standing at the counter in an apron, slicing cheese. She put a plate in front of Father, but he ignored it. “Herr Hitler was evidently charmed by Elisabeth Cerruti, the cultured wife of the Italian ambassador, in a rose-pink velvet gown trimmed with sable.”

Mother always wrote about what people were wearing. She said it helped the reader to picture them. She herself had fine clothes, but times were hard and she had not bought anything new for years. This morning, she looked slim and elegant in a navy-blue cashmere dress that was probably as old as Carla.

“Signora Cerruti, who is Jewish, is a passionate Fascist, and they talked for many minutes. Did she beg Hitler to stop whipping up hatred of Jews?” Father put the magazine down on the table with a slap.

Here it comes, Carla thought.

'You realize that will infuriate the Nazis,' he said.

'I hope so,' Mother said coolly. 'The day they're pleased with what I write, I shall give it up.'

'They're dangerous when riled.'

Mother's eyes flashed anger. 'Don't you dare condescend to me, Walter. I know they're dangerous – that's why I oppose them.'

'I just don't see the point of making them irate.'

'You attack them in the Reichstag.' Father was an elected parliamentary representative for the Social Democratic Party.

'I take part in a reasoned debate.'

This was typical, Carla thought. Father was logical, cautious, law-abiding. Mother had style and humour. He got his way by quiet persistence; she with charm and cheek. They would never agree.

Father added: 'I don't drive the Nazis mad with fury.'

'Perhaps that's because you don't do them much harm.'

Father was irritated by her quick wit. His voice became louder. 'And you think you damage them with jokes?'

'I mock them.'

'And that's your substitute for argument.'

'I believe we need both.'

Father became angrier. 'But Maud, don't you see how you're putting yourself and your family at risk?'

'On the contrary: the real danger is *not* to mock the Nazis. What would life be like for our children if Germany became a Fascist state?'

This kind of talk made Carla feel queasy. She could not bear to hear that the family was in danger. Life must go on as it always had. She wished she could sit in this kitchen for an eternity of mornings, with her parents at opposite ends of the pine table, Ada at the counter, and her brother, Erik, thumping around upstairs, late again. Why should anything change?

She had listened to political talk every breakfast-time of her life and she thought she understood what her parents did, and how they planned to make Germany a better place for everyone. But lately they had begun to talk in a different way. They seemed to think that a terrible danger loomed, but Carla could not quite imagine what it was.

Father said: 'God knows I'm doing everything I can to hold back Hitler and his mob.'

'And so am I. But when you do it, you believe you're following a sensible course.' Mother's face hardened in resentment. 'And when I do it, I'm accused of putting the family at risk.'

'And with good reason,' said Father. The row was only just getting started, but at that moment Erik came down, clattering like a horse on the stairs, and lurched into the kitchen with his school satchel swinging from his shoulder. He was thirteen, two years older than Carla, and there were unsightly black hairs sprouting from his upper lip. When they were small, Carla and Erik had played together all the time; but those days were over, and since he had grown so tall he had pretended to think that she was stupid and childish. In fact, she was smarter than he, and knew about a lot of things he did not understand, such as women's monthly cycles.

'What was that last tune you were playing?' he said to Mother.

The piano often woke them in the morning. It was a Steinway grand – inherited, like the house itself, from Father's parents. Mother played in the morning because, she said, she was too busy during the rest of the day and too tired in the evening. This morning, she had performed a Mozart sonata then a jazz tune. 'It's called "Tiger Rag",' she told Erik. 'Do you want some cheese?'

'Jazz is decadent,' Erik said.

'Don't be silly.'

Ada handed Erik a plate of cheese and sliced sausage, and he began to shovel it into his mouth. Carla thought his manners were dreadful.

Father looked severe. 'Who's been teaching you this nonsense, Erik?'

'Hermann Braun says that jazz isn't music, just Negroes making a noise.' Hermann was Erik's best friend; his father was a member of the Nazi Party.

'Hermann should try to play it.' Father looked at Mother, and his face softened. She smiled at him. He went on: 'Your

mother tried to teach me ragtime, many years ago, but I couldn't master the rhythm.'

