**The Visitors**

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**Year 9**

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***“An evil exists that threatens every man, woman and child of this great nation. We must take steps to ensure our domestic security and protect our homeland.”
-Adolf Hitler, when announcing the Gestapo***

It was a dark, starless night and snow was gently descending upon our village in cascading, swirls, driven by the wind. The snow would have settled if Schönau weren’t still sodden with the rain that had fallen upon it the day before. Instead it melted, on the roof tops and in the streets. The lights across the street were on in Frau Kaufmann’s house, she was and evil old hag who would follow the Fuhrer to the grave. Some people said that once she went all the way to Berlin to eat the gravel he had walked on. She had reported no less than 21 people to the Gestapo, most people think it was just because she didn’t like them, for whatever reason she reported them none were ever seen again. Papa had once called her a hag in the grocers, he hadn’t realised she was there, and when he turned around she gave him a look that could have curdled milk.

Her black silhouette was pacing back and forth in what I assumed was her bedroom. I moved back, away from the glass and drew my curtains as quietly as I could and crept back to my bed, wrapping myself in my blankets. I lay there with my eyes closed, twisting and turning, trying to get to sleep. Eventually I got out of bed and tiptoed out of my room and to my brother’s. I opened the door and put my head in and said in a loud whisper “Josef? Are you awake?” no answer, so I entered the room fully and whispered louder “Josef! Are you awake?” This time the now visible lump in the bed moved, I was about to call again when he replied, his voice muffled under the blankets, “No I am not awake, Go away!” I ventured further into his room, so that now I was beside his bed and I poked his arm, hard. He jumped and made a strange strangled noise, before pulling his head from under the covers and looked at me, “I thought I told you to go away!” he said too drowsy to sound annoyed.

“Well,” I said “I couldn’t sleep and I really wanted to see my favourite brother”, I said in the most sickening voice I could muster. “I am your only brother, now go away and leave me alone”, he said mid-yawn, before pulling the covers back over his head. I sighed and walked quietly out of his room and into the corridor. I was almost at my door when a loud bang downstairs made me jump, I stood absolutely still listening to the silence, after a few seconds when there was nothing more I quietly reached for my door knob…

BANG! BANG! BANG!

I rushed back across the hall to Josef’s room and closed the door behind me; I winced at the noise it made.

“JOSEF! GET UP! GET UP!” I said panicked whilst fighting the covers off of him.

“I thought I told you to go away” was his only reply.

“Didn’t you hear that noise downstairs” I said whilst fighting with him for the blanket.

“What noise?!” he said a little too loud.

“Shh! Listen!”

He grudgingly got up, walked over to the door, and for a moment, I admit, I looked slightly jealously at how much taller than me he was, at least a head and a half, almost as tall as father. He also had wonderfully blonde hair, the perfect German. I quickly remembered my thumping heart; we had more important matters on our hands! We both pressed our ears to the door and listened,

“See, nothi---“ he was interrupted by three more loud bangs on the front door. There was a moment of silence, “I…I think there’s someone at the door” he said, sounding excited, I was slightly more terrified.

“Should we wake, mama and papa… they can’t have heard if they haven’t stirred yet.”

“No, let’s see who it is ourselves! This is what they have been training us for at the Youth group. Come on It will be exciting”

“…bu---“

“Think about it as… as an adventure”

“Ok, an adventure” I said quietly, but not sure that I saw it this way.

“Sister you’re younger, so you should go first.”

“You’re older and bigger… and a boy! Surely you should go first!”

“No but I’m… I…I---“

“You’re scared”

“No I’m not!”

“Prove it”

“Ok, I’ll go first” he said sticking his tongue out at me, before beginning to tiptoe down the stairs. I followed close behind him, the floor board creaked noisily behind me, surely Mama or father would have heard. What if the person at the door heard us! I shook off my fears, trying to forget them or at least put them off for a while. As Josef got to the door he bent down and looked through the keyhole, “brown shirts” he said…. Somewhat disappointedly.

“They’re officials I’m getting our mama and papa” I said. Somehow, as I got up, I bumped the hall table which made that horrible screeching noise of wood against wood. The table knocked over the metal coat rack behind it which clanged loudly several times before I managed to silence it. I winced and Josef shot me an incredulous look. We waited in silence for an age before I slowly moved and put my eye to the key hole, there was nothing, the men were gone. Then suddenly the key hole went dark, an eye! I jumped back but it was too late, “Josef! Annette! We know you’re there” his voice sent a chill down my spine. “I think it’s my youth leader” Josef said before standing up and moving toward the door, undoing the bolts that Papa had added in the early winter. When all the locks were undone he opened the door wide enough so that his head could fit through. “Leader Daecher” he said “what brings you here so late?”

