

## Acknowledgements

For support and encouragement that went well beyond this novel, I'm grateful to my family: Dad, Mom, Robyn, Sheila, Jim, Larry, Sue, Andy, and (in memory) Karen and my grandparents. I'm also extremely thankful for my friends, particularly Cindee Scott, Jan Hudson, Adam Parker, Jessica Hecht, Isaac Parker, Sister Mary Alix, David Lambert, Phil Harris, John J. Neilson (with deepest regrets that I couldn't include the Nazi falconry unit), Christopher Yocum, and the loyal readers of *Peregrine*.

The following people offered much-appreciated commentary on drafts in progress: Patrice Moore, Kasey Michaels, and Lois Winston (through the Brenda Novak charity auction); Lesley Glaister, Jessica Gregson, Elizabeth Reiff, and Amy Tudor; and Padmini Ray Murray and her students. Thanks to Judy Moir, Caitlin Blasdell, and Kate Pool for excellent professional advice.

Kevin Morrison, collection owner and curator of the Kevin Morrison Special Collection at Glasgow Caledonian University, generously allowed me access to his archive of Nazi propaganda.

I would like to thank Hilde Schramm (née Speer) for her willingness to share her memories of the Goebbels children.

Finally, I'm incandescently grateful to Mark Buckland, Gill Tasker, and everyone at Cargo Publishing.

This book is dedicated to Richard Talbot, for many lovely reasons, one of them being his cheerful acceptance of having an A3 schematic of the Führerbunker taped up in the living room.

The Fuehrer has ordered me, should the defence of the Reich collapse, to leave Berlin....For the first time in my life I must categorically refuse to obey an order of the Fuehrer. My wife and children join me in this refusal. Otherwise – quite apart from the fact that feelings of humanity and loyalty forbid us to abandon the Fuehrer in his hour of greatest need – I should appear for the rest of my life as a dishonourable traitor and common scoundrel....together with my wife, and on behalf of my children, who are too young to speak for themselves, but who would unreservedly agree with this decision if they were old enough, I express an unalterable resolution not to leave the Reich capital, even if it falls....

- Joseph Goebbels, 'Appendix to the Fuehrer's Political Testament'

# Chapter 1

My diary had to be perfect.

*22 April 1945. Uncle Adolf finally sent for me!*

My words looked splendid and bold on the rich paper, though I could hardly read them because of the cardboard blocking every pane of glass. I tilted my diary towards the threads of light that crept through at the edges. My neck ached, but I had to sit on the windowseat because if I used the dining room table, the little girls would nag me to look at their drawings or put clothing on their dolls. After the war ended, Mother would help me choose a proper writing desk, with compartments for all of my stationery and photographic postcards. She'd instruct Father's adjutant to place my desk in the corner of her office, not far from her own, so we could work together.

*When I was little, Father took me to visit Uncle Adolf as often as once a week, so it's hard to believe I haven't seen him since he came to our house in December. We baked him a special cake, and the five of us girls wore our white dresses and sang a lovely folk tune. Then we listened intently as he told us how he'd invented the most marvellous, destructive weapons in the history of the world, to smash all his enemies with. He swung his fists so hard he knocked a teacup off the table!*

*That was over four months ago. Why did he take so long to end the war? Doesn't he want to become Emperor*

*of Europe?*

I jerked my pen off the page.

“Really, Helga,” Father would say in his most cutting voice, flicking my words with his finger. “When I gave you a leather-bound diary and instructed you to set down your thoughts, I hardly thought it necessary to tell you not to write rubbish. You may be an extremely clever twelve-year-old, but even your simple-minded brother would avoid criticizing the Chief’s military decisions. Perhaps I should take away your Montblanc and replace it with crayons?”

My pen had such a delicate nib that I couldn’t simply cross out the mistakes. Praying that the nursery clock wasn’t about to strike seven, I drew tight overlapping circles to drown the sentences. At least I had the opportunity to correct my errors, because when Father published his wartime diaries and attached mine as an appendix, he’d edit it first.

None of the girls who read my diary would know about my mistakes.

