Contents

Preface xiii
Foreword by Kurt Kleinmann xv
Prologue 1

PART I
Vienna

1 'When Jewish Blood Drips from the Knife . . .' 5
2 Traitors to the People 28

PART II
Buchenwald

3 Blood and Stone: Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 45
4 The Stone Crusher 63
5 The Road to Life 73
6 A Favourable Decision 88
7 The New World 104
8 Unworthy of Life 117
9 A Thousand Kisses 134
10 A Journey to Death 155

PART III
Auschwitz

11 A Town Called Oświęcim 167

12 Auschwitz-Monowitz 186
13 The End of Gustav Kleinmann, Jew 194
14 Resistance and Collaboration: The Death of Fritz Kleinmann 206
15 The Kindness of Strangers 227
16 Far from Home 243
17 Resistance and Betrayal 258

PART IV

Survival

18 Death Train 279
19 Mauthausen 293
20 The End of Days 308
21 The Long Way Home 324

Epilogue: Jewish Blood 332
Bibliography and Sources 341
Acknowledgements 351
Notes 355
Index 404

Preface

This is a true story. Every person in it, every event, twist and incredible coincidence, is taken from historical sources. One wishes that it were not true, that it had never occurred, so terrible and painful are some of its events. But it all happened, within the memory of the still living.

There are many Holocaust stories, but not like this one. The tale of Gustav and Fritz Kleinmann, father and son, contains elements of all the others but is quite unlike any of them. Very few Jews experienced the Nazi concentration camps from the first mass arrests in the late 1930s through to the Final Solution and eventual liberation. None, to my knowledge, went through the whole inferno together, father and son, from beginning to end, from living under Nazi occupation, to Buchenwald, to Auschwitz and the prisoner resistance against the SS, to the death marches, and then on to Mauthausen, Mittelbau-Dora, Bergen-Belsen – and made it home again alive. Certainly none who left a written record. Luck and courage played a part, but what ultimately kept Gustav and Fritz living was their love and devotion to each other. 'The boy is my greatest joy,' Gustav wrote in his secret diary in Buchenwald. 'We strengthen each other. We are one, inseparable.' This tie had its ultimate test a year later, when Gustav was transported to Auschwitz – a near-certain death sentence – and Fritz chose to cast aside his own safety in order to accompany him.

I have brought the story to life with all my heart. It reads like a novel. I am a storyteller as much as historian, and yet I haven't needed to invent or embellish anything; even the fragments of dialogue are quoted or reconstructed from primary sources. The

bedrock is the concentration camp diary written by Gustav Kleinmann between October 1939 and July 1945, supplemented by a memoir and interviews given by Fritz in 1997. None of these sources makes easy reading, either emotionally or literally – the diary, written under extreme circumstances, is sketchy, often making cryptic allusions to things beyond the knowledge of the general reader (even Holocaust historians would have to consult their reference works to interpret some passages). Gustav's motive in writing it was not to make a record but to help preserve his own sanity; its references were comprehensible to him at the time. Once unlocked, it provides a rich and harrowing insight into living the Holocaust week by week, month by month, and year after year. Strikingly, it reveals Gustav's unbeatable strength and spirit of optimism: '. . . every day I say a prayer to myself,' he wrote in the sixth year of his incarceration: '*Do not despair. Grit your teeth – the SS murderers must not beat you*.'

Interviews with surviving members of the family have provided additional personal detail. The whole – from Vienna life in the 1930s to the functioning of the camps and the personalities involved – has been backed up by extensive documentary research, including survivor testimony, camp records and other official documents, which have verified the story at every step of the way, even the most extraordinary and incredible.

Jeremy Dronfield, June 2018

Foreword by Kurt Kleinmann

More than seventy years have already passed since the dreadful days described in this book. My family's story of survival, loss of life and rescue encompasses all those connected to that period who experienced incarceration, lost family members, or who were lucky enough to escape the Nazi regime. It is representative of all who suffered through those days and therefore needs to be never forgotten.

My father's and brother's experiences through six years in five different concentration camps are living testimony to the realities of the Holocaust. Their spirit of survival, the bond between father and son, their courage, as well as their luck, are beyond the comprehension of anyone now living, yet kept them alive throughout the entire ordeal.

My mother sensed the danger we were in as soon as Hitler annexed Austria. She helped and encouraged my eldest sister to escape to England in 1939. I lived under Nazi rule in Vienna for three years until my mother secured my passage to the United States in February 1941. That not only saved my life, but also brought me to the home of a loving family who treated me as if I were their own. My second sister was not so fortunate. Both she and my mother were eventually arrested and deported with thousands of other Jews to a death camp near Minsk. I have known for decades that they were killed there, and have even visited the remote location where it took place, but was deeply moved, devastated in fact, to read in this book for the first time exactly how this event happened.

That my father and brother both survived their ordeal is miraculously detailed in this book. I was reunited with them

when, drafted into military service in 1953, I returned to Vienna fifteen years after leaving. Over the subsequent years my wife Diane visited Vienna many times with me and our sons, who met their grandfather and uncle. There was a close family relationship that survived separation and the Holocaust and has lasted ever since. Although I did not have trauma or animosity towards Vienna or Austria, that does not mean that I can totally forgive or forget Austria's past history. In 1966, my father and stepmother visited me and my sister in the United States. Besides us showing them the wonders of our new country, it also provided them with the opportunity to meet my foster family in Massachusetts. That thankful and joyous union brought together those dear to me who were responsible for my existence and my survival.

