

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

You can't go home again.

Mann, Klaus

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YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

By KLAUS MANN

So I got finally the mission for which I had been waiting for the past twelve years; The Stars and Stripes, Mediterranean Edition, to the staff of which I belong, sent me "on temporary duty" to Allied-occupied Germany. My first job was to gather material for an overall picture of conditions in Austria and Bavaria.

Now, I can't write my story without first explaining why this particular mission was so excitingly welcome to me. It so happens that I was born and brought up in Bavaria. The city of Munich used to be my hometown; I left the place in 1933 when Hitler came to power, and have never set foot there since. Naturally, I was anxious to find out in what kind of shape the beautiful town on the Isar River had survived the storms of the past few years and months. Besides there were a few friends -- a very small group of ^{people} ~~persons~~ for whose political integrity I had certain proofs and whom I wanted to see again. And then of course there was our family home -- the roomy, hospitable villa on the river where I ~~had~~ spent my childhood and many a year of my adult life. None of us knew what might have happened to the dear old joint since the

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Nazis had taken it over, in 1933 -- stealing it simply and plainly, without even as much as a legal pretext. Situated in one of the residential suburbs, the house had probably been spared destruction. Who were its inhabitants now? Some Party bigshots, no doubt, or nasty opportunists who had profited by Nazi robbery. What fun it would be to kick out those thieves and give them a piece of my mind! I was looking forward to this little triumph.

The first Germans with whom I came in contact during this trip were the supposedly disarmed Landsers cloaking the roads of northern Italy. I said "supposedly disarmed," because I found many of them still carrying their weapons. Especially the German M.P.s appeared fully equipped, with rifles, bayonets, steel helmets and all. Their function was to keep order among the German soldiers and also to protect them against the fury of the Italian Patriots.

What an amazing sight! On the highways and in the streets of cities like Trento and Bolzano columns of German forces and groups of American fighting men met each other, ^(-- in most cases) ~~with~~ the Germans outnumbering the Americans about ten to one. There was ~~certainly~~ certainly no mingling, no frater-

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nization; but there was no friction either. GIs told me that they didn't like to be surrounded by "Krauts" without being allowed to take a shot at them; on the other hand, they all seemed to agree that it would have been a tough proposition to "mop up" a number of German division in this rugged terrain, and that the armistice therefore had come kind of handy. As for the Germans, they seemed to feel the same way. Their behaviour may be described as correct.

That is not to say that ~~their attitude~~^{it} was pleasant or adequate to the circumstances. They did not act as if they realized that they were defeated. Well-fed, well-cled, well-organized, they appeared as cocky as ever. Surely, there was nothing humble about them.

I talked with a few of them. What they told me suggested that in their opinion the armistice on the Italian front ~~was not~~ had not been enforced on them as a consequence of the total German collapse but was rather some kind of clever "deal" which their leadership had decided to make. One German officer-- a brutal-looking Prussian with a pig-like, fat, rosy face -- had the nerve to ask me whether it was true that we

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had been quarreling with the Russians and that the present armistice was only a prelude to a coming German-American alliance directed against the Soviet Union.

While telling him off, I promised myself not to forget this vicious fool in Wehrmacht uniform. It would be helpful, indeed, necessary to remember this arrogant grimace whenever anybody, German or German sympathizer, should try to ~~convince~~ convince me that the German people was altogether harmless and innocent -- just misguided by a small gang of madmen and criminals. This smirking rascal here in front of me had hardly ever belonged to the upper strata of the Nazi hierarchy. His appearance was that of a fairly well-to-do business man dressed up as a Herr Hauptmann. But his thoughts were poison, his suave speech was more impertinent than any bullying could have been. There are millions *(of the same kind)* ~~like that~~. Our future allies indeed!

Notwithstanding the somewhat cumbersome presence of so numerous "supermen," northern Italy was obviously liberated. The atmosphere prevailing between Bologna and the Brenner Pass was one of exultation with a ~~light~~ touch of confusion and ~~and~~ bewilderment. People waved and smiled

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at you wherever you showed up. Almost every inhabited building displayed the Italian colors, and many a wall was ~~was~~ adorned with big, clumsily painted inscriptions like the following one: "Thanks for liberating us we have waiting so long."

