



“David,” Mama called. “Time to get up.”

I thought I was dreaming, but when I opened my eyes I realized that it really was a school day. A ray of sunlight poked out from beneath the heavy blackout drapes. Before the occupation my window drapes had been pale blue and much nicer. Breakfast smells reached me, and I jumped out of bed and opened the drapes.

It was early autumn, and the leaves on some of the trees had already begun to turn from green to yellow. Soon they'd be orange, then red. I had hoped that by the time Jewish New Year came around the leaves would form a

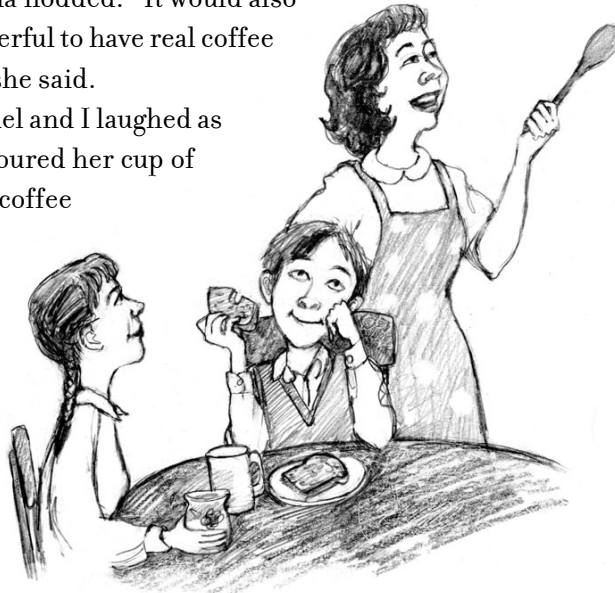
crunchy brown carpet covering the streets of Copenhagen. Autumn is my favourite time of year. Of course, Copenhagen is the most beautiful city in the world, any time of year. Even Nazi soldiers couldn't make Copenhagen ugly.

That morning, over breakfast, Mama said, "I'll bake a honey cake for Rosh Hashanah to make the New Year sweet." My big sister, Rachel, and I bit into our slices of dry toast. Breakfasts weren't as tasty since the Nazis had occupied Denmark. They sent most of our good food to Germany. Still, as Papa told us whenever we complained, "In other occupied countries people suffer much more than we do here in Denmark."

Rachel washed down the toast with chicory coffee and pulled a face. Rationing had put an end to real coffee. "A sweet year," she said, "would be a year without Nazis."

Mama nodded. "It would also be wonderful to have real coffee again," she said.

Rachel and I laughed as Mama poured her cup of chicory coffee into the sink.



“Why doesn’t Papa bake the honey cake?” I asked with a straight face. I didn’t mean to suggest that Papa could make better cakes. But after all, he *was* a baker.

Mama gave me a sharp look. “I’ll have you know, David, that your Papa’s not the only member of the Nathan family who can bake cakes.”

Rachel winked at me across the table. Nathan’s Patisserie, Papa’s pastry shop downstairs, was still the best in Copenhagen, even though good ingredients were getting harder and harder to find. His assistant, Mrs. Jensen, had a seaside cottage in Humlebaek. Some of her neighbours there ran small farms. They secretly sold Papa butter and fresh cream. If the soldiers found out they would be very angry.

Most of the time Mama took care of the apartment. On weekday afternoons, if it got busy in the pastry shop, she helped serve behind the counter. Still, even though Mama didn’t bake for the shop, no one in the world made a tastier honey cake. She only baked it once a year for Rosh Hashanah. Papa was the first to admit, “When it comes to honey cake, children, your Mama beats me hands down.” So I suppose that’s why we’d never tasted Papa’s.

As I ate the last bit of dry toast, I pretended it was Mama’s honey cake. My mouth watered.

Rachel checked her watch and got up quickly. “I have to go,” she said, picking up her schoolbooks and coat.

“So early?” said Mama with a frown.

Rachel was always in a hurry these days. She left home early and came home late. Sometimes she didn’t come home at all.



"I have to give Papa something," she said.

Mama looked worried as Rachel kissed her goodbye. "Bye, David," Rachel said to me. But she looked as if her thoughts were already miles away.

