

Brothers-In- Arms

A World War II Story

Jack Lewis Baillot

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Part One

**Somewhere over the
rainbow**

One

A friendship forged over sisters

1944

There were many times in the next few years when Japhet Buchanan wished he could escape his world and flee to another one like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz. He wanted to slip away and find himself in a place where the biggest concerns were witches and shoes. He would even have been willing to face the flying monkeys.

He sometimes liked to pretend he was able to escape into Oz. He would close his eyes when Stein stood in front of him and yelled, demanding Japhet give up the others in the resistance. Japhet would cast himself and others as the characters and imagine how different life would be.

He would be the Cowardly Lion looking for his courage. Courage to stand up to his friend, to stand up to the world even after the world took everything from him.

Jimmy was Dorothy, pulled out of the world he had always known and thrown into one full of insanity. The idea of Jimmy being Dorothy always made Japhet smile because Jimmy would have thrown a chess piece at him if he knew Japhet cast him as

Judy Garland.

Stein was the Wicked Witch of the East, out to take what he wanted and kill whoever got in his way. Sadly, he didn't die when he got wet.

The role of the Scarecrow was always filled by those who had insanity forced on them by the Nazis.

And Franz – Franz Kappel was the Tin Man. The man with no heart. The man who could coldly turn his best friend over the Nazis without batting an eye.

They hadn't always been best friends. They hadn't known each other until they were eight and seven. But when they met, it was an instant bond.

It happened at church. The Buchanans were Jewish, but also born-again Christians. They didn't go to the local synagogue every week, but instead attended a nearby church fairly often. That was how they first met the Kappels.

The Kappels had one of those long, boring family histories that Japhet Buchanan had never cared about. Everyone in Germany seemed to have one, his own family included, and after hearing ten such stories he stopped listening. From what he did hear, the Kappel family had been living in Germany for over a hundred years, and the recent Kappels had been living outside of Berlin for fifty years.

There weren't many kids Japhet's age in the little church. Japhet saw Franz from time to time but for some reason never thought to talk to him. Instead, it was Mrs. Buchanan who went to talk to Mrs. Kappel one day after the service. After that the two women talked after church for a month, then Mrs. Kappel came to tea and Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Kappel began to talk. It was only a matter of time before the two mothers forced their sons into an introductory meeting.

It happened during one of the tea sessions. Mrs. Kappel brought her son over and Mrs. Buchanan told Japhet he should take him out into the backyard to play. Japhet thought the whole thing was stupid. Mothers couldn't just arrange friendships, and he knew Franz Kappel was older than he, so he didn't know why he had to play host. But Japhet wasn't one for arguing with the woman who could send him to his room without supper. He obeyed.

Franz also wasn't overly impressed with the friendship attempt, and for a while, the two boys sat on the woodpile and said nothing. That was until Japhet's older sister thrust her brown head out of her bedroom window and demanded that Japhet return her brush.

"It's your brush," Japhet retorted back. "Why would I have it?"

She'd yelled at him until she saw Franz, then she glared and yanked her head back inside. Once she was gone from sight, Franz grinned almost wickedly at Japhet.

"Did you take it?" he'd asked.

There was something in that grin. Some kind of camaraderie Japhet had never seen before in any of his other friends. Unwilling, he returned the grin.

"Yes."

The evil grin widened.

"I did that to one of my sisters last week."

One of. That stuck in Japhet's mind faster than eggs stuck to a hot pan.

"You have more than one sister?" he asked.

Franz laughed scornfully. "I have five older sisters," he muttered.

Japhet felt instant sympathy.

"I'm sorry. I have only three older sisters."

And that was the start of it. Because boys know something mothers might not ever understand. Nothing creates a friendship faster than finding a fellow sufferer in a household of all girls and no boys.

1933

The fire snapped and devoured a log as Franz stared at the page laid down in front of him. The words on the page danced in front of his eyes. He knew if he blinked they would clear, but he didn't feel like it. Across from him, Japhet had his homework book closed already. He had his sketchbook open and was drawing.

Franz refrained from smashing his head down on his open history book. It was December. One more week of school before the Christmas holiday. Franz had to remind himself of this, over and over. He could make it.

Of course, making it would have been easier if Japhet didn't get through his homework so fast, or so easily. The two of them always got together after school to work in the Buchanan kitchen, and Japhet always finished an hour before Franz. Then he would "doodle" with his left hand, even though he was right-handed. It was almost aggravating since his so-called doodles probably could have been sent to an art museum.

"You could at least pretend to care about my agony," Franz finally grumbled.

Japhet didn't look up from the landscape his pencil flew over. Trees and a rolling hill were starting to take life.

"I could," he replied, "but then I'd have to tutor you again. And you're an annoying student."

"Am not." Franz spun his pencil around on the table. "You're a know-it-all teacher."

"I pay attention in class."

A bird joined the trees. The bird was so lifelike it could have flown off the page. Franz considered shooting his pencil at Japhet.

“No one likes a bragger,” Franz muttered just as Mrs. Buchanan walked into the kitchen. When she saw them at the table, she placed her hands on her hips and frowned.

“What are you two doing in here? There’s fresh snow on the ground. Why aren’t you outside?”

“Franz is too slow with his homework,” Japhet complained.

Walking over, Mrs. Buchanan studied his history page over his shoulder. She smelled like firewood and fresh bread. She was a short woman, plump, with bony arms. Franz knew they were bony. He’d once startled her when he’d barged into the kitchen and she’d caught him in the stomach with her elbow.

“History,” Mrs. Buchanan said. She shook her head. “It’s almost the school break. You two need to go outside for a bit and get into a snowball fight or something. The snow is perfect for snowballs.”

When Franz looked at Japhet, his eyes were twinkling. They both knew how important it was to get outside while the snow could be formed into snowballs. If they waited too long, it would start to melt and then all they’d have would be slush. Besides, when an adult said they ought to have a snowball fight it was impossible to say no. Franz slammed his book closed, Japhet laid his pencil on his sketchbook, and they raced to the door. They tried to pass through the kitchen door at the same time, crashed into each other, and fell into the living room where Mr. Buchanan was just coming in the front door. He removed his hat and stared down at them.

“I’m so glad to see my son racing to see me,” he teased. “There’s a mob of boys outside, by the way.” As he spoke, Mrs. Buchanan came out of the kitchen, stepped over the boys, and went to kiss her husband.

“I just ran into Gert,” Mr. Buchanan said, speaking of their neighbor across the street, after he’d returned her kiss. Franz only half listened as he wiggled out from under Japhet’s leg and ignored his glare.

They snatched up their coats as Mrs. Buchanan did the proper thing and asked how the neighbors were doing. Japhet grabbed one of the Franz’s gloves, dropped it on the floor, and pinned it under his foot.

“Great. The baby has finally stopped howling,” Mr. Buchanan continued. Husband and wife ignored the boys as Franz shoved his shoulder against Japhet’s chest. The younger boy didn’t budge.

“Did they find out what’s been wrong?”

Franz lived a block from the Buchanans but, like everyone else in the little village, he knew Mr. Leitz—Gert to the adults—and his wife had just had a baby boy who had been howling non-stop since he’d been born. No one could make the baby happy, and he kept neighbors and his parents awake. Right now, though, babies hovered in the back of his mind. He shoved his shoulder harder against Japhet, who braced his feet and grinned.

“The baby couldn’t figure out how to eat.”

Japhet and Franz stopped their struggle and Japhet squinted at his dad. “How can a baby not know how to eat?” he asked.

“It happens more often than you’d think,” Mrs. Buchanan answered. “A baby is

fed by a tube while in the womb. Then one day it comes out into the cold world and it isn't fed anymore and has to eat on its own. And no one is there to give it instructions."

Japhet grinned and dug his elbow into Franz's side.