The picture changed as ^(soon as) we crossed the Brenner. The trip itself was most pleasant. We found the highway in unexpectedly good shape, with most of the damage already repaired thanks to the efficiency of our engineers. As for the railroad installations, however, Allied bombers have done a terribly thorough job. To a layman in technical matters, this chaos of twisted metal and charred wood looked like a hopeless mess which no human ingenuity could ever salvage and make workable again.

On the other side of the Pass, there still were plenty of flags -- the red-white banner of pre-Hitler Austria. Yet the difference between conquest and liberation was to be sensed ^{in the air} from the moment on we entered Austrian territory. ^{American} ~~allied~~ soldiers, soldiers guarding strategic points and patrolling village streets appeared grimly vigilant, always on the alert. There was no smiling or waving.

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Arriving at Innsbruck after dark, we found ourselves in a completely dead, ghostly town. The curfew, lasting from 7 PM until 6 AM, is being strictly enforced. Nobody was to be seen except heavily armed guards. The streets were deserted, silent, blacked-out. Although Innsbruck has been bombed, comparatively little, the marks of destruction were only too conspicuous in the pale, chilly moonlight. In short, the first impression was as melancholy as it could possibly be.

Of course, the next morning, under a sunny sky and with the streets full of people, the place showed a different, much less depressing aspect. I paid a visit to the City Hall -- the so-called Landhaus (Country House) where the Austrian Patriots, under supervision of Allied military authorities, are busy carrying on and reorganizing the city's administration.

The leader of the anti-Nazi Resistance Movement in Innsbruck, Dr. Karl Gruber, received me with almost enthusiastic cordiality. Eager to tell me all about the efforts and exploits of his movement, he overwhelmed me with dramatic stories about the risks and adventures of underground operations, fights between SS men and Austrian rebels, the

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cowardly surrender of a German army commander to a handful of Tyrolian patriots, and so forth.

"Well," he concluded, beaming all over his honest, intelligent face, "it's all over at last! We are free again!"

He did not say or suggest that he was disappointed about anything that had happened after the liberation. But when I asked him whether he had expected that the non-fraternization rule would be applied to Austria too, he answered: "Frankly, no. I don't think that we deserve to be treated like the Germans. But I don't worry about any ^{temporary} ~~minor~~ hardships or misunderstandings. Surely, the Allies will gradually find out that the majority of ~~us~~ us Austrians are people of good will. Everything will be all right in the end. I am confident, full of hope."

Salzburg where we made our next stop appeared in a much better shape than Innsbruck. Not that there were less ruins or less patrolling GIs; but the atmosphere seemed more relaxed, more friendly. The charm of this unique place has somehow managed to survive the ^{double} ~~ordeal~~ of Nazism and war. I recognized, not without a certain nostalgic delight, the Salzburg I had known -- Mozart's birthplace with its lovely Baroque fountains and

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churches; the exquisite setting for the famous summer festivals which ^(once) ~~had~~ attracted music lovers from all over the world.

It was good to find the Festspielhaus (Festival Theater) still intact; so there will be a place for conductors like Toscanini and Bruno Walter to return to, when Europe is ready again for such delicate and sublime things as Mozart operas. There was the fine Salzburg cathedral in front of which the late Max Reinhardt produced the medieval mystery of "Every Man," and there were the hotels -- most of them now "Off Limits" or "Requisitioned by Allied Forces" -- where I had once enjoyed leisurely holidays.

How I would have liked to stay in Salzburg for a little while! But I had to rush on, to Munich -- partly because it was my professional duty to do so; partly on account of a little business I hoped to take care of on the Isar River.

In Bavaria most of the flags were white -- ^{tangible} symbols of defeat and submission. But in various villages and small towns, I was surprised ^(to notice also) ~~the display of~~ the old Bavarian colors, blue and white. Clearly, this was meant as an anti-Prussian ~~demonstration; it indicated a tendency~~

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gesture, a demonstration of Bavarian separatism -- away from Berlin and the Reich.

