

The Far Side of the Sky

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PART I

Chapter 1

NOVEMBER 9, 1938, VIENNA

The shadow still swayed over the pavement. Franz Adler tried to blink away the memory of his brother's dangling corpse and the silhouette it cast across the sidewalk, but the image looped over and over in his head.

A pane of glass erupted somewhere at street level, startling Franz. His hand slipped and he pierced Esther's skin at the wrong angle. "*Verdammt!*" he swore under his breath as he yanked back the needle's tip.

Three more windows shattered. The mob was so close. Its drunken cheers and raucous laughter infected the room. Franz could almost smell the stench of stale beer and body odor that must have wafted after it.

Concentrate, Adler! Finish suturing and go collect your daughter!

Eyes open or closed, the mental image persisted. As a surgeon, Franz had witnessed numerous deaths, but none compared with the memory of his own brother's.

A damp November chill permeated the spacious apartment. Fearing a fire, the caretaker had shut off the boiler. The windows were draped and the lights off, save for the flickering flame of three candles that projected long writhing shadows against the walls. Franz had to squint through the weak light to study Esther's blood-caked arm before him.

Another pane shattered three stories below. Franz heard a fresh wave of cheers as though it were some kind of feat to deface a city. But the voices grew more distant as the bulk of the mob stomped farther down Liechtenstein Strasse.

Esther Adler huddled for warmth under the blanket that Franz had wrapped around her shoulders. His sister-in-law's complexion was ashen. Abrasions crisscrossed her face. But amazingly, her gray eyes still possessed a remnant of their usual calm. "Your hands, Franz," Esther said in a hushed voice.

Franz glanced down at his shaky fingers. "Not enough light," he muttered.

"We will manage." A tremulous smile flitted across Esther's lips. "With God's help."

"God?" Franz nodded to the curtains, which glowed red from the fires consuming Vienna. "Essie, how could it be any clearer that there is no God?" he snapped.

She closed her eyes for a moment. "I can't believe that. I won't."

Franz took a slow breath and mentally aligned the edges of Esther's jagged wound, estimating the number of stitches it would require. Twenty, possibly more. He hoped he had enough catgut to close the laceration, which snaked almost the entire length of Esther's forearm but, remarkably, spared the largest nerves and blood vessels.

Hannah needs you, he reminded himself as he ran a fourth stitch through Esther's flesh. She barely flinched, despite the lack of local anesthetic. Franz always carried his suture kit in his medical bag, but he silently cursed himself for not having brought the rest of his supplies upstairs sooner. From the moment he first heard the wireless broadcasts—Goebbels's shrill shrieks of "*Juden*" this and "*Juden*" that—Franz had expected the worst. But he had not foreseen just how blood-thirsty the backlash would become. *Who could have predicted this?*

Earlier, Franz had tried to rush downstairs to get local anesthetic and bandages, but Esther grabbed his arm and, dripping blood onto his sleeve, begged him to proceed without freezing. She claimed to be more afraid of the injection than the stitches, but they both knew what

she really feared: if the Brownshirts or other thugs caught Franz rummaging through his ground-floor surgery, he would never return. And his daughter, Hannah, was waiting.

“It’s fine, Franz,” Esther whispered. “Just continue. Please.”

Franz looked into her kind eyes. Narrow-faced with sharp features, Esther had deep-set gray eyes that made her look older than her thirty-two years. Though not conventionally pretty, she radiated intelligence, humor, and, especially, compassion. Her empathy was boundless. Even now, with her arm splayed open in the wake of her husband’s lynching, little more than an hour earlier, she seemed as concerned for her niece’s welfare as her own. But her trembling shoulders belied her composed expression.

“All right, Essie,” he said as he looped another stitch through her arm, bringing the ragged edges a little closer together.

“We must get Hannah away from here, Franz.” Esther motioned toward the silhouettes of flames dancing against the curtains. “Our time has run out, *ja?*”

Franz nodded, ashamed of having resisted for so long. Until the Nazis set Vienna ablaze, he had clung to his naive belief that their reign of terror was a dark but passing phase in history. That his countrymen would come to their collective senses. But his brother, Karl, had been right from the outset. Nothing, not even blood, would appease these crazed animals.

Franz gazed into Esther’s glistening eyes. Even though Karl was his only sibling and the best friend he had ever known, his loss paled compared with hers. Esther had no brothers or sisters, her parents were long dead, and Karl and she had been unable to conceive a child. Esther and Karl had only each other, but that had always been enough. Franz had never known a couple more deeply in love. He racked his brain for some consoling words, but none came to mind. His brother, the lawyer, had been the verbally gifted one. So Franz finished stitching in torturous silence. He was reaching for strips of a torn shirt to use as a bandage when he heard a plaintive scream. He froze, then rushed to the window.

“Vorsicht!” Esther cautioned. “Be careful! Don’t let them see you!”

Franz gently peeled back the edge of the drape, exposing only enough of a gap to peek out to the street below.

A group of stragglers—some were dressed in civilian clothing, others wore the brown shirts, matching caps, and bloodred swastika armbands of the storm troopers—milled about on the road like wolves circling their kill. In the center of them, an older woman lay sprawled on her back, flailing wildly. A blond woman in a long leather coat stood over her, pinning the fallen woman down with a foot to the chest.