"Bet you needed instructions since I wasn't around yet to help you out."

Franz pounced on him and knocked him to the floor as Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan continued their baby conversation.

"Gert said we can come over and see the baby now. You have to come with me so it won't be strange that I'm over there."

It wasn't easy holding Japhet down. He was smaller and skinnier than Franz and could squirm away. He wiggled like a fish and slithered across the floor. Franz jumped up and threw himself on top of him again, pinning him by the couch. They both banged loudly onto the floor, but Japhet's parents said nothing.

"You need more babies in your life," Mrs. Buchanan said.

"Yes, you should give me more. Then I wouldn't have to make excuses to go over and hold the neighbor's."

Franz heard lips smacking, a sound he'd gotten used to. Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan always seemed to be kissing.

"I'd gladly give you more kids, but then we might have another son."

Japhet snatched a cushion off the couch, somehow twisted around under Franz, and beamed him in the face with it. Franz stumbled back and looked for something with which to retaliate when he realized he was now being talked about.

"What's so bad about another son?" Mr. Buchanan had asked.

"Well, Japhet is this bad with a part time brother. Can you imagine him with a full-

time one?"

Their hair standing on end from the wrestling match, Japhet and Franz both looked up. Mr. Buchanan's eyes had gone wide.

"What?" he exclaimed. "You mean Franz isn't my son?" He glanced down at Franz. "Why are you always over here then, eating my food?"

"Because I'm so amazing and he hopes to pick up on it."

Franz spun around with a retort to counter Japhet's teasing but instead got a face full of cushion.

Mr. Buchanan picked up Franz's glove and tossed it to him. "I guess you'll have to keep coming over then," he said with a wink.

"Funny." Franz tried to swallow his grin, but like always he failed. Instead he got to his feet, yanked on his coat, and dashed out the door before Japhet could hurl the cushion at his head.

Two

Snowball fight

1933

The first snowball fight of Christmas break always proved to be the best. Franz and Japhet held it in the Kappel's front yard since it was bigger than the Buchanan's.

Mrs. Kappel kept the water in her teapot hot so the boys could have hot chocolate when they came inside. Mr. Kappel helped them build their first fort. After that, they would pile more snow on it to fortify it as needed.

The moment they were let out of school on the last day, Franz and Japhet would dart out the door and meet up in the schoolyard. They would then race each other to the Kappel's front yard.

Franz always won the races. Japhet did his best. He pushed himself until his lungs burned, but his short legs refused to allow him to pass Franz. He always made up coming in second by jumping on Franz's back the moment he stopped.

Snow started to fall by the time Franz and Japhet reached the front yard. The fort

was already built—they and Mr. Kappel had worked on it the night before. The moment they reached it, Franz and Japhet dove behind it and began rolling snowballs while keeping an eye out for the other boys. They took turns, one keeping watch while the other rolled.

“Are they coming yet?” Japhet hissed after half an hour had passed. Their pile had grown to a good size, but he was concerned. None of the other boys had ever been this late before.

“I’d have told you if they were,” Franz retorted. “I’m not sleeping up here.”

Picking up one of the smaller snowballs, Japhet threw it at Franz’s back. Franz turned and jumped on him and they rolled back and forth in the snow, their grunts interrupted only by their laughter.

Japhet was getting the upper hand, which rarely happened since he was smaller than Franz, when a shout alerted them that they were no longer alone. Before they could get back behind their fortress, a snowball whizzed at them and got Franz in the head. Japhet snorted with laughter as he snatched up snowballs to return fire.

“I got one of them!” Japhet’s friend, Amell, shouted. Amell was his neighbor, the one with the new howling baby brother.

“Duck!” another boy, Gilbert, yelled. He hit the ground behind a neighbor’s car but wasn’t fast enough. Japhet got his leg as he dove for cover.

Franz now at his side, Japhet picked up two snowballs and hurled them at Amell, who took longer to duck in an attempt to hit Franz before he got behind the fortress. Amell’s snowballs flew harmlessly over Franz’s head while one Franz threw found a mark. It smacked Amell full on the face and Japhet grinned with glee when he saw snow

drop down his collar.

“How’s your face?” Japhet asked Franz before he stuck his head up and hit the stunned Amell in the chest.

“Not fair!” Amell accused. He dropped to his knees and rubbed at his face. “I’m blind!”

“War isn’t fair!” Japhet shouted. He glanced at Franz, who nodded. With a war cry both leaped up and charged Amell, hurling snowballs as fast as they could.

From behind the car, Gilbert whimpered and said something which sounded like surrender. Japhet ignored his pleas, ran past Amell, and pummeled Gilbert as he tried to wiggle away under the car.

The massacre was swift but merciless. Franz and Japhet never took prisoners and didn’t let up until both Amell and Gilbert begged for mercy.

Grinning, Japhet sat down on the sidewalk and watched as Amell pulled off his coat and beat snow out of it.

“Your shirt is wet,” Japhet said.

“You think you’re so good at this,” Amell complained. He brushed snow out of his hair and Japhet howled with laughter when it dripped down his shirt.

“You wouldn’t be laughing so hard if this were a game of hide-and-seek tag and not a snowball fight,” Gilbert grumbled. He had his glasses off. He kept rubbing them on his shirt to get the snow off but just smeared it.

Franz sat beside Japhet and said little, though Japhet had long since gotten used to his silence. Franz talked to Japhet but never said much to the other boys. Japhet didn’t care, it made his friendship with Franz feel different than with Amell and Gilbert –

closer somehow.

“I’ve been getting better,” Japhet told Amell. Not only could he not outrun Franz but he couldn’t outrun the other boys either. Amell was a year older, so not being able to outrun him didn’t matter as much. Gilbert was a year younger and another matter. His mom considered him a genius, Japhet figured there might be some truth in that. Gilbert was the youngest one in Japhet’s grade and he knew more than Japhet ever planned on learning. He spent all his time reading and was slightly pudgy, which only made it worse that he could outrun Japhet.

“Sure you have,” Amell mocked.

Lifting his head, Franz glared at Amell and then exchanged glances with Japhet. They both grinned at each other.

“Don’t believe me?” Japhet asked.

“Does it look like we do?” Gilbert asked. He put his glasses back on and water dripped down the lenses.

“You look scared to me,” Franz said.

“We’re not scared!” Amell shouted. He got to his feet and scowled. Japhet grinned just to annoy him.

“Fine.” He got up too, Franz scrambling up beside him. “Prove it.”

Then, before Amell had time to react, Franz reached around Japhet, slapped Amell’s arm, and took off.

“You’re it!”

“Try to find us and catch us!” Japhet added as he also turned and ran. Gilbert followed suit, stumbling off in the other direction, leaving Amell standing alone in the

cold.

Japhet found an empty trashcan that didn't smell of dying bananas and someone's leftover dinner. He heaved himself inside, pulled on the lid, and slowed his breathing, not moving a muscle. Franz had taught him all his hiding tricks.

"If you can't outrun them find another way to beat them."

And he had. All through the summer he and Franz had perfected his hiding skills. Now Japhet bit his lip to keep from smiling as Amell ran past his hiding place. Once, twice, three times. It started to get cold and Japhet had to fight to keep his teeth from chattering. "Buchanan!" he heard Amell shout once or twice before his voice faded off down the street. Japhet could have laughed.

Finally, Amell's voice was joined by Gilbert's, a sign that Gilbert had been found. More time passed. The chill got worse. Icy fingers came up Japhet's backside and climbed his spine. He still refused to move.

"When I get my hands on him I'm going to strangle him!" Amell snapped once, then his stomping feet faded.

"Where is he Franz?" were the next words to reach inside Japhet's trashcan. The question came from Gilbert. By then his fingers were little icicles.

"I don't know," Franz murmured.

Amell snorted in anger. "You do so, Kappel. Tell us! Before we all turn to snowmen ourselves."

