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INSIDE THE THIRD REICH

It's prison or a concentration camp if they catch you. tuned in on a forbidden radio program in Hitlerland. And they will take your driver's license away if even once you are overheard making a careless or joking remark that could be interpreted as "out of sympathy with the spirit of the new state." So even in the apparently private little world bounded by the turning wheels of your own closed car, you must think long and hard, like a badgered witness under cross-examination, before you dare open your mouth.

THE SUN quieted the rolling farmland, a few miles south of Ansbach.

Not a swastika was in sight, no storm-troopers, no labor conscripts, no sign of the New Germany. Only the sun, the farmers and the Franconian land.

We waited an hour before a car nally stopped. It was an aging machine, but the rear seat was roomy and comfortable. Two men in working clothes sat in front. The driver was young, around 25 or 26 with lose-cropped blond hair and a naïve, friendly smile. The other man was much older, with crinkled face, drooping white mustache and bad teeth.

"Where are you going?" they asked.

"To Stuttgart," I answered, and Edith added, "We are Americans and cannot speak good German."

"Good enough," said the old man, "good enough. And where do you

come from?"

"We left Paris eight weeks ago, and we've come through Switzerland, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia."

"All on foot?"

"Oh, no." Edith explained. "On foot and making auto-stop. Some days we have luck and only walk ten or fifteen kilometers; other days, we walk thirty or forty."

"And today, where did you come from today?"

"From Nuremberg."

"Good, good. And did you see the National Socialist Congress?"

"No," I answered, "we were too late. We stayed too long in Prague because we wanted to see the funeral of Masaryk, you know, the President of Czechoslovakia."

"Ja, ja," nodded the young man, "I know."

"He was a great man," I pursued, "a great scholar and a great democrat." The young man listened and nodded. "The people loved him very much and so many came to Prague from all over the country that the Government had to broadcast that no more should come or there would be no food."

"No?"

"Yes. And people waited in line for ten, twelve hours just to see his bier in the cathedral. 350,000 people came in one day. Ah, he was a great man, a real lover of freedom."

"Ja, ja," said the driver while the old man stirred restlessly. Edith's knee touched mine and I subsided. For a while we traveled in silence.

"They are afraid of war in Czechoslovakia," I said finally.

"Uhhh," grunted the older man and the young one said:

"Jaaa, and here, too!"

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"But no one wants war, do they? The people don't want war?"

"The people no, but the government yes," said the driver.

The old man came in, nervously.

"No, no, the government does not want it, no, no. What he says is only a matter of speaking, as one might say the government makes food dearer, but . . . but it doesn't, no, no, not at all. Food, well, food just gets dearer, and war . . ." his old hands fluttered, his shoulders contracted a little, "war, well, it comes too, sometimes. But we don't want war, we are like America, yes, like America." He paused.

"May be," said the other, "but . . ."

"And so," the old man cut him off, "what does America think of Germany, eh?"

Edith smiled and gestured warmly.

"Oh, the Americans love the German people because they are so charming and friendly and we understand them."

"So, good, good."

"But, of course, we don't understand your politics, because we are a democracy, you see, and you, well, you are something else. nein?"

"Ja," said the young worker, "ja!" And there was a faint, but unmistakable vibrancy in his tone, while his companion was silent.

I felt surer of myself and went on.

"And what we can't understand at all is the policy toward Jews."

The young man nodded interested, and wedged himself in the corner of his seat, so that his head was in profile to us. The other man didn't move, but I could sense him listening.

"In America we have all kinds of people, Germans, Jews, Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, Irish, and they all

work together. The rich Jew is the friend of the rich German; the poor Jew is the friend of the poor German. We think this talk of race is nonsense and stupid."

Edith nudged me again, but the young man was still nodding so I continued.

"Jews are often people with brains and training, and that is worth money to the State. But you turn them out and what happens? Your best engineers are making cannons for Russia and France; your best chemists are in England; your surgeons and professors are all over the world. Where is Einstein? In America. And Germany is the poorer."

"It is true," said the driver and the old man turned around with a thoughtful, tired face.

"So, but it must not be said."

"Yes, I understand." I answered, "but we must say it. Even now men, Germans, have told us that Einstein is really not a good scientist."

"That's right," said Edith. "In Nuremberg they told us that a German professor has written a book proving that Einstein is not a good scientist and that the relativity theory is all wrong. He proves it by showing that a good Jew must be a bad scientist."

The old man was smiling, half to himself. The younger worker laughed, but bitterly and scornfully.

"A professor wrote a book! Bah! We think what they want us to think. . . ."

The old man had stopped smiling and was shaking his head violently. He had a way of looking around timorously that seemed second nature to him, though here we all were, suspended within the world of a car guarded by twin rushing files of harmless apple trees.

The youth shook his shoulders harshly, as if to shake off the unspoken admonition of his companion.

“... ja, eat what they want us to eat and work what they want us to work.”

“What wages?” I interposed.