Franz spotted a balding old man lying ten or so feet away. His torso was twisted unnaturally, with his knees facing in almost the opposite direction to his scrawny chest. A fat storm trooper hovered over him, holding a thick wooden club in his pudgy fingers. The trooper raised the club high over his head and let it hang suspended in the air for a long moment.

“No, no, no . . . ,” Franz muttered.

The storm trooper swung the bat down like an ax into the victim’s midsection. Unconscious, possibly dead, the man didn’t respond. The woman shrieked again and was rewarded with a heavy kick.

The hair on Franz’s neck stood as he recognized the victims. “It’s the Yacobsens!”

Hannah loved visiting the Yacobsens’ bakery, at the end of their block. The kind old couple—“Tante Frieda” and “Onkel Moshe,” as his daughter called them—would shower the girl with delicious treats of strudel, *pfi tzauf*, and linzer cake.

“Gott in Himmel!” Esther breathed from across the room. “What have they done?”

The fat storm trooper motioned to the blond woman. She grabbed Frieda by the wrist. The older woman resisted as best she could, but a second storm trooper sauntered over and jerked Frieda’s other arm back. She howled as though her shoulder had been dislocated. The two Nazis dragged the thrashing woman toward the fat storm trooper, who stood over her motionless husband, tapping his club against his open palm.

“How can they?” Franz croaked. “To an old woman? It’s madness!”

He watched the fat storm trooper cock his arm again. He pictured Karl's swollen face and helpless eyes imploring him to act. Franz had never felt as impotent. Unable to stomach another moment, he spun from the window.

I must get Hannah!

Earlier, Franz had left his daughter at the neighboring apartment with the widowed Frau Lieberman before rushing out to retrieve Esther. After ushering his sister-in-law home through minefield-like streets, Franz had no choice but to suture her arm before she bled out. Now that he had closed the wound, he could not bear another minute apart from his daughter, who, though less than a hundred feet from him, felt worlds away.

Franz bolted for the door.

"No, Franz!" Esther cried after him. "Don't go out now!"

"I can't leave Hannah next door while the city burns."

"Hannah is safe with Frau Lieberman!" Esther whispered. "We must not move right now. What if they are already inside the building? What if they hear you?"

"I will be quiet."

"Franz, it's too dangerous. Hannah is safer where she is."

"I have to get her, Essie."

"Just a little longer, Franz." Her voice cracked. "For God's sake, not now, of all times!"

Ignoring her protests, he opened the door. The dark hallway beyond was empty and silent. Holding his breath, Franz took a tentative step out the door. He glanced to either side and then took another.

"Papa?" a little voice mewed.

His heart almost stopped as he spied Hannah tiptoeing down the hall toward him. "*Hannah!*"

Behind his daughter, Franz saw a faint light emanating from a crack beneath the doorway to the neighboring apartment, and he sensed Frau Lieberman's terrified presence. Franz padded toward Hannah, swept her up in his arms, and darted back into his flat. He pushed the door shut and gently clicked the deadbolt behind him.

Franz leaned over and smothered Hannah's head in kisses. "Oh, *liebchen*."

Esther threw her uninjured arm around Hannah as well.

Wriggling free of both of them, Hannah glimpsed her aunt's bloodied arm. She stared at it, wide-eyed. "Tante Essie, what happened?"

Esther tucked her arm in like a wing and turned that side of her body away from her niece. "Your clumsy aunt." She forced a smile. "This is my idea of how to clean up broken glass."

The eight-year-old viewed Esther skeptically but did not comment. Earlier, Franz had told Hannah about the rioting, downplaying the violence and the intended targets. But Hannah had immediately seen through his explanation. In the six months since Nazi Germany had swallowed Austria, in the so-called Anschluss, Hannah had already suffered more than her share of state-mandated anti-Semitism. Though only half Jewish by birth, she had been expelled from school and teased, bullied, or shunned by her Gentile friends. Franz would never forget the day she came home from the park with a bloodied nose and swollen lip at the hands of one of her former best friends.

"Where is Onkel Karl?" Hannah demanded.

Franz glanced over at Esther. Their eyes locked, and they wordlessly agreed: *Not tonight*.

"He has gone . . . gone home," Esther said softly.

"Is he all right?" Hannah asked.

Esther summoned a smile. "They can't hurt him now, darling."

Lips quivering, Hannah looked to Franz. "I'm afraid, Papa. The breaking glass and the shouting."

"Everything will be all right," he soothed. "As soon as I finish bandaging Essie, we will make cocoa."

"I'm not thirsty." Hannah flashed a shy little smile. "Besides, there is no gas to heat the cocoa. I just want to stay with you."

Franz cleared the lump from his throat. "Of course, *liebchen*. Is Frau Lieberman all right?"

Hannah nodded. With her curly brown hair and darker coloring, she bore far more resemblance to Franz than she ever did to her blond,

blue-eyed mother, Hilde. But she shared so many of Hilde's expressions. And like her mother, Hannah could convey so much without uttering a word.

