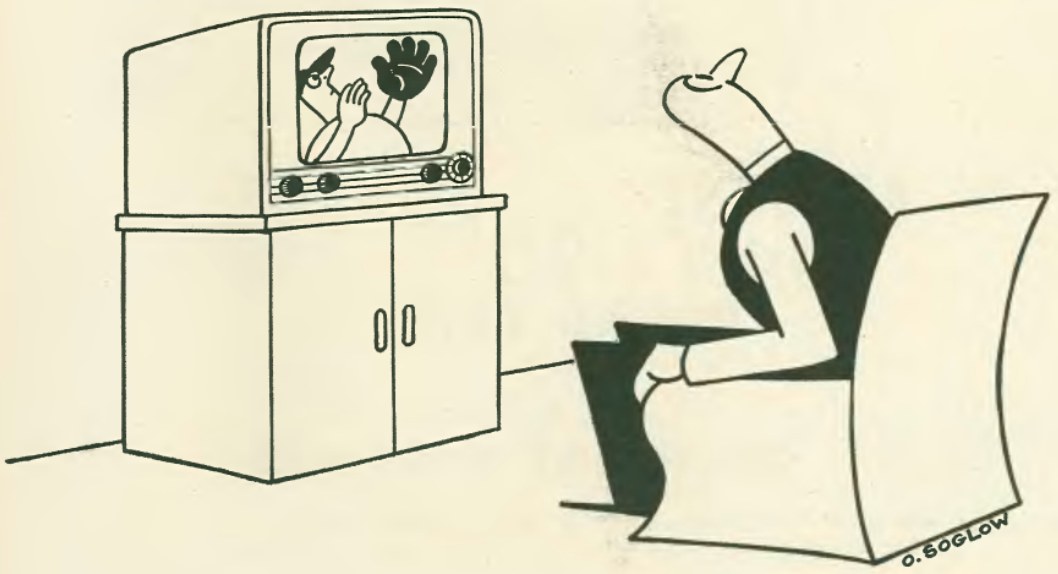
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THE LITTLE FISH

FIVE years after the death of Austrian-born Adolf Hitler, there are probably a million people in Austria—including Herr and Frau Anton Hasslinger, with whom I once, so many years ago, boarded in Vienna—who wish he were alive. The figure, signifying one person out of every seven of the population, is necessarily only an approximation, but it is not implausible. At the end of the war, five hundred and thirty-six thousand Austrians were on the membership rolls of the Nazi Party and its subsidiary organizations—the S.A., the S.S., the Hitler Jugend, the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Labor Service), the Volkswohlfahrt (Welfare Service), and so on. These Nazis of record had been active workers for the cause, according to the present Austrian government, and not just adherents on principle. The latter were called *kleine Nazimitläufer* (little Nazi followers), and there are still hundreds of thousands of them, plus some more recent converts whose philosophical outlook predisposes them toward Nazi precepts, whatever their outward political allegiance. The most significant index to the size of this disturbing bloc of Austrian citizenry is the result of the general elections last October. The present political party that appeals most to unreconstructed Nazis is the League of Independents, or V.d.U., the so-called Fourth Party. Although the Party's leaders disclaim any ties with Nazism, its membership is open only to Catholics, Protestants, and *Gottgläubige* (Believers in God, so classified because they are not affiliated with any church), which may be one way of indicating who *can't* join. One plank in the Party's platform is "to put an end to the evil cycle of punishment and retaliation," but another is "to punish murderers, including murderers of National Socialists, wherever they may be found." In the October elections, twelve per cent of the electorate voted for the V.d.U. If those twelve per cent can be assumed to reflect the views of twelve per cent of Austria's population of seven million, there are some eight hundred and forty thousand pro-Nazi types running loose in the country, in addition to those who are in jail pending trial and those who are scared to come out in the open and go on record.

