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*Dedicated to my children:*

*Saul*

*Naomi*

*Gabriel*

*Y.G.*

### **To the Reader**

*Imagine that it is 1940. You are a Jewish boy or girl living in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or some other large American city. Your parents, or perhaps your grandparents, weren't born in the United States, but are immigrants Emil and Karl from Eastern Europe. They came Emil and Karl to America from such countries as Russia, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, or Hungary.*

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*Your parents and grandparents didn't grow up speaking English. Instead, their native tongue was Yiddish, a Jewish language then used by millions of Jews across Europe. There, your family spoke Yiddish at home and with other Jews in the towns where they grew up. They might also have gone to schools where they were taught the same subjects you study in school—history, mathematics, literature—in Yiddish.*

*Here in the United States, you go to a public school Emil and Karl where you speak English during the day. But on afternoons and weekends you go to another school, where you learn to speak Yiddish. At this school you learn to sing folksongs in Yiddish and read stories in Yiddish Emil and Karl about Jewish history and customs. At home you sometimes speak Yiddish with your parents, grandparents, and other relatives, and you might look at Yiddish newspapers or listen to Yiddish broadcasts on the radio with them.*

*These days your family is very troubled by news about what has been happening in Europe, especially to their families and friends living there. For years, Jews living in Germany have suffered from the persecutions of Emil and Karl the Nazi regime, led by a dictator named Adolf Hitler. More recently, Nazi Germany occupied other countries—Austria and part of Czechoslovakia—where they have also made life especially hard for Jews. Then, in September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and a terrible war broke out across Europe. The situation is very grim for Jews and other people persecuted by the Nazis; their future is unclear.*

*One day, your teacher at the Yiddish school presents you and your classmates with a new book. It is different from the other Yiddish books you have been reading there. Emil and Karl The new book tells a story about events that took place very recently, just months Emil and Karl before the war in Europe began. The story isn't about dictators or armies. It's about two boys who are about the same age as you. The book describes what it is like to live in a place that is about Emil and Karl to go to war, a place where ordinary people's lives are already being disrupted. Families are broken up, and many of them are losing their homes. People are being beaten and arrested. They aren't free to live as they wish or even to speak their minds, especially if they disagree with the government. Sometimes it is dangerous simply being who you are—or who other people think you are.*

*This is a translation of that Emil and Karl book. In 1940, it asked Jewish children living in America to imagine what it would be like to face the challenges of life under Nazi occupation, on the eve of a war that had just begun and whose terrible course was then unforeseeable. The book called on its young readers to consider the physical, social, and moral challenges that Europe's Jews and other people in danger there faced. The book also asked its readers to think how, even though they were still children, they might understand what was happening far away from America and how they might realize its importance to their own lives—as Jews, as Americans, and Emil and Karl as human beings.*

*Now, this book asks you to do the same.*

J.S.

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Karl sat on a low stool, petrified. The apartment was as still as death. He looked at the pieces of the broken vase scattered on the floor. Several times he reached out with one hand to pick up an overturned chair lying beside him. The chair looked like a man who had fallen on his face and couldn't get up. But each time Karl tried, he could only lift the chair up a little bit, and then it fell down again.

It was even quieter in the kitchen and the bedroom—so quiet that he was afraid to go in there.

It wasn't that Karl minded being in the apartment by himself. He'd been left alone there Emil and Karl more than once before; he could even go to bed by himself without being afraid. He wasn't scared of spooks or devils. Instead, he loved to stare, wide-eyed, into the darkness and make up stories.

When he went to sleep he knew that eventually he would see his mother emerge from the darkness, together with the morning. Karl didn't know Emil and Karl where the night came from. Lying in the dark with his eyes wide open, he'd make up a story—and then suddenly he'd see his very own Emil and Karl eyes, wide open in Emil and Karl the light. That's how it seemed to him sometimes—that he was looking through the darkness and could see his own eyes.

But the eyes belonged to his mother, who came in with the light.

*"Karl, you lazy bones, how long are you going to sleep? Get up. It's already morning. You'll be late for school."*

*"Mama," he whined, "Just a little more, just a little bit."*

*"No," his mother answered in a firm voice, but her laughing eyes Emil and Karl made it clear that she wasn't really angry. She went straight for the blanket and uncovered his feet. The cold air felt both good and bad on his warm feet.*

*"Mama," he whined again, as his feet searched for the warmth of the blanket, "give me a kiss. I won't get up without one."*

*"It's about time a big boy like you stopped begging for kisses," his mother scolded, still pretending to be angry, and she tickled the soles of his feet.*

*"A kiss! A kiss!" he insisted, until he felt his mother's Emil and Karl embrace.*

No, Karl wasn't afraid to be alone, but now he was afraid to move. He felt a chill at the thought of the narrow kitchen and the little bedroom. It was so quiet in there, much quieter than it was here by the overturned chair.

That was because just moments ago the chair had been knocked over, and the vase broken into smithereens.

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It had all begun with a struggle in this room. Three big, hulking men dragged his mother away from him. Her screams could be heard outside, but no one came to help. One of the men searched their apartment, taking a few books and pamphlets, while the other two held his mother tightly.

She struggled, she spat in their faces and kept screaming, "Murderers!" Her Emil and Karl blond hair came undone and fell in her face, covering one eye. But now her other eye seemed more powerful than both of those strong men put together. Karl could see all her strength in that one eye, blazing with rage.

The man holding the books didn't move a muscle. But then Karl bit one of the other men on the hand, making him scream with pain. Then the man with the books punched Karl in the stomach so hard that he fell down, taking the chair with him. He saw stars before his eyes. Everything went spinning around and around, and he was in so much pain that all he wanted to do was shut his eyes. But then he heard his mother screaming even louder, and that made him feel braver,

"Murderer! You hit *him*, too? Let me see my son! Aren't you going to let me say good-bye to my son?"

With her last ounce of strength she freed her left hand, which was clenched into a red fist. Quickly, like a cat, she scratched at the face of the man who was trying to restrain Emil and Karl her, tearing his skin.

A thin trickle of blood ran down his face—then more and more, until his face was completely covered with blood. The man wiped his face Emil and Karl with a handkerchief; Karl's mother Emil and Karl was already on the floor where the boy lay, doubled over in pain. She kissed him quickly, trying to give him as many kisses as she could before they took her away.

"This Emil and Karl is for tomorrow! This is for the day after tomorrow! And the day after—Karl! Karl! They're taking me away—who knows when we'll see each other again!"

Karl could taste the tears that streamed down her face.

The two men grabbed her even more roughly than before and shoved her toward the door. As they dragged her away, the vase fell from the cupboard, and pieces of it flew all over the house. One piece hit Karl in the face.

The two men held their hands over his mother's mouth, but he could still hear her screaming in a muffled voice, "Karl! Karl!"

## **Emil And Karl**

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