

# MY FAMILY THE ENEMY

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# Family tree



**Jakob & Wilhelmina** (Fred's German grandparents)



**George & Queenie** (Fred's English grandparents)



**Walter & Violet** (Fred's parents)



**Fred & his sister Lil** (Jack's great granddad & great aunt)



**Jess** (Jack's granny)



**Pamela** (Jack's mum)



**Jack**



## Chapter 5

‘Night, pest!’ said Lil, sticking her head around my bedroom door. The white of her long, cotton nightdress almost glowed in the dark.

‘Night,’ I replied flatly, as I lay curled up in my bed. The curtains were open and I was staring at the view of the navy night sky, of buffeting, shadowy clouds bowling past the moon.

Lil went to close the door and then stopped and stuck her head back around.

‘Are you alright, Fred?’

I didn’t say anything ‘cause my head was thumping. I’d had a headache for days now, ever since that thrashing from Mr Shaw.

‘Something’s up. What is it?’ said Lil, pitter-pattering over the chilly floorboards and leaping onto

the bottom of my bed. Her fair hair snaked down one side in a long plait.

I hadn't told any of my family what had happened. In the days after the pen prank, all I could do was stay silent in class and do my work as best I could. Sink into my seat and become invisible.

It didn't always work. Mr Shaw liked to save the hardest questions about maths and grammar just for me – the ones he *knew* I wouldn't be able to answer – so he could have a good shout at me and show me up in front of my classmates.

But maybe telling Lil some of it would help?

'My teacher's taken against me,' I said. 'Alec's sure it's 'cause of my name being German.'

'Ha!' she surprised me by laughing. 'Can you imagine if your Mr Shaw was *my* teacher? 'Call this mess homework, *Wilhelmina Müller?!*' With *my* whole name, you couldn't get more German if you tried!'

In spite of feeling sorry for myself, my sister made me smile. Her name really was *so* German! It wasn't just because of Father and his heritage. It was because Lil was born at the turn of the century, when there was a fashion for giving children German names. She was one of three *Wilhelminas* in her class. None of them liked being saddled with something so hefty, so they

were each known instead as Helen, Mina and Lil. Lil was as tall and skinny as her name. ‘Tall as a lily,’ Mother liked to say dreamily.

‘But hey, Fred, it’s no surprise your teacher’s being funny with you, what with the rubbish that’s in the newspapers,’ Lil carried on more seriously.

She was right. The front pages were full of the latest politics and all about the huge wave of young men volunteering to join the army. But *inside*, there were reports telling everyone to be on the look-out for German spies lurking here, there and everywhere.

I didn’t know what a German spy would look like, but I was pretty sure it wasn’t my father, or my family. Customers seemed to be thinking differently, though. I’d heard Mother telling Queenie that several of our regular customers had faded away, and Queenie said she’d spotted lots of them at the baker’s on the high road. Mother had moaned that the friendly man who delivered flour for the bread had become surly and started charging much, much more for each sack.

‘Mother was sounding upset just now when I passed the parlour,’ Lil told me.

‘What about?’ I asked, and pushed myself up onto my elbow. ‘Did you hear?’

‘I listened in at the door for a while,’ Lil said with a shrug. ‘She was telling Father that some of her neighbourhood friends have become very cool with her. One even pretended not see or hear Mother today when she was directly across the road.’

‘That’s not fair...’ I muttered.

Mother had been trying to prove what a decent, British family we were by volunteering to help the refugees suddenly arriving from Belgium. Germany had invaded Belgium on their way to fight France, and these thousands of families had to jump on boats and flee to the safety of Britain. They were being housed temporarily up at Alexandra Palace, while host families were found for them.

But even if the refugee situation was scary, Mother had still made me, Father and Lil laugh out loud yesterday when she’d told us about sorting through clothing donations for the Belgian refugees. Some generous but clueless posh Londoners were dropping off gentlemen’s top hats and huge feathered ladies’ bonnets. ‘Do they think these poor refugees are looking for outfits for a night at the *opera*?’ Mother had said with a wide grin.

So there she was, trying to be bright and normal, trying to do good, while her friends were turning away from her.

‘Yes, it’s not fair at all,’ Lil agreed. ‘And there’s something else; I’ve noticed Rob starting to give cheek to Father.’

