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# THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS

a fable  
by  
John Boyne

*Also by John Boyne*

The Thief of Time  
The Congress of Rough Riders  
Crippen  
Next of Kin



BLACK SWAN

John Boyne was born in Ireland in 1971 and is the author of four previous novels, *The Thief of Time*, *The Congress of Rough Riders*, *Crippen* and *Next of Kin*. His work has been translated into fourteen languages. He lives with his partner in Dublin.

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*For Jamie Lynch*

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## Chapter One

### Bruno Makes a Discovery

One afternoon, when Bruno came home from school, he was surprised to find Maria, the family's maid – who always kept her head bowed and never looked up from the carpet – standing in his bedroom, pulling all his belongings out of the wardrobe and packing them in four large wooden crates, even the things he'd hidden at the back that belonged to him and were nobody else's business.

'What are you doing?' he asked in as polite a tone as he could muster, for although he wasn't happy to come home and find someone going through his possessions, his mother had always told him that he was to treat Maria respectfully and not just imitate the way Father spoke to her. 'You take your hands off my things.'

Maria shook her head and pointed towards the staircase behind him, where Bruno's mother had just appeared. She was a tall woman with long red hair that she bundled into a sort of net behind her head,

and she was twisting her hands together nervously as if there was something she didn't want to have to say or something she didn't want to have to believe.

'Mother,' said Bruno, marching towards her, 'what's going on? Why is Maria going through my things?'

'She's packing them,' explained Mother.

'Packing them?' he asked, running quickly through the events of the previous few days to consider whether he'd been particularly naughty or had used those words out loud that he wasn't allowed to use and was being sent away because of it. He couldn't think of anything though. In fact over the last few days he had behaved in a perfectly decent manner to everyone and couldn't remember causing any chaos at all. 'Why?' he asked then. 'What have I done?'

Mother had walked into her own bedroom by then but Lars, the butler, was in there, packing her things too. She sighed and threw her hands in the air in frustration before marching back to the staircase, followed by Bruno, who wasn't going to let the matter drop without an explanation.

'Mother,' he insisted. 'What's going on? Are we moving?'

'Come downstairs with me,' said Mother, leading the way towards the large dining room where the Fury had been to dinner the week before. 'We'll talk down there.'

Bruno ran downstairs and even passed her out on the staircase so that he was waiting in the dining room when she arrived. He looked at her without saying anything for a moment and thought to himself that she couldn't have applied her make-up correctly that morning because the rims of her eyes were more red than usual, like his own after he'd been causing chaos and got into trouble and ended up crying.

'Now, you don't have to worry, Bruno,' said Mother, sitting down in the chair where the beautiful blonde woman who had come to dinner with the Fury had sat and waved at him when Father closed the doors. 'In fact if anything it's going to be a great adventure.'

'What is?' he asked. 'Am I being sent away?'

'No, not just you,' she said, looking as if she might smile for a moment but thinking better of it. 'We all are. Your father and I, Gretel and you. All four of us.'

Bruno thought about this and frowned. He wasn't particularly bothered if Gretel was being sent away because she was a Hopeless Case and caused nothing but trouble for him. But it seemed a little unfair that they all had to go with her.

'But where?' he asked. 'Where are we going exactly? Why can't we stay here?'

'Your father's job,' explained Mother. 'You know how important it is, don't you?'

‘Yes, of course,’ said Bruno, nodding his head, because there were always so many visitors to the house – men in fantastic uniforms, women with typewriters that he had to keep his mucky hands off – and they were always very polite to Father and told each other that he was a man to watch and that the Fury had big things in mind for him.

‘Well, sometimes when someone is very important,’ continued Mother, ‘the man who employs him asks him to go somewhere else because there’s a very special job that needs doing there.’

‘What kind of job?’ asked Bruno, because if he was honest with himself – which he always tried to be – he wasn’t entirely sure what job Father did.

In school they had talked about their fathers one day and Karl had said that his father was a greengrocer, which Bruno knew to be true because he ran the greengrocer’s shop in the centre of town. And Daniel had said that his father was a teacher, which Bruno knew to be true because he taught the big boys who it was always wise to steer clear of. And Martin had said that his father was a chef, which Bruno knew to be true because he sometimes collected Martin from school and when he did he always wore a white smock and a tartan apron, as if he’d just stepped out of his kitchen.

But when they asked Bruno what his father did he opened his mouth to tell them, then realized that

he didn’t know himself. All he could say was that his father was a man to watch and that the Fury had big things in mind for him. Oh, and that he had a fantastic uniform too.

‘It’s a very important job,’ said Mother, hesitating for a moment. ‘A job that needs a very special man to do it. You can understand that, can’t you?’

‘And we all have to go too?’ asked Bruno.

‘Of course we do,’ said Mother. ‘You wouldn’t want Father to go to his new job on his own and be lonely there, would you?’

‘I suppose not,’ said Bruno.

‘Father would miss us all terribly if we weren’t with him,’ she added.

‘Who would he miss the most?’ asked Bruno. ‘Me or Gretel?’

‘He would miss you both equally,’ said Mother, for she was a great believer in not playing favourites, which Bruno respected, especially since he knew that he was her favourite really.

‘But what about our house?’ asked Bruno. ‘Who’s going to take care of it while we’re gone?’

Mother sighed and looked around the room as if she might never see it again. It was a very beautiful house and had five floors in total, if you included the basement, where Cook made all the food and Maria and Lars sat at the table arguing with each other and calling each other names that you weren’t supposed

to use. And if you added in the little room at the top of the house with the slanted windows where Bruno could see right across Berlin if he stood up on his tip-toes and held onto the frame tightly.

'We have to close up the house for now,' said Mother. 'But we'll come back to it someday.'

'And what about Cook?' asked Bruno. 'And Lars? And Maria? Are they not going to live in it?'

'They're coming with us,' explained Mother. 'But that's enough questions for now. Maybe you should go upstairs and help Maria with your packing.'

Bruno stood up from the seat but didn't go anywhere. There were just a few more questions he needed to put to her before he could allow the matter to be settled.

'And how far away is it?' he asked. 'The new job, I mean. Is it further than a mile away?'

'Oh my,' said Mother with a laugh, although it was a strange kind of laugh because she didn't look happy and turned away from Bruno as if she didn't want him to see her face. 'Yes, Bruno,' she said. 'It's more than a mile away. Quite a lot more than that, in fact.'

Bruno's eyes opened wide and his mouth made the shape of an O. He felt his arms stretching out at his sides like they did whenever something surprised him. 'You don't mean we're leaving Berlin?' he asked, gasping for air as he got the words out.