They returned to the sitting room, Hannah still clutching Franz's hand. The girl carried herself with such poise that, much of the time, Franz was oblivious to her slight limp and other handicaps. Hannah's head had been wedged too tightly in her mother's birth canal, depriving her brain of oxygen for precious minutes. She'd had to be delivered by an emergency Caesarean section that left her with spastic weakness of her left arm and leg. Her relatively mild cerebral palsy was not the only birth trauma. Within days of the delivery, Hilde succumbed to an overwhelming postoperative infection, leaving Hannah motherless and Franz a widower.

Franz gently wrapped his arms around Hannah again, cradling her head against his chest and rocking her on the spot. Her soapy childlike fragrance only intensified his guilt. *How will I keep you safe?*

"Vienna—Austria—is no longer our home, *liebchen*," Franz said. Six months earlier, uttering those same words would have been unimaginable. Before the rise of the Nazis, Franz had not even considered himself Jewish. He was an Austrian and a surgeon. Nothing more.

"Your father means that we have to leave the country," Esther added gently.

Tears welled in Hannah's eyes, but her lips broke into the most genuine smile Franz had seen in ages. "I so want to go, Papa."

"We will go, little one." Suddenly, nothing aside from Hannah's safety mattered anymore. "We will."

Chapter 2

Hannah finally drifted to sleep in Franz's arms. She didn't stir when he carried her into his room and laid her on his bed. He tucked Hannah's favorite doll, Schweizer Fräulein—the Swiss country girl-style rag doll that she had slept with since the age of two—under her arm and then covered her with a second wool blanket. He sat on the edge of the bed and watched his daughter sleep. Brushing his fingertips over her brow, he combed a few fallen strands of hair away from her eyes.

By the time Franz returned to the sitting room, Esther had already slipped into Hannah's bedroom and closed the door behind her. He could hear his sister-in-law's soft sobs drifting out under the door. Tasting acid, he wondered if the Nazis had just left his brother's corpse to rot on the lamppost. He doubted it; they tended to hide the evidence of their barbarism, as they had with all the Communists and other political opponents who had simply vanished overnight following the *Anschluss*.

Forcing the thoughts from his mind, Franz reached for the telephone. He swallowed his dread and slowly dialed his father's number.

"Guten tag . . . Herr Adler sprechen," Jakob Adler answered in his typical solicitor's tone.

"Papa, wie geht' s?" Franz asked.

"I am fine. They did not . . . reach my street. There are not enough Jews here . . . to make it worth their while," his father wheezed. Jakob had been afflicted by tuberculosis in his youth, and his lungs had steadily deteriorated in recent years. Nowadays, he fought for almost every breath. "And you, Franz?"

"I am all right."

"And your brother and the girls?"

"Hannah and Esther are safe."

"Not Karl?" Jakob asked in barely more than a whisper.

"No, Papa. Karl is . . ." Franz's voice faltered. "The storm troopers found him . . . Karl is dead."

Jakob went quiet. Only his wheezing filled the agonizing hush.

"Papa, there was nothing to be done," Franz muttered. "I was . . . I was too late."

"No, of course. Too late, indeed," Jakob breathed. He sniffed a few times.

The sound of Jakob's soft breathless sobs pushed Franz to the verge of tears. He had never before seen nor heard his father cry. Feeling totally impotent and isolated, Franz held the receiver to his ear and silently waited for his father to say something.

Finally, Jakob cleared his throat. "Franz, you must get Esther and Hannah out of the country. Now."

"And you too, Father?"

"No."

"You cannot stay here."

"It is not your decision to make, Franz."

"I will not leave without you."

"You most certainly will! Listen to me, Franz. We both know that my lungs are ruined." As though to prove the point, Jakob paused to pant for three or four breaths. "They will undo me long before Herr Hitler has the opportunity."

Franz winced at the memory of the flabby storm trooper beating the Jacobsens. The Nazis would show his father no more mercy, regardless of his poor health. “You cannot—”

“Son, have I ever asked anything of you?”

“No. Never.”

“So please indulge me this one request.” Jakob gulped a few breaths of air. “Allow me to spend my final days at home. I want to die here in Vienna, just as your mother and . . .” His voice quavered but this time his lungs weren’t to blame. “And your brother have.”

Franz recognized the futility in arguing the point over the telephone. “I understand.”

“Franz, I would like you to visit the British consulate.”

“Papa, everyone knows the British are not issuing new visas.”

“I have done legal work for the consulate,” Jakob said. “I know the vice-consul, a Mr. Howard Edgewood. A reasonable man. I would like you to speak to him.”

“Of course.”

“I will telephone Mr. Edgewood in the morning to arrange an appointment.”

“Thank you.” Franz paused, groping for the right words, but all he could muster was, “Papa, I am so sorry.”

Jakob was quiet for another long moment. “I only wish I had not been so horribly short-sighted.” He exhaled so heavily that the receiver whistled. “Do not make the same foolish mistake, Franz. Never underestimate the Nazis again. Their hatred is beyond rational, beyond human. They will never stop.”

Sleep was out of the question. Franz sat at the table agonizing over possible escape options. He berated himself again for having turned down a French colleague’s offer to fill the position of visiting surgical professor at the University of Paris. Franz had reasoned that Jakob was too frail to be uprooted or left behind. Now, with Karl dead and his father facing the same fate, Franz found the irony of his own flawed rationale painful to remember.