*I appreciate the victory so much because it comes after these horrible months of being exiled to the summer house. Mother was so ill she couldn’t respond to my letters, even though I wrote her every day. Father only visited when work allowed, and if I tried to ask about the Allied and Russian planes droning overhead, or the hundreds of cowardly refugees streaming past, he told me to go play with the others. After the war ends I’ll talk to every general in the armed forces. That way, when I travel in Uncle Adolf’s official train and give lectures in girls’ schools across the Empire, I can pull down a huge map and explain all the military actions. Of course I’ll also talk about Father’s brilliant films and radio programs, and Mr. Speer who built the miracle weapons, and the secret Werewolves who prowl to keep us safe from traitors. And if any girl doubts that Uncle Adolf is the most inspired leader Germany’s ever had, even*

*more than Frederick the Great, I'll instruct the teacher to demote her to the junior class.*

A clanking noise almost made my pen skitter.

I glared at Hilde, who'd dropped the silver hairbrush on her bedside table. "I have to finish this before we leave." Father wrote *his* diary for an hour every day.

Hilde adjusted the hairbrush, aligning it with the comb. "I brushed the little girls' hair and tidied their ribbons. Are you sure Mother said we'll wear our white dresses with the Italian necklaces? Mrs. Kleine was too busy whispering with the Ukrainian girl to answer me. Why haven't our trunks come from the summer house?"

"Mother said everything we need is at the shelter. Can you go back into the nursery so I can finish - "

"But are you *sure*?"

Father always said that Hilde wasn't capable of picking her nose without asking whether she was doing it correctly. "Do you think Mother would let us go to Uncle Adolf looking like refugees?" I placed the diary firmly across my lap, so I didn't have to look at the soiled grey hem brushing my knees. Hopefully my white dress still fit me - I'd grown so leggy in the past four months...but if it didn't, I could wear a different dress, and not look identical to the younger girls. "Mother had more important things to do than to tell me every detail. The trunks are probably being sent directly to the shelter. We can change in the secretaries' room."

*Was it only an hour ago that I ran down the back stairs and through the house as if I were still a child? Mother's bedroom was dim as winter twilight. She asked me to help her tidy her office.*

"You could stop writing for one minute and help me take care of the little ones." As Hilde stalked towards me, stray bits of sunlight danced through her golden hair. Her navy-blue skirt had damp patches from where she'd wiped off the dirt. "You promised Mother you would, after the nurs-

ery maids left, but even the Ukrainian girl does more than you. Telling me that Mother wants the little ones to bring one toy each to the shelter doesn't count as helping. The nursery has to be tidied and it's almost bedtime. Daisy emptied the doll wardrobe looking for that tutu Grandmother Auguste made her, and Helmut's kicking his metal soldiers and shouting that Werewolves don't play with toys – ”

“If you keep bothering me, I'll tell Father you stopped me from writing in my diary. Then he'll never let you become a League girl.”

Hilde looked crushed. “Father doesn't make decisions because of anything *you* say. When Mother praises me for keeping the little girls tidy, you'll wish you'd helped. Then maybe you'll understand that everyone has to follow rules.”

“At least I'm not fussing that the most important moment in history is interrupting our bedtime!”

Hilde pretended not to hear me as she stalked back towards the nursery.

The bombs were so loud overhead. Uncle Adolf must have been luring the Russians as close to the centre of Berlin as possible.

*The bombs make Mother's head ache, and her eyes hurt when all the lumpy candles shudder in their sconces. She'd just taken a pill for her heart, so I told her to lie quietly on the bed while I cleared away the heaps of old papers she wanted burned – notes for her radio talks and charity events, the drawings we sent her when she relaxed in health spas, bills from her dressmakers. It makes sense for her to clear away things that don't matter any more.*

*Mother deserves this fresh beginning more than any of us. When she has good nurses again and no need to worry about Uncle Adolf, she won't be ill any more. We'll travel together to lunches and women's groups, and whenever she gives a speech – no matter how many hundreds of people*

*are listening – she’ll always pause for a moment to smile at me.*

As I wrote, keeping my letters as neat as possible, I wished I could describe the way embers and black flakes churned in Mother’s fireplace when I stabbed the poker into their crimson heart. But the girls who read my diary after the war would know all about ordinary things like fireplaces.

Princess slipped into the bedroom. Her freshly-brushed hair glowed like a halo, and her shabby purse, one of Mother’s old beaded clutches, hung around her neck from its hand-made strap. “The king sees the princess.”

“Yes, we’re going to visit Uncle Adolf. You should bring your scrapbook instead of a toy.” Across the room, past the beds made up with smooth white spreads and pillows, a dozen Uncle Adolfs stared at me. Princess always kept her scrapbook propped open on her bedside table, and she only selected pictures where Uncle Adolf was looking straight out. When Father brought home folders full of newspaper clippings, he liked to have Princess sit beside him as she solemnly trimmed the pictures and pasted them in.

