Evil on the Wind

Diney Costeloe

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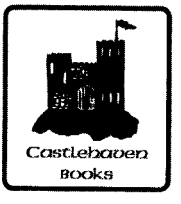
Extract

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Preface

The Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race: September 15, 1935

ARTICLE 4 (1) A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He cannot exercise the right to vote; he cannot hold public office. (2) Jewish officials will be retired as of December 31, 1935. In the event that such officials served at the front in the World War either for Germany or her allies, they shall receive as pension, until they reach the age limit, the full salary last received, on the basis of which their pension would have been computed. They shall not, however, be promoted according to their seniority in rank. When they reach the age limit, their pension will be computed again, according to the salary last received on which their pension was to be calculated. (3) These provisions do not concern the affairs of religious organisations. (4) The conditions regarding service of teachers in public Jewish schools remains unchanged until the promulgation of new laws on the Jewish school system.

ARTICLE 5 (1) A Jew is an individual who is descended from at least three grandparents who were, racially, full Jews... . (2) A Jew is also an individual who is descended from two full-Jewish grandparents if: (a) he was a member of the Jewish religious community when this law was issued, or joined the community later; (b) when the law was issued, he was married to a person who was a Jew, or was subsequently married to a Jew; (c) he is the issue from a marriage with a Jew, in the sense of Section I, which was

contracted after the coming into effect of the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour of September 15, 1935; (d) he is the issue of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, in the sense of Section I, and was born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936.

ARTICLE 6 (1) Insofar as there are, in the laws of the Reich or in the decrees of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and its affiliates, certain requirements for the purity of German blood which extend beyond Article 5, the same remain untouched...

ARTICLE 7 The *Fuehrer* and Chancellor of the Reich is empowered to release anyone from the provisions of these administrative decrees.

Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour

September 15, 1935

Thoroughly convinced by the knowledge that the purity of German blood is essential for the further existence of the German people and animated by the inflexible will to safeguard the German nation for the entire future, the Reichstag has resolved upon the following law unanimously, which is promulgated herewith:

SECTION 1 1 Marriages between Jews and nationals of German or kindred blood are forbidden. Marriages concluded in defiance of this law are void, even if, for the purpose of evading this law, they are concluded abroad. 2 Proceedings for annulment may be initiated only by the Public Prosecutor.

SECTION 2 Relations outside marriage between Jews and nationals for German or kindred blood are forbidden.

SECTION 3 Jews will not be permitted to employ female nationals of German or kindred blood in their households.

SECTION 4 1 Jews are forbidden to hoist the Reich and national

flag and to present the colours of the Reich. 2 On the other hand they are permitted to present the Jewish colours. The exercise of this authority is protected by the State.

SECTION 5 1 A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of section 1 will be punished with hard labour. 2 A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of section 2 will be punished with imprisonment or with hard labour. 3 A person who acts contrary to the provisions of section 3 or 4 will be punished with imprisonment up to a year and with a fine or with one of these penalties.

SECTION 6 The Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy of the *Fuehrer* will issue the legal and administrative regulations which are required for the implementation and supplementation of this law.

SECTION 7 The law will become effective on the day after the promulgation, section 3 however only on January 1, 1936.

Nuremberg, the 15th day of September 1935 at the Reich Party Rally of Freedom.

The Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler
The Reich Minister of the Interior Frick
The Reich Minister of Justice Dr Goertner

Dedication

To all those who suffered under Nazi tyranny...those who survived and those who did not.

"If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us!"
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
George Santayana

One

The crash of shattering glass and the sound of shouting in the street below startled Laura awake. More shouting and banging, a piercing scream and then more breaking glass. Laura sat bolt upright in bed, her eyes wide with fear as she listened in the darkness to the uproar outside, the shouts, bangs and crashes getting nearer. People were chanting something, Laura couldn't make out what, but their voices, combining into the throaty roar of a mob, were angry and frightening.

It was dark outside, though the faint light of a streetlamp gleamed through the gap in the curtains, but there was another light too, a flickering light, dancing and leaping, casting weird shadows on the ceiling. What was happening down there? What was going on?