Franz was still awake as the dawn broke, but the daylight brought

no renewed sense of security. On the contrary, it left him feeling even more exposed.

A gentle rap at the door froze Franz in mid-breath. Ever since the rioting began, he had half expected the authorities to come for him too. After a moment, he relaxed, realizing that if it were the dreaded Sicherheitspolizei or the SS, the door would be shaking from the heavy fists and the orders shrieked through it.

Still, Franz approached warily. He opened the deadbolt and opened the door a crack. As soon as he recognized Ernst Muhler, he opened it wider.

Ernst held a full grocery bag in either arm, a fragrant loaf of fresh bread poking out from one. Tall and gaunt with a blond widow's peak, the flamboyant artist dressed unconventionally, favoring all-black ensembles, but fashion had nothing to do with his current appearance. Ernst's nose was swollen and bloodied. His lips were scabbed and crusted, and he had raccoon-pattern bruising around both eyes. But his smile remained as undaunted as ever. "I thought you could use a little sustenance," Ernst said in his distinctive lilt as he raised the bags in his arms.

Franz glanced down the hallway to ensure that they were alone. "You shouldn't have come, Ernst," he whispered. "It's too dangerous."

"Rumor has it that Vienna has become somewhat volatile of late," Ernst said as he strode past Franz and into the apartment.

Franz slid the deadbolt back into place and followed his Gentile friend into the sitting room. He had known Ernst for over ten years, ever since his wife had dragged him to one of the painter's exhibitions. The eccentric marriage of eroticism and frailty in Ernst's avant-garde work had unexpectedly moved Franz. He wound up buying three paintings and, despite—or perhaps because of—their diametrically opposed lifestyles, the two men had formed a tight friendship. Ernst had since become a rising star on the Vienna art scene, until the Nazis came to power and banned his artwork as "pornographic."

Ernst placed the grocery bags on the kitchen table. "Where's my little pu n?" he asked.

“Hannah is still asleep.”

“She must have been scared witless last night.” He sauntered over and flopped down on the couch, throwing an arm over the backrest. “You know, Franz, I found these Nazis a bit tiresome even before last night’s tempest, but they’ve truly outdone themselves. Such brave, virile men, aren’t they just? Assaulting the helpless, vandalizing property, and burning down temples.” He snorted and then clutched his chest. “Ah, but the artist in me cannot help but admire their sense of aesthetics. They truly excel at making ugly things look and sound pretty, don’t they? Have you heard what they’re calling last night’s rampage?” Franz said nothing, but Ernst, who was accustomed to carrying on one-sided conversations, continued. “*Kristallnacht*. Isn’t that lovely?—‘the night of crystal.’” He grunted again. “Only the Nazis could make a night of national disgrace and hateful violence sound like an opera that Mozart might have penned!”

Franz pointed to his friend’s face. “What happened to you?”

“This?” Ernst ran a finger delicately over his swollen cheeks. “I’m afraid my little Gestapo captain got a touch frisky.” He dug a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket as he spoke and effortlessly slid one out. “It won’t leave a scar, will it, Herr Doktor? Now that they no longer allow me to paint, my face is my life, you know.”

Ernst heaved an exaggerated sigh. He lit his cigarette and took two long drags, leaning forward to bring his lips to the butt in his raised hand. “There’s no pleasing the Nazis, is there? First, they deem my artwork degenerate. Now, the little devils have decided my lifestyle is too.” Ernst took another puff. “These days I see a lot of my Gestapo friend, *Captain Erhard Langenbrunner*.” He sat up straighter, mock saluted, and clicked his heels together. “Erhard is a blue-eyed, broad-shouldered Norseman—the embodiment of Hitler’s homoerotic Aryan fantasy, really. Erhard keeps telling me that the Third Reich will not tolerate homosexuals among their ranks. Yesterday, he threatened to send me to Dachau concentration camp with ‘the rest of the faggots.’” He sighed again. “Honestly, Franz, only the Nazis could

believe they could cure my *proclivity* by locking me up in a camp full of men just like me.”

Even Franz chuckled at the absurdity of it.

“Erhard and his friends knocked me around a bit,” Ernst went on. “Truly, the attention he pays me makes me suspect Erhard could use a stint in Dachau too. It’s always the ones who protest the loudest who secretly harbor the same desire, isn’t it?” He touched his bruised cheeks again. “Regardless, I promised the captain I would dedicate myself to exclusively depraving women in the future. And that was that. Besides, it’s really nothing compared with what you Jews have been through. So appalling.”

A new worry struck Franz. “How do you know the Gestapo didn’t follow you here?”

Ernst flicked away Franz’s concern along with the ash from the tip of his cigarette. “I’ve been followed by my attentive little fascists for months, on and o . They are about as subtle as a herd of stampeding elephants. Trust me, Franz, no one followed.”

Franz nodded. “Thank you for bringing us the food, Ernst. I will, of course, pay you back.”

“Nonsense. You have overpaid for my paintings these last ten years.” Ernst winked. “So tell me, how are Karl and Esther coping?”

Franz looked down at his feet. “Of course, you haven’t heard.”

“Heard what, Franz?”