After Rachel had gone, Mama said very little. There was no point in my asking questions. Whenever I mentioned that Rachel was hardly ever home, Mama would say, "She has to study hard at the university, David. There's a lot of pressure, with papers to write and final exams to worry about."

The old Rachel wouldn't have been so serious, even about exams. On the other hand, it seemed as if the whole world had become serious, waiting for the worst to happen. Only what could be worse than being occupied? What could be worse than not being free?

I finished my breakfast and helped Mama wash the dishes.

"Will the Jensens eat Rosh Hashanah dinner with us as usual?" I asked.

"Of course," said Mama. "The Jensens are family." Mama always said that everyone in Denmark was like family. That didn't stop us from missing our real family. They'd moved to England before the war.

Aunt Bente, Uncle Leo, Cousin Lars and even Grandma lived in London. Sometimes they sent letters. They planned to return to Copenhagen when the war was over. I knew they must be very homesick.

"Elsa's probably waiting for you in the pastry shop," said Mama. I kissed her and ran downstairs.

Elsa was Mrs. Jensen's daughter. She was also my classmate and best friend. Her father owned the toyshop next door. Elsa thought that I was lucky my father owned a pastry shop. But I thought she was the lucky one.

Every morning I looked in the window of Jensen's Toys to see if the train set was still there. My tenth birthday was coming in November, and all I wanted was that train. But what if Mr. Jensen sold it before then? Anything could happen in two months.

Halfway down the back stairs I could smell the warm fragrance of freshly baked cookies. I quickened my step. Papa and Mrs. Jensen had been baking since before sunrise.

"There he is," said Mrs. Jensen, as I opened the back door. She patted her big white apron, setting free a small

floury cloud. "You're just in time." Then she handed me a sugar-speckled cookie from a tray on the counter like she did every day before school. It was still warm from the oven. Elsa grinned at me as she licked crumbs from her fingertips.

"Thank you, Mrs. Jensen," I said. The cookie was sweet, much tastier than dry toast.

"Good morning, David," said Papa. He stepped out from the baking area carrying a tray of cream-filled chocolate éclairs. Elsa and I stared in amazement. It had been a long time since Papa had made éclairs.

As Papa put the six éclairs in a box he noticed our surprise. He exchanged glances with Mrs. Jensen, as if they shared a secret.

"These are a special order," he murmured. That was another thing that the occupation had brought—grown-ups always seemed to have secrets.

Papa checked his pocket watch. "Someone should be picking them up soon." He looked worried, the way Mama had when Rachel left that morning. Whatever could be so serious about chocolate éclairs?

As I opened the front door, the bells above it jingled. Elsa and I said goodbye to Papa and Mrs. Jensen, and left the shop's warm, comforting smells.

As usual, there were two Nazi soldiers standing on the corner. These two sometimes came into the shop and took pastries without paying. Some soldiers at least paid for what they took. Still, no one liked any of them, even the polite ones. Denmark was *our* country, not theirs.



It had been three years since the Nazis had invaded. At first Elsa and I were scared of the soldiers, but we soon got used to them. We didn't like them, but grew accustomed to the sight of armed men in uniforms patrolling the streets, parks and railway station. I knew we wouldn't have to put up with them forever. I'd heard my parents and the Jensens talking. They said that someday, when the Allies won the war, the Nazis would leave Denmark. Then we'd be free again. No more blackouts. No more air raids. No more chicory coffee.

"After all," reasoned Elsa, "it's lots of countries against just one. I'm surprised they've taken so long, aren't you?"

I said yes, but I was sure there must be some reason why we'd waited three years. Elsa and I had been warned

not to ever talk about the Allies, or mention the war. Papa said that soldiers were trained to listen to gossip.

I asked him, "Is it all right if we think about it?" Papa smiled and said everyone was free to think, and Elsa and I should go ahead and think whatever we wanted.

"But always remember," Papa warned, "walls have ears. And sometimes trees do too." And he grinned and ruffled my hair with his floury hand.



For a long time I had dreams about that. Walls and trees with large, flapping ears. But that was when I was little. Now it was 1943, and I was almost ten.

Elsa and I waited patiently for the Allies to save Denmark. We didn't talk about it, because of the walls and trees having ears.

But I knew we were both thinking the same thing. One day we'd look outside, and instead of the Nazi flag, we'd see the Danish flag, the beautiful *Dannebrog*. One day. ♦