Mother laughed. 'It was like trying to get a giraffe to roller-skate.'

The fight was over, Carla saw with relief. She began to feel better. She took some black bread and dipped it in milk.

But now Erik wanted an argument. 'Negroes are an inferior race,' he said defiantly.

'I doubt that,' Father said patiently. 'If a Negro boy were brought up in a nice house full of books and paintings, and sent to an expensive school with good teachers, he might turn out to be smarter than you.'

'That's ridiculous!' Erik protested.

Mother put in: 'Don't call your father ridiculous, you foolish boy.' Her tone was mild: she had used up her anger on Father. Now she just sounded wearily disappointed. 'You don't know what you're talking about, and neither does Hermann Braun.'

Erik said: 'But the Aryan race must be superior – we rule the world!'

'Your Nazi friends don't know any history,' Father said. 'The Ancient Egyptians built the pyramids when Germans were living in caves. Arabs ruled the world in the Middle Ages – the Muslims were doing algebra when German princes could not write their own names. It's nothing to do with race.'

Carla frowned and said: 'What is it to do with, then?'

Father looked at her fondly. 'That's a very good question, and you're a bright girl to ask it.' She glowed with pleasure at his praise. 'Civilizations rise and fall – the Chinese, the Aztecs, the Romans – but no one really knows why.'

'Eat up, everyone, and put your coats on,' Mother said. 'It's getting late.'

Father pulled his watch out of his waistcoat pocket and looked at it with raised eyebrows. 'It's not late.'

'I've got to take Carla to the Francks' house,' Mother said. 'The girls' school is closed for a day – something about repairing the furnace – so Carla's going to spend today with Frieda.'

Frieda Franck was Carla's best friend. Their mothers were

best friends, too. In fact, when they were young, Frieda's mother, Monika, had been in love with Father – a hilarious fact that Frieda's grandmother had revealed one day after drinking too much Sekt.

Father said: 'Why can't Ada look after Carla?'

'Ada has an appointment with the doctor.'

'Ah.'

Carla expected Father to ask what was wrong with Ada, but he nodded as if he already knew, and put his watch away. Carla wanted to ask, but something told her she should not. She made a mental note to ask Mother later. Then she immediately forgot about it.

Father left first, wearing a long black overcoat. Then Erik put on his cap – perching it as far back on his head as it would go without falling off, as was the fashion among his friends – and followed Father out of the door.

Carla and her mother helped Ada clear the table. Carla loved Ada almost as much as she loved her mother. When Carla was little, Ada had taken care of her full-time, until she was old enough to go to school, for Mother had always worked. Ada was not married yet. She was twenty-nine and homely looking, though she had a lovely, kind smile. Last summer, she had had a romance with a policeman, Paul Huber, but it had not lasted.

Carla and her mother stood in front of the mirror in the hall and put on their hats. Mother took her time. She chose a dark-blue felt, with a round crown and a narrow brim, the type all the women were wearing; but she tilted hers at a different angle, making it look chic. As Carla put on her knitted wool cap, she wondered whether she would ever have Mother's sense of style. Mother looked like a goddess of war, her long neck and chin and cheekbones carved out of white marble; beautiful, yes, but definitely not pretty. Carla had the same dark hair and green eyes, but looked more like a plump doll than a statue. Carla had once accidentally overheard her grandmother say to Mother: 'Your ugly duckling will grow into a swan, you'll see.' Carla was still waiting for it to happen.

When Mother was ready, they went out. Their home stood in a row of tall, gracious town houses in the Mitte district, the old centre of the city, built for high-ranking ministers and army

officers such as Carla's grandfather, who had worked at the nearby government buildings.

Carla and her mother rode a tram along Unter den Linden, then took the S-train from Friedrich Strasse to the Zoo Station. The Francks lived in the south-western suburb of Schöneberg.

