

chapter one

Sometimes, especially in the mornings, Anna could pretend life was normal. That it was normal to eat a spoonful of lard for breakfast and to brush her teeth with her finger. That wearing shoes with more holes than actual leather was normal, and that a bath was a rare luxury. Since everyone else was doing the same, it was normal, in a way. The thing her mind had trouble with was that all this made her lucky.

The one really normal thing played out as it did every morning. Amalia refused to put on her shoes. She stared at her mother, chin pointed, waiting for the next provocation.

Anna tried to remain impassive. Patience.

“Child, *bitte*. We have to go. Mama will be late and you are coming with me today.”

“I don’t want to. I want to stay with Aunt Madeleine like before.”

“I know you do but you can’t stay at the hospital all day. Auntie needs to rest. Once she is better and comes home you can stay with her again. “Anna shot another glance at the grandfather clock in the corner ticking away, oblivious. The morning sun streaming through the unopened window cast a feeble beam into the small room, lighting the sad scene. One bed, a sofa, small table, a large wardrobe pushed into the corner, the suitcase with all Anna’s worldly belongings balanced on top. Home sweet home.

She smoothed the front of her blouse with the palms of her hands. “We will visit Auntie after I am finished working today. We can bring her something for dinner. Now, let’s go. Shoes.”

The girl sighed as if to empty every last molecule of air from her lungs and dragged the dusty brown shoes out from under the bed. Anna had cut the toes off to make them fit longer and now they showcased her mismatched socks with the holes in them. *If the sock has holes and the shoe has no toe, what is the point of wearing either one?* Anna wondered.

Amalia slipped on the shoes and stood up. “Is Auntie going to get better, Mama?”

“Yes, of course she is my little *Maus*. She needs some medicine for her lungs. They will make her better at the hospital. Then you can stay with her again. But today you have to come with me. Are you ready?”

“Ready, Mama. Are we going to see *Amis*?” Amalia looked worried.

Anna took the child’s hand and pulled her to the door. “Of course, little *Maus*. The Americans are everywhere. And don’t call them *Amis*, I don’t think they like it. Do you have Lulu?”

Amalia ran and pulled her doll from the bed. Lulu was dirty and missing one eye and some of her hair.

“Lulu hasn’t seen an American yet. I told her not to be scared,” Amalia said as Anna closed the apartment door behind them.

The day promised sunshine but a morning chill lingered and neither Anna nor Amalia had a sweater. The back court of the apartment building was still cast in shadow, the broken windows to the ground floor apartments boarded up like patches over injured eyes. A small path had been cleared between the piles of brick and stone and dust. The two made their way through to the big wooden gate that opened to the street.

“Let’s see how fast we can walk,” said Anna, hoping the exertion would warm them and that she could make up some time.

Emerging on the Adolfsallee, they turned left toward the Wiesbaden town center, Amalia taking off in a half-skip, half-run. People were out and about, beginning daily tasks of cleaning, clearing rubble, finding food, securing work or just walking the streets in search of something. A line of women—pails in hand—had already formed where the milk truck sometimes appeared. The allied bombs had been comparatively gentle on Wiesbaden, but that was just a relative notion. Bombs were bombs. Anna watched Amalia jump over holes in the sidewalk, her green dress bouncing in the dust clouds she kicked up. *This is the landscape of her childhood*, Anna thought. *Mountains of rubble and rivers of blood*. The girl was only five and had seen so much misery and stomached horrible fear, and Anna worried that more was to come. The war had been over for three months already, but what had replaced it? What were they living in? A sort of provisional purgatory, she thought, with occupiers who had to sort the bad from the good, the guilty from the innocent, the past from the future. *We are damned; we unleashed hell on the world. And now we*

Germans must make good. She thought this every day. But to make amends for monstrosities perpetrated in your name and with your complicity, even if it was coerced? Was it even possible?

