

A novel inspired by hidden history

Train.



Danny M. Cohen

T R A I N

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Suitable for age 13 and up

T H E T H I E F

Tsura

They'll never know we were here.

No sound. No impression in the hardened mud. Tsura had learned to keep her head below the brick walls of the city. To become the shadows and sidestep the light. She could recite each route by heart. Over railway lines and through private gardens, across main roads and public parks. But some checkpoints were impossible to avoid.

A crowd had gathered close to the U-Bahn station. Two young soldiers blocked the entrance.

“What’s going on?” Tsura asked them.

“The train station is closed,” one soldier said. He held out his gloved hand. “Papers?”

Tsura handed over her identity documents for inspection. “What happened?”

“Someone fell on the tracks.”

“Why are you dressed like a man?” the second soldier asked, rifle at his side.

Tsura pointed at the sleeves of his jacket, which didn’t even reach his wrists. “Why are you dressed like a schoolboy?”

The other soldier laughed. As he unfolded and checked her papers, his grin widened. “Nice to meet you, Greta. We share a birthday.”

“Lucky me,” Tsura said. Her fake smile matched her false identity.

The soldiers sniggered as she walked away.

“I know what I’d do with her.”

“She likes you,” the other said.

Tsura shivered with disgust. *Nazi scum.*

Through the city, she moved against the winter morning wind that slipped between her neck and turned-up collar. The woolen overcoat hid the curves of her breasts, and her hair stayed tucked tight into a flat cap. She looked like a man and felt stronger for it. The sense of danger thrilled her and the familiarity of the damp corners was calming, yet Tsura remained wary of what lurked nearby, of being discovered.

Behind rows of houses, she crouched by a fence.

She watched Seraph approach. Seraph—a code name, of course—with her short fair hair and skinny frame, pulled a revolver from her pocket. “Here. It’s loaded,” Seraph warned.

Tsura’s pulse quickened. *She managed to pull it off.* Tsura had never held a gun before and she was already in control. Testing the weight of the weapon, Tsura felt it become part of her as the distant clattering of a train on its tracks, like whisperings through walls, took her to thoughts of her imprisoned family. Through hidden voices and faded screams, her people pleaded, *Tell our stories.* The wheels of their words moved on rails that until that moment had dragged Tsura along but now filled her with momentum. Tsura had assumed her fateful position—she was the engine now, and the carriages she pulled were her responsibility.

She slid the revolver into her overcoat and led Seraph onto a local street. “The documents. When will they be ready?” Tsura asked, keeping her voice to just above a whisper.

“We’re working on them. I just need those photographs.”

“I owe you,” Tsuru said, and she meant it. Seraph hadn’t had much time to prepare the forged identity documents, and Tsuru was grateful.

The young women stepped out onto the side streets toward Seraph’s home in Berlin’s affluent Schöneberg neighborhood. In the dim light, factory workers trudged away from the closed train station.

“So, did you hear?” Seraph asked.

“What?”

“Gestapo. Another *Aktion* soon,” Seraph whispered.

“Round-ups? Who?”

“More Jews. By the end of the weekend, they’ll be gone from the city.”

As she absorbed Seraph’s words, her deep hate for Hitler’s henchmen grew. Waves of muted rage summoned painful memories and Tsuru bit down hard along the cracks in her lips, frightened that the Nazi plan for the Jews of Berlin also included the Roma—her people.

Tsuru wanted to walk in silence, but Seraph continued to chatter. “Are the papers for someone in your family?”

“No. Someone else.”

Alexander

The morning air froze in Alex’s throat and his boots hit the ground hard as he tripped over the crisscrossing tram tracks set into the cobblestones. He passed the uniformed soldiers on the streets. *Don’t look at them.* Walking too fast or too timidly would raise suspicion. He kept his eyes on the pavement and his hands in his coat pockets, touching old crumbs, shivering with nerves. Graying buildings and barren trees stood over him. Leafless branches pointed at him. Rows of flags—red, black, white—billowed overhead against Berlin’s sky. As if the entire city knew his secret.

The shop stood almost hidden between the grander stone buildings. Jangling bells above signaled his arrival and startled the old man behind the counter.

“Paul Voeske sent me,” Alex said, his stomach in knots.

“You came here alone?”

Alex nodded. “You take photographs, right?”

The old shopkeeper bowed his head at the teenager. “Follow me.”

Alex squeezed through the narrow aisles between pieces of furniture pushed up against shelves and cabinets filled with ornaments and crockery. The room was bursting, from the overlapping rugs on the creaking wooden floor up to the mismatched dust-covered chandeliers hanging from the tin ceiling.

In the back room, Alex put on a jacket and tie and sat for the camera. Shoulders square, clean-shaven, chin forward. Sweat collected on his forehead as he waited for the shopkeeper to give him instructions. They both knew they were breaking the law. With unsteady hands, Alex smoothed down his hair.

“Keep still, please.” The old man moved quickly and began to hum an unfamiliar song as he adjusted the camera stand. The camera flashed. Then once more.

Alex felt older than seventeen. He resembled his father and imagined himself bald like him one day.

“Please wait in the front,” the shopkeeper said.

Alex removed the borrowed tie and suit jacket and threw on his coat and cap. His face still burned with worry, and he returned to the front of the shop, which was packed with trinkets and treasures. Perhaps he’d discover the perfect birthday gift for Ruti.

Searching dusty bookshelves along the far wall, below the volumes on history, anatomy, and music, Alex found a small group of books on travel. A London guidebook or British map would have been perfect, but there were only books on German architecture and German railways and maps of Austria. *They must’ve burned all the good stuff.* As he snaked through the aisles, one object caught his attention.

A miniature porcelain train sat locked behind grimy glass. The front engine and each of the five matching carriages had been brushed with a distinct tone of ivory glaze. The wheels and crankshafts were decorated with silver leaf. Each carriage was intricate and unique, and was connected by an elegant silver hook to a tiny silver hoop on the rear of the next. Silver paint framed its miniature white windows, and the details of the carriage doors, including the locks, were carved perfectly into the ceramic. But the most striking piece was the train engine itself, painted an ivory matte. Its furnace, valves, and driver's cab were covered in silver leaf and its thin white porcelain chimney was perfect in its simplicity. Alex knew Ruti would love it, and not just because her big brother picked it out.

The shopkeeper returned, his wary eyes fixed on the street outside. "You can come back for the photographs at the end of the workday. And please, not a word to anyone, or I'll be shot." The man's smile erased the sting of his words.

As Alex anticipated holding the black-and-white images, ready to be added to false documents, his stomach growled with both hunger and apprehension.

Alex pointed to the porcelain train. "How much is this?"

The old man peered over his thick glasses and reached up to unlock the cabinet door. He gestured for Alex to pick up the ornament and, once more, hummed his pretty tune.

Alex's thumb and forefinger unhooked the train engine from the sequence of carriages. A small paper tag, resting on the glass beneath the ornament, stated what he thought was a more-than-fair price. He held the engine in his palm. Its chimney had broken off once but was now carefully fixed with glue. He placed the engine back on the shelf and examined its five carriages, detaching and checking them one by one. He discovered fractures along the sides of the first and fifth carriages. Even with its imperfections, the train was beautiful.

"Could you wrap it? It's a gift."

With his wrinkled hands, the shopkeeper scooped up the six train pieces and carried them over to the counter. The old man

continued to hum his melody as he placed the porcelain train into a small wooden box and wrapped the box in brown paper.

“Thank you,” Alex said. He handed over crumpled bank notes for the photographs and train, tucked the wrapped box beneath his arm, and stepped out onto the street. He squinted at the sunlight and pulled down his flat cap as his breath left his mouth in a cloud of vapor like cigarette smoke.

His younger sister, Ruti, had collected porcelain ornaments for years. Alex knew she’d love the tiny train and she’d love his treasure hunt that would lead her to find it. But his satisfaction was followed by hollow guilt. *Ruti will cry tonight when she finds me gone.* He pictured Mother and Father crying, too. If only he could give them a proper goodbye. If only he weren’t leaving the day before his sister’s birthday. But this was Alex’s only chance to escape Germany. By tomorrow night, he’d be far from Berlin. Far from the lifeless trees and iron-cold factories. Far from the frozen cobblestones and the buildings with their swastika banners. And far from the passersby who could only stare at the yellow star sewn to his coat.

Ruth

The light fell through the stained glass windows of the cathedral and sparkled across the lenses of Ruth’s glasses, making her squint.

Mama stepped out of the confession box on the opposite side of the vast space. “Ruti!” she called out across the rows of wooden pews. Ruth’s nickname echoed up the pillars into the domed roof. “Your turn.”

Every year, Mama brought her here. The twenty-sixth of February. The day before Ruth’s birthday. Earlier, walking into the cathedral, Ruth had whined that she hated confession. And Mama had reminded Ruth that birthdays were new beginnings. It was 1943 and the war could be over soon, Mama had whispered, so there was even more reason to make amends and repent for their sins.

The confession box was dark and smelled of musty wood. As Ruth closed the curtain, she forgot the list of sins she'd prepared to recite. *I'd rather be at school.*

"Good morning, my child," Father von Wegburg said through the wooden lattice.

Ruth knelt and stared back at his silhouette, trying to make out the features of his face. She adjusted her glasses.

"Are you all right?" he asked after a few moments of silence.

Ruth tried to keep a straight face. "Oh, I'm fine. Thank you."

"You may share whatever is on your mind. There are no secrets from the Lord, for He has already seen what we have done."

Ruth pictured herself standing on the kitchen countertop, in her winter nightgown with its hand-stitched leaves and flowers, reaching to open a cupboard and finding the cake Mama had made for her. The number 15 had been piped over white cream icing. "I found my birthday cake. I woke up early when my family was still sleeping."

"Looking for a cake is no sin," Father von Wegburg said.

She wanted to laugh. If Mama knew what she'd said, she would have either scolded Ruth for mocking the Catholic Church or chuckled along. Ruth continued, "I tasted the icing. I shouldn't have. But I couldn't help it."

"In that case, you might be guilty of gluttony."

Ruth nearly snorted.

"Is there anything else you need to confess?" Father von Wegburg asked, sounding as if he was smiling, too.

Ruth should have been admitting to a small list of transgressions, she knew. Earlier that week, when her teacher asked Ruth to share her views on the justifications of Germany's war, she hadn't told the truth. *Nobody can speak the truth anymore.* "There's nothing else."