'I'm afraid so,' said Mother, nodding her head sadly. 'Your father's job is—'

'But what about school?' said Bruno, interrupting her, a thing he knew he was not supposed to do but which he felt he would be forgiven for on this occasion. 'And what about Karl and Daniel and Martin? How will they know where I am when we want to do things together?'

'You'll have to say goodbye to your friends for the time being,' said Mother. 'Although I'm sure you'll see them again in time. And don't interrupt your mother when she's talking, please,' she added, for although this was strange and unpleasant news, there was certainly no need for Bruno to break the rules of politeness which he had been taught.

'Say goodbye to them?' he asked, staring at her in surprise. 'Say goodbye to them?' he repeated, spluttering out the words as if his mouth was full of biscuits that he'd munched into tiny pieces but not actually swallowed yet. 'Say goodbye to Karl and Daniel and Martin?' he continued, his voice coming dangerously close to shouting, which was not allowed indoors. 'But they're my three best friends for life!'

'Oh, you'll make other friends,' said Mother, waving her hand in the air dismissively, as if the making of a boy's three best friends for life was an easy thing.



'But we had plans,' he protested.

'Plans?' asked Mother, raising an eyebrow. 'What sort of plans?'

'Well, that would be telling,' said Bruno, who could not reveal the exact nature of the plans – which included causing a lot of chaos, especially in a few weeks' time when school finished for the summer holidays and they didn't have to spend all their time just making plans but could actually put them into effect instead.

'I'm sorry, Bruno,' said Mother, 'but your plans are just going to have to wait. We don't have a choice in this.'

'But, Mother!'

'Bruno, that's enough,' she said, snapping at him now and standing up to show him that she was serious when she said that was enough. 'Honestly, only last week you were complaining about how much things have changed here recently.'

'Well, I don't like the way we have to turn all the lights off at night now,' he admitted.

'Everyone has to do that,' said Mother. 'It keeps us safe. And who knows, maybe we'll be in less danger if we move away. Now, I need you to go upstairs and help Maria with your packing. We don't have as much time to prepare as I would have liked, thanks to some people.'

Bruno nodded and walked away sadly, knowing

that 'some people' was a grown-up's word for 'Father' and one that he wasn't supposed to use himself.

He made his way up the stairs slowly, holding onto the banister with one hand, and wondered whether the new house in the new place where the new job was would have as fine a banister to slide down as this one did. For the banister in this house stretched from the very top floor – just outside the little room where, if he stood on his tiptoes and held onto the frame of the window tightly, he could see right across Berlin – to the ground floor, just in front of the two enormous oak doors. And Bruno liked nothing better than to get on board the banister at the top floor and slide his way through the house, making whooshing sounds as he went.

Down from the top floor to the next one, where Mother and Father's room was, and the large bathroom, and where he wasn't supposed to be in any case.

Down to the next floor, where his own room was, and Gretel's room too, and the smaller bathroom which he was supposed to use more often than he really did.

Down to the ground floor, where you fell off the end of the banister and had to land flat on your two feet or it was five points against you and you had to start all over again.

The banister was the best thing about this house – that and the fact that Grandfather and Grandmother lived so near by – and when he thought about that it made him wonder whether they were coming to the new job too and he presumed that they were because they could hardly be left behind. No one needed Gretel much because she was a Hopeless Case – it would be a lot easier if she stayed to look after the house – but Grandfather and Grandmother? Well, that was an entirely different matter.

Bruno went up the stairs slowly towards his room, but before going inside he looked back down towards the ground floor and saw Mother entering Father's office, which faced the dining room – and was Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions – and he heard her speaking loudly to him until Father spoke louder than Mother could and that put a stop to their conversation. Then the door of the office closed and Bruno couldn't hear any more so he thought it would be a good idea if he went back to his room and took over the packing from Maria, because otherwise she might pull all his belongings out of the wardrobe without any care or consideration, even the things he'd hidden at the back that belonged to him and were nobody else's business.

## Chapter Two

### The New House

When he first saw their new house Bruno's eyes opened wide, his mouth made the shape of an O and his arms stretched out at his sides once again. Everything about it seemed to be the exact opposite of their old home and he couldn't believe that they were really going to live there.

The house in Berlin had stood on a quiet street and alongside it were a handful of other big houses like his own, and it was always nice to look at them because they were almost the same as his house but not quite, and other boys lived in them who he played with (if they were friends) or steered clear of (if they were trouble). The new house, however, stood all on its own in an empty, desolate place and there were no other houses anywhere to be seen, which meant there would be no other families around and no other boys to play with, neither friends nor trouble.

The house in Berlin was enormous, and even

though he'd lived there for nine years he was still able to find nooks and crannies that he hadn't fully finished exploring yet. There were even whole rooms – such as Father's office, which was *Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions* – that he had barely been inside. However, the new house had only three floors: a top floor where all three bedrooms were and only one bathroom, a ground floor with a kitchen, a dining room and a new office for Father (which, he presumed, had the same restrictions as the old one), and a basement where the servants slept.

All around the house in Berlin were other streets of large houses, and when you walked towards the centre of town there were always people strolling along and stopping to chat to each other or rushing around and saying they had no time to stop, not today, not when they had a hundred and one things to do. There were shops with bright store fronts, and fruit and vegetable stalls with big trays piled high with cabbages, carrots, cauliflowers and corn. Some were overflowing with leeks and mushrooms, turnips and sprouts; others with lettuce and green beans, courgettes and parsnips. Sometimes he liked to stand in front of these stalls and close his eyes and breathe in their aromas, feeling his head grow dizzy with the mixed scents of sweetness and life. But there were no other streets around the new house, no one strolling

along or rushing around, and definitely no shops or fruit and vegetable stalls. When he closed his eyes, everything around him just felt empty and cold, as if he was in the loneliest place in the world. The middle of nowhere.

In Berlin there had been tables set out on the street, and sometimes when he walked home from school with Karl, Daniel and Martin there would be men and women sitting at them, drinking frothy drinks and laughing loudly; the people who sat at these tables must be very funny people, he always thought, because it didn't matter what they said, somebody always laughed. But there was something about the new house that made Bruno think that no one ever laughed there; that there was nothing to laugh at and nothing to be happy about.

'I think this was a bad idea,' said Bruno a few hours after they arrived, while Maria was unpacking his suitcases upstairs. (Maria wasn't the only maid at the new house either: there were three others who were quite skinny and only ever spoke to each other in whispering voices. There was an old man too who, he was told, was there to prepare the vegetables every day and wait on them at the dinner table, and who looked very unhappy but also a little angry.)