The history of Nazism in Austria is, like almost everything else in that country, a mixture of reality and romanticism, a bewildering succession of violent ups and downs. The Nazi Party came into being there in the late twenties and functioned openly until 1933, when the Dollfuss regime declared it illegal and drove it underground. Those who stuck with the Party then or joined it during the next five years are now referred to—with admiration by one out of seven members of the populace—as "illegals." On March 13, 1938, Hitler marched into Vienna, and overnight the outlawed party became the only legal party in Austria. It kept its exalted position until Hitler's collapse.

Shortly after the Liberation, the People's Party (Catholic), the Socialists, and the Communists—the only three parties then legally recognized in Austria—outlawed the Nazi Party as an organization of war criminals. All former Nazis had to register with the police, and lists of these registrants were posted in municipal offices throughout the country. "Little illegals" and "little Nazis"—the distinction between them being based on whether they had joined the Party before or after March, 1938—were fired from their jobs and either had to help clean up the rubble in the city's streets or were assessed for a reconstruction fund. The big illegals and the big Nazis were also fired, and they paid heavier assessments and cleaned up more rubble. Former S.S. men were interned in Camp Glasenbach, near Salzburg, in the American Zone, where they are said to have promptly and efficiently built up an underground organization, which became the nucleus of Austria's Neo-Nazism. Then came the denazification law of February 6, 1947, which distinguished between the *Minderbelastete* (the moderately implicated), the *Schwerbelastete* (the greatly implicated), and out-and-out war criminals. Whether a Nazi was moderately or greatly implicated was determined by his actions while a member of the Party and by the rank he had held in it; as a rule, those under the rank of cell leader were considered only moderately implicated. The amnesty law of April 21, 1948, gave a blanket pardon to all moderately implicated Nazis, and their names were stricken from the registration lists. Four hundred and forty-five thousand of them were let off. They can now move around freely and apply for any job, and most of them are back in their old positions. The *Bonzen* (bigwigs) have been tried as war criminals or are still awaiting trials, which may never be held. A year ago, the law limiting the number of political parties to the three already established ones was rescinded, and that is when the Fourth Party came into being.



Back in April, 1945, when the Red Army was getting uncomfortably close to Vienna, many of the Nazi brass moved to the western parts of Austria, because they expected, not unreasonably, that the United States Army would treat them more leniently than the Russians would. A lot of them went into temporary seclusion around Salzburg, west of Vienna, and Graz, south of Vienna, which were the citadels of Nazism in the old days and

are again today. But thousands of little Nazis, the core of the former Party, stayed in Vienna. It is not easy to identify them. For one thing, the intransigent Russians are still in town and the little Nazis want to keep out of their hands, and for another the former Party leaders wouldn't like it if they talked too much. The safest course is to deny that one was *anything*. Not long ago, the prosecuting attorney at a denazification trial, irritated by a defendant's obstinate disavowals, snapped, "All right! We know that there were never any Nazis in Austria. But do you deny that there was a Hitler?"

THE situation being what it is, it was only a lucky accident that recently enabled me to spend an evening with a Nazi family. In 1926, I arrived in Vienna from Czechoslovakia to study at the College of Economics, and I moved into a small room in the home of Herr and Frau Hasslinger. (For reasons that are obvious, that is not their real name.) The room had no heat, mirror, table, or curtains, but it was cheap, and such meals as I ate with the family were passable. Herr Hasslinger was a badly paid petty official in the municipal administration. He and his wife had two young children, a son and a daughter, and lived on the third floor of a ratty apartment house; the family managed to make ends meet by taking in boarders. One day last month, as I was coming out of the Army Post Exchange near the Waehringer Guertel, a woman stopped me. I wouldn't have recognized her as Frau Hasslinger if she hadn't told me who she was. She was thinner and smaller than I remembered her, and her face was sallow and shrunken. Age or bitterness had chiselled two deep lines at the corners of her mouth. She wore an old, mouse-colored coat and was carrying a head of red cabbage done up in a newspaper. When I asked her how she had been, she burst into tears. I inquired if anyone in her family had been lost in the war, but she said no, everybody was back and in good health, thank God. "It's just that we've had a terrible, terrible time since the end of the war," she explained. "Everything has gone from bad to worse. Oh, my dear sir, the world has become so cruel! We are little, innocent people, but they are after us all the time."