"Say two Hail Marys," Father von Wegburg told her. "And have a pleasant birthday."

When she stepped out of the confession box, Mama was kneeling at one of the pews.

"How do you feel?" Mama asked Ruth when they walked outside.

Ruth suppressed a grin. “Hungry.”

“What do you fancy for lunch?”

“Something hot.”

Against the cloudy sky, the dome and cross of St. Hedwig’s Cathedral stood proudly, just like Mama. It was the way she carried herself that made her so beautiful. Mama wore her hat not because it kept her warm in the February weather, but because it suited her. Their gloves on, Mama linked her arm with hers and, as they followed the arc of the street, Ruth mimicked her mother’s elegant posture. They had the same green eyes and the same healthy light-brown hair, but while Ruth’s was tied into a single braid, Mama’s was pinned perfectly into a bun at the back, like the scoop of ice cream Ruth was hoping would accompany her birthday cake.

Ruth couldn’t wait to tell Elise about her cake confession. They’d have a good laugh about it. Ruth hadn’t seen her best friend in days. Since the beginning of the year, with her father fighting in the war, Elise was constantly running errands for her mother, and was always cancelling their plans.

But Ruth would see her this evening, and she couldn’t wait. Every year, Elise stayed over for Ruth’s birthday. After a special dinner, the girls would whisper in Ruth’s room for hours, gossiping about boys and shrieking at the nighttime sounds of scurrying mice beneath the floorboards. And then they’d wake up—on Ruth’s birthday—for breakfast, gifts, and Alexander’s annual treasure hunt. And delicious cake, of course.

Elise

I always ruin everything. Elise practiced how to break the news to Ruth. Mother wanted Elise at home. She wouldn’t be able to stay over as they’d planned, so they’d have to celebrate tomorrow, instead.

As Elise left the League meeting, she avoided a proper goodbye with the other girls. Hurrying to the door, she threw her pink coat

over her brown Girls' League climbing jacket. She stuffed her neckerchief and beret into her bag and put on her woolen scarf and warmer hat. Her uniform was hidden completely.

"Enjoy your weekend, Elise," one of the League leaders called out.

Not bothering to reply, Elise headed north toward Hackescher Market. Brittle weeds reached out to her through the cracks in the pavement.

Today had been like any other day. Elise had been up at dawn. She'd washed the floors and prepared boiled potatoes and fish for her mother. Then school. Mathematics in the morning. Writing after lunchtime. In Girls' League later in the afternoon, they'd practiced their embroidery and sang their usual pledges to the Führer—their leader, Adolf Hitler—and the Fatherland.

Hackescher Market on Friday afternoons was always bustling, with its rows of red brick arches on one side of the square and a line of food stalls along the promenade. Orange juice and butter had already sold out. Mother wouldn't be pleased. Elise used her ration card to buy potatoes, a tin of pickled fish, canned vegetables, a little sugar. Since autumn, the citizens of Berlin had been surprised to see food rations increase—a sign of Germany's victories, the newspapers reported.

The women and old men working the stands wore thick scarves and hats. They announced their wares, but not as cheerily as they once had. In wartime, it's not easy to be proud, Elise's mother once said. But Elise knew that wasn't strictly true. The girls in the League couldn't have been prouder. The leaders taught them how to chant and sing. And how to think. *We are the future mothers of the Reich*. Their Führer would be victorious. Their grandchildren would lead the new world.

Elise looked down at her coat. Its soft pink material and off-white trim were elegant, but even with her League jacket underneath, it wasn't warm enough. She'd have to switch it for her old overcoat.

As she passed the fish stall, Elise turned toward the dark corners and vacant arches along the brick structure. Carved panels and pretty

windows stood out against Berlin's sky, while the illegal traders worked in the shadows below. Trading without ration cards wasn't allowed, but it was common and easy. The traders ignored the policemen on patrol, who paid little attention in return.

As Elise passed the opening of a courtyard, she heard someone yelp in pain. Around the corner, two people were scuffling. She held her satchel close. Her eyes locked on the scene. A man a few years older than Elise, with unshaven, grubby pale skin and dark hair, had his back against the brick wall. An African boy pressed his hand against the young man's pale throat. Elise recognized the boy—he stood out, since almost all people in Berlin were fair-skinned. She'd seen him in the market before. He was younger than her, maybe twelve or thirteen. *Keep away from him*, Mother had said. Elise's leaders in the Girls' League had warned them about Africans. *Thieves*. The Jews had brought them to Germany to poison and weaken the superior German race.

"Give it to me!" the African boy shouted, and he kicked at the young man's shins.

The African is robbing him. She had an urge to intervene. Or get help. With his hands around a heavy bag, the young man pushed and punched the African boy away. When the boy turned his eyes toward Elise, she held her breath. Her stomach spun. She wanted to turn and run, but her feet were firmly in place.

The boy punched the young man's stomach and pulled down on the bag's strap, which cut into the young man's neck, and he grimaced in pain. Elise wanted to fling herself toward the boy, to dig her nails into his dark skin. Her eyes caught the silver flash of a knife, its handle clutched by the boy's fist, the blade pointing at the scruffy young man's throat. Elise gasped. Her sudden sound, like a choked scream, startled them both, and the boy turned, giving the young man the chance to grab and twist the boy's wrist. The African boy screamed out and released the knife, which fell and landed by Elise's foot. She looked down at its razor-sharp edge.

"Pick it up!" the young man yelled at her, his arm now pinning the African boy against the wall.

“No! Girl, that’s mine!” the thief shouted.

Elise wanted to pick up the blade. But she felt paralyzed. The young man turned and jabbed his fist hard into the boy’s shoulder. While the African thief yelped and winced in agony, the young man reached for the knife. Then he stood, arm outstretched, holding the blade to the thief’s neck. For a moment, the young man backed off. Then he lunged forward and slammed his fist into the thief’s ribs. With a howl, the boy doubled over.

The young man slipped the knife into his coat and turned to Elise. “Come on.”

In her head, Elise heard the voices of her League leaders. *Black blood is a danger to our race.* “Should we call the police?”

“No. Leave him. Let’s go.”

They ran into Hackescher Market. Their shoulders and bags bashed into the crowd. The young man ran fast, ahead of Elise. But she kept up, even with her satchel of food. They scurried like cats between the stalls and carts and traced a perfect route through the busy cobblestoned streets. If her brother, Viktor, were there, he would have screamed in delight. He would have turned to shoot his make-believe gun at the boy trying to catch them. A soldier in battle.

Slowing down to a fast walk, Elise glanced behind her to make sure they’d lost the thief. They turned onto Rosenstrasse and ducked into another courtyard off the main road. Out of breath, she faced the young man.

“Thanks,” he said.

“For what?” She felt lightheaded, in part because he was extremely good-looking.

“You saved me. And my bag. You distracted him.”

The young man wore a long, gray coat. A flat charcoal-colored cap almost covered his eyes. Earlier, in the rush of everything, he had seemed grubby, but as he adjusted his cap, his thick dark hair fell neatly over his ears and partly over his face, making him look clean and respectable, and now somewhat younger, too. He was a little older than Elise, but definitely no older than eighteen.

“Did he hurt you?” she asked, pointing at his throat.

“Nah,” he said, his knuckles touching his neck, grazed by the bag’s strap.

As he laughed, his face creased into dimples and Elise noticed his chipped side tooth. *He’s not from a good family.* If Mother had known Elise had been involved in a fight with a black boy and his knife, Elise would have received a lecture about setting a poor example for little Viktor.

“Smoke?” he asked, filling her awkward silence.

He reached into his coat and pulled out an almost empty packet of cigarettes. As he held them toward her, Elise studied his thin forearm. She shook her head. She’d never been offered a cigarette before. He took a cigarette for himself, lit it, inhaled deeply, and blew smoke up into the air.

“I’m Elise. As in Beethoven,” she blurted out.

She cringed with embarrassment. Referencing Beethoven was something her father would have done. She was blushing; she could feel it. The young man’s smile was infectious and she admitted almost aloud that he was handsome. For a moment, Elise thought about asking to see the knife in his pocket. She wanted to hold it and stare at her reflection in its blade.

“Where do you live?” she asked, not quite believing her own confidence.

“Here and there.”

She let out a short squeaky laugh.

He reached into his bag. “Here you go.” He took out a packet of biscuits, the fancier kind Elise had loved as a little girl.

She shook her head.

“Go on. Take it.”

Elise reached out her hand. He was staring down at her coat sleeve that was pulled up a few inches so her forearm was exposed, revealing the scratches on her skin.

“Thank you,” she mumbled. She took the biscuits and pulled her arm away.

“See you around.” Then he disappeared into the crowd.

As Elise turned back onto Rosenstrasse in the direction of Ruth's home, she placed the packet of biscuits into her satchel, next to her Girls' League books and the food she'd bought. She could feel the red fading from her face. *I told him my name, but he didn't tell me his.*

Marko

I'm lucky as hell. The little girl with stringy hair and spotty skin—Marko's little helper—had appeared from nowhere.

Opening a compartment on the side of the heavy bag, Marko almost cheered when he found an old wristwatch. Straight away, he put it on. He'd never worn a watch before. Marko laughed to himself. If the black kid hadn't pulled out a knife, Marko would've felt sorry for the scrawny wretch.

About fifteen minutes earlier, Marko had been walking through Hackescher market. A commotion had broken out in front of a market stall after a middle-aged woman was accused of stealing produce. Marko had seen the woman before; she roamed the alleyways and stalls around Hackescher, collecting only the best quality wares in an oversized bag. Some market sellers ignored her. Others were happy to trade, and the woman would swap one item at a time. Accusing her of stealing, a market seller had alerted a policeman. As two guards held her wrists, she'd cried and pleaded. She hadn't done anything wrong. But the Nazi policemen had dragged her away. When Marko spotted her bag on the street, he'd pushed through the crowd. But the woman was long gone. He'd planned to keep her bag for himself and sell whatever was inside.

By the time he'd reached the market stall, the bag had disappeared. That's when he'd seen the black kid with the woman's bag on his back. Feeling cheated, he'd followed the kid into an alley and confronted him. He'd seen the bag first, Marko told him, and suggested they split the contents. But the kid had refused and put up a good fight, but in the end, Marko had been stronger.

On a quiet side street, Marko kneeled and opened the bag's main compartment. Below fresh produce and orange juice, he discovered bars of chocolate, packs of cigarettes, bottles of wines and liquors. *Perfect.* He would give the perishable foods to old Duerr and leave Berlin on her good side. He'd gift some of the chocolate to Kizzy, his little cousin. And it wouldn't be hard to sell the rest.

