



Chapter Twelve

FRAU ZWIRN PACKED the children's clothes. They said goodbye to their friends and their teachers at school and then they were ready to leave Switzerland for their new life in France. But it wasn't a bit like leaving Berlin, said Anna, because they would be able to come back and see everyone at the Gasthof Zwirn any time they liked, and Herr Zwirn had already invited them for next summer. They were to live in a furnished flat in Paris which Mama was busy now getting ready. What was it like? Max wanted to know. Papa thought for a moment. If you stood on the balcony, he said at last, you could see the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe both at the same time – these were famous Paris landmarks. But beyond this he seemed unable to

remember much about it. It was a pity, thought the children, that Papa was sometimes so vague about practical matters. But the fact that the flat had a balcony made it sound rather grand.

The journey to Paris took the whole day and they almost did not get there at all. They had no trouble until Basle, but there they had to change trains because Basle is the frontier between Switzerland, France and Germany. Owing to some delay on the line they arrived very late and only had a few minutes to catch their Paris connection.

'We'll have to be very quick,' said Papa as the train drew into the station.

Luckily there was a porter immediately at hand. He grabbed their luggage and flung it on to his wheelbarrow.

'The Paris train! Hurry!' cried Papa and the porter set off at a gallop with them all running behind him. Anna had trouble keeping the porter in sight as he turned and twisted through the crowds of people, and Max and Papa were already helping him to heave the luggage aboard the other train when she caught up with them. She stood for a moment, getting her breath back. The train must be just about to leave, for all along it people were leaning out of the windows saying goodbye to their friends on the platform. Immediately

beside her a young man seemed in danger of falling right out as he gave his girlfriend a passionate farewell embrace.

'Go on with you!' said the girl and gave him a little push back into the train. As he straightened up, the bottom of the window came into view. There was a printed notice stuck on it. It read STUTTGART.

'Papa!' screamed Anna. 'This is the wrong train! It's going to Germany!'

'Good God!' said Papa. 'Get the luggage off, quick!' He and Max dragged the suitcases off again as fast as they could. Then they heard the whistle.

'Never mind!' shouted Papa and pulled Max back, even though there was a suitcase still left on the train.

'That's our case!' shouted Max. 'Please give us our case!' and just as the carriage began to move the young man with the girlfriend kindly pushed it on to the platform for them. It landed at Anna's feet and they stood there, with luggage littered all round them, and watched the train steam out of the station.

'I clearly told you the Paris train!' said Papa, angrily looking round for the porter. But there was no sign of him. He had disappeared.

'If we'd got on that train,' asked Anna, 'would we have been able to get off before it got to Germany?'

'Possibly,' said Papa. 'If we'd realised it was the wrong train.' He put an arm round her shoulders. 'I'm certainly very glad you noticed before we ever got on it.'

It took some time to find another porter and Papa was sure they had missed the Paris connection, but in fact they caught it with time to spare. Its departure time had been put back to fit in with the delay on the Swiss line. It was odd that the first porter had not known about this.

As they sat in their compartment waiting for the French train to start Max suddenly said, 'Papa, do you think that porter took us to the wrong train on purpose?'

'I don't know,' said Papa. 'It could just have been a mistake.'

'I don't think it was a mistake,' said Max. 'I think he was trying to earn the thousand marks on your head.'

For a moment they sat thinking about it, and about what would have happened if they had travelled to Germany. Then the whistle went and the train started with a jolt.

'Well,' said Papa, 'if that porter really was trying to earn a thousand marks he certainly made a bad bargain. I never had time even to give him a tip.' He smiled and settled back in his seat. 'And in a few minutes, thanks to Anna, we'll be not in Germany but in France.'

And thanks to Max we've even got all our luggage.' He lifted his hands in mock admiration. 'Pssst!' said Papa. 'What clever children I have!'

They arrived in Paris after dark and very tired. Anna had already sensed something different in the train after leaving Basle. There had been more French voices talking quickly, sharply and incomprehensibly. The smells from the dining-car had been different too. But now that she was standing on the platform in Paris she was overwhelmed.

All round her there were people shouting, greeting each other, talking, laughing. Their lips moved quickly, their mobile faces keeping pace with them. They shrugged, embraced each other and waved their hands to emphasise what they were saying – and she could not understand a word. For a moment, in the dim light and the noise and the steam drifting back from the engine, she felt quite lost. But then Papa was bundling her and Max into a taxi and they were charging through the crowded streets.

There were lights everywhere, people walking along wide pavements, eating and drinking in the glass-fronted cafes, reading newspapers, looking into shop windows. She had forgotten a big city was like this. The height

of the buildings amazed her, and the noise. As the taxi swayed and turned in the traffic, unfamiliar cars and buses and coloured electric signs which she could not read loomed out of the darkness and disappeared again.

'There's the Eiffel Tower!' cried Max – but she turned too late and missed it.

Then they were driving round a huge open space with a floodlit arch in the middle. There were cars everywhere, most of them blowing their horns.

'That's the Arc de Triomphe,' said Papa. 'We're nearly there.'

They turned into a quieter avenue and then off it into a little narrow street, and then the taxi stopped quite suddenly with a squeal of brakes. They had arrived.

Anna and Max stood in the cold outside a tall house while Papa paid the taxi driver. Then he opened the front door and pushed them into the hall where a lady was sitting half-asleep in what appeared to be a glass-fronted cage. As soon as she saw Papa the lady leapt into life. She rushed out of what turned out to be a door in her cage and shook him by the hand, talking very quickly in French all the time. Then, still talking, she shook hands with Max and Anna who, unable to understand, could only smile weakly in reply.