‘No!’ I said in surprise. ‘I know you think Rob’s a show-off, Lil, but he’s always been polite to Father, hasn’t he?’

‘He *used* to be polite, but he’s changed his tune lately,’ said Lil. ‘I’ve heard Father asking Rob to do something, and it’s as if Rob deliberately takes his time before he gets round to it. He’s started to answer back, and roll his eyes when Father’s talking.’

‘What’s Father making of that?’ I asked. ‘He won’t stand for it, surely?’

‘I swear he’s pretending not to notice,’ said Lil.

‘But why would he do that?’ I asked next.

‘I think Father’s worried that if Rob leaves, he might not find another apprentice so easily. For one thing, all the young lads are signing up for the army. And for another...’

I could see my sister staring at me. We both knew what she meant without her having to spell it out. Young lads weren’t going to be queuing up to work for a ‘German’, were they?

‘What are you two chattering about?’ said Mother, appearing at my door with her usual sweet smile. ‘You need your sleep, you know!’

‘I’m going, I’m going!’ Lil said, hurrying off to her room, pausing to give Mother a quick hug on the way.

‘Sleep tight, Fred, my dear!’ Mother whispered, coming over to kiss me on the forehead.

I didn’t.

As soon as she was gone, and as soon as I slipped into sleep, my old nightmare paid me a visit.

Two years ago, in 1912, I was eight. The news then wasn’t of wars, but of a terrible tragedy at sea. The sinking of the Titanic was all anyone talked about at school, and in the evenings at the kitchen table.

And in the dark, tucked up in bed, bad dreams brewed in my head, playing out every dreadful detail that had been discovered about that fateful night. After a few months, the night terrors faded away.

But hello; here they were again...

*I’m on one of the many decks of the ship. The night sky is a velvet dark blue, with a prickling of stars. A freezing haze of mist hangs over the sea as we head speedily and surely west. In the stillness, music drifts down from somewhere on the upper decks. A waltz, by Johann Strauss, I recognise. I can hear distant ripples of laughter, murmurs of conversations.*

*The cold pinches at my face, turns my breath into clouds, but the rest of me is cosy; over my shoulders I've draped a blanket I've found left on a steamer chair. Someone had probably sat wrapped up in it this afternoon, staring out at the Atlantic, thinking of the place they left behind (England? France? Ireland?) and the destination for us all... New York City, America.*

*The ship would get there in three short days. What a thing to change country, change your life! A smile stretches across my face as I think of that – and then my breath catches in my throat...*

*Up ahead, the white shape looms out of the water.*

*We're taking a direct line towards it.*

*I start to scream a warning, but the cold freezes it into silence as it leaves my mouth!*

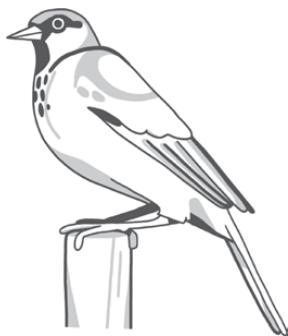
*I want to run and find a member of the crew to tell, but my hands are frozen to the metal railings I'm gripping onto.*

*There's nothing, nothing I can do! The iceberg is coming towards us, like a great white monster, about to devour us. It's huge enough as it is, but I know it has to be even more enormous and deadly below the water.*

*In minutes, it will collide against the side of the ship and–*

I woke up in bed with a start, my heart thundering. In a panic, I slid my hands under the blankets to check the bedsheet I was lying on. But it was alright – I'd managed to drag myself out of my sleep before I got too deep into the nightmare.

Still, I didn't dare nod off again after that, and yawned my way through school the next day. Mr Shaw wasn't happy so I got six of the belt.



## Chapter 6

The news changed so fast, so much was happening every day.

We'd only just heard that Britain had now declared war on Germany's allies, Austria-Hungary. That made a difference to the war in general, Father explained to me and Lil.

But it made a difference in class too, for Gertie in particular. Her father, Mr Bartó, was a popular piano teacher in the area, *and* Hungarian. Now Gertie got similar treatment to me, with Mr Shaw practically spitting out her name when he wasn't ignoring her.

This particular morning, the sun shone on this strangely normal-looking London, where in many ways, nothing felt normal at all. I wondered what newspaper sellers would be shouting on their street corners today.