Getting across the city on foot would take an hour. Catching the U-Bahn would mean switching train lines. Marko checked his new watch. It looked expensive, so he tucked it under his sleeve. Opting to walk, lugging the bag, he moved fast. His neck was scratched, but it was no big deal.

West on Reinhard Street, Marko passed the new air raid shelter, a massive structure with tiny windows that made the government look weak after the air raids a few months before. The idea of Hitler losing the war amused Marko, and he purposely walked close to a Nazi guard, who shot him a look of contempt. Marko felt like punching his bastard face.

"What?" Marko dared to say. Then he spat on the ground and kept going.

Kizzy

There were things nobody knew about Kizzy. She wanted to live on a ship for a few months and travel the world. She dreamed of learning to tame and ride a horse. One day, she'd try beekeeping; she wanted to see up close the honeycombs inside the hives. *Or maybe I'll be a nurse.*

"Your tea's ready," Kizzy called out.

Climbing the stairs, she balanced a heavy tray—full teapot, cup and saucer, bread and honey.

As usual, Professor Duerr's room reeked of stale smoke. The old woman was sitting up in bed, napping, with a half-full packet of

cigarettes next to her. Now and again, when the woman wasn't looking, Kizzy would take a cigarette or two.

She set the tray down on the bedside table.

"Frau Professor?"

Kizzy nudged her arm. Professor Duerr didn't move and, quickly, Kizzy stuffed a handful of the cigarettes into the pocket of her pinafore dress. She was about to tiptoe away when she saw a line of saliva hanging between the old woman's chin and nightgown.

"Frau Professor?"

Leaning over the old woman, Kizzy grabbed and shook her shoulders. Nothing. Minutes earlier, Professor Duerr had called out to the girl to make her some food. Kizzy tapped the old woman's face, and panic filled her head and gut as she wondered if her guardian was dead.

"Frau Professor, wake up!"

Remembering an old trick her cousin Tsuru had taught her, Kizzy looked around Professor Duerr's cluttered bedroom. Piles of clothes covered every surface, empty cigarette packets here and there. Kizzy found the hand mirror she was looking for. She lifted the old woman's forehead and, with the other hand, held the mirror below Professor Duerr's nose. The mirror fogged up. *She's breathing.* Kizzy breathed, too.

"Frau Professor! It's me!"

Kizzy tapped the old woman's face, a little harder than before, but Professor Duerr sat there, slumped forward, away from her pillows, her face down to one side. *What's wrong with her?*

Kizzy poured tea into the cup on the bedside table. With a spoon, she forced some of the warm liquid into the old woman's mouth. The tea spilled back out and onto the bed sheets. *I've gotta get help.*

Kizzy bolted down the stairs, found Professor Duerr's house key on the kitchen worktop, and threw on her coat.

Outside, Kizzy pulled on her hat. Its thick light-blue wool covered her ears, keeping out the icy air.

The idea of taking an underground train filled Kizzy with fear. She'd never traveled by U-Bahn on her own. So instead she ran south, over the river and toward the western edge of the Tiergarten. Kizzy held the key in her pocket and pictured the poor old woman, her guardian, slumped over in bed. Kizzy needed to find Tsuru.

Tsura

Their footsteps light, Tsura and Seraph climbed the ornate iron staircase inside Seraph's elegant apartment building. The weight of the new revolver inside her coat pocket made Tsura think of Gestapo officers swarming the streets of Berlin, relentless in their hunt to catch their inferior prey. Guards and soldiers had checked and double-checked Tsura's falsified papers dozens of times. To most, she went by the name Greta Voeske. *Greta would make a great member of the Nazi party.* Tsura longed for her other self to penetrate the government's core, to corrode from within. Before they could grasp her plot, Greta would suffocate them, beat each Nazi with her bare Romani hands, each crying out for mercy just as her family cried, just as they'd beaten Father and her uncles, just as they'd taunted Mother and Aunt Marie. Through Greta's eyes, Tsura saw the blood of revenge pouring over the Nazis' boots, the beautiful souls of her people looking down.

But that was only a fantasy. It was early 1943 and the political climate was more repressive than ever. Since the Gestapo's recent clamp down on student resistance groups, Tsura and her peers had been inspired and, for now, silenced. Only a few still dared to pass

out anti-Nazi leaflets. In the middle of the night, Tsuru and Seraph would scamper across the cityscape to plaster up illegal anti-Nazi posters on Berlin's buildings and billboard pillars. Occasionally, Tsuru helped to ferry the Nazis' targets—mostly political opponents of the government—from hiding place to hiding place, risking her freedom and life to smuggle food and information between the darkened corners of Hitler's capital. Others, braver still, sabotaged trucks and cars, smuggling weapons and explosives. But even they couldn't prevent the round-ups. More families torn apart. More pain. More killing.

Six flights of stairs up, Seraph tapped out the password on the door. Wolf let the young women inside. He was unshaven as usual and, despite the warmth of Seraph's apartment, still in his coat and gloves. Tsuru hadn't seen him in days.

Seraph pulled Wolf close and kissed him on the mouth. "Wolf, your boots," she whined and slapped him hard on the arm.

Wolf shrugged and sneered at Tsuru. Behind Seraph's back, Tsuru smiled at him. Then she locked the door and kept her boots on, too—always ready to run—while Seraph plunged her bare feet into the plush blue rug.

In the living room, Seraph poured hot coffee before leaning into Wolf and repeating the rumors. "Sounds like they'll be arresting more Jews this weekend."

As Seraph lit her cigarette, Wolf's eyes burned with fury.

"When are we leaving for Marzahn?" Tsuru asked.

"In a few days. I'm still organizing a vehicle," Seraph explained.

"That could be too late. What's the delay?"

"Trucks don't fall from the sky" was Seraph's retort, and Tsuru ignored her.

Rastplatz Marzahn, a Nazi encampment on the outskirts of the city, separated the so-called Aryan population of Berlin from the government's Roma prisoners. Its rundown caravans, guarded by police, held women, children, and a handful of men, including Tsuru's mother and aunt. The government's choice to refer to the

Marzahn camp as a resting spot—*Rastplatz*—as if the Roma families had chosen to move there, was both insulting and frightening.

Tsura took out the revolver from her pocket, turning it in her hand. “So where did you get this?” she asked Seraph.

Seraph laughed. “I’ve become a gun smuggler.”

“I thought you were a pacifist,” Wolf said and he rolled his eyes at Tsura.

Seraph took out her own gun and waved it carelessly in Wolf’s face.

“Careful with that,” Wolf snapped.

“I suppose violence is necessary sometimes,” Seraph said and she put the pistol away. “I’ve never hurt a fly and I’d only kill if I had no choice.”

Wolf ignored his girlfriend’s ramblings. With his gloved hand, he took the revolver from Tsura and, pointing the gun at the floor, he looked her in the eyes, indicating she should pay attention. He drew back the release and imitated pulling the trigger.

Seraph was still talking. “Guns are for cowards,” she sighed.

When they heard a knock on the door, Seraph became silent. Eyes wide, Tsura stood, taking the revolver back from Wolf. Without a sound, Tsura and Wolf moved across the room and stepped into an alcove behind a tall mahogany cabinet, out of sight. Wolf took out his pistol. Any anxiety Tsura should have felt had been replaced by the comfort her new gun provided, and she wondered if she’d need to use it. The tapping turned into their password. *Someone who knows us*. Seraph unlocked and opened the door, gesturing for the visitor to step inside.

“Is Greta Voeske here?”

“What’s your name?” Seraph asked.

“Franziska.”

At the sound of the familiar voice, Tsura dropped the gun back into her coat. As Seraph closed the door, Tsura stepped out from the alcove, astonished to see her little cousin Kizzy. Just as Tsura used her false name, Greta, Kizzy was using her own false name, Franziska. Tsura smiled. She’d taught Kizzy well. Even in the dim

light, Kizzy's tangled hair and rosy skin sparkled under her crocheted hat, a hand-me-down, the exact same blue winter hat Tsuru had worn when she was Kizzy's age.

"What's wrong? How did you find me?" Tsuru asked. She was both troubled and entirely amazed to see Kizzy. She must have followed them, somehow. And she knew their code. *Kizzy and I are family, for sure.*

Kizzy glared at Wolf's gun. Wolf stared back, seemingly confused as to how and why this thirteen-year-old had tracked them down.

"This is my Kizzy," Tsuru declared.

As soon as Tsuru used Kizzy's real name, she could see her cousin relax. Seraph and Wolf could be trusted. But Wolf scowled at Tsuru, angry she'd allowed herself to be followed.

"She's my little cousin," Tsuru explained.

"Not so little," Kizzy said.

Seraph nodded while Wolf continued to sulk. They walked into the kitchen, leaving Kizzy and Tsuru alone.

Tsuru felt bad for patronizing her. *You're my little cousin, but you're no longer a child,* she wanted to say out loud. While Tsuru was impressed that her cousin had found the apartment, she could tell from Kizzy's worried expression that this impromptu visit was serious.

Kizzy was still breathing heavily. "It's Duerr. I think she's dying."

"How bad is it?"

Kizzy shook her head.

Images of Professor Duerr collapsed on the kitchen floor or slumped over in her reading chair blocked words from leaving Tsuru's throat. *Everything's different now.* The old woman had chosen the wrong day to die. "Wait here."

The kitchen was filled with cigarette smoke. The scratches in the wooden table matched the lines on Wolf's head as he inhaled his tobacco and listened intently to the wireless, tuned into the forbidden news reports. Seraph nodded as the voice of a British

reporter, speaking in German, reviewed the implications of the Soviet's recent victory at Stalingrad.

Seraph clapped and looked up at Tsuru. "Did you hear that? The Nazis will lose the war. What did—"

"I have to go," Tsuru interrupted. "I need to take care of something."

Seraph exhaled quickly. "Fine. But I need the photographs by seven o'clock."

Tsuru would need to change the carefully laid plans. "I'll see you by seven. But I'll get you the photographs later tonight."

Surrounded by his clouds of cigarette smoke, Wolf appeared to be hypnotized by the radio, but Tsuru could tell he was listening to the conversation.

"I'll see you later," Tsuru said, looking at him.

Without looking up, Wolf nodded.

On the echoing stairwell, Kizzy knew to keep silent. She didn't speak until the two cousins stepped out into the wintery afternoon.