“Karl is dead. They killed him last night.” Franz’s voice was deadpan but he could barely believe his own words.

“ *No! The bastards!* ” Ernst leapt to his feet. “Oh, Franz. I am so sorry!”

Franz brought a finger to his lips and nodded toward Hannah’s bedroom, where his sister-in-law was staying. “Esther,” he mouthed.

“How?” Ernst asked in a low, plaintive tone. “*Why?*”

Franz shook his head. “They knew Karl had been helping other Jews with their documents. They went to his o ce to find him.”

“Those savages!” Ernst muttered.

“Karl managed to save Esther,” Franz said. “She was at the office with him when the troopers arrived. He broke a small window in the back and pushed her out into the lane behind the building. That was where I found her.”

Ernst squeezed the bridge of his nose and shook his head. “Franz, I know a man at the Dutch consulate. A dear friend. I will speak to him about urgent visas. We have to get your family the hell out of Austria.”

“You are a good person, Ernst. And a better friend.”

Ernst grunted a humorless chuckle and reached for his cigarettes again. “What I am is ashamed. Ashamed to call myself Austrian—or German—or whatever the hell it is we are supposed to be these days.”

Franz walked Ernst to the door. He paused a moment to study his friend’s battered face. Angst, and even a glint of fear, had replaced Ernst’s usual flippancy.

“We Jews have no choice,” Franz said. “But you, Ernst? Why do you choose to stay?”

“Oh, the same stupid sentimental reasons. Vienna is home. After all, how can I leave the city where Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele helped to define twentieth-century art?” Ernst sighed. “And, of course, I’m in love.” He blew out his lips. “But we have to keep *that* a secret, since my beloved works for city hall. He is not ready to leave his wife and join me in Paris. And lovesick fool that I am, I can’t bear to live without him.”

With little left to say, they shared a solemn handshake at the door.

Minutes after Ernst left, Jakob telephoned to announce that he had arranged an interview for Franz at eleven o’clock that morning at the British consulate. His father’s voice was ragged with exhaustion and grief, but Jakob never once mentioned Karl.

Franz waited fifteen more minutes, but neither Esther nor Hannah emerged from their rooms. Deciding he could not wait any longer, he jotted a quick note to his sister-in-law and left it on the table. As Franz lifted his hat and coat off the peg, he was overcome by the intense

memory of the night before. He winced at the recollection of his brother's panicky voice over the telephone. "*Franz, they're here!*"

"Where are you?" Franz demanded.

"My office," Karl whispered. "God help me, Franz! *Essie is here too!*"

"I'm coming, Karl."

"It's so dangerous. I would never have called if Essie weren't—" The line went dead.

Franz dropped Hannah off at Frau Lieberman's with a hasty explanation. The old widow begged him not to leave the building but Franz ignored her. Heart in his throat, he raced the ten blocks over to his brother's office building, though twice he had to suddenly divert to avoid one of the roaming mobs.

Franz ducked into the lane behind Karl's office and found Esther sitting amid shards of glass, propped up against the rear wall of the building. She stared into her lap while the blood dripped freely from her lacerated forearm. "Essie, your arm!" Franz cried, but she didn't even look up at him.

He threw off his jacket and struggled to tear his shirt sleeve. Buttons flew in the air as the cloth ripped. Franz wrapped the makeshift tourniquet tightly above her elbow, and the hemorrhage slowed.

"Is Karl still inside?" Franz asked.

Esther slowly raised her gaze to meet his. In one glance, she confirmed his worst fears. His knees buckled, and he shot a hand out to support himself against the wall. "Oh, Essie, no! Please, no."

"I didn't want to leave him," she said in a monotone voice. "He pushed me out through the back window. I could hear the shouting and then . . ."

They waited in terrible silence for ten or fifteen minutes until their breathing settled and Franz convinced himself that the street in front of the building had emptied. Esther said nothing as they inched down the lane toward the side street. At the corner, Franz poked his head around the edge of the building. Across the street, under the beam of a streetlamp, a swaying shadow caught his eye. He was filled with dread

as he looked up to see the body dangling from the lamppost. Along the front of the dead man's shirt one of the Nazis had splashed a Star of David in red paint. The victim's face was swollen and bloodied, but there was no doubt. *Karl!* He groaned.

Esther followed his gaze across the street. Before Franz could stop her, she leapt out from behind him and dashed toward the lamppost. She flung her arms around her husband's legs and pulled his whole body toward her.

Just as Franz reached her, he heard the nearby sound of shouts and shattering glass. He grabbed Esther by the arm, inadvertently digging his fingers through the warm gash. She gasped in pain but said nothing.

Franz pried Esther's hands free of Karl's legs and dragged her away. After a few strides, she stopped resisting and let him lead her.

Once on the other side of the street, Franz slowed for a final glance at his brother. Karl's waxy face held a neutral expression, but his brown eyes—which in life had brimmed with such compassion and amusement—seemed to find Franz's.

I will take care of Essie. I swear it, Karl.