The Boy Who Followed His Father into Auschwitz is a sensitive, vivid yet moving and well-researched story of my family. It is almost difficult for me to describe my gratitude to Jeremy Dronfield for putting it together and writing this book. It is beautifully written, interspersing the memories of myself and my sister with the story of my father and brother in the concentration camps. I am grateful and appreciative that my family's Holocaust story has been brought to the public's attention and will not be forgotten.

Kurt Kleinmann
August 2018

Prologue

Austria, January 1945

Fritz Kleinmann shifted with the motion of the train, shuddering convulsively in the sub-zero gale roaring over the sidewalls of the open freight wagon. Huddled beside him, his father dozed, exhausted. Around them sat dim figures, moonlight picking out the pale stripes of their uniforms and the bones in their faces. It was time for Fritz to make his escape; soon it would be too late.

Eight days had passed since they'd left Auschwitz on this journey. They had walked the first sixty kilometres, the SS driving the thousands of prisoners westward through the snow, away from the advancing Red Army. Intermittent gunshots were heard from the rear of the column as those who couldn't keep up were murdered. Nobody looked back.

Then they'd been put on trains bound for camps deeper inside the Reich. Fritz and his father managed to stay together, as they had always done. Their transport was for Mauthausen in Austria, where the SS would carry on the task of draining the last dregs of labour from the prisoners before finally exterminating them. One hundred and forty men crammed into each open-topped wagon – at first they'd had to stand, but as the days passed and the cold killed them off, it gradually became possible to sit down. The corpses were stacked at one end of the wagon and their clothing taken to warm the living.

They might be on the brink of death, but these prisoners were the lucky ones, the useful workers – most of their brothers and sisters, wives, mothers and children had been murdered or were being force-marched westward and dying in droves.

Fritz had been a boy when the nightmare began seven years ago; he'd grown to manhood in the Nazi camps, learning, maturing, resisting the pressure to give up hope. He had foreseen this day and prepared for it. Beneath their camp uniforms he and his papa wore civilian clothing, which Fritz had obtained through his friends in the Auschwitz resistance.

The train had passed through Vienna, the city that had once been their home, then turned west, and now they were only fifteen kilometres from their destination. They were back in their homeland, and once they broke free they could pass for local workmen.

Fritz had been delaying the moment, worried about his father. Gustav was fifty-three years old and exhausted – it was a miracle he had survived this far. Now that it came to it, he could not make the escape attempt. The strength wasn't in him any more. Yet he couldn't deny his son the chance to live. It would be a wrenching pain to part after so many years of helping one another to survive, but he urged Fritz to go alone. Fritz begged him to come, but it was no good: 'God protect you,' his father said. 'I can't go, I'm too weak.'

If Fritz didn't make the attempt soon, it would be too late. He stood up and changed out of the hated uniform; then he embraced his papa, kissed him, and with his help climbed the slippery sidewall of the wagon.

The full blast of the wind at minus twenty degrees hit him hard. He peered anxiously towards the brake houses on the adjacent wagons, occupied by armed SS guards. The moon was bright – two days from the full, rising high and laying a ghostly glow across the snowy landscape, against which any moving shape would be starkly visible.[1] The train was thundering along at its maximum speed. Screwing up his courage and hoping for the best, Fritz launched himself into the night and the rushing, freezing air.

PART I

Vienna

Seven years earlier . . .

1. 'When Jewish Blood Drips from the Knife . . .'

אבא

Gustav Kleinmann's lean fingers pushed the fabric under the foot of the sewing machine; the needle chattered, machine-gunning the thread into the material in a long, immaculate curve. Next to his worktable stood the armchair it was intended for, a skeleton of beechwood with taut webbing sinews and innards of horsehair. When the panel was stitched, Gustav fitted it over the arm; his little hammer drove in the nails – plain tacks for the interior, studs with round brass heads for the outer edge, tightly spaced like a row of soldiers' helmets; in they went with a *tap-tapatap*.

It was good to work. There wasn't always enough to go around, and life could be precarious for a middle-aged man with a wife and four children. Gustav was a gifted craftsman but not an astute businessman, although he always muddled through. Born in a tiny village by a lake in the historic kingdom of Galicia,* a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he'd come to Vienna aged fifteen to train as an upholsterer, and then settled here. Called to military service in the spring of the year he turned twenty-one, he'd served in the Great War, been wounded twice and decorated for bravery, and at the war's end he'd returned to Vienna to resume his humble trade, working his way up to master craftsman. He had married his girl, Tini, during the war, and together they had raised four fine, happy

* Now part of southern Poland and western Ukraine.

children. And there was Gustav's life: modest, hard-working; and if not entirely content, he was at least inclined to be cheerful.

The droning of aeroplanes interrupted Gustav's thoughts; it grew and receded as if they were circling over the city. Curious, he laid down his tools and stepped out into the street.

Im Werd was a busy thoroughfare, noisy with the clop and clatter of horse-drawn carts and the grumbling of lorries, the air thick with the smells of humanity, fumes and horse-dung. For a confusing moment it appeared to Gustav to be snowing – in March! – but it was a blizzard of paper fluttering from the sky, settling on the cobbles and the market stalls of the Karmelitermarkt. He picked one up.

PEOPLE OF AUSTRIA!

> For the first time in the history of our Fatherland, the leadership of the state requires an open commitment to our Homeland . . .[1]

Propaganda for this Sunday's vote. The whole country was talking about it, and the whole world was watching. For every man, woman and child in Austria it was a big deal, but for Gustav, as a Jew, it was of the utmost importance – a national vote to settle whether Austria should remain independent from German tyranny.