And while I was wondering, I came down the stairs from our flat and into the small hallway between the front shop and the bakery at the back. I could hear Father's voice as he gave Lil instructions about how to lay out all today's produce in the blue velvet-lined window.

The bakery itself was empty, so I ducked in and grabbed two newly baked rock cakes that were cooling on a marble counter. And then I saw I was being watched – Rob was standing at the back door, smoking a cigarette. Father absolutely forbade anyone to smoke near the food, and would be furious if he saw Rob now. But the look I got from Rob was cocky – without a word he pointed his finger at me, as if to say, 'You tell on *me*, and I'll tell on *you*...'.

Whatever rule *Rob* was breaking, he'd made me feel guilty. I normally thought that Father wouldn't mind me helping myself to a bun or two, but with less customers and higher bills from his supplier, every penny mattered, I realised. I put the rock cakes back down and went to leave through the shop.

'Hey, Fred, my lad!' Father said cheerfully, looking as smart as ever in his matching trousers and waistcoat, and tie. His white shirt had a starched high collar and white cotton protectors covered his sleeves right up to

his elbows. Over all that, he wore a long white starched apron. ‘Another day of learning beckons, eh?’

Father jokingly tapped my head, to check if it was full of information or hollow. It was his regular leg-pull, and I found myself smiling, almost believing our family hadn’t a care in the world. Outside the door I could see Alec grinning, waiting for me. Everything felt as wonderfully normal as it should be.

And then a dark-dressed figure passed Alec and turned to come into the shop. As the door was pushed open, the bell above it jangled into life.

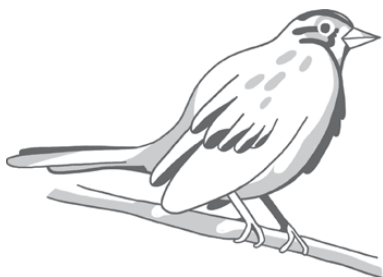
‘PC Gibbs!’ Father said with a warm smile. ‘How can we help you today? Are you after a pie for your dinner, perhaps? Or can I tempt you to a Madeira tart?’

‘Neither, Mr Müller,’ said my nan’s lodger. ‘I’m here on police business, I’m afraid. I’m going to need you to come with me to the station.’

Lil shot me a panicked look.

It felt as if an iceberg had moved closer.





## Chapter 7

Just as I got to the school gate, I felt so numb with worry that I had to sit on the low wall for a second. Alec patted my back, like the true friend he was.

‘What’s happened?’ I heard Prue call out through the railings that separated the boys’ and girls’ playgrounds.

‘Fred, are you alright?’ That was Gertie.

‘Don’t be so nose-y, you two!’ Alec told them both off. ‘It’s none of your business.’

Alec crouched down beside me and looked up into my face.

‘Hey, it wasn’t as bad as you thought, mate! It wasn’t as though your dad got arrested or anything!’ said Alec.

No, Father hadn’t been arrested. But it hardly meant everything was fine.

‘That’s easy for you to say!’ I found myself snapping at Alec. ‘It’s not *your* father that’s being treated like a spy!’

Even as I said that I knew I wasn’t being fair on Alec. But it *had* been a shock, having PC Gibbs come along to tell Father about the new government rule. All German ‘aliens’ had to register themselves with the police. They had to sign in at the police station every month. They were not allowed to leave their homes after 9pm. Like criminals!

The school bell suddenly jangled and I hurried to join our line in the playground. Alec followed me, but his expression had darkened.

‘Sorry,’ I mumbled quickly.

‘Uh-huh,’ he mumbled back.

A few minutes later, sitting at our desks, I looked around at Alec, but he didn’t notice, or *pretended* not to notice. I’d have to make it up with him later. I needed my best friend right now, more than ever.

‘Fred!’ I heard goody-goody Prue hiss at me and quickly swivelled round just as Mr Shaw strode into the classroom.

‘Let’s start with some spelling this morning, to sharpen your feeble brains!’ Mr Shaw announced,

picking up a piece of chalk from his desk. ‘Gertie Bartó – get up here and spell ‘*artillery*’ on the board.’