"Who are?" I asked, perhaps naïvely.

"Who?" she repeated. "Those police criminals, of course. But I can't talk here." She glanced apprehensively

around. "One never knows. Why don't you come to see us tomorrow night? We're still living in the same place. It's hard to believe, but our building was never touched in the bombing raids. My husband will be so glad to see you again. You always were our nicest boarder. Not like those drunkards, who were forever coming in after midnight and waking everybody up. And you must see the children. They were only little tots when you were here." She nudged my arm and pointed to some PX supplies I was carrying. "You're an American now?" I nodded, and she said, "Will you bring us a few cigarettes? My husband can't afford American cigarettes, and he likes them so much."

The next day, I made a few inquiries about the Hasslingers and learned a few facts. Herr Hasslinger had joined the Nazi Party in 1936. His superiors in that organization had labelled him "honest, rather limited in intelligence, and without any ambition to become a leader." He had kept his subordinate position in the municipal administration until the Nazis took over, in 1938, when he was suddenly made chief of his bureau, over the heads of three men, all of them anti-Nazis. Subsequently, he had joined the S.A. and become an *Untersturmbannführer*, approximately the equivalent of a lieutenant colonel. In 1944, he had commanded a company in the Volkssturm, the civilian-defense organization that was set up at about the time the German Army was reaching the end of its rope. His son, Hellmut, had been a *Gefolgschaftsführer* (roughly, a platoon leader) in the Hitler Jugend and had been made a sergeant in the German Army, in which he distinguished himself at the Stalingrad front. Hasslinger's daughter, Mathilde, had been a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädchen and, later, of the Party. According to a deposition signed by Hasslinger's former office underlings after the Liberation, he had treated them brutally, even refusing to let them take shelter during air raids, and he had remained an active Party man to the last. As a moderately implicated illegal, Hasslinger had been given amnesty under the 1948 law and was again working for the municipal administration, though at the very bottom of the official ladder.

THAT evening, I set out for the Hasslingers', taking along some cigarettes and three bottles of Gumpoldskirchner, a dry white Austrian wine of deceptive lightness. I found that

the building they lived in was indeed undamaged, but shabby and dirty, and the paint was flaking off. There was the well-remembered smell of wet plaster and warmed-over cabbage in the entrance hall. Everything was incredibly dreary. I walked up to the third floor and rang the Hasslingers' bell, under a brass shield bearing their name. I heard steps, an eye appeared at the peephole, a chain was slid back, and Frau Hasslinger opened the door. "Welcome!" she said. "It's nice of you to come. And wine, too! That's very kind of you. My husband is in the dining room."

We walked down the hall to the dining room. Dust covers I recognized instantly were spread over the familiar sofa and the two heavy armchairs along one wall, but the oaken center table and the chairs around it were uncovered, probably in anticipation of my visit. A single shaded electric light bulb, suspended by a long cord from the ceiling, illuminated only the table, leaving the rest of the room in semi-darkness. A radio was playing "*Wien, Wien, nur du allein Sollst stets die Stadt meiner Träume sein.*" On the buffet were still the awful china figurines of two naked satyrs I had hoped I would never see again, along with photographs of the family, and the grandfather's clock in the corner was stopped at five minutes to six, as it had been all the time I lived there.

Herr Hasslinger got up from the table, where he had been reading *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, a popular German encyclopedia. He was gray-haired now, and his face was pale and lined. He was wearing a yellow shirt open at the top of his hairy chest, embroidered suspenders, short leather pants, Tyrolian shoes, and no socks. "I hope you don't mind my informal costume," he said gravely as he shook hands with me. "Klara! A chair for the gentleman! My last two suits are slowly going to pieces."

"The gentleman was nice enough to bring some wine along," said Frau Hasslinger. She stood rigid by the table—almost at attention—watching her husband closely. Hasslinger had always been a tyrant in the home, running his family with an iron hand—a phrase he admired and frequently employed. But now he was a demoted tyrant and his desperate attempts that evening to keep up a front seemed rather sad. "Well, what are you waiting for?" he said harshly to his wife. "Don't leave him holding the bottles all night! Go open them!"

