

David Safier

AS LONG AS WE LIVE

Solange wir leben

- Bestselling author David Safier tells the compelling story of the lives and loves of his parents – based on true events.
- His series *Miss Merkel* (Vol. I and II) sold 730,000 copies and topped the bestseller list for months. Both books were translated into 9 languages.
- More than 5,5 million copies of David Safier's novels were sold in Germany and over 1,5 million copies internationally!
- English sample translation available.



April 2023 · 464 pages

What is stronger, love or fate? The story of a Jew and a German woman who find each other after the war.

There's no reason why the Viennese Jew whose family are killed in the Holocaust and the young woman from Bremen should ever meet, let alone fall in love and build a life together against all the odds. Their story spans 80 years, taking us from Vienna in 1936, where we meet student Joschi Safier, to Gestapo jails and eventually to Palestine, where Joschi works as a barman and a spy and eventually goes to sea. Waltraut, for her part, grows up in a working-class family in Bremen. The family are bombed out of their home during the war, and live for years in a railway carriage. When the economic miracle arrives, Waltraut gets a sought-after apprenticeship as a saleswoman. She is widowed at a young age. The first time she meets Joschi at an ice cream parlour, she rebuffs him. But the sailor sends her postcards from all over the world, before turning up at her door one day with a typewriter under his arm. And there he stays. Their love soars to great heights and endures terrible twists of fate. How strong must the bond between two people be to withstand all of this?

Two lives that take us halfway across the world and through a whole gamut of emotions: a dramatic, moving and tender book.

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David Safier was born in 1966, and is one of today's most successful authors and screenwriters. His novels *Mieses Karma*, *Plötzlich Shakespeare*, *Happy Family*, *Muh!* and *28 Tage* sold millions. His books are also bestsellers in markets outside Germany. He won both the International Emmy and the Grimme Prize for his screenplay for the TV series *Berlin, Berlin*. He lives and works in Bremen, is married and has two children and a dog.

David Safier
Solange wir leben_As Long as We Live

Sample translated by Helen MacCormac 2023

1997

“Shall I shove him into the grave?” my drunk mother asked, swaying slightly as she spoke. When she said *him*, she meant the old Rabbi speaking the prayer for the dead, and when she said *grave*, she meant the freshly dug grave of my father.

“Shall I shove him in?” she said again, as if I hadn’t heard her the first time. But even the rabbi had heard her, which was why he had raised his voice and was speaking more quickly now. He was praying in Hebrew, so neither my mother nor I could understand a word he was saying. And presumably neither could any of the Russian mourners who had been paid a few marks each to ensure there would be ten adult Jews for the Minyan needed to say Kaddish. Most of them were holding shopping bags from Lidl.

“Shall I, shall I?” my mother giggled, sidling up to the rabbi. She probably thought my father would have found this funny. A rabbi falling into a grave was exactly his kind of humour. My father was not a religious man, despite being a great-grandchild of the miracle rabbi of Brzesko, and sitting on the board of Bremen Jewish Council. He even beat up a rabbi in Jerusalem back in 1946. But he wouldn’t have been amused to see his wife pushing a rabbi into his own grave at his funeral. And he would have objected to the Lidl shopping bags.

The rabbi spoke more and more quickly. He obviously expected to end up in a skirmish with my mother any minute. He was right to worry. I grabbed Mum’s hand and drew her away. My wife Marion held her other hand. While I was trying to control my mother, Marion was hoping to comfort her. There was little chance of that. No one could console my mother. When my sister died four years ago, something inside her was irretrievably broken. And now, to make matters worse, my father had gone and killed himself for her sake.

Nothing else happened during the funeral. When it was over, the grim-faced rabbi walked away without a word of comfort for anyone.

The paid Soviet-Jewish mourners trudged off, clutching their Lidl bags. That left just the three of us standing by the graveside while two workers filled it in. My wife and I were keen to get home to our two-year-old son who was being looked after by a babysitter from ‘Grandma’s Helpline’. I ordered a taxi for our own grandma and promised to pop in at around ten the next morning. I was hoping she would still be relatively sober at that time of the morning.

“We shouldn’t bring children into this world,” she said suddenly.

I felt the pain behind those words, and so did my wife, who would never blame her for saying such a thing, despite having a small child of her own, and longing for another one soon. We didn’t say anything, and simply walked to the gate with my exhausted mother, where a taxi was already waiting. Before she got in, she leant over to me. “Your father had two illegitimate children,” she whispered, “One in Vienna. And one in Israel.”

What she was saying didn’t hit me at first, it seemed unreal.

“He and his first wife were good friends with another couple in Haifa. Everyone could see that their baby was Joschi’s.”

This was the first time my mother ever mentioned my father’s first wife to me. I had heard about her from my uncle Charlie, who thought Dora had been a fantastic person, and who told me he had never understood why my father left her for my mother.

I thought back. My father had only just managed to get out of Vienna in time, in 1939. Any child of his born in Austria would have been at least thirty years older than I was, and was presumably killed in the Holocaust like almost all of my father’s extended family. My mother climbed into the taxi without another word. I reminded her that I would see her the next day, shut the door and watched as the car drew away, bumping along the narrow cobblestoned street beside the graveyard.

Did those children even exist?

My parents never told me anything about the lives they had led before I was born. In fact, my father never mentioned his parents at all. They didn’t even tell me my sister wasn’t my father’s own child until I was twenty years old. I had had to work that out for myself. At the age of eleven, I discovered an old cardboard box in his cupboard, full of postcards from all over the world, from when he had been at sea. They were addressed to Waltraut and Gabi Kampe. Of course, I knew that Mum’s maiden name was Behrens.

Did my father tell her about his illegitimate children? Had my aunt and uncle let on? Or was it just another one of her stories, like the one about being descended from nobility, that she told with such fervour that she soon believed them to be true.

What did I really know about my parents’ lives? Except that theirs were bad times, and good. And that they loved each other?

1937 – 1938

The night little Waltraut took her very first steps in a worker's house in Bremen, Joschi was sitting in the Hotel Stefanie's grand banquet hall in Taborstraße in Vienna, enjoying a Jewish political cabaret. The young man was watching his sister Rosl, the Maître de Plaisir, announce the last song of the evening. "The perfect Nazi is as blond as Hitler, slim as Göring, as pretty as Goebbels and his name is Rosenberg," she cried.

The audience roared with laughter as the sextette started to sing their hit song 'The Jews, the Jews are always to blame' to the tune of 'Habanera' from *Carmen*, "If the telephone is not working or the bathtub's got a leak, if your pay cheque's turned out lousy..."

A group of five men dressed in white tie and tails, who looked just like the Comedian Harmonists, surrounded redheaded Rosl. Joschi wished they were the Comedian Harmonists – who would have been a lot funnier than the guys on stage with his sister. Rosl's looks and voice were the best thing about the show. In fact, the only reason he was here was to see his sister. Ever since she'd married a water polo player a lot older than her, and moved out of the Safier family's small flat at Rotensterngasse 23, it had been hard to get hold of her. Joschi would never have thought he might miss Rosl one day; they had fought like cats and dogs as long as they'd shared a small room together.

"When snow is so awfully white, and when it's, whatcha call it, cold; and when fire is so awfully hot..."

