

Friends Don't Quit

Page 72 - rise of Nazi's

Hanni and Maria grew more and more curious. Just what was the Nazi party all about? Were they just trouble makers, or were they actually a party worried about the condition of the common man? If so, how did they differ from the Communists? Naturally, with these doubts on their minds, when they heard there was going to be a Nazi rally at the Grosser Stern (a large traffic circle not far from the Brandenburger Tor), they planned to go.

The parading group stopped in the center of the Grosser Stern, under the monument. From within their ranks, a small man stepped forward. A crate was quickly produced and he stepped up on to it to address the crowd. He began by raising his arm in salute and screaming "*Heil Hitler - Heil Hitler.*" The crowd led by the Brown Shirts raised their arms and yelled the *Heil Hitler* chants back. Having pumped up the crowd the small hawk-faced man began ranting and raving about the non-caring rich that, along with the Jews, had conspired since the Great War with the French and the English to keep Germany from its rightful place in the world. The more he ranted, the more agitated the audience became. Maria found herself being swept into the mood of exhilarated discontent. At first she thought this man to be Adolf Hitler himself, but from a man near her she learned that the speaker was actually the firebrand politician and spokesman of the Nazi party Josef Goebbels.

As the crowd began to get into a frenzy, the police moved forward. Maria clung tightly to Hanni and tried to get her to back out of the crowd. Even if Hanni had wanted to leave, the two women were trapped in the cheering, fist-waving mass. Just then a military officer, accompanied by a group of stick-bearing soldiers, came into the circle and started to force their way to the makeshift podium. At first the crowd gave way, but when the soldiers reached the Brown Shirts, they could get no further. Before long a wild melee broke out. Soon it seemed there were fights all around Maria and Hanni. A young soldier threatened Hanni with his baton. He had not reckoned on the strength of the farm-raised Maria. She quickly grabbed his baton and wrested it from him. He at first started to fight her, then thought better of it and backed away. Maria almost physically picked up her smaller friend and swept her to the edge of the crowd. Just when she felt that they were clear of the fight, they saw a line of police running toward them. She shielded her friend and awaited the blows of the police batons. The police brushed right past the cowering girls and joined the riot.

To Maria's surprise, the police were not supporting the soldiers but the Brown Shirts. Maria and Hanni had experienced enough of the new politics and headed back home. They stopped at their favorite *Kneipe* and bought large glasses of *Berliner Weisse mit Schuss*. As they quaffed their slightly cool (*Keller kalt*) beer they began to laugh. Hanni managed to choke out "You big silly goose, you shouldn't pick on those little soldier boys."

The two of them decided that they would not take part in any more political rallies. They felt it best that they restrict their political activities to eaves dropping on conversations that came through their switchboards; and so they did. Apart from normal business related calls, the major topic of nearly every phone call was the pros and cons of

Hitler's National Socialist Party. One of the interesting links to the pulse of the political times came through a non-German. One of the frequent callers through Maria's switchboard was an American news reporter by the name of Louis Lochner. Mr. Lochner was assigned to the Associated Press Berlin Bureau.

Page 143 - War

On that night, despite Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels' promises that it could never happen, Berlin was bombed. The air raid siren sounded at 12:20 AM. The sirens had wailed on several earlier occasions with no raids to follow. On the night of the 26th when the sirens sounded the girls on the switchboards, remembering the false alarms, just kept to their duties and gave it little notice. Then calls began to light the board. People were trying to reach authorities to report that the sound of planes could be heard overhead. Several jokes were made between switchboard operators about the panic by some people. Then a loud explosion rocked the telephone building. It was followed by several others. Panic ensued. The operators abandoned their boards and ran to the basement. Though no further explosions were heard, the girls huddled together in the dark bomb shelter and speculated whether it had really been bombs they heard. Some were even heard to cry. Maria's main concern at the time was for the safety of her friend, Hanni. They were at the time not serving on the same shift. Sitting there in the near dark, listening to the whimpers of some of her colleagues, caused all sort of negative thoughts to flash through her brain. Herr Frick, the shift supervisor, came down and ordered the girls back to their boards, but some refused to go back upstairs until the all-clear signal was finally heard at 3:23 AM.

Page 168 - Friends in tough times

Maria slowly undid the small piece of hair ribbon that held the cloth wrapping in place. She instinctively folded each carefully to be used another time. Her hands were actually shaking as she started to open the box. She chanced a look at Hanni and found her friend sitting there both hands in front of her mouth holding her breath. It was Maria's turn to tease. She set the small box down, leaned back, and said: "Perhaps we should roast our *Kastanien* first." This received the desired response as Hanni sat up straight and nearly yelled: "Oh! You naughty girl. Quit teasing me and open that box." Maria slowly did as told. In the box was something wrapped in cotton. She searched around in the white fluff and came up with two shiny silver rings. She held the two rings in front of her eyes, trying to see through the tears that welled up. At last she was able to say: "But, what am I to do with two of them?" Hanni quickly grabbed the smaller of the two bands and slipped it on to her own finger. "See, we now are truly linked as friends." Maria quickly put on her ring and threw herself into the arms of her closest, dearest friend.

Maria looked back to Hanni. Her friend shrugged and nodded, then said in a near whisper, "There they would have been stolen. Here," she held up her hand and displayed the new ring, "they will be as safe and secure as our friendship." It was the happiest Christmas of Maria's life.

Page 279 - The horror of death

The green canvas body bag was still in the pathway where they had left it. Maria did not hesitate. She knew that if she did not quickly act she would never again have the courage to do what must be done. She cut a small slit over the cadaver's head and pulled the canvas back. She had steeled herself for the sight of a dead face, but was greeted with an image scarcely recognizable as a human face. The nose and lips were almost totally decomposed, exposing flashes of skull and teeth. The eye sockets were pools of liquid. Maria fell back against Kaethe, who dropped the candles. They were submerged into darkness. With darkness, the smell and their memory of the image of the decomposing face intensified and both women began to panic. They clutched each other tightly in the darkness. At last Maria chanced to search for a candle and upon finding it, managed to light it. After the second candle was found, and also lit, Maria chanced another look. With the candles close she could see gray hair. This was definitely not (her friend).