"You give up?" Franz kept his voice level, but there was a note of triumph in it.

"Yes, sure. I can't feel my toes. Just find him for us so we can go inside. My dad will kill me if I leave him out here all night."

Franz laughed and Japhet closed his eyes as the lid came off the trashcan. Cold air hit his head and he lifted his face, opened his eyes, and looked up to find Franz grinning down at him.

“I think you won,” Franz said.

Three

Hanukkah

1933

"I'm supposed to invite you to Hanukkah."

Franz looked up from the pile of wood and nails. He had locked himself in his dad's back shed, even though it wasn't really locked since the lock had long since broken off. It had something to do with Franz and Japhet trying to see if they could kick doors in, though nothing had ever been proven.

"What?"

Japhet stood in the doorway and somehow he'd gotten a hold of Franz's hammer. He held it out to him.

"Hadi said I had to come over and invite you and your family to celebrate the last day of Hanukkah with us." Japhet leaned in the doorway and frowned at his boots.

Hadi was one of the middle Buchanan girls. Her full name was Hadassah, but Franz could only remember one time she'd ever been called that. She and Kirsten, who was Franz's 19-year-old sister, were close. Probably because they had boyfriends with whom they liked to spend almost every waking moment.

"We always come over on the last day of Hanukkah." Franz, now armed with his hammer, began nailing boards into place.

He spoke between the banging. "Why is she inviting us now?"

"Something to do with Ross," Japhet said. Ross was Hadi's boyfriend. "I guess he's coming over and she said it should be more formal. Or something. I didn't really

listen.”

“If it’s so formal why is she making you ask us over? Why doesn’t she do it? Or have Kirsten ask us?” Franz didn’t expect an answer. He had sisters. He knew half of what they thought up wasn’t meant to make sense.

“I don’t know. Just make sure you come, okay? I don’t want to spend the whole day alone with Ross. I need you there for moral support.”

Holding nails in his teeth, Franz turned from his hammering. He raised his eyebrows and Japhet grinned. Franz pulled the nails from between his lips.

“Maybe I don’t want to come over now that I know Ross is there.”

“If Kirsten hears he’ll be there then she’s going to bring Hardy. So you’d better come or I’m going to climb in your window at midnight and bury you in snow. And you know I’ll do it.”

Since Japhet had done it before, Franz didn’t doubt one word. He shrugged and returned to his catapult. Japhet entered the shed and helped him by holding boards into place for him.

Franz had come up with the catapult design and idea. His talent didn’t lie in drawing so he made up for it in other areas. Usually, they involved pulling pranks on Amell and Gilbert. He planned to set the catapult up behind the fortress and get Amell and Gilbert on the last day of the Christmas break.

They worked on it until Mrs. Kappel called them into dinner. Franz didn’t know if Japhet had originally planned on staying to eat, but he didn’t say anything as his friend sat at the table.

Not that it mattered. Both boys often ate at each other’s houses. If they didn’t

show up at their own home for dinner, their parents knew where they were.

“How’s the catapult?” Mr. Kappel asked as Japhet and Franz claimed their seats.

“Good. I think we’ll have it done by the end of the week,” Franz answered.

Kirsten shook her head as Mr. Kappel grinned.

“This is one reason Hardy doesn’t like to come over, Dad. And you encourage it.”

Mr. Kappel’s grin turned evil.

“You’re my girl, Kirsten. If Hardy is as interested in you as he claims, he will brave anything the boys throw at him. This is my way of testing him, to see if he’s worthy of you.”

Sighing, Kirsten tugged on a strain of blond hair. Franz settled back into his seat and beamed at his sister. Thankfully she had gotten too old to fling peas at him.

Japhet had taken a few bites of food before he seemed to remember his invitation.

“Mr. and Mrs. Kappel,” he said, ripping his eyes from his plate, “my sister is being weird. She wanted me to invite all of you to Hanukkah. I told her you always come, but she told me to ask. I think it has something to do with Ross.”

Franz saw his dad’s eyes shine, but he held back any laughter. He glanced slyly at Kirsten but said nothing. She didn’t notice the look, which disappointed Franz. He liked it when her face turned as red as an apple.

“Is your mom cooking?” Mr. Kappel asked Japhet.

“Wilhelm!” Franz’s mom rebuked. “You’re going to make the boy think the only reason we go over is for Sarah’s cooking!”

“That *is* the only reason I go over,” Mr. Kappel teased.

"I'm telling her you said that," Mrs. Kappel warned.

"I'm not scared."

"You will be when Josef finds out you are trying to horde all his wife's cooking."

"Traitor," Mr. Kappel said into his peas.

The rest of the meal passed with Kirsten, Bea, Elsa, Gabi, and Sophia trying to decide what they would wear to the Hanukkah gathering and Franz and Japhet kicking each other under the table. When the meal was over and Japhet started for home Mr. Kappel made sure to remind him they'd be over for the celebration, and Franz made him promise to come back the next day to help finish the catapult.

"I want to get Hardy tomorrow night; we can test it out on him."

Japhet grinned. "I'll be here then."

Hour

Standing up

1934

Ten was a special age. When Franz turned ten, he'd been given permission to go alone to the field a mile outside of town—not that he ever went alone. Japhet always went with him. They just no longer had the need to beg their sisters to take them. Ten was an age which meant more freedom. Except Japhet had school the day of his birthday.

"It's not fair," he grumbled as he and Franz walked down the middle of the road together. It always made them feel like they were walking on the edge of danger even though there were few cars in town. "Last year my birthday was on Sunday."

"It's because the days are always changing," Franz pointed out, trying his rarely used big brother tone. He swung his books in an arch, almost hitting Japhet with them. "But it isn't going to be so bad. I'm coming to spend the night again. And Ruth said she will make your cake. Besides, I had to go to school on my birthday."

Ruth was Japhet's fourteen-year-old sister and the youngest out of the three girls. She excelled at baking even if her big sister skills needed work.

"You owe me this birthday," Japhet said.

"I owe you?" Franz stopped swinging his books. "For what?"

"For my last birthday. Remember? Last year you came up with the idea to prank our sisters, and I got grounded for it. I had to spend the whole day inside."

“You’re just whining,” Franz said. “I spent all day with you while you were imprisoned and you know it. Even though I’d already served my punishment.”

Japhet laughed gleefully. “You had to polish all of your sisters’ shoes and do their laundry. For a week.”

“And cook dinner on Kirsten’s night so Hardy could take her to a restaurant. If anything, you got off easy.” Franz smacked Japhet lightly on the back of the head.

Such gestures always called for war. Japhet shoved Franz and took off running down the snowy street, the cold winter air stinging his lungs. Franz gave chase and they dashed into the school yard and made it to the lawn before Franz tackled Japhet to the ground. Books went flying and the boys rolled over and over each other. When they came to a stop, they were covered in snow and there was a hole in Franz’s pants leg.

“I’m dead,” he said.

“Good. Serves you right, tackling me on my birthday.” Japhet sat up and reached for his hat, which had gotten knocked off his head. As he brushed snow out of his hair and tried to keep it from going down his back, some of the other boys walked past him and Franz. Looking up, Japhet smiled at them, not sure if it surprised him anymore when the other boys didn’t return it. Something strange had been going on with Amell, Gilbert, and the others for the past few months. Japhet had given up trying to find out what.

“Franz, what are you doing?” Gilbert stopped and looked down at them. Japhet shifted his seat when he felt the snow beginning to melt and seep into his pants. He peered up at Gilbert.

That was another thing Japhet had started to notice. Whenever the other boys

were around now, which wasn't often, they spoke to Franz instead of him. At first it had been funny, watching Franz glare and sputter for sentences. Now it was annoying.

Franz stopped making half-hearted grabs for his scattered books.

