

EDELWEISS

by

Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It is 1941. Anticipation runs high in one classroom at the Schloss Strasse School for Girls in Munich. What will the new teacher be like? Each of the girls in the classroom hopes she's not like the horrid former teacher who, rumor has it, joined the Gestapo. The students are pleasantly surprised when Frau Decker, the militant headmistress, introduces them to Dorchen Werth, a young teacher just beginning her career.

Dorchen quickly sees her class as a microcosm of society. There's Eleanore, who is in love with the local Nazi Youth leader; Hilde, a hard-worker who protects her younger sister, Gertrude; Lilli, the girl who's trying to get all the boys; Paula, the student who has her eye on attending the university; Renita, who knows enough to be frightened because of her mixed heritage; Annabelle, a girl with divided loyalties; Edith, frightened of everything and everyone; and Marte, who is frightened by nothing.

As the Nazi noose tightens around the neck of the common German, the effects are felt in the classroom. Renita doesn't show up for school one morning, and it becomes clear she and her family have been taken to a camp. Angered, Marte confronts Kurt, the local Nazi Youth leader, and forces him to dance to forbidden "big band" music she has brought to school. Horrified that such music is heard through her school, Decker begins watching Dorchen more closely.

Fearing for both the safety of her students and their intellectual freedom, Dorchen asks the girls if they will agree to allow complete freedom of thought and speech within the classroom walls. The girls agree, and, for a time, experience the luxury of security.

But when Hilde and Gertrude are arrested with their family for hiding Jews, Marte retaliates by attacking Kurt and his friends. This action horrifies the other girls who know the incident will be traced to the classroom. Their security begins to evaporate as they doubt one another, and their own fears begin to eclipse reason and common sense.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(11 F, 3 M)

LILLI: At 16, she's more concerned with her appearance than with anything happening in the outside world.

GERTRUDE: Though she is 13, she is considerably less mature than her years. She is fearful and dependent upon her sister, Hilde, for everything.

PAULA: A very pragmatic, studious girl of 17.

EDITH: A slow, 16 year-old student who is frightened by everything that is happening in her world.

ANNABELLE: The 15-year-old daughter of a French woman and a German man of 15. She fears her heritage will make her suspect in the eyes of the law.

RENITA: A bright student of 14 who realizes all too quickly what her family background means.

ELEANORE: Typical 16 year-old student who loves to write – especially about her love for Kurt.

MARTE: Rebellious 17 year-old student who hates authority, making her a danger to herself and everyone else.

HILDE: Gertrude's 15-year-old sister, who is very protective, cautious.

FRAU DECKER: In her 40s, the head of the Schloss Strasse School for Girls. She is a dedicated National Socialist and suspects each and every move her new teacher makes.

DORCHEN WERTH: At 21, a teacher who has retained her ideals despite the onset of the Nazi dictatorship. She wants to create a world of safety for her students in the midst of the horrible events outside.

KURT HOLBEIN: The local head of the Hitler Youth. He is a zealous National Socialist to the point of denouncing the normal feelings of a boy of 17.

JULIUS WERTH: Dorchen's uncle, in his 50s. He doesn't want to rock the boat.

EMMA WERTH: Dorchen's aunt, also in her 50s. Like her husband, she would like to play along until everything is over.

HERR REIDL: A smooth, cruel Gestapo member. In his 30s.

SETTING

A second-floor classroom at the Schloss Strasse School for Girls. Teacher's desk DSL, facing downstage on an angle. Three tables, each with a bench, fill up center and right. The tables face the teacher's desk. A large window dominates upstage wall left, with a door into the classroom USR. A coat rack stands near window. At right we find a blackboard and a bulletin board and calendar, which changes as indicated. A picture of Hitler in one of his more glorious poses hangs down right. Various rules and posters decorate the room. An old victrola or record player sits on small table behind teacher's desk along with a file cabinet. The room is drab, lifeless, official.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Morning, early September, 1941.

Scene 2: That afternoon.

Scene 3: Morning, mid-October, 1941.

Scene 4: Two days later, morning.

Scene 5: Just before Christmas, 1941.

Scene 6: The following morning.

ACT II

Scene 1: Mid-January, 1942.

Scene 2: Two days later, afternoon.

Scene 3: Friday afternoon, that same week.

Scene 4: October, 1945, late evening.

ACT I
Scene 1

(September, 1941. Before rise, we hear a SIMPLE MELODY, played on flute or piano. It fades under initial dialogue, then disappears. AT RISE: ELEANORE, MARTE, PAULA, LILLI, EDITH, ANNABELLE, HILDE, GERTRUDE, and RENITA sit at the tables, chattering excitedly. They wear drab school clothing, cardigan sweaters, skirts, shirts, and sensible shoes. Nevertheless, they are like girls everywhere, anxious and excited on their first day of the new school year.)

LILLI: I certainly hope she's good looking! I'd hate to have another Frau Burkenhoff!

GERTRUDE: She was so mean!

PAULA: You know what I heard?

EDITH: I don't want to hear.

LILLI: Oh, honestly, Edith! You NEVER want to hear anything.

EDITH: I just don't want to hear.

LILLI: YOU can't hide being afraid, Edith! It's your forehead! It's a giveaway when the veins pop out!

ANNABELLE: Do not be so cruel, Lilli.

LILLI: Shut up, you little import!

RENITA: Don't call names. You know it's not nice.

LILLI: It's true!

ANNABELLE: I am a German citizen.

LILLI: With a French mother? How can anyone trust someone like you, darling?

ELEANORE: Stop it! All of you!

LILLI: I was just kidding.

PAULA: Eleanore's right. What kind of year will we have if we're already bickering.

LILLI: What kind of year will we have if nobody can take a joke?

MARTE: So, Paula...what DID you hear about Frau Burkenhoff?

PAULA: She's joined the Gestapo.

HILDE: Oh, dear.

GERTRUDE: We don't like the Gestapo, do we, Hilde?

HILDE: Be quiet, Gertrude!

GERTRUDE: But that's what Father says.

MARTE: Is it, now? Well, you'd better be careful talking about what Father says.

HILDE: Gertrude won't say anything more. Will you?

PAULA: Do you want Frau Burkenhoff to pay a visit to your house?

EDITH: You're being horrible!

PAULA: Don't you think she'd make a fine member of the secret police?

LILLI: She knows enough tortures.

MARTE: Remember how she made you stand in the corner holding those books for two hours? What had you done?

LILLI: You don't remember my crime? I wore eye shadow.

MARTE: That's right! *(Imitating a horrible Frau Burkenhoff.)* Women of the Reich do not need to profane their natural Aryan beauty with the addition of cheap, sordid makeup!

(The GIRLS all laugh, even Edith. FRAU DECKER and DORCHEN enter at door USR, unseen. Angrily, Decker claps her hands twice. Immediately, the girls scramble to their proper seats, except for Marte, who saunters to the back row of desks.)

DECKER: Entertaining again, Fraulein? *(DECKER moves to MARTE.)* Mocking those very things you should hold dear to your heart, Fraulein?

GERTRUDE: Oh, no, Frau Decker! Marte was just ... just ... imitating a monkey she once saw at the zoo.

DECKER: A monkey! Monkeys are funny, aren't they, Fraulein?

MARTE: I don't know, Frau Decker.

DECKER: Let's SEE this monkey of yours. I said, let's SEE this monkey! *(MARTE slowly moves to front of class.)* WELL? *(MARTE bends like an ape. She begins to hop around. She scratches. The GIRLS and DORCHEN giggle.)* That's enough!

End of Freeview

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