Laura stole out of bed and crept to the window. Cautiously she lifted the corner of the curtain and peeped out. She stared down into the street in fascinated horror. A crowd was surging along the road, their snarling faces lit by the streetlamps and the flaming torches some of them carried. Many brandished stout walking sticks in the air, others carried stones, bricks and iron bars. They were led by men in uniform, guns held high, urging the crowd on. The windows of the baker's shop across the way were already smashed, and its door hanging on a broken hinge. Even as she watched, Laura saw a man throw another brick, this time at the windows of the apartment above the shop. There was a cheer as the glass shattered, its shards flying inwards.

"Jews out! Jews out! Jews out!" She could hear what they were

chanting now as the voices grew louder, stronger, as more and more people joined the crowd.

"Laura, what's happening?" Inge, her seven-year-old sister, asked sleepily from the other bed.

"I don't know," Laura said, shrinking back behind the curtain, but somehow unable to turn away. "There're people outside throwing stones and shouting."

There was another sound too, the crackle of flames, and Laura realised with growing horror that the dancing light she had seen through the curtains was fire. There was smoke now, and the red and gold tongues of flame appeared at the windows of the synagogue further up the road. Even as Laura watched, horrified, the door burst open and Rabbi Rosner came rushing out, shouting for the fire brigade. He ran straight into the crowd that bayed with delight at his terror, and brandishing their sticks and hurling stones, they chased him back into the burning building.

"I don't like it!" Inge was wailing. "Where's Mutti?"

At that moment the bedroom door opened and Ruth Friedman, the girls' mother, came quickly into the room, her face white with fear.

"Laura! Come away from the window!" she cried and, rushing over, dragged her daughter away. "Out of here, quickly." She scooped Inge off the bed and clutching her in her arms, pushed Laura in front of her as she hurried them into her own bedroom at the back of the house. Her husband, Kurt, was already in the room with the twins, Peter and Hans, aged just three; both were crying at having been awoken so suddenly and their father was trying to hush them. Ruth turned the key in the lock, and, placing Inge on the bed, went to the twins.

"Papa, the synagogue's on fire." Laura tugged at her father's sleeve. "It's burning down, and Rabbi Rosner is inside."

"Don't worry, darling," her father put an arm round her. "He'll have got out safely."

"No, Papa," Laura insisted, her eyes wide, "when he ran out some people chased him back inside. They were hitting him!"

Before her father could answer, there came a thundering on their own front door, the splintering of wood and the sound of breaking glass as the window in the shop below became the target for the bricks. Ruth drew the twins closely into her arms, and Kurt gathered the now screaming Inge against him, his other arm still firmly round Laura.

"Ssh! Ssh!" he hushed them. "It'll be all right. Mutti and Papa are here! It'll be all right."

But it wasn't. Within moments they heard heavy footsteps on the stairs, and then a voice, which bellowed, "Come out, Jews! Come out, dirty Jews! Come out of your holes!"

Before they could do anything, there was a crash and the door flew open, the lock hanging sideways where a jackboot had kicked it free. A tall man in storm-trooper's uniform, his cap – with its death's head badge – dark over his fair hair, stood on the threshold, a gun in his hand, towering over the family who crouched together around the bed. Behind him two others moved along the landing, kicking open the bedroom doors, and shouting down to the mob below, "Jews up here!"

"You, Jew, you're under arrest!" The first man advanced on Kurt, who pushed his daughters behind him in an effort to shield them.

"Why? What for?" It was Ruth who asked, her voice cracking with fear. "He's done nothing wrong."

"He's a Jew. He's under arrest!"

"But... ." Ruth began to protest.

"Shut up," bellowed the man, "or I'll arrest the lot of you!"

"Don't worry, Ruth," Kurt said, trying to keep his voice steady. "I'll go with him. I'm sure there's some mistake and I'll be back in no time." For a moment their eyes met, hers wide and fearful. Kurt's strong face was calm and determined, but fear flickered behind his eyes too, and, seeing it, Ruth began to shake.

"You look after the children, I'll be back soon. And if not," there was the slightest tremor in his voice, "go to Herbert."

"Out!" The storm trooper grasped him by the shoulder, and

spinning him round, shoved him roughly through the door. "Out! Out!" Immediately the two men on the landing grabbed his arms, one punching him violently in the stomach so that he doubled over, groaning with pain, before they dragged him, still bent double, down the stairs.

The storm trooper, still in the bedroom, glanced across at the trembling woman surrounded by her four children. "You'll stay up here if you know what's good for you," he said coldly, and turning on his heel, stamped his way back down the stairs.

For a moment there was silence in the bedroom and then Inge began to wail again. "Where's Papa gone? I want Papa."

