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# Look at Me

“Look at me. Look at me!” The delicate curve of the girl’s arm continued through the arc of her two middle fingers—a perfect ballet position. She pirouetted with a sense of grace and balance rare in a five-year-old. Blonde braids flew straight out as she turned. “*Vati*,” she said to her father, “Look at me.”

“Anita, stop showing off and quit making all that racket.” Her father turned to her mother. “Hilde, get that child out of here.” He sputtered in anger, his German words tumbling over one another, “It’s insult enough that you failed to give me even one son, but must I put up with two tiresome girls every waking hour?” He raised his hands toward the ceiling. “Whatever possessed me to marry a Jew?”

“Fritz! Not in front of the children.”

Anita stood frozen for a moment before she slipped into a corner, squeezing herself in between the wall and the chest. Her slender arm reached out to pull nearby Teddy onto her

lap. She hated it when her mother and father fought. Lately it happened all the time, but Anita never meant to start yet another argument.

“Hella, take your little sister out to the kitchen.” *Mutti* used her hands to gently hurry them toward the door.

Anita hung back, wanting to be near her mother, but Hella gave her a sharp jerk that left no doubt about the outcome. Once in the kitchen, Anita leaned her face against the doorjamb.

“Anita tries so hard to please you. Can’t you see that she only wants your approval?” *Mutti*’s voice could be heard in the kitchen almost as clearly as if they stood in the same room. The Dittman row house, located in the Breslau suburb of Zimpel, was spacious and luxurious, but it had one drawback—angry voices penetrated the walls as if they were made of paper.

“Don’t start with me, Hilde.” *Vati* paced the floor. “I have my own difficulties and I don’t need your complaints heaped on top of them.”

“Trouble crowds in on all of us these days, Fritz, but can’t we try to shield the girls as long as possible?”

“Hella does her best to please me—I have no problem with Hella, but Anita . . .”

Anita put her hands over her ears. Hella tried to pull her outside, but Anita scooted under the table, looking for refuge. Her stomach hurt.

“Why do you show such favoritism? Hella is ten years old. Of course she is more able to control herself.” *Mutti*’s voice tightened. “Anita may be tiny, but she is a bundle of energy and creativity. If you could just see her for herself and forget the boy you wished for . . .”

“I admit it—I wished for a boy. A lot of good that did. I shall discuss this no further.” Vati slammed a hand down. The sound made Anita flinch. “Do you know what I really wish?”

Mutti did not answer.

“I wish I had never married you. Whatever was I thinking? Marrying a Jew—it’s sheer madness for an Aryan!” Vati spoke each word with chilling precision. “Hitler is calling it ‘race disgrace’ now—the mixing of pure German blood with that of the Jew.”

Mutti’s quiet sobs carried to the kitchen.

“Let me tell you, Hilde, my wife,” the words my wife dripped with sarcasm, “that one stupid act has caused me no end of grief.”

Mutti still didn’t answer, but her responses never mattered to Vati. Once he got going, he could argue for hours all by himself.

“Not that you care one whit about my trouble. Things are changing—that’s a fact—and here I am, saddled with a Jewish wife and two half-breed daughters.”

*Anita heard the door slam.*

“Anita, Hella, come in here, please.” Mutti’s voice sounded sad.

Hella took Anita’s hand and pulled her out from under the table.

“Mutti, I’m sorry.” Anita put her arms around her mother’s leg. “I never meant to make Vati angry.”

“Hush, Anita,” Mutti said in that soothing voice. “Hush.” She put an arm around Hella as well. “Your father worries about things and takes that worry out on us.”

“Vati hates me.” Anita’s stomach still hurt.

“Don’t be silly, Anita.” Hella’s voice rang with impatience. “Fathers do not hate their own children.”

“Hella is right,” Mutti said. “Vati’s anger comes out in mean words, but that anger is not really directed at you, Anita.” She smoothed the flyaway strands that escaped Anita’s braids.

Anita didn’t argue with Mutti, but she felt Vati’s rejection whenever she tried to put her hand in his hand or when she tried to sit in his lap. He always found an excuse to pull away or shoo her off. She’d become an expert at watching his face for reactions. When Hella came near, he rarely pulled away.

“Why does Vati get so angry these days?” Hella sounded confused.