Joschi didn't think Rosl's marriage to the water polo player stood a chance. He gave them a year or two at the most. Either Rosl would end up going meshugge behind the counter at Lamberg, his sports shop near the Naschmarkt, or the water polo player would strangle her because she never stopped nagging. Or maybe a bit of both. Joschi was the only person who put up with her complaining, because he loved her to bits. Just like he loved his parents. Mama Scheindel, who had given his life meaning and direction by ensuring he got a decent education, even if he wasn't exactly enthusiastic about her plans for him. And his father, Israel, who had long since given up hoping his wife, daughter or son would do a thing he said.

Joschi loved his family more than any girl he'd ever met. And he was sure Rosl would never give up her dreams of the stage, or moving to Palestine, for any man.

"And if you don't believe it, then that's their fault as well. The Jews, the Jews are always to blame!"

The song was over, and so was the show and the audience started clapping loudly. Joschi clapped louder than anyone. Not because he liked the song that much. He was very good at clapping. Sometimes he even got into theatres and cabarets for free if he offered to be a claqueur. In fact, that was the main reason he loved going to the theatre. Although he knew the texts by the greatest cabaret artists, such as Karl Farkas or Fritz Grünbaum, off by heart, and had heard some of them umpteen times, he couldn't stop laughing at the silly puns and jokes, like the one about the treaty of Locarno: "Locarno Pakt." "Really? Where's he off to?"

Once the guests started leaving the theatre, Joschi went to find his sister. She beamed at him. The cabaret was her greatest love, and she thrived on applause. Rosl was even prettier when she smiled. Sometimes, Joschi could hardly believe that she was the daughter of their small, skinny mother, and pale, balding father. Israel had so little hair left on his head that he could never find a kippa big enough to cover the bald patch. Mama Scheindel had been no spring chicken when she decided she wanted to have children. Although he was five years younger than she was, she deliberately chose Israel Safier for the purpose. Some people from the old home in Poland they had fled before the First World War had found the age gap between the older woman and younger man shocking.

There were times when Joschi couldn't actually believe that he was descended from these two old people either. He was a bit a looker, even if he said so himself. That wasn't just his opinion either; his success with the ladies proved it. When he put on the perfectly tailored suit his father had made for him, and just the right amount of pomade in his hair, along with the long trench coat he always wore, except on hot summer days, he looked nothing like the poor Jew he really was. Or so he thought!

"How's university, Joschi?" Rosl asked. The siblings usually spoke Yiddish at home with their parents, but they always talked in German when it was just the two of them. They were modern, young Jews – the new generation.

"It's so boring," he said.

"It's supposed to be boring!"

"It would be nicer if it weren't."

"You've got to stop being so lazy."

"Who says I'm lazy?"

"Who says you aren't?"

Joschi could think of tons of replies, but in his heart of hearts, he knew he wasn't cut out to be a great mechanical engineer. Of course, it meant having a more secure future than if he had become a tailor like his father; and his parents had been delighted when he had announced that he'd gained a place at university. Especially his mother, whose father, Henschel Klapholz, had been mayor of Brzesko, while his paternal grandfather had been a vagabond all his life. The children knew this because Mama Scheindel had let it slip when she lost her temper during an argument with Israel.

Joschi and Rosl had never met their grandparents, or any of the eighteen aunts and uncles who still lived in Poland along with a myriad of children. There were so many different branches of the family that they had all lost count. Grandfather Henschel had seven brothers and sisters for starters. Joschi and Rosl only knew those relatives who had fled to Vienna before the chaos of the First World War, and their children of course. That was more than enough mishpocha as far as they were concerned.

Joschi's parents soon began to worry about his place at university when they realised how high the fees they had to scrape together actually were. There was not much Joschi could do to help. He delivered the suits and trousers his father made or mended in their poky kitchen, but that was all, and he never managed to pick up more than a tip or two from the customers. Joschi's fees were so exorbitant because he was registered as a Pole, rather than as an Austrian citizen, despite having been born in Vienna, as were Rosl and his parents. Even though the family had fled from a region that had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time.

If they had been Austrian, things would undoubtedly have been easier for all of them.

"I'm not lazy."

Rosl gave him a withering look that only one other person in the world could master.

"You look just like Mama," he said, knowing full well that this would drive his sister mad.

"I am not one bit like Mama!" she shouted in a cloud of rage.

It was odd. Joschi loved his sister, and he was pretty sure that she loved him too, but they nearly always started arguing within minutes every time they met. If either of them complained to their mother, (never to their father), she would simply say "True scum's forever fighting and making up!" That usually sorted things out, because they would immediately join forces to protest that they were certainly not scum!

"Have you got a new girl?" Rosl asked, changing the conversation and having another dig at him at the same time.

"Not just at the moment."

"You need to find someone who can put up with you for more than a week."

"Like that old water polo player of yours you mean?" Joschi retorted, doing his best to provoke his sister.

"The water polo player is called Paul for your information. And he's only 37. You could try taking things a bit more seriously for a change. It would do you good you know."

"You really are just like Mum."

Rosl flushed in anger. Joschi was expecting her to start screeching like a jackdaw. But all she said was "I'll see you around. I need to go and get changed." Without waiting for an answer, she marched off to her dressing room. It was life as usual. Although Joschi had been looking forward to seeing Rosl, they had ended up fighting again.

Joschi's mood improved considerably as soon as he stepped out of the hotel into the bright lights on Taborstraße. The street was teeming with people. Lots of young people were out and about of course, but he also saw groups of orthodox Jews talking together on the pavement. A pleasant breeze dispersed the sweltering heat of the hot June day, bringing with it the smell of mountains Joschi had never seen. He took off his jacket and threw it over his shoulder, feeling great as he strolled down the street towards

Rotensterngasse. His parents grew up in Brzesko and Dębica with no electricity or running water, and they were deeply grateful to be able to rent a flat for themselves and their two children in Vienna. When Rosl used to complain about the goy downstairs, spending hours on the toilet in the hall, Mama Scheindel would always mention the Jewish refugees from the East who still lived in wooden shacks near the Prater amusement park. And she would scold Rosl, telling her to be grateful that she had a school to go to, and that Joschi was allowed to attend the Gymnasium – a proper secondary school. Just once, at the tender age of 11, Rosl dared tell Mama Scheindel that she thought she was far more clever than her brother was, and she should be going to the Gymnasium instead of him. Mama Scheindel gave her a good hiding for that.

Joschi hadn't been a very keen pupil at school, but he was clever enough to get by without much effort. He nearly messed things up two years before taking his Matura exams, when he skived lessons several times, and the school janitor spotted him at a local swimming pool. If it hadn't been for Mama Scheindel, he would have been expelled. Mama Scheindel had managed to persuade the headmaster that though her son was an idiot, a slap from his mother would do him more good than stopping his education, which would ruin his chances for life. She spoke to him in Yiddish because then she could curse better; as half of Rotensterngasse knew very well. Almost every other day, you could hear her shouting all the way to house number 9 where the Bohemian and Czech whores lived with their pigs (the human ones and the animals).

Suddenly Joschi heard a woman shouting across the way. "Let go of me, you 'Oarsch!'" she yelled, drawling the insult in the typical Viennese fashion. She was a very fat, dull-looking woman, and a brute of a man with meat carver's hands was bearing down on her.