For five years, Nazi Germany had been looking hungrily across the border at its Austrian neighbour. Adolf Hitler, an Austrian by birth, was obsessed with the idea of bringing his homeland into the German Reich. Although Austria had its own home-grown Nazis eager for unification, most Austrians were opposed to it. Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg was under pressure to give members of the Nazi Party positions in his government, Hitler threatening dire consequences if he didn't comply – Schuschnigg would be forced out of office and replaced with a Nazi puppet; unification would follow, and

Austria would be swallowed by Germany. The country's 183,000 Jews regarded this prospect with dread.[2]

The world watched keenly for the outcome. In a desperate last throw of the dice, Schuschnigg had announced a plebiscite – a referendum – in which the people of Austria would decide for themselves whether they wanted to keep their independence. It was a courageous move; Schuschnigg's predecessor had been assassinated during a failed Nazi coup, and right now Hitler was ready to do just about anything to prevent the vote going ahead. The date had been set for Sunday 13 March 1938.

Nationalist slogans ('Yes for Independence!') were pasted and painted on every wall and pavement. And today, with two days to go until the vote, planes were showering Vienna with Schuschnigg's propaganda. Gustav looked again at the leaflet.

> . . . For a free and Germanic, independent and social, Christian and united Austria! For peace and work and equal rights for all who profess allegiance to the people and the Fatherland.
>
> . . . The world shall see our will to live; therefore, people of Austria, stand up as one man and vote YES![3]

These stirring words held mixed meanings for the Jews. They had their own ideas of Germanism – Gustav, immensely proud of his service to his country in the Great War, considered himself an Austrian first and a Jew second.[4] Yet he was excluded from Schuschnigg's Germanic Christian ideal. He also had reservations about Schuschnigg's Austrofascist government. Gustav had once been an organizer for the Social Democratic Party of Austria. With the rise of the Austrofascists in 1934, the party had been violently suppressed and outlawed (along with the Nazi Party).

But for the Jews of Austria at this moment, anything was preferable to the kind of open persecution going on in

Germany. The Jewish newspaper *Die Stimme* had a banner in today's edition: 'We support Austria! Everyone to the ballot boxes!'[5] The Orthodox paper *Jüdische Presse* made the same call: 'No special request is needed for the Jews of Austria to come out and vote in full strength. They know what this means. Everyone must fulfil his duty!'[6]

Through secret channels, Hitler had threatened Schuschnigg that if he didn't call off the plebiscite, Germany would take action to prevent it. At this very moment, while Gustav stood in the street reading the leaflet, German troops were already massing at the border.

אמא

With a glance in the mirror, Tini Kleinmann patted down her coat, gathered her shopping bag and purse, left the apartment and woke the echoes in the stairwell with her neat little heels *click-clacking* briskly down the flights. She found Gustav standing in the street outside his workshop, which was on the ground floor of the apartment building. He had a leaflet in his hand; the road was littered with them – in the trees, on the rooftops, everywhere. She glanced at it, and shivered; Tini had a feeling of foreboding about it all which Gustav the optimist didn't quite share. He always thought things would work out for the best; it was both his weakness and his strength.

Tini walked briskly across the cobbles to the market. A lot of the stallholders were peasant farmers who came each morning to sell their produce alongside the Viennese traders. Many of the latter were Jews; indeed, more than half the city's businesses were Jewish-owned, especially in this area. Local Nazis capitalized on this fact to stir up anti-Semitism among the workers suffering in the economic depression – as if the Jews were not suffering from it too.

Gustav and Tini weren't particularly religious, going to synagogue perhaps a couple of times a year for anniversaries and memorials, and like most Viennese Jews, their children bore Germanic rather than Hebraic names, yet they followed the Yiddish customs like everyone else. From Herr Zeisel the butcher Tini bought veal, thinly sliced for Wiener schnitzel; she had leftover chicken for the Shabbat* evening soup, and from the farm stalls she bought fresh potatoes and salad; then bread, flour, eggs, butter . . . Tini progressed through the bustling Karmelitermarkt, her bag growing heavier. Where the marketplace met Leopoldsgasse, the main street, she noticed the unemployed cleaning women touting for work; they stood outside the Klabouch boarding house and the coffee shop. The lucky ones would be picked up by well-off ladies from the surrounding streets. Those who brought their own pails of soapy water got the full wage of one schilling.† Tini and Gustav sometimes struggled to pay their bills, but at least she hadn't been reduced to *that*.

The pro-independence slogans were everywhere, painted on the pavements in big, bold letters like road markings: the rallying cry for the plebiscite – 'We say yes!' – and everywhere the Austrian 'crutch cross'.‡ From open windows came the sound of radios turned up high, playing cheerful patriotic music. As Tini watched, there was a burst of cheering and a roar of engines as a convoy of trucks came down the street, filled with uniformed teenagers of the Austrian Youth waving banners in the red-and-white national colours and flinging out more leaflets.[7] Bystanders greeted them with fluttering handkerchiefs, doffed hats and cries of 'Austria! Austria!'

It looked as if independence was winning . . . so long as you

* Sabbath; from just before sundown on Friday to darkness on Saturday evening.

† Equivalent to about two or three pounds in 2019.

‡ A cross with T-bars at the ends of the arms.

took no notice of the sullen faces among the crowds. The Nazi sympathizers. They were exceptionally quiet today – and exceptionally few in number, which was strange.

