

# A Candle *in the* Dark

The year is 1938 and the world is  
poised on the brink of war...

Germany is a dangerous place for  
Jews. Clara and her little brother,  
Maxi, must leave behind everything  
they know and go to England to live  
with a family they have never met.



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# **Author's Note**

Long Easterby is an imaginary village. All the characters in this book are fictional. The historical events leading up to the Kindertransports are true, and I have based the story of what happens to Clara and Maxi on real accounts.

# 1

**9th November, 1938**

## **A Night of Broken Glass**

Clara had never seen a grown man cry. Herr Stern, fat, bald, funny old Herr Stern from Papa's shop was weeping. He was wiping his tears away with the backs of his hands as he spoke, in just the same way Maxi did, but Maxi was four years younger than she was. Maxi was only five.

The clock chimed two. Clara had never before been awake as late as this. Frantic knocking, hammering at the door had woken her. It must have been Herr Stern. Clara crept into the salon and no one told her to go back to bed. Her mother was still dressed... Had she not been to sleep at all?

There was a pot of fresh coffee on the table. But why was Herr Stern visiting in the middle of the night?

‘The shop,’ Herr Stern said. ‘They have smashed all the windows. They have thrown the furniture into the streets ... it’s lying upside down in the gutter. All the shops, not just ours. They are all destroyed. And they have torches ... fire and glass everywhere, fire and glass. In the middle of the road they have bonfires. They are burning everything: books, so many books, even the Holy Book, even the *Torah*. Nothing is sacred.’ Herr Stern’s voice faded almost to a whisper. ‘They are marching on the synagogues. Not one brick of any synagogue in the whole of Germany will be left standing on another ... this is what they are saying...’

Clara’s mother, Lotte, said soothingly:

‘Sit, Herr Stern. Sit down. Drink some coffee. No good will come from tears. Please, sit here.’

‘But where is your husband, *gnädige Frau*? Where is Herr Nussbaum? That is the worst of all. They are taking away all the men they

can find. Rounding them up and taking them to a camp, to a prison... Who knows where they will take them. Who knows when they will return.'

'My husband is in Leipzig,' said Lotte.

'Thank God,' said Herr Stern and he allowed himself to be led to a chair.

Clara could see how white her mother's face was, how tightly her lips were clamped together, and how her hands trembled as she poured out the coffee. She could hear, in the distance, a rhythmic pounding that was coming nearer and nearer. I know that sound, she thought. I've heard it before. It's Them, marching. 'They' were the Nazis. Clara tried not to say that word, even to herself. It was an ugly, black little word that buzzed in her head and reminded her of spiders; the spider symbol of the Swastika which was on every flag now, and on every street, made her feel a little ill. Nothing was the same any more, not since Herr Hitler had become Chancellor. Everything had changed. Clara remembered the first time she had read a notice on a shop window: *Jews are not wanted as customers in this*

*shop*. She had turned to her mother in horror. 'But this is Tante Trude's drapery! We always come here.'

'From now on,' said Lotte, 'if Trude serves us it will cause trouble for her.'

'She likes me,' Clara said. 'I know she likes me. Last time we were in the shop, she gave me nearly half a metre of pink ribbon for Angelika's petticoat. Real satin ribbon.'

'Poor Angelika!' Lotte tried to make light of it. 'Soon she will cease to be the best-dressed doll in town. Come, we will try to find a draper somewhere else.'

Everything was different. Elsa, who had been coming to the flat since Clara was a baby to help with the cleaning and the cooking, didn't come any longer. Working for Jewish families was frowned upon, and Clara had heard her father say, sadly, that soon even Nussbaum and Sons, the furniture store that had been in the family for years and years, would be theirs no longer. No Jew would be allowed to own anything.

Losing her best friend, though – that was the very worst of all. At first, when Marianne moved from her usual place in the

classroom to sit beside Monika, Clara couldn't understand why.

'My father told me I mustn't sit next to you any longer,' Marianne said. 'So I can't.'

Clara walked home from school that day all by herself for the first time. A fog of tears had filled her eyes, so that she could hardly find her way. Now she went to a Jewish school and hardly ever saw Marianne. Only once, in the street, the person whom she had loved best in the world after Mama and Papa and Maxi had crossed over to the other pavement to avoid her.

'Try not to cry when such things happen,' Clara's mother had told her. 'I know how much it must have hurt you, but don't give her the satisfaction. Pretend you don't care.'