"Whatcha call me?" the brute shouted menacingly.

"Oarsch, you eejut!"

He slapped her in the face without warning.

Joschi was furious. No one was allowed to hit a woman!

Not even if she called you an arse, an eejut, or a clodhead.

The fat woman fell over and started screeching. Her knee was bleeding. Joshi looked around to see if anyone was going to help her. None of the pedestrians seemed keen to do anything at all. In fact, people nearby were hurrying across the street to get out of their way. The brute bent down to the woman and grabbed her by the scruff of the neck. "Get up!" he growled, "Or I'll knock you about some more!"

If Joschi didn't come to her rescue, no one else would. He knew full well he couldn't tackle the huge guy on his own and had practically no chance of stopping him. But he had no choice. He couldn't just stand there watching him slap her around. So, he charged across the street and jumped on the man with such force that he knocked him to the ground. Caught by surprise, the brute didn't react immediately. But the woman did! Although her knee was still bleeding, she managed to get to her feet, and she started

thumping Joschi with both fists, shouting, "Leave my husband alone!" He cradled his head in his arms to fend off the woman's punches, which meant he didn't notice the bloke get back on his feet, or see the blow coming, before a fist crashed into Joschi's face. Joschi's head started spinning. He tried to stay standing, but another punch clipped his cheekbone and sent him crashing to the ground. As if that wasn't enough, the woman started kicking him in the stomach for good measure. "Yer got a face like a spanked arse now," she said as she walked off with her fella.

"True scum's forever fighting and making up!" Joschi thought as he lay writhing on the sun-baked pavement.

"You're a real hero, you are," he heard a young woman say kindly. He tried to look up. But it was too painful to open his eyes properly.

"Come on, I'll help you up."

Joschi saw a blurred hand and grabbed hold of it, not realising that he was touching the hand of his first love for the very first time.

Joschi couldn't believe it; here stood a young brunette offering to help, who looked just like Hedy Lamarr. As far as Joschi was concerned, the famous film star was the prettiest Jew in all of Vienna. Rosl disagreed of course. She said Lamarr was nowhere near as beautiful as some people thought, and called her a traitor. Lamarr had converted to Catholicism to marry a wealthy arms dealer, and Hitler and Mussolini were frequent guests at their home. Joschi didn't care. Hedy had been the woman of his dreams ever since he had managed to sneak into a cinema to see the film *Ecstasy* at the tender age of 15, and had watched the scandalous orgasm scene. Rosl also felt that female activities of that kind were none of Joschi's, or any man's business.

So here he was, with a real beauty every bit as lovely as Lamarr, holding his hand. She had the most gorgeous lively sparkling brown eyes, with a splash of green in the left one, and a lovely pointed chin, which gave her face a sculpted look. Her blue summer dress was made from the finest material, and she wore a simple chain with a gold Star of David around her neck. And she smelled so lovely. A faint fragrance of roses or orchids, perhaps. Only last week Joschi had been to the University's botanical gardens and had smelled orchids for the first time. She was one classy lady, Joschi thought, suddenly realising that he looked just like a poor Jew after all.

"Are you all right?" the brown-haired woman asked. Joschi was already calling her Hedy in his mind. She smiled, somehow managing to look worried and amused by his antics at the same time. She let go of his hand, and Joschi wanted to grab hold of it again right away.

"I've been worse," Joschi replied, although he had never taken beating like that in his life.

"That's all right then." Hedy smiled, and turned to go.

"You're leaving already?" Joschi was surprised how much he minded.

"Well spotted."

"I'll be your chaperone."

Hedy laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"You're offering to protect me?"

"Of course."

"Like that other woman?"

She was teasing him now.

"I can look after myself, thank you," Hedy said, and headed off towards the Danube. Joschi quickly caught up with her. "But you don't have to," he said.

"You are one stubborn Jew!"

"One chivalrous Jew."

"I'm here with another man," Hedy said,

"I don't see anyone."

"But that is how it is."

"Well, where is he?"

"He's gone to a call box to order a taxi. I was going to have a quick cigarette, but I didn't have time. Obviously."

Hedy pulled a cigarette out of her red handbag. Joschi didn't like smoking, and it was far too expensive anyway. But how he wished he had a cigarette now, to have a smoke with this wonderful woman. Or some matches at least, so he could offer her a light.

Of course, she had an elegant gold lighter of her own.

"I'd never leave you on your own," Joschi blathered.

Hedi glanced at him as if she liked what she was hearing, and said gently, "Well you really are a chivalrous Jew."

Joschi smiled.

"Or else you are making false promises."

"I never make false promises," Joschi protested.

Hedy grinned.

A taxi pulled up next to them, the rear door opened, and a blond man sitting in the back, in an expensive suit called: "Get in Ruth!"

Hedy was a much better name for this wonderful being. Ruth sounded a bit like an old maid.

"Bye-bye, my chivalrous Jew."

"Will I see you again?"

"You want to see me again?"

"Tomorrow evening at seven, at the entrance to the Prater."

“Ruth!” the man called again.

“You know what, brave hero? One day this summer you will find me waiting at the Prater entrance at seven,” she said, and climbed into the taxi that sped off immediately. Joschi watched the car cross the Danube bridge, and disappear into the world of Christians and wealthy Jews.

How many evenings would he have to spend waiting at the Prater entrance? he wondered.

On the last day of summer, Joschi went to the Prater with a young girl from Bohemia, called Dubravka. She was nowhere near as charming as Hedy, but her bosom was nice to look at. He had waited for Hedy at seven o’clock every evening for twelve days in a row, before he gave up. Even after that, he’d often strolled past the Prater at around the same time if he had the chance, trying to convince himself that he had come this way for a breath of fresh air. With the summer over, the new term at university had started, and Joschi was finding his studies more tedious than ever. He felt he deserved a bit of light relief.

Dubravka worked as a barmaid at a Heuriger wine tavern in Oberlaa, and had liked Joschi the minute she saw him and his friend Otto, sitting on a wooden bench outside the tavern one day. Joschi had paid her plenty of compliments. “Yours are the most beautiful dimples in the world!” he had said, and had made sure to give her a decent tip when they left. Rosl was always saying that Joschi was useless with money. Joschi always replied, “I spend it on the things that make life worthwhile.” This evening that happened to be a Bohemian barmaid.

A delighted Dubravka was just pointing out the big wheel when Joschi spotted Hedy, waiting at the entrance. What was the silly goose thinking? Was he supposed to ditch his Bohemian lady friend and rush over, feeling eternally grateful that her highness had condescended to grant a poor Jew like him an audience at long last?

He hid his anger and steered Dubravka towards Hedy, determined to breeze past and ignore her completely. He was going to have a great evening without her. But when he got close, Hedy called: “I’ve been here at seven three times. Where were you, brave hero?”