“It’s complicated.” Mutti stood up and moved across the room to straighten out the folds of the curtain. “It’s politics and his job mostly.”

“Politics?” Hella took Teddy off the floor and sat him on Anita’s lap.

“You know about all the trouble brewing with Hitler’s ideas, neh?” Mutti asked.

“Some.”

“The newspaper Vati edited has been part of the movement they call the *Social Democrats*. Everyone expected things to get better after the financial chaos of the last few years, but here it is 1933 and Germany is more uneasy than ever.”

Anita poked at Teddy’s eye. She didn’t understand what Mutti said. She wished they would talk about things that she knew.

“Hitler hates the Social Democrats, and Vati now must join the Nazi party or . . .”

“What’s Nazi, Mutti?” Anita disliked the way the word



from the gaslights, and the rhythmic sound of toe shoes making padded thuds and slaps against the boards made her dream seem more real than her waking hours.

It was mid-dream one night when she woke to a gentle shaking.

“Anita, *Mein Liebling*, wake up. It’s Mutti.”

She rolled over, trying to recapture the dream.

“Anita. Listen to Mutti.” Her mother pulled her to a sitting position. “I must leave, but I will come to see you tomorrow.”

*Leave?* Suddenly the dancers faded and Anita focused on her mother. “You cannot leave me, Mutti!” She reached arms around Mutti’s neck and continued screaming the same phrase over and over.

“Anita, Anita. You are very nearly six years old. Please don’t carry on so. You are breaking Mutti’s heart.”

“I’ve had enough of this.” Vati came into the room. He sounded angry. “I want you out of my house, Hilde. I want you gone now.”

“But my daughters—surely you do not want them?”

“It’s not a matter of what I want. I am an Aryan and my daughters are half Aryan. Your Jew blood taints their veins and that’s bad enough, but I’ll not allow your Jew ideas to contaminate them any longer.” He stood with his arms crossed across his chest and his feet planted wide apart—an immovable force.

“You may have the right under Hitler, Fritz, but what about what’s right under heaven?” Mutti’s voice resonated through the house and a sleepy Hella came into Anita’s room.

“Don’t call on heaven, Hilde.” Vati’s voice cracked.

“Surely even you are not hypocrite enough. You do not believe in the God of your people. You do not believe in the God of the heavens either. Admit it.” He stood with his hands on his hips and his feet apart. “That modern religion of yours believes in a weak concoction of Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, animal gods, even—I don’t even know how many gods you have.” Vati straightened his back. “I am proud to be an atheist. In fact, I’m a devout atheist—I do not believe in God. Period.” When he said “God” he spat it out of the back of his throat, like it was a bitter mouthful. “Religion is for the weak and you, Hilde, are the weakest of all. You cannot even manage to embrace one religion and stick there. You need to create your own little crutch made up of a hodgepodge of deities.”

“Fritz, my philosophy doesn’t matter here.” She looked at the two girls. Hella stood frozen. Anita wept. “Hella, take your little sister to the kitchen . . . please. I will be there to speak with you as soon as I am done speaking to your father.”

Anita grabbed Teddy and took Hella’s hand. Once in the kitchen, the shivering Anita crawled under the table again, listening. Hella pulled out a chair and sat down. Anita could see her sister’s foot rubbing up and down the calf of her leg. That’s what Hella always did when she was frightened.

“I want you out of here, Hilde, and that’s the end of it.” Father’s voice carried all the way into the kitchen. “I hope to cover my Social Democrat activities by joining the Nazi party and turning over the newspaper to them.” He made that har-rumphing sound he made to cover embarrassment. “After all, what good are ideals when one’s life is at stake?”

Mutti said something, but Anita couldn’t make it out.



“I may get away with my past by trying to fade away during this confusing time, but I’ll never get away with my continued ‘race disgrace.’”

Anita didn’t understand much of what Vati said. She only knew that Vati wanted Mutti to go away.

“Don’t leave me, Mutti,” she cried to herself.

“Hush, don’t upset Vati.” Hella said in a whisper. “Poor Vati; he must do it.”

Anita put her fist in her mouth to stop the cries. Hella loved Vati above all else. Even though Anita understood little, she knew Vati loved Hella best and Hella returned that love with unquestioning loyalty.