Frau Hasslinger took the bottles into

the kitchen, and her husband turned to me. "Sit down, sir, and tell me about yourself," he said. We talked briefly about the old days and about life in America. Then Frau Hasslinger returned with an opened bottle and three glasses. Hasslinger filled the glasses, drained off his wine at a gulp, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and sighed. I asked how he was making out these days. "Ah," he said, "I'm living the life of the little fish. The big fish got away and joined either the Black Ones [the Catholics] or the Red Ones [the Communists], but I'm a little fish, and I'm the one that gets caught. And it isn't just because I was a member of the Party, either. There's a high commissioner at the Ministry of Justice, an old man—he looks as if he'd been dead for a long time and doesn't know it yet—who was a member of the Party long before I was. He sat out the war years in Berlin, and is back now at his former desk, big as ever. Makes you sick. For a while, in the very early days after the war, we hoped things would improve when the Americans came in. But what happens? All they do is sell us cigarettes and lipsticks." He took a cigarette from a pack I had put on the table, lit it, inhaled deeply, and said, "With your permission? Thank you."

Hasslinger sat there for a moment brooding and smoking, and then poured himself another glass of wine. His wife, taking the cue, fetched in the two other bottles from the kitchen. "All my life I've been a conscientious official, with a sense of duty, and look where I am today," Hasslinger said abruptly. "And why? Because I believed Austria should join the great German Reich. Austria belongs to Germany as a son belongs to his father. We are too small. We can't afford to have a national life of our own. I learned my lesson as long ago as 1918. In the First World War, I was a petty officer in the Austrian Navy, stationed in Pola and Trieste. Then my world collapsed. For months after the armistice I thought I was living in a bad dream. They should have left us the monarchy. I've been through two emperors—Franz Josef and Karl—the first Renner Republic, the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg regimes, the annexation under Hitler, the four-power occupation, and now the Second Republic. The monarchy was the best of all. Everybody here feels that way. No wonder people in the theatre applaud when an actor dressed up as the old Emperor appears on the stage."

"You shouldn't get excited, Papa," said Frau Hasslinger. His glass was

empty again, and she filled it. "The doctor told you not to—"

"Quiet, Klara!" Hasslinger snapped. "Is it a crime to share that century-old longing for Germany?" He apparently saw no contradiction between his enthusiasm for the monarchy and his longing for union with Germany. I was surprised for a moment, and then I wasn't surprised, because nothing is very surprising in Vienna today. "Ah, sir," he went on, "you should have seen the Ringstrasse on the day in March, 1938, when the Führer made his triumphal entrance into Vienna! An ocean of people! There wasn't a soul in town who didn't turn out for the occasion. But today, of course, you'd have a hard time getting anybody to admit being there. I, at least, have never denied that I was on hand, happy and proud to see him. My God, Hitler was practically forced down our throats by the great powers, wasn't he?"

"Yes, it was a lovely day," said Frau Hasslinger with a sigh. "You've never seen so many people! Somebody stole my umbrella." Her husband glanced at her impatiently, and she shut up.

"It used to be that anybody working for the municipal administration had to be a regular member of the Socialists," said Hasslinger. "Otherwise, he couldn't have kept his job. So I was more or less a member of the Red Ones. Naturally, I had lots of friends among the Nazis, but what's so bad about that? Everybody has friends. It was only to be expected that after the Anschluss I was offered a better job. The regime needed reliable, conscientious people who were not afraid of work. I've never been a loafer. Not everything was perfect under the Nazis, but at least they respected a worker and there was order."

"Yes," said Frau Hasslinger. "There was order. Not like today, when everybody does as he pleases."