Joschi didn’t so much as look at Dubravka again

Instead of going to a bar and spending lots of money – Hedy had made it clear that she did not intend to allow Joschi to buy her a drink or anything else – they strolled along side-by-side, while Joschi entertained her with his best Prater stories. About how he had a ride on the Ferris wheel when he was a lad, and tried to spit on the heads of the people below – unfortunately he ended up hitting the Ferris wheel owner of all people! Or about the time he conducted the ladies’ orchestra with a brezel, although he knew nothing about music. All the women had played along, and the whole beer garden had danced, until his friend Otto fell off a table and broke his ankle, which put an end to all the fun. And of course, Joschi told Hedy

his favourite story. When he was fourteen, he noticed a black tent with a sign in huge red letters saying: VIENNA AT NIGHT. Like any boy that age, Joschi wasn't going to miss an opportunity like that. He was sure he would see a real naked woman, or some half-naked ones at least. With his heart racing, Joschi bought a ticket and stepped into the pitch-black tent. "Move along!" someone shouted, after he had taken a few tentative steps. Joschi did as he was told, egged on by the voice for the next three minutes or more. But it stayed dark with not a single naked or even semi-naked woman to be seen. There wasn't even any music! Then Joschi saw a crack of light. Unfortunately for Joschi he hadn't found a lamp with a woman sprawling beneath it. It was a slit in the tent wall. "Move along, move along now!" the voice called again, so Joschi headed towards the light. When he got there, it turned out to be the exit, and a disappointed Joschi stumbled out into the open. He was met by a man with practically no teeth, who said in a low voice, "No blabbing, and keep yer trap shut, laddie. It's a great lark for the whippersnappers. And yer don't want to look like an eejut – eh?"

"Well you've told me now!" Hedy said, turning to give him a beautiful smile as they passed a shooting gallery on the spot where the tent had once stood.

"I'm not fourteen anymore."

"Thank goodness, or the police would be after me!"

Joschi started laughing. For the first time in his life, a woman other than Rosl was making him laugh. Deary me! Hopefully Hedy wouldn't turn out to be as quarrelsome as his sister.

Having used up all his Prater ammunition, Joschi decided it was time for compliments. But what was he going to say? Joschi had never met a woman like Hedy before. He couldn't just say that she had the sweetest dimples, which of course she did, and the most beautiful eyes, or hair, or legs ... He didn't dare look at her bosom even for a second. He remembered the best piece of advice his sister had ever given him. "It's much better to listen to a woman instead of making compliments all the time." Of course, Rosl would say that. She was always talking someone's ear off. Her long-suffering water-ball boyfriend could sing a song about it. But over time Joschi had realised that she was right. Girls liked it when he was interested in them. Even if he was just pretending. He'd asked Dubravka about her hopes for the future on their way from the tram stop to the Prater, and then regretted it, when she started gushing on about a big family with at least five children. That was another good reason for dumping the Bohemian girl.

Hedy didn't look like the kind of girl who would want kids.

"Tell me your hopes and dreams."

"Gosh, you're nosy!"

"Here's another question then: what do you do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I went travelling for a year after I finished university. You know, Paris, London, Boston ... What?"

Joschi felt so inferior he didn't know where to put himself, but he quickly pulled himself together and made a joke. "I've done a bit of travelling myself."

"Is that so?"

"I went on a school trip to the Vienna Woods

"Here we are, two cosmopolitans swanning through the Prater," Hedy laughed. Joschi joined in. Then he asked, "So what comes next? You carry on doing nothing?"

"My mum thinks I should be a doctor like my father."

"And?"

"The last thing my father wants is for me to become a doctor."

"What does he want?"

"He wants me to marry well."

"That blond guy in the taxi?"

"Oh no, my father doesn't rate him at all."

Joschi was glad to hear it.

"Why not?"

"He's Chancellor Schuschnigg's private secretary."

"So, your father thinks he'll lose his job because of Hitler?"

"Doesn't everyone?"

Joschi hated thinking about politics, it spoiled the fun.

"I want to write books," Hedy said.

"Oh!" Joschi said, remembering a girl called Esther from his final year at the Zwi-Perez Chajes School. She was always writing stories about Palestine and a new Jewish state. Although she never stopped talking about emigrating, she was still living in Leopoldstadt, where she worked in a stationer's shop. Somehow, Joschi couldn't imagine Hedy writing stories about Zionists turning deserts into fertile soil.

"Oh?" Is that all you've got to say? You don't think I could?" Hedy was teasing him again. She obviously didn't mind his reaction.

"I think you could do anything," Joschi answered truthfully.

"And so you should," she laughed and gave him a peck on the cheek.

They shared their first real kiss while they were eating candyfloss together. A puff of sugar stuck to the top of his lip, and Hedy offered to remove it for him. Her advances made General Blücher at the Battle of Katzbach look like a laggard of the worst kind.

As the sun set, they walked into an elegant flat in Ringstraße. Hedy's parents were in Salzburg attending a doctor's conference. Hedy showed Joschi into her father's study, which no one was ever allowed to enter, where she taught him how to swirl cognac in a glass and smoke a Cuban cigar. Joschi had a coughing fit, and she couldn't stop laughing.

Shortly before midnight, she led him into her bedroom.

What a perfect way for the summer to end.

Hedy decided she was going to introduce Joschi to her parents on his birthday, of all days. Joschi wasn't exactly thrilled at the prospect of meeting them at last.

Especially as it meant he wouldn't be able to see his father. They were both born on the 1st of February, and they usually celebrated their joint birthday together by eating pancakes in the Café Central. He was also sure that he wouldn't go down well with Hedy's well-off parents, considering that the Chancellor's private secretary hadn't been good enough for them. Hedy had jilted the guy after their second rendezvous. Hedy warned Joschi that her father talked about politics incessantly, and her mother had turned into bundle of nerves, ever since someone scrawled 'Jew' on the front door of their surgery.

Joschi was used to that kind of thing by now. Right-wing student fraternities kept singing antisemitic songs all the time at the technical university. And although Joschi would dearly have loved to hit them, he followed his parents' advice and did his best to keep his head down and stay out of trouble, like so many other Jewish students. Rosl felt such advice had never done the Jews any good, and had joined the Betar Movement, a group where young Jews prepared for a new life in a future state of Israel. They didn't just learn Hebrew, which Joschi had learned at school, or how to till the land, but also how to use weapons.

One person Joschi certainly wouldn't mention when he met Hedy's parents was his sister. Most of the Jewish families who had lived in Vienna for generations despised the Zionists.

If he'd had his way, Joschi would have celebrated his birthday with just the two of them, Hedy and him. But what could he do? He loved her, and assumed she loved him too, although she hadn't said so yet. He knew she would one day. No one could keep love to themselves forever. So, he had to get through this evening somehow. And anyway, it was going to be a walk in the park compared to introducing Hedy to his mother. There wasn't a girl good enough for him in her opinion, and yet she thought the water polo player who married Rosl was a real godsend.

When Joschi arrived at Ringstraße in soaking wet weather, he was freezing, despite his trench coat. He looked more like a gangster from some American movie than a tailor, or a tailor's son to be more precise. Hedy was waiting for him in front of the house. Was he late? He glanced at the watch his parents had given him when he finished school to make sure he got to his lectures on time. The fact that he believed a watch would make any difference was very endearing, Joschi thought. He wasn't late. In fact, he was five minutes early, and there was enough time for a cigarette to calm his nerves. It was Hedy's fault that he'd started smoking. She introduced him to cigarettes when they were out in the Vienna Woods one day. Now each cigarette was a memory of that wonderful trip to the forest.