Vati lived in their home, but he was a stranger to Anita—a stranger she longed to please, but never could.

“If I gave the girls to you, I would have to give you money for their care. I would have to get you an apartment.” Vati coughed. “This argument tires me.”

Mutti said something else, too low to hear.

“They can learn to take care of themselves. You spoil them. In fact, they can care for me.” His voice got louder. “Girls, come.”

Hella pulled Anita out from under the table and pushed her ahead into Anita’s bedroom where Vati and Mutti were. Anita still clutched Teddy.

“Your mother must leave, but you will visit her . . .”

“No! Mutti, don’t leave me.”

Hella pulled her little sister’s braid. “Stop it, Anita, stop it!” Hella moved to stand in front of Vati. “I will help you, Vati. I can cook.”

Anita looked at Mutti’s face in time to see her wince in

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pain as she started to reach her hand toward Hella, but then quickly dropped it to her side.

“Don’t leave me, Mutti,” Anita whimpered, quieter now but no less determined.

“Anita.” Her father squatted down in front of her. Anita had never seen him so close. He smelled of warm wool and shaving soap. “Stop crying and I’ll give you a present.” Vati pulled Teddy out of her arms and threw him on the bed. He reached down into his satchel and pulled out the large golden teddy with jointed arms and legs—the very one she’d longed for each time they passed the toyshop window. “Look . . . a nice new teddy.”

Anita shook her head and pushed the bear away. She crawled up on the bed to retrieve Teddy. Without saying a word, she crawled back down and went over to Mutti and took her hand.

“Fine, then.” Vati took the new bear and flung it across the room. “You win, Hilde. Take her and leave. Hella will stay with me.”

Anita wanted Hella to take her hand, but Hella stood over by Vati. Her eyes didn’t blink, but Anita saw her lips quiver.



“Hilde. Open up, Hilde. It’s me, Inge.” The knocking on the door woke Anita from a deep sleep. *Why is our neighbor, Inge, knocking at our door?* Rolling claps of thunder punctuated the banging on the door.

*What a minute—Inge is no longer our neighbor. We left Vati last night. We’re at Tante’s house, not in our own house.* She

thought of her sister. *I wonder if Hella is sleeping in my bed at home?* The knocking grew more insistent. *Why is Vati's neighbor, Inge, knocking at Tante's house?* Anita shook Mutti, lying next to her on the cot. "Mutti, someone's knocking on the door for us. It's Inge."

Mutti stood up and wrapped a shawl over her nightdress. Anita stayed in bed, listening to the claps of thunder. She loved storms. Her mother often told her about the ferocious thunderstorm that raged the night she was born.

Drawing back the lock and opening the door, Mutti greeted her friend.

"Oh, Hilde. You must come." Inge's breath came out in uneven puffs as she grabbed her friend's arm with both of her hands. "You must come. Hurry." She took up much of the doorway with her soggy woolen cape.

Anita slipped out of bed to get a better look.

"What time is it? Come where?" Mutti wrapped the shawl tighter around her shoulders.

"It's in the early hours of the morning—perhaps two." Inge shivered.

"Forgive my manners. Come in. Catch your breath."

The younger woman stepped inside, but did not sit down. "You must come back to your house. When you left yesterday, Fritz left soon afterward. We didn't think anything about it, since he rarely stayed at home when you were there." She poked a wet strand of hair under her hood. "Tonight, when the storm broke, we heard banging sounds from inside the house and thought perhaps Fritz had returned."

Mutti began to wring her hands.

"When my Otto came home an hour ago, he heard the

knocking and banging sounds right through Fritz' door. As he went to the door to ask if all was well, Hella called out." Inge put her hands on her hips and shook her head. "Your Fritz had not yet been back since he left the night before—more than twenty-four hours earlier. The thunderstorm had terrified Hella, but the door was locked and she had no way to get help."

"Hella . . . oh, no. My Hella . . ." Mutti began to pull her clothes on over her bed clothes.

"She told me you were staying over here temporarily and asked if I would get you."

"Thank you, thank you." Mutti kissed her friend.

Without further conversation, a tired, wet Inge took her leave and hurried to go back home.

Mutti dressed Anita and the two of them followed, walking back to the only home Anita had ever known.