Kizzy laughed. "Surprised I found you?"

Tsuru narrowed her eyes. "You're in trouble, Kizz."

When Kizzy saw Tsuru was smirking, she grinned, too.

Tsuru watched her beautiful cousin walk half a step ahead. The sight of Kizzy's maturing features, her shoulders determined, leading them to Kizzy's home, filled Tsuru's heart with pride and her stomach with dread. *You're not a little girl any more, Kizzy Lange.* It was then Tsuru knew what she had to do. She ignored the ball of sadness creeping its way from her chest toward her throat. Kizzy didn't know—not yet—that in a few hours she and Tsuru would be saying goodbye to one another, perhaps for many years.

Alexander

Alex's house was empty. As he'd expected, he wouldn't have a chance to say goodbye to his parents and sister.

He had no choice but to leave. The floodwaters of National Socialism were rising. *I'm a Jew on Hitler's list.* His stepmother and stepsister, Ruti—both Catholic—were safe. But Alex worried for Father, who'd soon be the last Jew remaining in their family. *I should stay at home, where I belong.* Yet Alex felt an obligation to escape the impending flood. He imagined himself at the coast, a failing world behind him, as he boarded his ark to London. To abandon the people he loved the most was better than drowning.

In the kitchen, Alex chewed down leftovers—Mother's roasted potatoes, yesterday's stew, some bread with butter. As he ate, he saw the marks of his family everywhere. Father's slippers rested neatly beneath the kitchen table. Mother's cookbooks with her recipe notes sticking out from their pages were piled on the wooden countertop. The wall calendar had Ruti's birthday circled in hand-drawn flowers.

For the last time, Alex walked upstairs to his room. Just as he had climbed the stairs at the factory earlier that afternoon, every step felt heavy. Today, while he prepared to leave Berlin, each act was a goodbye to everything he knew—to his routines, his family, his home.

He dropped Ruti's gift on his bed. Its brown paper cover was crisp and waiting to be unwrapped. Next to the gift box, Alex spread out his overcoat as if dressing an invisible man. From the edge of his bed, he looked down at the yellow star. Alex fell back onto the quilt and trailed through the list of tasks he couldn't forget. He needed to pack and write letters to his parents and sister. He had already planted some of the clues leading to Ruti's birthday prize, but he needed to hide the rest. He took hold of his coat's sleeve. Alex and the invisible man lay still, staring up through the window to Berlin's afternoon sky. Against the gray, the empty tree branches swayed in the winter wind, as though waving goodbye. *This is really happening,* Alex said to the man in his overcoat.

The man whispered, *Don't worry.*

Alex found Father's small suitcase and filled it with shirts, socks, underwear. He remembered soap, a razor, a small towel, his toothbrush. At his desk, Alex watched the street below, the

reassurance of the familiar view echoing the comforts of his bedroom. His pencils and notepads lined up on the desk reminded him of the hours he'd spent writing about his ambitions. He'd be a cartographer and give public lectures on geology and the science of map making. The map book on his desk and the framed world map on his bedroom wall reminded Alex of the journey ahead, full of exciting possibilities.

He ripped two sheets of paper from a notebook and began to write a summary of what had happened.

*Dearest Mama and Papa,
I have some exciting news, an opportunity I couldn't pass. I know you'll both understand. This morning at the brewery, my colleague pulled me aside with some urgent news. A chance to get out of Berlin...*

In the letter, Alex didn't mention how he had made excuses to his supervisor. How, on his workmate's recommendation, he'd headed to an antique shop in the city where an old man had taken his photograph. But he mentioned the chance to acquire false papers. He kept the letter upbeat, focusing on his chance to escape. Both Father and Mother would be pleased, he knew.

Fighting back tears, Alex ended the letter to his parents and began to write to Ruti. The handwritten farewell would accompany her hidden gift.

Happy fifteenth birthday to my favorite (and only) little sister. I'm so sorry to be missing your celebration, but I'm thinking of you... By now, Mama and Papa would have told you everything... I wish I could take you with me, Ruti... Make sure you work hard in school. I know you will. And look after our crazy parents...

He stared at the notes on his desk, the cryptic puzzles of Ruti's birthday treasure hunt waiting to be hidden.

When he read the first puzzle again, a better idea hit him. He shredded the original clue into pieces and dropped it into the wastepaper basket beneath his desk. On a blank piece of notepaper, he rewrote the new first clue, ensuring its prose was purposely unclear. He folded Ruti's goodbye letter and tucked it inside the brown paper of the gift box.

He placed the letter to his parents on his desk next to Ruti's new first treasure hunt clue and his house keys, which he no longer needed.

Leaning over the invisible man in his black winter overcoat, Alex lifted a corner of the yellow star. The stitches snapped as he ripped it off, leaving no mark on the woolen fabric. He put on his coat and flat cap, then dropped the yellow patch into the top drawer of his bedside table and hid the remaining treasure hunt clues around the house. In Ruti's bedroom, he rummaged through her art box and found a piece of white chalk. Suitcase in hand and Ruti's boxed porcelain train under his arm, Alex said goodbye to the paintings and photographs lining the walls of his family's home. The framed portrait of his grandmother seemed to whisper a blessing for his safe escape.

Alex found a shovel from the gardening tools by the kitchen door. He used Ruti's chalk to write his final clue and hid her train in the spot he'd been planning. All Alex had left to do was pick up his developed photographs and take them to the meeting place. Walking away from home, he filled the February air with clouds of his breath.

Alex's family home stood close to rail tracks in the western corner of the old Friedrichshain district. As a child, Alex would run through Berlin's neighborhoods with his friends, jump aboard the city tram, and head to a park to play ball. Now, as in old times, he had no yellow star. When he'd worn the Jewish patch on his coat, the same people who had once called him charming and given him treats had gawked at him from afar. Alex had become used to it.

Now, he worried that the empty space on his chest was visible to the passersby. He implored the city to remind them of who he used to be. He walked by old apartment blocks, with their sloped roofs

and iron balconies. His family had lived in Berlin for generations. Carved monuments stared back at him, just as they had when he was a boy. The red, black, and white of the Nazi banners flying from silent buildings reminded Alex of Father's family—his cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandfather—sent away to the labor camps. The black crooked lines of each swastika flag pointed to the distant corners of Hitler's new world.

The bells on the shop door jangled and the old man appeared from the back room. "Good timing. I was about to close for the day." Through the clutter of furniture and ornaments, the shopkeeper kept his eyes on the street. Then he reached into his waistcoat pocket and handed Alex two developed photographs.

Alex stared down at the two small black-and-white images. In the suit and tie, Alex didn't look like himself. *This is how strangers will see me.*

Alex turned to leave. "Thank you."

The old man gave a heavy sigh, making Alex stop. "You need to be more careful, young man."

A chill ran across Alex's neck. "Why?"

"You didn't barter for the porcelain train. You must stand up for yourself. Especially in wartime." The man pointed to a box of old coins and buttons on a shelf. "Go on, choose one for yourself."

Surprised by the man's integrity, Alex rummaged around and picked up what he first thought was a small coin bearing the imprint of a soldier's helmet and crossing swords.

"It's steel," the shopkeeper explained. "A medal from Germany's first war, awarded to an injured trench soldier, most likely. And now it's yours."

Alex paused. Then he dropped the medal into his trouser pocket and the photographs into the inside pocket of his coat.

"Thank you for everything."

On the main road, Alex's stomach jumped into his chest when he saw a small group of Nazi guards walking toward him. *If they ask to see my papers, I'm dead.* Alex crossed the street and kept his eyes on his feet. He dared not look up.

Like a crackling radio being tuned in for the early evening broadcast, their voices sharpened through the haze of Alex's thoughts.

"Jewish dog," one guard yelled, as the others laughed along.

Alex found it difficult to catch his breath. *How do they know I'm a Jew?* He looked up. The insults had been aimed at somebody else. At first, he didn't want to look back, but he couldn't help himself. A woman and man walked arm in arm, their yellow patches glowing against the cloudy afternoon. Alex choked when he recognized them both, and he spun his head forward, hoping they hadn't seen his face. He quickened his pace.

Alex turned left onto a quiet side street and glanced back. The Nazi guards were out of sight, but the Jewish man and young woman were following him, their winter shoes shuffling on the cold cobblestones. Alex wanted to turn and tell them to leave him alone. But they kept up, whispering behind him. *They know I saw them.*

Then the man called out. "Alexander? Alexander Broden."

Checking every direction, ensuring he couldn't be seen, Alex stopped and turned, nodding for Lea and her father to approach.

Lea Federman and her father were Alex's colleagues. They stepped away from the street to join Alex in the shaded stone doorway of an apartment building. Lea's dark-brown hair folded where it hit her thin shoulders. Her gloved hands held onto her elbows to keep herself warm. She stared at the breast of Alex's coat—where the yellow star used to be. But she said nothing.

"Where are you headed?" Mr. Federman asked.

"Home," Alex lied.

The man's eyes were bloodshot, exhausted from the long workday. He stood hunched over, just as he did on the brewery's factory floor while his daughter worked in the office. Alex would sometimes say hello to Lea when he collected his delivery schedule and she would smile while her colleagues giggled at their exchanges. Lea was also seventeen, but extremely shy.

"Have you heard the warnings?" Mr. Federman asked in a whisper.

Alex shook his head and stepped back into the doorway's dark corner, his back against the frozen stone. He couldn't be seen talking to people with yellow stars. "I have to go."

He was taken aback when the usually silent Lea began to talk. "Before the end of work today, we heard rumors of more round-ups." Her voice was soft and full of fear.

There were always rumors of an imminent Nazi *Aktion*. Sometimes the speculations were true. Often they weren't.

"I haven't heard anything," Alex said truthfully.

Mr. Federman looked relieved. Lea was about to speak again when they heard the marching of boots on the street. More Nazi guards. Alex grabbed the door handle of the building and slipped inside, pulling Lea and her father with him. Without a sound, Alex closed the door to the dark tiled hallway they were now standing in, his finger against his lips to tell them to keep quiet.

Alex could see they were startled. The whites of Lea's eyes were fixed on his, wondering why he was hiding. Her father's eyes were now closed, as if awaiting execution. Alex clenched his fists, hoping that the people outside—Nazi soldiers, police, or Gestapo—didn't see them. The smell of the brewery lingered on Mr. Federman's clothes.

Alex heard them walking fast, away from the building now, their trudging fading into the distance as they hid behind the wooden door.

