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English Comprehension Test

A Candle in the Dark, by Adèle Geras

This is part of a story set in Germany 1938, during the time Hitler was in power. It takes place during 'Kristalnacht,' or 'The Night of the Broken Glass' a night when all the Jews in Germany were attacked at the same time. Jewish shops and houses, and all their contents, were smashed and destroyed.

Clara could see how white her mother's face was, how tightly her lips were clamped together, and how her hands trembled as she poured out the coffee. She could hear, in the distance, a rhythmic pounding that was coming nearer and nearer. I know that sound, she thought. I've heard it before. It's 'Them,' marching. 'They' were the Nazis. Clara tried not to say that word, even to her self. It was an ugly, black little word that buzzed in her head and reminded her of spiders; the spider-symbol of the Swastika which was on every flag now, and on every street, made her feel a little ill. Nothing was the same any more, not since Herr Hitler had become Chancellor. Everything had changed. Clara remembered the first time she had read a notice on a shop window: 'Jews are not wanted as customers in this shop.' She had turned to her mother in horror.

'But this is Tante Trude's drapery! We always come here.'

'From now on,' said Lotte, 'If Trude serves us it will cause trouble for her.'

'She likes me,' Clara said. 'I know she likes me. Last time we were in the shop, she gave me nearly half a metre of pink ribbon for Angelika's petticoat. Real satin ribbon.'

'Poor Angelika!' Lotte tried to make light of it. 'Soon she will cease to be the best-dressed doll in town. Come, we will try to find a draper somewhere else.'

Everything was different. Elsa, who had been coming to the flat since Clara was a baby to help with the cleaning and the cooking, didn't come any longer. Working for Jewish families was frowned upon, and Clara had heard her father say, sadly, that soon even Nussbaum and Sons, the furniture store that had been in the family for years and years, would be theirs no longer. No Jew would be allowed to own anything.

Losing her best friend, though - that was the very worst of all. At first, when Marianne moved from her usual place in the classroom to sit beside Monika, Clara couldn't understand why.



'My father told me I mustn't sit next to you any longer,' Marianne said. 'So I can't!'

Clara walked home from school that day all by herself for the first time. A fog of tears had filled her eyes, so that she could hardly find her way. Now she went to a Jewish school and hardly ever saw Marianne. Only once, in the street, the person whom she had loved best in the world after Mama and Papa and Maxi had crossed over to the other pavement to avoid her.

'Try not to cry when such things happen,' Clara's mother had told her. 'I know how much it must have hurt you, but don't give her the satisfaction. Pretend you don't care.'

Clara thought of these things as the noises grew louder and louder, outside in the street. Inside, there was nothing but silence. Suddenly, Mitzi, the new black-and-white-kitten, raced out from behind Maxi's bedroom door and fled across the floor. She squeezed herself into the tiny gap between the bottom of the bookcase and the floor. Maxi came chasing into the salon after her, dressed in his nightclothes.

'Mama, there's shouting! Mitzi is frightened . . . she ran away . . .'

'Come and sit here next to me, Maxi, and keep very quiet till the noise is finished. Mitzi is under the bookcase. She is quite safe, lieblich.'

'But why are they shouting? What are they doing? Will they come here?'

'Sssh! Sit quietly and maybe they will go soon,' said Lotte.

Questions:

1. Explain the following words in the context of the story: (5 marks)
 - a) 'clamped' (line 1)
 - b) 'buzzed' (line 6)
 - c) 'frowned upon' (line 21)

2. What do you think the following phrases mean? (4 marks)
 - a) 'It was an ugly, black little word' (line 5)
 - b) 'the furniture store that had been in the family for years and years' (line 22)
 - c) 'her usual place' (line 26)
 - d) 'a fog of tears'

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3. How do you think Clara felt when she realised that there were shops her family were no longer allowed in? Whose shop will she miss the most?
(5 marks)
4. Describe in your own words and give reasons why Clara's mother was so scared.
(4 marks)
5. Why do you think Marianne moves away from Clara? Is it really because she doesn't like her any more?
(3 marks)
6. What was Clara's reaction to what Marianne does to her?
(2 marks)
7. Lotte, Clara's mother says that 'maybe they will go soon.' Write in your own words who 'they' are, and if they really will go away soon.
(5 marks)
8. Who is Maxi? Using the text, describe how he acts and how he must be feeling about what is happening.
(4 marks)
9. Imagine you are Clara, sitting, scared, with Lotte. Continue the story from the end of the passage, writing about what you maybe feeling and what happens next. You should try and write about 10 lines.
(8 marks)