

C H A P T E R 22

DARK CLOUDS BEFORE THE STORM.

It was now 1937 and we still lived in Austria like in Schlaraffia, as if we had guaranties for peace, although dark clouds should have been seen on the horizon. We still were sure that Mussolini will protect Austria. We had a dictatorship in Austria, the press was under the control of the government and many events that happened around us in the world were kept from us. There were many warnings, about which we knew, like the re-occupation of the Rhineland by Germany, the formation of the "Berlin-Rome Axis", resulting from a visit of the Italian foreign minister Count Ciano to Hitler on October 25th, 1936, which should have been an eye-opener. A visit of Schuschnigg to Mussolini on April 22nd, 1937, was, as far as I remember, not reported in Austrian newspapers. In history books one could read now that Mussolini warned Schuschnigg at that meeting that Italy could not be counted on to give armed support against Germany, and that his advice was that Schuschnigg make his peace with Hitler and admit Nazis to the government. Schuschnigg rejected the advice. He was seeking and finding a measure of support from France and France's allies. As I said, we did not know anything about it, as it was not in our newspapers, and we continued to feel secure, and that goes for almost all the people in Austria.

We made our plans for our summer vacation, and went this time to Zinkenbach on the southern shore of the Wolfgang Lake.

It was a beautiful place and we enjoyed it immensely. On the other side of the lake was the famous "Hotel zum Weissen Rossel" (White Horse) and also the Schafsberg. Once or twice I went with Francis by boat across the lake, and we went up to the top of the Schafsberg. Francis was at that time already very interested in butterflies and we caught there a few beautiful Apollos (Parnassius), which fly generally only on high mountains. I remember that we drank there water from a well by lying down on our bellies. We had often visitors in Zinkenbach, among others Leon and Marianne Erdstein and Ernst Husserl. Leon Erdstein was a great pianist and became later Francis piano teacher and Johanna's too. Later on, back in Vienna, Francis went often with a patient of mine, a Mr. Streitz, who was a great butterfly expert, on butterfly hunting trips. This was the first year that Francis went to public school. His teacher, Mr. Turek, was full of praise about Francis, and he brought a report card home with straight I-marks in every subject. In the winter of 1937-38, I went with Francis on a ski trip to Annaberg in Lower Austria in the area of the Hochschwab for 3 or 4 days. It was amazing with what ease he came down on difficult lanes without falling. I stayed with him only for 2 or 3 days, and then Lisa came and stayed a few more days with him. These last few years were probably the most beautiful and best years of our lives. We lived without worries in a beautiful home, had two maids, and our whole family nearby, enjoying visits at our home.

To complete the description of Hedy's father and mother, a few more things, which I later remembered, should be added here, for instance some of his frequent remarks: "It is an art

to make something out of nothing." Or: "Today we have not spent any money, so we should stick out a white flag." Once he was invited with the rest of the family to the home of a niece, Mitzi Bruell, the sister of Sami Bruell, who served a soup with soupballs. He said to my mother-in-law: "These are excellent soup balls, ask Mitzi to give you the recipe." It so happened that my mother-in-law had made the soup and the soup balls herself at home, and had brought it to the dinner as a contribution to the meal. We all had a good laugh. He took every day a cold shower, and, while doing it, used to howl, and he recommended these cold showers to all his patients. All the members of the family had to do it, of course, too. His explanation was that cold water causes constriction of the veins of the skin, thereby accelerating the blood flow, eliminating toxic substances from the blood by way of the kidneys more rapidly. He specifically mentioned barbiturates, which many people take for sleeping, which remain for a prolonged period of time in the system and cause drowsiness as an after-effect, which are by that cold water-treatment more rapidly eliminated and thereby contribute to the refreshing effect of that treatment.