Suddenly the cheerful music was interrupted and the radios crackled with an urgent announcement – all unmarried army reservists were to report immediately for duty. The purpose, said the announcer, was to ensure order for Sunday's plebiscite, but his tone was ominous. Why would they need extra troops for that?

Tini turned away and walked back through the crowded market, heading for home. No matter what occurred in the world, no matter how near danger might be, life went on, and what could one do but live it?

בן

Across the city the leaflets lay on the waters of the Danube Canal, in the parks and streets. Late that afternoon, when Fritz Kleinmann left the Trade School on Hütteldorfer Strasse on the western edge of Vienna, they were lying in the road and hanging in the trees. Roaring down the street came column after column of lorries filled with soldiers, heading for the German border two hundred kilometres away. Fritz and the other boys watched excitedly, as boys will, as rows of helmeted heads sped past, weapons ready.

At fourteen years old, Fritz already resembled his father – the same handsome cheekbones, the same nose, the same mouth with full lips curving like a gull's wings. But whereas Gustav's countenance was gentle, Fritz's large, dark eyes were penetrating, like his mother's. He'd left high school, and for the past six months had been training to enter his father's trade as an upholsterer.

As Fritz and his friends made their way homeward through the city centre, a new mood was taking hold of the streets. At

three o'clock that afternoon the government's campaigning for the plebiscite had been suspended due to the developing crisis. There was no official news, only rumours: of fighting on the Austrian–German border; of Nazi uprisings in the provincial towns; and, most worrying of all, a rumour that the Viennese police would side with local Nazis if it came to a confrontation. Bands of enthusiastic men had begun roaming the streets – some yelling 'Heil Hitler!' and others replying defiantly 'Heil Schuschnigg!' The Nazis were louder, growing bolder, and most of them were youths, empty of life experience and pumped full of ideology.[8]

This sort of thing had been going on sporadically for days, and there had been occasional violent incidents against Jews;[9] but this was different – when Fritz reached Stephansplatz, right in the very heart of the city, where Vienna's Nazis had their secret headquarters, the space in front of the cathedral was teeming with yelling, baying people; here it was all 'Heil Hitler' and no counter-chant.[10] Policemen stood nearby, watching, talking among themselves, but doing nothing. Also watching from the sidelines, not yet revealing themselves, were the secret members of the Austrian Sturmabteilung – the SA, the Nazi Party's stormtroopers. They had discipline, and they had their orders; their time hadn't yet arrived.

Avoiding the knots of demonstrators, Fritz crossed the Danube Canal into Leopoldstadt, and was soon back in the apartment building, his boots clattering up the stairs to number 16 – home, warmth and family.

משפחה

Little Kurt stood on a stool in the kitchen, watching as his mother prepared the noodle batter for the chicken soup, the traditional Shabbat Friday meal. It was one of the few traditional practices the family maintained; Tini lit no candles, said

no blessing. Kurt was different – only eight years old, he sang in the choir of the city-centre synagogue and was becoming quite devout. He'd made friends with an Orthodox family who lived across the hallway, and it was his role to switch on the lights for them on Shabbat evenings.

He was the baby and the beloved; the Kleinmanns were a close family, but Kurt was Tini's particular darling. He loved to help her cook.

While the soup simmered, he watched, lips parted, as she whipped the egg batter to a froth and fried it into thin pancakes. This was one of his favourite cooking duties. The very best was Wiener schnitzel, for which his mother would gently pound the veal slices with a tenderizer until they were as soft and thin as velvet; she taught him to coat them in the dish of flour, the batter of beaten egg and milk, and finally the breadcrumbs; then she would lay them two by two in the pan of bubbling buttery oil, the rich aroma filling the little apartment as the cutlets puffed and crinkled and turned golden. Tonight, though, it was the smell of fried noodles and chicken.

From the next room – which doubled as bedroom and living room – came the sound of a piano; Kurt's sister Edith, eighteen years old, played well, and had taught Kurt a pleasant little tune called 'Cuckoo', which would remain in his memory forever. His other sister, Herta, aged fifteen, he simply adored; she was closer to him in age than Edith, who was a grown woman. Herta's place in Kurt's heart would always be as an image of beauty and love.

Tini smiled at his earnest concentration as he helped her roll up the cooked egg, slicing it into noodles which she stirred into the soup.

The family sat down to their meal in the warm glow of the Shabbat – Gustav and Tini; Edith and Herta; Fritz and little Kurt. Their home was small – just this room and the bedroom which they all shared (Gustav and Fritz in together, Kurt with

their mother, Edith in her own bed, and Herta on the sofa); yet home it was, and they were happy here.

Outside, a shadow was gathering over their world. That afternoon, a written ultimatum had come from Germany, insisting that the plebiscite be cancelled; that Chancellor Schuschnigg resign; that he be replaced by the right-wing politician Arthur Seyss-Inquart (a secret member of the Nazi Party) with a sympathetic cabinet under him. Hitler's justification was that Schuschnigg's government was repressing the ordinary Germans of Austria ('German' being synonymous with 'Nazi' in Hitler's mind). Finally, the exiled Austrian Legion, a force of thirty thousand Nazis, must be brought back to Vienna to keep order on the streets. The Austrian government had until 7.30 p.m. to comply.[11]

After dinner, Kurt had to hurry off to the Shabbat evening service at the synagogue. He was paid a schilling a time for singing in the choir (substituted by a chocolate bar on Saturday mornings), so it was an economic as well as a religious duty.