"That's called democracy, Klara," said Hasslinger with sodden irony. We had more wine. Hasslinger's cheeks began to show some color. "I'll tell you what happened after the end of the war," he said, leaning toward me confidentially. "As long as the Russians were raging through the streets, one couldn't venture out. My God, who could tell *what* to expect from those Asiatics! The Americans are at least clean-shaven and washed. As soon as it was possible, I went back to my office. Conscientious—that's what I've always been. When I got to my room, there sat the three men who had been working under me. Little nobodies, people I wouldn't even spit on. The welcome

they gave me wasn't very enthusiastic, I must say. They wouldn't even let me go to my desk. 'Have you registered?' they asked. 'Registered for what?' I said. My God, I'd had to register so many places and so many times that by then I felt like a walking file cabinet. 'As a Nazi,' they said. 'That's the new law.' And I did register. Don't ask me why. The law didn't really concern little fish like me. I was of no consequence. Just a little creature. I was in the S.A., as it happened, but nobody can say it was my fault."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," Hasslinger said, "every bureau chief had to join if he wanted to keep his job. It was merely a Betriebs-S.A., an office organization. We certainly didn't do much, either. A few roll calls, and whenever there was an air raid, we helped the police keep order. There's no denying that order must be kept, and somebody's got to help the police. But imagine us old gentlemen being allowed to do anything important! It was really a kind of club. A few evenings with beer, singing *Lieder*. Don't you people in America ever sing?"

"After 1944, you hardly ever went to the roll calls," Frau Hasslinger said.

"Maybe only once a week," Hasslinger said. "Of course, I've always been a man of discipline, and that's the best way to make enemies. The population was depending on the municipal employees for water, gas, and electricity. The big Anker Bakery was in my district, and I couldn't let the population down, could I? But the S.A. was just a joke, believe me. My God, I didn't even know I was paying dues to the Party!"

"You didn't?" I asked. "Hadn't you joined?"

"Well, *I* hadn't joined the *Party*," Hasslinger replied. "*It* joined *me*, if I may say so. Our Betriebs-S.A. was integrated into the Party. I had no say in it—nobody asked me. The dues were deducted from my pay. I tried to explain all this to the police after the war, but they were all Communists. They wouldn't even listen to me."

"Criminals," said Frau Hasslinger.

"Don't talk so much, Klara!" Hasslinger said. "It would be better if you just filled our glasses. . . . So—*prosit!* No, if those criminals in the police didn't like a man's face, they would call him a Nazi, and that was that. When I came back from registering with the police, you should have seen how that little no-good who is now sitting at my desk treated me. In the old days, he

wouldn't have dared hand me my overcoat. Now he was the bureau chief. Well, I didn't get my job back. I went home and waited. After a week, two Russian policemen came and said that they had got my name from the bureau chief and that he'd told them I was a Nazi. I said, 'Gentlemen, gentlemen, there must be a slight misunderstanding'—but try and talk to people who wash potatoes in their toilet bowls. They said to come along with them. 'What for?' I asked. 'We Austrians are not conquered people. We've been told we have been liberated!' You know what those Asiatics did? They laughed! They thought I was joking. Then they grabbed me and hauled me off to the Russian headquarters, where I was informed that I would have to clean rubble out of the streets."

Hasslinger looked at me sharply, perhaps hoping to see sympathetic indignation on my face. "But then," he went on, "I said to myself, 'Why not? I love my Vienna, and somebody's got to clean up all that rubble.' I worked for three months. It wasn't so bad—we even got a hot meal at noon, and in those days practically nobody else in town had anything to eat. After three months, the police came to me again and said that a deposition had been filed against me by my fellow-workers in the municipal administration. I was supposed to have forced them, with a gun in my hand, to work for the Führer. Me, who wouldn't harm a worm! I had never agreed with those—those excesses." He stopped. Frau Hasslinger looked at me apprehensively and said, "He means against the Jews."

"I used to quarrel with my own brother on that subject," Hasslinger said, lighting another of my cigarettes. "My brother Fritz used to say that all Jews should be extermin— well, got rid of somehow. My brother would start talking about the wonderful Hitler when he got up in the morning and would still be talking about him when he went to bed at night. He was an idealist, you understand. You just couldn't argue with him. I guess it's a good thing that he died before the collapse." He stared into his glass. "We didn't even know about those camps and things. My God, nowadays everybody seems to think that we are a nation of murderers! Sure, there were always certain rumors. But who believed rumors? We were so used to them that they'd go in one ear and out the other. But I was telling you about this deposition filed against me. The police said I had threatened my subordinates with a

gun. I never threatened anybody with a gun. I was commander of a Volkssturm company—I admit it—and I enforced discipline. *Somebody* had to enforce discipline. When the critical days came, all the other commanders vanished. I was the only one with any sense of duty."

