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“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

GERMANY,
1945

CHAPTER ONE
EVERYTHING IS TO

"Who told you that?" I asked quietly. "About Ivan?"

"A girl. I don't know. I don't ask their names anymore."

Right. It was like naming barn cats. You called them Cat or Mouser, and then your heart didn't get broken every time they moved on. But I always asked their names. A name could be held on your tongue, like chocolate.

A name can dissolve. I didn't want to think about that, but sitting at my piano working on the Moonlight Sonata, it was difficult not to.

I persisted. "What did she say?"

"Nothing," Hilde said. "It's nothing to worry about."

"Stop treating me like a baby." I was sixteen—old enough, I felt, to know the truth about what was going on.

That morning I'd heard the radio, before Mutti had shut it off. "Everything is to remain as it is," the Nazi Gauleiter announced. "The German population is in no immediate danger." I wanted to believe him, but his voice was full of forced calm—like we were panicked horses a startle away from bolting. Even I could tell the people from the east were fleeing their homes. Was the danger like typhus? Would it spread?

Hilde went back to lingering by the side door, waiting for the postman—these days we never knew when he'd show up—while I practiced the opening arpeggios of the Moonlight's third movement in the right hand. The first bars were charged with fury, hard to play without my fingers getting tangled. It took up enough of my attention that I could ignore my sister's smug look: I'm waiting for a love letter. All you can do is play that stupid piano.

Hilde was like a planet; the force of gravity around her drew men in. She was taller than I was, and prettier, and had nicer hair.

Even the postman was in love with her, and he was at least sixty years old. I'd never had a boyfriend. But what did I care? A piano didn't run off to war hoping for a fancy belt buckle that said *Gott mit uns*—God with us—like Hilde's boyfriend did.

"Beethoven wasn't pleased with this sonata," Herr Goldstein had told me during one of our lessons. It was winter and the cellar was especially cold. He'd brought down a mug of warm water for my hands, and we both kept our coats on. A yellow Star of David was sewn conspicuously across his. "He considered it inferior to his other pieces for piano."

"How could he think that?" I said. "It's the best sonata he ever wrote."

"I agree." My piano teacher gave one of his theatrical shrugs. "But an artist is rarely satisfied with his own work. Look at you, how hard you are on yourself."

The memory was even sweeter than the smell of Mutti's bread. He had called me an artist.

But I was an artist with small hands. Anything more than an octave reach was too much of a stretch, so Herr Goldstein had doctored up the sonata, crossing off nonessential notes to make the bigger chords manageable.

"For God's sake, stop playing the same bits over and over," Hilde shouted from the door. "You'll make us all crazy."

"It's called practicing," I said. "It's how you get better."

When the postman arrived, she stepped outside and asked, "Anything for me?"

"No, my dear. I'm sorry," he said in a softened voice.

I didn't know why she bothered waiting for mail anymore. There hadn't been a letter from her boyfriend, Paul, in months.

everything behind." I'd never lived anywhere except in this house. I knew all its bumps and corners by heart.

Hilde glanced at Mutti. "We'll be back soon. Right?"

"It's only temporary," Mutti said.

Outside our window people passed with their horses and wagons, the women riding with the children, the men walking alongside waving long sticks to keep the horses moving. Only temporary? Their wagons were so stuffed it was a wonder they didn't topple over.

Mutti rushed around gathering food. I was surprised to see she already had a bag packed with photographs and clothes—things she must have prepared in advance.

"Where will we go?" I asked.

"I'm sure Aunt Ilse and Uncle Otto will take us in until this blows over," she said. Like a storm, or the smell from the fields when the manure had been spread. She handed us each a bowl and cup, a fork, a shawl. She wrapped up the bread she'd made that morning, and packed all the salami.

I ran to the piano and grabbed my book of Beethoven sonatas, and the book of Schumann's *Lieder*. Herr Goldstein had entrusted to me before he'd gone away. **You'll take care of it for me** he'd said.

"No, Katja, they're too heavy," Mutti said. "You'll have to choose one."

My heart argued with me back and forth. It was like choosing

But Mutti didn't answer my question.

"The war is almost over," I added. Surely we'd go home again.

“Ilse will be relieved to know we’re alive,” Mutti said. “She and I were very close when we were youngsters. We used to play Piggy on the Ladder together in the hayloft.”

Mutti with her no-nonsense bun, her lips pursed, scrubbing milk churns or covered in flour—I couldn’t imagine her as a little girl playing a game with string. She had talked to us often about Ilse, because Ilse and her husband owned a clothing shop. I was curious to meet someone whose idea of dressing up meant more than taking off her apron.

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- to go home again
- a new pair of shoes
- rabbit stew, oh, rabbit stew—the way Mutti made it, turning it into a feast, with sauces and braised this and sautéed that. I imagined us sitting at the dining room table with her favorite Schumann

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“And a teacher?”

“I’m sure there’ll be plenty of women in Fahlhoff like Frau Erdmann.”

“I didn’t mean her,” I said. “I meant Herr Goldstein.”

Mutti acted as if she hadn’t heard me. Frau Erdmann had been my official teacher, but my real piano lessons happened once a week, in secret, at Herr Goldstein’s house. His son, Jacob, was always home studying. He wanted to become a doctor. Sometimes when I finished my lesson, I caught Jacob standing outside the cellar—though the room was almost completely soundproof.

But he was two years older than I was. The conversations we had, which had meant everything to me, had probably meant nothing to him. Still, I couldn’t think of the piano without thinking of the Goldsteins.

Three years ago they had moved to Poland, and though I wrote to Herr Goldstein, I never heard from him again. Someone else moved into their home. No one spoke about it. Whenever I asked Mutti, she would say she didn’t know what had happened to them. But my mother—candid in every other way—

a thought I'd had too many times on this journey.

Daffodils bloomed nearby. Even they were pretending they couldn't see what surrounded them.

I couldn't help thinking of Papi, dead now for two years—a hero's death, the letter had told us, as if that made any difference. He'd never wanted any part of the war; he hadn't even voted for Hitler. But he spoke Russian, they needed him, and it wasn't the sort of thing you could say no to. Anyway, whether you were a hero or not, dead was dead. We'd never said a proper goodbye to him. Mutti didn't even know where he was buried—or if he was buried.

My aching feet. My empty stomach.

My empty stomach. My aching feet.

Mutti was well into a discussion about whether or not a proper borscht should contain meat, so I caught up to Hilde and the other girls. They weren't paying attention to the ditches. They were talking about the film star Hans Albers. He was dreamy—no, too fat—and the controversial Hedy Lamarr who, shh showed her naked body on camera. Did she really? Yes, my cousin's aunt's neighbor's friend saw the film in Hamburg-Munich-Berlin-Somewhere.

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