However impatient I was to reach the goal of my journey, there were some further delays. First of all, I had to have a look at Berchtesgaden; to inspect Hitler's conquered mountain fortress was even more important than to see our modest but nicely preserved family home again. So up to Berchtesgaden we went -- and the excursion certainly proved worthwhile. The French flag waving over the ruins of the Fuehrer's famous retreat; Allied soldiers relishing the choice wines from Hitler's well-supplied cellars; the pathetic remnants of this once sumptuous household scattered over the parched, blackened ground -- it was indeed a unique, memorable ~~memorable~~ spectacle!

The following day we were all set to take off for Munich, when word came through that ~~Reich~~ Reichs Marshal Hermann Goering had been captured and could be interviewed by Allied correspondents. Who could have resisted such a temptation? Naturally, we joined the convoy of journalists ^{who were} and high-ranking officers ~~which~~ was guided to the hiding place where the

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fabulous fat man, well guarded by American troops, was waiting for whatever may be in store for him.

He turned out to be less voluminous and less self-assured than I had expected. He was beautifully dressed, though -- all in light grey, with gorgeous, swastika-adorned epaulets. The gloves which he kept twisting between his short, spatular fingers matched the color of his uniform. He was obviously nervous and worried as he tried to convince the assembled journalists that he was not really a war criminal. It was fascinating to watch him wriggling and lying.

But now it was high time for us to proceed to Munich; not even the revived Fuehrer could have distracted us from our route.

If I had known what the city actually looks like, I would not have been in a hurry to get there. Of course, I expected to find a mutilated, half-destroyed town; but the reality turned out to be ~~was worse, than I had ever expected.~~

Munich is dead, it does not exist anymore. What used ~~to~~ to be the fairest town of Germany, ~~now~~ one of the most attractive European cities, has been transformed into a vast cemetery, ~~now, into heaps of rubble.~~

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Throughout the whole center, not one -- literally not one! -- building has been spared. There is nothing left but heaps of rubble and some seemingly undamaged, or little damaged, fronts, behind which there is rubble again. I could hardly find my way through the once familiar streets. It was like an evil dream, ~~to look at this terribly estranged scenery with which I had been once so intimately acquainted.~~

Was this empty, charred shell really the main railroad station? Was this bleak, ~~empty path~~ ^{road} lined by ruins indeed the once so busy Theatiner-Strasse where my grandmother and my mother used to do their shopping? Yes, I recognized this dreary mess over there; it was the opera house where I had heard for the first time the works of Mozart, Verdi and Wagner. I saw the names of book stores, barbers, restaurants, hotels, to the clientele of which I had once belonged; now their trademarks crowned piles of rocks and rubbish.

How could I have ever hoped to ~~find~~ ^(locate) any friends in this deserted, devastated place? And as for ~~the~~ that villa on the Isar River which I had suspected to be occupied by impertinent ~~men~~ intruders ~~men~~, I realized by now that I would hardly have a chance to kick out anybody,

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simply for want of a locality fit for such purposes.

As the residential district which I entered at last seemed to be comparatively ~~well-preserved~~ ^{untouched}, I became more hopeful again. And when I approached the house, my first impression was: There it is! Still standing up! Still intact! It has weathered the storms!

But it hadn't, really. As so many other buildings in town, it had survived ^{only} as a hollow shell; it was the fairly well-preserved outside structure which had momentarily deluded me. A second glance corrected my mistake. Obviously, the place had been bombed; inside it was all in pieces.

I managed to enter the house and presently noticed changes which had nothing to do with the air raids. ~~So there had been intruders, and they had done over the place.~~ ^{There were} I found walls and doors which I had never known. All the rooms had become smaller as if they had contracted with disgust and disapproval. My father's studio, once spacious and stately, had now a petty, undersized aspect. Where our dining room used to be, I found ugly remnants of a kitchen installation. My mother's drawing room -- ^{once} a sanctum from which we children had been banished, except on

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festive occasions -- had completely changed its shape and character. If the destruction caused by the bombs was bad, these wanton distortions were worse^s. If I had only come in time to throw out and punish the transgressors!