When they arrived, Mutti fitted her key into the lock and Hella practically fell out of the house into her mother's arms. Hella clung to Mutti, sobbing. Anita stood alongside, patting Hella's arm. As Mutti murmured comforting words, they gathered a few things and left.

As they walked down the silent street in the hour just before dawn, Hella let go of her mother's hand to shift her umbrella. "I should have left Vati a note." Her sobs had long since given way to sniffles. "Do you think he'll worry?"



Days later when the three of them came back to pack their things for the move to the tiny apartment they'd found

on the other side of Zimpel, Anita's stomach ached the whole time.

Hella slowly packed her things, carefully smoothing out all the wrinkles and lingering over every memento. Anita figured Hella could finish much faster if she wouldn't keep looking to the front room where Vati sat, shoulders hunched, listening to the *wireless*.

As they gathered things for the last parcel, Vati walked into the room and put a tentative hand on Mutti's arm. "I . . . well, I realized it wouldn't have worked out caring for Hella after all. Sorry."

Hella kept her head down and moved toward the door.

As they stood there watching the movers loading the last box on the truck, Vati looked hard at Mutti. "I agreed to give you and the girls money each month against my better judgment. I don't have to, by law, you know, because you are a Jew." His eyes narrowed and he lowered his voice to a whisper. "I think I've managed to make a clean break from my political past. You see before you a proud member of the Nazi Party." He paused and then spoke with precision, "If you so much as breathe a word about my past, Hilde Dittman, you'll not get another cent. Do you understand?"

Mutti just looked at him.

"*Auf Wiedersehen*, Vati." Hella ran and hugged him. "I love you."

Vati stood still, looking uncomfortable with his arms by his sides. As Hella moved away, Vati reached an awkward hand up to pat her head.

Anita stood nearby, wishing he'd say good-bye. *Look at me, Vati, Look at me.*



## A Time to Dance

*Judenfratz.*” Anger spilled out of the boy’s mouth along with the single word that meant Jew-brat.

The startled six-year-old Anita flinched and dropped her ballet satchel. One pink satin slipper tumbled out onto the street. “Mutti, what does that mean? Why is he mad at us?”

“Pick up your shoe and brush it off, *Mein Liebling.*” Mutti opened the satchel so Anita could put her things back in order. Mutti handed the bag back and waited until the boy left before speaking. “Some children have nothing better to do with their time than to bully helpless little girls.”

“Shall we tell his mother?” Anita knew he lived near their apartment.

“Oh, no, child. No.” Mutti shook her head, sighing. “You must be very careful with what you say. Things are topsyturvy these days. I don’t want to speak any further about this, but you must remember this—” Mutti paused in the street and

squatted down right in front of her daughter. “Are you listening carefully?”

Her serious tone frightened Anita. “Yes, Mutti, I’m listening very carefully.”

“No matter what anyone says or does, you must keep your head down and go on about your business. No matter what. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

“And when you are out on the street or even at school, do not make eye contact with anyone. Do you know what eye contact is?”

“No.”

“It’s when you look at someone eye to eye.” Mutti stood up and looked over her shoulder as if only just aware of the attention her conversation with Anita might draw to them. “Come, let’s walk. Always keep your head down and your eyes averted.”

“But why? I don’t understand. Is our new neighborhood dangerous?”

“No. Not any more than any other neighborhood in Germany. Let’s talk tonight at dinner, neh?”

Mutti hurried her on to ballet practice. This would be the last practice before Anita’s recital at Breslau’s beautiful Century Hall.

How Anita wished she still fit her chiffon ballet costume, but she’d already outgrown it. The silky petals of the skirt had fluttered and quivered with every movement. There was no money to buy fabric for a new one. Her ballet slippers were worn shiny, and they fit so snug that it took Mutti a long time to work them onto Anita’s feet.

“No matter,” *Frau* Mueller-Lee, her dance teacher, had said. “You will capture every heart when you dance.”

Her words always gave Anita hope. Less than a year ago, *Frau* Mueller-Lee had called Mutti to a meeting to talk about her daughter’s future. Anita still remembered the meeting. Her teacher had looked at Anita and said, “Child, with your natural talent and my training, you will someday be famous. Audiences will worship the very stage you dance on.” From then on, Anita spent two hours a day with *Frau* Mueller-Lee, doing calisthenics, etiquette, and her favorite—ballet.