Ruth suppressed the cry that rose in her throat that she wanted him too, and tried to soothe the terrified children.

"Don't cry," she said, rocking Peter on her knee and holding Inge to her with the other arm. "Don't cry, Peter, there's a good boy. Look, Hansi isn't crying. Laura, give Hansi a cuddle, he's being very brave. Come on now, you must be brave, all of you. That's what Papa would want. We must all be brave!"

She gathered the four children close, rocking them comfortingly, and as they huddled together on her bed, she listened to shattering glass and splintering wood as the mob downstairs ransacked the shop, their voices raised in shouts of glee. Then with the bang of a door and shouts of laughter, the baying mob moved onward down the street. The stillness they left behind was, if anything, more terrifying than their animal howls. What was happening down there? Had the mob moved on somewhere else? Was it safe to come out of the bedroom? Ruth went quietly across the room, and, opening the door, peeped out onto the landing. The apartment was empty; there was no sound from downstairs.

"You'll stay up here if you know what's good for you," the trooper had said, but Ruth could not. She had to go down, to find out what had happened.

"Stay here," she said to the children and quietly crossed into the girls' bedroom to look out into the street below. She lifted the

corner of the curtain as Laura had done and looked down. Their street was almost empty now, the mob had moved on to the next. She could still hear its animal roar, but more distant, the chanting indistinct. She looked over towards the synagogue. There were still flames behind the windows, but she could see the shadows of people running around inside, trying to douse the fire before it really took hold and burned the place to the ground. The smell of smoke was bitter and acrid as it billowed out from the broken windows, wafting along the street.

Ruth returned to her bedroom door. "Stay here, Laura," she said. "Look after the little ones. I'll be back in a minute." Steeling herself to what she might find below, Ruth crept downstairs. She was still afraid the storm troopers might be there lying in wait for her, but as she peered round the corner into the shop there was no one. Complete chaos greeted her eyes, and for a long moment she stood, aghast at what she saw. In the few minutes the mob had given its attention to Friedmans' Grocery, they had destroyed everything they could find.

The till had been broken open and lay upended on the counter, with what little money there had been in it, gone. Broken jars and bottles littered the floor, their contents mixed with the shards of glass from the window. Sacks of flour, too heavy to carry, had been ripped open and tipped out, tea and rice, coffee, jam and oil all added to the glutinous mess that covered the floor. Ruth crossed to the cold store and opened the door. Where there should have been cheese and butter, eggs and milk, the shelves were empty. Trays of eggs had been tossed to the floor, a milk churn upended. Two large cheeses, wrapped in their linen cloths, had disappeared. For a moment she stared at the mess in sick dismay. Then she smelled the smoke.

At first she thought it must be coming from the burning synagogue along the street, but then she realised that it was in the shop with her. Looking round wildly she saw that smoke was seeping out from under the door of the storeroom where they kept all the dry goods. Running into the kitchen, Ruth grabbed a bucket from

under the sink and quickly filled it with water. Cautiously she edged the storeroom door open, her bucket poised to douse the fire, but with the draught from the outer door drawing them, the flames leapt towards her. Her tossed bucket of water made no impression on the fire and in that moment Ruth knew it was already too late to save the shop and their home. Feeding on oil which had been liberally emptied onto floor and shelves, it was a glorified chip-pan fire and had too firm a hold to be controlled; water would only make matters worse.

With a shriek of terror, Ruth tried to slam the storeroom door shut, but the heat from within was too great and flames had already laid claim to the door. Ruth's one thought now was to save her children from the fire. As she fled back up the stairs she could hear the crackle of the fire almost at her heels. There was a door at the top of the stairs separating the apartment from the shop below and she slammed this behind her, hoping to keep the fire at bay, but even with this door safely closed the smoke was wreathing its way underneath, wafting along the landing.

"Hurry," she cried as she flew into the bedroom where the children waited. "Hurry! Hurry! There's a fire, we must get out now. Laura, you carry Hans, I'll take Peter. Inge, stop crying, darling, and hold tight to my skirt."

Laura reached out for Hans, gathering him into her arms and holding him against her body. "Come on, Hansi, put your arms round my neck," she said, trying to ease the dead weight of his body as he snuggled against her. Obediently he reached up and she felt his arms snake round her neck, the hair on the top of his head soft under the curve of her chin. She turned for the door, following her mother who had Peter on her hip and was holding Inge's hand firmly in her own. Ruth strode along the landing to the door at the top of the stairs. The smoke was thicker now, forcing its way under the door in thick black coils, making them cough. Even before she eased the door open, Ruth knew that they were too late. The fire had taken hold of the stairs, crackling merrily as it ate up the tinder-dry wood of the ancient staircase.