"We need to get home," Mr. Federman said to Lea, "or your mother will start to worry."

Lea nodded at her father, then turned to Alex. "Are you going into hiding?" she asked.

Alex remained silent.

Then Lea leaned forward on tiptoes and, in the dark hallway, kissed his cheek. "Please, be safe," she whispered, and she and her father disappeared into the late afternoon.

If the circumstances had been different, Lea Federman might have been Alex's girlfriend.

Ruth

Ruth loved birthdays. But sometimes she built them up too much.

“Ruth, I’m so sorry.”

While Elise stared at the ground, Ruth tried to stay cheery. “Don’t worry. We’ll celebrate tomorrow.”

Sitting on the step outside her house, Ruth wanted to tell Elise to stay for their sleepover, but she dropped the topic. A packet of delicious biscuits, an early birthday gift from Elise, sat on the step between them, marking the end of their short party. Against her spotty skin and messy fair hair, Elise’s pink coat made her look washed-out and ill. Elise had once been a happier person, but everything had changed. This was the first year in as long as Ruth could remember that Elise Edelhoff, her closest friend, wouldn’t be sleeping over for her birthday. Elise hadn’t mentioned her mother, but her friend was needed at home, Ruth knew. Elise would miss a good dinner, and the gifts, and Mama’s cake, and leftovers for breakfast.

“You’ll still have fun,” Elise said.

“Just me and my parents.” Ruth laughed. “How incredibly boring is that?”

“And Alex.”

As much as Ruth adored her brother, her birthday dinner would now be an anti-climax. With only Alexander and their parents, tonight would be no different from any other Friday. Ruth usually blew out her candles and opened her gifts with Elise by her side. Last year when Ruth turned fourteen, Alexander had rewarded her with a set of tiny ceramic cats to add to her collection of ornaments. And while Papa raised a toast in his daughter’s honor, Mama disapproved as Ruth and Elise stuffed their mouths with too many slices of cake and cackled away about how they’d grow up to be fat old women.

“Please save me from my family,” Ruth whined.

Elise said nothing and Ruth immediately felt embarrassed that she was complaining. Ruth pushed her glasses into place. “I didn’t mean that.”

Everything had changed so much in one year. Elise had new obligations. Elise's father was fighting the Soviets on the Eastern front. Mrs. Edelhoff never left their house. Almost every day, Elise would rush through Berlin's markets and then head home to cook and clean and even repair anything that needed fixing. Ruth felt terrible for her best friend. As Ruth's mother often said, the longer Germany's war lasted, the more difficult life would become. The war was now into its third year.

"It's getting cold. I should go," Elise said.

Ruth leaned in for a hug. "See you in the morning."

Elise stood up and reached into the pocket of her pink coat. Between her fingers, a folded piece of paper fluttered in the February wind. "I was supposed to give this to you tonight, when you asked me for it."

Ruth's nickname and the word "*Freund*"—friend—was written on the outside of the paper. Nobody called her Ruti except for Alexander and her parents. Immediately, Ruth knew that the paper was part of Alexander's birthday treasure hunt, created especially for her. She unfolded it.

"Ruth Broden! What are you doing?"

"It's just a silly riddle," Ruth said.

"But you'll ruin your brother's game."

Ruth grinned and tugged on her best friend's coat sleeve. "If you can't stay for dinner, you can help me find my gift."

Ruth read Alexander's clue.

*Three circles
In blue fabric
Provide comfort and discretion*

Ruth's glasses fogged up when they walked from the cold into the warmth of her home. They dropped their overcoats onto the chair in the hallway and Ruth rushed into the living room.

"Blue fabric," Ruth said out loud.

Elise tutted with disapproval but she seemed amused. “Ruth, don’t! Your brother planned it all out for you. You have to start from the beginning.”

Ignoring Elise, Ruth read the treasure hunt clue again. She knew she was spoiling Alexander’s game. Her brother usually gave Ruth the first riddle in the chain himself. But she couldn’t resist. *Blue fabrics. Comfort. “Cushions!”*

“You’re so funny,” Elise said. She was smiling, with her arms folded across her Girl’s League uniform. That brown jacket and ugly skirt. Ruth had once found Elise’s Nazi uniform frightening. Over time, fear had been replaced by discomfort.

Again, Ruth read Alexander’s riddle. She was sure it referred to the circular swirling lilac patterns of the armchair pillows and matching curtains. She lifted each cushion and checked around the windows. No notes in sight. The previous year, Alexander had buried one of his clues down the back of the sofa. Ruth checked there, too. *Three circles.* The word “discretion” made her think of her bedroom.

“Upstairs?” Elise said, letting out a giggle, and she raced Ruth to the top of the staircase.

Ruth joined her on the landing and sighed. Ruth loved her brother, but his riddles and childish treasure hunt games were becoming tiring. “I’ll be fifteen tomorrow. Alexander needs to stop making these for me.”

“Oh, Ruth, shut up,” Elise said with a smirk. “It’s fun.”

Elise was right, of course, and Ruth read the clue again.

“What does it say?” Elise asked.

Ruth raised her eyebrows, folded the note into her hand, and pretended to scold her friend. “So now you want to play along?” Then she poked her tongue out, which made Elise chuckle.

Ruth checked in the drawers of her bedroom dresser, rummaging through her blouses and undershirts. She found what she was looking for—some lavender ribbons she often used to tie back her plaited hair. But there was no note there. She checked the piles of clothes scattered about on her floor and bed.

Elise stood at Ruth's dressing table, as she often did, admiring Ruth's collection of ceramic figurines. She picked up a porcelain boy and girl in traditional German dress. Ruth's parents had bought her the piece for her tenth birthday, when her hobby was at its peak. While she still liked the figures and tiny objects, Ruth knew they were just knick-knacks. *Alexander's prize will be another piece of porcelain, I bet.* She worried she'd be disappointed. She was secretly hoping for some jewelry or new clothes.

Still, Ruth felt compelled to solve the puzzle in her hand. "Follow me."

Unlike Ruth's bedroom, everything in her brother's room was in its place. Alexander's bed was made. His floor was clear of clutter. His desk and bookshelves were neatly organized, and a map of the world hung, framed and dusted, above his bed.

"What are you looking for?" Elise asked.

Part of Ruth wanted to solve the riddle alone. "I haven't figured it out." She opened the doors of her brother's wardrobe and rummaged through his shirts. Ruth pulled out a blue shirt to check its pocket and sleeves. Nothing. "Don't just stand there, Elise. Check the dresser."

Elise beamed. "Okay. But I'm not touching your brother's underwear."

"That's it!" Ruth squealed, forgetting to be unimpressed by her brother's game. "Move!" she boomed and she comically bumped Elise out of the way. Then she pulled open the top drawer of Alexander's dresser and picked up a pair of his underwear.

"Disgusting!" Elise howled.

Ruth tugged at the waistband, the largest of its three circular openings. "Alexander has one pair of blue underwear." Ruth knew this because she helped Mama with the laundry. It was just like Alexander to make her touch his disgusting undergarments.

Elise winced and wiggled her fingers, as if preparing to reach into a sewer. Then she grabbed the corner of a pair of long johns and threw them in Ruth's face. Ruth screamed and fell back onto Alexander's bed, and they both cackled with laughter.

“The Underwear Man!” Elise said and she burst into hysterics.

“Yes!” Ruth screamed. The infamous Underwear Man was a neighborhood legend, a grouchy middle-aged gentleman known for screaming at children who dared to wander into his front garden. He earned his namesake because he was rarely seen wearing trousers. Ruth and Elise had never met him until, one weekend afternoon, a few years earlier, they’d spotted him in the street and were completely astonished that he was wearing his underwear on his head.

Wrapping Alexander’s clean long johns around her hair, Ruth blew out her cheeks, pretending to be fat and round. She furrowed her forehead and shouted in a deep voice, “Get out! Get out! Get out of my shrubs!” Then she couldn’t make any more words, only fits of giggles. Rolling back onto Alexander’s bed, she held her stomach in pain.

Elise was crying with laughter now and they lay there, side by side, snorting and cackling until they could just about manage to speak.

Ruth took in a deep breath. “So funny.”

“What do you think happened to him?” Elise said, rubbing her eyes.

Ruth stopped laughing. “I think he died.”

In silence, they stared up at the ceiling.

“I wonder what he wore when they buried him,” Ruth said and she started to giggle again.

But Elise didn’t laugh. She furrowed her eyebrows, disapproving of Ruth’s tasteless joke. Then she stood and approached the dresser. “Ruth, you were right.”

Ruth removed her brother’s long johns from her head and joined Elise by the open drawer. There, between the blue fabric and the drawer’s base, was the next treasure hunt clue. “Ruti” was written along the top, over the word “*Unterväsche*”—underwear.

Ruth’s fingers quickly opened the folded paper. Her eyes skimmed the next puzzle.

*Embroidered leaves
On winter branches
Good night, Ruti
Stay warm*

“What does it say?” Elise asked.

Good night. “Check around his bed,” Ruth said.

The image of leaves and branches led Ruth to look out to the street, remembering how one year Alexander had managed to hide one treasure hunt clue on a windowsill outside. She walked over to his desk and pulled at the window’s handle. When a gust of cold wind filled the room, a pile of papers blew onto the floor. Ruth checked the windowsill. She looked at the trees outside her house. Nothing. She shut the window and bent down to pick up the papers.

“I’ve never touched one before,” Elise mumbled. She was standing by Alexander’s bedside table, an object in her hand.

“What’s that?” Ruth asked. She walked over to Elise, who held a single yellow star—frayed edges, threads hanging from its corners. Against Elise’s brown Nazi League jacket, the flash of gold startled Ruth, as if the two should never touch.

“Jude.” Ruth read aloud the word printed in black ink. *Jew.*

“Hitler is sick in the head,” Elise blurted out.

Ruth stared at Elise, who stared down at the yellow patch of fabric. Ruth was surprised to hear such an explicit, forbidden opinion from her best friend.

“I hate these things,” Ruth said, taking the yellow star from Elise.

Alexander and Papa wore Stars of David all the time. They had to. Ruth held the rough and flimsy material and recalled the cross of St. Hedwig’s Cathedral pointing into the sky that morning. She remembered seeing Papa and her brother wearing the stars for the first time, just a year or so ago. They’d been forced to wear them and Ruth said she wanted one on her coat, too, in protest. Papa called her innocent—a euphemism for naïve—and said he was glad Mama and Ruth weren’t Jewish. Wearing the star was dangerous. But Ruth

didn't see them as unsafe—just reminders that Papa was her stepfather and Alexander was her stepbrother. Before the stars came along, she'd liked forgetting that.