Chapter 3

Sweat dampened his armpits as Franz stepped out of his building and into the bright but chilly November morning. He yanked his hat even lower on his head and stared down at his feet, reassuring himself that he could easily pass for a Gentile. With his straight nose, hazel eyes, and strong jaw, he didn't possess a particularly Jewish look—at least, not in terms of the hook-nosed, beady-eyed caricatures that filled the newspapers and schoolbooks. His real risk lay in being spotted by a Gentile acquaintance, neighbor, or even patient. From those awful final days at the Vienna General Hospital, before being stripped of his title as chief of surgery and professor, Franz had learned how willing, even eager, some people were to point Jews out to the nearest Nazi official.

Franz would never forget the day his protégé, Dr. Johan Grasser, turned on him. He had once seen so much of his younger self in the promising twenty-seven-year-old surgeon. Up until that spring morning, March 13, the day after the Anschluss, Grasser had shown Franz only deference and loyalty. However, as Franz stepped onto the surgical ward, Grasser's folded-arms stance suggested a monumental shift in attitude. "Have you not heard, Herr Doktor?" The junior surgeon smirked. "We are part of the Reich now. And Jews have no place in German hospitals."

The ambush had left Franz speechless and humiliated in front of a cluster of gawking nurses and orderlies. Despite all the affronts he had faced in the months since, the memory of Grasser's betrayal still stung the most.

On the pavement, Franz's feet crunched with every step. The ground glistened from the layer of broken glass. Through the shattered window of his ground-floor surgery, he saw upturned furniture and papers strewn across the waiting room. His sense of loss was minimal. Six months earlier, after his summary discharge from the hospital, he had been forced into the basic private practice, performing only minor excisions under local anesthetic; the work of a surgical intern.

Franz turned the corner at the end of the block and was stunned to see the street writhing. Moving in complete silence, men and women of all ages, and even children, were kneeling down, using small brushes or their own hands to gather up the broken glass. Armed guards, spaced in regular intervals, hovered over them. Dressed in gleaming black SS uniforms, the guards barked insults and orders while holding horsewhips menacingly at the ready.

A younger man rose up from his knees to stretch his back. Immediately, one of the guards cracked a whip across his neck, hurling the man back to the ground with a groan.

"*Schweinhund!*" the trooper bellowed. He turned to another SS man with a laugh and snapped his whip triumphantly in the air.

Franz scanned the terrified faces near the pavement. He made eye contact with a middle-aged woman on her knees, recognizing her as Dalia Gruben, a patient whose gallbladder he had removed a few years before. Wide-eyed, Gruben mouthed *Go!* to him.

Franz could barely move. Aside from the taunts of a few schoolyard bullies, he had hardly known anti-Semitism before the Nazis descended. Like most of the city's Jews, he was assimilated; as proud an Austrian as any other. After the *Anschluss*, seemingly overnight Franz had lost many of his Gentile friends and colleagues. But in the wake of Kristallnacht, the Nazis were elevating persecution and terror to a level he would have never imagined possible.

One of the nearest SS troopers, young enough to still be in his teens, swiveled his head toward Franz. His hand reached for the pistol clipped on his belt, while his pale eyes ran up and down Franz as though assessing a dung heap. “*Juden?*” he growled.

Stunned, Franz shook his head. “*Nein.*”

The young man’s hand fell away from his weapon and his face lit with an apologetic smile. At that moment, he could have passed for any polite Austrian youth performing a civic duty. “I am terribly sorry for any inconvenience, sir,” he said. “We will make sure these filthy Jews clean up their mess. Won’t take any time at all, but it is best not to loiter.”

Franz nodded and trudged away. He felt like a cowardly fraud as he imagined the eyes of his former patient burning into his back.

The Gentiles of Vienna appeared to have awoken to a typical autumn day. Non-Jewish businesses, their windows pristine, welcomed customers as usual. The scent of baking bread and brewing coffee filled the air. People bustled along the sidewalks past the broken windows, vandalized storefronts, and Jews scrubbing the roads under armed guard as though it were a morning like any other.

Franz resisted the urge to grab passersby by the shoulders and shake them out of their indifference. *Can you not see what is happening to your former colleagues, neighbors, and friends? He could have screamed. Has the whole country gone mad?*

Franz kept his head low as he walked along Reisnerstrasse toward the British consulate. Like the other consulates in Vienna, it had been an embassy up until the day of the *Anschluss*, when Vienna lost its designation as a capital city.

As he rounded the corner onto Jauresgasse, Franz spotted a Union Jack flying from the quaint baroque building on the corner. For months, he had witnessed lineups outside the consulates as Jews scoured the city searching indiscriminately and, for the most part, in futility for any foreign power willing to offer haven. Franz had expected another line in front of the British consulate, but the size of this one stunned him. It snaked on for as far as he could see. Whole families huddled together. A sea of faces—some old and sickly, others fresh-faced but bewildered—

caught Franz's eye. Most appeared stunned or petrified. They were so silent that Franz imagined he might have heard a coin falling out of a pocket at the far end of the line. Even though a British visa would represent a new lease on life for entire families, Franz saw no one jostle or shove anyone else. Their orderliness and compliance were ingrained Germanic and Jewish traits.

Franz tucked his gloved hands into his coat pockets, crossed the street, and walked alongside the queue toward the entrance. Halfway down the block, he heard the howl of approaching sirens. Suddenly, a black canvas-covered transport truck turned the corner and roared down the street. It hopped the curb, screeching to a halt in the middle of the crowd. A mother swung her young son out of its path in the nick of time, but she was still bowled forward by the truck's bumper. She managed to scramble away, as did the others near her.