"Back! Go back!" Ruth cried as she flung the door closed again and pushed them back along the landing. For a moment she stood in the bedroom, the bedroom she had shared with Kurt for almost fifteen years, the room where all the children had been conceived and born, and which now seemed likely to be their grave. Putting Peter back onto the bed she ran into the front room and looked down into the street again. A few people had ventured outside to stare in horror at the trail of destruction the mob had left behind, the mob that even now howled its rage on other Jewish homes, other Jewish businesses. Leah Meyer was standing outside her husband's baker's shop, trying to take in the damage that had been inflicted on it so suddenly and so swiftly. Other shadows appeared by the synagogue, from which smoke was still pouring in a thick dark cloud, though the combined efforts of the neighbours seemed to have doused the flames, their flickering light no longer dancing in the windows.

Nobody had noticed that Friedmans' Grocery was also on fire. Ruth threw up the window and began calling for help. At first no one seemed to hear her frantic cries, but at last Leah Meyer looked up and seeing Ruth at the window raised her hand in salute.

"Help!" Ruth screamed. "Help us! We're trapped. The stairs are on fire! Help! Oh, help us, please!"

Frau Meyer seemed to be turning away again, but Ruth screamed at her, calling her by name. "Leah! Leah! Get help! My children will be burned alive!"

At last the words seemed to register in the old lady's brain and she ran towards the synagogue and went inside. Within moments people came rushing out. One woman ran to the shop door, but was driven back by the flames that now completely engulfed the ground floor.

"Jump!" she shouted. "You must jump! We can't get in to rescue you."

"I can't!" shrieked Ruth in panic. "The children can't jump from this high."

"Get a sheet and lower them down," the woman shouted. "Quickly, tie them to a sheet and let them down. We'll catch them."

Ruth nodded and, dashing back to her bedroom, hustled the children into the girls' room. "Look after the twins," she instructed the girls as she grabbed the sheet from Laura's bed. Tearing at it, she tried to rip it in half, but the quality was too good, the hems too strong to be torn. With a bellow of frustration, she ran into her bedroom and grabbed the manicure set off her dressing table. The nail scissors were small, but they cut enough to start the tear.

Smoke was pouring along the landing now, and, choking, Ruth slammed the bedroom door closed. She concentrated on ripping the sheet into two strips to tie together for a makeshift rope. Dragging the bedstead to the window, she made one end fast to the metal frame and dropped the other out of the window. It was too short. There were still at least six feet to drop to the ground. Grasping the quilt from the bed, she tossed it out of the window. Willing hands below grabbed it and held it taut, to make a makeshift landing place.

"You first, Laura," Ruth said. "Remember, grip the rope with your feet as well as your hands so you don't go too fast." She gave her daughter a hug. "Come on, darling, be brave, I need you down there to catch the twins."

The smoke was pouring under the door now and the other children began to cough, their eyes streaming as it coiled round them, hiding them from their mother. Laura sat on the windowsill, and with a terrified glance at her mother, slid down the rope, the taut linen ripping at her hands, so that she screamed with pain and fear as she reached the end and landed in a crumpled heap in the middle of the quilt. The moment the rope was free, Ruth hauled it up and knotted it tightly round Peter's waist, then even as he screamed and clung to her in terror she edged him off the sill and lowered him down to the waiting arms reaching up from below.

The flames were crackling outside the bedroom door now, and it was buckling under the increasing heat. Frantically Ruth knotted

the rope round Hans's waist and slipped him over the sill, lowering him to the safety of the ground below. All this was done to the accompanying screams of Inge, who lay on the floor, drumming her heels in fear and rage. As Ruth hauled the rope up again, the door finally gave way and the fire exploded into the room, the flames spreading and feeding on the furnishings. With one backward glance, Ruth gathered up the bellowing Inge in her arms and dragged her to the window. There was no time to tie her safely into the rope of sheets, so with a warning cry to those gathered below, she tipped the little girl out of the window onto the quilt that was spread ready to catch her. Even as the child landed and was gathered into waiting arms, Ruth felt the heat on her back as her clothes began to smoke and smoulder. With another warning cry, she jumped.