I watched Gertie get to her feet and walk shyly to the front of the class, the bottom of her calliper making a clacking sound on the wooden floor with each step she took. I suddenly felt as sorry for Gertie as I did for myself, ‘cause it wasn’t only German men who had to abide by the new Aliens’ Restriction Act; it was Austrian and Hungarian men too. Which meant Mr Bartó was probably paying a visit to the police station today as well.

‘Come on, hurry up!’ Mr Shaw snapped at Gertie, making my blood boil. ‘*Artillery!*’

With a trembling hand, Gertie took the chalk from Mr Shaw’s hand and gave it a go. In small, neat handwriting, she wrote ‘*artilerially*’.

‘NO!’ barked Mr Shaw, immediately grabbing the wooden and felt blackboard eraser and rubbing out Gertie’s effort.

Gertie looked like a mouse in the face of a lion’s roar. She didn’t deserve this. Especially not today.

Before I knew what I was doing, I stood up and yelled, ‘STOP! Leave her alone!’

I tried to duck, but the blackboard eraser hurled through the air and hit me square in the face.

I think Mr Shaw had been wanting to do that to me – or anyone who represented the ‘enemy’ – for quite some time.



## Chapter 8

‘Tsk, tsk,’ said Queenie, frowning at the dent on the bridge of my nose and the purple bruising round my eye. ‘Serves you right, Fred, for running around with your bootlaces undone...’

The way Queenie stared at me I knew she didn’t believe a word of my story about tripping in the playground.

Lil knew the truth, though. And Lil *also* knew that I didn’t want to trouble Mother and Father at the moment.

‘I’ll tell you one thing, it’ll take a lot of scrubbing to get the blood out of this white shirt,’ said Mother. ‘What must your poor teacher have thought when he saw the mess you were in? Mr Shaw must have got quite a fright!’

‘Sort of,’ I said with a shrug. Lil winked at me as she came into the room with the plates and cutlery.

My sister knew that part of the story too. Mr Shaw *did* get a fright – when the headmaster burst into the classroom. Mr Pritchett had been passing and got a perfect view of Mr Shaw lobbing the wooden eraser block at my face. The headmaster had ordered me outside to the lavatories to wash the blood off my face. When I got back, there was no sign of Mr Shaw for quite some time – Prue said Mr Pritchett had spoken very sharply to him, ordering the teacher to come with him for a talk. When Mr Shaw finally returned, he was very tight-lipped and dour-faced, and told us to read in silence.

‘Anyway, where’s your father got to?’ asked Mother now, as she began setting the table for our Friday night tea.

‘Walter was busy tidying up the bakery when I came in,’ Queenie said.

‘I thought he and Rob would be finished by now...’ Mother replied.

‘No sign of young Rob that *I* saw,’ Queenie reported.

‘You know, I bet Walter let Rob go early,’ Mother suggested. ‘He’s such a nice, hardworking lad.’

Me and Lil exchanged glances again, raising our eyebrows. (Which hurt a bit with my bust nose.)

‘You know, that young lad will make someone a lovely husband one day!’ Mother said brightly, sneaking a quick look in Lil’s direction.

‘Not for *me*, he won’t!’ Lil said very certainly.

‘Don’t be cross, Lil! I meant far, *far* in the future, perhaps!’ Mother said, slightly flustered by how determined Lil sounded.

‘Mother, no matter how far, *far* in the future you’re talking, I’d never marry the likes of Rob Campbell!’ Lil announced, putting her hands on her hips.

‘He’s not good enough for you anyway, Lil,’ muttered Queenie. ‘You deserve *better* than the likes of him.’

‘Nobody’s ‘deserving’ of me, Nan!’ Lil said, raising her voice at Queenie now. ‘I’m not planning to marry at all! *Ever!*’

‘Don’t be silly, Lil! Of course, you’ll be married one day,’ said Mother. ‘My, my... you’re sounding just like one of those Suffragettes!’

‘Well, what if she does?’ said Queenie, suddenly coming to my sister’s defence.

I have to say I was enjoying what was going on. It took the attention away from me, at least.

‘Ach, what’s all the raised voices for?’ said Father, coming into the room, free of his long work apron and sleeve protectors now.

His smile was warm and wide, as it always was. I loved Father so much in that moment, with his chipper tone, as if nothing untoward had happened at all today. As if a respected local shopkeeper hadn't had to go on some register at the police station, knowing word would soon get out to his customers.