"I'm sitting in the snow, idiot. What does it look like?"

With his new thrust into the social world, Franz's temper had made an appearance. Japhet made a snowball and threw it at Gilbert, but the boy just ducked and kept his eyes on Franz.

"No." A couple of other boys joined Gilbert. "What are you doing with him?" Gilbert pointed right at Japhet.

"Him?" Franz stared at Japhet in confusion and Japhet stared right back. Japhet racked his mind in a sudden panic, trying to remember if Franz had talked him into pulling a prank on Gilbert, which would have ended looking like Japhet had done it. He couldn't remember anything. They'd only seen Gilbert once that summer.

"I'm sitting in the snow with him. And he has a name."

"But—" One of the seven-year-old boys stared in horror as if Japhet had suddenly grown fangs.

"But he's a Jew!" Amell suddenly joined the group and the conversation.

"Duh," Franz muttered. "Everyone knows he's a Jew. Everyone has always known he's a Jew. You've always known he's a Jew."

Japhet's face reddened. He had never really considered his heritage. He had been born and raised in Germany, just like all the other boys. He was a Jew, but that didn't make him all that different from everyone else. His parents were Christian and only celebrated some of the Jewish holidays to remember their past. Japhet couldn't

understand why, all of the sudden, being called a Jew made him uncomfortable.

“But you shouldn’t be...playing...with a Jew,” Gilbert said slowly.

“What?” Franz got to his feet and glared, his temper running shorter with each second. “Why not? He’s my best friend! Besides, you play with him all the time.”

“I don’t anymore!” Gilbert yelled.

“It doesn’t matter what we used to do,” Amell cut in. He held his head high, using his height advantage over Franz. “He’s a Jew!”

Japhet didn’t know how to react to the argument and kept his seat in the snow as Franz clenched his hands into fists.

“Stop saying that!” he shouted. “It doesn’t matter if he’s a Jew or not! It has never mattered and it never will!”

Amell stepped closer to Franz. “It does matter! He’s a stinking Jew and he shouldn’t even be allowed here! He’s so stupid he shouldn’t even try going to school! He can’t learn anything!”

Stunned, Japhet didn’t know how to react. He’d never once dreamed Amell would say anything like that about him. Japhet’s head felt like it was spinning and he couldn’t make sense of what was happening.

Unexpectedly, Franz’s fist slammed into Amell’s stomach. The boy doubled over and Franz kicked him in the shin, then jumped on him and knocked him to the ground where he punched him again.

“You take it back!” Franz shouted as he let his fists fly.

Gilbert, gasping in horror, grabbed one of Franz’s arms and tried to pull him off Amell, but Franz wouldn’t budge.

“Take it back!” he yelled.

Japhet heard his friend’s angry shouts. He heard girls screaming and calling for the teachers. He heard Gilbert’s words of reason and Amell’s grunts of pain, but it all sounded far away and muffled. The only thing he heard sharply was the sneering taunt of Jew as it rang loudly in his head.

Franz and Japhet sat outside the principal’s office. Franz’s lip bled slowly from a lucky swing Amell had gotten in. The cut hurt, but he didn’t care, because it was the only blow Amell had been able to land – and the other boy, doubled over and gasping for air, had two black eyes and had to be helped off the school lawn. That would teach him to insult Japhet.

Inside the office, Franz could hear a murmur of voices. His parents and Japhet’s had been called in. That had been over an hour ago, and during that time Japhet had not once uttered a sound. He sat stiffly in his chair and stared at the opposite wall. He looked as if someone had taken his world and turned it on its head. The vacant look frightened Franz.

“I’ve never liked Amell. That’s why I put those ants in his desk last semester.”

Franz tried to break the silence. Japhet didn’t as much as blink.

“Tomorrow I think I will put a tack on his seat. You have one I can borrow, don’t you?”

Even then Japhet didn’t respond. Franz was about to poke him when the office door opened and the Kappels and Buchanans emerged. They said nothing, but Mrs.

Buchanan held out her hand to Japhet and Mrs. Kappel motioned for Franz to follow her. The two boys did as they were instructed, but as they left Franz noticed the principal frowning at them and he knew things were never going to be the same.

Not a word was said until they had all left the building, then Mr. Kappel demanded to know what had happened.

"I beat up Amell," Franz explained, trying to sound sorrier about it than he actually was.

"You beat him up?" Mr. Buchanan asked. Franz didn't know why he sounded surprised.

"Yes, and I'm not really sorry I did." Franz could still see Amell's sneer and it made his blood boil.

Stinking Jew. What did Amell know? He was stupid, and he'd been held back a year in school.

Mr. Kappel stopped walking and faced his son. "And Japhet. Where was Japhet when this happened?"

"By me. Well, not really. He was sitting." Franz didn't understand why it should matter where Japhet had been. Japhet didn't get into fights.

"He didn't beat up Amell?" Mr. Buchanan asked. He looked at his son.

"No." Franz frowned deeply and answered since Japhet was still quiet. "I beat Amell up, by myself."

"Why?" Mrs. Kappel asked gently.

"He called Japhet a stinking Jew," Franz explained. "So I punched him. You can punish me for it, but I'm not sorry."

Mr. Kappel sighed and ran both hands through his neatly combed hair. When he lowered his arms, a small smile played on his lips.

“You shouldn’t beat your fellow schoolboys up,” he said in his fatherly tone, “but to be honest, I don’t really feel like punishing you. You stood up for your friend. Soon, we might all have to decide how far we’ll go to do that.” He glanced swiftly at Mr. Buchanan as he spoke.

“What do you mean?” Franz’s stomach tied into a knot. He wasn’t getting in trouble, and his father sounded worried. Something wasn’t right.

Mr. Buchanan placed one hand on his shoulder and one on Japhet’s. He smiled.

“Don’t worry about it right now. Come on. Let’s get you two home and cleaned up. We have a birthday to celebrate.”

Franz sat up and glared over the top of the bed, but he couldn’t see Japhet on the other side of it. Leaving his warm blanket, he rolled onto the bed and dangled his head down the other side.

“You’re not asleep so wake up!” he hissed. He poked Japhet’s ear, the only thing visible above his blanket.

Japhet ignored him so Franz retaliated and snatched his pillow. Japhet’s head hit the floor and he came up fighting. Franz smacked him with the pillow, momentarily stunning him. There was something satisfying about knocking his best friend slightly senseless on his tenth birthday.

Sitting up on the bed, Franz crossed his legs, pulled the pillow to his chest, and smiled over the top of it. He kept that position until Japhet recovered enough to hurl

himself at Franz. They crashed backward, off the bed, legs and arms flailing as they tried to keep from hitting the floor. The attempt ended with them landing in a thunderous crash.

Both of them laid still and listened. Franz knew they had just made enough noise to wake the dead, but he hoped they hadn't been loud enough to wake anyone in the house. He counted to ten, but when no sounds came, he turned his head and saw Japhet grinning at him.

"That was an unfair fight," Japhet said, "I was almost asleep. You can't hit an unarmed man."

"It's only ten o'clock, and it's your birthday. You can't just go to sleep like that," Franz rebuked. "And you would have been armed and prepared if you'd been awake."

Japhet looked away and Franz knew he had begun thinking about school again. He refused to let Japhet sulk on what was left of his birthday and shoved the pillow into his chest.

"Come on, we can't go to sleep yet. Besides, I didn't have a chance to give you my present."

Tossing the pillow away, Japhet twisted his night shirt around so it wasn't strangling him.

"What present?" He leaned forward.

"The one...from me. I already said that. I didn't think you wanted it..."

Japhet reached for the discarded pillow, but Franz kicked it even farther from his reach.

"Of course I want it," Japhet said.

With the pillow safely out of the way, Franz pulled a package out from under the bed. He had hidden it there when he'd come up to change into his night clothes. He'd been waiting for the perfect moment to give it.