'We don't have the luxury of thinking,' said Mother, opening a box that contained the set of sixty-four glasses that Grandfather and Grandmother

had given her when she married Father. 'Some people make all the decisions for us.'

Bruno didn't know what she meant by that so he pretended that she'd never said it at all. 'I think this was a bad idea,' he repeated. 'I think the best thing to do would be to forget all about this and just go back home. We can chalk it up to experience,' he added, a phrase he had learned recently and was determined to use as often as possible.

Mother smiled and put the glasses down carefully on the table. 'I have another phrase for you,' she said. 'It's that we have to make the best of a bad situation.'

'Well, I don't know that we do,' said Bruno. 'I think you should just tell Father that you've changed your mind and, well, if we have to stay here for the rest of the day and have dinner here this evening and sleep here tonight because we're all tired, then that's all right, but we should probably get up early in the morning if we're to make it back to Berlin by tea-time tomorrow.'

Mother sighed. 'Bruno, why don't you just go upstairs and help Maria unpack?' she asked.

'But there's no point unpacking if we're only going to—'

'Bruno, just do it, please!' snapped Mother, because apparently it was all right if she interrupted him but it didn't work the other way round. 'We're

here, we've arrived, this is our home for the foreseeable future and we just have to make the best of things. Do you understand me?'

He didn't understand what the 'foreseeable future' meant and told her so.

'It means that this is where we live now, Bruno,' said Mother. 'And that's an end to it.'

Bruno had a pain in his stomach and he could feel something growing inside him, something that when it worked its way up from the lowest depths inside him to the outside world would either make him shout and scream that the whole thing was wrong and unfair and a big mistake for which somebody would pay one of these days, or just make him burst into tears instead. He couldn't understand how this had all come about. One day he was perfectly content, playing at home, having three best friends for life, sliding down banisters, trying to stand on his tiptoes to see right across Berlin, and now he was stuck here in this cold, nasty house with three whispering maids and a waiter who was both unhappy and angry, where no one looked as if they could ever be cheerful again.

'Bruno, I want you to go upstairs and unpack and I want you to do it now,' said Mother in an unfriendly voice, and he knew that she meant business so he turned round and marched away without another word. He could feel tears springing up

behind his eyes but he was determined that he wouldn't allow them to appear.

He went upstairs and turned slowly around in a full circle, hoping he might find a small door or cubby hole where a decent amount of exploration could eventually be done, but there wasn't one. On his floor there were just four doors, two on either side, facing each other. A door into his room, a door into Gretel's room, a door into Mother and Father's room, and a door into the bathroom.

'This isn't home and it never will be,' he muttered under his breath as he went through his own door to find all his clothes scattered on the bed and the boxes of toys and books not even unpacked yet. It was obvious that Maria did not have her priorities right.

'Mother sent me to help,' he said quietly, and Maria nodded and pointed towards a big bag that contained all his socks and vests and underpants.

'If you sort that lot out, you could put them in the chest of drawers over there,' she said, pointing towards an ugly chest that stood across the room beside a mirror that was covered in dust.

Bruno sighed and opened the bag; it was full to the brim with his underwear and he wanted nothing more than to crawl inside it and hope that when he climbed out again he'd have woken up and be back home again.

'What do you think of all this, Maria?' he asked

after a long silence because he had always liked Maria and felt as if she was one of the family, even though Father said she was just a maid and overpaid at that.

'All what?' she asked.

'This,' he said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. 'Coming to a place like this. Don't you think we've made a big mistake?'

'That's not for me to say, Master Bruno,' said Maria. 'Your mother has explained to you about your father's job and—'

'Oh, I'm tired of hearing about Father's job,' said Bruno, interrupting her. 'That's all we ever hear about, if you ask me. Father's job this and Father's job that. Well, if Father's job means that we have to move away from our house and the sliding banister and my three best friends for life, then I think Father should think twice about his job, don't you?'

Just at that moment there was a creak outside in the hallway and Bruno looked up to see the door of Mother and Father's room opening slightly. He froze, unable to move for a moment. Mother was still downstairs, which meant that Father was in there and he might have heard everything that Bruno had just said. He watched the door, hardly daring to breathe, wondering whether Father might come through it and take him downstairs for a serious talking-to.

The door opened wider and Bruno stepped back

as a figure appeared, but it wasn't Father. It was a much younger man, and not as tall as Father either, but he wore the same type of uniform, only without as many decorations on it. He looked very serious and his cap was secured tightly on his head. Around his temples Bruno could see that he had very blond hair, an almost unnatural shade of yellow. He was carrying a box in his hands and walking towards the staircase, but he stopped for a moment when he saw Bruno standing there watching him. He looked the boy up and down as if he had never seen a child before and wasn't quite sure what he was supposed to do with one: eat it, ignore it or kick it down the stairs. Instead he gave Bruno a quick nod and continued on his way.

'Who was that?' asked Bruno. The young man had seemed so serious and busy that he assumed he must be someone very important.

'One of your father's soldiers, I suppose,' said Maria, who had stood up very straight when the young man appeared and held her hands before her like a person in prayer. She had stared down at the ground rather than at his face, as if she was afraid she might be turned to stone if she looked directly at him; she only relaxed when he had gone. 'We'll get to know them in time.'

'I don't think I like him,' said Bruno. 'He was too serious.'

'Your father is very serious too,' said Maria.

'Yes, but he's Father,' explained Bruno. 'Fathers are supposed to be serious. It doesn't matter whether they're greengrocers or teachers or chefs or commandants,' he said, listing all the jobs that he knew decent, respectable fathers did and whose titles he had thought about a thousand times. 'And I don't think that man looked like a father. Although he was very serious, that's for sure.'

'Well, they have very serious jobs,' said Maria with a sigh. 'Or so they think anyway. But if I was you I'd steer clear of the soldiers.'

'I don't see what else there is to do other than that,' said Bruno sadly. 'I don't even think there's going to be anyone to play with other than Gretel, and what fun is that after all? She's a Hopeless Case.'

He felt as if he was about to cry again but stopped himself, not wanting to look like a baby in front of Maria. He looked around the room without fully lifting his eyes up from the ground, trying to see whether there was anything of interest to be found. There wasn't. Or there didn't seem to be. But then one thing caught his eye. Over in the corner of the room opposite the door there was a window in the ceiling that stretched down into the wall, a little like the one on the top floor of the house in Berlin, only not so high. Bruno looked at it and thought that



he might be able to see out without even having to stand on tiptoes.

