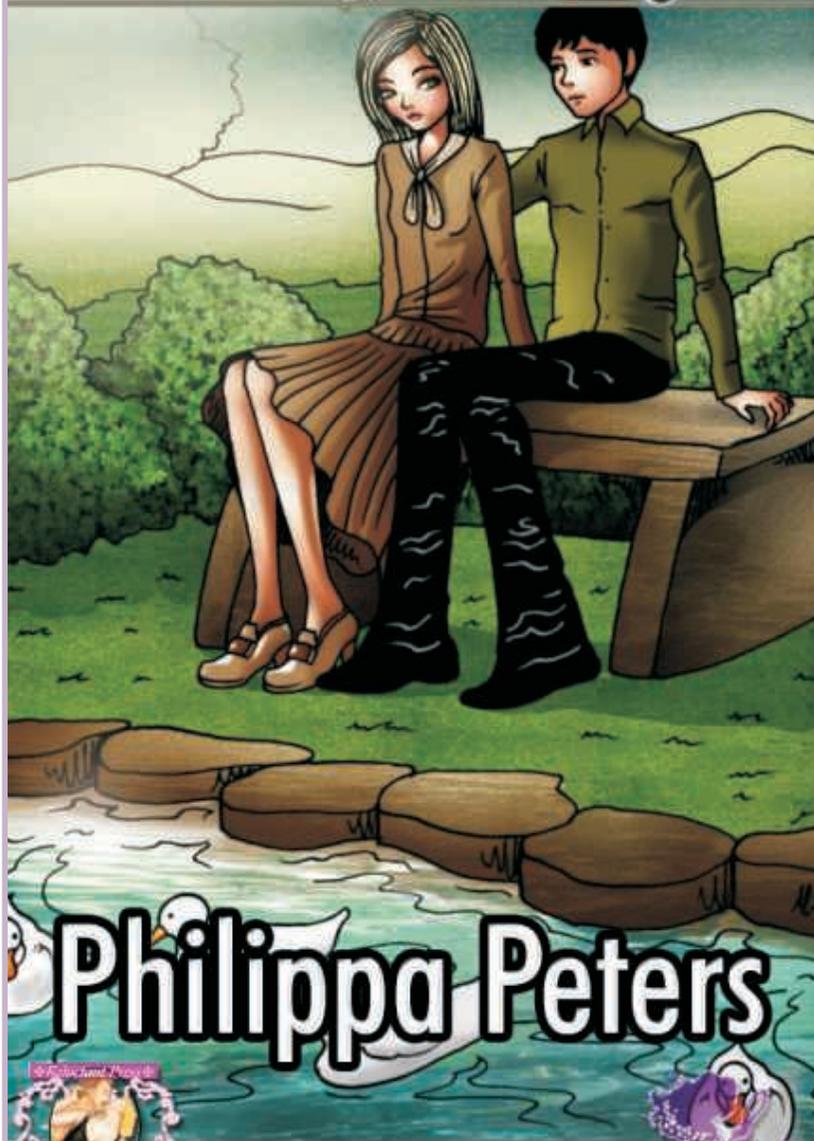


Mama's Innocent Daughter



Philippa Peters



A "Young Adult Tv" Novel



Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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MAMA'S INNOCENT DAUGHTER

by Philippa Peters

WHOSE LITTLE GIRL ARE YOU?

Of my life before, prior to Trudi and Mama, I really only remember the enormous room full of toys. There was the wooden rocking horse that I was lifted on to ride. There were white walls, plaster figures molded into the ceiling, woolly creatures much bigger than me, hanging things, birds, butterflies, and white wooden bars.

That must have been a crib or playpen, or so I think now. I can distinctly remember the feeling of being trapped, however, trapped behind white bars, as if I was in jail. I must have been three or four, at least, at that time.

There was Hannah of course, always angry, and before her, sweet-tempered Gitte, and others before that, nurses or nannies.