Carla was hoping to see Frieda's brother Werner, who was fourteen. She liked him. Sometimes Carla and Frieda imagined that they had each married the other's brother, and were next-door neighbours, and their children were best friends. It was just a game to Frieda, but secretly Carla was serious. Werner was handsome and grown-up and not a bit silly like Erik. In the doll's house in Carla's bedroom, the mother and father sleeping side by side in the miniature double bed were called Carla and Werner, but no one knew that, not even Frieda.

Frieda had another brother, Axel, who was seven; but he had been born with spina bifida, and had to have constant medical care. He lived in a special hospital on the outskirts of Berlin.

Mother was preoccupied on the journey. 'I hope this is going to be all right,' she muttered, half to herself, as they got off the train.

'Of course it will,' Carla said. 'I'll have a lovely time with Frieda.'

'I didn't mean that. I'm talking about my paragraph about Hitler.'

'Are we in danger? Was Father right?'

'Your father is usually right.'

'What will happen to us if we've annoyed the Nazis?'

Mother stared at her strangely for a long moment, then said: 'Dear God, what kind of a world did I bring you into?' Then she went quiet.

After a ten-minute walk they arrived at a grand villa in a big garden. The Francks were rich: Frieda's father, Ludwig, owned a factory making radio sets. Two cars stood in the drive. The large shiny black one belonged to Herr Franck. The engine rumbled, and a cloud of blue vapour rose from the tail pipe. The chauffeur, Ritter, with uniform trousers tucked into high boots, stood cap in hand ready to open the door. He bowed and said: 'Good morning, Frau von Ulrich.'

The second car was a little green two-seater. A short man

with a grey beard came out of the house carrying a leather case, and touched his hat to Mother as he got into the small car. 'I wonder what Dr Rothmann is doing here so early in the morning,' Mother said anxiously.

They soon found out. Frieda's mother, Monika, came to the door; she was a tall woman with a mass of red hair. Anxiety showed on her pale face. Instead of welcoming them in, she stood squarely in the doorway as if to bar their entrance. 'Frieda has measles!' she said.

'I'm so sorry!' said Mother. 'How is she?'

'Miserable. She has a fever and a cough. But Rothmann says she'll be all right. However, she's quarantined.'

'Of course. Have you had it?'

'Yes – when I was a girl.'

'And Werner has, too – I remember he had a terrible rash all over. But what about your husband?'

'Ludi had it as a boy.'

Both women looked at Carla. She had never had measles. She realized this meant that she could not spend the day with Frieda.

Carla was disappointed, but Mother was quite shaken. 'This week's magazine is our election issue – I *can't* be absent.' She looked distraught. All the grown-ups were apprehensive about the general election to be held next Sunday. Mother and Father both feared the Nazis might do well enough to take full control of the government. 'Plus my oldest friend is visiting from London. I wonder whether Walter could be persuaded to take a day off to look after Carla?'

Monika said: 'Why don't you telephone to him?'

Not many people had phones in their homes, but the Francks did, and Carla and her mother stepped into the hall. The instrument stood on a spindly legged table near the door. Mother picked it up and gave the number of Father's office at the Reichstag, the parliament building. She got through to him and explained the situation. She listened for a minute, then looked angry. 'My magazine will urge a hundred thousand readers to campaign for the Social Democratic Party,' she said. 'Do you really have something more important than that to do today?'

Carla could guess how this argument would end. Father loved her dearly, she knew, but in all her eleven years he had never looked after her for a whole day. All her friends' fathers were the same. Men did not do that sort of thing. But Mother sometimes pretended not to know the rules women lived by.

'I'll just have to take her to the office with me, then,' Mother said into the phone. 'I dread to think what Jochmann will say.' Herr Jochmann was her boss. 'He's not much of a feminist at the best of times.' She replaced the handset without saying goodbye.

Carla hated it when they fought, and this was the second time in a day. It made the whole world seem unstable. She was much more scared of quarrels than of the Nazis.

'Come on, then,' Mother said to her, and she moved to the door.

I'm not even going to see Werner, Carla thought unhappily.

Just then Frieda's father appeared in the hall, a pink-faced man with a small black moustache, energetic and cheerful. He greeted Mother pleasantly, and she paused to speak politely to him while Monika helped him into a black topcoat with a fur collar.