He walked slowly towards it, hoping that from here he might be able to see all the way back to Berlin and his house and the streets around it and the tables where the people sat and drank their frothy drinks and told each other hilarious stories. He walked slowly because he didn't want to be disappointed. But it was just a small boy's room and there was only so far he could walk before he arrived at the window. He put his face to the glass and saw what was out there, and this time when his eyes opened wide and his mouth made the shape of an O, his hands stayed by his sides because something made him feel very cold and unsafe.

## Chapter Three

### The Hopeless Case

Bruno was sure that it would have made a lot more sense if they had left Gretel behind in Berlin to look after the house because she was nothing but trouble. In fact he had heard her described on any number of occasions as being Trouble From Day One.

Gretel was three years older than Bruno and she had made it clear to him from as far back as he could remember that when it came to the ways of the world, particularly any events within that world that concerned the two of them, she was in charge. Bruno didn't like to admit that he was a little scared of her, but if he was honest with himself – which he always tried to be – he would have admitted that he was.

She had some nasty habits, as was to be expected from sisters. She spent far too long in the bathroom in the mornings for one thing, and didn't seem to mind if Bruno was left outside, hopping from foot to foot, desperate to go.

She had a large collection of dolls positioned on

shelves around her room that stared at Bruno when he went inside and followed him around, watching whatever he did. He was sure that if he went exploring in her room when she was out of the house, they would report back to her on everything he did. She had some very unpleasant friends too, who seemed to think that it was clever to make fun of him, a thing he never would have done if he had been three years older than her. All Gretel's unpleasant friends seemed to enjoy nothing more than torturing him and said nasty things to him whenever Mother or Maria were nowhere in sight.

'Bruno's not nine, he's only six,' said one particular monster over and over again in a sing-song voice, dancing around him and poking him in the ribs.

'I'm not six, I'm nine,' he protested, trying to get away.

'Then why are you so small?' asked the monster. 'All the other nine-year-olds are bigger than you.'

This was true, and a particular sore point for Bruno. It was a source of constant disappointment to him that he wasn't as tall as any of the other boys in his class. In fact he only came up to their shoulders. Whenever he walked along the streets with Karl, Daniel and Martin, people sometimes mistook him for the younger brother of one of them when in fact he was the second oldest.

'So you must be only six,' insisted the monster, and Bruno would run away and do his stretching exercises and hope that he would wake up one morning and have grown an extra foot or two.

So one good thing about not being in Berlin any more was the fact that none of them would be around to torture him. Perhaps if he was forced to stay at the new house for a while, even as long as a month, he would have grown by the time they returned home and then they wouldn't be able to be mean to him any more. It was something to keep in mind anyway if he wanted to do what Mother had suggested and make the best of a bad situation.

He ran into Gretel's room without knocking and discovered her placing her civilization of dolls on various shelves around the room.

'What are you doing in here?' she shouted, spinning round. 'Don't you know you don't enter a lady's room without knocking?'

'You didn't bring all your dolls with you, surely?' asked Bruno, who had developed a habit of ignoring most of his sister's questions and asking a few of his own in their place.

'Of course I did,' she replied. 'You don't think I'd have left them at home? Why, it could be weeks before we're back there again.'

'Weeks?' said Bruno, sounding disappointed but



secretly pleased because he'd resigned himself to the idea of spending a month there. 'Do you really think so?'

'Well, I asked Father and he said we would be here for the foreseeable future.'

'What is the foreseeable future exactly?' asked Bruno, sitting down on the side of her bed.

'It means weeks from now,' said Gretel with an intelligent nod of her head. 'Perhaps as long as three.'

'That's all right then,' said Bruno. 'As long as it's just for the foreseeable future and not for a month. I hate it here.'

Gretel looked at her little brother and found herself agreeing with him for once. 'I know what you mean,' she said. 'It's not very nice, is it?'

'It's horrible,' said Bruno.

'Well, yes,' said Gretel, acknowledging that. 'It's horrible right now. But once the house is smartened up a bit it probably won't seem so bad. I heard Father say that whoever lived here at Out-With before us lost their job very quickly and didn't have time to make the place nice for us.'

'Out-With?' asked Bruno. 'What's an Out-With?'

'It's not *an* Out-With, Bruno,' said Gretel with a sigh. 'It's just Out-With.'

'Well, what's Out-With then?' he repeated. 'Out with what?'

'That's the name of the house,' explained Gretel. 'Out-With.'

Bruno considered this. He hadn't seen any sign on the outside to say that was what it was called, nor had he seen any writing on the front door. His own house back in Berlin didn't even have a name; it was just called number four.

'But what does it mean?' he asked in exasperation. 'Out with what?'

'Out with the people who lived here before us, I expect,' said Gretel. 'It must have to do with the fact that he didn't do a very good job and someone said out with him and let's get a man in who can do it right.'

'You mean Father.'

'Of course,' said Gretel, who always spoke of Father as if he could never do any wrong and never got angry and always came in to kiss her goodnight before she went to sleep which, if Bruno was to be really fair and not just sad about moving houses, he would have admitted Father did for him too.

'So we're here at Out-With because someone said out with the people before us?'

'Exactly, Bruno,' said Gretel. 'Now get off my bedspread. You're messing it up.'

Bruno jumped off the bed and landed with a thud on the carpet. He didn't like the sound it made. It was very hollow and he immediately decided he'd

better not go jumping around this house too often or it might collapse around their ears.

'I don't like it here,' he said for the hundredth time.

'I know you don't,' said Gretel. 'But there's nothing we can do about it, is there?'

'I miss Karl and Daniel and Martin,' said Bruno.

'And I miss Hilda and Isobel and Louise,' said Gretel, and Bruno tried to remember which of those three girls was the monster.

'I don't think the other children look at all friendly,' said Bruno, and Gretel immediately stopped putting one of her more terrifying dolls on a shelf and turned round to stare at him.

'What did you just say?' she asked.

'I said I don't think the other children look at all friendly,' he repeated.

'The other children?' said Gretel, sounding confused. 'What other children? I haven't seen any other children.'

Bruno looked around the room. There was a window here but Gretel's room was on the opposite side of the hall, facing his, and so looked in a totally different direction. Trying not to appear too obvious, he strolled casually towards it. He placed his hands in the pockets of his short trousers and attempted to whistle a song he knew while not looking at his sister at all.

'Bruno?' asked Gretel. 'What on earth are you doing? Have you gone mad?'

He continued to stroll and whistle and he continued not to look until he reached the window, which, by a stroke of luck, was also low enough for him to be able to see out of. He looked outside and saw the car they had arrived in, as well as three or four others belonging to the soldiers who worked for Father, some of whom were standing around smoking cigarettes and laughing about something while looking nervously up at the house. Beyond that was the driveway and further along a forest which seemed ripe for exploration.