“Forty marks a week, and I’m an expert machinist. Forty marks! It’s lucky I’m single!”

“And how long do you work?”

“On paper, eight hours a day. At the lathe, ten, eleven hours . . . until our work is done. Today is the first Saturday afternoon I’ve had in a month.”

The old man now suddenly came around.

“There’s no money for wages,” he said, “but look what they wasted on Mussolini’s visit.”

The driver spat out of the window.

“I wonder what they are arranging right now,” I said. “Poor Spain! Italy is sending regular army divisions down there.”

“I know,” said the driver and his companion nodded.

“And Germany has sent a great many aviators and technicians.”

“I know, I know.”

“But the Spanish people are wonderful. There was a big Italian defeat some time ago, and . . .”

“I know,” the driver repeated.

“... now the Government has counter-attacked and pushed them back from Madrid.”

“Ja, I know that, too.”

I had been talking, following a trend of thought, and had hardly paid attention to all his knowing remarks, but now they penetrated into my active consciousness and I was sure that many of the things I had mentioned had never appeared in German newspapers. I was puzzled and curious.

“You do know? Well, how do you know?”

"Oh, I just know."

"Perhaps the radio station," Edith interjected.

"Yes," said I, "you listen to the radio station."

"What radio station?" asked the old man.

"You know, there is a secret wireless station in Germany, started several months ago by the communists. Surely you know about the communist radio station?"

"No," said the old man, "we don't."

"Well, tune in some time. The wave length is 2.9, and it broadcasts around nine o'clock in the evening."

"So," said the younger man.

I said nothing; they said nothing. The few moments' silence lengthened out until suddenly the silence seemed to assume meaning and separate the workers in front from us in the back. I thought to myself that I had gone too far; the mere word communism had torn the tenuous web of confidence that had been slowly established. Edith seemed to feel the same strain, for she began speaking of the Paris Exposition and her voice lacked confidence. But we were mistaken in our estimation, for the first question the younger worker asked was:

"And the Russian pavilion, how was it?"

"Very fine," answered Edith. "We thought that from the outside it was the most beautiful building in the Exposition."

"And inside?"

"It was good, too," said Edith cautiously.

"But is it true that it is filled with models of their big industries, and railways and air lines, and that it has automobiles and tractors, books, stage models and all sorts of things?"

"And is it true," said the other,

"that in front of the Italian pavilion there is a statue of Mussolini naked on a horse?"

"Yes," I said, "but how do you know?"

The driver turned around with a big boyish grin; the car swerved a little.

"The radio told us," he confessed.

At first I thought they meant the official stations and then I caught on.

"So you do listen!"

The old man was smiling, too. There was a definite feeling of ease and friendliness, of barriers removed.

"We do," he said, "we do. Three times a week."

"Yes? When?"

"Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The government tries to interfere; you can hear the noises they make. . . ."

"Ja, ja," said the young man. "Sirens and things; rrrrrr . . . zzzzzz . . ." he made different sounds, his index finger revolving around his ear. "But we hear just the same." They both laughed and the old man added chuckling:

"It costs the government a lot of money." And they laughed some more as we joined in.

"Many people listen?"

The old man nodded with a lift of his eyebrows. "But it is more difficult now; the police . . ." he shook his head.

I was about to question him further when the driver cut in.

"We will go up in there," he said, pointing to the low Franconian mountains, whose base we had been skirting. "He has to see his brother. It will not take long and then we will take you to Aalen."

"That will be fine." I answered, and a few minutes later we swung off the main road. As we went up the

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rough country road, we passed some youths in grey jackets repairing it.

"Labor front," said the driver. "Do you know their pay? Twenty-five pfennigs a day, not even enough for cigarettes."

"Don't they get cigarettes free?"

"They do not. They live in barracks and have food and uniforms. Week days they work and drill; Sundays they parade. The government gets one year free labor."

"That's outside the army service?"

"But yes! Army service is two more years, and after that, three months' service every year."

"Three months?"

"Ja. Three months a year until you are forty-five."

Edith and I looked at each other.

"Well," she said, "it's one way to cut down unemployment figures."

We passed two big trucks, beautiful, heavy machines with tremendous loads, completely covered under snug canvas. The worker pointed at them.

"Supplies for the cannon factory."

"Cannon factory down here? I thought the armament works were in the north."

"So they are, but this is a new one, hidden in the forests. I'll show you where it is later."

And he did. When an hour later we were back on the main road, running parallel to the forest-covered slopes, he slowed down almost to a stop and pointed.

"It's right in there," he said.

"But I don't see anything," said Edith. "Not even smoke from the stacks."

The driver smiled.

"It's there just the same. The workers come from the village ten kilometers away and are carried back

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and forth in the factory buses. Remember the two we passed a little while ago? They were part of the fleet.”

I did remember the buses. Small, neat grey machines, but they had been filled with women, and I had dismissed them as being some kind of an excursion. I said as much, and the driver snorted.



(image added)