Japhet accepted the box and Franz sat back and grinned as he watched Japhet eagerly tear into the paper. When he had it all pulled back, Japhet sat back and stared, then lifted his large eyes and stared at Franz. Franz felt a spike of pleasure and his grin turned smug.

"You...where...how..."

Franz clasped both hands over his mouth so he wouldn't risk bringing down the wrath of the sleepy Buchanan girls as he laughed.

"I've been saving up for it. Do you like it?" he asked after a few moments.

"I...it's the best present I've ever gotten!"

Japhet held the knife up in the moonlight so he could get a better look as his eyes gleamed. He turned it over and over, examining the black handle and the shiny, sharp blade.

"Your dad and mine helped me pick it out. They said it would last you for the rest of your life. It even has a sheath."

Pulling the black leather sheath out from the paper, Japhet beamed a grin at Franz.

"Thank you," he said in that almost mushy way that made Franz's face turn red. "It's perfect! But you know what this means, don't you?"

"What?"

"This means I have the upper hand when we play war."

Franz reached for the pillow. "I'm older, and taller. You'll never have the upper hand. I'll always be able to catch you."

Five

The world begins to change

1935

Snow covered the ground, at least three inches thick. Outside Japhet's bedroom window, he watched Mr. Leitz and Amell as they tried to free their brand new Opel Olympia from a snow bank. Two years ago, Japhet would have gone out and helped, but that was before he'd been labeled a Jew. No one wanted help from a Jew anymore.

Japhet turned back to his history book. Normally, history was a subject that held his rapt attention but this morning his thoughts kept wandering. The night before he'd overheard his parents talking. The conversation replayed through his mind, over and over, even though he tried to force it out.

"They cut my hours," Mr. Buchanan had said.

This was followed by silence, then Mrs. Buchanan's gentle, "We knew it was going to happen sooner or later. At least you still have a job. Aaron lost his."

"I know I should be grateful," Mr. Buchanan murmured, "God has been taking

care of us. There are others worse off than we are. But, everything about this is wrong! Japhet and Ruth being forced to leave school, me losing hours at work and being forced to turn over my gun, you not being allowed into the shoe—”

“Hush,” Mrs. Buchanan whispered. “I told you not to worry about the shoe incident.”

“Things are so much worse in Berlin,” Mr. Buchanan whispered back. “How long before it really begins to affect us? They’ve already stamped our papers with a J. They’re labeling Jews, keeping an eye on them.”

“All we can do is pray,” Mrs. Buchanan reminded him. “Pray, and stick together.”

Pray and stick together. Isn’t that what families did? When one of them got kicked out of school, the other followed. When hours were taken from a job schedule families learned to do without sugar and other non-necessities. And life went on.

But for how much longer?

Giving up on history, Japhet grabbed his sketchbook. He’d finally decided that he wanted to start taking art seriously, maybe even pursuing it as a career when he got older. That wasn’t why he’d started drawing more. It helped when he began to remember the stories he’d heard about families being dragged off and never seen again. Stories about people fleeing Germany, of people who vanished into the night.

Smack!

Something splattered against Japhet’s window and he jumped, falling backward out of his chair. One of the chair’s arms dug into his rib cage and he rubbed his side as he picked himself up and tried to look around the snowball covering the middle of his window. He wasn’t surprised to see Franz standing in the yard, his hat askew, a

snowball in one hand, and a grin on his face.

“Goodness!” Mrs. Buchanan gasped from downstairs. “Please don’t tell me that was another bird!”

“I keep telling you, Mom...we need to stop washing the windows so much then that wouldn’t happen,” Ruth said from the kitchen. It was her favorite spot to do school since she could sit by the oven. Japhet preferred the quiet of his room – when it was quiet.

“It wasn’t a bird!” Japhet called down as he shoved his window open after frowning at his sketch book. His picture of a deer now had a jagged line through it. “It was just Franz!”

“Just Franz?” Franz retorted, catching the last part as the window jerked free of the ice which held it to the window sill. “Since when did I become ‘Just Franz’? I’m almost another member of your family!”

Japhet leaned on the frame, not caring when cold snow seeped into his sleeves. “That’s when you became ‘Just Franz’,” he said. “Like Ruth is ‘Just Ruth.’ And you ruined my drawing. I hope you’re happy.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Ruth, wearing socks, had managed to sneak up behind him without making a sound. It was one of her more annoying talents, in a long list of annoying older sister talents.

Before Japhet could say anything to her, she was at the window. She scowled down at Franz.

“What are you doing out there, throwing snowballs at our windows?” she scolded.

“Why aren’t you in school?”

“It was canceled since half of the teachers couldn’t get there because of the snow on the roads,” Franz explained. He tried to look pensive for the snowball.

“Well, Japhet still has school,” Ruth reported, tilting her nose high in the air, “so why don’t you go home and let him study?”

“Study?” Somehow Mrs. Buchanan had joined them, also without making a sound. “With this much snow on the ground? I don’t think school should be allowed on days like this.” She smiled and held Japhet’s gloves up. “Besides, Franz is out there all alone. And, knowing him, he will probably stand there until you go out. You had better hurry.”

Japhet could have kissed his mom, but he was eleven. Instead, he accepted his gloves, smiled smugly at Ruth, and dashed down the stairs where he stopped long enough to pull on his boots, coat, hat, and gloves – then he was out the door, snatching up snow, and hurling it at Franz’s head.

Franz ducked, barely avoiding being hit in the eye, and released the snowball he had been holding. Japhet saw it coming for him and dived into a snow bank. He rolled over and ended up sprawled out on his back. Franz walked over and looked down at him.

“Does this mean war?” he demanded, his arms crossed over his chest.

Japhet didn’t answer. Instead he swept his legs to the side, knocking Franz’s legs out from under him. His friend went down hard, his arms flailing as he tried to catch himself. As soon as he was down, Japhet fought to get to his feet, crawling until he was out of the deeper snow, then running into the road. Once there he spun around,

grabbed a handful of snow, and rolled it into a ball. Franz rolled out of the snow bank and sprawled out on what used to be the walkway but was now just a smaller pile of snow.

“So, war it is,” Franz yelled as he got to his feet.

Grinning, Japhet threw his perfectly made snowball, hitting Franz in the back of the head, then laughed and ran away as Franz spun and came after him. They dashed down the street, breath rising in puffy clouds in the cold air. Japhet could hear Franz closing the distance behind him and knew it wouldn't be long before he caught up. Franz was still faster, even though Japhet did all he could to beat him in races. Sometimes he even resorted to cheating but always failed.

Even so he kept trying. Japhet wasn't going to give up without a fight.

Japhet took a road that led to one of the open fields. He darted right into the deep piles of snow and pushed through even when the wet cold tried to pull his boots off and slow him down. There was a hill in front of him—one he and Franz liked to roll down in the summer—and Japhet charged up the side of it. By then his breath was coming in desperate gasps. His lungs burned from cold and lack of air, but he kept going. Franz would shove him head first into the snow if he caught him and that was his motivation to keep pushing.

At the top of the hill, Japhet risked a glance over his shoulder and saw – with not enough time to avoid it – a snowball flying for his head. He ducked, but it still smacked him, right in the face. Stunned, he stopped running and Franz threw himself forward. He wrapped his arms around Japhet's legs and both lost their balance and crashed down the other side of the hill.

They rolled over each other and down, snow filling their coats and boots. Japhet lost one of his gloves and he was certain at one point he got Franz's boot in his teeth.

Then it was over, and both lay on their backs – cold, wet, panting, and laughing.

“Who won?” Japhet asked when he was breathing normally again.

Without warning, Franz pulled Japhet's knife from its sheath. Japhet always wore it, strapped to his belt.