"Anton has always had such a strong sense of duty," Frau Hasslinger said.

"The Volkssturm was the only thing left in those days," Hasslinger said. "The people were totally demoralized, and I—I say it frankly—was the only man left in my district who knew his duty. But it was no use trying to explain any of this to the police. They sent me to the Central Cemetery to dig graves, and I spat on my hands and started to dig. Two graves every day for six weeks." He fortified himself against this recollection with another big gulp of wine.

"After six weeks," Hasslinger continued, "they took me out of the cemetery and made me a mason. The former bureau chief mixing plaster and laying bricks! But it didn't hurt me, and I'm sure I was a better mason than lots of people who had been masons all their lives. Then, one day, I gathered my courage and went back to my old office. I said I would like to see the famous deposition against me. They showed it to me." He stared at the dark ceiling, closed his eyes, and quoted: " 'Hasslinger treated his subordinates brutally and inhumanly. During air attacks by Allied fliers, he prevented his men from entering the air-raid shelter and forced them to stick to their jobs, saying, "The home front stays in the fight." He was active until the very end on behalf of the Party.' " He nodded grimly. "That last sentence I would have been glad to underscore. When a man has a feeling for duty in his bones, he can do nothing about it. What did make me angry, though, was that all my former subordinates, without exception, had signed the deposition—even those who had always been on my side. I met one of them a few days later and asked him, 'Ferdl, how could you sign that pack of lies?' And the man started to cry and said, 'Anton, go ahead and spit on me. I deserve it. I signed because everybody else signed.' Well, to make a long story short, they took me back at the office, but I'm no longer boss. I work for a stupid ass I once barely tolerated having around, and get two-thirds of my prewar salary. There go the fruits of a lifetime of hard work and devotion to duty. The stupid ass makes twice what I do, and in two years he will be three civil-service grades ahead

of me. And that's called democracy!"

"We didn't like everything under the Nazis," said Frau Hasslinger, "but at least one had a feeling that there was a strong hand."

"Yes," agreed Hasslinger. "A strong hand is needed more than anything else today. I've got nothing against democracy, provided it's democracy that keeps a strong hand on the people. That's the trouble, the people themselves are plain stupid!" He was shouting now, and slamming his fist on the table. "The people have to be told what to do. They need authority. They are tired of making up their minds by themselves. You read the papers and you know that everything you see in them is false. All those columns of propaganda before the elections, for instance."

"Did you vote?" I asked.

"Yes," Hasslinger said. "Klara dragged me out, and I voted for the Fourth Party. They say a new broom sweeps clean. Maybe this party will come up with something sensible."

THE door opened and a buxom brunette came in. "Do you remember Mathilde?" Frau Hasslinger asked. "She was only two when you lived here." Mathilde acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod, and, contrary to Viennese custom, did not hold out her hand. She sat down, filled her mother's glass with wine, and drank it off. She drank like a man, with big swallows, and when she had finished, she turned the glass upside down and spilled the last drops on the rug. She looked ten years older than she was, and suspicious and hard. "Where's Hellmut?" she asked.

"Sitting in his room, as usual," said Frau Hasslinger, and sighed deeply. "I wish Hellmut would go out and mix with people, the way he did in the old days," she said to me, "but he simply sits there in his dark bedroom, brooding and doing nothing. Sometimes he likes to put on his uniform. I just don't understand what's got into the boy!"