As to my mother-in-law, I remembered a song, which she has sung a few times and I learned to play the melody on the piano, and know also still the words. It was probably a so-called "Heurigen" song, which were sung in the wine-gardens in the suburbs of Vienna by singers to the accompaniment by guitars, and were always very humorous. As I said before, my mother-in-law had a great sense of humor, and here is the song,

first in German, in the typical Viennese dialect, then translated into English:

"A Mutterl hat a erschtgebor'nes Kinderl grad am Arm, sie moecht gern hab'n dass 's schlafen tut, d'rum sagt sie
liab und warm,
mit aner g'wissen Innigkeit "Du Pamperletscherl Du,
Du Zuckergoscherl, Herzenspinkerl, mach heidi - heidu."
Hab'ns an Idee? Se'gns does ~~is~~ weanerisch, holla diroeh, an Witz, an Scharm, so red'n d' Leit in Wean, vor so a Ausdrucksweis hat jeder an Respect, does is der echte, unverfelschte Weana Dialect!"

Here now the translation into English:

"A mother has a first-born child on her arm, she would like to see that it sleeps, and therefore says
lovingly and warm,
with a certain heartiness: "You pamperletscherl, you, you sugarmouth, you little heart, make heidi - heidu."
Do you have an idea? You see, that is Viennese, holla diroeh, a joke, a charm, this way the people talk in Vienna, such a way of expression is being respected by all. That is the genuine, unadulterated Viennese dialect."

In 1938, Francis was 7 years old and Johanna in her second year. We had up till then a wonderful life, a life of love and harmony, and much happiness with our two children. Francis was a very handsome and lovely boy, and Johanna was simply precious. The grandparents came daily and enjoyed the children immensely. There were often family gatherings in the evening, as we had a very large number of relatives in Vienna. Everything was just fine.

All that came suddenly to an end, when we heard on the radio that chancellor Schuschnigg was invited by Hitler to a visit in Berchtesgaden on February 12th, and went there. He was there exposed to a brutal monologue by Hitler and received conditions, equal to capitulation. Under pressure he had to promise an amnesty to Austrian Nazis, who had been imprisoned, and furthermore to agree to take certain Nazis into the cabinet. On February 16th, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a Nazi, became minister of the interior. On February 24th, Schuschnigg, replying to a speech by Hitler, re-affirmed the independence of Austria, and appealed for support against further demands for concessions. This speech called forth a good deal of enthusiasm in Austria. Last-minute efforts of Schuschnigg to arrange a reconciliation with the Socialist working classes came to nothing. As a last resort, Schuschnigg suddenly announced on March 9th, that a plebiscite would be held on the following Sunday, March 13th, on the question of Austrian independence, and ballots were to be distributed.

It was quite certain that this plebiscite would have shown a majority for the independence of Austria, and Hitler knew it. The propaganda for this plebiscite was enormous. On all streetcorners there were devices painted on the sidewalks with thick red paint: "Rot-weiss-rot bis in den Tod", in English "Red-white-red up to the death". The announcement of the plebiscite gave Hitler an opportunity to submit an ultimatum, demanding postponement of the plebiscite and the resignation of Schuschnigg. German troops began to concentrate on the frontier. Unable to resist, Schuschnigg resigned, and Seyss-Inquart became chancellor. On March 12th, the German

army began the invasion of Austria. No resistance was offered. On March 13th, Seyss-Inquart proclaimed the union of Austria with Germany.

The anxiety we endured in these few weeks is difficult to describe. Everything came so suddenly, so unexpected. Not only we, but millions of people in Austria were unprepared and surprised. Where were France and England? In the English parliament, prime minister Neville Chamberlain was asked what he had to say about the visit of chancellor Schuschnigg with Hitler in Berchtesgaden. Chamberlain did not open his mouth and only shrugged his shoulders. This was a signal for Hitler that England would not do anything, and that he could proceed. Many people left Austria in these 4 weeks, but most people did not, as the time for preparations was too short. We could not leave, of course, had to stay on and hope. I came into the living room on March 11th, when Hedy was sitting near the radio, crying. Schuschnigg had just terminated a fare-well speech and had said: "May God protect Austria" and the Austrian hymn was played. He had abdicated and in the next moment he was arrested.