Then, on occasion, scrubbed and specially cleaned, I recall being presented to large people with fat, clean-smelling hands, jovial, always smiling, jowled cheeks, and pink skin. I remember the black uniforms, the grey suits, the huge chains of pearls or shells on the ladies. I think that I was told to call one of them Mama, but I can't be sure. It was so long ago.

I do remember the explosions, the clouds of fine dust floating down from the cracking cherubs on the ceiling while we huddled, Hannah and me, under the sturdy table where I was served meals each day.

Hannah, bad-tempered as always, pulled a coat on me and took me out of the shaking, high-ceilinged house, onto the street. There was a tree ablaze on the boulevard, at the end of our street. I can always recall that, a blackened pillar inside a flaming torch. Hannah tugged on me to hurry on, to I-don't-know-where. There were lots like us on the strasse, Hannah did give it a name but I really can't remember it now. There were lots of people running across the wide boulevard, away from us, adults clutching children. I recall that and also wondering why we didn't follow them.

Suddenly, there were soldiers, in a Jeep of some kind, jumping out. Hannah pulled me into an alley between two huge walls, yelling at me to run. I remember the sounds like moths hitting the lamps in summertime. Hannah fell, pulling me down beside her. She was staring at me, unblinking, as we lay together on the hard concrete.

I remember saying, "Can't we get up now?" But she didn't answer.

I stood up finally and saw the mark on her coat. It was as if someone had torn a hole into the back from the outside. I knew without any shock or fuss that she was dead.

I recollect thinking that I should go back to our house, back the way we'd come. It would be easy. But people came round the corner of the alley, running straight at me, screaming. I was terrified by the frightened looks on their faces. Immediately, I ran too, out the other side of the alley, into the ruined buildings of another boulevard and on, until the fear in me couldn't make me move at all.

I wandered for several days where there were no unshattered buildings before I met Trudi. I'd already lost my coat to two older boys who'd attacked me for it. They were so frightening because they said nothing, just hit me and hit me until I let it go. I think they would have taken all my clothes if a soldier hadn't seen us scuffling in the flat ruin near the only working water tap I'd found. The soldier shouted and fired a round of bullets our way. The boys took off like rabbits. I ran the opposite way, into a bombed-out church. Trudi was crouched down behind a splintered bench.

"They always shoot at the boys," she told me. "Sometimes, they'll give us girls something to eat."

Eat. I hardly remembered what that was. Trudi brought out some blackened pumpernickel, as hard as a rock. I remember how delicious it was, softened by rain-water, collected in a stone basin near a blasted-out doorway.

I followed Trudi after that. She showed me how to get close to the garbage can fires at night time, to lean against the old people's legs, but not the young or middle-aged men or even near them, she warned me. Gradually, the old folks, the women mainly, would let us in.

We scrambled away from gangs of other kids. They wanted everything we had, especially my clothes, until my sweater and pants became as tattered and dirty as everyone else's and didn't look at all like the clothes I'd worn on Friedrichstrasse. There, I do remember the name of one huge street. It might even be close to where I once lived.

Trudi found some sacking which we took to wearing all the time, not just covering ourselves with it at night. With it about us, we looked very much alike. We found some sacks that were complete. We called them smocks after we tore out holes for arms and heads and wore them on top of everything.

My hair was thick about my neck and in front of my eyes. Hannah hadn't taken me to the barber in ages. Once she'd muttered that four marks were four marks. She'd taken scissors to the fringe on my forehead. Today, when I think about it, I know that she pocketed the money.

Trudi found cloche-like hats in the ruin of an old store. I wore the green one and Trudi the blue. Somehow, we were warmer.

A soldier near the Horse Church (it had one carved on its wall) once called us to come to him just after we started wearing the hats. He had a loaf of bread, a wine bottle, even a sausage. "Come on, little girls," he called to us, his voice thick and slurry, a foreign voice Trudi called it. "I don't want much for this."

Trudi led me away quickly, holding my hand tightly after seeing the look I gave the sausage. She explained what the soldier wanted from little girls. I felt repulsed even though I would have done almost anything for the food he offered.

Trudi led me over to the Lady's house. We'd approached before and watched. The Lady would open her

door and carry out a tray with what looked like buns and cups of milk. She gave it out to the little line of children at the door, girls with younger ones, you couldn't tell of what sex.