As usual, Fritz escorted him; he was an ideal elder brother – friend, playmate and protector. The streets were busy this evening, but the unruly noise had subsided, leaving behind a sense of lurking malevolence. Usually Fritz would accompany Kurt as far as the billiard hall on the other side of the Danube Canal – 'You know your way from here, don't you?' – and head off to play billiards with his friends. But this evening that wouldn't do, and they walked together all the way to the Stadttempel.

Back in the apartment, the radio was playing. The programme was interrupted by an announcement. The plebiscite had been postponed. It was like an ominous tap on the shoulder. Then, a little after half past seven, the music broadcast was halted, and a voice declared: 'Attention! In a few moments you will hear an extremely important announcement.' There came a pause, empty, hissing; it lasted for three full minutes, and then Chancellor Schuschnigg came on. His voice wavered with

emotion: 'Austrian men and Austrian women; this day has placed us in a tragic and decisive situation.' Every person in Austria who was near a radio at that moment listened intently, many with fear, some with excitement, as the chancellor described the German ultimatum. Austria must take its orders from Germany or be destroyed. 'We have yielded to force,' he said, 'since we are not prepared even in this terrible situation to shed Germanic blood. We decided to order the troops to offer no serious . . .' He hesitated '. . . to offer no resistance.' His voice cracking, he gathered himself for the final words. 'So I take my leave of the Austrian people, with a German word of farewell, uttered from the depths of my heart: God protect Austria.'[12]

Gustav, Tini and their daughters sat stunned as the national anthem began to play. In the studio, unseen and unheard by the people, Schuschnigg broke down and sobbed.

בן

The sweet, exalting phrases of the 'Hallelujah', led by the cantor's tenor and fleshed out by the voices of the choir, filled the great oval space of the Stadttempel, embracing the marble pillars and the gilded ornamentation of the tiered balconies in harmonious sound. From his place in the choir on the very top tier behind the ark,* Kurt could look right down on the *bimah*† and the congregation. It was far more crowded than usual, packed to bursting – people driven by uncertainty to seek comfort in their religion. The religious scholar Dr Emil Lehmann, unaware of the latest news, had spoken movingly about Schuschnigg, exalting the plebiscite, closing with the now deposed chancellor's rallying cry: 'We say yes!'[13]

* Ornate cabinet in which the scrolls of the Torah are kept.

† Reading table used by a rabbi, facing the ark.

After the service, Kurt filed down from the balcony, collected his schilling and found Fritz waiting. Outside, the narrow cobbled lane was thronged with the departing congregation. From out here there was little to show the synagogue's presence; it appeared to be part of a row of apartment houses – the main body was behind the façade, squeezed between this street and the next. While Leopoldstadt was nowadays the Jewish quarter of Vienna, this little enclave in the old city centre, where Jews had lived since the Middle Ages, was the cultural heart of Jewish life in Vienna. It was in the buildings and the street names – Judengasse, Judenplatz – and their blood was in the cobblestones and in the crevices of history, in the persecutions and the medieval pogrom that had driven them to live in Leopoldstadt.

By day the narrow Seitenstettengasse was insulated from much of the noise of the city, but now, in the Shabbat evening darkness, Vienna was bursting to life. A short distance away, in the Kärtnerstrasse, a long thoroughfare on the other side of the Nazi enclave in Stephansplatz, a mob was gathering. The brown-shirted stormtroopers of the SA, free now to bring out their concealed weapons and put on their swastika armbands, were on the march. The police marched with them. Lorries rolled along filled with stormtroopers; men and women danced and yelled by the light of flaming torches.

Across the city came the full-throated roar – 'Heil Hitler! *Sieg Heil!* Down with the Jews! Down with the Catholics! One people, one Reich, one Führer, one victory! Down with the Jews!' Raw, fanatical voices rose in song: 'Deutschland über alles' and chanted: 'Today we have all Germany – tomorrow we have the world!'[14] The playwright Carl Zuckmayer wrote that 'The netherworld had opened its portals and spewed out its basest, most horrid, and filthiest spirits . . . What was being unleashed here was the revolt of envy; malevolence; bitterness; blind, vicious vengefulness.'[15] A British journalist who

witnessed it called the procession 'an indescribable witches' sabbath'.[16]

Echoes reached the Seitenstettengasse, where the Jews outside the Stadttempel were dispersing. Fritz shepherded Kurt down the Judengasse and across the bridge. Within minutes they were back in Leopoldstadt.

The Nazis were coming, along with hordes of newfound weathercock friends, flooding in tens of thousands through the city centre towards the Jewish district. The tide poured across the bridges into Leopoldstadt, washing into Taborstrasse, Leopoldsgasse, the Karmelitermarkt and Im Werd – a hundred thousand chanting, roaring men and women, filled with triumph and hate. '*Sieg Heil!* Death to the Jews!' The Kleinmanns sat in their home, listening to the tumult outside, waiting for it to burst in through the door.

But it didn't come. For hours the mobs ruled the streets, all noise and fury, but doing little physical harm; some unlucky Jews were caught outdoors and abused; people who 'looked Jewish' were beaten up; known Schuschnigg loyalists were attacked; a number of homes and businesses were invaded and plundered, but the storm of destruction did not break over Vienna that night. Amazed, some people wondered whether the legendarily genteel nature of the Viennese people might temper the behaviour even of its Nazis.

It was a vain hope. The reason for the restraint was simple: the stormtroopers were in charge, and they were disciplined, intending to strip and destroy their prey methodically, not by riot. Together with the police (now wearing swastika armbands), the SA took over public buildings. Prominent members of the governing party were seized or fled. Schuschnigg himself was arrested. But this was just a prelude.