“I just wanted to talk with your parents” said Leader Daecher. Josef opened the door a little, not wide enough as if he were inviting them in, but enough that I could see out it. The leader was not alone there were two men with him in the smart and intimidating Gestapo uniform that Papa hated so much, he called them the Fuhrer’s henchmen and the rats of society who destroyed people’s families, tearing their lives apart. I remember when papa had said this and made me and Josef swear not ever to repeat it outside the house… he was so wildly determined to make sure we understood not to say it ever again. Mama and Papa told me to ‘speak though a flower’, only say good things about the Fuhrer or say nothing at all. In the League of German Maidens they often asked us if we had heard of anyone who had said anything against the Fuhrer, girls reported strangers, friends even relatives, I never said anything. The German Maidens had replaced church on a Sunday and we don’t sing hymns at school anymore we sing *Deutchland, Deutchland* over and over again. All, our crucifixes were replaced with Hitler’s picture and two swastikas, religious studies by political studies. They say I shouldn’t listen to mama and papa, only Hitler understands the young, papa once stopped us from going but he got a letter telling him that next time it would be a fine and after that… prison. Once papa even got arrested for playing music from a Swiss radio station… but this was soon stopped by the short-wave *volksempfängers* that Goebbels introduced so that we could all enjoy the People’s radio.

I looked up at Josef; he had been making small talk with the Leader Daecher. The door was now fully open, I began to quietly listen to their conversation; I noticed whenever the Leader would ask to come in Josef would change the subject and whenever the leader would try to enter, Josef would move into his path blocking him from entering. I watched Josef’s peculiar behaviour for a few minutes before looking at the men behind, the officers seemed oblivious to what Josef was doing but Leader Daecher looked suspicious.

“Boy move! I know what you’re doing!”

“What am I doing?” Josef asked innocently.

The leader muttered something, all I heard was “I don’t…ha…tim…this” and before I knew it an officer had pushed Josef to the ground. I just stood in shock and turned to Josef who was already back on his feet running at the Gestapo officer who had mama’s new vase in his hand and he smashed it hard over the back of the officer’s head. Then it dawned on me, why these men where here.

“PAPA! PAPA!” I screamed. That old witch reported him! “PAPA!” I stumbled over the Gestapo officer, unconscious on the floor, trying not to the notice the blood, which made my, already churning stomach, churn even more. The other officer ran past me out of the house. “PAPA, PAPA!” I ran towards the stairs. I froze. A gun. Josef had a gun. He was shaking, sweat pearling on his forehead.

“Give me back my gun boy!” said leader Daecher.

“Sofie, I’m sorry, to you, to papa” he said to me, his voice tight… holding back tears.

“Regretting it now boy?”

“What’s he talking about? Josef?” I asked and looked up at my brother, only to be met by his face, a mask of guilt and regret. He wouldn’t look at me.

“No!” I said quietly “it couldn’t have been you that reported papa, tell me it was that witch from across the road” getting louder “TELL ME!” I yelled at him. Mama and papa were now standing at the upstairs banister, I could tell mama was clutching papa hard, but their expressions were hidden in the shadows. Josef’s hands, still shaking as he wrapped his fingers round the trigger, tears building up in his eyes, threating to spill.

BANG!

The Leader laughed.

Josef crumpled, his body rolled to the bottom of the stairs, leaving a crimson trail on the carpet.

I knelt down next to Josef crying hysterically, shaking him, trying to wake him up but his eyes were glazed and staring. I turned to face the shooter and through tear blurred eyes I saw the Gestapo officer that Josef had knocked unconscious. I felt like pieces were being torn from me. I watched helplessly as my parents were dragged from the house, as mama screamed and cried, as papa tried to resist them but there were too many. I watched as all the rest of the officers left the house, I reached out lamely to try and stop the officer from lifting Josef up and taking him away. I sat there, trying to absorb the last half hour, a man, the leader, shoved a hand in my face, I took it and he dragged me up so hard my shoulder hurt. He pushed me out of the front door. It was a dark, starless night and snow was gently descending upon our village in cascading, swirls, driven by the wind.