Princess swayed back and forth, tightening the purse strap into a black line across her throat. “The princess walks into the forest.”

“I can’t tell you a story right now. Can you ask Hilde how many minutes it is until seven o’clock?”

*Princess is excited about seeing Uncle Adolf again. She doesn’t understand how significant it is that our family has been invited to share this historic moment, but I envy her a little for being so simple. She’s never embarrassed to sit adoringly at his feet, staring up at him.*

*We were all disappointed to miss his birthday celebrations two days ago, but the bombs made it too dangerous, even though it only takes a few minutes to drive to the Chancellery. The Russians probably expected that he’d release*

*the weapons on his birthday, but he fooled them! We sent our presents with Father, and we'll sing his birthday song tonight as part of the victory celebrations.*

A crash burst out directly overhead.

I dropped my Montblanc. Princess scampered away.

The noise stormed on and on like troops of giants marching past. Russian bombs never pushed so hard across the sky.

"Not without *me!*" I screamed, clinging to my diary as the windowseat quaked.

I was supposed to stand in front of the cameras, locking my face in a smile, praying that none of my hair grips had eased out of place since I'd pinned up my dark braids into a sleek crown. Afterwards, I'd never betray how weary I was of giving the same responses to journalists, never yawn as Father instructed me how to present myself, never give anyone the slightest doubt that I was the Emperor's favourite child, because he was too devoted to his country ever to marry and have children of his own. I'd studied Mother all my life, learning how to behave, waiting for this moment to prove myself.

I hurried into the nursery, stretching my arms out for balance. The smiling dolls shuddered, crammed into their wooden cradle. The rocking horse tossed its golden mane, and the free-standing globe, shining pink with all the territory of the Empire, twirled on its axis. Hilde was kneeling beside the doll wardrobe, her arms around Daisy, the two of them surrounded by a sea of tiny dresses.

Even if Father called me a little fool, he'd tell me if we'd accidentally hurt or insulted Uncle Adolf. Had he not liked our birthday presents? Daisy and I had sewn a collar for Blondi, because he'd mentioned her leather one was getting shabby...

Tossing my diary onto the dining table, I stumbled towards the door. Half a dozen English novels had fallen out of my bookcase. On the shelves above me, cuddly



toys gazed out with blank glass eyes. I lurched past the life-sized puppet theatre, and when the curtain swayed I thought one of the marionettes was flopping onto the stage, but it was a tiny blonde girl, her hands clamped to her ears and her rosebud mouth stretched wide.

The floor stilled. I breathed with relief in the sudden quiet. If the sirens had gone off, and we'd taken the lift down to the basement shelter, it might have been hours before we left the house. "I'm going to speak to Father. Hilde, can you bring my coat to the front hall?"

"You can carry it yourself. Kitten, come out of the puppet theatre, please."

Kitten lifted her head. "Don't let the giants eat me!"

"Uncle Adolf never lets the giants hurt us - "

Growling erupted over Hilde's words, and she slumped back down beside Daisy.

Kitten's shrieks pierced the thunder as she cried for Mother.

I turned back and threw myself down, reaching in through the curtains. Kitten rolled against me, whimpering. "I'll never let them capture you," I whispered into the tiny shell of her ear. "Not even if the giants stomp through the ceiling. You're the most precious little girl who ever lived. I'll always keep you safe."

A black shadow flowed through the doorway. For an instant I thought Mother had come to us, but the feet wore patched shoes. Mrs. Kleine hurried towards our bedroom, carrying one of our nightcases.

Kitten's hot breath fluttered on my arm. Thumps spread across the nursery floor, harder and stronger than the noises from overhead. Helmut was hopping, waving his fists. His shouts emerged from the grinding explosions. "We'll get you! The Werewolves will get you!"

I cringed, in case the bombs were only taking another breath, but they faded completely into the distance.

"Were those Russian bombs?" I called to Helmut.

Helmut stomped over the rug, as if smashing the roses woven into the pattern. His socks slithered down. "That's stupid. Who else has bombs except the Russians? Helga's the stupid one, not me!"

I jumped up, nearly smacking my head on the golden curlicues that formed the theatre's arch. "You're an idiot, Helmut."

"Dolly was scared," whined Daisy, crushing her doll in her arms as she sat up. She'd lost another tooth that morning, and her mouth looked ragged. "Dolly wants to go down to the little kitchen and drink cocoa."