Clara thought of these things as the noises grew louder and louder, outside in the street. Inside, there was nothing but silence. Suddenly, Mitzi, the new black-and-white kitten, raced out from behind Maxi's bedroom door and fled across the floor. She squeezed herself into the tiny gap between the bottom of the bookcase and the floor. Maxi came chasing into the salon after her,

dressed in his nightclothes.

‘Mama, there’s shouting! Mitzi is frightened ... she ran away...’

‘Come and sit here next to me, Maxi, and keep very quiet till the noise is finished. Mitzi is under the bookcase. She is quite safe, *liebling*.’

‘But why are they shouting? What are they doing? Will they come here?’

‘Sssh! Sit quietly and maybe they will go soon,’ said Lotte.

They *are* coming, Clara thought. They will come. We are like small animals, hiding in the forest, waiting for the hunters. I can hear them downstairs. I can hear boots on the stone steps. They are breaking everything. There was screaming now, and sobbing and howling. Clara realised she could recognise voices she knew ... neighbours’ voices. They will be here soon, she thought, and she sat with every nerve and muscle tensed, waiting for the door to crash open. Maxi covered his ears with his hands and closed his eyes.

When they came, there were three of them; three men, dressed in black and wearing peaked caps and enormous leather gloves.



Clara, Lotte, Herr Stern and Maxi sat frozen with terror in their chairs.

‘You will come with us,’ said one of the men to Herr Stern. ‘Immediately.’

‘You are making a mistake,’ Lotte said, ‘if you think this is my husband. Can you not see how old this gentleman is? Are you dragging grandfathers away now?’

‘Your husband,’ said the tallest of the men in black. ‘Where is he?’

‘He is travelling,’ said Lotte. ‘On business.’

‘A Jew with business?’ The man laughed as though this was the funniest joke he’d heard in his life. His friends joined in the merriment. ‘In that case we shall continue upstairs.’

‘But not before admiring,’ said the second man, ‘your wonderful collection of china.’ He walked over to the closed cabinet. Behind the glass-fronted doors (three panes on one side and three on the other) were the cups and plates, the jugs and small statues that Lotte loved and cared for. Once a week she took out each piece, and washed and dried it carefully before putting it back in its proper place.

‘Dresden,’ said the man. ‘Meissen, Sèvres. I can see you are devoted to fine things.’

He spoke gently, softly. Clara was almost soothed by his smooth voice, his kind words. Then in one movement, he slammed a black-gloved fist through one of the panes in the cabinet door. The glass fell on the polished wooden floor with a silvery tinkle. After six blows from the black fist, both floor and carpet were iced with broken glass, glittering like gemstones.

‘A splendid collection,’ the man said again, quietly, and swept the china from the shelves. Bits of plates and jugs and cups edged with gold paint sprang and bounced in the air before falling and shattering into fragments. Clara’s heart beat in her throat. She could see, lying on the floor, one small statuette that was still unbroken. It was a shepherdess in a pink dress and hat with blue ribbons. Please, she thought, please let him not see it. Please let him leave it where it is. The man smiled, and almost as though he could read Clara’s mind, he brought the heel of his tall, black boot down on the shepherdess’s face, and ground it to a

powder. Afterwards, Clara found a tiny porcelain hand under the rug.

‘We will bid you goodnight,’ said the tallest man.

Two of them had already gone, already started up the stairs to the next flat, when the third man, the only one who had not spoken a word, picked up the Menorah, the heavy, silver, eight-branched candelabra which stood on the sideboard.

‘What is this?’ he asked. ‘Is this a religious object?’

‘Yes,’ said Lotte, squaring her shoulders and looking into the man’s eyes. ‘We will need it to light candles when Hanukkah comes.’

The man in black tossed the Menorah into the air. It flew from his hands as though it were weightless. Up and up in a curve across the room it went, towards the window. It sailed through the glass, dragging the curtain behind it. The sound the lace made as it tore was like a shriek; the noise of the silver exploding through the glass was the sound of the end of the world.

After the men had gone, no one spoke

for a long time. Then Lotte looked at Clara and said:

‘Tomorrow, we start English lessons. I will begin to make arrangements. I will not permit my children to live in this hell. Now, Clara, fetch a broom from the kitchen, please ... and you, Maxi, you must help as well. We will make the floor safe for when Mitzi decides to come out.’

Maxi took his hands away from his ears and began to cry.