By next morning, the first columns of German troops had crossed the border.

The European powers – Britain, France, Czechoslovakia –

objected to Germany's invasion of sovereign territory, but Mussolini, supposedly Austria's ally, refused to consider any military action; he wouldn't even condemn Germany. International resistance fell apart before it had even formed. The world left Austria to the dogs.

And Austria welcomed them.

אבא

Gustav woke to the sound of engines. A low drone that entered his skull with the stealth of an odour and grew in volume. Aeroplanes. For a moment it was as if he were in the street outside his workshop: it was still yesterday; the nightmare had not happened. It was scarcely breakfast time. The rest of the family, apart from Tini, clattering quietly in the kitchen, were still in their beds, just stirring from their dreams.

As Gustav rose and dressed, the droning grew louder. There was nothing to be seen from the windows – just rooftops and a strip of sky – so he put on his shoes and went downstairs.

In the street and across the Karmelitermarkt there was little sign of the night's terrors – just a few stray 'Vote Yes!' leaflets, trampled and swept into corners. The traders were setting out their stalls and opening their shops. Everyone looked to the sky as the rumbling engines grew louder and louder, rattling windows, drowning out the sounds of the streets. This wasn't like yesterday at all – this was an oncoming thunderstorm. The planes came into view over the rooftops. Bombers, dozens of them in tight formation, with fighters darting loose above them. They flew so low that even from the ground their German markings could be picked out and their bomb-bay doors could be seen opening.[17] A ripple of terror swept across the marketplace.

What came out, though, was not bombs but another snowstorm of paper, fluttering down over the roofs and streets. Here

was a political climate that produced actual weather. Gustav picked up one of the leaflets. It was briefer and simpler than yesterday's message. At the head was the Nazi eagle, and a declaration:

> National Socialist Germany greets her National Socialist
> Austria and the new National Socialist government.
> Joined in a faithful, unbreakable bond!
> Heil Hitler![18]

The storm of engines was deafening. Not only the bombers but over a hundred transport planes flew over; while the bombers banked and circled, the others headed southeast. Nobody knew it yet, but these were troop-carrying aircraft, heading for Aspern Aerodrome just outside the city – the first German spearhead into the Austrian capital. Gustav dropped the slip of paper as if it were toxic and went back indoors.

Breakfast was bleak that morning. From this day forward a spectre would haunt every move, word and thought of every Jewish person. They all knew what had happened in Germany in the past five years. What they didn't yet know was that in Austria there would be no gradual onset; they would experience five years' worth of terror in one frantic torrent.

The Wehrmacht was coming, the SS and Gestapo were coming, and there were rumours that the Führer himself had reached Linz and would soon be in Vienna. The city's Nazis were mad with excitement and triumph. The majority of the populace, wanting only stability and safety, began to sway with the times. Jewish stores in Leopoldstadt were systematically plundered by squads of SA stormtroopers, while the homes of wealthier Jews began to be raided and robbed. Envy and hatred against Jews in business, in skilled trades and in the legal and medical professions had built to a head during the economic depression, and the boil was about to be violently lanced.

There was a myth that it wasn't in the nature of the Viennese to conduct politics through street-fighting and rioting – 'The real Viennese,' they said in dismay as the Nazis filled the streets with noise and fury, 'discusses his differences over a café table and goes like a civilized being to the polls.'[19] But in due course 'the real Viennese' would go like a civilized being to his doom. The savages ruled this country now.

Yet Gustav Kleinmann, a hopeful man by nature, believed that his family might be safe – they were, after all, Austrians more than Jews. The Nazis would surely only persecute the devout, the openly Hebraic, the Orthodox . . . wouldn't they?

בת

Edith Kleinmann kept her head high as she walked. Like her father she considered herself an Austrian more than a Jew. She thought little of such things – she was eighteen years old; by day she was learning millinery and had ambitions to be a hat designer; in her free hours she had a good time, went out with boys and loved music and dancing. Edith was, above all else, a young woman, with the drives and desires of youth. The boys she went out with were rarely Jewish. This made Gustav uneasy; being Austrian was a fine thing, but he felt that one should still cleave to one's people. If there was a contradiction there, Gustav didn't recognize it.

A few days had passed since the arrival of the Germans. They had marched in on the Sunday, the day the abandoned plebiscite would have taken place. Most Jews had stayed indoors, but Edith's brother Fritz, typically daring, had ventured out to watch. At first, he reported, a few brave Viennese threw stones at the German troops, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the cheering, Heil-Hitlering multitude. When the full German force made its triumphal entrance into the capital, led by Adolf Hitler himself, the columns seemed

endless: fleets of gleaming limousines, motorcycles, armoured cars, thousands of field-grey uniforms, helmets and tramping jackboots. The scarlet swastika flags were everywhere – held aloft by the soldiers, hanging from the buildings, fluttering from the cars. Behind the scenes, Heinrich Himmler had flown in and begun the process of taking over the police.[20] The plundering of wealthy Jews went on, and suicides were reported daily.

Edith walked briskly. Some kind of disturbance was going on at the corner of the Schiffamtsgasse and Leopoldsgasse, where a large crowd had gathered near the police station.[21] Edith could hear laughter and cheering. She went to cross the road, but slowed her step, noticing a familiar face in the press – Vickerl Ecker, an old schoolfriend. His bright, eager eyes met hers.

