

EXCERPT FROM A RELATIVE INVASION - THE TRILOGY

BOOK ONE

INTRUSION

Chapter One

October 22nd 1937.

Today the Duke and Duchess of Windsor met Herr Hitler at Berghof

Kenneth. Until now he'd been just a name on a Christmas card written by someone else. *Kenneth*. Billy felt his tongue thick against his lips. It felt the same when he said 'filth'. 'Filthy' was the word Mother used when he'd got dirty knees playing outside.

He bent down to his hobby horse's hard white head. The furry strip along the top of its neck was nice to stroke. He whispered into the leathery ear, 'Do you know? We're really, really going to have a boy to play with *here*, in our house! He's called a cousin.'

The horse's wheel was shiny red like a ripe tomato and when its head was pressed down, the wheel squeaked. Really, that was the horse talking. Horsey always said it would be jolly good if Jim and Andrew could come over after school. But Mother said it would be too much to have a child here to play.

Now he would!

He smiled to himself. Yesterday, he'd felt really important at News Time. Miss Peake was kind and sometimes wore a pretty blouse. He'd put up his hand.

'Billy? Do you have some news for us?'

'I've got a cousin and he's coming to my house.'

'My cousin lives next door,' said Sonia.

Dick and Mick shouted out that they had UMPTEEN cousins not silly old ONE.

'No such number, umpteen.' Sonia was clever, and she knew.

'Loads, anyway.'

'Yes, loads 'n loads.'

‘Now twins, that’s not very nice’. Miss Peake smiled, ‘We’re all happy that Billy has his cousin visiting, aren’t we, children?’

‘Yes, Miss Peake,’ everyone chanted.

At home time, he’d told Mother, ‘Miss Peake is ever so pleased that my cousin is visiting.’

Mother’s mouth moved into something like a smile, only not as nice. ‘Perhaps she’d like to entertain him, then.’

Now it was the very day the cousin was coming. He stroked Horsey’s head. On Monday, he’d tell everyone what he and Kenneth had played.

‘Billy!’ Mother’s voice calling upstairs made him start. ‘Are you washed?’

He pulled Horsey away from the window where they’d been watching the children in the house over the road laughing and even shouting.

‘Billy? They’ll be here soon.’

He rode out of his bedroom and along the passage, past the big bathroom with its misty windows and the little lavatory with its long chain and white knob and down the stairs, being very careful not to catch the hobby horse wheel on the stair-rods as he went. At the bottom, it made a nice clickety-clack sound on the hall tiles.

Mother waved her arms. ‘For goodness sake, child! Everyone can hear that for miles. People who live in Primley Road don’t want your noise.’

The horse clattered into the hall-stand. Mother looked down with her *Don’t* face. ‘You’ll have to behave when your relatives come, Billy. I’m sure Kenneth will, with that angelic face.’

A jelly face! He started to ask, ‘Mother, why does—?’

‘That horse in the umbrella stand, please. Look, here’s your father home from Chambers.’

Horsey squeaked, ‘Something big’s going to happen.’

Father’s shadow showed through the glass in the front door.

The galloping had made Billy’s socks slide down to his ankles. They were a new pair but the elastic wasn’t very strong. He pulled them up as neatly as he could before the front door opened.

Father came in with a whoosh of wintry wind, shaking raindrops from his gabardine. He shut the front door, leaving the dark outside with the empty milk bottles. ‘Here I am, Marcia.’

Mother’s shoes clippity-clicked forward as she went to collect his briefcase. ‘You’re quite late, Herbert. High tea is nearly ready. I’d have thought you’d be eager to entertain your relatives.’

‘Indeed I am, dear. Family near at last. But what a day! Court sat late and then we were discussing this.’ He tapped the newspaper under his arm. ‘Ha! The Windsors’ latest. Did you see it?’

I don't know what Frank's take on it will be. Judge Ware-Simpkins called it outrageous. I tend to agree.'

Mother nodded. She didn't answer but put his briefcase in its place and dabbed the raindrops off it. One dropped onto the hobbyhorse's mane, but it didn't squeak.

'Swanning over to meet Hitler, Marcia. Bavaria. Huh! The King surely won't like that— his brother mixing with the ruddy Huns.'

Mother shrugged. 'They must know what they're doing, I suppose. We don't want any nastiness, after all.'

The wireless voice often spoke about Nasties. Mother was afraid that Nasties would come here. Billy looked at Father to see if he was frightened of Ruddy Huns, but he was twirling his umbrella into a swizzle stick like a barber's pole.