Laura watched in horror as her mother fell from the bedroom window, arms flailing as she tried to grasp the linen rope to slow her fall. Her fall was broken by Rabbi Rosner as he reached up his arms to try and catch her. They collapsed together in a heap on the ground, their arms and legs entwined as if in some passionate embrace, the wind knocked out of the old man as Ruth landed heavily on his chest.

Forgetting the pain in her hands, Laura rushed over to her mother, crying out as she saw her lying on the ground. "Mutti! Are you all right? Mutti!"

Her mother lay still, and Laura thought she was dead until she heard a faint moan and saw her legs twitch. Ruth, winded by her fall, couldn't answer for a moment, and in truth she didn't know the answer. Every inch of her felt bruised, she could still feel the heat on her back, and her ankle felt as if it had been pierced by a red-hot needle. Underneath her Rabbi Rosner groaned, and Ruth tried to disentangle herself so that he could get up. Frau Rosner hurried up, and, pulling Laura out of the way, knelt beside her husband. The twins, being looked after by Frau Meyer, began to whimper and Inge, who had never ceased wailing, increased the volume of her crying to maximum. The savage roar of the mob

surged back through the darkness as it circled round to continue its way along a parallel street.

There was an anguished cry. "They're coming back. They're coming back!"

The few people gathered in the street melted away into the darkness, scurrying for the illusory safety of their homes as they heard the monstrous crowd baying for its prey.

"We must get away from here," Frau Rosner urged. "Come on, Samuel! You must get up." She pulled at Ruth's arm to try and move her out of the way so that the rabbi could get to his feet. "They're coming back!" she cried, terrified by the sound of the shouting. "We must get off the street! Samuel!"

Ruth dragged herself clear and Laura and Inge rushed to her side. "Mutti!" Laura clutched at her hand: "Are you all right?"

This time Ruth did manage to answer. "Yes, darlings, I'm all right. Just a bit bruised. I think I may have sprained my ankle."

"They're coming back!" Leah Meyer shouted, her voice cracking with fear. "We must get off the street." She took the twins firmly by the hand and dragged them back towards her own home, above her husband's shop.

"We must call the fire brigade," cried Ruth as she looked up and saw the flames devouring the curtains at the window of the bedroom, reaching out to lick at the overhanging wooden eaves.

"They won't come!" snapped Frau Rosner as she pushed her still-wheezing husband ahead of her. But she was wrong. Within a few minutes a fire engine was racing down the street and the powerful hoses were trained on what was left of the Friedmans' home. Ruth had not had to call them, they had come at the summons of another neighbour whose home backed onto the Friedmans'; a neighbour who was not Jewish and so didn't deserve to have his house burned down.

The Friedman family were taken in and given refuge by the Meyers. Although their shop had been damaged and daubed with paint, the brick through the first-floor window was the only damage

to their living quarters above. With infinite care, Frau Meyer, who had no children of her own, bathed Laura's rope burns in cold water and bandaged her hands with clean strips of linen. She warmed some milk for the younger children, and then took the twins into the tiny spare bedroom and placed them top to toe under the quilt on its single bed, crooning to them softly as they fell into exhausted sleep.

Ruth sat in an armchair, her injured foot up on a footstool. It was so swollen that when they had taken off her shoe she could hardly see her toes. Leah had put on a cold compress.

"Tomorrow we will try and get Dr Kohn to have a look," she said.

"It'll be much better in the morning," Ruth assured her, her face pale and pinched with the pain that shot through her ankle if she so much as moved it an inch. "I don't need a doctor."

"We'll see in the morning," Leah insisted. "It may be broken."

Laura, her hands a little less painful now, looked anxiously across at her mother. Inge had finally stopped crying and was curled beside her, her fair hair hiding her face as she buried her head in Mutti's shoulder.

Laura saw Mutti wince with pain as Inge shifted to get more comfortable, and she said sharply, "Inge! Sit still, you're hurting Mutti!"

Inge ignored her, snuggling closer, and Mutti said, "It's all right, darling. I'm all right." She smiled weakly across at Laura and added, "How are your hands?"

Laura looked down at the bandages and said, "Frau Meyer says she'll get Dr Kohn to look if he comes to see you."

At last Inge had drifted into an uneasy sleep against her mother's shoulder. Leo Meyer lifted her gently and placed her in the big double bed in his own room.