Elise let out a small gasp. Ruth turned to see Elise on her knees, by Alexander's desk.

"Ruth," she said, almost whispering. She held a piece of paper.

Ruth thought it was another treasure hunt clue, at first, but Elise was gawking at her, with her eyes ready to pop.

"What?" Ruth grabbed the paper.

*Dear Mama, dear Papa,
I have some exciting news, an opportunity...*

She skipped to the end of the letter.

*...and I promise to be in touch as soon as I can. My only regret
is that I couldn't say goodbye to you in person. I'll be thinking of
you, every day.
All my deepest, fondest love.
Alexander*

Ruth looked at the yellow star still in her hand. "Oh God. He's gone."

Elise

I'm bad luck. It was typical that Elise would be around for a sad moment like this. On the floor, both on their knees, Elise and Ruth read through Alex's letter. *I can't be here*, she almost said aloud. She didn't want to see the flood of Ruth's tears that was about to begin.

Ruth's hand covered her words. "I can't believe this."

"Lots of Jews escape or go into hiding," Elise reminded her. It wasn't safe for the Jews anymore. Everyone knew that.

Ruth began to sob. “No, I can’t believe he didn’t tell us.”

In her dark blue flannel dress and white stockings, Ruth’s mousey brown hair was neatly braided and her green eyes were shining with fresh tears through her perfectly fitting glasses. Ruth looked like a painting. Elise looked down at herself. Compared to Ruth, she was a mess. Her skin was blotchy and her hair was like straw. Not enough nutrients, her father would have said.

Ruth picked up a set of keys from Alex’s desk and cried harder. Elise wanted to put her arms around her best friend, but she stopped herself. Instead, she scooped up the scattered papers from the floor and dropped them back onto Alex’s desk.

The sound of the door downstairs was followed by the cheery voice of Mrs. Broden. “Ruti!”

“Mama, we’re upstairs,” Ruth called back, her voice shaking.

Elise edged toward the door. “I have to get home.”

Taking in loud, deep breaths to calm herself, Ruth led Elise downstairs, the letter in one hand and the yellow star in the other.

Tying her apron, Mrs. Broden walked out of the kitchen. “Wash your hands. You can help set the table.”

“Elise can’t stay,” Ruth said.

Mrs. Broden nodded, as if expecting that. It had been over a month since Elise had last stayed for dinner. There had been a time when she’d eaten with Ruth and her family every other day.

As Elise put on her coat, Ruth held out the letter to her mother, along with Alex’s keys and the yellow fabric.

Mrs. Broden’s hair was pinned back away from the soft makeup on her cheeks. “God,” she whispered. Elise could see that she was about to burst into tears, too.

I need to leave. “See you in the morning,” Elise said to Ruth.

Elise put her arms around her best friend. She had planned to tell Ruth about the fight in the market and how she’d saved the handsome young man. But it was trivial now.

“Thanks again for the biscuits,” Ruth said as Elise stepped into the front garden.

Her satchel at her side, Elise hunched her shoulders against the wind. In the last few days, the temperature had dropped. She reminded herself to switch her pink coat for her heavy coat starting tomorrow. Walking north, away from Ruth's home, Elise felt a sense of relief. She usually begrudged her mother and her endless list of chores. This time, Elise was glad to have a reason to leave. She wondered whether she should cancel her plans for tomorrow, too. With Alex gone, Ruth's birthday would be a long slog.

In Elise's head, her little brother, Viktor, walked by her side, his silky blond hair blowing in the breeze. She remembered that she'd missed visiting him on his birthday. That year, Viktor had spent his birthday alone. When their father said Elise wasn't allowed to see him, she'd cried in her bedroom for hours. Elise pictured herself laughing upstairs in Alex's bedroom. She remembered The Underwear Man and she tried to smile. Despite the sadness of Alex's sudden departure, Elise knew she needed to be with Ruth on her birthday weekend. *I'm a terrible friend.*

Behind her, the trains on their tracks rattled like machine guns. So many of the men were gone, fighting in the war, including her father. Among the faces of pedestrians on their way home from work, Elise searched for him. She pretended he was returning to Berlin as a surprise. Viktor walked next to her, his thin fingers grabbing onto her sleeve. Elise shook the thought of Viktor from her head and instead forced herself to picture the handsome young man from the market—his unshaven face, his dark hair. *His knife.*

Marko

From the end of the street, Marko spotted his cousin's frizzy hair. Kizzy was out front, smoking. In her pinafore dress, no coat, no hat. *She'll catch a cold*, Marko worried, but he stopped himself from saying aloud anything that would sound considerate.

Kizzy looked up and threw down the smoke. “Where’ve you been, you idiot?” she yelled.

She was always giving him a hard time, and he played along. “What the hell is that?” Marko said, pointing to the still-glowing cigarette on the ground. Marko picked it up, took a deep hit, and blew smoke at Kizzy’s face, hoping for a reaction.

“It’s Duerr. She’s dying,” Kizzy said.

“What’re you talking about?”

Professor Duerr was stronger than Marko. There was no way she was sick. He took another hit of the cigarette and flicked it into the street.

“Tsuras here,” Kizzy said.

Marko followed Kizzy upstairs, still in his coat and cap. The professor’s room reeked of stale cigarettes. Duerr was in her bed, eyes shut, looking half-dead.

Tsura, Marko’s older sister, sat at the old woman’s bedside in her overcoat, her hair hidden in her cap, no makeup, clunky boots.

“What happened?” Marko asked. He put his bag on the floor.

“I told you,” Kizzy shouted.

When Duerr let out a slurping sound, Kizzy shut her mouth.

“Kizzy came to find me. Duerr had some kind of seizure,” Tsura explained to her brother.

Kizzy smirked. “Hear that, Marko-baby? I found Tsura.”

“You have to get her to the hospital. Take her to Charité,” Tsura said to Marko.

No chance. There was no way Marko would be changing his plans.

Professor Duerr was Marko and Kizzy’s guardian. She’d been looking after Marko and Kizzy—her sweet little Gypsies, as she put it—for years. Tsura too, at one point. A favor to their parents. The old woman had been a university teacher. Duerr had cooked their meals, mended and washed their clothes. And now she was sick. But that Marko and Tsura had an obligation to care for the old woman was only half the problem; they were now responsible for their younger cousin, Kizzy, too.

Marko pulled up his sleeve to look at his new watch. He didn't have enough time to take Duerr to the hospital.

"You take her," Marko said to Tsuru.

Tsuru shook her head. "Too much to do."

Marko's sister was always busy. Her so-called work usually had something to do with fighting the Nazi regime. But Tsuru rarely shared the details.

Marko leaned in so Kizzy couldn't hear. "I can't do it, sis. I've got stuff, too."

"No need to whisper, Marko-baby. Tsuru told me everything," Kizzy said.

Marko glared at Tsuru and she nodded. "I told Kizzy to pack her bag."

Holy hell. "Pack?" Marko shouted. He felt sick. Kizzy would be leaving Berlin with him. *This can't be happening.*

Duerr's fat body was slumped over in bed. A heap. Marko suddenly resented the old woman. If only she'd stayed well for one more day.

"Kizz, find some blankets," Tsuru said.

Kizzy, always listening to Tsuru, left the room.

"Pack her bags?" Marko said through clenched teeth.

"Don't argue. Kizzy can't stay here now."

Duerr's double chin was wet. She was drooling like a baby. Marko thought about getting across the border with Kizzy in tow.

"It's too dangerous," he said. And he meant it. It would be one thing if he was arrested, but the thought of little Kizzy getting caught filled Marko with dread.

Tsuru scowled. "Kizzy can't stay with me. There's no other solution."

"I can't believe this!"

"She's our family." Tsuru's eyes popped.

Marko's sister made him crazy sometimes. It was impossible to argue with her.

"You're taking Duerr to the hospital," Tsuru said.

"No."

Tsura crossed her arms and raised her voice. “What else do you suggest, Marko?”

“We’ll leave Duerr here.”

“After everything she’s done for you?”

Marko felt stupid for suggesting it. It had lost him the argument and he knew he’d have to go to the damn hospital after all.

“Take Duerr and I’ll meet you later,” Tsura said.

Marko let out a huff of resignation. “I’m not gonna let you forget this.”

Tsura reached for a stack of papers on Duerr’s table.

“What’s all that?” Marko asked.

His sister held out some old documents—Duerr’s identity cards, used ration books, old photographs. “You’ll need these,” Tsura said. She picked up Duerr’s coat and stuffed the papers inside.

There were some photographs still on Duerr’s table—Marko, Tsura, and Kizzy as kids. In one portrait picture, Kizzy looked the same but younger. Their little cousin was thirteen now.

“Marko, I’ll help to get her downstairs, but then I have to go. And I can’t meet you at eight any more. I’ll see you at midnight instead.”

“Fine.”

“Friedrichshain Park. Western corner. By the fountain,” Tsura said.

“Okay.” Marko repeated the time and location in his head to make himself remember.

An hour earlier, escaping Germany had felt thrilling. Now Marko had to leave Berlin with Kizzy. It wasn’t going to work.

“You really told Kizzy everything?” Marko asked.

“Not everything.”

Duerr was heavy. Marko and Tsura moved the old woman so she was sitting up in bed. She gurgled, but her eyes stayed shut. They pushed Duerr’s arms in her coat-sleeves and swung her legs down. She smelled like she’d wet herself and Marko wanted to puke. Their hands in her armpits, they lugged her onto the landing. Kizzy was at the bottom of the staircase with a wheelchair.

“What the hell?” Marko laughed.

“Tsura found it,” Kizzy said with a grin.

Tsura was smiling, too. “Don’t ask.”

Together, Marko and Tsura half-carried, half-dragged the old woman down the stairs and dropped her into the chair. Kizzy placed a blanket over her legs.

Moving quickly, Marko fetched his bag from upstairs. He opened it in the kitchen and placed the fresh produce on the table—eggs, butter, orange juice. He kept the rest—bottles of wines, cheeses, tins of spreads, jams, boxes of cigarettes, chocolate. He swung the bag onto his shoulder and headed back to the hallway.

“I have to go,” Tsura said.