There was often a car in front of her house, with soldier's flags. There was actually glass in her windows and light. We caught strains of music and saw flashes of movement within, in front of the light. That, Trudi said, was the Lady dancing with her men friends.

We stood in the shadows across from the Lady's new, brightly painted door. I was thinking of the soldier's sausage, wondering who had earned it and how Trudi had known what the soldier would want from a little girl for the sausage, when we saw a car arrive. A couple of men in black, fur-collared coats went up to the door, waving parcels as they were admitted into laughter and music. On either side of the Lady's house, the other buildings were gaunt, empty of glass, wood, or life.

"They're rounding up the kids in this quarter," Trudi whispered as we stared at dark, unlighted windows next door to the house where the music was coming from.

We were about to go when another black, shiny automobile came gliding down the street. The soldier driver stepped out to let the Lady, yes, it was her, and a fat, uniformed man, out the back.

The Lady tripped lightly up the steps to her doorway. She handed something to the fat man who began to fumble at the doorway. She turned and looked about, a few stray, reddish curls blown across her smooth face by the light breeze. She looked across the street to where we crouched in the bay window of the burned-out house.

We slunk down but the Lady had seen us. She waved and called us over, light pouring from her doorway, the sound of music wafting out to us. We heard a girl scream

in laughter. The Lady turned as the man with her smiled, urging her to go in with him. The soldiers with the car were angry, lifting their weapons and calling out for us to come out with our hands up. Even I, by then, knew better than to go to soldiers. We slipped through the broken doorway of a once-proud town house and hid.

The big car stayed there all night. One of the soldiers searched the house for us but we hid beneath treacherous floor boards. He finally left some time before dawn when the air is at its coldest. The big car took away the man who'd come with the Lady but more cars arrived and more people left. I popped my head round the door post and watched the last one go. The lights of that one shone into the doorway, almost blinding me, before it was gone.

The Lady must have seen me. There I was, lifting a floorboard to huddle back down with Trudi, to try and get warm again when I heard her, the Lady, at the ruined doorway.

"Oh, you poor little darlings!" she exclaimed, stepping gingerly over the rubble, still in her black, shiny, high-heeled shoes. "No, I won't hurt you," she said quickly when Trudi jumped up after I nudged her with my elbow in her ribs. "Come with me and we'll get breakfast."

All the kids I'd talked to had said never to let yourself be taken inside. So, Trudi and I paused in the doorway of the Lady's house and just stared in at the shiny floor, the carpeted stairs, and the white-painted walls. Warm air flowed over us and with it came the smell, a sugary smell, of cinnamon toast and warm cake.

At the end of the hallway, the Lady appeared again in a white apron about her flowered dress. "Come on, little girls," she said, pointing back to what must be a kitchen.

“Come and eat. Close the door and keep the warm in. You needn’t lock it. You can run if you have to.”

The Lady had a nice smile. Her teeth were white, not yellow and dirty-brown, nor missing, like those of most people who smiled at us.

She sat at the far side of the table and talked almost non-stop, in a gentle, soft voice, while we drank milk, ate cake and hot, buttered toast until I thought my stomach would burst or I would, at least, be sick.

“You need somewhere to sleep, don’t you darlings?” the Lady said at last. “Somewhere warm.”

We followed, ten feet behind, as she showed us the basement, the pipes and an old, rickety metal cot. She put a short ladder by the window beside the bed and showed us how to flick the lock open so that we could crawl out easily, if we had to.

Then she left us to sleep or leave as we wanted. Trudi tried the bed first and I soon followed. The mattress was softer than the piles of papers, rags or boards we usually slept on. It was warm next to the pipes. I cuddled up to Trudi, feeling fat and bloated. Trudi was asleep in an instant. She didn’t hear the Lady tiptoe in or feel her cover us with a blanket. I did.

I was trying to fake being relaxed, as if I slept, while all the time I was really tense and listening. “Poor little girls,” I heard the Lady say. “Thirty years ago, I could have been you. Mama found me and took me in. Now it’s my turn.”