"She'll sleep now, poor little thing," he said. He added, as Laura went over to sit by her mother, "Be careful now, Laura. Your mother is very bruised. It is a miracle she wasn't killed!"

"It's a miracle that we weren't all killed," Frau Meyer was saying as Laura thought, it's always Inge. She's allowed to sit with Mutti.

"Now then, Laura, time you got some sleep as well," said the old lady. "You can go in the bed next to Inge, all right?"

"I can't sleep," Laura insisted, her voice trembling, on the verge of tears. "How *can* I sleep? Where's Papa?"

But sleep she did. When Frau Meyer had tucked her into the bed beside the sleeping Inge, Laura had buried her face in the pillow, and with muffled sobs cried herself to sleep; she didn't wake until several hours later, needing the bathroom. Inge was no longer in the bed beside her, just a damp patch across the sheet. Inge had also needed the bathroom, but she hadn't been able to wait. Laura screwed up her nose at the sour smell of the damp sheet, and felt scarlet with embarrassment that her sister should have done such a thing in someone else's bed.

A wet bed, however, was the least of the household's worries that morning. Leo Meyer went out to find out what was happening and to try and discover what had happened to Kurt Friedman, but no one knew. So many of their friends' homes had been damaged; other men had been dragged off as Kurt had been. As he learned more of what had happened to so many Jewish families that night, Leo could hardly believe he had not been arrested too.

Ruth managed to convince Leah that she didn't need Dr Kohn to come to see her. She had no money, and she hated to become even more indebted to the Meyers. The old lady replaced the compress, and as they could both see that the swelling had lessened a little, she said no more about the doctor.

"I think you should be keeping it up though," she said.

"I'm sure you're right," Ruth agreed, "but I can't sit here and do nothing. I have to go over to the shop and see what can be salvaged before anyone else does." Very gingerly she lowered her foot to the floor. Leah understood. She found an old walking stick and helped Ruth get to her feet.

"I'll mind the little ones," she said. "You take Laura with you and go and have a look."

Using Laura's shoulder and Leah's stick for support, Ruth emerged from the bakery. Outside she paused, looking along Gerbergasse, the street where she had lived all her married life. A narrow twisting street that wound its way through a largely Jewish neighbourhood, and dominated by the synagogue at one end, it had been the centre of her community life; doors left open, children running in an out of each other's homes, neighbours gossiping on the pavement, a street vibrant with life. Now, not a soul was abroad; Gerbergasse was deserted. Several of the buildings showed superficial damage, caused in the riot, but it was when Ruth turned her eyes to her shop, her home, that despair flooded through her. Leaning heavily on Laura and the stick, she hobbled across the road to contemplate what was left of it. The shop window was a smoke-blackened gaping hole and the remains of the charred front door hung from one hinge. As Laura pushed against the hanging door, the single hinge creaked ominously before the weight of the door was too much and it crashed inwards, allowing Ruth and Laura to see what was left of the family business. There was nothing. The shop had been completely destroyed. An acrid pall still hung in the air. They gazed in despair at the blackened shell. Only a few tins lay on the floor. Gone were the counter and the shelves, gone the staircase leading to the apartment above.

Ruth fought back the tears that sprang to her eyes. Everything they had in the world was gone, and she had to face it all alone. They had taken Kurt, and now it was she who would have to find somewhere for herself and the children to live. How were they going to survive? What were they going to live on? They couldn't stay with the Meyers more than another couple of days, they had problems of their own. Ruth felt a wave of panic rising within her, black fear filling her head and threatening to engulf her. Everything they had possessed had gone and she couldn't even stand on her own feet.

"Mutti!" Laura's small voice brought her back and she realised that she had been gripping her daughter's arm so tightly that it hurt.

Forcing herself to relax her grip she said, "Sorry, darling. Come on, let's go. There's nothing for us here."

"Shouldn't we get the box from the garden?" asked Laura. For a moment her mother looked at her blankly and Laura said again, "You know, Papa's box. The one he buried?"

The deed box. For a moment Ruth looked stunned. She had forgotten all about the deed box. Kurt, no longer trusting the bank to deal fairly with its Jewish customers, had put all their important documents into a strong metal box and had buried it in the garden beneath one of the paving slabs outside the back door. How could she have forgotten?

