

**T**his story is true. It really happened to real people in the real world.

It was a very long time ago. Your grandmothers and grandfathers hadn't even been born yet, and *their* mothers and fathers were still children. Maybe the same age as you are now. The year was 1938. The world was a scary place in those days, full of dangers and threats: wars, angry people, lots of things changing in ways nobody could predict. Parents worried about how they could keep their children safe in such a world.

The story I'm going to tell you is about a family who had more reason to worry than most. Their surname was Kleinmann. The parents were Gustav and his wife Tini, and they had four children – two girls and two boys, Edith and Herta, Fritz and Kurt. They lived together in Vienna, a beautiful old city in the country of Austria.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Say Yes!*

‘Head it!’  
Fritz leapt in the air, stretching for the football his friend Leo had kicked. It flew over his head, hit a lamppost and rolled into the road. He ran to fetch it, as a cart pulled by a huge shaggy horse came thundering along.

‘Get out the way!’ yelled the driver, and Fritz leapt back. There was a clatter of hooves and iron wheels, then it had passed by.

The horse had trodden on the ball and squashed it flat. It wasn’t a proper football, just a bundle of rags rolled up and tied tightly. The local kids were mostly poor and couldn’t afford a real leather football. Fritz squeezed and rolled the bundle until it was round again, then kicked it back to Leo.

Fritz Kleinmann and Leo Meth lived around the

corner from each other. Fritz had lots of friends – a great big gang of them – but Leo was one he would remember forever.

The boys were playing in the open space of the marketplace, which was called the Karmeliter market, across the street from Fritz's apartment. It was after school, and the stalls had closed down for the day. The farmers had packed up their unsold produce and clopped off along the street on their carts.

Fritz and the other kids ran among the empty stalls, kicking the ball back and forth. Only Mrs Capek, the fruit seller, was still there. She never packed up until it got dark. In summer she gave the kids corn cobs. Most of the boys and girls around here were poor and would take all the free food they could get. They sometimes got bits of sausage from the butcher, stale bread rolls from the baker and – the best of all – whipped-cream cakes and pink wafers from the confectioner in Tabor Street. The cakes in Vienna were the best in the world.

Leo kicked the ball high again. Two other friends went for it, but this time Fritz stopped it with his head, and as the ball dropped to his feet, he started dribbling it along the cobbled square. He was about to give it a mighty kick, which would have sent the ball right over Mrs Capek's stall, when he spotted a policeman heading their way. They could get into trouble if he caught them playing. Ball games weren't allowed in the market, even though it was the only open space near their homes.

The stern-looking policeman glanced in the boys' direction. Quick as a flash, Fritz tapped the ball under the stall, and Mrs Capek dropped a box over it. She put her finger to her lips. *Shhh*. The policeman walked by, staring suspiciously at the boys, who all tried to look innocent. Then he was gone.

As Fritz was retrieving the ball and thanking Mrs Capek, they heard the piercing sound of horns in the distance. *Ta-raa! Ta-raa!*

The fire engine was going out on a call!

Fritz and Leo had the same thought at the same time. They started running towards the sound before their friends had even realised what was happening. They raced to the end of the line of stalls and turned into Leopold Lane.

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‘Fritz! Wait for me! Fritz!’

Looking back, Fritz saw his little brother, Kurt, come running through the market, waving his arms. He stood no chance of catching them up – Fritz and his friends were fourteen, and Kurt was just eight years old. He had a gang his own age, and they often tagged along with the older boys for safety.

Fritz waited, itching with impatience. By the time Kurt caught up, Leo and the others were almost out of sight.

‘Mum says you’re to come home,’ said Kurt. ‘It’s dinner.’

Fritz wasn’t ready yet. He wanted to go and see the fire engine. He stood at the edge of the road, trying to make up his mind whether to cross it and follow his friends, or turn back with Kurt. The road was busy with vans, lorries and the horse-drawn carts of the coal sellers and breweries.

Then he noticed their neighbour, Mr Loewy, trying to cross from the other side. He’d been a soldier in the First World War and had lost his eyesight. He stood at the kerb, listening to the thunder of traffic and tapping his walking stick on the ground.

Fritz dodged across quickly and took Mr Loewy’s hand. ‘It’s Fritz,’ he said. ‘I’ll help you.’

‘Gustav’s boy?’ said the old man. ‘How’s your father?’

‘He’s fine, thank you, Mr Loewy. Here’s a gap! Hurry now.’

Fritz guided him across. Mr Loewy thanked him and went on his way, his stick tap-tapping on the paving stones.

When Fritz came back, Kurt was staring at the pavement. ‘What’s that stuff?’ he said, pointing.