We slept all day, fitfully. It wasn’t right to be in a bed nor for the world to be so quiet. The Lady woke us as evening was darkening the basement again. A smell of cooking, something spicy, came wafting down on the air with her.

We sat again at the white-painted table on white chairs while the Lady put sausages, fried potatoes and bread with butter on our plates and gave us glasses of milk. She talked and talked while we just ate. She talked about everything, the food, the artifacts in the kitchen, the patterns on the plates, everything.

“Well,” she said when we’d finally cleaned our plates with the last of the bread. “You’ll have to go back downstairs after we’ve tidied up. My friends will be here very soon. Can you do that? Can you be quiet as church mice while there’s a party going on up here?”

“Of course you can! It’ll be a long time but when they’re all gone, we’ll have a party of our own, won’t we? You’ll be my daughters now. You’ve no other family, have you?”

We both shook our heads. Always agree with adults. We’d learned that rule the hard way. “You can call me Mama,” the Lady said with a smile, “and I shall call you ...” She looked at us expectantly.

“Trudi,” said Trudi, squeezing my hand hard beneath the table. “And this is Erika.” She feminized my name as she had before when we’d sneaked up to the fire, claiming to be waiting for our Papa.

We helped to clear the table and learned where to put things. I could see Mama frowning at our dirt-grimed hands and arms. I caught a glimpse of myself in the polished surface of the stove. I was as dirty as Trudi and looked just like her. She was a little taller than me. Otherwise, we could have been twin sisters.

My clothes were dirty. The clothes we wore were battered and torn, pushing our hair down about our faces. We wore shapeless smocks over the sacking, and over other clothing I scarcely remembered.

I saw Mama wrinkle her nose as I handed her the basket from which the bread had been served. I was so used to how I smelled, and how Trudi smelled, that I could only suspect how rancid and aromatic we'd become. Mama took away Trudi's cloche and glowered at the matted hair, chunks missing where we'd cut it away to keep it out of her eyes. Mine was much the same.

Mama didn't say anything but showed us where everything went. We peeped into the front room where she entertained, amazed at the luxury of soft cushions, carpets and draped windows.

When the doorbell rang, we scurried downstairs, more buns, a slab of cheese and glasses of milk in our hands. We lay on the bed, nibbling, thinking only of the wonderful food, the wonderful house above and how to please Mama to get her to keep us there.

The music and creaking across the floors went on for a very long time. Mama was tired, dark circles beneath her smudged eye makeup, when she came to the top of the basement stairs and called us back up, into the kitchen.

We cleared away the remains of Mama's party very willingly. The bottles, cigarette butts and ashtrays, even the food remnants, we could have used for barter on the streets where we lived. We worked quickly and filled the two trash bags Mama set out while Mama moved about, finding and putting glasses in the sink.

Hot water, boiled on a working gas stove, filled the washbowl. We pushed over chairs to reach the sink. I washed my hands, leaving a clear borderline between clean and not-clean on my arm. I washed the dishes while Mama, a delighted smile on her face at the care I took with her things, Trudi had stressed that to me, dried up.

Mama put some more water on the stove and heated it. We didn't see what she was going to do at first but then

she put a towel about Trudi's neck and had her stand on the chair again in front of the sink.

The washing and drying of Trudi's hair took forever. Trudi didn't look like Trudi any more, not with a cleaned face and hair, not with shiny, black curls. Mama quickly snipped her bangs level, fighting with tangles and combing and cutting her hair level again.

Then it was my turn. "My goodness," said Mama when she lifted my head for the third time. "You're a blonde!"

The water was so filthy that Mama insisted on pouring it away and heating more for us to wash in. She took out an old metal washing clothes container from behind a door in the kitchen. "Used to wash Putzi, my dog, in this," she said cheerfully, as she began to pour water in, cold and hot, followed by soap powder and soap.

Trudi tried to hang on to her clothes. "Erika first!" she screamed, but Mama insisted. She still had the scissors and, before Trudi knew it, Mama had cut away the smocks, string ties and linings until the thin, almost skeletal Trudi was bare and shivering on the kitchen rug in front of her.