'Just chatting, Walter!' Queenie quickly reassured him. 'What's that you've got there?'

'Something that will make everything better...'  
said Father, patting a roll of card. 'The printer's boy dropped it round. I'm going to put it in the window for everyone to see!'

Father unfurled the roll. Upon the paper was a sign; the lettering and message was professional and clear.

***'WE ARE A PROUD BRITISH BUSINESS,  
run by a proud British family.  
Thank you for your custom.  
Here to serve our community, always!'***

'Oh, that's marvellous, Walter!' said Mother, tearing up a little.

'Hmm. Can't do any harm, I suppose,' said Queenie, getting as close to praising Father as she ever would.

'With this sign, we'll be fine!' Father insisted. 'And *everyone* says the war will be over by Christmas. Let's

just ride out the next few months and we'll be back to normal. You'll see!

Father put the sign down on the table and held out his arms for a hug. Mother and Lil, being closest to Father, went straight to him.

I pushed my chair back to go and join them, suddenly feeling more hopeful than I had in weeks.

Maybe Mr Shaw would leave me alone now, after having some kind of talking-to by the headmaster.

Customers would come flocking back once they saw Father's patriotic announcement in the shop window.

The war would be over by Christmas... everyone said so!

Then I heard the whack of the letterbox down in the front shop.

'I'll go!' I said, wanting to be useful.

I took the steps two at a time, then dived through the shop to scoop up the folded note lying on the doormat.

It wasn't mine to read, really. But it wasn't in an envelope, so I idly flipped open the small sheet of paper. I wish I hadn't.

I can't repeat the words, since they were so foul. There were more swearwords in the sentence than not.

But the meaning was clear; pure hatred for Father, *and* for us.

1915

Father the hero, Father the alien





## Chapter 9

The war was supposed to be short.

Everyone said – *Father* said – it was going to be over by Christmas 1914.

But they were wrong. So wrong.

The war was declared back in August last year, and now it was May 1915. Eight long months. Fierce battles between the British and French and Germans had been fought across the North Sea in Belgium. There had also been fighting in faraway places like Persia and Mesopotamia and East Africa and places I'd never even heard of. Lumbering and deadly Zeppelin airships had dropped bombs over Norfolk and the London Docks.

Then there were the thousands of injured British soldiers being shipped back; some were even transferred to a hospital not far from us. I didn't like to think about

the men that were never coming home; the regular, professional soldiers, *and* all of the young, keen lads that had signed up to fight.

As for Father's well-meaning, patriotic sign in the shop window... it hadn't brought customers back. Yes, Father still had some who stayed loyal to him, but even *they* came less and less. Who wants to be seen buying frivolous fancy cakes from an enemy of the nation?

Father tried to adapt, buying a cheap second-hand bike for deliveries. Before and after school, and on Saturdays too, I'd deliver bread and pastries to folk's homes, to spare them the embarrassment of standing in our shop.

We never found out who sent the poisonous note last September. All these months later, notes still occasionally turned up. Different handwriting, different misspellings, different kinds of hate and threats, just so we knew there was *more* than one person who wished us harm.

At least some people acted just the same as ever.

'Come on, boys! Chop, chop!!' Queenie said sharply, as me and Alec dragged the heavy Turkish carpet out of her back door and into the yard. It was the same carpet we'd lugged around to her terraced house last summer.

‘I’ll need to give that a good beating, before I get a new lodger,’ Queenie announced. ‘PC Gibbs made an awful mess of it, dropping tobacco from his pipe all the time.’

PC Gibbs had recently and reluctantly moved out. He’d told Queenie that he’d been getting too much stick from the other officers and his superiors about having a landlady who was a ‘German sympathizer’. A German sympathizer... just because Father was her son-in-law!

This was something *else* I wasn’t supposed to know. I overheard Queenie and Mother talking about it in the parlour last week, in hushed voices. Yes, my parents and nan still tried to keep things from me, like I was just a little boy. As if I didn’t see the posters in the windows of so many shops saying ‘*Germans not served here*’. Even our neighbour Mr Koslovsky in the tailor’s next door had one. (‘I don’t mean *you*, dear Mr Müller,’ old Mr Koslovsky had said to Father. ‘I’m talking about all these *dangerous* Germans, who are not to be trusted!’ Father sadly shook his head at that.)