"You know perfectly well what's got into Hellmut," said Mathilde. She spoke precise, grammatical German, not the broad Viennese dialect of her parents. "Hellmut was at the university for a year before the war," she explained to me. "He was a *Gefolgschaftsführer* in the Hitler Jugend and was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, in the Army. Now, after spending three years in Russia as a prisoner of war, he is back home, and, like thousands of others in his position, he is beginning to realize that his homeland has no use for him. A man

with his abilities carrying sacks in a warehouse! And look at Hellmut's friends. Hans lost a leg and is now working in a travel bureau, and selling American cigarettes on the side. Karlheinz is a carpenter's apprentice. Imagine—a former *Gefolgschaftsführer!* And who knows where the others are? But Hellmut has a good memory, and I bet he's made up a private blacklist, as we all have. Someday he'll catch up with the criminals who are running us."

Hasslinger cleared his throat, and said, "Now, now, Mathilde. I've told you not to talk like that in front of strangers." He turned to me placatingly. "Don't mind her. An innocent young person, hard-working and good-hearted, and what has she got out of life? Don't think she hasn't had to work on the rubble, too—a nice young girl like that! And all because she joined the Bund Deutscher Mädchen. What else could she do? If she hadn't joined, she couldn't have graduated from secondary school."

"I was too young then to understand what was going on," Mathilde said, staring down at the table. "But today I do understand, and I would do it again, believe me."

"Naturally, since the B.D.M. was a Party organization, Mathilde was expected to become a Party member," Hasslinger said. "But try and explain that to anybody. My God, those criminals even made Klara sweep up the streets, just because she had been in the Frauenschaft and had helped out in the canteen."

Mathilde got up and went over to the radio. She turned the dial fitfully from one station to another, as first a dance band and then a pair of comics and then a girl singer made their brief bids for attention in the gloomy room. Finally, she picked up a Berlin program of brassy Wagnerian music, which was apparently what she had been looking for and which, at the moment, was presenting the funeral march from "Götterdämmerung." After increasing the volume, she came back to the table, sat down, and leaned back with closed eyes.

Just then, the door leading into the small room where I had once lived was opened, and a tall man in shirtsleeves came into the dining room. He stood there in the semi-darkness for a moment, looking around, and then sat down on one end of the sofa. Hasslinger and Mathilde paid no attention to him, but Frau Hasslinger whispered to me, "Don't mind Hellmut. He'll just sit there."

Hasslinger had another glass of

wine. The third bottle was half gone. None of the unhappy, frustrated little family said anything for a few minutes. Then Mathilde suddenly opened her eyes and leaned forward. "The Nazis made one big mistake," she said emphatically. "They should have forced *everybody* to join the Party. Then no one could play the innocent lamb today. The trouble with this country is that the people here have no guts, like the Germans have. They have no national pride. No one wants to work hard. No one has any initiative. Everybody is just trying to squeeze by."

Mathilde's words came rapidly, and she paused for effect after each sentence; I got the impression that she had made the speech many times before. Mathilde was what the Viennese, who delight in plays on words, call a *Nazisse* (a female Nazi), which is very close to *Narzisse* (Narcissus). Unlike her father, a mere amateur, she evidently had been trained thoroughly in Party dialectics and knew what she was talking about. Every time she spoke, Hasslinger listened to her with obvious respect.

Just as abruptly as she had roused herself, Mathilde again leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, listening to the fanfares from the radio as Siegfried's body was carried home. The man on the sofa sat motionless. The funeral march came to an end, and the voice of the announcer came on. The concert would continue with the "Tannhäuser" overture.

"I love music," Mathilde said to me. "One has to have something to help one escape and forget. Are you surprised?" She filled one of the glasses. "So many of us girls have started to drink, too. My friend Erika never touched wine before the war. Now she drinks a litre every day. She, I, almost all the girls we know are just waiting, though no one knows exactly what for. We live from one day to the next, like everybody else in this country. The newspapers claim we are banding together again. Well, why shouldn't we? We are trying to escape back into the world we knew—or else into romanticism—Wagnerian music, mysticism, religion. Two girls I know whose families are nonbelievers have joined the Church in the past year."

"Well, the Black Ones won't ever get *me*," said Frau Hasslinger. "I don't believe in anything."

"Poor Mutti," said Mathilde, unsmiling. "She's the heretic of the family."

