

Chapter One

Munich, Germany, 1938

The young woman drew rapidly, sketching the old man on his knees in the street, with blood running down his face. A group of five young thugs wearing Nazi uniforms kicked and beat him, cheering each blow, their taunts mingling with the old man's screams. An angry cluster of civilians urged them on, stamping and shouting.

“Jewish shit!” “*Judenschwein!*”

The blows and kicks rained down on the helpless man until his cries stopped and he moved no more. The crowd began smashing the windows of the dead man's family bakery.

“Here.” Renata handed her sketchbook to the young man at her side who was also sketching, and walked deliberately, slowly, toward the body.

The crowd paused to stare at her.

She was quaking, but kept walking.

One leering youth slapped a thick stick in the palm of his hand.

Unwinding the scarf from around her neck, she knelt and carefully placed it over the dead man's face, stood and glared at the crowd, then turned her back on them and returned to her companion, ignoring the catcalls and jeers behind her.

As soon as she was no longer visible to the crowd, her friend grabbed her by the arm and pulled her close.

She realized she had been holding her breath.

He steered her briskly, back into the labyrinth of alleys and narrow streets until the crowd noise faded behind them. “What the

hell were you doing out there? You could have gotten us both killed!”

“I know. But I’m not sorry. Those people are beasts! Let’s get out of here, Hans.” She was shivering.

“You’re braver than me. But we have good sketches for Switzerland tonight. I put you in the last one.”

“You did? Let me see.”

Pausing behind a row of dustbins, Hans handed her the sketchbook.

He had perfectly captured the rage of the crowd, their brutality, and Renata’s courage. She swallowed the lump in her throat and shuddered. “Those bastards! He could have been my father.” She squeezed his hand.

Noises behind them started them running.

Arriving at Hans’ back door, Renata Lowenthal tore a page from her book, handed him the sketch, then leaned up to kiss him lightly on the lips. Both eighteen, in the first flush of love, they stole moments together whenever they could, despite laws that forbade relationships between Jews and Gentiles.

He was so handsome—tall, blond, blue-eyed, a true Aryan, but without Nazi poison flowing through his veins. She and Hans had attended art school together before she was banned from classes. Hans had a friend, an employee of the railway system, who smuggled their sketches of Nazi atrocities out of Germany, and into the hands of foreign journalists willing to use them.

Hans slipped his hand around Renata’s neck and drew her to him again. He nuzzled her curly hair and lifted her chin for another kiss. She threw her arms around him.

“Oh, Hans, it’s getting worse every day. We have to keep believing that what we do matters.”

“It does. But it’s getting so dangerous, I’m not sure how long we can continue.”

“If I can ever convince my parents, we’ll leave, but until then, I’ll keep working. We must get our real Germany back. But what about you?”

“I’ll be drafted into the Army any day, God help me. I won’t go. I’ll leave the country first. Come on, let me walk you home.”

“Not yet. The gallery sent me a letter. They won’t show or sell my paintings any longer, so I have to pick up the two still there.”

She frowned and kicked at a loose brick on the pavement.

Hans swore softly. "They are closing everything to Jews. I don't know how you will even eat, the way things are going. I'll get the sketches to our friend. Be careful and remember—you're stronger than you know."

Renata squeezed his arm and trudged away toward the gallery.



"Good afternoon, Herr Bauer. What's this letter you sent me?" She waved it and leaned on the counter, scowling. Tall at five feet nine inches, and with an enormous mop of curly dark hair, Renata towered over the hapless gallery owner.

His immaculate white shirt, tie, and gray vest, intended to convey an air of confidence and authority, belied his hand-wringing and nervous glances to the street outside. He stared at the wall through tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses. "I have been ordered to cease showing or selling paintings by Jews. You must remove your paintings immediately, or I may... I mean my family... they will arrest me." He looked up.

Renata noticed beads of perspiration on his brow and upper lip.

He licked his lips. His eyes pleaded with her to understand.

"And how do you expect any Jewish artists to survive if no one will sell their works? Of course, that is exactly the plan, isn't it? They don't want us around and will do whatever they must to dispose of their 'Jewish problem.'" She slammed her hand on the counter.