As it seemed impossible to get up to the second floor, I decided that there would be no sense in hanging around any longer. Why should I pro-
(which I had already experienced in the ruined streets
long this nightmare? The sense of estrangement and profound perplexion
overcame me again, almost intolerably intensified. To ~~stare~~^{look} at these
broken walls and empty windows was like ~~looking~~^{facing} at a sinister caricature
of my own past. I made haste to get out.

While lingering in the garden (how badly neglected it was! and all its flowers were gone!), I happened to look up to the balcony in front of my own room, on the top floor. Suddenly I ~~discovered~~^{noticed} a person half-
hidden behind the balustrade. It was a young woman, ~~As I shouted at her,~~
she emerged reluctantly from her hiding place. Her face could have been almost pretty, ~~but~~ but whatever charm it had was marred by its sullen, worried expression.

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"What are you doing up there?" I said to her.

She seemed to be somewhat surprised to be addressed ~~in~~ in German
(do you want me to go?)
by an American soldier. Yet she remained suspicious. "Where ~~else should~~
~~I go?~~ she said, shrugging her shoulders. "You Americans have re-

quisitioned my apartment -- my aunt's apartment, I mean; for I have
been bombed out of my own. I must sleep somewhere -- isn't that right?

So I thought this balcony here would be as good as any other place.

-- Do you want to throw me out?" she added in a lowered voice.

I was rather embarrassed. "The whole thing seems so strange," I
said, somewhat evasively. "I didn't even think there was a passable
way up to the second floor."

"Well, there isn't really," she explained, without a smile. "But
~~we~~ ^{my} have ^{our} ladder."

It was an ingenious mechanism thanks to which I reached my former
room. The girl showed me the way. She had become more friendly since
she realized that it was not my intention to evacuate her from her
balcony.

My room, too, had shrunk; but the balcony was unchanged, except

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for the girl's mattress and flower table. It looked all very neat and trim. I told her so, and she blushed a little. "It's all right," she said. "In fact, I'm rather happy here -- as long as it isn't raining, of course."

I felt that I owed her some explanation for ~~my~~ my curiosity; so I told her, as casually as I could, that I had known the previous owners of the house.

"Not old Private Councilor Siebert?" she cried. "I used to be his secretary; that's ^{how} ~~why~~ I happen to know the place."

No, I said, Siebert must have been after my time.

After a pause she said:
She looked at me askance. "You don't try to tell me that you've been acquainted with the SS men who lived here before Siebert moved in."

What SS men? I inquired. What was their business here?

"Why," she explained, in a calm, matter-of-fact manner, "they just took over the joint. Originally it belonged to a writer, but he didn't get along with the Nazis, so he left the country or was sent to a concentration camp -- I don't know what happened to him."

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In any case, as soon as he was gone the house was occupied by the SS men and their girls."

Their girls? This story became more and more fantastic! Had our home been used as a Nazi brothel?

But I was told by my hostess that the women who shared our rooms with the black-shirted storm troopers were by no means plain prostitutes. "They tried to be patriotic, I suppose," she continued with a wry smile. "You know, the propagation of the Nordic race, and all that kind of thing. The Fuehrer wanted them to get babies from racially first-class guys. So they came here and did their duty with those picked fellows of the SS. They got their babies right here -- it was all very hygienic. No brothel, if you please! Rather something like a baby factory."

She had spoken quite seriously; besides, she was not the type of girl that would try to pull jokes. I didn't know what to say. ^{sh} Could I ask her whether she too had done her patriotic duty -- in my former bedroom perhaps -- before accepting the job as the Private Councilor's secretary? But for one reason or another I did not feel

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like asking further questions. ~~So~~ I just mumbled that it was getting
late and I had to take off.

"That's a pity," she said. "It was nice talking with you. Come again
whenever you want to. It's almost like home here, you know."

You can't go Home again

It was more than an assignment,
reporting on the old home town.