Joschi walked up to Hedy. She placed a cigarette between her lips and stepped away from him as if she didn't want to be touched. He wanted to ask her why she was outside without a coat in this weather, but

she seemed agitated, and suddenly Joschi felt that something awful was about to happen, without any idea what it could be.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Hedy didn’t answer.

He tried to put his arms around her, but she shirked him off.

“What is it?”

“I’m pregnant.”

His stomach turned. “Pregnant?”

“That’s what I meant when I said pregnant.”

All of Vienna was talking about how the world would change when – not if – the Nazis came to power, and now his life had changed in a flash already.

Of course, there could be no question of having a meal with Hedy’s parents now. She stubbed out her cigarette and said she’d tell them that Joschi wasn’t feeling well. Then she disappeared into the house.

If Joschi hadn’t been so shocked by the news, he would have realised that Hedy must be even more so. But as things were, he stood there as if someone had given him an anaesthetic. He needed help. Someone who could show him a way out of this situation. Or someone to get drunk with, who would help him drown his sorrows. Otto was always good for a night out, but he would only be interested in what he’d call the ‘sordid details’. Joschi would never have talked to Otto about Hedy like that.

Should he talk to Papa?

On their joint birthday?

A fine celebration that would be. And what advice could he give him anyway? Joschi’s father had been much older when Rosl arrived. And his parents had been living in a small Polish shtetl at the time, not in a huge city about to be overrun by Nazis. Mama Scheindel would be devastated. She would never forgive him if he gave up university to find a job. All the sacrifices she had made to give him a better start in life would have been in vain. He could have become a respected citizen of Vienna, like her father Henschel in Brzesko. Well, maybe not quite as well respected. But it would have been something at least.

Joschi felt like he had a huge lump in his throat, and his stomach was churning. He needed to talk to someone. Who could help him? Who? Who?

Rosl.

When no one else could help, there was always Rosl.

She would understand how scared he was of so much responsibility.

Her water polo husband was always trying to get her to have a child, but she always told him he was nuts.

Joschi ran all the way to his brother-in-law's sports shop, which was nearer than the flat where they lived. It was already past closing time, but there was a chance Rosl might still be in the shop doing the accounts.

Joschi ran and ran. Until he couldn't run anymore and had to walk, gasping for air. Across the Naschmarkt and down a side street to Lamberg sports shop, where a light was still burning. The doors were already locked, so he banged on the window. Rosl was busy hanging up a tennis racket. She spotted him, but despite his continuous knocking, she quietly finished what she was doing before she unlocked the door.

"Something has happened," he gasped.

"Not Papa,"

"No, no ..."

Rosl looked relieved. She was a tough old nut who only showed feelings if she could make a drama out of them. But she was always worrying about her father's health, although there was no need. Apart from a bout of weakness a year ago, he'd always been in good shape. Funnily enough, Rosl never worried about their mother's asthma, or showed any sympathy in that department.

"Is your water polo player here?" Joschi asked, having caught his breath somewhat.

"Paul," she said articulating her husband's name clearly, "is out training the first league team."

"Good."

"So, what's up?"

Joschi told her all about Hedy. He hadn't mentioned her to Rosl before. Then about her being pregnant, and then started wailing that his life was over. Although he didn't know it, he could make a scene just like his sister.

Rosl looked at him gravely. Joschi was expecting her to call him an idiot for not being more careful. He was ready to shout back. He could already see himself stomping out of the shop and slamming the door behind him, before going off to get drunk with Otto instead. But Rosl said in a quiet, serious voice, "You aren't the first person this has happened to. And your life isn't over either. So, pull yourself together, own responsibility, and make the best of it! Other people managed before you."

"Do you mean Papa?"

"Who else?"

Joschi started laughing. It was the best lecture he'd ever had.

Joschi stood in the middle of the crowd cheering the Führer, Adolf Hitler, as he made his way to Heldenplatz in glorious sunshine. There were men in the bare trees, children were waving flags with swastikas, and all of Vienna had turned up in their Sunday best for the occasion, except for the Jews. The

goy who lived in their block of flats had been wearing a swastika armband ever since Chancellor Schuschnigg resigned, and had stopped saying hello to the Safiers if they met on the stairs.

All the Jews Joschi knew were hiding in their flats, but he had been determined to see Hitler for himself. Hedy said he was mad, but she was suffering from morning sickness, and felt too ill to stop the father of her unborn child. Joschi still hadn't proposed. For a while he had hoped that Hedy's father would be willing to support them until he finished university, but the proud man had put an end to that idea. Hedy's mother did say she would work on her 'Benjamin' and get him to change his mind, but that had been weeks ago.

Rosl said it was obvious. Hedy's old man didn't want to be reminded that he was every bit as Jewish as they were as far as the Austrians were concerned. The prospect of a half Polish grandchild, after his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents had worked so hard to climb up the social ladder to the very top of Austrian society, must feel like a slap in the face.

Joschi couldn't care less about Hedy's father's motives. The man was blocking the solution to the problems that were gradually suffocating him. During the day, Joschi usually managed to persuade himself that he would cope somehow. But sometimes during the sleepless nights, he was so scared he found himself wishing that Hedy would lose the child. The pressure would be gone, and he would be able to breathe freely again at last. His thoughts filled him with shame. And he hated himself because he couldn't stop them from coming in his darkest moments.

Joschi didn't catch a glimpse of Hitler when his open top limousine drove past. He was too far away at the back of the crowd. And he couldn't hear the troops marching by, or see their flags and standards. The men surrounding him shouted more loudly than at a football match, and the women were almost hysterical. He had seen them like that before, on the opening night of the film *Königsvalzer* when Willi Forst blew hand kisses to the crowd from the red carpet. But this time the women seemed threatening. As if they would happily tear Joschi apart if someone told them to. The oddest thing was, a part of him wanted to cheer too. Carried along by the crowd. How marvellous it would be to be a part of this. To be able to join the Austrian people and shout out in sheer joy because of the Anschluss of Austria. Never had Joschi longed to be a part of something like this, this much.

And never had he felt so isolated in his Vienna.

Joschi and Hedy were sitting having a cigarette on the steps outside her flat. Although it was a warm spring day it was raining. Not that it made any difference. Even if the sun had been shining brightly, they would have been shivering inside. The Nazis had humiliated Hedy and her parents. Together with other wealthy Jews they had been forced to clean the cobblestones in a neighbouring street with toothbrushes, while their neighbours, the butcher, the baker's wife and even some of Hedy's father's patients, had jeered

and hurled insults at them. He had even saved one of their lives after a heart attack. And now the man was spitting at him.

Joschi's family hadn't fared as badly since the Anschluss. And no one had smeared anti-Jewish slogans on the sports shop windows yet. Maybe the Nazis had run out of paint, Rosl joked. Even the goy in their house who was so proud of his swastika armband hadn't insulted them or beaten anyone up. Which was saying something, as Austrians could attack Jews without fear of punishment these days. Mama Scheindel and Papa Israel kept their heads down when they met their neighbour on the stairs, and Joschi did too. Not because he was scared, but because after what had happened to Hedy and her parents, he wanted to hit someone.

"My parents are taking me to Paris," Hedy said between two puffs of her cigarette. Until this moment they had hardly spoken a word.

"You managed to get visas?"

"They cost us mother's best rings."

"Can you get any more?"

"Papa says we are going to need all our jewellery to survive in Paris."