'There! She's one!'[22]

Faces turned towards her, she heard the word *Jewess*, and hands gripped her arms, propelling her towards the crowd. She saw Vickerl's brown shirt, the swastika armband. Then she was through the press of bodies and in the midst of a ring of leering, jeering faces. Half a dozen men and women were on their hands and knees with brushes and buckets, scrubbing the pavement – all Jews, all well dressed. One bewildered woman clutched her hat and gloves in one hand and a scrubbing brush in the other, her immaculate coat trailing on the wet stones.

'On your knees.' A brush was put in Edith's hand and she was pushed to the ground. Vickerl pointed at the Austrian crosses and *Say Yes!* slogans. 'Get rid of your filthy propaganda, Jewess.' The spectators crowed as she began to scrub. There were faces she recognized in the crowd – neighbours, acquaintances, smartly dressed businessmen, prim wives, rough working men and women, all part of the fabric of Edith's world, transformed into a gloating mob. She scrubbed, but the paint wouldn't come off. 'Work suitable for Jews, eh?' somebody called out and there was more laughter. One of the stormtroopers picked up a man's

bucket and emptied it over him, soaking his camel-hair coat. The crowd cheered.

After an hour or so, the victims were given receipts for their 'work' and permitted to go. Edith walked home, stockings torn, clothes soiled, struggling to contain herself, brimming over with shame and degradation.

In the coming weeks these 'scrubbing games' became an everyday part of life in Jewish neighbourhoods. The patriotic slogans proved impossible to shift, and often the SA added acid to the water so that it burned and blistered the victims' hands.[23] Fortunately for Edith she wasn't taken again, but her fifteen-year-old sister, Herta, was among a group forced to scrub the Austrian crosses from the clock pillar in the marketplace. Other Jews were forced to paint anti-Semitic slogans on Jewish-owned shops and businesses in livid red and yellow.

The suddenness with which genteel Vienna had turned was breathtaking – like tearing the soft, comfortable fabric of a familiar couch to reveal sharp springs and nails beneath. Gustav was wrong; the Kleinmanns were not safe. Nobody was safe.

משפחה

They all dressed in their best outfits before leaving the apartment – Gustav wore his Sunday suit; Fritz in schoolboy knickerbocker trousers; Edith, Herta and Tini in their smartest dresses; little Kurt in a sailor suit. In Hans Gemperle's photography studio they gazed into the camera's lens as if looking to their own futures. Edith smiled uncomfortably, resting a hand on her mother's shoulder. Kurt looked contented – at eight he understood little of what the changes in his world might mean – and Fritz displayed the nonchalant ease of a cocky teenager, while Herta – just turning sixteen and a young woman already – was radiant. As Herr Gemperle (who was not a Jew and would thrive in the coming years) clicked his shutter, he

caught Gustav's apprehensiveness and the stoicism of Tini's dark eyes. They understood now where the world was going, even the sanguine Gustav. It had been Tini's urging that had brought them to the studio. She had a foreboding that the family might not be together for much longer and wanted to capture her children's image while she had the chance.

The poison on the streets now began to flow from the offices of government and justice. Under the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, Austrian Jews were stripped of their citizenship. On 4 April Fritz and all his Jewish schoolfellows were expelled from the Trade School; he also lost his work placement. Edith and Herta were fired from their jobs, and Gustav was no longer able to practise his trade; his workshop was seized and locked up. People were warned not to buy from Jews; those who were caught doing so were made to stand with a sign: 'I am an Aryan, but a swine – I bought in this Jewish shop.'[24]

Four weeks after the Anschluss,* Adolf Hitler returned to Vienna. He gave a speech at the Nordwest railway station – just a few hundred metres away from Im Werd – to a crowd of twenty thousand members of the SA, SS and Hitler Youth. 'I have shown through my life,' he thundered, 'that I can do more than those dwarfs who ruled this country into ruin. In a hundred years' time my name will stand as that of the great son of this country.'[25] The crowd exploded into a storm of '*Sieg Heil!*' repeated over and over, ear-splitting, echoing throughout the Jewish neighbourhoods of Leopoldstadt.

Vienna was decked with swastikas, every newspaper filled with pictures glorifying the Führer. The next day Austria had its long-awaited plebiscite on independence. Jews, of course, were barred from voting. The ballot was firmly controlled and closely monitored by the SS, and to nobody's surprise the result was 99.7 per cent in favour of the Anschluss. Hitler declared

* Literally 'joining'; the forcible unification of Austria with Germany.

that the result 'surpassed all my expectations'.[26] The bells of Protestant churches across the city rang for fifteen long minutes, and the head of the Evangelical Church ordered services of thanksgiving. The Catholics remained silent, not yet certain if the Führer meant to deal them Jews' wages.[27]

Foreign newspapers were banned. Swastika lapel badges began to appear everywhere, and suspicion fell on any man or woman not wearing one.[28] In schools, the Heil Hitler salute became part of daily routine after morning prayers. There were ritual book-burnings, and the SS took over the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, the Jewish cultural and religious affairs centre near the Stadttempel, humiliating and baiting the rabbis and other officials who staffed it.[29] From now on the IKG would become the government organ through which the 'Jewish problem' was handled, and would have to pay 'compensation' to the state to occupy its own premises.[30] The regime seized Jewish property worth a total of two and a quarter billion Reichsmarks (not including houses and apartments).[31]

Gustav and Tini struggled to hold their family together. Gustav had a few good Aryan friends in the upholstery trade who gave him employment in their workshops, but it was infrequent. During the summer, Fritz and his mother got work from the owner of the Lower Austrian Dairy, delivering milk in the neighbouring district early in the morning, when the customers wouldn't know that their milk was being brought by Jews. They earned two pfennigs for each litre they delivered, making up to one mark a day – starvation wages. The family subsisted on meals from the Jewish soup kitchen along the street.