Mutti sighed and put her lips together in that worried way of hers when *Frau* Mueller-Lee complimented the tiny dancer, but it was the stuff of Anita’s dreams.

Now she was to dance her most important performance ever. Mutti found an old crepe paper costume that had been Hella’s. The paper had faded slightly, but once carefully steamed, the pink and blue looked more delicate than ever. Anita didn’t even ask for another chiffon costume. She knew Mutti had gone without coffee to scrape together pennies for some paper flowers to wreath her hair.

Anita sighed. Her shoes pinched her toes, but she vowed to dance her very best. The better the dance, the less it mattered that her costume was only made of paper. She practiced as diligently as if the studio were a stage.

That night, as the sisters set the table, Mutti seemed pre-occupied. “We must talk about the events happening around us.” She put a bowl of soup on the table with three slices of warm pumpernickel bread. “I long for you to have a gentle childhood, filled with friends and games and parties, but most of all, I wish it could be free of worry.”



The girls took their places at the tiny table tucked into the corner of the warm kitchen as Mutti ladled thin soup into each bowl. Anita sensed Mutti's seriousness. Neither girl seemed to know how to reply.

"Sometimes it feels as if the world has gone crazy." Mutti sat down. "Hitler is working his way to complete power in our country. Hella, you understand this, neh?"

"Ja, Mutti."

"President von Hindenburg has long been unwell—weak. In his place Hitler managed to push his way in, using the unhappiness of the people to seize power. But, weak as von Hindenburg is, he's the one who stands between Hitler and his hatred for the Jews."

"Why are people unhappy?" Anita knew she was mostly happy.

"It's complicated, *Mein Liebling*. After we lost the World War, the German people took a beating. We had no money and precious little pride left. Adolf Hitler spoke to the German sense of pride. The message came at a time when people needed hope."

"So, he's good then?" Hella sounded confused.

"Oh, no. No. It is dangerous to say so, but Hitler is bad, very, very bad." Mutti put down her spoon, leaned forward, and looked at both girls. "You must listen to me very carefully and try to understand what I am saying. Our lives may depend on it."

Anita put down her spoon. "I will listen hard, Mutti."

"And I," Hella added.

"Day by day, Hitler's evil unfolds. Just this spring Parliament passed the Enabling Act. That law gave Hitler all the

power he will ever need. You've seen me sitting here at the table listening to the *wireless*, neh?"

The girls nodded.

"Every day Hitler reveals a new part of his plan. Remember when we had to walk over to the district office to register?" Mutti continued, "We had to declare our nationality. Not German, mind you, but Aryan or Jew."

"What's Aryan?"

"Hitler decreed that it means a white—Caucasian—person who is not Jewish. When we registered, you girls registered as half Jewish, since your father is Aryan. I registered as a Jew."

"Is that bad, Mutti?" Anita asked. "You do not go to *synagogue*."

"Doesn't matter. Hitler hates the Jewish people. He also hates those who are poor or handicapped. *Ja*, and the Gypsy people and—"

"That's a lot of hate, isn't it?" Anita didn't know why, but her stomach ached. She broke off a corner of her bread and ate it slowly.

"Yes, little one. Too much hate. That's why we must talk. Every day sees more laws—Jews cannot own land; Jews cannot keep their seats in the symphony. Jews cannot exhibit art in the galleries; Jews are prohibited from being newspaper editors—"

"It's a good thing Vati is an Aryan." Hella took a deep breath in through her nostrils.

"*Ja*, but he has his own problems because of things he wrote in his newspaper over the years. For his sake, you must not mention him or talk about him, even to your friends."



The sisters nodded.

“This is the hard part.” Mutti leaned in close and talked in a low voice. “We must be very careful what we say and do. The only place you may speak freely is at home. And—this is important—we must not repeat anything we hear at home to anyone.”

“What about to our friends?” Hella shifted in her seat as she rubbed one foot against the other leg.

“How ’bout Frau Mueller-Lee or my teacher at school?” Anita wanted to ask a question, too.

“I’m glad you ask the questions,” Mutti said. “You need to understand this. Our lives will depend on it.” Mutti broke off a piece of bread. “You must not talk freely with friends or even with your teachers. You two may be the only students at your school who are not members of the *Hitler Youth* organization. You must be cautious; they will be allowed to say or do anything they like to Jewish students.”