Hilde was on her feet. "We only drink cocoa in the shelter if the alarm sounds. Now let me put your coat on, please. It's almost seven o'clock."

I helped Kitten out of the puppet theatre and wiped her face with my handkerchief. "They'll have cocoa for you at Uncle Adolf's shelter, and that will be even nicer than ours. Daisy, your doll needs to wear her best dress for photographs. Hurry and find the velvet dress with lace trim."

Daisy shook her head at me as Hilde pulled her coat straight. "Dolly's wearing her tutu, even though it doesn't have stars on it."

The cuckoo clock began chiming. Hilde yanked the remaining coats from their hooks. "Helmut, Princess, come here this moment, please. Everyone behave nicely."

Princess stepped forward. "The princess walks into the forest."

"No princesses here. Only obedient little girls. Hold out your arms, please."

"Don't go down," said a hoarse voice.

Boyka, the Ukrainian maid, stood like a ham-faced lump in the doorway. Even in the dim light, her large nose stood out from her pocked face. All of our maids were ugly. "Don't go down, girls. Not safe."

Hilde thrust my coat at me. "I'm bringing my small

sewing kit. It would be just like Uncle Adolf to become so excited that he tears off a button, and perhaps no one else would care about mending it.” Turning to Boyka, she motioned towards the dining table. “Could you clear the supper plates? The entire nursery stinks of rabbit stew.”

I nearly went to the doll wardrobe myself, but Daisy’s doll would look sophisticated even in the handmade tutu. Most of our dolls came from Paris, and Father loved watching the little girls drag them around by the hair or feet. Daisy’s doll was made of bisque china and delicate blonde mohair and kidskin, though the lids never closed over the glass eyes after what Princess did to it.

Kitten couldn’t go to the shelter empty-handed, not as the youngest. I darted to the shelves of cuddly toys, thankful that Helmut was clutching a small metal wolf. “Where’s the plush Alsatian Mr. Goering gave us, the one that looks just like Blondi? Kitten can bring it.”

Hilde was pushing Princess into her coat. “Kitten has her teddy bear. Come along, everyone. If Helga wants to keep Father waiting by looking for toys, that doesn’t mean we all have to be disobedient.”

The Alsatian would be perfect because I could use it to explain to the journalists why Uncle Adolf loved dogs so much. Before he was the leader of Germany, he was so poor that he had to give his dog away to strangers. But the dog loved him so much she searched for him in the streets, eating garbage and limping on her sore paws, until she found him again.

All I saw on the gloomy shelves were bears with button eyes, a cow that moored when you squeezed it, a family of tiny mice. So many people gave us toys that we sometimes had to search for hours to find the one we wanted. We’d have to pose with Blondi herself – of course Uncle Adolf would bring her to the shelter.

Boyka stood beside the door, gaping fearfully with her big cow eyes. “Don’t go!”

I shook my head as I approached her. "I'm very sorry, but you can't come with us."

As I sidled past, she lunged at me. Her fingers clamped my arm. "Don't go car. Not safe!"

Boyka's meaty breath sprayed over my face as I ripped free from her grasp. "You stupid mongrel!" I yelled back as I hurried down the corridor. After the war we'd have our German maids back, instead of refugees who pleaded sob stories and then vanished as soon as they heard rumours about a Russian invasion.

Helmut was dawdling at the top of the stairs. "Maybe there's a Werewolf at the shelter!" He ran down, nearly stumbling as he skimmed his toy wolf down the banister. "He'll tell Uncle Adolf how he didn't let any Russians escape. He was too sneaky and he caught every one!"

I paused to pull on my coat. When we came into the front hall, Father would tell us how proud he was of us for living through all the privations of the war without complaining, and I would write about that in my –

"I'll meet you downstairs!"

From the landing, Hilde glanced up, but didn't pause. Four little shadows bobbed along behind her.

Thankfully, Boyka was gone. After retrieving my diary from the dining table, I looked around the empty nursery for my pen.

"Thank goodness you're back," Mrs. Kleine called from the bedroom doorway, patting her silvery chignon. "Helga, you need to take the others out to the car at once, before your father comes out of his studio –"

"Have you seen my pen?"

Mrs. Kleine only stared at me, so I had to go into the bedroom myself. Boyka was rooting around in our open nightcase, shoving clothing as if trying to fit everything inside. I turned to Mrs. Kleine. "We hardly need anything packed. We'll only be gone a few hours."