He went to the foot of the stairs. 'Werner!' he shouted. 'I'm going without you!' He put on a grey felt hat and went out.

'I'm ready, I'm ready!' Werner ran down the stairs like a dancer. He was as tall as his father and more handsome, with red-blond hair worn too long. Under his arm he had a leather satchel that appeared to be full of books; in the other hand he held a pair of ice skates and a hockey stick. He paused in his rush to say: 'Good morning, Frau von Ulrich', very politely. Then in a more informal tone: 'Hello, Carla. My sister's got the measles.'

Carla felt herself blush, for no reason at all. 'I know,' she said. She tried to think of something charming and amusing to say, but came up with nothing. 'I've never had it, so I can't see her.'

'I had it when I was a kid,' he said, as if that was ever such a long time ago. 'I must hurry,' he added apologetically.

Carla did not want to lose sight of him so quickly. She

followed him outside. Ritter was holding the rear door open. 'What kind of car is that?' Carla asked. Boys always knew the makes of cars.

'A Mercedes-Benz W10 limousine.'

'It looks very comfortable.' She caught a look from her mother, half surprised and half amused.

Werner said: 'Do you want a lift?'

'That would be nice.'

'I'll ask my father.' Werner put his head inside the car and said something.

Carla heard Herr Franck reply: 'Very well, but hurry up!'

She turned to her mother. 'We can go in the car!'

Mother hesitated for only a moment. She did not like Herr Franck's politics – he gave money to the Nazis – but she was not going to refuse a lift in a warm car on a cold morning. 'How very kind of you, Ludwig,' she said.

They got in. There was room for four in the back. Ritter pulled away smoothly. 'I assume you're going to Koch Strasse?' said Herr Franck. Many newspapers and book publishers had their offices in the same street in the Kreuzberg district.

'Please don't go out of your way. Leipziger Strasse would be fine.'

'I'd be happy to take you to the door – but I suppose you don't want your leftist colleagues to see you getting out of the car of a bloated plutocrat.' His tone was somewhere between humorous and hostile.

Mother gave him a charming smile. 'You're not bloated, Ludi – just a little plump.' She patted the front of his coat.

He laughed. 'I asked for that.' The tension eased. Herr Franck picked up the speaking tube and gave instructions to Ritter.

Carla was thrilled to be in a car with Werner, and she wanted to make the most of it by talking to him, but at first she could not think what to speak about. She really wanted to say: 'When you're older, do you think you might marry a girl with dark hair and green eyes, about three years younger than yourself, and clever?' Eventually she pointed to his skates and said: 'Do you have a match today?'

'No, just practice after school.'

'What position do you play in?' She knew nothing about ice hockey, but there were always positions in team games.

'Right wing.'

'Isn't it a rather dangerous sport?'

'Not if you're quick.'

'You must be ever such a good skater.'

'Not bad,' he said modestly.

Once again, Carla caught her mother watching her with an enigmatic little smile. Had she guessed how Carla felt about Werner? Carla felt another blush coming.

Then the car came to a stop outside a school building, and Werner got out. 'Goodbye, everyone!' he said, and ran through the gates into the yard.

Ritter drove on, following the south bank of the Landwehr Canal. Carla looked at the barges, their loads of coal topped with snow like mountains. She felt a sense of disappointment. She had contrived to spend longer with Werner, by hinting that she wanted a lift, then she had wasted the time talking about ice hockey.

What would she have liked to have talked to him about? She did not know.

Herr Franck said to Mother: 'I read your column in *The Democrat*.'

'I hope you enjoyed it.'

'I was sorry to see you writing disrespectfully about our chancellor.'

'Do you think journalists should write respectfully about politicians?' Mother replied cheerfully. 'That's radical. The Nazi press would have to be polite about my husband! They wouldn't like that.'

'Not all politicians, obviously,' Franck said irritably.

They crossed the teeming junction of Potsdamer Platz. Cars and trams vied with horse-drawn carts and pedestrians in a chaotic melee.