Six or seven SS troopers brandishing machine guns jumped out of the truck and rushed the crowd. More trucks thundered down the road. They skidded noisily to a stop in a long row behind the first one. Men in black poured out of them. Franz spotted a trooper who raised a megaphone to his mouth and shrieked, "All male Jews over the age of fourteen step forward! *Now! Macht schnell!*"

Another trooper unleashed a round of machine gun fire into the air. Startled, Franz stopped dead. Several people dropped to the ground in terror. Others leaned back against the building's windows and walls as though trying to melt into them.

More screams, shouts, and gunfire. And then Jewish men, their faces clouded with fear and despair, began to step forward. With punches and kicks, the SS men herded them—often by the scruff of their necks—toward the backs of the trucks without a word of explanation.

Franz dropped his gaze and carried on. Despite the urge to flee, he was careful not to move so fast as to draw attention. Without even looking up, he passed the consulate's entrance, turned the corner, and walked away from the building.

Legs wooden with dread, Franz trotted three or four blocks before he slowed to glance at his watch. It read 10:55. The eleven o'clock appointment with the British vice-consul might have represented his family's final chance for a visa, but he also knew that the SS would stop him outside the consulate. His only identification—the passport he carried in his pocket—was stamped with an incriminating large red *J*. He could not risk being arrested, not before he had gotten Hannah and Esther out of the country.

Franz spent the next hour wandering the streets, never straying far from the consulate. Strolling the City of Music, his beloved Zeiss Ikon plate camera in tow, had once been his favorite pastime.

Franz had originally taken up photography to appease his wife, who had given him a camera as a birthday present. Hilde soon became his primary subject; he snapped countless photos of her. After her sudden death, Franz found it too painful to view the photos. Even lifting the camera stirred too many memories, so he abandoned the hobby. A few years later, he came across the camera, dusted it off, and, on a whim, took it outside to snap photos of buildings that had caught his eye. The initially random pursuit grew into a passion. He began photographing buildings all over Vienna, ignoring the famous landmarks to focus on quaint, often rundown structures whose shapes or settings had struck him as quintessentially Viennese. To Franz, it was never about art so much as precision. He found the challenge of capturing the exact light, focal point, and angle akin to surgery.

But light and angles were the least of his concerns. Every moment he spent exposed on the street compounded his worry. His surroundings, once such a source of pride and comfort, struck him as more than just hostile. His birth city—the only place he had ever lived—felt foreign to him.

After covering at least two more miles, and witnessing more broken glass and vandalized property than he imagined possible, Franz finally looped back toward Jauresgasse. As he reached the British consulate, he was desperately relieved not to see any sign of SS men or

their trucks. The lineup had thinned considerably but still ran at least two blocks long and consisted almost exclusively of frightened women and bewildered children.

Franz headed straight for the front of the queue, where two British soldiers in combat fatigues and berets guarded the door with rifles held across their chests. He shouldered his way past a group of women at the front too traumatized to object to the intrusion. He approached the taller soldier, a chunky redhead. With an embarrassed shake of his head, the guard pointed to a sign posted above him that read in large-print German, *The consulate regrets to announce that His Majesty's Government will not process new immigration visas until further notice.*

"I have an appointment with Mr. Edgewood," Franz said in English. In 1933, Franz and Hannah—a toddler at the time—had spent six months in London at St. Mary's Hospital, where he completed a surgical fellowship while honing his English skills.

"Your name, sir?" the soldier asked.

"Dr. Franz Adler," he said. "I apologize for my lateness."

The second soldier scanned his clipboard and then nodded to his colleague. The redhead showed Franz a slight smile. "No matter, Dr. Adler. With all that broken glass, they're not making it particularly easy to navigate the city today."

The soldier led Franz inside the building, along a corridor, and up two wide flights of stairs. A polite, middle-aged man, who appeared to be a secretary, took his coat and then led him into a brightly lit office. Two large bookcases stood against the wall, their shelves piled high with books bearing only German titles. A painting of King George VI and his queen consort, Elizabeth, hung prominently on the wall behind an oak desk.

Franz had to wait only a few minutes before a squat balding man, who wore a navy blazer and argyle tie, bustled into the room. "*Ein vergnügen, Sie zu treffen, Herr Doktor Adler,*" Howard Edgewood said in accent-free German as he hurried toward Franz with an extended hand.

Franz squeezed the man's chubby hand, noting its dampness. He

deliberately responded in English. "I appreciate you seeing me on such short notice, Mr. Edgewood."

"Of course, of course," Edgewood said as he rushed around the desk and sank into the chair across from Franz. "I admire your father. An excellent lawyer and a true gentleman." His flushed face creased into a frown. "If I may say so, Herr Adler did not sound at all well on the telephone."

His son was just murdered. How did you expect him to sound?

"These are difficult times for him," Franz said.

"Yes, of course. Trying times. Trying times, indeed," Edgewood chirped as he raised a thin file from the top of a stack. "Mr. Adler explained some of the circumstances of your, um, predicament."