Mrs. Kleine crept towards me. "He's the one they'll look

for, but if they find you with him...you'll all be safe at the summer house."

I squinted towards my bedside table, but nothing was there except the framed picture of Mother holding me when I was a baby. "Why do you think we're going to the summer house? You need to listen more carefully. Can't you look for my pen?"

Mrs. Kleine fumbled in the pocket of her black skirt. "Mr. Rach will drive you – I gave him my gold necklace. Boyka and I will come as soon as we can. Your mother isn't thinking right, not even about her own children."

Boyka lumbered to her feet, nodding her huge head as she pulled Daisy's nightdress from under her pillow.

"How can you insult Mother like that? She's the mother of the country – even the British know that – and she's *my* mother. Who are you? A war widow who's bribed Father's chauffeur to kidnap us. Are you going to demand ransom money from Uncle Adolf?"

In spite of my disgust, I felt a thrill up my spine. Father had warned all our lives about secret enemies who might harm Uncle Adolf by hurting us, because we were so important.

Mrs. Kleine's hand trembled as she dabbed the red bulge of her nose. "The Russians do such horrible things to girls. If they come too close, we'll find another place to hide you."

"I promise you won't get away with it. Mother may have a bad heart, and Father limps because of his war wound, but they'll crawl to the summer house – or Uncle Adolf will send his Werewolves to rescue us. Could you fight his finest commandos?"

Mrs. Kleine tried to speak, but it came out as a gargle. Mother only hired her because just before we went to the summer house, the nursery maids didn't come to dress the little girls, and we'd found their beds empty. When a war widow begged for work we had no other choice. Mrs. Kleine and Boyka were our only servants at the summer house,

and they always whispered together. How had I stayed so ignorant of something happening under my nose?

I snatched up the slim tube lying on the windowseat and slipped it into my coat pocket. “You of all people should understand what your husband’s sacrifice was for, and beg for the chance to come with us tonight. Uncle Adolf saved Germany and made it the greatest empire in history. Adolf the Great! When he conquers the world, he’ll build a new world, and we’re the best children he knows. That’s why Father puts us in films, to show it’s children like us who will make sure Germany is never beaten again.” I tucked the diary under my arm. “You’ve always been kind to the little girls, and you stayed with us even though all the other maids ran away, so I won’t tell Father about your plot.”

Had they actually expected me to hide in the countryside while everyone else in Germany celebrated the victory? Uncle Adolf would have thought I’d done something so terrible that I couldn’t face his wrath.

Mrs. Kleine and Boyka stood motionless, like an audience enraptured by my speech.

At the door, I raised my voice just as Father had taught me. “If you’re still here when we come back, I’ll make sure you’re arrested for treason.”

## Chapter 2

“Once upon a time,” Hilde was whispering to the little girls. Her words vanished into the rumblings overhead. Even the ticking of the grandfather clock couldn’t reach us from the far end of the front hall.

I opened my diary, crouching down to balance it on my knee.

*We were all startled when the weapons roared and shook the house! Uncle Adolf must be testing them as a final warning to the Russians. I won’t cover my ears when he finally releases them, even if they burst above my head like fireworks. They’ll sound like music, because the war started when I was a child, and now it’s finally done.*

*Father says we’ve been with Uncle Adolf since the beginning and so our reward is to stand beside him at the end, no matter how many other people betrayed him or slunk away in fear. I have a particularly special position because Uncle Adolf is too devoted to Germany to marry, or even to have a lady-friend, so it makes sense that the eldest daughter of his most loyal minister is his favourite girl. I have to appreciate the responsibility this gives me – not only to the little ones but to all the girls in Germany, who look up to me just as all the women of the Empire look up to Mother.*

“Fight with everything you have!” Father emerged from the corridor that led to his recording studio.

Helmut bounded towards me as I straightened up, and

Hilde jerked the little girls into line. I tried to tell whether Father knew anything about the weapons test, but his pale face winked in and out of the shadows too quickly.

“Be proud and courageous! Be inventive and cunning! Your regional leader remains with you. His wife and children are here as well. That has a rather stirring ring, don’t you think?” He grinned over our heads.

Father always gave speeches that made me want to jump up from my seat, and the entire stadium quivered until they could shout. If I copied Father’s speeches into my diary, maybe I could finally learn to speak the way he did, using my voice to shoot shivers through people’s bodies –

“I suppose after three months in the country you all find my words too mundane.” His gaze slid over us. “Perhaps Helga’s new diary is more erudite than anything her father has to say.”