Mother said: 'Isn't it better for the press to be able to criticize everyone equally?'

'A wonderful idea,' he said. 'But you socialists live in a dream world. We practical men know that Germany cannot live on ideas. People must have bread and shoes and coal.'

‘I quite agree,’ Mother said. ‘I could use more coal myself. But I want Carla and Erik to grow up as citizens of a free country.’

‘You overrate freedom. It doesn’t make people happy. They prefer leadership. I want Werner and Frieda and poor Axel to grow up in a country that is proud, and disciplined, and united.’

‘And in order to be united, we need young thugs in brown shirts to beat up elderly Jewish shopkeepers?’

‘Politics is rough. Nothing we can do about it.’

‘On the contrary, you and I are leaders, Ludwig, in our different ways. It’s our responsibility to make politics less rough – more honest, more rational, less violent. If we do not do that, we fail in our patriotic duty.’

Herr Franck bristled.

Carla did not know much about men, but she realized that they did not like to be lectured on their duty by women. Mother must have forgotten to press her charm switch this morning. But everyone was tense. The coming election had them all on edge.

The car reached Leipziger Platz. ‘Where may I drop you?’ Herr Franck said coldly.

‘Just here will be fine,’ said Mother.

Franck tapped on the glass partition. Ritter stopped the car and hurried to open the door.

Mother said: ‘I do hope Frieda gets better soon.’

‘Thank you.’

They got out and Ritter closed the door.

The office was several minutes’ walk away, but Mother clearly had not wanted to stay any longer in the car. Carla hoped Mother was not going to quarrel permanently with Herr Franck. That might make it difficult for her to see Frieda and Werner. She would hate that.

They set off at a brisk pace. ‘Try not to make a nuisance of yourself at the office,’ Mother said. The note of genuine pleading in her voice touched Carla, making her feel ashamed of causing her mother worry. She resolved to behave perfectly.

Mother greeted several people on the way: she had been writing her column for as long as Carla could remember, and

was well known in the press corps. They all called her 'Lady Maud' in English.

Near the building in which *The Democrat* had its office, they saw someone they knew: Sergeant Schwab. He had fought with Father in the Great War, and still wore his hair brutally short in the military style. After the war he had worked as a gardener, first for Carla's grandfather and later for her father; but he had stolen money from Mother's purse and Father had sacked him. Now he was wearing the ugly military uniform of the Storm troopers, the Brownshirts, who were not soldiers but Nazis who had been given the authority of auxiliary policemen.

Schwab said loudly: 'Good morning, Frau von Ulrich!' as if he felt no shame at all about being a thief. He did not even touch his cap.

Mother nodded coldly and walked past him. 'I wonder what he's doing here,' she muttered uneasily as they went inside.

The magazine had the first floor of a modern office building. Carla knew a child would not be welcome, and she hoped they could reach Mother's office without being seen. But they met Herr Jochmann on the stairs. He was a heavy man with thick spectacles. 'What's this?' he said brusquely, speaking around the cigarette in his mouth. 'Are we running a kindergarten now?'

Mother did not react to his rudeness. 'I was thinking over your comment the other day,' she said. 'About how young people imagine journalism is a glamorous profession, and don't understand how much hard work is necessary.'

He frowned. 'Did I say that? Well, it's certainly true.'

'So I brought my daughter here to see the reality. I think it will be good for her education, especially if she becomes a writer. She will make a report on the visit to her class. I felt sure you would approve.'

Mother was making this up as she went along, but it sounded convincing, Carla thought. She almost believed it herself. The charm switch had been turned to the On position at last.

Jochmann said: 'Don't you have an important visitor from London coming today?'

'Yes, Ethel Leckwith, but she's an old friend – she knew Carla as a baby.'

Jochmann was somewhat mollified. ‘Hmm. Well, we have an editorial meeting in five minutes, as soon as I’ve bought some cigarettes.’

‘Carla will get them for you.’ Mother turned to her. ‘There is a tobacconist three doors down. Herr Jochmann likes the Roth-Händle brand.’