"Good girl! Come on!" With new purpose, Ruth hobbled through the burnt-out shop and down the steps into the tiny yard below at the back. She remembered which stone Kurt had raised, but it seemed as firmly embedded as those around it.

"We need something to lever up the stone slab," she said, looking round to see what they might use.

"I'll look in the shed," Laura said, and crossed to the lean-to shed that stood against the back wall. Inside she found the coal shovel and returned to the yard. "This should do." She put the blade of the shovel under the edge of the paving stone and leaned hard on the handle. She felt a little movement, but wasn't strong enough to lift the slab. For a moment or two she heaved in vain.

"I can't shift it, Mutti!" she said despairingly. "It's too heavy! Shall I run and get Herr Meyer?"

"No." Her mother's reply was sharp. "No, this is private family business. Here, hold this stick and let me have a go." Ruth handed the walking stick to Laura, and balancing awkwardly on one leg tried to lever the stone. "Here, Laura, put your weight on it too."

Time and again they leaned on the shovel, and gradually they felt the stone loosening.

"We're getting there," Ruth said breathlessly. "At least Papa didn't cement it back down. One more go!"

This time the stone shifted enough to allow the edge of the shovel to slide right in underneath it.

"Now we need something to wedge it open," puffed Ruth, and then gave a little cry as she stepped back onto her sprained ankle, and sat down hard on the ground.

"Mutti! Are you all right?" cried Laura.

The stab of pain had taken her breath away, but she managed to say, "Yes, Laura, I'm fine. See what you can find to hold the stone up, so we can get at the box."

Laura went back into the shed and came out moments later carrying a brick. "There are more of these in there," she said. "We can put them under the edge of the stone."

At last it was done. The heavy paving stone was resting on bricks and Laura was able to reach in underneath and pull out the strongbox her father had hidden there.

"Well done," said her mother. "Let's put the stone back, and then we'll go." It was a struggle to put the slab back in place, but Ruth was determined that there should be as little evidence of the hiding place as possible. Who knew when they might need it again? Once the stone was flat, she instructed Laura to push the loose dust back round it, pressing it down into the cracks, so that at a casual glance anyway there was nothing to see. Laura put the shovel and the bricks back into the shed. They, too, might serve again another day. She helped Ruth to her feet, handed her the stick and then picked up the box.

"We don't want anyone to see this," Ruth said. "I'll go to the front door, and if there's no one about, you carry it quickly to the Meyers'."

"What about you?" asked Laura anxiously.

"I can't move fast enough," Ruth replied. "You take the box to safety, I can manage on my own. Try not to let anyone see what you've got. Hide it under the bed for now."

"Not even Frau Meyer?"

"Better not," answered her mother. "If she does, never mind, but better if she doesn't. Come on." Ruth was anxious to get their valuable box to safety. She couldn't remember all it contained, but, apart from the clothes they stood up in, it was all they had left in the world, and she wanted to take no risks. "Wait, while I have a look outside." She edged past the broken front door and looked along the narrow street. There were a few people still moving in and out of the synagogue, but no one seemed to be coming in their direction.

"Go! Fast!" Ruth stood back to let her daughter slip out of the door and dart across the road to the comparative safety of the Meyers' home. Once she saw that Laura was safely inside, Ruth set out to hobble the thirty yards or so to join her. As she negotiated the uneven cobbles of the street, two boys wearing the uniform of the Hitler Youth came round the corner, carrying a bucket of red paint.

"Here's one," cried the first. "Give me the brush!" He snatched a large paintbrush from his companion and dipping it in the bucket daubed two words in red paint on the remains of the Friedmans' shop window. *Jüden Raus! Jews Out!*

Unable to stop herself, Ruth turned round, as he laughed and began chanting "Jews out! Jews out!"

His friend took up the chant, and then seeing Ruth standing unsteadily in the middle of the street, he pointed a finger. "Poor old Jew!" he jeered. "Poor old Jew! She's got a bad leg."

Before she realised what he was going to do, the boy came up behind Ruth and kicked her savagely in the back of the leg, so that her knees buckled and she fell to the ground with a cry.

"Jew! Jew! Dirty Jew!" chorused the boys, as they pranced round her. The one with the paintbrush still in his hand slashed it across her face, the red paint running into her eyes, and as she reached up to dash it away, the other gave her a brutal kick, his boot ramming into her side. Ruth curled up in the road, sobbing as he aimed one

last kick at her head before they marched on down the street chanting, "Jews out! Heil Hitler! Jews out!" and daubing other shop windows as they went.