Franz looked down at the desktop. "My wife is dead, Mr. Edgewood. I have an eight-year-old daughter. Hannah is a very brave girl, but Vienna is no longer a city that is kind to children of even partly Jewish origin. I have to find her safe asylum. Britain, of course, would be our very first choice."

"Of course, of course." Edgewood nodded sympathetically as he opened the file. "And I would so dearly love to help."

Franz's heart sank, but he said nothing.

"Our quota for refugee visas has been completely filled for the next year. And, Dr. Adler, we are absolutely prohibited from making exceptions." Edgewood shrugged helplessly. "You must understand, there are nearly two hundred thousand Jewish people living in Austria alone. If we were to set such a precedent . . . well, it would be a slippery slope with no end."

Franz swallowed his crushing disappointment. "That same argument is convenient for all nations which have chosen to shut their doors to us," he muttered.

Edgewood raised a finger. "However, Dr. Adler, I have made several inquiries this morning. And I am hopeful in your case that there might be a way."

Franz sat up a little straighter. "How so, Mr. Edgewood?"

"In light of your distinguished university standing, I believe we

might be able to offer you an educational visa. It would be open-ended, of course.” Edgewood flashed a shy grin. “And we would concern ourselves with the specifics of your university appointment and location at a later date.”

Franz’s sense of relief bordered on ecstasy. He laughed joyously. “Mr. Edgewood, there is no place in your great country, from the Isle of Wight to the tip of Scotland, to which we wouldn’t be willing to relocate.”

Edgewood gawped as he reached for the papers on his desk. “Yes, well, I do not imagine we will have to banish you to the Shetland Islands just yet.” He flipped through a few pages. “And as your daughter is still a minor, we can include her on the same visa.”

“And Esther, of course,” Franz said.

“Oh, have you remarried, Dr. Adler?” Edgewood asked.

“Esther is my sister-in-law. My brother, her husband . . .” Franz’s voice cracked. “He recently died.”

Edgewood’s smile seeped away. “Oh, I am sorry.”

“It will not be a problem, will it, Mr. Edgewood?”

Edgewood shut the file in his hand. “I am afraid it will, Dr. Adler. We cannot possibly include your sister-in-law on an educational visa granted to you. It is simply not legal.”

Franz’s stomach plummeted. He would have willingly married Esther to get her name on that visa, but he also knew that, as Jews, they no longer had any legal standing. They would never be able to secure an official marriage license. “And my father?” he asked mechanically.

Edgewood frowned. “Mr. Adler made it clear to me that he had no intention of leaving Vienna.” Franz didn’t reply. “Dr. Adler, if you and your daughter were to travel ahead, perhaps once you had settled in you would be able to find alternate arrangements for the others. And by then undoubtedly the political climate here would have stabilized somewhat—”

“I will not leave them here.” Franz shook his head adamantly. “I cannot.”

Edgewood dropped his chin and spoke to the file. "I do not see what else I can offer."

"I am not certain where else to turn, Mr. Edgewood." Franz clasped his forehead between his thumb and forefinger. "I must get my daughter out of Vienna. If anything were to happen to her . . ."

A bleak moment passed in silence before Edgewood's round head suddenly snapped up. "Hold on, Dr. Adler. There might be one other option."

"Yes?"

"My government is about to unveil a new program entitled Kindertransport."

"The 'children transport'?" Franz echoed.

"Yes. We intend to offer several thousand emergency visas to Jewish children in Germany and Czechoslovakia."

Franz frowned. "Only the children?"

"For the time being, yes." Edgewood cleared his throat. "We intend to place the children in emergency foster care until such time as they can be safely repatriated with their parents."

"And you could find Hannah a spot in this Kindertransport program?"

"I believe so, yes."

Franz wavered. His heart ached as he tried to imagine his handicapped daughter adjusting to life in England without family or friends around her. As awful as the idea seemed, he realized it might also be the only practical solution. "Mr. Edgewood, may I take a little time to consider this?"

"Of course, of course. Take a day or two." He smiled kindly. "And please do reconsider the offer of the educational visa as well."

"Thank you, Mr. Edgewood. I appreciate your kindness."

As Edgewood walked Franz to the door, the diplomat heaved a sigh. "Dr. Adler, I am a huge admirer of this country." He nodded to his bookcase. "Particularly Vienna. Perhaps my favorite city in the world. Or, at least, it used to be. Recent events, especially these last few

days, have absolutely appalled me. How a civilized nation could brutalize her own citizens in such a manner is simply beyond me.” His face went blotchy with indignation. “It is a ghastly business as far I am concerned.”

Franz recognized Edgewood’s sincerity. He was aware the diplomat had done everything within his power to help. But something suddenly snapped inside him, and he could not hold his tongue. “Mr. Edgewood, your sympathy and outrage is of no use whatsoever to me.” He pointed to the window. “Or any of those other blameless people outside.”

“Well, yes—”

“I have given up trying to make sense of the Nazis or even my own countrymen.” Franz eyed Edgewood steadily, desperate for an outlet—even one as undeserving as the well-intentioned diplomat—for his outrage. “What I fail to understand is how a civilized world that claims to be so appalled by such brutality can simply turn its back on the victims.”