‘Hurry up, boys!!’ Queenie said now, clapping her hands together. ‘Get this rug hung up!’

Alec looked over his shoulder and pulled a face at me. And then he heard Queenie mention getting us ginger beer and a treat once we were finished and his

face transformed into a grin. Fearsome Queenie was a softie underneath.

And so, with a few lop-sided heaves and groans, me and Alec got the grubby carpet over the washing line and gave matching sighs of relief.

‘Hey, Fred, have you and your pal not volunteered for the army yet?’ we suddenly heard someone ask.

We glanced up at the wall that Socks the cat liked to sit on. A head looked over at us. It belonged to Joe, who lived on the bottom floor of the house next door. An Irish family lived in the rooms upstairs. Joe was a simple man, who worked as a street cleaner and whose family were his pigeons in the coop in his yard.

‘We’re not old enough, Joe. I only just turned eleven!’ I reminded Queenie’s neighbour.

‘Ach, yes, yes, you’re just young, you boys,’ Joe said with a nod, scratching at his balding head.

‘Yeah, but my brother Rob says he’s going to sign up to the army soon!’ Alec burst out, sounding proud.

That was news to me.

‘Rob’s only seventeen – he’s not old enough yet!’ I turned and said to my friend. ‘Anyway, he works for *us*!’

Alec frowned.

‘My brother’s not your *servant*, Fred!’ he snapped at me. ‘He can do what he likes, and he’ll join the army when he turns eighteen next year, just you wait and see!’

I was taken aback at how annoyed Alec seemed. We’d had a few of these moments over the last few months. I’d spoken to Lil about it. She reckoned it was ‘cause so many of the neighbourhood kids wouldn’t hang out with me anymore, which meant they ignored Alec too. It had to be hard on him. It was the same in class; only goody-goody Prue and Gertie still talked to us.

‘Alec,’ I began, ‘I didn’t mean—’

A rattle of a bicycle in the side alley interrupted my apology to my best friend. The yard door smacked open.

‘Queenie about?’ a red-faced and breathless PC Gibbs asked.

‘Yes, I’m here,’ said my nan, coming out of the back door with a plate of bread and jam. ‘What a pleasant surprise, Mr Gibbs! What brings you here?’

‘I’ve just heard something terrible at the station,’ said PC Gibbs, his face flushed with exercise and emotion. ‘I’m trying to spread the news, and I was just cycling by and thought I’d let you know, so you can pass it on...’

‘Well, what is it? Spit it out!’ said Queenie, frowning.

‘A German U-boat has sunk the Lusitania.’ announced the policeman. ‘It was sailing from New York to Liverpool and went down off the coast of Ireland this afternoon.’

Apart from PC Gibbs’ laboured breath and the gentle coo-ing of Joe’s birds next door, we stood in silence, each of us trying to absorb the shock.

The Lusitania.

The grandest and fastest cruise-liner there was, just a few years older than the tragic Titanic.

A submarine had *sunk* it?

Something so huge and beautiful?

‘But how could a U-boat target the Lusitania? That’s not allowed, is it?’ asked Joe, still staring over the wall.

‘No!’ I blurted out. ‘The rules of the war say you can only attack military targets. And the Lusitania – that would just be full of normal passengers, wouldn’t it?’

An ocean liner full of ordinary people, travelling here from America for work, for family visits, for new lives. Standing on deck, staring off at the view of Ireland, so close to landing in Britain, so full of hope and plans. And then a submarine stalks it below the surface, waiting to strike.

‘Are there many that survived? Did they get to the life rafts in time?’ Queenie asked, obviously thinking of

the passengers of the Titanic, and the anguished chaos in the nearly three hours it took to sink.

PC Gibbs shook his head. ‘News reports say it sank in just eighteen minutes. There were about two thousand passengers and crew. There’s no news yet of survivors, but it can’t be good, can it?’

I heard Queenie gasp. I could feel my heartbeat thundering in my ears.

‘I’ll tell you one thing for sure, Queenie,’ said PC Gibbs, ‘there will be terrible repercussions from this.’

‘Ach,’ I heard Joe say, and he slipped away behind his wall.

I didn’t know till later what repercussions meant (Lil explained it was ‘*consequences*’), and a whole pile of them certainly rolled in, furiously fast.