

I MARRIED A NAZI!

True Story of a Strange Honeymoon

By
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WHAT will America say? This was my first reaction to the startling news Karl brought me that March morning in 1938 when Hitler invaded Austria. In Frau Hoffman's pension at Mittenwald in the Bavarian Alps the atmosphere was tense. The radio was just beginning to tell what was happening.

"What will America say?" I repeated my question out loud.

"Karl, does this mean war?" "Not at all," he replied. "The democracies dare not interfere." Then he became the thorough German, the lecturer, the sounder of warnings. "Show no excitement," he commanded. "Every one knows you are the only foreigner here, and they will be watching you."

That was how the news of the *anschluss*, the swift seizure of Austria, came to us. The rest of the world apparently was just as startled. Schuschnigg of Austria was turned out with no notice. Hitler was conqueror. He had taken advantage of France's difficult domestic situation to master the little republic that had been set up after the war.

Overnight the Reich reorganized Austria, absorbed her millions. Currency regulations were announced immediately. Passport regulations were abolished at once and the custom houses on the old border were changed into Youth hostels.

The next day we heard the noise of approaching troops again in Mittenwald. This time they came from the direction of Innsbruck. Austrian soldiers were being transferred to German garrisons to take the places of Germans sent into old Austria.

As the new allies arrived the villagers and the visitors cheered. Little girls ran forward and presented the Austrians with flowers. Cigarettes were showered on the marching columns from the windows. The mayor, standing on a chair commanded from a cate, made a speech when the detachment halted. It ended with "Sieg Heil!" Then the Austrian band played the two German anthems. As the march was resumed we all stood with hands outstretched in the Nazi salute.

Slowly my husband and I went back into the pension. A deep feeling of discouragement overwhelmed me. Another idyl was ending. The prospect of an evening alone with Karl was depressing. He would deliver a speech about Hitler and the devilishness of democracies, or he would be silent, ignoring an uneducated foreigner. Politics had engrossed him again.

I was more glad than sorry when he sat down to the radio, eagerly absorbing the news of the *anschluss*, and let me go upstairs alone.

So we had come back again to German politics. Mittenwald's peace was ended. Nazi action and Nazi propaganda were triumphant here, as they were everywhere else in this nation of many millions. Airplanes roared over our heads. The Nazi flags, so seldom seen when we arrived, hung from all the houses now, and both inhabitants and tourists chattered incessantly of Hitler and Germany's return to power.

It was a welcome relief when we left the village for a one-day trip. Our first stop was Oberammergau. There was nothing disappointing there; the dignity that has wrapped itself about the actors in the famous Passion play was unaltered. They were all preparing calmly to give the next performance in 1940.

We halted later at Fussen to visit King Ludwig's magnificent castle of Neuschwanstein, perched on a mountain crag and surrounded by mists. It looked like the pictures of fairy palaces in the books that little girls in

● When in 1937 the author married Karl Reinke, a German living in Haiti, he was gentle, kind, full of the love of life. On a honeymoon to his family's home in Hamburg, Karl came rapidly under the influence of the Nazi ideology, and the happiness of their marriage as rapidly was tarnished. On a winter vacation trip to the Bavarian Alps the Reinke's learn that Hitler is marching into Austria.

America get at Christmas time. The interior was splendid. On the walls were paintings representing scenes from the great operas—"Tristan," "Tannhauser," "Rienzi," "Parsifal," "Lohengrin," and the Ring trilogy of Wagner. Karl and I were touched, as usual, by beautiful things associated with music.

Soon we bade farewell to Mittenwald. The day we left we saw 800 Italian laborers being brought in to aid the German farmers with their spring planting. Their train, its coaches covered with Fascist and Nazi banners and portraits of Mussolini and Hitler, was halted at the village station. The Mittenwald band played the patriotic music of the two governments as the workers were fed spaghetti and given red wine in the station dining room.

We were to make a slow progress back to Hamburg, stopping at each interesting city. Munich, scene of Hitler's first attempts to seize power, and therefore sacred to the Nazis, showed us what Germany had become since the *anschluss*. The whole town bubbled with enthusiasm over the victory, and soldiers by the hundreds swaggered through the streets.