Sitting up, Franz knelt over him and pointed the knife at his throat as he grinned.

“I won,” he declared.

Sif

Unfair fight

1936

Japhet sat at the table and drew. Lead from his pencil smeared the side of his left hand, showing how long he'd been working on the picture. Already it had more detail than any of his other pictures. Franz stared in amazement at the individual blades of grass and each feather on the bird's back. Normally such a picture would have made him proud of his friend's talent, now it just made him sad.

The worse things got, the more Japhet drew. He'd pulled back and hardly spoke to anyone now, not that there were many who spoke to him. All of the other Jews in the village had fled, and everyone else pretended the Buchanans didn't exist. Whenever Franz and Japhet went out, only Franz was addressed in conversations. Even with school out for the summer Japhet kept reading text books and never left the house unless Franz went with him.

Franz hated it. He hated the way Amell spoke about Japhet in school, and he hated the way Gilbert went out of his way to avoid walking past the Buchanan house.

Franz had spent most of the school year perfecting his catapult. When he had Gilbert in his sights, he'd shot three shovel loads of snow on him. He'd howled with laughter while Gilbert crawled through the snow, looking for his glasses. Franz then talked Japhet into helping him fling mud the next time Gilbert was in range.

"I'm bored," Franz complained. He had to force himself to stop thinking about revenge on Gilbert.

"Good for you." Japhet didn't look up as he added realistic clouds to his sky. Franz thought they had more detail than real clouds.

"Your drawing is making me sick. One person shouldn't be that talented."

"That's what I keep saying," Mr. Buchanan said. He stood on a kitchen chair, patching up a hole in the ceiling. He'd become an almost permanent figure around the house since losing even more hours at work. Just the night before he and Franz's dad had gotten into an argument.

"They're only working you two days a week now?" Mr. Kappel had shouted when Mr. Buchanan told him the news while they were in the back yard making homemade ice cream. "Those weasels! Who do they think they are?"

"I can see where Franz gets his temper," Mr. Buchanan had laughed.

Curious, Japhet and Franz had gone to the window and looked out, watching the whole exchange.

"This isn't funny, Josef! They can't just go and cut all your hours at work just because you're a Jew!" Mr. Kappel's face was red and his eyes bulged.

"It is funny! You should see your face!"

"Stop laughing and help me shoot them."

“That won’t fix the world, Wilhelm,” Mr. Buchanan said. He continued laughing.

“No, but it’ll make me feel better.” Mr. Kappel suddenly got serious. “Promise me if you need anything you’ll let me know?”

“God will provide for us,” Mr. Buchanan said, equally serious.

“I know, but He also gave you friends to help you out when things get bad. Please, Josef. Promise.”

“I promise,” Mr. Buchanan had said.

After that, Franz and Japhet had stopped listening. Now, as Mr. Buchanan whistled and re-plastered the ceiling, Franz wondered if anything would ever bother him.

“You have talent, you just use all yours in other areas,” Japhet said, reminding Franz that he’d been whining seconds before.

“Yes, I do.” Franz grinned as he again thought of Gilbert’s scramble through the snow. “But really, I’m bored. Let’s go and get ice cream.”

“Go and get ice cream,” Mr. Buchanan agreed. “If you use up all your talent in one afternoon, you won’t get a job later in life and I’ll have to continue supporting you even when you’re forty and forget how to shave.”

“I won’t forget how to shave,” Japhet said, but he closed his sketchbook. “Don’t let Ruth see my bird. She insulted the last one and called it a chicken.”

“I’ll guard it with my life,” Mr. Buchanan promised. “Now get out of here. I’m tired of seeing Franz, his face is giving me a headache.”

“Gee, thanks, Mr. Buchanan.” Franz shoved back his chair, caught Mr. Buchanan’s quick wink, and pulled Japhet to his feet.

“Anytime. Eat an extra scoop for me.”

Franz got Japhet to race him out the door and they ran down the street. By the time they reached the ice cream shop, Franz well in the lead, they were both out of breath; Japhet more so. He'd lost some weight over the winter and hadn't gained it back. He'd been sick for most of the winter, but Franz didn't think all of Japhet's weight loss had to do with the illness.

"Milkshake or cone?" Franz asked as they started up the walkway to the little shop.

Japhet shoved his hands in his pockets. "Shake of course. Cones aren't patriotic."

"What would you care about patriotism?"

Franz had noticed the other boys coming up the sidewalk, but he'd made a point to ignore them. They, apparently, didn't want to be ignored.

"What do you care about Germany? You're a Jew, not a German!" It was Amell who spoke, as he started up the walkway after them. Franz stopped and turned to face him, putting himself between Japhet and the other boys.

"He was born and raised in Germany," Franz spat, "and his family has been here longer than yours. Yours immigrated from France years ago! He's more pure blood German than you are!"

Japhet laid a hand on Franz's arm, but he didn't want to heed the warning.

"He's a Jew!" Amell snapped.

Franz had long since gotten tired of that insult.

"I'm pretty sure he'd rather be a Jew than a sniveling coward who gets beat up all the time." Over the last couple of years, Franz had gotten pretty good at his own insults.

Passersby stopped as the boys' voices rose. Most of them stared at Japhet and Franz could feel his awkwardness. Franz started to see red.

"Just leave us alone, Amell." He fought to control his temper. "We just want some ice cream."

"Go and get some then." Amell crossed his arms over his chest. "Just make sure the Jew stays outside. And I would be more careful if I was you. No one is taking kindly to Jew lovers."

Reason snapped. Even Japhet's restraining hold on his sleeve wasn't enough to stop Franz. He charged Amell, satisfied when the other boy yelped and his face went white. Even then, Franz didn't stop. He swung hard and fast and his fist sank into Amell's stomach. There was a satisfying *wooph* as the air was knocked out of Amell's lungs.

Amell doubled over and wheezed. Franz stood over him, smiling as he watched the other boy struggle to breathe. He was so busy feeling proud of himself that he didn't see the punch which caught the side of his head. Dazed, Franz fell to the pavement and felt blood trickle down his temple and cheek. He blinked, saw stars, and blinked a few more times. Turning his head, Franz saw someone coming for him and was able to push himself away just in time.

Stumbling to his feet, he faced one of the older schoolboys who was bigger than Amell. He glared at Franz and Franz tried to glare back even though the stars weren't leaving him alone.

"So it's true," the other boy said, "you are a Jew lover! You're the one who visits Jews all the time, aren't you?"

Franz ignored him, rubbed his eyes, and curled his hands into fists. Bigger or not, he would teach this boy to hit him when he wasn't looking. He launched himself again, swinging and kicking, and was easily knocked aside by a backhand to the face. Franz hit the pavement hard and lay still, staring up at the spinning sky above him.

"Had enough?" The older boy stood over him and sneered down. Franz wished he had Japhet's knife, he would show this boy! A second later he forgot all about knives when he heard a cry of pain.

Sitting up so fast his head spun, Franz stared in horror as two boys grabbed Japhet's arms and held him upright as another punched him twice in the stomach.

"Leave him alone!" Franz jumped to his feet, but the other boy grabbed him and held him back. Franz fought, but the boy had too strong of a grip and didn't even seem aware of Franz's kicks.

The boy punched Japhet in the stomach again, then another in the head. The other two boys laughed and let him go. Japhet fell hard, laying on his side. He stirred and one of the boys drew his foot back and kicked him hard. Japhet groaned and lay still. Fear, unlike any Franz had felt before, tore through him and he pulled free of the other boy's hold and ran to Japhet's side, ignoring the blood which rolled into his left eye and blurred his vision. He knelt down as the older boy stood over them.

"Don't forget this," the boy said as Franz rolled Japhet onto his back. Japhet grasped his side and closed his eyes. "Jews and their friends are no longer welcome here – do you really want to be considered the friend of a Jew?"