There was no escaping the touch of Nazism. Groups of brown-shirted stormtroopers and Hitler Youth marched in the streets singing:

> When Jewish blood drips from the knife,
> Then we sing and laugh.

Their songs extolled the hanging of Jews and putting Catholic priests against the wall. Some of the singers were old friends of Fritz's, who had turned Nazi with shocking suddenness. Some had even joined the local SS unit, the 89th Standarte. The SS were everywhere, demanding identification from passing citizens, proud and pleased in their crisp uniforms and unalloyed power. It infected everything. The word *Saujud* – Jew-pig – was heard everywhere. Signs saying 'Aryans only' appeared on park benches. Fritz and his remaining friends were barred from playing on sports grounds or using swimming pools – which struck Fritz hard, because he loved to swim.

As summer progressed, the anti-Semitic violence subsided, but official sanctions went on, and beneath the surface a pressure was building. A fearful name began to be heard: 'Keep your head down and your mouth shut,' said Jews to one another, 'or you will go to Dachau.' People began to disappear: prominent figures first – politicians and businessmen – then able-bodied Jewish men were spirited away on flimsy pretexts. Sometimes they were delivered back to their families in ashes. Then another name began to be whispered: Buchenwald. The *Konzentrationslager* – concentration camps – which had been a feature of Nazi Germany since the beginning, were multiplying.[32]

Persecution of Jews was becoming thoroughly bureaucratic. Their identities were a matter of special attention. In August it was decreed that if they didn't already have recognized Hebraic first names, they had to take new middle names – 'Israel' for men, 'Sara' for women.[33] Their identity cards had to be stamped with a 'J' – the *Juden-Kennkarte*, or *J-Karte* as they called it. In Leopoldstadt, a special procedure was employed. The cardholder, having had their card stamped, was taken into a room with a photographer and several male and female assistants. After being photographed, head and shoulders, the applicant had to strip naked. 'Despite their utmost reluctance,' one

witness recorded, 'people had to undress completely . . . in order to be taken again from all sides.' They were fingerprinted and measured, 'during which the men obviously measured the women, hair strength was measured, blood samples taken and everything written down and enumerated'.[34] Every Jew was required to go through this degradation, without exception. Some bolted as soon as they got their cards stamped, so the SS began doing the photography first.

By September the situation in Vienna was quiet, and a semblance of normal life began to resume, even for Jews within their communities.[35] But the Nazis were far from content with what they had done so far; a spur was needed to push people to the next level of Jew-hatred.

In October an incident occurred in Belgium which foreshadowed what was to come. The port city of Antwerp had a large and prosperous Jewish quarter. On 26 October 1938, two journalists from the Nazi propaganda paper *Der Angriff* came ashore from a passenger steamer and began taking photographs of the Jewish diamond exchange. They behaved in an intrusive and offensive manner, and several Jews reacted angrily; they tried to eject the journalists, and there was a scuffle in which one of the Germans was hurt and their camera taken.[36] In the German press the incident was blown up into an outrageous assault on innocent and helpless German citizens. According to Vienna's main newspaper, a party of German tourists had been set upon by a gang of fifty Jewish thugs, beaten bloody, and had their property stolen as they lay unconscious. 'A large part of the Belgian press is silent,' the paper fumed. 'This attitude is indicative of the inadequacy of these papers, which are not afraid to make a fuss when a single Jew is held accountable for his crimes.'[37] The Nazi paper *Völkischer Beobachter* issued a dire warning that any further acts of Jewish violence against Germans 'could easily have consequences beyond their sphere of influence, which might be extremely undesirable and unpleasant'.[38]

The threat was clear, and tensions high.

As November began, anti-Semitic feelings all across the Reich were looking for an outlet. The trigger was pulled far away in Paris, when a Polish Jew called Herschel Grynszpan, in a blaze of rage over the expulsion of his people from Germany – including his own family – took a new-bought revolver into the German Embassy and fired five bullets into Ernst vom Rath, an official chosen at random.

In Vienna the newspapers called the assassination an 'outrageous provocation'.[39] The Jews must be taught a lesson.

Vom Rath died on Wednesday 9 November. That night, the Nazis came out in force on the streets of Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Vienna and every other town and city. Local party officials and the Gestapo were the masters of ceremonies, and under their lead came the SA and the SS, armed with sledgehammers, axes and combustibles. The targets were homes and businesses still in Jewish hands. Jews were beaten and murdered out of hand if they got in the way. The stormtroopers tore down and burned wherever they could, but it was the shattering of glass that onlookers remembered most vividly; the Germans called it *Kristallnacht*, night of crystal glass,[40] for the glittering shards that carpeted the pavements. The Jews would remember it as the November Pogrom.

The general order was that there was to be no looting, only destruction.[41] In the chaos that ensued the order was broken many times over, with Jewish homes and businesses robbed under cover of searching for weapons and 'illegal literature'.[42] Jews denounced by their neighbours had their homes invaded, possessions broken, furnishings and clothes slashed and torn by brown-shirted men; mothers shielded their terrified children and couples clung to each other in petrified despair as their homes were violated.

In Leopoldstadt, Jews caught outdoors were driven into the Karmelitermarkt and beaten. After midnight the synagogues