Trudi got into the water slowly, sorrowfully, as if she was about to die. But her expression changed when she felt the warm, soapy water. She began to smile and finally it was hard for Mama to get her out, Trudi's hands and fingers wrinkled, pink and clean as I'd never seen them before.

Mama snipped at my hair as I stood, trembling, thinking only how I'd get poor Trudi kicked out with me when Mama saw what I was.

"Someone really cut this off too short," Mama said, pulling at the back of my hair, low-down. Then she cut loose my smock and the sacking.

“Whew!” she laughed as I stood, clutching what I had, embarrassed at what she might see and afraid of what she might do. She dropped my outer clothing into the garbage bag with Trudi’s.

I tugged and twisted myself out of my torn pants, the tattered sweater and the grimy shirt. I had an even dirtier vest and underpants below and holed, woollen socks. Mama’s eyes looked as if they were smarting.

“Excuse me, Erika dear,” she said and went out of the kitchen. When she came back with a nosegay, my clothes were all bagged with Trudi’s. I was in the dark, warm water, already used by Trudi, washing myself earnestly.

“What a good girl!” exclaimed Mama. She took the large towel from Trudi and took her out, to her bedroom, as I later found out. I was wrapped in the towel when she came back.

“Really, you could have soaked a while, darling Erika,” Mama laughed, depositing what were clearly girl’s panties, a night dress and a huge, white dressing gown of hers on the chair.

While she took the water to the back door, I was able to turn and put on the panties. I remember how strange I felt as the elastic in the legs and about the waist pinched at me.

Mama sighed as she looked at me. “You’re as thin as Trudi,” she said, taking the little, light pink night dress and putting it over my head. It was tight at my neck, a kind of ruff tickling me. The arms ended with a similar ruff at my wrists while the main part fell about my ankles. Her robe held the cotton against me, warm but shivery all the same, because I knew these were girls’ clothes I was wearing.

Mama finished drying my hair, took my hand and led me to her bedroom, the night dress seeming to float about

me, leaving me with the most alarming feelings. I knew I shouldn't be dressed as I was. Trudi knew it as well but she wouldn't look at me. I just hoped so desperately that she wouldn't tell on me to Mama.

Trudi was already in the big bed, propped up on a frilly pillow. She finally looked at me in the little girl's, pink night dress but said nothing. "Luckily I have some clothing from before. Before all the fighting started," Mama said. "But they're still too big for both of you."

She adjusted the pink, frilly, rosebud-covered neckline on my nightie and helped me into bed while she took off her robe. She had a black, silky nightie on beneath, and most of her bosom was exposed. She smiled at me and climbed over me to sit in the middle of us. She smelled very nice, like roses in summer.

"You like that?" Mama asked me as I wrinkled my nose. She reached up behind her bed for a little bottle. She dabbed some liquid on my wrists, behind my ears and on my chest until I realized that I smelled like her. I smelled like Mama.

Mama read to us, a story about a mouse, as we lay together, warm and snug, the scent of roses in our nostrils.

"Isn't this nice?" Mama laughed. "All of us girls together in one bed."

"It's lovely," said Trudi, looking at me. "I used to do this with my Nana before the fighting started."

"And you, Erika?" Mama asked. "Whose little girl were you?"

"H-Hannah's," I whispered, curling up closer to her, the frills of my nightie tickling my chin and neck. "She was my nanny, I think. She was shot."

Mama nodded in sympathy. "Well, you're *my* little girl now," she said to me, seeing the tears on my face, hug-

ging me. "If anyone asks, you can say you're Frau Buren's daughter."

MAMA'S DAUGHTERS

The next day, we wore aprons that Mama had cut out and sewed, over our night dresses. We did chores for her and waited in the cellar when she went out, anxious about her return for we had no protection against the elements if we had to run. All we had were thin, cotton night dresses and cotton panties.

Mama, however, had been out buying for us. She came back with little dresses, blouses and skirts, stockings, and shoes, black, shiny, patent-leather shoes with silver buckles, girls' shoes.