'Bruno, will you please explain to me what you meant by that last remark?' asked Gretel.

'There's a forest over there,' said Bruno, ignoring her.

'Bruno!' snapped Gretel, marching towards him so quickly that he jumped back from the window and backed up against a wall.

'What?' he asked, pretending not to know what she was talking about.

'The other children,' said Gretel. 'You said they don't look at all friendly.'

'Well, they don't,' said Bruno, not wishing to judge them before he met them but going by appearances, which Mother had told him time and time again not to do.

'But *what* other children?' asked Gretel. 'Where are they?'

Bruno smiled and walked towards the door, indicating that Gretel should follow him. She gave out a deep sigh as she did so, stopping to put the doll on the bed but then changing her mind and picking it up and holding it close to her chest as she went into her brother's room, where she was nearly knocked over by Maria storming out of it holding something that closely resembled a dead mouse.

'They're out there,' said Bruno, who had walked over to his own window again and was looking out of it. He didn't turn back to check that Gretel was in the room; he was too busy watching the children. For a few moments he forgot that she was even there.

Gretel was still a few feet away and desperately wanted to look for herself, but something about the way he had said it and something about the way he was watching made her feel suddenly nervous. Bruno had never been able to trick her before about anything and she was fairly sure that he wasn't tricking her now, but there was something about the way he stood there that made her feel as if she wasn't sure she wanted to see these children at all. She swallowed nervously and said a silent prayer that they would indeed be returning to Berlin in the foreseeable future and not in a month as Bruno had suggested.

'Well?' he said, turning round now and seeing his sister standing in the doorway, clutching the doll, her golden pigtails perfectly balanced on each shoulder, ripe for the pulling. 'Don't you want to see them?'

'Of course I do,' she replied and walked hesitantly towards him. 'Step out of the way then,' she said, elbowing him aside.

It was a bright, sunny day that first afternoon at Out-With and the sun reappeared from behind a cloud just as Gretel looked through the window, but after a moment her eyes adjusted and the sun disappeared again and she saw exactly what Bruno had been talking about.

## Chapter Four

### What They Saw Through the Window

To begin with, they weren't children at all. Not all of them, at least. There were small boys and big boys, fathers and grandfathers. Perhaps a few uncles too. And some of those people who live on their own on everybody's road but don't seem to have any relatives at all. They were everyone.

'Who are they?' asked Gretel, as open-mouthed as her brother often was these days. 'What sort of place is this?'

'I'm not sure,' said Bruno, sticking as close to the truth as possible. 'But it's not as nice as home, I do know that much.'

'And where are all the girls?' she asked. 'And the mothers? And the grandmothers?'

'Perhaps they live in a different part,' suggested Bruno.

Gretel agreed. She didn't want to go on staring but it was very difficult to turn her eyes away. So far, all she had seen was the forest facing her own window,

which looked a little dark but a good place for picnics if there was any sort of clearing further along it. But from this side of the house the view was very different.

It started off nicely enough. There was a garden directly beneath Bruno's window. Quite a large one too, and full of flowers which grew in neat orderly sections in soil that looked as if it was tended very carefully by someone who knew that growing flowers in a place like this was something good that they could do, like putting a tiny candle of light in the corner of a huge castle on a misty moor on a dark winter's night.

Past the flowers there was a very pleasant pavement with a wooden bench on it, where Gretel could imagine sitting in the sunshine and reading a book. There was a plaque attached to the top of the bench but she couldn't read the inscription from this distance. The seat was turned to face the house – which, usually, would be a strange thing to do but on this occasion she could understand why.

About twenty feet further along from the garden and the flowers and the bench with the plaque on it, everything changed. There was a huge wire fence that ran along the length of the house and turned in at the top, extending further along in either direction, further than she could possibly see. The fence was very high, higher even than the house they

were standing in, and there were huge wooden posts, like telegraph poles, dotted along it, holding it up. At the top of the fence enormous bales of barbed wire were tangled in spirals, and Gretel felt an unexpected pain inside her as she looked at the sharp spikes sticking out all the way round it.

There wasn't any grass after the fence; in fact there was no greenery anywhere to be seen in the distance. Instead the ground was made of a sand-like substance, and as far as she could make out there was nothing but low huts and large square buildings dotted around and one or two smoke stacks in the distance. She opened her mouth to say something, but when she did she realized that she couldn't find any words to express her surprise, and so she did the only sensible thing she could think of and closed it again.

'You see?' said Bruno from the corner of the room, feeling quietly pleased with himself because whatever it was that was out there – and whoever *they* were – he had seen it first and he could see it whenever he wanted because they were outside his bedroom window and not hers and therefore they belonged to him and he was the king of everything they surveyed and she was his lowly subject.

'I don't understand,' said Gretel. 'Who would build such a nasty-looking place?'

'It *is* a nasty-looking place, isn't it?' agreed Bruno.

'I think those huts have only one floor too. Look how low they are.'

'They must be modern types of houses,' said Gretel. 'Father hates modern things.'

'Then he won't like them very much,' said Bruno.

'No,' replied Gretel. She stood still for a long time staring at them. She was twelve years old and was considered to be one of the brightest girls in her class, so she squeezed her lips together and narrowed her eyes and forced her brain to understand what she was looking at. Finally she could think of only one explanation.

'This must be the countryside,' said Gretel, turning round to look at her brother triumphantly.

'The countryside?'

'Yes, it's the only explanation, don't you see? When we're at home, in Berlin, we're in the city. That's why there are so many people and so many houses and the schools are full and you can't make your way through the centre of town on a Saturday afternoon without getting pushed from pillar to post.'

'Yes . . .' said Bruno, nodding his head, trying to keep up.

'But we learned in geography class that in the countryside, where all the farmers are and the animals, and they grow all the food, there are huge areas like this where people live and work and send

all the food to feed us.' She looked out of the window again at the huge area spread out before her and the distances that existed between each of the huts. 'This must be it. It's the countryside. Perhaps this is our holiday home,' she added hopefully.

Bruno thought about it and shook his head. 'I don't think so,' he said with great conviction.

'You're *nine*,' countered Gretel. 'How would you know? When you get to my age you'll understand these things a lot better.'

'That might be so,' said Bruno, who knew that he was younger but didn't agree that that made him less likely to be right, 'but if this is the countryside like you say it is, then where are all the animals you're talking about?'

Gretel opened her mouth to answer him but couldn't think of a suitable reply, so she looked out of the window again instead and peered around for them, but they were nowhere to be seen.