Ruth pulled herself up onto her hands and knees, and began to crawl the last few yards to the Meyers' shop door. It, too, had received the red-paint treatment, but the youths were too keen to daub as many doors as possible to bother breaking in again. As she reached it, the door opened and Laura erupted into the street.

"Mutti! Mutti! Are you all right? Oh Mutti!" Laura was sobbing as she tried to help her mother to her feet. Leah Meyer came out behind her and together they eased Ruth into the shop and onto a chair. "Frau Meyer wouldn't let me come to you!"

"She was quite right," wheezed Ruth, still winded from the kicks. "Worse if you'd come out."

This time Leah insisted on calling Dr Kohn. "We'll pay him," she said, guessing at Ruth's dilemma. "You can pay us back in happier times."

Feeling so completely battered, Ruth could only accept their generosity. She hoped there was some money in the deed box.

Dr Kohn came as dusk was falling, gratefully accepting the coffee Leah Meyer offered him. After examining Ruth, he said he thought that there was no permanent damage done, just very heavy bruising. He treated the bruises with ointment, gently rubbing it in while Ruth winced at every touch.

"You were lucky," he said. "They could have ruptured a kidney with kicks like that! Try and get some rest." With a smile, he shook his head at the proffered money. "Not after last night," he said.

"What will you do, Ruth?" asked Leah, when only she, her husband and Ruth were left in the living room. "Where will you go?"

"Of course you can stay here for as long as you want," Leo had said, but Ruth had caught the glance that flashed between husband and wife and knew, though the offer had had to be made, it was not possible for her to accept. For one thing there was no room for

them all. Already the Meyers had given up their bed, and she was propped up on the only other piece of furniture on which one might lie down.

Ruth was pale with exhaustion and fear, her eyes huge and dark in her stark white face. Her ankle throbbed, she ached all over and her brain felt like cotton wool.

What am I going to do, she thought wearily? We can't stay here and we can't go home...we've no home to go to.

"It's very kind of you both," she said, "but I shall take the children to Kurt's brother. I know he'll take us in and...and," her voice broke, "that's where Kurt will come to find us."

"We'll think about it in the morning," Leah said kindly. "What you need now is a good night's rest. I've got some aspirin. You take two of those and try and get some sleep."

Ruth took the proffered aspirin gratefully, but insisted on sleeping with the girls so that the Meyers could at least have the sofa to sleep on that night. "We can easily fit into that big bed," she said, "and you need your sleep too."

When at last she was settled beside the girls, Ruth thought about the deed box she and Laura had rescued that afternoon. It was hidden under the bed, but she couldn't examine its contents because the box was securely padlocked, and she had no key. Kurt had the key hidden somewhere, but that somewhere was in the ruins of the shop and Ruth had no idea where. It had never occurred to Kurt that he would not be there when the box was needed.

There's no alternative, Ruth decided. Tomorrow I'll have to borrow some sort of tool from Leo and break the lock. Then we'll go to Herbert.

With the decision taken, Ruth tried to get some sleep, but her brain would not rest. Endlessly it re-played the riot, the storm troopers, the raid on the shop, the fire, and as a soundtrack to it all the baying of the mob, terrifying in its savagery, thundered in her head. Did that sound really only emanate from human throats? Her physical aches were as nothing compared with her mental torment.

Her only concern was to keep her children safe, and with Kurt arrested, it was now up to her.

Leo had reported back that the riots had been localised. "Just in our part of Kirnheim," he'd said, "but they were carefully orchestrated...storm troopers whipping up the mob, encouraging the Hitler Youth to take part. Small riots, but breaking out everywhere!"

"Didn't seem like a small riot to me!" remarked his wife.

It didn't seem like a small riot to Ruth, either. It seemed to her that all Germany had gone mad; that persecution of Jews had become a national pastime. Going to Herbert seemed to be the only chance of safety. Herbert and Kurt were not close as brothers. Kurt had been happy to take over and run the family business, whereas Herbert had set out to better himself and worked as a clerk for a large legal practice in Munich. Ruth didn't know him well, but surely Herbert would stand by his brother's family in their time of need, it was just a question of getting to him.

Eventually, lulled by the regular breathing of her daughters, Ruth dozed off and slept fitfully until the fingers of dawn pierced the curtains and woke her once again to the stark reality of what had happened to them all.