"Did you ask?"

"I suppose Mother and I could persuade him to let you come with us."

"Do it then."

"Would you really leave your parents behind?"

Joschi had no idea what was worse, leaving his family behind in Vienna, or his intended and their child in Paris. He took a long drag on his cigarette. Concentrating on the smoke as it filled his lungs, hoping to find the right answer.

"There is another way," Hedy said quietly.

"What other way?"

Hedy didn't answer.

"Go on, tell me."

She held her face into the fine rain; was she going to break up with him? Surely not. Didn't she love him anymore? Had she ever loved him? Rosl thought Hedy had fallen for him to provoke her father.

What did Rosl know?

Was he in love with Hedy?

Joschi searched his feelings.

Yes, he loved her. The pregnancy and the Nazis had smothered his feelings, but they were still there. Should he convince her to stay in Vienna? With him? Here? Without having anything to offer her? Without being able to protect her. Was that what she was thinking? No one could do that to the woman they loved.

He leant forward to kiss her on the cheek when she said, "I'll get rid of the child."

Joschi walked down Taborstraße in a daze, past the theatres where Jews were now forbidden to perform. Which cabarets and theatres could you still go to for a good night out? Was Hans Moser supposed to perform monologues now? Joschi wondered how the actor was fairing. Didn't he have a Jewish wife? Heinz Rühmann, a German film star, left his wife because she was Jewish. Joschi hoped Moser wasn't a coward like that.

But he was just as bad, he felt. He hadn't begged Hedy to keep the child. He had only offered to go with her to the friend of her father who would perform the abortion. A right cavalier.

She'd said no.

They just sat in silence. Soon it was time for Joschi to go before it got dark, and was too dangerous for Jews to be outside. They didn't even say goodbye the way they usually did. No kisses. They hugged each other, but that was all. Like two companions of misfortune who had to go separate ways. They agreed to meet one last time at the end of the week, before Hedy left for Paris.

He wanted to give her something to say goodbye.

Goodbye.

To Hedy who didn't love him, and the child they both didn't love.

Joschi stood still. This time it wasn't his stomach churning like when he discovered that Hedy was pregnant. Or a lump in his throat. His heart was aching.

They were denying a soul a life.

It was Hedy's decision, but he hadn't tried to stop her. Like a real toad, he had almost felt relieved for a moment.

Henoch.

Suddenly, a name for the unborn child, he was beginning to imagine, flashed through his mind. Mama Scheindel, who would now never know about the baby, would have been delighted.

If he ever had a son, he would call him Henoch.

And he'd call a daughter Rosl.

At the weekend, he went to say goodbye to Hedy as agreed. He had bought the very best lighter in all Leopoldstadt for her. Or at least, the best one he could afford.

Joschi rang the doorbell but no one answered the door. He rang again. And again. He decided to wait. After half an hour a neighbour appeared and told him to get off the steps and make sure he took his three cigarette butts with him. He wished he knew if the man was one of the pigs who had jeered and heckled when Hedy was on her knees cleaning the street. Instead, he asked if he had seen the family. The neighbour told him that they had left two days ago with all their goods and chattels.

Hedy must have told him the wrong day on purpose. Were there more lies? About the abortion? Surely not. He was surprised to find that a part of him hoped the child was still alive.

Three weeks later, he received a postcard from Paris. Just two lines. Hedy was well; the procedure was a success. All best wishes. Get to safety.

He put the postcard into the drawer of his bedside table and never looked at it again.

How?

How to get to safety?

It was Rosl who convinced them all to apply to leave the country. To go to Panama, although she had always wanted to go to Palestine. But there was no chance of the Brits taking in Jews in their Mandate if they could avoid it. Would the Germans grant applications for them to travel to this new promised land? Possibly. They were so keen to be rid of all the 'parasites'. It would be fantastic if the Panamanians could take them off their hands. Or was it Panamarians or Panamers? Rosl was sure that the people of Panama were called Panamese, like the Chinese. None of them knew a thing about Panama apart from the fact that it might be a route to safety.

Joschi didn't want to go to Panama any more than he wanted to go to Palestine. Or anywhere else for that matter. Maybe the Nazis would leave them alone. Like the goy in their block of flats.

And maybe Hitler would start dancing the Charleston at the next party conference.

If he did make it to Panama, he was going to have to start a new life. Whatever that might look like. It would be a good idea to have something to show for his old life if possible. His school leaving certificate for one thing, and proof that he had been studying in Vienna. He had written confirmation that he had enrolled at the university and started his studies. It would be even better to have as many documents as possible, showing which exams he had passed to date. So far, he had sat 'Mathematics 1' and 'Mathematics 2', and had passed by the skin of his teeth. Well, he could change that! The university was still open to Jews, so Joschi started revising, day and night, for his next three exams. To his surprise did very well in 'Structural Engineering I' and 'Descriptive Geometry'. The third one was 'Building Materials Science'. Feeling confident that he had done plenty of revision, Joschi walked to the university to sit the exam. As he approached the central building, he heard jeers and hoots of laughter. The student fraternities must be harrying the Jews again. To get to the examination hall, he would have to take a different route.

When Joschi reached the university square, he saw where the jeering students were gathered. All the noise was coming from an open window on the second floor. That was a good sign; he would be able to avoid bumping into them. The examination hall was in a different wing of the building.

Joschi was nearly at the entrance when he heard the fraternity students chanting, "And one! And two! And three! You Jewish pig!"

He looked up just in time to see someone being thrown out of the open window. It was Samuel, a senior Jewish student. Joschi had hardly ever spoken to him. He screamed until he hit the cobbled street below.

Joschi turned away at first, and then forced himself to look: Samuel lay in the road with a bleeding head. His legs were stretched out from his body at an odd angle. He was still breathing. For how much longer? Joschi wanted to help. But then he heard the chant again. “And one! And two! And three! You Jewish pig!” Another student flew out of the window – Joschi had never seen him before.

The young man didn’t make a sound. He was paralysed with fear. This time Joschi didn’t watch him hit the ground. He heard his rattling breath though.

There was no way Joschi could help his fellow students without attracting attention. The fraternity students were leaning out of the window jeering and howling. One of them was his friend Otto.

“And one! And two...!”

Joschi turned on his heel and started to run...

“... and three! ...”

Then he thought better of it. Running would give him away. He changed his pace to a fast walk.

“...you Jewish pig!”

He heard the scream.

He heard the impact.

He heard the jeers.

He was almost sure he could hear Otto laughing.

Joschi didn’t turn around.

He walked away.

And never went back to the university again.

1939 – 1945

The summer before the war, while the Safiers in Vienna only left their flat if they had to, three-year-old Waltraut and her family were able to go to the Wallersee lake every weekend. On this hot August day, Papa Hinrich was lying in the direct sun, and his skin was turning dangerously red. This was his favourite way of relaxing after the hard shifts at 'Use Akschen', as he and his workmates called the Deschimag shipyards, where they cut wood for all the new submarines being fitted. Every now and then, Hinrich sat up and opened another bottle of beer with his teeth. Waltraut and her big brother Klaus, who was five years older than she was, thought this was funny.

Friedrich joined in the laughter. He was the same age as Waltraut, but seemed more delicate. He was visiting them in Bremen with Auntie Brigitte. Auntie Brigitte wasn't a real aunt, she was a cousin of Henriette, Waltraut's mother.