'There should be cows and pigs and sheep and horses,' said Bruno. 'If it was a farm, I mean. Not to mention chickens and ducks.'

'And there aren't any,' admitted Gretel quietly.

'And if they grew food here, like you suggested,' continued Bruno, enjoying himself enormously, 'then I think the ground would have to look a lot better than that, don't you? I don't think you could grow anything in all that dirt.'

Gretel looked at it again and nodded, because she was not so silly as to insist on being in the right all the time when it was clear the argument stood against her.

'Perhaps it's not a farm then,' she said.

'It's not,' agreed Bruno.

'Which means this mightn't be the countryside,' she continued.

'No, I don't think it is,' he replied.

'Which also means that this probably isn't our holiday home after all,' she concluded.

'I don't think so,' said Bruno.

He sat down on the bed and for a moment wished that Gretel would sit down beside him and put her arm around him and tell him that it was all going to be all right and that sooner or later they'd get to like it here and they'd never want to go back to Berlin. But she was still watching from the window and this time she wasn't looking at the flowers or the pavement or the bench with the plaque on it or the tall fence or the wooden telegraph poles or the barbed wire bales or the hard ground beyond them or the huts or the small buildings or the smoke stacks; instead she was looking at the people.

'Who are all those people?' she asked in a quiet voice, almost as if she wasn't asking Bruno but looking for an answer from someone else. 'And what are they all doing there?'



Bruno stood up, and for the first time they stood there together, shoulder to shoulder, and stared at what was happening not fifty feet away from their new home.

Everywhere they looked they could see people, tall, short, old, young, all moving around. Some stood perfectly still in groups, their hands by their sides, trying to keep their heads up, as a soldier marched in front of them, his mouth opening and closing quickly as if he were shouting something at them. Some were formed into a sort of chain gang and pushing wheelbarrows from one side of the camp to the other, appearing from a place out of sight and taking their wheelbarrows further along behind a hut, where they disappeared again. A few stood near the huts in quiet groups, staring at the ground as if it was the sort of game where they didn't want to be spotted. Others were on crutches and many had bandages around their heads. Some carried spades and were being led by groups of soldiers to a place where they could no longer be seen.

Bruno and Gretel could see hundreds of people, but there were so many huts before them, and the camp spread out so much further than they could possibly see, that it looked as though there must be thousands out there.

'And all living so close to us,' said Gretel, frowning.

'In Berlin, on our nice quiet street, we only had six houses. And now there are so many. Why would Father take a new job here in such a nasty place and with so many neighbours? It doesn't make any sense.'

'Look over there,' said Bruno, and Gretel followed the direction of the finger he was pointing and saw, emerging from a hut in the distance, a group of children huddled together and being shouted at by a group of soldiers. The more they were shouted at, the closer they huddled together, but then one of the soldiers lunged towards them and they separated and seemed to do what he had wanted them to do all along, which was to stand in a single line. When they did, the soldiers all started to laugh and applaud them.

'It must be some sort of rehearsal,' suggested Gretel, ignoring the fact that some of the children, even some of the older ones, even the ones as grown up as her, looked as if they were crying.

'I told you there were children here,' said Bruno.

'Not the type of children *I* want to play with,' said Gretel in a determined voice. 'They look filthy. Hilda and Isobel and Louise have a bath every morning and so do I. Those children look like they've never had a bath in their lives.'

'It does look very dirty over there,' said Bruno. 'But maybe they don't have any baths?'

'Don't be stupid,' said Gretel, despite the fact that she had been told time and time again that she was not to call her brother stupid. 'What kind of people don't have baths?'

'I don't know,' said Bruno. 'People who don't have any hot water?'

Gretel watched for another few moments before shivering and turning away. 'I'm going back to my room to arrange my dolls,' she said. 'The view is decidedly nicer from there.'

With that remark she walked away, returning across the hallway to her bedroom and closing the door behind her, but she didn't go back to arranging her dolls quite yet. Instead she sat down on the bed and a lot of things went through her head.

And one final thought came into her brother's head as he watched the hundreds of people in the distance going about their business, and that was the fact that all of them – the small boys, the big boys, the fathers, the grandfathers, the uncles, the people who lived on their own on everybody's road but didn't seem to have any relatives at all – were wearing the same clothes as each other: a pair of grey striped pyjamas with a grey striped cap on their heads.

'How extraordinary,' he muttered, before turning away.

## Chapter Five

### Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions

There was only one thing for it and that was to speak to Father.

Father hadn't left Berlin in the car with them that morning. Instead he had left a few days earlier, on the night of the day that Bruno had come home to find Maria going through his things, even the things he'd hidden at the back that belonged to him and were nobody else's business. In the days following, Mother, Gretel, Maria, Cook, Lars and Bruno had spent all their time boxing up their belongings and loading them into a big truck to be brought to their new home at Out-With.

It was on this final morning, when the house looked empty and not like their real home at all, that the very last things they owned were put into suitcases and an official car with red-and-black flags on the front had stopped at their door to take them away.

Mother, Maria and Bruno were the last people to



leave the house and it was Bruno's belief that Mother didn't realize the maid was still standing there, because as they took one last look around the empty hallway where they had spent so many happy times, the place where the Christmas tree stood in December, the place where the wet umbrellas were left in a stand during the winter months, the place where Bruno was supposed to leave his muddy shoes when he came in but never did, Mother had shaken her head and said something very strange.

'We should never have let the Fury come to dinner,' she said. 'Some people and their determination to get ahead.'

Just after she said that she turned round and Bruno could see that she had tears in her eyes, but she jumped when she saw Maria standing there, watching her.

'Maria,' she said, in a startled tone of voice. 'I thought you were in the car.'

'I was just leaving, ma'am,' said Maria.

'I didn't mean—' began Mother before shaking her head and starting again. 'I wasn't trying to suggest—'

'I was just leaving, ma'am,' repeated Maria, who must not have known the rule about not interrupting Mother, and stepped through the door quickly and ran to the car.

Mother had frowned but then shrugged, as if none

of it really mattered any more anyway. 'Come on then, Bruno,' she said, taking his hand and locking the door behind them. 'Let's just hope we get to come back here someday when all this is over.'

The official car with the flags on the front had taken them to a train station, where there were two tracks separated by a wide platform, and on either side a train stood waiting for the passengers to board. Because there were so many soldiers marching about on the other side, not to mention the fact that there was a long hut belonging to the signalman separating the tracks, Bruno could only make out the crowds of people for a few moments before he and his family boarded a very comfortable train with very few people on it and plenty of empty seats and fresh air when the windows were pulled down. If the trains had been going in different directions, he thought, it wouldn't have seemed so odd, but they weren't; they were both pointed eastwards. For a moment he considered running across the platform to tell the people about the empty seats in his carriage, but he decided not to as something told him that if it didn't make Mother angry, it would probably make Gretel furious, and that would be worse still.