“So you mean we can’t fight back, like when that boy called me *Judenfratze*?” Anita didn’t like to be called names.

“*Ja*. That’s right. You must look down and walk away. You must not talk back and you must not fight. Hitler’s people listen everywhere.”

“I don’t understand,” Hella said.

“As Hitler came to power, he brought his bodyguards with him—the *Schutzstaffel* or, as they are now called, the *SS*.” Mutti shuddered. “They are to be feared.” She put her head in her hands, shaking it back and forth. “Oh Hella and Anita, my sweet little daughters, I hate to tell you to live in fear, but if I keep from warning you in order to protect you

from the ugliness, I might very well be sending you straight into the heart of trouble.”

“We are big enough to understand, aren’t we, Anita?” Hella came and put an arm around her mother. “We’ll make it like our game—our secret game. Anything you say to us will be locked in our hearts.”

“*Ja!* And nobody has the secret key ’cept Hella, Mutti, and me.”

“Why did I worry about you girls? You are my wise ones.” Mutti hugged them both. “And we will play the game together. Now—tell me the parts of the game.”

“Everything we say to each other gets locked deep inside.” Anita sat up straight, proud that hers was the first answer.

“We must not fight back if we are teased,” Hella added.

“We need to keep our eyes down and our heads down when we are on the street.” Anita smiled wide. “That was a hard one, wasn’t it, Mutti?”

“And we mustn’t ever talk about Vati,” Hella said, “or he might get in trouble.”

“Can we lift our heads to watch the brown shirts marching down the street in a parade?” Anita wondered who could ignore the explosive sound of hundreds of men goose-stepping down the street. It reminded her of the thunder she loved.

“No, no, no.” Mutti pulled Anita close. “This is one of those confusing things. Those brown shirts are the *SA*—the storm troopers. They are much like the *SS*. Dangerous. They are all Nazis. They may be marching, but they are watching. Always watching.” Mutti took Anita’s face between her

hands. “Hitler decreed that no Jew can salute the *Swastika* flag, so if you raised your arm in salute you could be taken away. But here’s the hard part—if you are standing on the street when a parade turns the corner and you do not raise your arm and shout ‘*Heil* Hitler,’ you can be slammed to the ground or even worse for the disrespect.” Mutti planted a kiss on Anita’s cheek and said, “Enough of this doom and gloom. Our soup may be lukewarm, but it’s nourishing. Let’s eat.”

“But Mutti,” Hella asked, “if we are on the street and the flag goes by, what do we do?”

“Slip into a shadow. Carefully and slowly make your way out of sight without drawing any attention to yourself.”

*The shadows will cover me.* Anita liked that idea—another part of the game.



On the night of the recital, the city never looked prettier. Mutti, Hella, and Anita took the streetcar to the hall. They left home hours early to make sure nothing would go wrong. The lights sparkled, and the fragrance of summer jasmine scented the air.

Backstage, Mutti braided Anita’s braids so tightly that the little dancer’s scalp pulled. She imagined that her eyes must have stretched wider. Mutti then wound the braids into a figure eight at the nape of Anita’s neck and pinned the paper flower wreath to her head.

“*Schön.* What a cunning little thing.” The flutist stopped on her way to the orchestra pit. “How can a tiny child like that be dancing already?”

Anita smiled at the compliment. After all, *Schön* meant beautiful, but she couldn't bear to let the misunderstanding about her size stand uncorrected. "Thank you, *Fräulein*, but I am much older than I look. I've always been slight, but I dance like the big girls."

The musician laughed. "And how old are you?"

"I am six, nearly seven years old."

"Forgive me," she laughed again, "I hadn't realized how very old you are. I look forward to seeing your dance." She winked at Mutti as she left.

Anita drew herself up to her full height, trying to hold her head high in a classic ballet stance. The hunger to dance sometimes grew stronger than the hunger for food. "When she sees me dance," she said to Mutti, "I don't think she'll laugh or wink."

"Oh, Anita," Mutti said, "you are one of a kind. Sometimes I think you are the spitting image of your father—all the good things of course—along with a dose of that stubborn German pride."