Tsura never stayed for long. She buttoned Duerr’s coat and kissed her wrinkled cheek. Kizzy was unusually quiet. With the new plans, it meant that Kizzy would probably never see Professor Duerr again. And, in a few hours, Marko would be saying goodbye to his sister. His stomach flipped and he swallowed hard at the thought.

“Leave her outside the hospital,” Tsura told Marko. Her voice was steady, as though she didn’t feel anything toward the old woman. “And if anyone asks, you found her in the street.”

“Found her?” Kizzy coughed.

“Shut up,” Marko snapped, fighting a pang of sadness. His little cousin didn’t understand.

Kizzy crossed her arms. “Idiot.”

“See you later, sis,” Marko said to Tsura, and he elbowed Kizzy playfully in her shoulder.

Kizzy let out a yelp of pain, obviously exaggerating. “He hurt me!”

Tsura laughed at their squabbling. “Kizz, while Marko’s out, make yourself some dinner,” she said and kissed her little cousin on the forehead. Then she turned to her brother. “I’ll see you later.” Tsura pulled her cap down and left through the kitchen door.

It was just Marko and Kizzy now. And the unconscious old woman. Marko hung his bag, which was now a little lighter, on the wheelchair’s handles. He needed a solution, and quick. There was no

way he could take Kizzy with him, out of Germany. She was too young. And she'd be in the way. *I'll find her somewhere safe to live.* He lifted his sleeve and checked the time. "I'll be back late. Eat something, then get to bed."

"You got a watch?" Kizzy said, sounding surprised and jealous.

"Please shut up." Marko didn't mean to sound so harsh. But inside he was panicking and trying to figure out what the hell to do.

Kizzy lurched her face forward. "I hate you, Marko!" Then she put her arms around Duerr's shoulders and whispered, "Goodbye."

Marko stared down at Duerr and let out a loud, frustrated sigh. Then he noticed Kizzy's nasty brown coat and her ugly blue hat on the floor in the corner. *Yes.* Marko almost cheered out loud at his own genius.

Kizzy

Kizzy's teeth rattled in the evening air. She was only wearing her thin pinafore. And she wanted to burst into tears; she'd never see her kind, old guardian again. Her chest burned with sorrow and an unexplainable regret. She turned away.

"Kizzy," Marko said.

"What?"

"I need to get her down the steps. Grab her legs."

Looking at Professor Duerr made Kizzy want to cry. "Do it yourself," she snapped back at Marko.

"Please. I need your help. And put your coat on. It's freezing."

Kizzy almost grinned. Embarrassed and suspicious that her cousin seemed to care she was cold, Kizzy crossed her arms.

"Will you just help me?" Marko snapped.

Kizzy poked out her tongue. "Fine." She stepped back inside and put on her coat and hat, pulling the wool over her ears so she didn't have to listen to Marko's nonsense. She helped him get Professor Duerr down the steps outside. While Kizzy steered the

chair, Marko held the old woman's legs. The wheelchair was shaking and the professor's head knocked against the handle, hard.

"What're you doing?" Marko barked.

"It's not me!"

"Stupid kid," he muttered.

"Oh, grow up, Marko!" *I'm not a kid anymore*, Kizzy wanted to scream. She was already thirteen, but Marko still treated her like a baby. He'd smoked when he was Kizzy's age, but now he said she was too young for that. Marko and Tsuru were brother and sister, but they couldn't have been more different. They looked like siblings, with their dark hair and slim frames. And they were almost the same height. But Tsuru was serious and brave and treated Kizzy like a grown-up.

Months ago, curious about where Tsuru disappeared to, Kizzy had followed her to an apartment in Berlin's Bavarian Quarter. Kizzy had hidden in the stairwell, one floor down. Tsuru had tapped out a code on the door and Kizzy had made sure to remember it. Earlier, inside the apartment, Tsuru had seemed impressed and proud that Kizzy had found her, trying to get help for Professor Duerr. Tsuru didn't even tell Kizzy to keep the door code secret. *Tsuru trusts me*.

Marko, on the other hand, didn't trust Kizzy with anything. *He's an idiot*. And now Kizzy had to leave Berlin with him. They'd argue the whole time, but Kizzy was excited for the journey. She wondered where they'd go. Maybe they were leaving Germany altogether. Kizzy and Marko would travel by train, but she hoped she'd have a chance to travel by boat, too. She'd see the ocean. They'd settle in the countryside and Kizzy would learn to ride horses. She'd get to know different towns and villages and use her real name, rather than Franziska.

As Kizzy pushed the wheelchair down the front step, the old woman's head continued to jolt.

"Frau Professor?" Kizzy said, in case they'd knocked her conscious.

Professor Duerr didn't respond. When Kizzy pushed the chair again, the wheels buckled.

“Kizzy. Stop. Now.”

Marko dropped Professor Duerr’s legs, pushed his cousin aside, and took over Kizzy’s job, ready to push the chair. As the footrests had broken off, Kizzy now had to lift and carry the woman’s blanket-wrapped feet so they didn’t drag. The shaking wheels continued all the same. Her cousin’s ugly face was driving Kizzy nuts, so she turned her back to him and walked in front of the chair with Professor Duerr’s legs under her arms.

When they reached the pavement, Kizzy adjusted the professor’s blanket. *I’ll never see her again.* Kizzy wanted to cry. But not in front of Marko. If she did that, he’d have the chance to make fun of her for weeks. The old woman was slumped in her chair. Kizzy put her hand on Professor Duerr’s shoulder to push her upright, but she flopped back down like an old ragdoll.

Kizzy whispered into the unconscious old woman’s ear, “Frau Professor. I have to say goodbye now, okay? Thanks for keeping us safe.” Kizzy kissed her silver hair and turned toward the house.

“Kizzy, wait.”

“What?” Kizzy shouted at Marko, her teeth together, holding back tears.

“Do me a favor, Kizz.”

“No.”

“Take her to the hospital for me. I’ve gotta go.”

“Go?” *What’s Marko talking about?*

“You’ve got a key, right?”

He had to be joking. Kizzy touched Professor Duerr’s key, still in her coat pocket.

“Tsuru said to take her to Charité. It’s that way,” Marko said, pointing along the street.

“Are you kidding? I can’t take her on my own!” Kizzy’s voice cracked and echoed against the buildings.

Marko hung his bag on his shoulder.

“Where’re you going, Marko? You can’t leave us. Charité isn’t close. She’ll freeze to death!”

Marko walked back to the front door of the professor's house, pulling it shut. He was serious. Before Kizzy could speak, he reached into his bag. "Here." He was holding out a jar of jam. Real, good-quality jam with an official seal. "It's yours."

Marko smiled with half his face. He was up to something. And it was something big. He'd never given away good stuff before, especially not to Kizzy. She took the jam jar and dropped it into her coat pocket. It was heavy and pulled her coat down on one side.

"Take her to the hospital. Please, Kizz."

Suddenly her annoying cousin was pretending to be sweet. He never said please. And he never called her Kizz. He called her things like Fränzi, the irritating name he used when he wanted to wind her up. He was definitely desperate.

"Why?" she asked.

"Thanks, Kizz!"

"I'm not taking her." Kizzy reached for the house key and walked up the steps to the door.

Marko groaned. "We should've left her upstairs."

Kizzy pictured Professor Duerr, dead at home, just because Marko refused to help. "You're so horrible."

"Look, I really need you to do this." He was serious now.

Secretly, Kizzy was surprised he trusted her. Kizzy didn't really mind taking Professor Duerr to the hospital. Kizzy would pretend not to know her. The idea was exciting. "Fine. But you're gonna pay me back for this."

Marko grinned. "Whatever you want."

Idiot. Kizzy was determined to come up with something really disgusting. Cleaning her room or doing her laundry was too easy. She'd think of a chore Marko would hate.

Marko pushed the wheelchair along the street. He kept checking his new watch, showing off as usual. The sky was thick black and covered in stars. The temperature had dropped even more.

"What do I tell the hospital?"

"Nothing. Just leave her there," was Marko's bright idea.

"I know that, idiot. I mean, if someone asks."

“Like Tsurra said, you found her on the street.”

All they had was one another, Professor Duerr had told Kizzy many times. The old woman wasn't family by blood. She was an old friend of Marko and Tsurra's parents, and she risked her life to keep them safe. Leaving the professor at a hospital where she would probably die alone felt like a terrible thing to do. Kizzy's throat tightened. She couldn't speak.

“You don't know her, okay?” Marko said.

Kizzy ignored her cousin. The professor had loved Kizzy so much. She'd shouted at Kizzy sometimes, and told her tales of her old husband and stories about Kizzy's Romani family, and made jokes to cheer Kizzy up when she was unwell.

“Kizzy. Are you listening? This is serious.”

“Yes, I know!” Kizzy couldn't help shouting.

Marko stared at Kizzy, but she refused to look at him. *He doesn't trust me. He thinks I don't know what's going on in Berlin. In Europe.* Kizzy didn't understand everything, but she knew if they didn't get Professor Duerr medical treatment, she'd die. Kizzy understood why she had to pretend the old woman was a stranger. If the authorities found out the professor had helped Gypsies, they'd all be in trouble. And Kizzy knew what it meant to be Roma. They were loathed. Feared. To the Nazis, they were thieves. And if not thieves, vermin. The government called them *Zigeuner*. It meant “don't touch,” Tsurra once said. Kizzy remembered resting her head on her mother's shoulder, on Mama's long dark hair, as Mama recited fairy tales and fables. Kizzy wondered if storybook princesses hated their storybook cousins as much as she hated Marko. And if witches hated little hungry children as much as the Nazis hated the Romani.

See, Marko. I know stuff, Kizzy wanted to shout. Kizzy knew the government had arrested Papa and sent him away. She knew the big questions everyone asked. She knew about the encampment in Marzahn, where Mama and Aunt Jaelle were imprisoned. Tsurra often talked to Kizzy about their people and how the Roma should've been fighting back. Tsurra told Kizzy her plans and plots, and stories about heroines and ghosts. Real ghosts. And Tsurra asked Kizzy her

opinions. Not like Marko, the ignorant buffoon. What Marko didn't want to understand was that, while she didn't know everything, Kizzy was only thirteen and already knew too much.

Bells from a church tower in the distance made Marko halt. Kizzy dropped the professor's legs onto the cobblestones and the old woman let out a whimper.

"She said something!" Kizzy said with a gasp. "Frau Professor?"

Marko checked his watch for the millionth time. "Okay, I'm off."

"You're leaving? Now?"