Since arriving at Out-With and their new house, Bruno hadn't seen his father. He had thought perhaps he was in his bedroom earlier when the door

creaked open, but that had turned out to be the unfriendly young soldier who had stared at Bruno without any warmth in his eyes. He hadn't heard Father's booming voice anywhere and he hadn't heard the heavy sound of his boots on the floorboards downstairs. But there were definitely people coming and going, and as he debated what to do for the best he heard a terrific commotion coming from downstairs and went out to the hallway to look over the banister.

Down below he saw the door to Father's office standing open and a group of five men outside it, laughing and shaking hands. Father was at the centre of them and looked very smart in his freshly pressed uniform. His thick dark hair had obviously been recently lacquered and combed, and as Bruno watched from above he felt both scared and in awe of him. He didn't like the look of the other men quite as much. They certainly weren't as handsome as Father. Nor were their uniforms as freshly pressed. Nor were their voices so booming or their boots so polished. They all held their caps under their arms and seemed to be fighting with each other for Father's attention. Bruno could only understand a few of their phrases as they travelled up to him.

• '... made mistakes from the moment he got here. It got to the point where the Fury had no choice but to ...' said one.

'... discipline!' said another. 'And efficiency. We have lacked efficiency since the start of 'forty-two and without that ...'

'... it's clear, it's clear what the numbers say. It's clear, Commandant ...' said the third.

'... and if we build another,' said the last, 'imagine what we could do then ... just imagine it ...!'

Father held a hand in the air, which immediately caused the other men to fall silent. It was as if he was the conductor of a barbershop quartet.

'Gentlemen,' he said, and this time Bruno could make out every word because there had never been a man born who was more capable of being heard from one side of a room to the other than Father. 'Your suggestions and your encouragement are very much appreciated. And the past is the past. Here we have a fresh beginning, but let that beginning start tomorrow. For now, I'd better help my family settle in or there will be as much trouble for me in here as there is for them out there, you understand?'

The men all broke into laughter and shook Father's hand. As they left they stood in a row together like toy soldiers and their arms shot out in the same way that Father had taught Bruno to salute, the palm stretched flat, moving from their chests up into the air in front of them in a sharp motion as they cried out the two words that Bruno

had been taught to say whenever anyone said it to him. Then they left and Father returned to his office, which was *Out Of Bounds At All Times And No Exceptions*.

Bruno walked slowly down the stairs and hesitated for a moment outside the door. He felt sad that Father had not come up to say hello to him in the hour or so that he had been here, but it had been explained to him on many occasions just how busy Father was and that he couldn't be disturbed by silly things like saying hello to him all the time. But the soldiers had left now and he thought it would be all right if he knocked on the door.

Back in Berlin, Bruno had been inside Father's office on only a handful of occasions, and it was usually because he had been naughty and needed to have a serious talking-to. However, the rule that applied to Father's office in Berlin was one of the most important rules that Bruno had ever learned and he was not so silly as to think that it would not apply here at *Out-With* too. But since they had not seen each other in some days, he thought that no one would mind if he knocked now.

And so he tapped carefully on the door. Twice, and quietly.

Perhaps Father didn't hear, perhaps Bruno didn't knock loudly enough, but no one came to the door, so Bruno knocked again and did it louder this time,

and as he did-so he heard the booming voice from inside call out, 'Enter!'

Bruno turned the door handle and stepped inside and assumed his customary pose of wide-open eyes, mouth in the shape of an O and arms stretched out by his sides. The rest of the house might have been a little dark and gloomy and hardly full of possibilities for exploration but this room was something else. It had a very high ceiling to begin with, and a carpet underfoot that Bruno thought he might sink into. The walls were hardly visible; instead they were covered with dark mahogany shelves, all lined with books, like the ones in the library at the house in Berlin. There were enormous windows on the wall facing him, which stretched out into the garden beyond, allowing a comfortable seat to be placed in front of them, and in the centre of all this, seated behind a massive oak desk, was Father himself, who looked up from his papers when Bruno entered and broke into a wide smile.

'Bruno,' he said, coming round from behind the desk and shaking the boy's hand solidly, for Father was not usually the type of man to give anyone a hug, unlike Mother and Grandmother, who gave them a little too often for comfort, complementing them with slobbering kisses. 'My boy,' he added after a moment.

'Hello, Father,' said Bruno quietly, a little overawed by the splendour of the room.

'Bruno, I was coming up to see you in a few minutes, I promise I was,' said Father. 'I just had a meeting to finish and a letter to write. You got here safely then?'

'Yes, Father,' said Bruno.

'You were a help to your mother and sister in closing the house?'

'Yes, Father,' said Bruno.

'Then I'm proud of you,' said Father approvingly. 'Sit down, boy.'

He indicated a wide armchair facing his desk and Bruno clambered onto it, his feet not quite touching the floor, while Father returned to his seat behind the desk and stared at him. They didn't say anything to each other for a moment, and then finally Father broke the silence.

'So?' he asked. 'What do you think?'

'What do I think?' asked Bruno. 'What do I think of what?'

'Of your new home. Do you like it?'

'No,' said Bruno quickly, because he always tried to be honest and knew that if he hesitated even for a moment then he wouldn't have the nerve to say what he really thought. 'I think we should go home,' he added bravely.

Father's smile faded only a little and he glanced down at his letter for a moment before looking back up again, as if he wanted to consider his reply

carefully. 'Well, we are home, Bruno,' he said finally in a gentle voice. 'Out-With is our new home.'

'But when can we go back to Berlin?' asked Bruno, his heart sinking when Father said that. 'It's so much nicer there.'

'Come, come,' said Father, wanting to have none of that. 'Let's have none of that,' he said. 'A home is not a building or a street or a city or something so artificial as bricks and mortar. A home is where one's family is, isn't that right?'

'Yes, but—'

'And our family is here, Bruno. At Out-With. Ergo, this must be our home.'

Bruno didn't understand what *ergo* meant, but he didn't need to because he had a clever answer for Father. 'But Grandfather and Grandmother are in Berlin,' he said. 'And they're our family too. So this can't be our home.'

Father considered this and nodded his head. He waited a long time before replying. 'Yes, Bruno, they are. But you and I and Mother and Gretel are the most important people in our family and this is where we live now. At Out-With. Now, don't look so unhappy about it!' (Because Bruno was looking distinctly unhappy about it.) 'You haven't even given it a chance yet. You might like it here.'