Trudi and I had to dress for her and show her how our dresses and skirts fitted. Mama marked them for altering and re-sewing. She'd bought little bodices, with garters that stockings attached to, and underslips, to cover up our new, pink and lavender panties.

Mama dressed me quickly while my lavender panties kept hidden what I knew was there and what Trudi must have been aware of too. It was funny, sort of awful, to put on the white stockings and attach them to the garters on the tight, white bodice about my chest, Mama adjusting the straps for me.

But it was also kind of exciting, kind of nice, to be in clean, soft clothes, even if the dresses did cling to me and swish about my legs. Trudi smiled at me as she swirled her dress. I did it as well. Yes, girls had it so much easier than boys, didn't they? I really did feel strange, but nice as well, as everything smelled so clean.

"Now you look like little girls," said Mama, tugging on me here and there to make the dress fit better. The shoes were new and pinched our feet. I looked down,

charmed to see how bright they looked with the white stockings I wore as dark, purple skirts flared out below my knees.

Mama took us to the mirror. She smiled at how stunned we were. We did look like rich little girls, a brunette and a blonde. Mama bent down and hugged us to her before she touched my head. "Tonight," she said with a laugh, "we'll do something about your hair."

Mama set mine in tiny rollers and put a hood over it, still complaining about us hacking it off so short before. Trudi's hair didn't need so much attention. She just had to wear a net to keep her curls in place.

Our hair treated, we went back to the cellar in our new, long grey work dresses with white sleeves and collars, our pretty clothes put away, while Mama had another party with a lot of loud men friends. We put on our aprons to keep clean even downstairs and, as we lay on our old bed, we hugged each other and promised to do nothing, ever, to upset Mama and to help her in every way we could. Trudi told me that, if we were Mama's girls in every way, she'd keep us with her. I didn't say anything against that. But I did shiver as I agreed with her.

The next morning we got up earlier, tiptoed upstairs to see that all the men had gone and made Mama breakfast in bed. Mama was almost crying as she hugged us both and called us her beautiful daughters. She combed out my hair. It was bright and golden when I looked at it in the mirror, my face surrounded by curls, just like Trudi's natural ones.

"You are such a pretty child," Mama said, kissing me as I admired the little girl in the mirror, only vaguely thinking that she was me. Trudi gave me an encouraging smile and complimented me too, calling me her sister.

My deception couldn't last long, however. At our next bath, a few days later, Mama undressed Trudi and put her in the warm water as she had before. It was a bath large enough for two; so, when Mama stopped me from hanging back and began to undress me, I knew what would happen.

"What is this?" Mama asked as I stood without clothes, trying to conceal my boyhood. Trudi looked away, clearly unhappy. Now we would both be sent away, I could almost hear her thinking.

I couldn't look up at Mama. She lifted me after a short while and put me in the bath with Trudi and made me wash myself very thoroughly. After she dried me, we were all very quiet. Mama stared at me and gave me a new pair of panties, pink just like Trudi's, softer than before with lace trim at the legs, not elastic. I put them on quickly while she just sat with her arms crossed, not saying a word. The panties covered up what I hadn't wanted her to see. She gave me a new nightie, flowered and light blue, like Trudi's, floating down to my ankles.

We went to bed just as before in our nighties, Mama between us. She stroked my curls absent-mindedly as she read to us about a beautiful, golden-haired princess, who, the night before she had said was just like me, quiet, a good girl, and deserving to marry the handsome prince as she did at the end.

"I wonder, do I still have two beautiful daughters?" Mama asked as she put the book away behind the bed. She looked at me and smiled in a funny way. I felt a shiver go through me as she touched my nightie and moved me a little beneath her silky night dress.

I nodded, wanting to please her, not wanting these wonderful days, with warmth and food, to ever end. I

hugged Mama while Trudi did the same. Trudi wanted me to be her sister and go on as we had the last few days.

“We shall see,” Mama said gently, hugging me first and then Trudi. “I already spent too much on clothes for little girls. It would be easier for a few days anyway to keep you alike.”