Auntie Brigitte wore a blue swimsuit and lovely sunglasses, while Waltraut's pale mama was dressed in a floppy hat and a long-sleeved dress. She didn't like sitting in the glaring sunlight, and always encouraged the family to find a nice place in the shade. She could never get her way though. Heinrich did as he pleased and would often tease her for being so pale, even calling her Nosferatu in front of the children once, because of her fear of the sun. Of course, Waltraut then asked, "Who's Nossferratoooo?" but Henriette wouldn't let her husband tell the children about vampires. They would only have nightmares.

Over a cup of home-brewed coffee, Auntie Brigitte gushed about how life in their hometown Essen was improving day by day, now that the National Socialists had taken over the wheel, and her husband, Schorsch, had managed to find work at the Stern brewery. He got all the perks, including a discount for a crate of beer.

"Tell him to bring a crate or two, next time he comes," Hinrich laughed.

He got up and called to the children, "Come on, we're going swimming."

"Yippie!" Klaus shouted. He loved doing anything with his father because it was so rare.

Little Waltraut was not so keen. She hated it when Papa threw the children up into the air or into the water. Klaus could swim, but if Papa didn't pull her out of the water she would drown.

"Fredrich is staying right here by the towels," Auntie Brigitte announced. "Our little man is still too weak after that bout of pneumonia."

"He's always catching something or other," Papa said without much sympathy.

"Hinrich!" Mama scolded. But Papa didn't react, and called to his children, "Last one in is a Friedrich!"

Papa started running and Klaus chased after him. Little Waltraut stayed sitting on her towel and watched Friedrich. Although he didn't seem to notice that Papa was being mean to him, she still wanted to pat his hand and cheer him up. She sucked her finger instead. She was the only child in Bremen-Walle who sucked her finger instead of her thumb.

Half an hour later, Mama Henriette called in her thin voice, “It’s time for sandwiches.“ Hinrich and Klaus didn’t hear. Papa was getting ready to throw his son as far as possible across the water. Auntie Brigitte stood up and yelled as loud as she could: “Hinrich! Klaus! Saaandwiches!”

Sitting beside her, small Friedrich put his hands over his ears. Mama Henriette passed him a meat paste sandwich. Sitting on a towel beside him, Waltraut thought it smelled awful. No wonder, the picnic basket had been standing in the sun all morning, just covered with a white tea towel.

“Last one back to the towels is a Friedrich!” Hinrich shouted.

Waltraut thought he was being very cruel. She watched Friedrich lick the edges of his sandwich instead of taking a bite. He obviously didn’t like it, but didn’t dare say so.

Waltraut kept sucking her finger.

Hinrich and Klaus raced out of the water. Of course, Papa didn’t wait for his son who was tired from all the swimming. He had to work hard to keep up. How else was he ever going to grow up to be a real man?

Klaus did his best, but the gap between them was soon too big to catch up. This made him feel angry. He so wanted to be like Papa. Tears shot into his eyes. He stopped running and dragged his feet through the sand. Hinrich shouted, “Don’t give up little man!”

Klaus started running again. Maybe he could catch up after all. But Hinrich ran even faster, and threw himself down onto the towel, laughing. Klaus arrived last, feeling ashamed and fighting back the tears. When he got there, Friedrich asked with a full mouth, “Do you want to play ball with me later?”

Before he could say anything else, Klaus furiously kicked Friedrich’s ball, and sent it flying away through the air. Friedrich started to cry in shock.

Waltraut stopped sucking her finger, stood up, grabbed a sandwich, and hurled it at her big brother’s head.

Hinrich laughed when the sandwich fell apart and the half full of meat paste ended up sticking to Klaus’s forehead, while the other half slipped down his nose and landed on the floor. Even Brigitte had to hide a grin. Only Mama Henriette was cross: “Waltraut!” she shouted. Unlike Hinrich, she’d never shortened her daughter’s name to Traudel, and always called her Waltraut. No matter whether she was being kind or cross, like now. She had picked the name because she thought it stood for a strong and brave woman: one who dares go into the woods. And in a way she was right. The name came from ‘waltan’ and ‘trud’, two old high German words, meaning strong and female leader, so it did stand for a strong brave woman, although she could not have known that. She only went to school for six years before she had to start work at her parents’ bakery. She wanted Waltraut to be strong. She had to be. Not like Karla, who died in 1933, when she was just five months old, because of something the doctors called ‘spinal meningitis’.

Klaus’s face went bright red. He wiped off the leftovers of the sandwich and smacked Waltraut in the face.

Waltraut had never been slapped before.

Her eyes filled with tears, but she was determined not to cry. Whatever happened. Not in front of everyone. Not in front of Klaus, and not in front of Friedrich, who had stopped crying in all the mayhem. Waltraut shut her eyes to hold back the tears.

“Your littlun is definitely not a cry baby,” Auntie Brigitte said to her mama.

“She’s a lion” Papa Hinrich laughed.

Lion – Waltraut liked the sound of that.

And she liked the fact that her father sounded proud of her too.

* * *

None of the Safiers went to Panama. Their applications to leave the country were all turned down. Then suddenly Rosl received the opportunity to go to Palestine, because she was a member of the Betar Movement. Dr Perl, a lawyer and long-term member of the Zionist organisation, had by some miracle managed to secure 386 visas for young Jews to travel to Greece. The journey would take them to an island off Athens, and then on to the promised land on a ship called *Artemissa*. The young people would have to swim the final leg of their journey, and get into the country illegally. Not everyone was up to it.

Rosl was jubilant when she found out. She didn’t seem to mind going without her husband, or feel ashamed that she was leaving her parents, the way Joschi would have been. Mama and Papa were happy she was getting an opportunity to escape. When she came to Rotensterngasse 23 to say goodbye, they hugged each other and cried. Then Paul drove her to Vienna central station with Joschi sitting in the back.

Young Jews were flocking towards the station from all directions. Each of them had one rucksack. That was all they could carry. Their parents had packed those rucksacks full of all sorts of useful, and not so useful, things, until they were practically bursting. Mama Scheindel had baked a semi-delicious cake for Rosl to share with her travel companions. Rosl climbed out of the car and kissed Paul, as they promised each other that they would meet again. She hugged Joschi, and promised that they would meet again, too.

He didn’t believe her.

An elated Rosl headed off into the station with hundreds of other Betar members. Joschi decided to follow and see her off. That wasn’t allowed, of course. The Nazis had insisted the whole operation had to be kept secret, but if there was one person predestined to get in without permission it must be him, Joschi decided.

He saw a policeman stop a photographer and take away his camera. And took the opportunity to nip past without being seen.

Inside the station, the Betar members' train was ready and waiting to depart. The excited young people got in and found places to sit. Joschi hid on another platform behind a painted billboard showing a blonde

woman with a white fur coat in her hand, promoting 'Global' for killing moths and moths' eggs. He had a great view from there and could watch what was going on.

SS men stepped onto the platform and climbed up onto a podium which had been built especially for this purpose. Joschi gasped when he saw their leader. It was none other than Adolf Eichmann, the man responsible for the fate of every Jew in Vienna.

Suddenly someone shouted, "Amdu Dom!" in Hebrew – attention. And then "Tzeh hachutza!" – Come out!