'I don't like it here,' insisted Bruno.

'Bruno . . .' said Father in a tired voice.

'Karl's not here and Daniel's not here and Martin's not here and there are no other houses around us and no fruit and vegetable stalls and no streets and no cafés with tables outside and no one to push you from pillar to post on a Saturday afternoon.'

'Bruno, sometimes there are things we need to do in life that we don't have a choice in,' said Father, and Bruno could tell that he was starting to tire of this conversation. 'And I'm afraid this is one of them. This is my work, important work. Important to our country. Important to the Fury. You'll understand that some day.'

'I want to go home,' said Bruno. He could feel tears welling up behind his eyes and wanted nothing more than for Father to realize just how awful a place Out-With really was and agree that it was time to leave.

'You need to realize that you *are* at home,' he said instead, disappointing Bruno. 'This is it for the foreseeable future.'

Bruno closed his eyes for a moment. There hadn't been many times in his life when he had been quite so insistent on having his own way and he had certainly never gone to Father with quite so much desire for him to change his mind about something, but the idea of staying here, the idea of having to live in such a horrible place where there was no one at all to play with, was too much to think about. When he

opened his eyes again a moment later, Father stepped round from behind his desk and settled himself in an armchair beside him. Bruno watched as he opened a silver case, took out a cigarette and tapped it on the desk before lighting it.

'I remember when I was a child,' said Father, 'there were certain things that I didn't want to do, but when my father said that it would be better for everyone if I did them, I just put my best foot forward and got on with them.'

'What kinds of things?' asked Bruno.

'Oh, I don't know,' said Father, shrugging his shoulders. 'It's neither here nor there anyway. I was just a child and didn't know what was for the best. Sometimes, for example, I didn't want to stay at home and finish my schoolwork; I wanted to be out on the streets, playing with my friends just like you do, and I look back now and see how foolish I was.'

'So you know how I feel,' said Bruno hopefully.

'Yes, but I also knew that my father, your grandfather, knew what was best for me and that I was always happiest when I just accepted that. Do you think that I would have made such a success of my life if I hadn't learned when to argue and when to keep my mouth shut and follow orders? Well, Bruno? Do you?'

Bruno looked around. His gaze landed on the

window in the corner of the room and through it he could see the awful landscape beyond.

‘Did you do something wrong?’ he asked after a moment. ‘Something that made the Fury angry?’

‘Me?’ said Father, looking at him in surprise. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Did you do something bad in work? I know that everyone says you’re an important man and that the Fury has big things in mind for you, but he’d hardly send you to a place like this if you hadn’t done something that he wanted to punish you for.’

Father laughed, which upset Bruno even more; there was nothing that made him more angry than when a grown-up laughed at him for not knowing something, especially when he was trying to find out the answer by asking questions.

‘You don’t understand the significance of such a position,’ Father said.

‘Well, I don’t think you can have been very good at your job if it means we all have to move away from a very nice home and our friends and come to a horrible place like this. I think you must have done something wrong and you should go and apologize to the Fury and maybe that will be an end to it. Maybe he’ll forgive you if you’re very sincere about it.’

The words were out before he could really think about whether they were sensible or not; once he

heard them floating in the air they didn’t seem like entirely the kind of things he should be saying to Father, but there they were, already said, and not a thing he could do to take them back. Bruno swallowed nervously and, after a few moments’ silence, glanced back at Father, who was staring at him stony-faced. Bruno licked his lips and looked away. He felt it would be a bad idea to hold Father’s eye.

After a few silent and uncomfortable minutes Father stood up slowly from the seat beside him and walked back behind the desk, laying his cigarette on an ashtray.

‘I wonder if you are being very brave,’ he said quietly after a moment, as if he was debating the matter in his head, ‘rather than merely disrespectful. Perhaps that’s not such a bad thing.’

‘I didn’t mean—’

‘But you will be quiet now,’ said Father, raising his voice and interrupting him because none of the rules of normal family life ever applied to him. ‘I have been very considerate of your feelings here, Bruno, because I know that this move is difficult for you. And I have listened to what you have to say, even though your youth and inexperience force you to phrase things in an insolent manner. And you’ll notice that I have not reacted to any of this. But the moment has come when you will simply have to accept that—’



'I don't want to accept it!' shouted Bruno, blinking in surprise because he hadn't known he was going to shout out loud. (In fact it came as a complete surprise to him.) He tensed slightly and got ready to make a run for it if necessary. But nothing seemed to be making Father angry today – and if Bruno was honest with himself he would have admitted that Father rarely became angry; he became quiet and distant and always had his way in the end anyway – and rather than shouting at him or chasing him around the house, he simply shook his head and indicated that their debate was at an end.

'Go to your room, Bruno,' he said in such a quiet voice that Bruno knew that he meant business now, so he stood up, tears of frustration forming in his eyes. He walked towards the door, but before opening it he turned round and asked one final question. 'Father?' he began.

'Bruno, I'm not going to—' began Father irritably.

'It's not about that,' said Bruno quickly. 'I just have one other question.'

Father sighed but indicated that he should ask it and then that would be an end to the matter and no arguments.

Bruno thought about his question, wanting to phrase it exactly right this time, just in case it came out as being rude or unco-operative. 'Who are all those people outside?' he said finally.

Father tilted his head to the left, looking a little confused by the question. 'Soldiers, Bruno,' he said. 'And secretaries. Staff workers. You've seen them all before, of course.'

'No, not them,' said Bruno. 'The people I see from my window. In the huts, in the distance. They're all dressed the same.'

'Ah, those people,' said Father, nodding his head and smiling slightly. 'Those people . . . well, they're not people at all, Bruno.'

Bruno frowned. 'They're not?' he asked, unsure what Father meant by that.

'Well, at least not as we understand the term,' Father continued. 'But you shouldn't be worrying about them right now. They're nothing to do with you. You have nothing whatsoever in common with them. Just settle into your new home and be good, that's all I ask. Accept the situation in which you find yourself and everything will be so much easier.'

'Yes, Father,' said Bruno, unsatisfied by the response.

He opened the door and Father called him back for a moment, standing up and raising an eyebrow as if he'd forgotten something. Bruno remembered the moment his father made the signal, and said the phrase and imitated him exactly.

He pushed his two feet together and shot his right arm into the air before clicking his two heels together

and saying in as deep and clear a voice as possible – as much like Father’s as he could manage – the words he said every time he left a soldier’s presence.

‘*Heil Hitler*,’ he said, which, he presumed, was another way of saying, ‘Well, goodbye for now, have a pleasant afternoon.’



