



## Hitler's Canary

### Sandi Toksvig

#### About the book

*Hitler's Canary* is based on the experiences of Sandi Toksvig's father and the stories he used to tell her as she was growing up. It is the tale of Bamse, a nine year old boy who lives in Copenhagen with his famous actress mother, set designing father and older brother and sister. It is the night of an after-show party at the Royal Copenhagen Theatre and Bamse wakes up as the Nazis are invading Denmark. Told through the eyes of Bamse we see how the Danes react to occupation – including making fun of the Nazi soldiers, and in some cases, befriending them.

Bamse's friend Anton who lives in the apartment upstairs is the same age as him but is Jewish. Bamse has trouble understanding why his friend is being treated differently to him and together they play some pranks on the German soldiers. Bamse's father reacts angrily to these pranks until the events grow steadily more serious, and Bamse's older brother Orlando goes into hiding with the resistance. The propaganda against Jews and communists grows, and the whole family becomes involved in the resistance.

Finally, as the order is given to round up all of Denmark's Jews, the family plays a key role in helping to hide and save the Jewish population. Bamse's mother makes a huge sacrifice, playing the role of her life, which helps to hide Anton and his family, and could have led to her own arrest should it have gone wrong.

#### About the author

Sandi Toksvig is a writer and broadcaster from Denmark. She lives in the UK, and she wrote the story based on the stories her father told her of his experiences during World War Two. He once said to Sandi when she asked why they did what they did, that it 'was the right thing to do'.

## Key Themes

### **People are not all good or all bad**

- Bamse's sister Masha starts to see a German soldier, and Bamse is horrified. Later the soldier ends up helping the family by giving them valuable information
- Bamse's uncle Johann agrees with the Nazis and welcomes their destructive measures. The family try to hide their opinions from him to begin with, but in the end he is convinced and takes part in saving the Danish Jews
- the family's maid disappears and they realise she has betrayed them, which shocks them all

### **Small acts of resistance**

- Bamse is involved in a lot of smaller acts of resistance, including making fun of German soldiers
- the Danes take to wearing coins as a necklace to symbolise the date of occupation

### **Victims of Nazi persecution were part of the community**

- Sallie Besiakov, the milliner, has her shop attacked by the Nazis, whilst Bamse's mother is in the shop. Sallie is Jewish, but people are incredibly shocked by the attack
- Bamse's mother's costumer Thomas is a gay man, but this is never really mentioned until he comes under persecution from the Nazis

### **Ordinary people can make a difference**

- the Danes take great courage from the King's defiance to the Nazis
- one focus of resistance activity takes place in a dentist's office

You can use HMD resources to find out more about other acts of resistance in:

>> [Sophie Scholl](#)

>> [Alone in Berlin](#)

>> [The Righteous Muslims](#)