The November Persecutions of 1938

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The month of November, 1938, had started on a dreary note in Berlin; it had been raining for several days; the skies were dark and clouded.

On the fifth, my father's younger brother had left Germany with his family and his orchestra. Of course, we were glad to see him get out of the infernal country, yet we felt sad at seeing a near relative leave us. Now, besides us, my grandparents and my father's older brother were the only members of our large family still in Berlin.

The ninth of November lay two days ahead; it was to be the fifteenth anniversary of Hitler's march to the Munich "Feldherrnhabe" in 1923, on which occasion a considerable number of Nazis were killed. We knew that this day was always an occasion for new ordinances _ one can hardly call them laws _ affecting the Jews.

That seventh of November all newspapers bore large red headlines; all public loudspeakers in the streets blurted out the fact that the Polish Jew, Hershel Grynszpan, had shot the German attache, von Rath, in Paris.

There was mourning among the Jews in Germany that day, for everyone knew that this was the long-sought pretense for the most ferocious persecutions the country had seen since the dark ages. For two days we anxiously devoured every newspaper article, hoping that the German would live, thus averting, or at least postponing, a disaster for the Jews in Germany.

At two o'clock on the morning of November the ninth, we were awakened by a clattering noise. We looked outside; a gang of Hitler youth was breaking the windows of a Jewish dry goods store across the street. We knew then that the news of von Rath's death had been the signal for mass persecutions. These gangs that broke the first windows were no mob; they were organized bands who did their job systematically. No mob, however, needs much encouragement to start plundering and murdering. That noon when my mother went to the grocery she saw a mob again battering one of the exclusive cosmetic and perfume stores, stealing everything within reach. One brave German's suggestions that all Jews should be soaked in gasoline and set afire was answered with shouts of "kill them! Beat them to death! Burn them!" The crowds were literally drunk with destruction, just as the Paris mob had been on the night of St Bartholomew or the Reign of Terror.

Later in the day we heard that they were breaking into Jewish homes. We kept our doors locked, our lights out, and went about in our stocking feet because our apartment was above that of a confirmed Nazi, one of those fanatic adherents to the party who would gladly kill a Jew or anyone else. We were so quiet that we could hear our own hearts beat.

Down the street they were trying to break into a kosher meat market; unhappily for the mob the owner was in the habit of pulling shutters down at night, shutters that were too heavy to tear down.

With traditional German thoroughness every Jewish store had been marked for just such an eventuality. Each window bore the name of the owner in large white lettering as well as a yellow "J", a paint job paid for by the owners. On the fatal day, trucks loaded with Hitler youth went
along the streets, each gang in a specified
district, checking and destroying each store
systematically.

The next day we saw the full extent
of the destruction, display windows were
empty, pieces of wood had hastily been
nailed over the broken glass. It was a pic-
ture of horror and desolation. Fire had
been set to every synagogue in Germany.
The one in our neighborhood had once
been one of the most beautiful in the
country with its mosaic ceiling and colored
glass windows. Now it was a sad looking
roofless skeleton, a monument of Nazi
culture.

Friends of ours who owned a store
down the street showed us what had been
done to their place. In their apartment in
back of the store every piece of furniture
had been broken, the wallpaper and the
upholstery torn. They were asleep when
the crowds broke in. Without putting on
even a coat they went out through the
back door and hid in a neighbor's apart-
ment. For hours they heard the mob
breaking everything. When they returned
they found a gold watch and three hundred
marks missing along with most of the
jewelry.

The newspapers reporting the "out-
break of popular disgust" said, "the popu-
lace, knowing Jewish merchandize to be
trash, left everything untouched."

Winter

Jacqueline Crist

The snow had turned Indianapolis into
a fairyland. For three days there was a
steady downfall of large clinging flakes.
The houses looked like tiny white doll-
houses, and the ground was a blanket of
down. Pure white trees stretched their
limbs toward an ice blue sky. The chill
on the air turned Christmas shoppers into
red-nosed, rosy-cheeked bundles of wool,
fur, and packages. Santa Clauses of all
sizes and shapes were packing them in at
the department stores. Children dreamed
of stockings "hung by the chimney with
care", new sleds or bicycles, dolls with
human hair, regiments of little tin soldiers.
In the kitchens mothers were baking cook-
ies and cakes planning the Christmas diner,
and trying to think of a good place to
hide Dad's new pipe.

Indianapolis bustled with activity. At
ight many of our outdoor boys and girls
scurried toward Lake Sullivan, which
means ice skating at its best. Clad in
jeans, bright plaid shirts, red corduroy
jackets, and brilliantly colored scarfs, the
skaters presented a colorful picture in the
firelight against the midnight blue of the
sky and the white of the hills and trees in
the background. A slightly off-tune
"White Christmas" filled the air as the
happy group around the campfire rendered
their favorite song. Around midnight a
tired, chilled, but happy gang of teen-agers
headed for home. Soon our town became
quiet and tranquil. Night reigned.