Herr Bauer jumped.

"Very well," she continued, her voice a growl. "Bring me my paintings. But cowards like you are the reason Hitler can get away with the horrible things he does."

Herr Bauer's glasses steamed from her acidic speech.

She wanted to throttle him.

He disappeared into the back room and returned minutes later with two paintings, wrapped in brown paper and string. His hands shook as he laid them on the counter.

"*Bitte, Franlein...*" he began, but Renata scooped up the

paintings and left, slamming the door behind her.

She stormed up the street, until the presence of soldiers forced her to slow, to avoid drawing attention. She pulled her scarf around her head against the chilly wind. Sullen clouds threatened snow. *A dreary day, a dreary heart*, she thought. Her throat tightened at the memory of the dead baker, who in better times had given her the occasional bagel when she stopped by his shop with her mother.

She had watched the rise of Nazi brutality, seen many Jews beaten and their shops destroyed, yet her parents ignored her insistence that they leave the country. Renata was furious at what the Nazis had already done to her family. Her father, Dr. Karl Lowenthal, had been a respected physician and researcher at the medical school until he was banned from teaching. Now he treated other Jews in their homes and was paid with whatever barter the patients could manage. Renata had seen her budding career of art shows and reviews, in which she was fêted, crumble. She was still steaming at the insult when she arrived home.

Her parents believed in the basic goodness of humanity and were sure the German government would not take things too much further. Her hand tightened on the paintings as she swore she would try once more, this evening, to convince them to leave.



“Guten Abend, Mama.”

She set the paintings down while she removed her boots and hung her coat and scarf on a rack near the door.

“Guten Abend, Renata,” her mother replied from somewhere inside. “Your Tante Adele is here for coffee and cakes. Please join us.”

Lea Lowenthal was a wiry woman in her late forties, her face etched with suffering that had slid into chronic depression. She had never recovered from the birth of her stillborn son, Solomon, fifteen years earlier. She visited the tiny grave weekly, swept it, added flowers in the summer, and wept over the dream that he would have been her perfect son. Her sister, Adele, begged her to let the little one go and focus on her living daughter, but Lea could not. Unable to provide the warmth and affection Renata needed, Lea

turned instead to art and became Renata's teacher, albeit a harsh and demanding one.

Art ran deep in their family history. The walls of their home were covered with masterpieces that went back generations, including some of her own. When she married Karl, he had insisted she stop painting, believing that the husband was to be the breadwinner and the wife to be the *hausfrau*. But he did not stop her from teaching their daughter.

The little girl hated the stern lessons for years, until at some point, she found her own style and began pouring her feelings onto canvas. Four years ago, the gallery held a show of her paintings. Many sold immediately. But that was then. Now, no one would dare say anything good about a Jew, or worse yet, pay one for anything.

"Ah, there you are, my dear. So good to see you." Tante Adele swept into the hallway trailing scents of lavender and rose. She kissed Renata on the cheek and stood back to look at her flushed face. "What's wrong, Renata? You're upset. Come sit down and tell us what's happened."

They walked into the parlor and sat on overstuffed antique chairs.

Lea placed coffee and biscuits on a table beside them. She poured, and Adele helped herself to a biscuit, but Renata could not eat.

"The gallery made me bring my paintings home. They won't show them any longer, nor any other Jews' works. And old Herr Nussbaum was just beaten to death outside his shop. It's getting worse every day, Mama. We need to leave!" She thumped a fist on her thigh.

"Renata, I won't have you talking like that. I'm tired of hearing it. I'm so sorry about Herr Nussbaum, but he must have done something wrong. Tante Adele is here to look at your paintings, and since you have the two you brought, why don't you put them up on the mantel so we can look at them?" She took a sip of coffee.

Her daughter pressed her lips together at her mother's willful ignorance.

Tante Adele added, "I can't imagine Hitler will go much further. But I would like to see the paintings, my dear."

"Oh, very well." Renata swallowed her anger. She fetched

the paintings, unwrapped them, and set them out.