‘Oh, that will save me a trip.’ Jochmann gave Carla a one-mark coin.

Mother said to her: ‘When you come back, you’ll find me at the top of the stairs, next to the fire alarm.’ She turned away and took Jochmann’s arm confidentially. ‘I thought last week’s issue was possibly our best ever,’ she said as they went up.

Carla ran out into the street. Mother had got away with it, using her characteristic mixture of boldness and flirting. She sometimes said: ‘We women have to deploy every weapon we have.’ Thinking about it, Carla realized that she had used Mother’s tactics to get a lift from Herr Franck. Perhaps she was like her mother after all. That might be why Mother had given her that curious little smile: she was seeing herself thirty years ago.

There was a queue in the shop. Half the journalists in Berlin seemed to be buying their supplies for the day. At last Carla got a pack of Roth-Händle and returned to the *Democrat* building. She found the fire alarm easily – it was a big lever fixed to the wall – but Mother was not in her office. No doubt she had gone to that editorial meeting.

Carla walked along the corridor. All the doors were open, and most of the rooms were empty but for a few women who might have been typists and secretaries. At the back of the building, around a corner, was a closed door marked ‘Conference Room’. Carla could hear male voices raised in argument. She tapped on the door, but there was no response. She hesitated, then turned the handle and went in.

The room was full of tobacco smoke. Eight or ten people sat around a long table. Mother was the only woman. They fell silent, apparently surprised, when Carla went up to the head of the table and handed Jochmann the cigarettes and change. Their silence made her think she had done wrong to come in.

But Jochmann just said: ‘Thank you.’

‘You’re welcome, sir,’ she said, and for some reason she gave a little bow.

The men laughed. One said: ‘New assistant, Jochmann?’ Then she knew it was all right.

She left the room quickly and returned to Mother’s office. She did not take off her coat – the place was cold. She looked around. On the desk were a phone, a typewriter, and stacks of paper and carbon paper.

Next to the phone was a photograph in a frame, showing Carla and Erik with Father. It had been taken a couple of years ago on a sunny day at the beach by the Wannsee lake, fifteen miles from the centre of Berlin. Father was wearing shorts. They were all laughing. That was before Erik had started to pretend to be a tough, serious man.

The only other picture, hanging on the wall, showed Mother with the social-democratic hero Friedrich Ebert, who had been the first President of Germany after the war. It had been taken about ten years ago. Carla smiled at Mother’s shapeless, low-waisted dress and boyish haircut: they must have been fashionable at the time.

The bookshelf held social directories, phone books, dictionaries in several languages, and atlases, but nothing to read. In the desk drawer were pencils, several new pairs of formal gloves still wrapped in tissue paper, a packet of sanitary towels, and a notebook with names and phone numbers.

Carla reset the desk calendar to today’s date, Monday 27 February 1933. Then she put a sheet of paper into the typewriter. She typed her full name, Heike Carla von Ulrich. At the age of five she had announced that she did not like the name Heike and she wanted everyone to use her second name, and somewhat to her surprise her family had complied.

Each key of the typewriter caused a metal rod to rise up and strike the paper through an inky ribbon, printing a letter. When by accident she pressed two keys, the rods got stuck. She tried to prise them apart but she could not. Pressing another key did not help: now there were three jammed rods. She groaned: she was in trouble already.

A noise from the street distracted her. She went to the window. A dozen Brownshirts were marching along the middle

of the road, shouting slogans: 'Death to all Jews! Jews go to hell!' Carla could not understand why they got so angry about Jews, who seemed the same as everyone else apart from their religion. She was startled to see Sergeant Schwab at the head of the troop. She had felt sorry for him when he was sacked, for she knew he would find it hard to get another job. There were millions of men looking for jobs in Germany: Father said it was a depression. But Mother had said: 'How can we have a man in our house who steals?'

Their chant changed. 'Smash Jew papers!' they said in unison. One of them threw something, and a rotten vegetable splashed on the door of a national newspaper. Then, to Carla's horror, they turned towards the building she was in.