“No,” we all shouted.

I wanted to slip my diary behind my back, but Father fixed his dark eyes on me.

“It’s better than all your other speeches,” I told him. “Uncle Adolf couldn’t have picked anyone else to talk to Germany on his behalf – ”

“It’s inspirational,” Hilde said loudly. “Everyone will be proud to listen to you, Father.”

He shrugged. “I must admit it’s not my cleverest speech, and I’m astonished that you praise it so much, Helga, though of course the besieged people of Berlin will also lack the ability to critique my rhetoric. Even at the forefront of history, it’s best to tell the herd a simple message – what a shame this never worked on my dim-witted son, who still can’t pull up his own socks. Helga, why are you wearing your sister’s coat? Do I not clothe you?”

As Helmut ducked, scrambling around his feet, I hunched my shoulders. My wrists still stuck out. “It’s last year’s coat, Father. I only meant that all of your speeches



are wonderful. We heard the explosions – ”

“Of course you had no spare moment to take down those hems. No, you’d prefer to give Bormann an excuse to mock my shabby children. Take it off the minute we reach the shelter.”

“I can take down the hems in the car,” I said quickly. “Hilde brought her sewing kit.”

He tipped his head, putting a finger to his chin. “You’ll conduct a delicate operation, using a seam ripper and a needle, in semi-darkness while lurching through bomb craters? What hidden depths you have. Your mother and I are travelling in the armoured car. All of you, into the other Mercedes.”

I stepped forward, holding out my diary. “I’ve written about the weapons, but I couldn’t explain why Uncle Adolf was testing them before *we* arrived.”

Father turned towards the back of the hall. “Schwaegermann!”

When Mr. Schwaegermann appeared in the far corner of the hall, Father walked away, limping as if his war wound were hurting him or he needed his leg brace adjusted.

Helmut shouted at me, “I told you those weren’t the weapons! I’m not stupid!”

“You’re certainly loud,” Hilde chided him, sweeping the little girls past me.

I waited in the front drive. The sun had dipped below the treetops, and splinters of light danced across the roofs of the two cars. The crisp, tangy smell of spring fought with a smoky bitterness.

My stunted coat sleeves wouldn’t really matter, not as much as not having a fresh dress...but if Father hadn’t noticed, I might have made Uncle Adolf ashamed of me. And I’d just written about being a role model for all the girls of the Empire!

After the war I’d have a new wardrobe for my official business and public appearances. Mother would select

everything, because she paid such close attention to fashion and dressed so elegantly. I'd have a dove grey coat of light wool, hats that wouldn't blow off when I waved from a moving car, a floaty dress of voile and tulle for parties and a backless silk dress for evening receptions and film premieres, and sensible hard-wearing dresses for visiting girls' schools. Armies of dressmakers would troop through the house, and everything would be tissue-paper patterns and mouthfuls of pins.

Mr. Rach closed the rear door of the second Mercedes, cutting off Helmut's shout. He slouched towards me, crossing his black-gloved hands. Did he still think he was meant to be kidnapping us?

"We're going to the shelter," I called.

His head didn't turn on its thick neck.

When Mother finally came out the front door, I rushed to meet her. "Uncle Adolf won't do anything important until we arrive, will he?"

Mother's hair gleamed in a bright line under the brim of her hat. Behind her, Mr. Schwaegermann carried our nightcase and one of Father's wooden cases. It was probably filled with recordings of music to transmit after the victory. He carried it as lightly as if the heavy wax cylinders were feathers.

As we walked towards the cars, I slowed down to match Mother's pace, switching my diary to my other hand so she could lean against me if she felt tired. "Can Mr. Rach be trusted to take us to the shelter?"

Mother halted, pressing her hand to her chest. She was wearing an old cloth coat. "Where's Princess? I want her in the armoured car."

"Hilde's looking after the little ones. We were all so disappointed we couldn't celebrate Uncle Adolf's birthday, but we've been practicing our song. Will there be cake and champagne afterwards?"

"Tell Hilde that if Princess wants to come sit with me,

she's to bring her." Mother opened her purse. "I expect you to make sure the others stay quiet. None of you are to disturb him – where's my pillbox? Did I leave it in my room?"

All I could remember was shovelling handfuls of letters into the fireplace's stony mouth. I hadn't even looked at her vanity table with its heaps of powder compacts, lipstick cases, and glass perfume bottles. "I can go back and find it."

"So your father can shout at me because we're not ready when he decides to leave?" Mother dragged her hand through her purse.

