

# When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (2019)



The family is reunited  
after safely escaping from  
Germany (c) Warner Bros.

As Holocaust stories go, this is very mild, and thus a suitable film for introducing children to the subject. There are no Gestapo round-ups of Jews, street beatings, or any trace of barbed wire, not to speak of ovens or mass shootings. Just a family story fortunate enough to have a father who can see clearly what will happen to his homeland if the fanatical Adolph Hitler should win the upcoming election.

Based on Judith Kerr's semi-autobiographical 1971 children's novel of the same title, director Caroline Link's film is told through the eyes of 9-year-old Anna Kemper (Riva Krymalowski). At a children's costume party in Berlin in 1933 she is being harassed by several boys dressed in Nazi uniforms. Her older brother Max (Marinus Hohman), dressed as Zorro, comes to her rescue. At home her father Arthur (Oliver Masucci) and Dorothea (Carla Juri) are concerned about adult Nazis. Arthur is a prominent theater critic who has also denounced Nazism and thus is on Hitler's list of enemies to be eliminated when he comes to power. With the election a short time away, Arthur leaves for Prague on business and arranges for the family to

join him soon in Zurich, Switzerland should Hitler become the German Chancellor.

Of course, Hitler does take power, and the Kempers quickly pack up essentials. Anna must choose between her toys, thus leaving behind the beloved stuffed rabbit of the title. She also must say Goodbye to the family's best friend, her beloved godfather, "Uncle" Julius (Justus von Dohnányi), who assures her that "Good will always win." She also tearfully embraces family's devoted housekeeper, Heimpi (Ursula Werner), promising to return to her in soon. Struggling over whether to bring her old stuffed rabbit or the newer stuffed dog, she chooses the latter. The children are admonished to keep their departure a secret from everyone. Heimpi also loyally tells no one.

The family stay in Switzerland is fairly brief, with the children having trouble understanding some of the customs—the German spoken at school being very different from that of Berlin. There is antisemitism among the people, plus little job opportunity for Arthur. The neutral Swiss are worried that his views on Hitler might upset their big neighbor.

The family moves to Paris in the hope of better employment opportunities but pay is not so good for the few writing jobs that Arthur can find. They settle into a genteel poverty, the children complaining about the monotony of their meager meals and trying to cope with the problem of purchasing pencils. Anna is continually drawing, her main subject being catastrophes of one kind or another. Julius keeps in touch via postcards. For her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday Anna is delighted by Heimpi's telephone call to her. Either from her or Julius Anna learns that the Nazis had raided their house and burned their books and other possessions.

Anna is very fortunate to have a father with such prescience that he could detect danger in time to leave Germany. So many Jews refused to heed the warnings, and thus wound-up perishing

in Hitler's death camps—indeed, the family learns that Julius suffers a sad fate. Many have criticized the film because the family's sufferings were minor compared to the six million who perished, but losing your home, furnishings, career, and life-long friends are still serious enough to warrant a film in my opinion. And as I wrote earlier, this is a good film to introduce a child to antisemitism and its evil effects.

*This review is in the September issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.*