Marko didn't answer. Kizzy hated him for making her do this. She should've said no. She didn't want Marko to abandon them out there. Two minutes earlier, the idea hadn't seemed so bad. Kizzy would take the professor to the hospital then come home. Kizzy had wanted the responsibility. But now, with the idea of being alone with all the streetlights switched off, she wasn't so sure.

"I can't push the chair on my own," Kizzy said. She preferred for Marko to think of her as physically weak than to know she was nervous.

"I'll see you at home," Marko said.

"The chair's too heavy. She'll die out here. I can't do it!" Kizzy had to get Marko to stay. She worried about not finding the hospital. *What if the wheelchair breaks?*

Marko exhaled an impatient sigh.

"I'm not an idiot, you know," Kizzy said. "I worked it all out way before Tsura told me. I knew we were leaving Berlin."

"Keep your voice down," Marko snapped back.

"I figured it out. You and Tsura. All the whispering. It was obvious."

"You're such a whining baby."

Kizzy ignored the comment. She crossed her arms and smiled smugly. "We're leaving Germany, right?"

"Kizzy! Everyone can hear!"

There was nobody around. Marko was making a fuss for nothing. Kizzy decided not to respond to his pointless shouting. She was amazed that she'd guessed everything right.

"When were you gonna tell me?" she asked.

"Shut it."

The wheels on the chair screeched along the stones as Marko pulled the chair, backward now, to the pavement. Professor Duerr's feet dragged and Kizzy could see how rolling the chair backwards would've been much easier all along. The freezing wind smacked her face. Her woolen hat had slipped up. She pulled it back down to cover her ears and the back of her neck.

"You're horrible!" Kizzy shouted at Marko, wanting him to stay.

"And actually, you're staying in Berlin." Marko's tone was harsh.

"No, I'm not."

"Didn't Tsura say? I was leaving Berlin without you. Then Duerr got ill and Tsura wanted me to take you, too. But there's no way that's happening."

Kizzy stayed quiet. She hated her cousin more than ever.

Marko laughed. "See, Kizzy, you don't know everything. You didn't figure it out."

Her cousin was trying to get her angry and it was working. She wanted to punch him hard. "Fine!" she shouted. "Leave me in Berlin. Then I won't have to stare at your irritating face."

Marko ignored her. *He's bluffing.*

"Where will I stay?" Kizzy asked, knowing she couldn't stay in the professor's house. There was nowhere for her to go.

"Don't know," Marko said. He paused, appearing to think things through.

"You don't know?" Kizzy gave him a smug grin.

Marko's expression changed from annoyed to concerned. "Kizzy, we'll talk later. I'll figure it out. I've already got an idea where you can stay. But right now, I'm late. Take Duerr. Then come straight home. And make sure your bag's ready. We'll need to leave first thing."

Kizzy hated it when Marko talked to her like he was her parent. “Fine.” She let out a breath of defeat. “But you definitely owe me.”

Marko stood over the professor. He didn’t touch her. He said nothing. Not even a goodbye. Kizzy wanted to cry for them. *He might never see her again.* Then Marko reached into his bag. “Here.” He took out a whole bar of chocolate.

Real chocolate! “Where did you get that?” Kizzy squealed in delight, forgetting she hated his guts. She snatched the chocolate bar from him without a second thought and dropped it into her pocket, the jar of good jam in the other.

“I’m going. Don’t do anything stupid, okay?” Marko said and started to walk away. Then he pointed at his backside—their secret for code for “kiss this.”

“Idiot!” she called out. Even though she’d never ever admit it, Kizzy found Marko kind of funny.

Marko now out of sight, Kizzy looked down at Professor Duerr in her rickety wheelchair. Her head and arm had dropped to the side and Kizzy worried the chair would topple over. Propping the professor upright, Kizzy put the old woman’s arms inside the seat by her sides and tucked in the blankets to hold in her legs and feet. Kizzy pulled the wheelchair backward—a lot easier than forward—letting the professor’s feet drag. Professor Duerr made more groaning sounds. With her hands growing numb from the cold, Kizzy considered giving up and leaving the old teacher out there. Someone would find her. Then Kizzy shook the idea from her head. *I’ve gotta get her somewhere safe.* If the woman was dying, she deserved to be more comfortable. Professor Duerr made more sounds. When Kizzy stopped the wheelchair and leaned toward her, she saw the woman’s wrinkled fingers begin to move.

“Frau Professor?”

Duerr groaned again. Her eyes twitched, but they stayed closed.

“It’s me—Kizzy. I’m taking you to the hospital.”

The woman’s frail whimper gave Kizzy instant energy to keep going.

The roads twisted, empty and dark. The starlight pointed the way. After half an hour of trudging and stopping and trudging again, pulling the wheelchair backwards all the way, Kizzy was sure she'd taken a wrong turn. Her worry faded when she recalled the route to Charité Hospital. Kizzy was hungry, but she resisted the chocolate and jam in her pockets. Blackout shades covered the windows of the buildings they passed. Kizzy listened to her shoes shuffle on the uneven ground. Above her head, the empty branches of tall trees looked like the thin fingers of storybook witches. Other girls her age would have been frightened, and the journey seemed to be taking forever, but Kizzy was enjoying being outside. For once, she was in charge.

When Kizzy arrived at the Charité Hospital complex, it was the sight of two policemen that scared her. As she walked up to the entrance, the policemen, neither much older than Marko, stared at Kizzy dragging the wheelchair along. They said nothing. One of them opened the hospital door, assuming Kizzy wanted to take the old woman inside.

"I found her," Kizzy said.

The policemen gawked at her.

"Should I just leave her here?" Kizzy tried her best to sound childlike.

"Who is she?" the taller policeman asked.

Kizzy shrugged. "I think she fell asleep in the street. I found her, so I brought her here."

The tall policeman nodded. "You did the right thing." He reached for the wheelchair's handle and gave Kizzy a nod, permission to leave.

That was easy. Ignoring the cramp of sadness in her gut, she turned to walk away.

But the second policeman called out, "Girl, what's your name?"

Kizzy's false documents with her photograph were in her coat pocket, folded and ready to be shown. Kizzy almost smiled when she told them her well-practiced lie. "Franziska Scholz."

"Your papers," the short policeman demanded.

Kizzy reached into her pocket, happy with herself that the rehearsals with Tsura were paying off. He looked over the document and then stared at Kizzy.

“Why are you outside so late?” he asked as he handed her papers back.

Kizzy put the documents back into her pocket, wondering what to say. Her stomach turned. Her hunger disappeared. She didn’t have an answer prepared. *Why am I out here?* As soon as she found herself hesitating, she knew she was in big trouble. “I found her near my home. And it’s not that late.”

“Where’s home?”

“I live with my auntie.”

“How old are you, girl?”

“Thirteen.”

Kizzy could feel herself tremble, in her stomach and in her throat. She wished she could have said eleven, or even ten, but her false papers told the truth.

“You shouldn’t be out here alone,” the taller policeman said.

Kizzy nodded and tried to look thankful for the advice.

The short guard—Kizzy hated him now—stared at her with his medals. “What have you been up to?”

“Nothing.”

Kizzy wished Marko were standing right there with her. As much of an idiot as he was, he would’ve known what to say. Or, even better, Tsura. *Tsura would know what to do.*

The policemen looked confused. In her head, Kizzy kicked herself. Why would a thirteen-year-old be out at night, alone? Why didn’t she have this figured out?

Kizzy looked at the ground. “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

The taller guard stepped forward and bent down in front of Professor Duerr. When he slapped her face—either to wake her or just for fun—the old woman groaned. He hit her again, harder, which made Kizzy flinch. Professor Duerr started to drool.

“She needs a medic,” the policeman said.

“Can I go now? My aunt will be worried,” Kizzy said in a babyish voice.

The young men looked at each other.

“We’ll have to complete a report,” the shorter guard mumbled.

Why did Marko make me do this? When Professor Duerr made more noises, Kizzy and the policemen all stopped to listen. *She’s saying something.* Kizzy wanted to put her arms around the professor and tell her she’d be okay. But she just stood there. Helpless. *Professor Duerr is a stranger.*

Slowly, with her head still hanging, the professor opened her eyes and Kizzy’s heart jumped. Professor Duerr was going to be okay. But then Kizzy was frightened. *She mustn’t see me.* Kizzy took a small step back. She couldn’t say a thing. No words of comfort. *She’s a stranger. I found her.*

The tall policeman bent down again. “Woman, what’s your name?” He spoke slowly with kindness in his voice.

Professor Duerr looked at him, her head hung to the side. She mumbled again, her speech dragging. Tears came to Kizzy’s eyes. When the professor turned her neck and looked right at her, Kizzy took another small step back.

“Your name?” the policeman asked again.

With a half-smile from only one side of her drooping mouth, the professor spoke, clearly. “My Kizzy.”

Kizzy felt faint.

Professor Duerr lifted her shaking hand toward Kizzy.

“Do you know her?” the taller policeman asked.

“No.” Kizzy laughed as if to find it funny that the woman was confused. “She thinks I’m someone else.”

As Kizzy spoke, the tall policeman crouched in front of the professor, reached into the old woman’s coat, and pulled out her documents. Kizzy held her breath as he examined the papers.

“Liar!” he blurted out.

“What is it?” the other policeman asked.

“Her house address is the same as yours.” He looked genuinely betrayed that Kizzy hadn’t told them the truth.

I have to run. Kizzy turned, but a hand came down on her shoulder. Kizzy tried to pull away, but there was no point.

Professor Duerr let out a feeble cough. “My Kizzy,” she said again. And then she mumbled something else before closing her eyes.

The tall policeman squeezed Kizzy’s shoulder hard. “What did she call you?” He asked not because he hadn’t understood but because he wanted to humiliate Kizzy even more.

“I don’t know,” Kizzy lied.

The policeman raised his gloved hand and brought it down onto Kizzy’s face. She was too shocked to make a sound.

“What did she call you?”

Kizzy stood with her mouth hanging open, unable to speak. He lifted his hand again.

“*Zigeunerchen,*” Kizzy repeated. *She called me her little Gypsy girl.*

As if Kizzy had stayed silent, or because she hadn’t, his hand landed harder against her face. This time she screamed. Her cheek stung in the freezing air. The short policeman pushed Professor Duerr and her wheelchair through the hospital doors. The tall policeman, the one who had seemed kind, reached for Kizzy’s neck and grabbed the terrified girl by the ends of her frizzy hair.