Franz looked up through the blood and his own blinding anger and gave one last look of defiance.

“I’d rather be his friend than the friend of a bully,” he snapped.

Without warning the bigger boy kicked him in the side, then turned and walked off as Franz crumpled and tried to remember how to breathe.

The owner of the ice cream shop left the building long enough to tell Franz Japhet was no longer welcome anywhere close to the store as he only caused trouble. If he had been able to breathe, Franz would have said something, but as it was, he could only kneel and gather in small puffs of air. As soon as the man left, Franz turned his attention back to Japhet and tried to help him sit up.

Wincing, Japhet bit his lower lip and kept his eyes closed. His breathing was ragged and slow and he tenderly kept one hand on his side as Franz got him upright.

“Can you stand?” Franz asked, wishing his voice didn’t squeak and reveal just how frightened he was. All he could think about was the last part of the winter when Japhet was so sick and close to dying. He still didn’t have all his strength back and Franz feared something might be wrong from the way Japhet kept panting.

“You’re bleeding,” Japhet said. He lifted his head and squinted in pain.

“Doesn’t matter. Are you okay?” Franz demanded.

“My side hurts, but I’ll live.”

Franz didn’t feel much better but said nothing. He carefully eased Japhet out of his bent over stance, but the moment he stood straight Japhet gasped and bent back over. Franz held him upright, pulling his arm over his shoulders.

“Here, lean on me,” he instructed.

Japhet didn’t protest and put most of his weight on Franz. Ignoring the pain throbbing through his own body, Franz bore Japhet upright and together, slowly and

painfully, they limped to the Buchanan house.

Mrs. Buchanan was outside when they stumbled down the road. She was pulling weeds out of her garden when she saw them. She jumped up when she saw them, yelled for Mr. Buchanan, then ran down the road to meet the two boys before they reached the house.

“What happened?” she demanded. She took Japhet’s weight on her own shoulders and allowed Franz the chance to place his hands on his knees and breathe in small amounts of air.

“A fight,” Franz panted as the front door slammed open. He heard Mr. Buchanan say something and Ruth scream. He hadn’t thought they looked that bad.

“Ruth!” her father scolded as he hurried into the road and helped Franz straighten. Then, much like Franz had helped Japhet, Mr. Buchanan half carried him into the house. Both boys were taken to the kitchen and eased into chairs while Mrs. Buchanan told Ruth to get water and bandages.

“What happened?” Mr. Buchanan asked as Mrs. Buchanan helped her son out of his shirt. Japhet yelled when he had to move his arms and Franz winced.

“It wasn’t his fault,” Franz said as Mr. Buchanan examined the cut above his eye. “I got mad at Amell and attacked him. Then some older boys attacked us. They beat him up and I couldn’t help him.” The same helpless feeling he’d had on the sidewalk returned. Franz wasn’t sure what burned his blood more, anger or shame over the fact he’d been unable to do anything.

Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan exchanged a grown up look over Franz’s head, then Mrs. Buchanan laid a motherly hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Let’s get you cleaned up before we send you home or your mother will worry,”
she said gently.

Seven

Flying monkeys

1939

War had finally come. The whispered rumors and the fearful glances that passed between people were real now. Japhet had listened in while his father and Mr. Kappel talked about it a week after Hitler announced the war.

“England and France have declared war on us,” Mr. Buchanan had said. “They said it was because we invaded Poland.”

“It has more to do with the Treaty of Versailles. Everyone knows that. I don’t know why they’re trying to pretend it isn’t,” Mr. Kappel replied, shaking his head and sighing.

Japhet had read about the treaty. It had been written up after the Great War and said Germany should accept the blame for causing the war. The German government had to pay \$6.6 billion for damages, give up some of their land, and most of their army. The country was plunged into poverty and many said it was through the work of Adolf

Hitler alone that they had pulled out of poverty and were becoming a proud country once again.

Before, Japhet hadn't really cared. It was in the past; it wasn't affecting his life as far as he could tell. The government could deal with their own problems. But since getting banished from school he started to realize the past was changing his life and choices made then were shaping his future. He had to become involved because he wasn't going to stand back and let the world decide what to do with him. He wanted a say in the matter, though he didn't know how to go about it.

The older he got, the more time Japhet spent alone. It had gotten worse after the boys had broken his rib outside the ice cream shop. Now he would hide in his bedroom, too scared to leave the house unless someone went with him. Japhet preferred that someone to be Franz, though he sometimes caught himself wondering how long Franz would stay when all his other friends had long since left him.

Other things had changed as well. Leah had moved out of the house. She lived with Bea and Elsa, Franz's next two oldest sisters. They worked in a little factory in Munich and seemed happy from their letters. Japhet still worried. He worried about Hadi and Ross – now married – who had gotten a house close to Berlin. He worried about Kirsten and Hardy, who were expecting their first child. He worried about Gabi and Sophia since they visited Kirsten and her Jewish husband often. Sophia was even considering moving in for a while after the baby was born to help out.

More than any of them, though, more than himself and his family, Japhet worried about Franz. Franz was getting angrier and more rash. All anyone had to do was mention the word Jew and he flew into a rage. His grades were slipping and he usually

left school with a new bruise. Japhet had lost count how many black eyes he'd ended up with in the past year.

"You're never going to get a girl to like you if you keep looking like a raccoon," he'd told him one day as Franz sat at the Buchanan kitchen table, holding a package of frozen peas to his eye.

"No girl will date me, black eyes or not" Franz had muttered. At sixteen, Franz was becoming handsome. His blond hair had a wave to it, his blue eyes were intense, and his arms muscled. He was the opposite of Japhet, who was slight and warily with his ribs sticking through his shirt. It wasn't that he was starving; he just found he had little appetite these days. Food turned his stomach and now his cheeks were hollow and pale with lack of food and worry. He could see why girls avoided him, even if it wasn't just over the fact he was a Jew and now had to wear the Star of David on his jacket or shirt whenever he went out. But Franz, if things had been different, should have had the local girls falling at his feet.

"Franz." Mrs. Buchanan had looked up from where she was scrubbing the life out of the kitchen oven. "If you're not careful you're going to get into real trouble one of these days."

"I don't care," Franz had said. "I will stop fighting them when they stop insulting my best friend."

And Mrs. Buchanan had smiled, but had to hide it because she was a mom and moms weren't supposed to encourage fighting.

A horn honked and brought Japhet back to the present. He looked out the window. Mr. Leitz pulled out in his now-not-so-new Opel. Japhet stared until the car

disappeared from sight. Amell had been in the passenger seat, wearing his Hitler Youth uniform.

Japhet dropped his head to his school book and closed his eyes. His head pounded. The ache beat against his temples and refused to go away. Japhet knew he shouldn't be worrying; he should be praying like his dad and mom did. Their faith hadn't been shaken, even as things slowly got worse. They still trusted that God could work all of this out, and even if He didn't, it was all according to His plan.

Japhet wanted to ask why. He wanted to yell. What purpose could all of this have? The star he was forced to wear, the anger in Berlin that had slowly spread to the village, the constant worry for his friends and family. War coming. How could the world falling apart be something God wanted or was allowing to happen? What would it accomplish in the end?

While these thoughts tumbled through his mind, Japhet remembered what had happened last year and a cold chill went down his back. They called it the Night of Broken Glass. Japhet had heard it being talked about while shopping with his mom. It started when a Jewish teen assassinated a German official.

On November 9th, 1938 an unplanned attack took place, though everyone questioned just how unplanned it was. Synagogues were burned, Jewish businesses destroyed, and Jewish homes, hospitals, and schools were looted while the police and fire department did nothing. A lot of Jewish men – so many Japhet had never heard the exact count though it was in the thousands – were rounded up and taken away. Their crime? They were Jews.