The young Jews climbed back out of the carriages.

"Amdu be'arba Schurot!"

And lined up in rows of four. Like soldiers. They all had all been trained. To fight for Israel. The Germans couldn't believe their eyes. Their world view didn't include Jews with military skills.

Joschi tried to catch a glimpse of Rosl in the crowd. And finally spotted her. She was standing in a row right at the back. Who knows, perhaps she would command a whole division one day, Joschi thought. He wouldn't be surprised.

Dr Perl, who had christened his rescue operation 'Operation Action' even gave a speech, although Eichmann and his men were standing directly behind him on the podium. "You are leaving, but at the same time you will be coming home. You are leaving the country where you are a minority, sometimes well treated, sometimes not, but always a minority. You are going home to the country that has been promised to you by God. You will be proud people in a proud land. And one day soon you will create a Jewish state. When you leave this station, you will leave a country and people behind, who don't want you, and are on your way to join brothers and sisters who long to have you. Happy home coming! Happy Alija!"

Alija – Joschi knew the word meant return and arise. Rising, in this case, into a different world.

For the first time, Joschi wished he could go to Palestine too.

For a moment everything went quiet. It had never been so quiet in any station before.

Then a girl started singing 'Hatikvah' in a crystal clear voice – 'The Hope'. Within seconds, everyone joined in, belting out the song which reverberated back from the station roof. The Nazis, including Eichmann, looked shocked.

Joschi sang along quietly.

When the singing was over, the young people climbed back into the carriages. Eichmann mopped his brow with a handkerchief and left with his men before the train started moving. It almost looked as if they were running away. Dr Perl departed once the train left the station. Joschi was left standing by himself, and he continued to watch his sister leave, staring after train until it was long gone.

Hatikvah. Joschi felt a shimmer of hope.

* * *

On a dull, windy autumn day, Waltraut was outside, scribbling on the pavement with a stick of chalk, together with Hilde, from down the road, who could already draw lovely pictures of the sun.

A truck rushed past their small house. A group of men were standing on the back. They all looked like twins, as far as Waltraut could tell. All wearing the same boots, trousers, shirts and hats. The only colourful thing about them were their red and white armbands. The truck stopped a bit further down the road on the other side. Waltraut and Hilde stopped drawing to see what was going to happen next. The men jumped down from the back of the truck, and the driver and two more men climbed out of the cabin. They ran over to Mr and Mrs Lange's house.

Small Mrs Lange was a kind lady, who often gave Waltraut, Hilde, Klaus and the other children sweets. She never told them off like old Mr Schuster. She even gave Waltraut a *Babbelerstange* once – a local speciality also known as the longest cough sweet in the world! It took Waltraut so long to eat that she actually forgot to suck her finger for an hour or so! Papa was cross about her sucking her finger, now that she was four, and had told their mother to make her stop, or else he would take matters into his own hands.

The men crowded around the front porch, and two of them started banging on the door. No one answered. They banged more loudly and shouted, "Open up!". Still no one answered. One of the men started kicking the door. Once. Twice. Three times. Then someone opened it from inside. Mrs Lange looked even smaller than usual, standing in the doorway. And she looked afraid. So did Mr Lange. He stood on the doorstep beside his wife looking awfully pale.

Waltraut started to suck her finger.

"Where is he?" several men yelled at Mr and Mrs Lange.

They started shaking.

Suddenly, one of the men struck Mrs Lange. She nearly fell, but Mr Lange managed to hold her steady.

Hilde got up and ran home. But Waltraut stayed sitting where she was, watching what was going on. She was a lion after all.

Mr Lange pointed into the house quietly, and said something that Waltraut couldn't understand. Some of the men stormed into the house, while others dragged the Langes to the truck and ordered them to get in.

Waltraut could see people in the other houses, standing behind their windows watching. Then she heard a scream coming from the Lange's house. And behind her, the door opened and Mama came rushing out.

The men dragged a bleeding man outside. His clothes and face were nearly black. Was that a chimney sweep who could bring you luck if you touched him, like the one who had painted a black mark on Waltraut's nose once?

"The damn Jew was hiding in the chimney," one of the men shouted, while the others started beating him with their clubs.

From behind her, Mama put a hand over Waltraut's eyes, picked her up and carried her into the house. Waltraut heard the man's screams until they faded away, and there was just the sound of the beating clubs. Mama closed the door behind them and carried her up the narrow stairs into the little room under the eaves where Klaus and she slept. A framed picture of Waltraut's sister, Karla, who died when she was a baby, stood on a chest of drawers.

"Are the men ... " Waltraut stuttered. She was so scared she could hardly speak, "... are they coming here next?"

"No, no, no. I promise." Mama said. She set Waltraut down on her bed and gave her her little grey teddy. She liked to chew its ears when Papa wouldn't let her suck her finger.

"What did they want from the man?" Waltraut asked with the teddy's ear in her mouth.

Mama didn't answer at first, she seemed to be thinking. Then she said, "I'll tell you a secret."

"What they did to the man?" Waltraut kept on munching her teddy's ear.

"No, a different secret."

"What?"

Waltraut stopped chewing her teddy.

"You and I are real nobility."

"What does 'nobility' mean?"

"You know about kings and queens and princes and princesses?"

"Yes."

"Well, nobility is the next best thing."

"I'm a princess?" Waltraut asked, looking amazed.

"Almost. A countess."

Waltraut smiled, but looked confused.

"Countesses live in castles, too."

"I don't live in a castle." Waltraut said. There were lovely pictures of castles and palaces and princesses in her book of fairy tales. Mama loved reading those stories to her.

"It's my fault we don't live in a castle."

"Why?"

"My papa is a count. He lives in a big castle near Essen ..."

"Where Friedrich lives?" Waltraut asked.

"That's right."

"Does Friedrich live in a castle?"

"No, he doesn't, but my papa does."

“So why don’t you?”

"My papa disowned me."

“He what?”

“Disowned me. That means he doesn’t want to see me again, and he won’t let me go to his castle.”

“Why?”

“Because I fell in love with a man who wasn’t nobility.”

“Papa?”

“Papa.” Mama smiled. “I had to choose between living in a castle and true love. Well, I followed my heart.”

“Do you miss the castle?”

“Not one bit – I’ve got all of you instead,” she said, giving Waltraut a hug.

“Can we go there one day?”

“I told you, I’ve been disowned. My papa won’t let me in.”

“Would he let me in?”

“No, he wouldn’t let you in either.”

Waltraut looked disappointed. But before she could start chewing Teddy’s ear again, Mama said, “I want you to know how special you are.”

“Because I’m a lion ...?” Waltraut asked.

“Yes,” Mama laughed. “And nobility! You are better than the rest. And you are strong.” She glanced at the picture of baby Karla.

“I am strong,” Waltraut agreed.

“Because of the noble blood in your veins.”

“I am a lion princess,” Waltraut said. And Mama laughed again. “Countess”.

“A lion countess,” Waltraut said.

“You have to promise me one thing.”

“What?”

“This is just between the two of us.” Papa must never know that I gave up my noble title and my old life for him. And Klaus must never know either, because he would tell Papa right away.

“I won’t say a word.”

“Cross your heart and hope to die?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die!” Waltraut promised with all her might.