"But you have to take your pills if you're feeling unwell. Uncle Adolf would be so worried if you had an attack!"

Mr. Schwaegermann slammed the trunk closed, then stood motionless beside the armoured Mercedes. For my entire life he'd been near Father, carrying his folded overcoat or waiting patiently for orders. He couldn't have been part of the plot.

Mother sighed, pulling the pillbox out of her handbag. "Open this for me."

The pillbox was smooth except for the embossed eagle rising up from the lid. I scraped at the catch, but I couldn't keep hold of my diary with fewer than three fingers.

"Use both hands, Helga. Why can't you do the one simple thing I ask you?"

As the catch released, the box tilted and the lid flipped back. The pills scattered like tiny stones.

"Oh, Mother, I'm sorry – "

"Just like your father." As Mother clawed the pillbox from my fingers, it rattled lightly. "So concerned with your precious diary you can't think about anyone else. None of you care how much *he* needs us. You think it's all about singing and champagne."

"I do care! Mother, there's at least one pill left – tomorrow we can get more..."

She was stalking away. As she passed Mr. Schwaegermann, their shadows paused together. Then Mother laughed.

Father stepped out into the driveway and motioned for Mr. Rach to join him.

I went towards the car and waited beside the passenger door, gripping my diary so my shaking hands didn't drop that, too. Hilde tapped on the window, making a questioning face at me.

Mr. Rach was standing in front of Father, waving his arms. "All I'm worth? You son of a..."

Mr. Schwaegermann reached into his jacket. His glass eye shone as black as the house windows.

I pulled at the handle and opened the door just enough to let myself through. I wasn't supposed to open my own car doors, because a minister's children had to be treated with respect.

Father knew all about the kidnap plot. He was dismantling it without even raising his voice.

"What took you so long?" Hilde demanded as I slid into the front seat. "Did Mother ask us to do anything?"

Princess was gazing out the side window.

"She was only making sure that we know to be quiet. None of us can disturb Uncle Adolf, even if we want to sing to him." I smoothed my coat, checking that my Montblanc was safely in my pocket. "Father is making sure that Mr. Rach knows where we need to be driven."

Helmut bounced up and down on the jump seat. "But I have to ask about Werewolves! I bet they don't even wear any socks."

"Stop kicking my legs," whined Daisy. "I'm a ballerina."

I winced as Hilde cried, almost in my ear, "How could Mother think we'd bother Uncle Adolf?"

Mr. Rach was stomping towards us. He ripped the door open so hard the car shuddered.

As he started the engine, I pressed my diary between my hands. When I wrote about the kidnap plot, other girls would understand that being the daughter of the Empire's most important minister wasn't simply about lovely clothes and having my photograph printed on postcards. Sometimes I felt scared, just as they did, but I never let it show.

The car trailed the armoured Mercedes, which prowled ahead of us.

"Don't look out," Hilde instructed. "Remember how scared we were driving back from the summer house, with all the horrible refugees shouting at us."

"The princess walks into the forest," said Princess.

"I'm not starting a new story until I finish the one you already asked for. When Rapunzel was twelve –"

"It's my turn next!" complained Daisy. "I get to ask for a story next."

"Only little girls who behave nicely can ask for stories. When Rapunzel was twelve years old and the most beautiful girl in the world, the evil witch locked her in a tower."

The light had grown smoky, as if the bombs were releasing dust instead of explosives. The car tires kept crunching against stones, so Mr. Rach had to reverse and steer around them. Whenever he swore, Hilde's voice got louder. The car started shaking back and forth, but none of us were ever sick in cars. When I finally flew in an airplane, I wouldn't even feel queasy.

We weren't taking Father's usual route to the Chancellery. Small white things shone among the collapsed buildings, as if all the crockery had tumbled out. The city looked grimy and defeated, but Mr. Speer would rebuild Berlin bigger and better than it had ever been, even under Frederick the Great. People flickered past, flashing headscarves and epaulets and collar patches. A man wobbling on a bicycle shook his fist, as if he thought we were the Russians. Everyone walked with their heads down, like

the refugees who walked westward throughout our months at the summer house – trudging old women with their hair wrapped in rags, old men pushing wheelbarrows piled high with boxes and pots, young women carrying bundles or screeching children. Everyone in Germany cheered Uncle Adolf when he expanded the Empire and sent all the Jews away to the east, but when the British and Russians attacked us, no one trusted Uncle Adolf enough to wait for victory. I wanted to roll down the window and insist that everyone listen to me – the war would be done within an hour!