Women were also arrested and sent to jail, and Germans were only allowed to

open their businesses if they agreed not to serve Jews. Japhet feared the Nazis would soon show up in his village, break into his home and drag his family off.

“I knew it!”

Japhet sat upright so fast he knocked his book to the floor. It landed with a loud thump. He spun around to find Franz standing in the doorway of his bedroom. Franz grinned and looked pleased with himself.

“You really have to stop doing that,” Japhet complained as he picked up his book and set it back on the desk. For a moment he thought Franz was a Nazi soldier ready to drag him off. His heart fought to slow back to normal.

“All that studying is making you jumpy,” Franz said. He laughed and threw himself on Japhet’s bed. Japhet was pleased to see no black eye.

“It is not,” Japhet retorted. He considered throwing his book at Franz but changed his mind. He didn’t want to be the one to give him a new black eye. “It’s making me smarter, unlike you.”

“You’ve been studying so long you fell asleep,” Franz said, rubbing his scar. He’d been pleased with the scar. He’d gotten after the fight outside the ice cream shop.

Pushing himself up, Franz snatched Japhet’s book and examined the cover as he asked, “What are you studying this time? More of the Brothers Grimm?”

“No,” Japhet retorted. He had given up on fairy tales after he’d heard about the Night of Broken Glass. “And I wasn’t asleep.”

“You were asleep,” Franz said, then wrinkled his nose. “You’re learning English? The American language?”

Japhet snatched his book back, opened it to the last page he had been on, and

laid it back on his desk. He shrugged.

“I thought it would be interesting.”

“Is it?” Franz looked doubtful.

“Not really,” Japhet admitted, a little reluctantly. Franz always said that someday soon Japhet was going to find one subject he couldn’t master. Japhet feared he finally had and would have to put up with a lot of “I told you so” from Franz.

Franz’s eyes lit up. “Really?” he asked slyly.

“It’s a stupid language,” Japhet muttered with a sigh as he glared at the book. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“So you haven’t learned anything from it?” Franz asked hopefully. He swung his feet over the bed and thumped them on the floor, grinning.

“No, I’ve learned some of it.”

“Really?” Franz didn’t believe him, Japhet could hear it in his tone. He glanced up from the book and squinted, then recited – as best he could – a sentence in English.

“The dog eats the rodent.”

Franz hurriedly looked out the window, then pretended he hadn’t. Japhet understood. A lot of books were being burned and having a book that taught English in his bedroom was dangerous. If caught, Japhet could be one of the people who vanished and got sent who knew where. Japhet wasn’t sure he cared. He couldn’t stand up to the Nazis; he was just one kid. But he could defy them and do the things they told him he couldn’t.

“You’re right, it does sound like a stupid language. But I forgot I came over for a reason.”

“It wasn’t to mock my book?” Japhet asked.

“Not this time. Mr. Astor was able to get one last movie.”

Mr. Astor ran the little theater in town. He used to play American films, mostly Westerns, which he personally did subtitles for in German. Japhet and Franz liked to go and watch them, but lately Mr. Astor hadn’t been able to get many movies, not unless they were German made. That meant no more Westerns.

“How did he get it?” Japhet asked excitedly.

“He told me not to ask. And he said it was the last one he is going to be able to do. He also said it’s getting too risky and he can’t let us in after this one. He’s taking a chance letting us watch this one, but he said we could sneak in the back door like last time as long as we make sure no one sees us going in.”

Japhet did not want to go. He didn’t want to cause trouble for Mr. Astor, but he knew the older man would be disappointed if he didn’t show up, especially if he had gone through all the work to get one final American movie and translate it for Japhet and Franz.

“When are we going?” he asked, fingering the hilt of his knife for courage.

“Tomorrow night.”

“And what movie is it?”

“A popular one in America. The Wizard of Oz.”

Japhet didn’t wear his star. Instead, he wore a baggy suit, a crooked tie – he hadn’t learned how to tie his own ties and usually got Franz to help – and a hat. He looked like a gangster out of the American history book he’d been reading. Franz would have laughed, except he recognized the suit. It was the same one Japhet had worn to

Hadi and Ross' wedding and it should have been too small for him by this time. It shouldn't have hung on him as if it belonged to his father.

Franz tried to hide his aggravation. He knew his friend was barely eating. Since learning of the Night of Broken Glass, he had been forced to watch Japhet waste away to nothing. He was just skin and bones now and there were usually dark rings under his eyes from lack of sleep. He was shallow and fading away. The only reason he hadn't completely given up, Franz felt, was because Japhet knew Franz wasn't going to let him. Franz made a point to visit the Buchanan house for dinners and stare until Japhet ate.

For the time being Franz tried to forget it. Tonight he planned on making Japhet laugh and forget about having to wear stars and thinking the only way he could stand up to the Nazis was by learning English. Tonight they were going to stand up to the Nazis together and watch an American-made movie with an actress named Judy Garland.

"I guess she's popular in America," Franz said as he and Japhet walked down the quiet, dark streets.

Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan almost hadn't let Japhet go. It was dangerous being out after dark, even in their quiet village. If Japhet were caught, he could get worse than a beating. It had taken all of Franz's charm to get Japhet's parents to consent.

"I'll be at his side the whole time. And the theater isn't far from your house. We will go straight there and back. Promise. And I won't let him out of my sight. I'll bring him back in one piece."

"There and back," Mr. Buchanan had instructed.

“I heard she’s a real beauty, and she has a great voice,” Franz now said.

“Who told you that?” Japhet asked.

“Mr. Astor.”

“Oh, I believe it then.”

Franz rolled his eyes and pretended to be offended, but Japhet didn’t show any remorse.

“You believe Mr. Astor over me?” Franz asked.

“Of course. Mr. Astor wasn’t the one who told me John Wayne was a real life cowboy who lived all of the adventures in his movies.”

Shrugging, Franz stopped outside the theater’s back door.

“How was I to know?” he said. “I thought the camera people just followed him around so they would be able to catch everything he did-”

“Oh give it up.” Japhet playfully shoved him. “I haven’t believed that since I was twelve.”

Franz shoved back, then tapped on the door. Mr. Astor was there in a heartbeat and he led them into the empty theater. They were now the only ones he let see his American movies; it was too risky to allow anyone else. Someone else might turn him in.

“Get some popcorn,” he ordered the two of them, “and find a seat. Make sure you’re comfortable, you won’t want to miss this one! Especially Judy Garland!”

Life is full of embarrassing moments. One time Japhet and Franz had tried to scare Kirsten and Hardy and instead caught them kissing on the front porch. Catching someone kissing was awkward enough without that someone being one’s sister. But if

there were ever a point when Franz looked back on his life and was asked to pick his most embarrassing moment it would have been the night he saw The Wizard of Oz and hid behind the seats with his best friend because they were scared of the flying monkeys.

Judy Garland was just as pretty as Mr. Astor promised, maybe even more so. She had a dazzling smile, great hair, and cute eyes – everything Franz had heard American girls were supposed to be.

The plot of the movie wasn't too bad either; a girl getting sucked into another world and fighting to get back home. The sparkly shoes were a little weird, but it didn't matter because Judy Garland looked great in them.

Franz enjoyed the whole thing right until the creepy, flying monkeys came onto the screen. Franz and Japhet ducked at the same time and Franz knew neither would be able to pick on the other.

As they left the theater later on, surprised at the movie's ending, they stopped outside the door and looked at each other for a minute without speaking. Then they made a pact.

"Let's keep the monkeys to ourselves," Japhet said.

Franz held out his hand and they shook on it.

"Never a word," Franz promised.

That wasn't the only thing they kept secret about that night. Japhet went to the Kappel's to spend the night, and he and Franz stayed up late, staring into the shadows, jumping at every little sound – convinced monkeys were ready to fly out at them and eat them.

Some things had to be kept secret.

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