She drew back and peeped around the edge of the window frame, hoping that they could not see her. They stopped outside, still chanting. One threw a stone. It hit Carla's window without breaking it, but all the same she gave a little scream of fear. A moment later, one of the typists came in, a young woman in a red beret. 'What's the matter?' she said, then she looked out of the window. 'Oh, hell.'

The Brownshirts entered the building, and Carla heard boots on the stairs. She was scared: what were they going to do?

Sergeant Schwab came into Mother's office. He hesitated, seeing the two females; then seemed to screw up his nerve. He picked up the typewriter and threw it through the window, shattering the glass. Carla and the typist both screamed.

More Brownshirts passed the doorway, shouting their slogans.

Schwab grabbed the typist by the arm and said: 'Now, darling, where's the office safe?'

'In the file room!' she said in a terrified voice.

'Show me.'

'Yes, anything!'

He marched her out of the room.

Carla started to cry, then stopped herself.

She thought of hiding under the desk, but hesitated. She did not want to show them how scared she was. Something inside her wanted to defy them.

But what should she do? She decided to warn Mother.

She stepped to the doorway and looked along the corridor. The Brownshirts were going in and out of the offices but had not reached the far end. Carla did not know whether the people in the conference room could hear the commotion. She ran along the corridor as fast as she could, but a scream stopped her. She looked into a room and saw Schwab shaking the typist with the red beret, yelling: 'Where's the key?'

'I don't know, I swear I'm telling the truth!' the typist cried.

Carla was outraged. Schwab had no right to treat a woman that way. She shouted: 'Leave her alone, Schwab, you thief!'

Schwab looked at her with hatred in his eyes, and suddenly she was ten times more frightened. Then his gaze shifted to someone behind her, and he said: 'Get the kid out of the damn way.'

She was picked up from behind. 'Are you a little Jew?' said a man's voice. 'You look it, with all that dark hair.'

That terrified her. 'I'm not Jewish!' she screamed.

The Brownshirt carried her back along the corridor and put her down in Mother's office. She stumbled and fell to the floor. 'Stay in here,' he said, and he went away.

Carla got to her feet. She was not hurt. The corridor was full of Brownshirts now, and she could not get to her mother. But she had to summon help.

She looked out of the smashed window. A small crowd was gathering on the street. Two policemen stood among the onlookers, chatting. Carla shouted at them: 'Help! Help, police!'

They saw her and laughed.

That infuriated her, and anger made her less frightened. She looked outside the office again. Her gaze lit on the fire alarm on the wall. She reached up and grasped the handle.

She hesitated. You were not supposed to sound the alarm unless there was a fire, and a notice on the wall warned of dire penalties.

She pulled the handle anyway.

For a moment nothing happened. Perhaps the mechanism was not working.

Then there came a loud, harsh klaxon sound, rising and falling, which filled the building.

Almost immediately the people from the conference room

appeared at the far end of the corridor. Jochmann was first. 'What the devil is going on?' he said angrily, shouting over the noise of the alarm.

One of the Brownshirts said: 'This Jew Communist rag has insulted our leader, and we're closing it down.'

'Get out of my office!'

The Brownshirt ignored him and went into a side room. A moment later there was a female scream and a crash that sounded like a steel desk being overturned.

Jochmann turned to one of his staff. 'Schneider – call the police immediately!'

Carla knew that would be no good. The police were here already, doing nothing.

Mother pushed through the knot of people and came running along the corridor. 'Are you all right?' she cried. She threw her arms around Carla.

Carla did not want to be comforted like a child. Pushing her mother away, she said: 'I'm fine, don't worry.'

Mother looked around. 'My typewriter!'

'They threw it through the window.' Carla realized that now she would not get into trouble for jamming the mechanism.

'We must get out of here.' Mother snatched up the desk photo then took Carla's hand, and they hurried out of the room.

No one tried to stop them running down the stairs. Ahead of them, a well-built young man who might have been one of the reporters had a Brownshirt in a headlock and was dragging him out of the building. Carla and her mother followed the pair out. Another Brownshirt came behind them.