One of the frequent "solidarity" days was being observed. Funds were being collected for winter relief. Soldiers rattled boxes. After contributing we



(Acme photo.)
Frauleins of occupied territory greet German soldiers.

were given little dolls that made us exempt from further solicitation. Twenty pfennig, or the equivalent of a nickel, was all that was demanded or expected. But every German gives willingly, and a surprising amount is raised. High officials, including Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels, often act as collectors, and long lines await an opportunity to contribute to them.

Before we left Munich we visited the memorial crypt where the bodies of the fallen Nazi heroes of the first *putsch* lie in huge bronze coffins. Storm Troopers stood guard, and every visitor as he arrived stood at attention and gave the Nazi salute.

It was all so solemnly theatrical—as if tribute were being paid to godlike personages—that I could not help but wonder whether it was an artfully encouraged bit of propaganda. But the Germans do not see it that way. The suggestion, I am sure, would have been regarded by Karl as blasphemous. Like all the others, he was worshipping the memory of the heroes who had died for the Fuehrer. On such a premise few Germans will recognize any limit of sentimentality.

We halted next at Nuremberg, where the atmosphere was fully as martial. Some of the transferred Austrian troops were quartered there and were applauded roundly as they marched in the streets.

A street car took us to the city's most famous structure, the huge stadium in which the annual Nazi rally is held in September. We climbed to the speakers' stand and looked out over a vast expanse of field and masonry. I asked Karl if he could imagine how Adolf Hitler would feel, standing where we were and listening to the roar of a hundred thousand loyal followers.

"What he hears are cries of joy from a unified people—something your democracies can never know," he said.

"Must people who do not like that kind of unity remain forever silent?" I asked.

"Why," he demanded, "do Americans always think of rebellion as the way to achieve a good life? We do not like revolutions. By hard work and strong governments we Germans are trained to obedience and loyalty. We would rather have Hitler as he is than be run by criminals and Jews and communists."

He continued this lecture at length. It was the old, old theme of German necessity and German superiority. You heard it wherever you went, from radios, from newspapers, in casual conversation. It was the German obsession; to rise to power and then to justify the methods.

Karl was gripped by it. It was hard to believe that the calm young man of the Haitian days, with the international viewpoint, had become so thorough an advocate of the policy of blood and iron. And, after all, which was the real Karl? Was my husband only changed to fit the scene, and capable of changing back when he reached America? Or was he only now throwing off the shell that was the first Karl and appearing in his true character as a serious, fanatical advocate of National Socialism?

The answer was not yet plain.

From Nuremberg we went to ancient Rothenburg on the Tauber. Karl was gay on the trip. His good humor increased when we viewed the clock commemorating the titanic encounter of Tilly, the great general of the Thirty Years' war, and Burgomaster Nusch of Rothenburg.

Legend has it that Tilly, having taken the town by storm, was about to put it to sack and to kill the burgomaster and the councillors. But the women and children pleaded with the conqueror and presented him with a three-liter goblet of the fine old wine of Rothenburg.

"If there is a man here who can empty this goblet at a draft," said the general, "then I will spare the city."

The intrepid burgomaster stepped forward and without taking breath downed the wine. Figures of Tilly and Nusch stand, one on each side of the clock, quaint representatives of a time when a bargain was a bargain.

We laughed over the whimsy of it. And then on a round tower I saw a great black and yellow poster containing one of Julius Streicher's denunciations of the unfortunate German Jews. I asked Karl if he thought such treatment of a helpless minority was fair or even necessary. His reply was tart.

"You'll have to get used to that," he said. "You must realize that nowhere in Germany is the Jew welcome. He must get out."

We went on to Heidelberg. Flowers already were in bloom. The air was soft with spring, and we lunched in an open-air café. In the afternoon we climbed through the forest to the wide-spreading cemetery where the city's World War dead lie buried.

Before us, row on row, stretched the concrete crosses, each marked with the name, rank, and age of the soldier it represented. So many of them had been mere boys when they died for the fatherland! There in that peaceful spot, as the sun went down, Karl began talking again of Germany and the sufferings of his people.

"Three million dead," he said, "and millions more wounded, incapacitated. Can you wonder that we were outraged by the treaty of Versailles? Branded as the criminals of the civilized world, called on to pay to the Allies more gold than the whole human race possessed!"

