

CHAPTER XIII
THE GERMANS MARCH IN

It was Sunday morning, 19th March 1944. I was in a tram on the way to my weekly lesson of astrology and completely oblivious of the crowd, being still full of the entrancing beauty of *Don Giovanni*—an exceptionally fine performance of which I had just heard the night before.

Suddenly I realised I was standing next to Lacika, one of John's boys, who was supposed to be studying music at the Liszt Academy. But during the last few weeks he had been spending all his time with the Rivels—Charlie Rivel*, the well-known clown, and his three sons and daughter who were jugglers and contortionists. Every day, before they went to perform at the Arizona, he would spend several hours with them in their suite at the Bristol⁸⁰, playing the piano to them and watching them practise their music-hall acts. I had never known a clown personally until Lacika introduced me to Charlie Rivel, who gave me a lecture on his view of the European situation. He was pro-Nazi but his arguments were amusing and original. I was even thinking of asking Lacika to arrange another meeting with the family when he told me that he was on his way to visit Teddy.

'Why don't you come along with me?' he said. 'We'll drag

him out of bed. He's sure not to be up yet at this hour of the day.'

It was an idea. I had not seen Teddy for months. He was living only a few blocks from my astrology master and it was still early for the lesson. We found Teddy, as we had expected, in bed but enjoying his morning tea with unusual relish.

'Well,' he said rather smugly, 'it has already happened!'

'What has happened?'

'The occupation.'

'What occupation?'

'The German occupation. The troops crossed the border this morning at six o'clock and will be in Budapest by lunch-time. Of course I already knew about it ten days ago. Everything was prepared very carefully.'

For a moment I was speechless. I just could not believe it and stared at him while he went on sipping his tea, as if it had never before tasted so delicious. I should have liked to choke him there and then—the swine! To think that he had known about it for ten days and had probably taken part in organising the coup!

'And what is going to happen now?' I asked.

'Nothing, except that Hungary will have to stop playing this farcical little game of war with a handful of soldiers. Henceforth she will have to start fighting properly, and people like John will have to do their duty.'

'Does that mean that Hungary ceases now to be an independent country?' I asked.

'Oh no, officially this is only a military occupation. There will just be a change of government. Of course Kállay must go.'⁸¹

* Josep Andreu (1896–1983), Catalan-born clown who performed under the stage name Charlie Rivel.

Notes

1. These friends were Baroness Wanda Radvánszky (c.1897–1963) and her son János (1924–2007), whose country seat was at Radvaň, now part of Banská-Bystrica in central Slovakia. The ‘swift cool river’ below its park is the Hron. János had been a pupil of RB’s at Sárospatak (*Note 37*). Wanda’s sister Anna Gleiman, also a friend of RB’s, was a psychologist (*Note 50*). Wanda and János emigrated to Australia after WWII and Radvaň castle passed to the Czechoslovak state. The huge park that surrounded it is now largely built up.
2. György (Gyuri) Fodor, ‘blond and blue eyed...just 25 years old... full of contradictions, very well read...free in his opinions...’ (Letter from RB to his mother, 3rd Feb 1941). Gyuri’s younger brother István (‘Pista’) was also a good friend to RB.
3. Losonc (Lučenec) was awarded to Czechoslovakia following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1918. It was returned to Hungary as part of the First Vienna Award, a grant of territory made by Nazi Germany in 1938—as RB says, to lure Hungary into the war on the Axis side. The new Slovak border then began just north of Losonc (*see map on inside front cover*), with a frontier railway station at Tomášovce (Losonctamási).
4. In 1921 (in the only referendum allowed when Hungary’s borders were re-drawn after WWI) the people of Sopron voted overwhelmingly not to become part of Austria. This explains why on the map Sopron occupies a sort of peninsula, randomly jutting into Austria.
5. This was Balázs Lengyel (1918–2007), known to friends as Bandi (pronounced ‘Bondy’, as RB spells it). The entire Lengyel family (*Note 13*) were extremely loyal friends to RB and when he was in