Again, Hasslinger banged on the table. He plainly considered that the con-

versation had run off into irrelevancies. "What I want you to understand is that we never really knew what was going on!" he shouted at me. "I mean the concentration camps and things like that. Even today I don't believe what I read in the papers. I'll admit that some of these things may be true, and they make me ashamed. But all of them, no! We Austrians are the most kind-hearted people on earth! Klara, remember that cold winter before the war when the frost came so early that it trapped our swallows here before they had time to fly south? The government had the swallows collected and sent them south in chartered airplanes. And then we're supposed to believe that the same people could do all those terrible things? No, no, no!"

The man on the sofa stirred slightly. Mathilde said, "Once, when I was working with the other B.D.M. girls at one of the hospitals, we discussed what we would do if we found a Jew or a Pole who had been hit by a car lying in the street. I mean should he be left lying there or should he be picked up and brought in? Finally, we took a vote. Eighteen girls voted for leaving him outside. Four wanted to help him." She paused, and then said, without emotion, "I voted with the minority, because I believe in tolerance. Fortunately, the vote was secret. I would have been disciplined if they had found out. And where did all my tolerance get me? Look at us now!"

Hasslinger was still demanding attention. "Those were bitter times back in 1918, too," he broke in. "But, evil as they were, I couldn't have denounced a person, however badly he had used me. Today—" He left the sentence unfinished. "I've never hated anyone in my life before," he went on. "Now, looking around, I can't help hating. All my friends feel the same way. They sit at home and talk and wait, just like us. What else can they do?"

Frau Hasslinger went into the bedroom and came back with a framed photograph of a tall, cheerful-looking young man in a German Army uniform. "That was Hellmut before the Battle of Stalingrad," she said to me. "Why don't you come sit at the table with us, Hellmut? Do you want a little wine? There's just one glassful left."

The man got up from the sofa and walked heavily toward us. As he sat down at the table and the light fell on his face, it was difficult for me to realize that he had once been the man in the

photograph. His face was thin and hard.

"A little wine?" Frau Hasslinger said again. Her son shook his head brusquely and crossed his arms on his chest. He sat there, staring down at the table.

"There were over a hundred thousand Austrians fighting at Stalingrad," Hasslinger said. "Those Prussians always used to laugh at the Austrian Army, but when there was dirty work to do, they needed the Austrians. With a little luck, our soldiers could have held the front and turned the course of the war. I read that in the paper the other evening."

The "Tannhäuser" overture came to an end, and the announcer said that a news broadcast would follow. Mathilde got up and shut off the radio. Then she walked out of the room, without saying goodbye. For a while, there was an uncomfortable silence. At last, Frau Hasslinger smiled timidly and said to me, "Would you like to see the Iron Cross that Hellmut won? Wait, I'll get it." With a glance at Hellmut, she rose quickly, left the room, and returned with a small black case, which she opened. The Iron Cross was lying in it on a velvet lining. She put the open case in front of Hellmut. "Beautiful, isn't it?" she said to him, or maybe to me.

Hellmut waked out of his trance. He picked up the Iron Cross with his left hand and with his right fished a piece of chamois out of his pocket. He breathed on the decoration, held it up to the light, and started to polish it carefully. He didn't smile, but his face seemed to lose some of its hardness. "Yes," he said. "It's beautiful."

—Joseph Wechsberg

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Monday evening, of last week Mrs. Robert L. Tompkins of Granite Springs found the first heralds, heralding Spring right on the door steps of a neighbor, Mrs. Charles Fuchs. Peepers!

The little pair, tan in color with a distinct marking of the Cross on their little backs, sat singing on the front steps of the Fuchs' home. Mrs. Tompkins has been in a glass container feeding them flies.

—*Yorktown Heights (N.Y.) Herald.*

A fig for privacy!

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EXHIBITS WE DOUBT EVER GOT MOUNTED

[*From the Culver City (Calif.) Culver-Palms Roberts News*]

The latest models of the Russian and English atomic bombs are on mobile exhibit this week by the Veterans of Foreign War, Santa Monica Post No. 3802 at Third and Santa Monica boulevard.