This was the mission for which I had been waiting the past 12 years. I was sent "on temporary duty" to Allied-occupied Germany to gather material for an overall picture of conditions in Austria and Bavaria.

I can't write my story, however, without first explaining why this particular mission was so welcome. It so happens that I was born and brought up in Bavaria. The city of Munich used to be my hometown; I left the place in 1933 when Hitler came to power and have never set foot there since. So I was anxious to find out how the beautiful town on the Isar River had survived the storms of the past few years and months.

Besides there were a few friends - a very small group of people for whose political integrity I had certain proofs and whom I wanted to see again. And then, of course, there was our family home in one of Munich's residential suburbs - a roomy hospitable villa on the river where I spent my childhood and many a year of my adult life. The Nazis had taken it over in 1933 - without so much as a pretext.

The first Germans with whom I came in contact during this trip were "supposedly disarmed" because I found many of them still carrying weapons. German MPs, especially, appeared fully equipped with rifles, bayonets, steel helmets and all. Their job was to keep order among the German soldiers and also to protect them against the fury of Italian Patriots.

What an amazing sight! On highways and in the streets of cities like Trento and Bolzano, columns of German forces and groups of American fighting men met each other - in most cases the Germans outnumbering the Americans about ten to one. There was certainly no mingling, no fraternization; but there was no friction either. The GIs told me that they didn't like to be surrounded by "Krauts" without being allowed to take a shot at them; on the other hand, they all seemed to agree that it would have been a tough proposition to "mop up" a number of German divisions in this rugged terrain and that the surrender, therefore, had come in kind of handy.

As for the Germans, they seemed to feel the same way. Their behavior may be described as correct.

That is not to say that it was pleasant or adequate to the circumstances. They did not act as if they realized that they had been defeated. Well-fed, well-clad, well-organized, they appeared as cocky as ever. Surely there was nothing humble about them.

I talked with a few of them. What they told me suggested that in their opinion the surrender on the Italian front had not been enforced on them as the consequence of a total German collapse but was rather some kind of a clever "deal" which their leadership had decided to make. One German officer - a brutal-looking Prussian with a piglike, fat rosy face - had the nerve to ask me whether it was true that we had been quarreling with the Russians and that the present situation was only a prelude to a coming German-American alliance directed against the Soviet Union.

While telling him off, I promised myself not to forget this vicious fool in a Wehrmacht uniform. It would be helpful, indeed necessary, to remember this arrogant grimace whenever anybody, German or German sympathizer, should try to convince me that the German people were altogether harmless and innocent - just misguided by a small group of criminals. This smirking landser here in front of me had hardly belonged to the upper stratum of the Nazi hierarchy. His appearance was that of a fairly well-to-do business man dressed as a "Herr Hauptmann." But his thoughts and his suave speech were poison. There are millions like him. Our future allies indeed!

Notwithstanding the somewhat cumbersome presence of so many "supermen", northern Italy was obviously liberated. The atmosphere prevailing between Bologna and the Brenner Pass was one of exultation with a touch of confusion and bewilderment. Almost every inhabited building displayed Italian colors and many a wall was adorned with big, clumsily-painted inscriptions like the following one:

"Thanks for liberating us, we have waited so long."

The picture changed as soon as we crossed the Brenner. We found the highway in unexpectedly good shape with most of the damage already repaired, thanks to the efficiency of our engineers. As for railroad

installations, however, Allied bombers have done a terribly thorough job. To a layman in technical matters, this chaos of twisted metal and charred wood ~~which~~ looked like a hopeless mess which no human ingenuity could ever salvage and make workable again.

On the other side of the pass there still were plenty of flags - the red and white banner of the "before Hitler" Austria. Yet the difference between conquest and liberation was to be sensed in the air the moment we entered Austrian territory. American soldiers guarding strategic points and patrolling village streets appeared grimly vigilant, always on the alert. There was no smiling or waving.