"Picture our terrible situation



(Associated Press photo.)

Hysterical crowds cheer Hitler . . . "standing alone, erect . . . the burden of empire resting on his shoulders."

that I should leave Germany a month earlier than Karl would. That way each of us would have a month with our relatives. I was, moreover, to look up business opportunities for him. He had made no change in the plans for American residence, and I was confident that all would be well when he followed me.

The first days in Hamburg were busy. Our lease on the apartment was up, and we moved our furnishings out. I began packing. Karl was engaged in almost endless formalities necessary before he could get his visa from the United States consulate. The Reinke family, unchanged and kindly

Fuehrer, but Karl knew that even under the unfavorable conditions we would find no place of vantage if we waited much longer.

Storm Troopers already were lined up from the railroad station to the harbor entrance, blocks distant, where Hitler was to board a launch to the drydocks and the new liner. Already thousands, adults and school children—marched to their stations by their teachers—were crowding up close to the lines. Rain-soaked but patient, shivering but determined, they would remain until they had seen the Fuehrer.

We stood on the steps of a café, whence we had a fine view

ume rose as Hitler came nearer. The shouts of "Hell Hitler!" and "Sieg heil!" came nearer and nearer to the pitch of hysteria.

Next we could see hands raised in the familiar Nazi salute. Some of those near us had tears in their eyes. Hamburg was going on an emotional jag, and even I, firm as I was, in my Americanism, was caught in the tense surge of feeling. I waved my banner and shouted with the rest.

There was Hitler! He stood alone, erect in an open car. The rain was over, but he wore the familiar trench coat. His brown military cap rested firmly on his head. Just before the car stopped he raised his hand in salute and, turning, bowed in each direction to the clamor.

The ovation rose to new heights, and I wondered what his thoughts must be. He looked tired. His face was white, almost a dead white, and tense. But there was something magnetic about him. It was easy to believe here in this burst of almost idolatrous enthusiasm that Hitler could feel the burden of empire resting on his shoulders. Somehow one forgot under the circumstances that this was the man who had murdered so many erstwhile friends, who had made life a hell for hundreds of thousands of Jews, who had sent so many thousands into concentration camps.

All the vast crowd in the streets was electrified at the sight of him. There may have been some present who shouted because they feared not to, but I am convinced that with the great majority the applause was sincere and unforced.

As cries of "Heil!" continued, the Fuehrer was received at the landing stage by Nazi officials and escorted slowly down the carpeted gangway between files of *Schutzstaffel* men.

Karl asked me almost breathlessly what I thought of Hitler then. Still swayed by the mass excitement, I replied, "He is wonderful."

"Come now," he said, "must even an American say that?"

"I am glad I felt that way just for a moment," I told him. "Now I can understand the hold he has on the German people."

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(Acme photo.)

Nazi celebration in Adolf Hitler place, Nuremberg.

and hospitable, assisted us all they could, and gradually our problems were solved.

Then, three days before I was to sail on the S. S. Manhattan, Hitler came to Hamburg. He was to christen, to dedicate the new Strength Through Joy liner just completed, a huge ship on which the red-faced workers of the Reich would take low-cost tours to the Mediterranean and to points of interest on the Baltic and North seas.

I was almost as enthusiastic as the Hamburg folk at this opportunity to see the man.

The great day came, with cold and rain and wind in gusty blasts. But this was disregarded. At 10 a. m. we stuffed sandwiches into our pockets and started out. It would be hours before the appearance of the

of the first gate of the Landingsbrücken, where Hitler was to walk down to the launch. There, with the throng constantly increasing, we waited for four weary hours.

Shortly after noon the Brown Shirts and the *Schutzstaffel*, the black-uniformed Hitler guards, went into action. They cleared a huge circle about the gate. This gave us a better view, but it thrust the crowd back upon us. The packed café steps became more and more congested. The hard heels of Hitler Youth trampled my toes. Literally we had barely room to breathe.

Two-thirty came, and with it the electrifying message, "He is coming!" Paper Nazi flags were distributed by the thousands to the crowd. Over toward the station cheering arose. Its vol-

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