Fritz looked down and saw that someone had written words all over the ground – on the pavement, on the road, even on the walls – in white paint. The same slogans over and over again.

SAY YES!  
YES FOR AUSTRIA!  
YES FOR FREEDOM!

Fritz knew what it meant. It was part of the reason their mum had been so worried lately about them being outdoors when it was getting dark. The slogans were about the big vote that was happening in a few days.

‘It’s to do with Hitler,’ said Fritz. ‘We’re showing him who’s boss.’

Kurt knew that name. Hitler. Although he didn’t really understand who Hitler was, Kurt knew he was dangerous. A chill went through him.

Fritz understood that of all the dangers in the world, Adolf Hitler was the worst. The country of Austria – where Fritz and Kurt lived – was next door to Germany, which was ruled by people who called themselves ‘Nazis’. Adolf Hitler was their leader.

The Nazis were driven by anger and determination to control everything and everyone. Hitler and his junior leaders dressed like soldiers; they loved war and hated everyone who was not like themselves. That meant foreigners, people of colour, traveller folk, gay people, anyone who had different beliefs about how society should work, anyone the Nazis thought was not a ‘true German’. Because the Nazis were in charge of the government in Germany, *they* got to decide what ‘not being a true German’ meant, and it was basically anyone the Nazis didn’t like. It didn’t make any sense, but the Nazis thought it. They wanted Germany to be great and powerful, and they wanted it to be the way they imagined it had been in the old days. Even modern artists who painted in new and different styles were called ‘degenerate’ and their artworks were banned.

Most of all, the Nazis hated Jewish people. Jews have been in the world for thousands of years. Their religion has some similarities with the Christian faith, but their beliefs about God are different from Christian beliefs, and they have their own traditions and special holy days. Many people distrust anyone who is different from themselves. The Nazis were especially suspicious of difference, believing that anyone who was not a ‘true German’ (according to their idea of what that meant) was a danger to the whole of German society. And when it came to Jewish people, the Nazis believed – without any



justification at all – that they were the cause of virtually everything that was wrong with the world.

Adolf Hitler wasn't satisfied with only ruling Germany. He wanted Austria too. Austrians speak German, the two countries have a lot in common, and Hitler was born in Austria, so he thought the country should be his too. He'd demanded that it be given to Germany, but Austria's leader, Mr Schuschnigg, wouldn't give it up. There was going to be a big vote next Sunday to prove that Austrian people wanted to stay free. That's what the slogans on the pavement were about – *Yes for Austria! Yes for freedom!* Hitler was extremely angry about the whole thing. So angry that he might even send his armies to conquer Austria.

There were hundreds of Jewish families in the neighbourhoods around the Karmeliter market. Fritz and Kurt and their family, the Kleinmanns, were among them. To those Jewish people, the idea of the Nazis coming there was terrifying.

What was even more scary was that some people in Vienna *liked* the Nazis, and wanted Hitler to come.

Fritz and Kurt turned to head home.

'Hey Fritz!' It was Leo and another friend, Hans. Leo was carrying a sweet pastry filled with whipped cream. Both boys had cream smeared around their mouths. 'Anker's bakery were giving away cakes!' said Leo. 'I saved this one for you. We lost the fire engine, though.'

The pastry was past its best and a bit squashed, but it was still delicious. Fritz broke it across the middle and shared it with Kurt as the four of them walked home.

Fritz asked, 'Do you think Hitler will come?'

'To Vienna?' said Leo. 'Dunno.' Leo was Jewish too. A lot of their friends were.

'I think he will,' said Hans. 'That's what he's like.'

Hans, who was part Jewish, knew what he was talking about. His family had moved to Vienna from Germany a few years ago after his father got in trouble for speaking out against the Nazis. Hans's father was a barber, and all the men in the neighbourhood who sat in his chair to get their hair cut heard about the terrible things he'd seen happening to Jewish people in Berlin.

'Yes, Hitler will come here,' said Hans again, licking cream off his fingers.

'Not today, though!' said Leo, giving Fritz a cheerful nudge.

Leo was right. Today had been a good day. Fritz took Kurt's hand, which was sticky with icing sugar. They crossed Island Street to the apartment building where they lived. Hans and Leo ran off through the market towards their own homes.

'*Will* Hitler come?' asked Kurt anxiously. To him, Fritz was a hero, older and wiser. Kurt would trust his brother over anyone.

Fritz didn't answer straight away. In truth, he just didn't know. He didn't like to think about it. 'Maybe,' he said. 'Maybe not.' He ruffled Kurt's hair, getting a smear of cream in it. 'Like Leo said, it won't happen today! Now let's clean up a bit. Mum'll be mad if she knows we've had cakes before dinner.'