The reporter approached the two policemen, still dragging the Brownshirt. 'Arrest this man,' he said. 'I found him robbing the office. You will find a stolen jar of coffee in his pocket.'

'Release him, please,' said the older of the two policemen.

Reluctantly, the reporter let the Brownshirt go.

The second Brownshirt stood beside his colleague.

'What is your name, sir?' the policeman asked the reporter.

'I am Rudolf Schmidt, chief parliamentary correspondent of *The Democrat*.'

'Rudolph Schmidt, I am arresting you on a charge of assaulting the police.'

‘Don’t be ridiculous. I caught this man stealing!’

The policeman nodded to the two Brownshirts. ‘Take him to the station house.’

They grabbed Schmidt by the arms. He seemed about to struggle, then changed his mind. ‘Every detail of this incident will appear in the next edition of *The Democrat!*’ he said.

‘There will never be another edition,’ the policeman said. ‘Take him away.’

A fire engine arrived and half a dozen firemen jumped out. Their leader spoke brusquely to the police. ‘We need to clear the building,’ he said.

‘Go back to your fire station, there’s no fire,’ said the older policeman. ‘It’s just the Storm troopers closing down a Communist magazine.’

‘That’s no concern of mine,’ the fireman said. ‘The alarm has been sounded, and our first task is to get everyone out, Storm troopers and all. We’ll manage without your help.’ He led his men inside.

Carla heard her mother say: ‘Oh, no!’ She turned and saw that Mother was staring at her typewriter, which lay on the pavement where it had fallen. The metal casing had dropped away, exposing the links between keys and rods. The keyboard was twisted out of shape, one end of the roller had become detached, and the bell that sounded for the end of a line lay forlornly on the ground. A typewriter was not a precious object, but Mother looked as if she might cry.

The Brownshirts and the staff of the magazine came out of the building, herded by firemen. Sergeant Schwab was resisting, shouting angrily: ‘There’s no fire!’ The firemen just shoved him on.

Jochmann came out and said to Mother: ‘They didn’t have time to do much damage – the firemen stopped them. Whoever sounded the alarm did us a great service!’

Carla had been worried that she would be reprimanded for causing a false alarm. Now she realized that she had done exactly the right thing.

She took her mother’s hand. That seemed to jerk Mother out of her momentary fit of grief. She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, an unusual act that revealed how badly shaken she was:

if Carla had done that, she would have been told to use her handkerchief. ‘What do we do now?’ Mother never said that – she always knew what to do next.

Carla became aware of two people standing nearby. She looked up. One was a woman about the same age as Mother, very pretty, with an air of authority. Carla knew her, but could not place her. Beside her was a man young enough to be her son. He was slim, and not very tall, but he looked like a movie star. He had a handsome face that would have been almost too pretty except that his nose was flattened and misshapen. Both newcomers looked shocked, and the young man was white with anger.

The woman spoke first, and she used the English language. ‘Hello, Maud,’ she said, and the voice was distantly familiar to Carla. ‘Don’t you recognize me?’ she went on. ‘I’m Eth Leckwith, and this is Lloyd.’

(ii)

Lloyd Williams found a boxing club in Berlin where he could do an hour’s training for a few pennies. It was in a working-class district called Wedding, north of the city centre. He exercised with the Indian clubs and the medicine ball, skipped rope, hit the punch bag, and then put on a helmet and did five rounds in the ring. The club coach found him a sparring partner, a German his own age and size – Lloyd was a welterweight. The German boy had a nice fast jab that came from nowhere and hurt Lloyd several times, until Lloyd hit him with a left hook and knocked him down.

Lloyd had been raised in a rough neighbourhood, the East End of London. At the age of twelve he had been bullied at school. ‘Same thing happened to me,’ his stepfather, Bernie Leckwith, had said. ‘Cleverest boy in school, and you get picked on by the class *shlammer*.’ Dad was Jewish – his mother had spoken only Yiddish. He had taken Lloyd to the Aldgate Boxing Club. Ethel had been against it, but Bernie had overruled her, something that did not happen often.

Lloyd had learned to move fast and punch hard, and the