Trudi and I worked even harder to do everything to please Mama. We kept the house tidy and sparkling clean. We washed our aprons and pressed them every day and we learned how to wash, dry, and iron Mama’s clothes, even her pretty underthings. She said she didn’t know what she’d do without her beautiful daughters, looking at me intently as she did so. I wished she could forget that I was really a boy. I wanted only to do everything I could to be her daughter.

Trudi and I dressed almost identically from the start. We had our work dresses, long to the floor, which we wore with long underslips and white socks. We also had colored woollen slippers to keep our feet warm as we worked in the cellar. Our everyday nice dresses, which we changed into at night when we weren’t working, had long, puffy sleeves with little frills at the wrist and round our necks. They were long as well and we didn’t have to wear stockings when we were in them. The long skirts kept us warm.

We wore pretty aprons over all our precious clothes and cotton scarves about our hair whenever we worked. Mama said that we should be proper little ladies all of the time; and we tried very hard to please her.

Our best dresses were different. We hung them on hangers from pipes in the cellar, having hopes of wearing them soon, even as Trudi and I cuddled in bed. Our best dresses were silk-lined velvet, gorgeous to wear, making both of us shivery and giggly whenever we put them on.

They were light and filmy on our bodies and legs. We agreed that they made us feel girlish.

Trudi acted differently all dressed up. She was coy and posed a lot. I imitated her which made Mama laugh.

"Dear Erika," she said with a smile, pulling me close and giving me a big hug. "You must learn to be yourself, little girl. Trudi wants to be a vamp, but you don't have to be. You will always be more of a lady than her, I think!"

So I copied Mama and did what she wanted. She showed us how to sit properly, how to walk in long and short skirts, and how to do girlish things like sew and knit. I think I was much more faithful to her teaching than Trudi ever was.

One afternoon we were sitting in the kitchen, legs crossed, of course. Mama was teaching us to embroider tea cloths when, suddenly, we heard a bang on the front door. Before we had time to put everything away and scurry to the cellar, a large, fat, uniformed man came bursting in, shouting Mama's name.

"What are these?" the military officer asked, wrinkling his long nose in disgust as we rushed about, trying frantically to store all the silk threads properly in Mama's work basket.

"Gunther, these are my daughters," said Mama proudly, signalling for both of us to come over and stand beside her. We clung to her skirt, her arms about our shoulders as the large man inspected us.

"This is Trudi," said Mama showing off my sister, "and this fair-haired beauty is Erika, my youngest."

The uniformed man stared, finally shaking his head as he set the bottle he had brought on the table we were clearing.

"And where were these last night?" Gunther asked, amused.

"In the cellar," said Mama haughtily, "in bed, where they have always been at that time of night."

The soldier grunted and frowned. He thought for a moment before saying, "Time to bring them out then, Liesl." His teeth gleamed as he smiled at Mama.

We could feel her hands shaking as she held us.

"Tonight," the man called Gunther said. "They can serve at Koenig's party. You always need help."

Mama squeezed me so hard that it hurt. "Frieda and Hilda will serve," she began.

"They'll be busy," leered Gunther.

We were happy to go to a party. We wanted Mama to be proud of us. We wanted to wear our beautiful dresses and look pretty for her.

Mama muttered under her breath all the time she got us ready but would only say, "It's nothing," when we asked her what was wrong.

She brushed our hair for a much longer time than usual and put white, silky ribbons in our curls, even though I had little hair at my collar. Oh, how I wished for my hair to grow long like hers.

We wore our velvet dresses at last and white, lacy aprons that Mama brought from one of the special drawers we were never to open, or look into, in her bedroom. It had been a while since we had worn stockings and garters but with our knee-length dresses and petticoats, they felt perfectly right as they swished so noisily about us. Just pulling on my stockings and hooking them up made me feel very girlish. I hardly needed the perfume Trudi claimed we girls absolutely had to wear at our necks and wrists.