Arriving at Innsbruck after dark, we found ourselves in a completely dead, ghost town. A curfew lasting from 7 PM until 6 AM was being strictly enforced. Nobody was to be seen except heavily-armed guards. Streets were deserted, silent, blacked-out. Although Innsbruck has been bombed comparatively little, marks of destruction were only too conspicuous in the pale, chilly moonlight.

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"Well", he concluded, beaming all over his honest, intelligent face, "it's all over at last! We are free again!"

He did not say or suggest that he is disappointed about anything that had happened after liberation. But when I asked him whether he had expected that the non-fraternization rule would be applied to Austria too, he answered, "Frankly, no. I don't think that we deserve to be treated like the Germans. But I don't worry about any temporary hardships or misunderstandings. Surely the Allies will gradually find

out that the majority of us Austrians are people of goodwill. Everything will be all right in the end. I am confident, full of hope."

In Bavaria, finally, I noticed immediately that most of the flags were white - tangible symbols of defeat and submission. But in various villages and small towns I was surprised to notice also old Bavarian colors, blue and white. Clearly, this was meant as an anti-Prussian gesture, a demonstration of Bavarian separatism - away from Berlin and the Reich.

Approaching Munich, I expected to find a mutilated, half-destroyed town; reality turned out to be much worse. Munich is dead, it does not exist anymore. What used to be the fairest town of Germany, one of the most attractive European cities, has been transformed into a vast cemetery. Throughout the whole center not one - literally not one! - building has been spared. There is nothing left but heaps of rubble and some seemingly undamaged, or little damaged, fronts behind which there is rubble again. I could hardly find my way through the once familiar streets. It was like an evil dream.

My old residential district which I entered at last seemed to be comparatively untouched, however, and I became more hopeful. And when I approached our former home my first impression was: There it is! Still standing! Still intact! It had weathered the storm!

But it hadn't, really. As so many other buildings in town, it had survived only as a hollow shell; it was the fairly well preserved outside structure which had momentarily deluded me. Inside it was all in pieces.

I managed to enter the house and presently noticed changes which had nothing to do with bombings. There were walls and doors which I had never known. All the rooms had become smaller as though they had contracted with disgust and disapproval. My father's studio, once spacious and stately, had now a petty, undersized aspect. Where our dining room used to be I found ugly remnants of^a kitchen installation. My mother's drawing room - once a sanctum from which we children had been banished except on festive occasions - had completely changed its shape and character.

As it seemed impossible to get up to the second floor, I decided that there would be no sense in hanging around any longer. The sense of estrangement and profound perplexity which I had already experienced

in the ruined streets overcame me again, almost intolerably intensified. To look at these broken walls and empty windows was like facing a sinister caricature of my own past. I made haste to get out.

While lingering in the garden, I happened to look up to the balcony in front of my room on the top floor. Suddenly I noticed someone half hidden behind the balustrade. It was a young woman; realizing that she was discovered, she emerged reluctantly from her hiding place. Her face could have been almost pretty but whatever charm it had was marred by its sullen worried expression.

"What are you doing up there ?" I said to her. She seemed to be somewhat surprised to be addressed in German by an American soldier. Yet she remained suspicious.

"Where do you want me to go ?" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "You Americans have requisitioned my apartment - my aunt's apartment, I mean; for I have been bombed out of my own. I must sleep somewhere - isn't that right ? So I thought this balcony here would be as good as any other place. Do you want to throw me out ?" she added in a lowered voice.

I was rather embarrassed. "I didn't think there was a passable way up to the second floor", I said, somewhat evasively.

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My room, too, had shrunk; but the balcony was unchanged except for the girl's mattress and flower table. It all looked very neat and trim. I told her so and she blushed a little. "It's all right", she said. "In fact, I am rather happy here - as long as it isn't raining, of course."

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"Why", she explained in a calm matter-of-fact manner, "they just took over the joint. Originally it belonged to a writer but he didn't get along with the Nazis so he left the country or was sent to a concentration camp - I don't know what happened to him. In any case as soon as he was gone the house was occupied by the SS men and their girls."

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"That's a pity", she said. "It was nice talking with you. Come again whenever you want to. It's almost like home here, you know."

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