One was a gloomy street scene, redolent with snow, ice, and darkness illuminated only by a waning moon and one weak streetlamp. Bundled figures, hunched against the cold, hurried to unknown destinations. Hints of uniformed men with guns hid in shadows. The foreboding in the painting was unmistakable. The other, completely different in style, featured wild reds and oranges, and mouths open in screams. Tiny dots of black suggested tears, or perhaps bullets.

"I can see why the gallery told you to take them home," said Lea. "And after all I taught you about form and style."

"Mama, I'm developing my own style. Isn't that part of being a great artist?" Resentment smoldered in her belly.

"Oh, listen to her, Adele. 'A great artist.' Talk about being puffed with pride." Lea stood and walked toward the opposite wall, on which hung paintings by her father and grandmother. She gestured grandly. "These are great artists. You are still a child."

Adele attempted to derail the percolating argument. "Lea, Renata is no longer a child and while she is not yet a great artist, thanks in part to your instruction, she may well become one. Isn't that your dream, Renata?"

"Yes. I'm going to succeed, no matter what Hitler and his bullies may do." Renata squeezed her aunt's hand and gave her a wispy smile. "Someday my paintings will hang in galleries again, and I will teach at universities."

Lea rolled her eyes and poured more tea for herself, ignoring her daughter, who had learned to absorb her mother's insults as she absorbed rain on a blustery day.

Adele rose to examine Renata's paintings more closely. She took her time, thoughtfully assessing each, tilting her head this way and that, while Lea gave the paintings a cursory look.

"I believe I like the abstract better," Adele finally announced. "It allows one to bring one's own interpretation to it. Certainly, it expresses fear, but there could be many other emotions: anger and lust, for example. The other one..."

Loud knocks interrupted her. The women froze.

"Open! Open the door for the *polizei*!"

Renata could only think of the sketches she and Hans had

made. Her insides turned to jelly.

“Open now, in the name of the Führer, or we will break the door down!” The knocking became violent.

Renata moved toward the door. “I’m coming! Don’t break the door, I am coming!”

She flipped the bolt and five policemen burst into the room, pushed Renata backwards and took up positions in a semicircle, where Lea and Aunt Adele stood quaking. The shiny black boots, spotless gray uniforms, and large guns seemed to fill the entire room.

Renata felt sweat trickle down her armpits.

“*Heil*, Hitler!” snapped the leader. The other men saluted. “*Heil*, Hitler!”

“We hear reports of corruption in this house.” The leader paced the room and slapped a riding crop in the palm of his gloved hand. He spotted the paintings on the mantel and stopped.

“I see the reports were correct!” He pointed his crop at the abstract work. “This painting is decadent, corrupt, and has no place in the Third Reich!” He gestured to one of the men, who marched up to the painting and slashed it to ribbons with a knife.

“No!” screamed Renata. Adele and Lea clung to each other, mouths agape. Lea was weeping.

In one step, the captain reached Lea and slapped her across the face, knocking her to the floor.

“So, you are the so-called artist producing this filthy anti-Reich work?”

Renata took two steps toward him, shaking but determined. “No, she is not. She is my mother. I am the artist. Leave her alone!”

“Get up!” He hauled Lea to her feet and pushed her away, then grabbed Renata and slammed her against the wall, knocking over an antique vase which shattered when it hit the floor. “I’ll show you how we treat Jews like you.” With a nod of his head, he sent two of his staff to guard Lea and Adele, who were sobbing in terror. The other men grabbed Renata by the arms and held her facing the wall.

“Stop it! I’m just an artist! Don’t hurt me!” Her arms hurt, they had stretched them so wide. Her mind was blank. From the corner of her eye, she could see her mother and aunt, white-faced, behind guards with drawn pistols.

The captain raised his crop and brought it down with all his strength on her back. She screamed. Stickiness oozed from the welt. She had no idea pain like this existed. Again, and again, he whipped her, until her back was crisscrossed with blood. Her screams ceased and she hung limp in the arms of the two men.

At a signal from their leader, they dropped her to the floor.