Two high thin whistles arched overhead.

A flare blazed across my eyelids. A bright scene appeared, as if on a stage: a young man was draped – no, he was *hanging* from a lamp-post. His head drooped to one side, and a gash slithered above his cheek.

“His ear’s gone!” Helmut crowed. “They tore it off!”

Darkness swallowed the soldier. Spots danced in my eyes.

“The Russians tore his ear off his head!”

I turned to Mr. Rach. “They hanged him! Did some Russians sneak into Berlin and do this as a warning?”

The car jerked forward. Mr. Rach grunted. “His own unit strung him up for desertion. Made a fine example of him.”

Helmut punched the back of the seat. “When I find a Russian I’ll rip off *his* ear!”

As Hilde scolded him, I closed my eyes. In the Chancellery, we’d take the elevator down to a room with paintings on the walls – even better than the ones in *our* basement shelter that Father had brought in from museums. All the ministers would be drinking champagne. Uncle Adolf would tell us how much he’d missed us, and the little girls would fall over him, though of course I’d greet him as calmly as Mother did. Blondi would be there as well, her ears perked up and her fur shining, wearing the collar that

Daisy and I stitched as a present. It was a shame we hadn't been able to give it to Uncle Adolf ourselves on his birthday, but Father promised to deliver it personally. Other children would be there – at the very least, the Bormanns and Speers and Gudrun Himmler and Edda Goering – but Father would push us to the front of the group.

Uncle Adolf would take centre stage. After the first tremblings in our feet, the entire room would shake, with Uncle Adolf scowling in concentration, and Mr. Speer joyful because his weapons had worked and he could rebuild Berlin. Mother would be so relieved, looking happy and healthy, and she'd smile across the room at me.

Then the film crews would ask for interviews, and the secretaries would carry out bouquets...I'd forgotten about our clothes! When we arrived, the secretaries would whisk us into their office and we'd change as quickly as possible and brush our hair, and then –

“The king hangs the soldier.”

Princess's words floated in a sudden stillness, as if the world had gone quiet. Ahead of us lay a wasteland of broken concrete.

I lurched forward, squinting. The armoured Mercedes was gone. “Why did we stop?”

Mr. Rach pounded the steering wheel. “You guard him so close you risk getting your nuts blown off, and what's your reward? Swinging from the end of a rope.”

Hushed whisperings came from the back seat.

I said firmly, “Mr. Rach, take us to – ”

“Eight years I put up with his crap. Meetings, rallies, speeches, back and forth to the Ministry. Pick up the latest actress, dump her off and go get the new one. So what if my fingers freeze to the wheel? The little doctor needs his little whores!”

If I said the wrong words, Mr. Rach might drive us in the opposite direction purely out of anger. Even if he were punished afterwards, even if Father had him hanged, we'd

miss the ceremony.

“Are you upset that you weren’t invited?” I asked gently, as if soothing one of the little girls out of a temper. “I’ll speak to Father if you like. I’m sure if he knew how much it meant to you, he’d arrange for you to stand quietly in the back with the secretaries.” Father would never change his mind, of course, but so long as I *did* ask him, I wasn’t lying.

Someone sobbed in the back seat. Hilde made shushing noises.

Mr. Rach gripped the wheel. He was too angry to thank me.

“Uncle Adolf sent for us,” I reminded him. “Mrs. Kleine was very misguided when she asked you to take us to the summer house.” If we were close enough to the Chancellery, soldiers could rescue us...but only if they knew where we were. Why hadn’t I noticed the other car pull away? “You work for Father, so you have to follow *his* instructions – ”

My head jerked back as Mr. Rach grabbed my coat collar. “Don’t you lecture me, you fine little miss.”

My diary thumped to the floor.

“I don’t need a bodyguard anymore,” as if he’s kicking an old tire.” He tugged hard, then shoved me away. “No money, not that it’s worth wiping my ass with, but he could have offered.”

“How dare you grab me like that?” He must have been a spy for the Russians. If we sat on this street for long enough, would a bomb fall exactly on top of us?

“Not even one of those magic blue pills you crack with your teeth and then you’re a million miles from Ivan. Just says he won’t be needing me after tonight – and cool as you please, tells me my last job’s driving his precious children through this hellhole, like it’s a trip to the zoo. The maids gave me their jewellery but the great minister can’t toss me a bone. What’s to stop me from driving the lot of you to the