'This is *Madame la concierge*,' said Papa. 'She looks after the house.'

The taxi driver came in with the luggage and *Madame la concierge* helped him to push some of it through a narrow door which she then held open for Anna and Max. They could hardly believe their eyes.

'Papa!' said Max. 'You never told us there was a lift!'

'It's very, very grand,' said Anna.

This made Papa laugh.

'I'd hardly call it that,' he said. But Anna and Max were not convinced, even when the lift creaked and groaned horribly as it rose slowly up to the top floor. At last it stopped with a bang and a shudder, and even before they had all got out a door opposite them flew open and there was Mamma.

Anna and Max rushed to her, and all became confusion while she hugged them and they both tried to tell her everything that had happened since they had last seen her, and Papa came in with the suitcase and kissed Mamma, and then the concierge brought in the rest of the cases and all at once the tiny hall was crammed with luggage and no one could move.

'Come into the dining room,' said Mamma. It was not much bigger but the table was laid for supper and it looked bright and inviting.

'Where can I hang my coat?' called Papa from the hall.

'There's a hook behind the door,' Mamma called back in the middle of a noisy description by Max of how they had nearly caught the wrong train. Then there was a crash as of someone falling over something. Anna heard Papa's polite voice saying, 'Good evening', and the mild smell of burning which Anna had noticed ever since their arrival suddenly became intensified.

A small glum figure appeared in the doorway.

'Your fried potatoes have gone all black,' it announced with obvious satisfaction.

'Oh, Grete . . . !' cried Mamma. Then she said, 'This is Grete from Austria. She is in Paris to learn French and is going to help me with the housework when she isn't studying.'

Grete shook hands gloomily with Anna and Max.

'Can you speak quite a lot of French?' asked Max.

'No,' said Grete. 'It's a very difficult language. Some people never manage to learn it at all.' Then she turned to Mamma. 'Well, I think I'll be off to bed.'

'But Grete . . . ' said Mamma.

'I promised my mother that no matter what happened, I'd always get my proper sleep,' said Grete. 'I've turned off the gas under the potatoes. Goodnight all.' And she went.

'Really?' said Mamma. 'That girl is no use at all! Never mind, it'll be nice to have our first meal in Paris together on our own. I'll show you your room and then you can get settled in while I fry some more potatoes.'

Their room was painted a rather ugly yellow and there were yellow bedspreads on the two beds. A wooden wardrobe stood in the corner. There were yellow curtains, a yellow lampshade and two chairs – nothing else. There would have been no space for any more furniture anyway because, like the dining room, the room was quite small.

'What's outside the window?' asked Max.

Anna looked. It was not a street, as she had expected, but an inner courtyard with walls and windows all round it. It was like a well. A clanging sound far below told her there must be dustbins at the bottom, but it was too far down for her to see. Above there were only the irregular outlines of rooftops and the sky. It was very different from the Gasthof Zwirn and from their house in Berlin.

They unpacked their pyjamas and toothbrushes and decided which yellow bed would belong to whom, and then they explored the rest of the flat. Next to their room was Papa's room. It had a bed, a wardrobe, a chair and a table with Papa's typewriter on it, and it overlooked

the street. From Papa's room a communicating door led to what looked like a little sitting room, but there were some of Mama's clothes strewn about.

'Do you think this is Mama's room?' asked Anna.

'It can't be — there's no bed,' said Max. There was only a sofa, a little table and two armchairs. Then Max took a closer look at the sofa.

'It's one of those special ones,' he said. 'Look' — and he lifted up the seat. In a cavity underneath were sheets, blankets and pillows. 'Mama can sleep on it at night and then she can turn the room into a sitting room during the day.'

'It's very clever,' said Anna. 'It means you can use the room twice over.'

Certainly it was important to make the best possible use of the space in the flat, for there was so little of it. Even the balcony, which had sounded so grand when Papa had talked about it, was not much more than a ledge surrounded by wrought iron railings. Apart from the dining room which they had already seen there remained only the tiny room where Grete slept, an even tinier bathroom and a small square kitchen where they found Mama and Papa.

Mama, flushed and excited, was stirring something in a bowl. Papa was leaning against the window. He

looked bothered and disapproving and as the children came in they heard him say, 'Surely all this trouble can't be necessary.'

The kitchen was full of smoke.

'Of course it's necessary!' said Mama. 'What are the children going to eat?'

'Cheese and a glass of wine,' said Papa, and the children burst into laughter while Mama cried, 'Oh, you are hopelessly impractical!'

'I didn't know you could cook,' said Anna. She had never before seen Mama in the kitchen.

'It'll be ready in five minutes,' cried Mama, stirring excitedly. 'Oh, my potatoes . . . !' They were going to burn again, but she just caught them in time. 'I'm making fried potatoes and scrambled eggs — I thought you'd like that.'

'Lovely,' said Max.

'Now where's the dish . . . and some salt . . . oh!' cried Mama, 'I've got another lot of potatoes to do!' She looked appealingly at Papa. 'Dearest, can you pass me the colander?'

'Which is the colander?' said Papa.

By the time the meal was ready on the table it was nearly an hour later and Anna felt so tired that she no longer cared whether she ate anything or not. But she

WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT

did not like to say so as Mamma had gone to so much trouble. She and Max ate their supper quickly and sleepily and then fell into bed.

Through the thin walls of the flat they could hear the murmur of voices and a clattering of dishes. Mamma and Papa must be clearing the table.

'You know, it's funny,' said Anna just before she went to sleep. 'I remember when we lived in Berlin Heimpi used to make us fried potatoes with scrambled egg. She used to say it was quick and easy.'

'I expect Mamma needs more practice,' said Max.