Mama sprayed us both but she wasn't happy doing it. I could tell by her distracted manner. She went over with us how to make up the trays in the kitchen, how to serve, how to bend in a ladylike manner so as not to show off our stocking tops, garters or lacy underwear.

We stayed in the kitchen when the first people arrived. We could hear laughter, the shrill voices of the women and the low booming of a very deep baritone.

It was the man called Gunther who came for us, shepherding us into the crowded living room, Mama had called it the salon, each of us carrying a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

The people seemed shocked at our appearance. "Daughters, Lies!" exclaimed one red-haired, older lady. "You've never mentioned before that you had daughters!"

"Where do you live, little girl?" asked one man, taking food from my tray with one hand and stroking my velvet-covered arm with the other.

"Here," I whispered, looking to Mama, who left a grey-haired man in uniform to come over to me. The other man's arm was now about my waist but Mama removed it forcefully.

She looked reproachfully at Gunther who'd also started to come over to rescue me. "Now you can see, Gunther. It is time for my daughters to go to bed," she said firmly while he nodded and grimaced at the man who'd put his arm about me. "And they will lock the door tonight from the inside," Mama added.

We went downstairs quickly. We did everything Mama had told us to, putting the bolts across the door so that no-one could come where we were. Trudi was put out with me. "I wanted to stay," she said wistfully as we lay in our matching nighties and similar lavender panties,

the boards creaking above our heads. "I wanted to see the dancing."

"Why did Mama have us leave so early?" I asked her.

"It was that man," Trudi said with a sigh. "You couldn't see his face. He wanted you, like you were a grown woman, like Mama. You looked too pretty in that dress with the ribbons in your hair. Mama saved you from him putting his hands in places you wouldn't want him to feel."

I felt sick at the thoughts that came to me. But Mama had saved me. I fell asleep in Trudi's arms feeling so grateful to have a Mama like our Mama. I would always do my best to be like her.

From that time on though, Trudi and I served regularly at Mama's parties. It seemed as if she'd been ordered to do so. She wasn't too happy at the new red, silk dresses that were delivered at the house for us. They had stiffer petticoats; we got real stockings, too, made of nylon, which made our legs so smooth. We kept on playing with them, smoothing them over our legs, so delicious was the feeling of being a woman and being grown up.

"Do that in front of Gunther," Mama told us, her expression grim, "and he'll spend even more on you." But as we looked wide-eyed at her, not quite knowing what we should say or do, she relented from her seriousness and began to dance with us about the salon so that our dresses flared. We got cool, airy sensations about our legs from our new, silk dresses.

"Oh, you make such beautiful little girls," said Mama, almost breathless as we collapsed into a pile of petticoats on the sofa, giggling as she tickled us both.

Mama would even let us wear a little of her makeup at times, especially about our eyes and on our lips. Trudi and I were always trying on her perfume. Its fragrance

made us feel so ladylike. We played games where the gentlemen escorted the pretty girl to the dances. We had to behave like ladies. We took turns being the pretty girl and the gentleman.

But we never wore makeup or perfume to Mama's parties. We weren't that sort of girl, Mama said. I was too shy to ask what sort of girl that was.

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When Mama decided to move, it all happened very quickly, to us at least. Gunther came around one morning and talked with Mama in the salon. When she came back to us in the kitchen, she was as pale as the flour I was kneading for bread.

Trudi and I were concerned right away. "What is it?" we both asked together, knowing that something bad was going to happen to us girls.

"I have to leave," Mama said, her face still stunned from whatever Gunther had said.

"We can look after things here," I said, quickly, anxiously, wiping my hands and rearranging my grey skirts so that I could sit and dice carrots we needed for dinner.

"No," Mama said, suddenly looking at me with a frown. "I mean that I have to leave this country. Today."

Trudi and I looked at each other, dumbfounded. We'd thought it might happen some day. We'd talked about our wonderful life with Mama coming to an end and what we might do. Everyone at Mama's parties talked of 'getting out' before it was too late. Would Mama go some day, we'd wondered fearfully, as we lay in our basement bed listening to the dancing, and leave us behind? We'd whispered late into the night about it. We knew it could happen.