"Do you think Vati will come tonight?" Anita asked as Hella came backstage.

Mutti did not answer.

"*Eine Kleine Schwester*," Hella said. "That costume looks *wunderbar*. Mutti, you did such a beautiful job."

Anita loved the compliment, but not being called "baby sister." "Hella, I'm big. I'm dancing with the biggest girls. None of the little dancers are performing tonight."

Hella laughed that beautiful rich laugh of hers. "Oops. I guess you are getting too big to be called 'little sister.' I shall be far more careful in the future."

“Places, dancers.” Frau Mueller-Lee bustled through the troupe of nervous girls.

“Come, Hella.” Mutti planted a quick kiss on Anita’s rosy cheek. “Let’s take our seats out front.”

The sound of the orchestra tuning their instruments always stirred something inside Anita. It was the sound she hoped to hear for the rest of her life. She knew that Mutti thought her too young to know her future, but when she danced—whether practice at the *barre* or during a performance—Anita knew contentment. As her muscles stretched and her limbs reached, she felt happier than at any other time. Sometimes at night she’d dream of flying. Her earthbound body would lift off the floor and she’d soar. In real life, dancing felt like flying. The ache in her stomach went away, and her body seemed to float somewhere between earth and the heavens.

Her solo dance came near the end of the evening. As the older girl before her danced, Anita became so caught up with the fluid motions of the choreography, she nearly forgot her own dance. Then she listened to the applause and knew it signaled her turn.

Anita took a deep breath in through her nose and let it out slowly through her mouth. Frau Mueller-Lee told her that exhaling released every bit of nerves and allowed a performer to focus on the dance. She ran out to center stage, remembering to keep her toes pointed and her back straight. The leather on the bottom of her ballet slipper made a whispery brush-thud on the wooden stage as she ran. Starchy crepe paper rustled with every step. She couldn’t see anything beyond the footlights. Mutti and Hella sat somewhere in the audience. Was Vati out there? *Look at me, everyone!*

The music seemed to carry her. Her dance welled up from deep inside her. She worried for a moment that Frau Mueller-Lee would be angry about the improvised steps, but the dance overtook Anita as her body moved to the music.

When the dance ended, she seemed to wake. The audience stood to their feet and clapped. She could only make out shapes, but the applause went on for the longest time. She put her hand to her lips and blew a pretend kiss toward where she imagined Mutti sitting. Anita couldn't wait to see her mother backstage.

"*Brava!*" Mutti hugged her daughter tight, crepe paper and all. "You danced your very best ever." She handed the excited dancer a rose. "If only money would allow an armful of roses, but there's time enough for that. This is from *Tante Käte's* garden."

"*Danke, Mutti.*" Anita put her face into the petals and breathed the rose scent.

Hella laughed. "Hothouse roses don't have any smell, so our ballerina got the best rose after all."

Anita hugged Hella. She wished she could hug the whole of Breslau tonight.

Later, as they walked to the streetcar, Anita listened to the rustle of her crepe tutu under her coat. The stars were brighter and the air clearer than she could ever remember. "I just love Germany," she said, spreading her arms wide. "Aren't we the luckiest people in the world?"

Neither Mutti nor Hella answered.

The next morning, Mutti gave Hella a coin she had saved to buy a newspaper. The music and art editor had been at Century Hall last night.



Hella hardly got in the door before Anita took Teddy by the arms and began jumping up and down. “Read it, Mutti. Read it!”

Mutti opened the paper and ran her finger across the article until she came to a familiar name. She began to read, “The dance was beautifully performed by six-year-old Anita Dittman. Her skill and grace at ballet far exceed her years. Nevertheless, we Germans no longer wished to be entertained by a Jew.” Mutti blinked as if suddenly struck across the face.

The very air seemed to go out of Anita and she looked smaller than ever. Before Mutti or Hella could reach out to her, Anita took Teddy and wedged herself into the shadows between the bookcase and the wall. Anita may have only been six, but she knew last night was her last performance.

Mutti and Hella came and sat near her on the floor.

“No one can take last night away from you, *Mein Liebling*.” Mutti ran the back of her fingers down Anita’s cheek. “No one who attended will ever forget you. Hitler may have decreed that Jews cannot dance on German stages, but he cannot stop your dancing spirit.”