“Now, perhaps you will listen. No more of this filth, or you will be arrested and shot. Understood?” He poked Renata with the toe of his boot. Groaning, she managed to nod her head.

He turned to the other women. “If we arrest her, we’ll arrest you all. And isn’t your husband Karl Lowenthal, the doctor?”

Lea nodded, blubbing.

“Where is he?”

“I-I don’t know. He-he-goes out for long walks in the afternoons.”

The officer pushed his face into Lea’s. “We have a warrant for his arrest, for making critical statements about the Führer. We’ll be back for him.”

He gave a curt command to the men. They left, banging the door shut behind them.

Lea and Adele rushed to Renata, who was conscious again, gasping in agony. She managed to raise her head and groaned. “Now do you believe me?”



When she opened her eyes, Renata was lying face-down on the divan, and although in terrible pain, she knew someone had cleaned and bandaged her wounds. The dress was gone and a thin sheet was her only covering.

Papa, looking ten years older, sat beside her, holding her hand. “You poor, poor darling. How are you feeling?”

“Like hell, of course.” She didn’t care about swearing at a time like this. Papa didn’t even flinch.

Lea offered her a glass of water. “Would you like something to drink?”

Renata was desperately thirsty, but movement was excruciating, even with Papa’s help. She managed a few sips, then

pushed the glass aside.

She suddenly remembered what the *polizei* had said. “Papa, Mama, we have to leave.”

“Shhhh, don’t worry about it now,” said Lea. “You need to rest.”

“No, we must leave now!” Grimacing, she pushed herself up. “Papa, they will arrest you! And they don’t know about everything I’ve been doing. If they find out, I’ll be shot.”

“What else have you been doing, Renata?” Karl asked quietly.

She told them of the sketches she had sent to Switzerland, but left Hans out of it. Lea gasped. Karl looked dumbfounded. Aunt Adele sat back with her mouth open.

“Tonight is our last chance. Here, help me get up.”

The room circled around her. When she reached for the mantel to steady herself, her back screamed. But there was no time to think about the pain now.

“Mama, get a satchel for each of us. Papa, your medical bag and our passports. Aunt Adele, you’ll come too, won’t you? They’ll find an excuse to arrest you, too, maybe not today, but soon.”

Aunt Adele backed away slowly. “But I’ve done nothing wrong. They can’t arrest us all, can they?” She laughed, a nervous, fluttery sound.

Renata fixed a steely glare on her dear aunt. “I’ve done nothing wrong, either, Tante Adele. At least nothing wrong in the free Germany we used to have. I tell you, they will find a way to arrest us all.”

“But how much worse can things get? They are just trying to make a point, and when war comes, they will need us.”

“No, Tante, please! Come tonight!”

But she shook her head.

Karl cleared his throat. “Lea, Renata is right. I will not risk our lives another day. Let’s pack what we can and leave. Adele, you would be wise to come with us.”

“But I can’t leave Solomon, Karl.” Lea wrung her hands. Tears welled in her eyes. “There’s no one to look after him. Visit him. Pray for him.”

“Mama, for God’s sake.”

Karl put his hands on Lea's shoulders. "Now my dear, I know this will be difficult for you, but we cannot remain here to tend one dead child only to create another. Look what they did to our Renata."

Lea averted her gaze.

Karl spoke again. "Adele, if you are determined to stay, will you watch little Solomon's grave for us?"

"Of course I will." Adele put her arms around her sister. "Go in peace, my dear. Don't worry, all will be well, and the babe has angels watching him, too, remember."

Lea's shoulders sagged. "Is there no other option?"

"No, Lea. We have tried all the others."

"Then I'll see you out, Adele, and thank you." Lea walked her to the door.

The sisters embraced and kissed. Renata's throat tightened. She sensed she would never see her aunt again.

"Hans will drive us to the *Hauptbahnhof*, I'm sure." She cranked the phone and in minutes was speaking with him.

"We've been invited to visit our family in Venice, and we would be grateful if you could drive us to the railway station... *Ja...* just me and my parents... *Danke*." When she hung up, she wondered who besides the operator was listening. Surely the call sounded innocuous? No matter. It was time to pack.