“Mama, look.” Amalia was pointing at something on the ground and beckoning. As Anna approached, she saw what had caught Amalia’s eye. Gleaming in the sunlight was a large metal button, the kind found on a Loden jacket or a dirndl or some other traditional dress, the kind the Nazis had been so fond of the German *Volk* wearing. It was heart-shaped and stamped with a scroll pattern. “Can I take it?” whispered Amalia, her eyes beaming as if she had found buried treasure. Which, Anna thought, she had, in a way.

“Yes, you may,” said Anna, joining in the spirit. “What a prize.”

Amalia picked up the button, now black with grime and held it on her flat palm. “Can we wash it, Mama? So it will shine?”

“Yes of course, little Maus,” said Anna. Now put it in your pocket and keep it safe. We need to hurry.”

Amalia slipped her hand into her mother’s and they walked on between the piles of stones that lay like sleeping prehistoric creatures along the street. Anna imagined them hibernating, waiting until they could be reanimated into something new, something hopeful. As they approached the Rheinstrasse, the bustle of the city flowed along the main thoroughfare and the Bonifazius church glowed in the morning sun, its Gothic spires flanking its bombed out sanctuary like two sentries. The American MP directing traffic at the intersection whistled and motioned for them to cross. They turned and walked east into the sun, joining the people heading to whatever jobs they were lucky enough to have. Nearing the large, looming Landesmuseum, where the Americans had set up shop, they walked along the newly-installed

chain-link fence with the barbed wire on top until they came to the guard at the workers' entry at the rear courtyard. The sign read *U.S. Army Monuments, Fine Art and Archives*, and the young soldier standing at the entrance looked as earnest and rigid as a statue himself. Anna sat Amalia down on a bench next to the gate.

"Listen to me, Maus." Anna squatted down. "Do you remember what I said? You wait here until I come out and get you. And what will you say if anyone asks you why you are here?"

Amalia exhaled and flatly recited the words: "My name is Amalia Klein. My *Mutter ist* Anna Klein. She *ist* in there. I wait for her?" She pointed at the building.

"Mother, not *Mutter*," said Anna, stroking the blond hair that threatened to escape from Amalia's braids. "Mother."

"Mother," said Amalia. She pulled the button from her pocket and studied it with scientific intensity.

Anna's stomach clenched. She wished she had some other choice other than leaving her daughter here, on a bench on the sidewalk. But she didn't. "Look, Maus." She pointed at the GI. "See that American? I bet he comes from Texas, from the Wild West. Maybe he is the sheriff of his town and he has a big horse and he keeps all the bad guys away. That's probably why he's standing guard here now. What do you think?"

They stole a glance at the bulldog of a GI. His face was young but worn and tired. His white MP helmet was balanced precariously on his head, which seemed too large for his short, square body. The name on his uniform said Long, which almost made Anna smile.

"So he's going to need your help keeping bad guys out of the museum while Mama goes to work." Anna turned Amalia to face the three-story building and pointed to the top floor. "Count three

windows from the end and that's where I'll be. I'll be watching you all the time while I am doing my job. Your job is to sit quietly here."

"But how long will you take, Mama?"

"Not long, only until lunchtime. Do you promise you won't move? You have Lulu to keep you company."

A pile of trash rained from an upper window. GIs and German workers dodged the periodic showers of debris, old blankets, mattresses, pieces of wood, and building materials that rained from above. These were the remnants of the hundreds of displaced people who had sought shelter in the museum at the end of the war. Now it would house the new offices of the Americans they called the Monuments Men. Anna was not altogether sure what their job was, something to do with returning items to people. But they had needed English speakers and typists and to her great good luck, she was adept at both.

She hoped she could get away with this absurd arrangement at least for a day. The thought of her daughter out here all day and all alone made her insides seize up, but she could not afford to lose the job—it was the only thing keeping them from starving.

Deep breath. She kissed Amalia on both cheeks, stood, and approached the GI, who had been watching them with detached interest.

"Excuse me, sir? This is my daughter Amalia and she will wait for me here today while I am working inside. She will be no trouble."

He shot her an exasperated look. "Lady, I'm not a babysitter," he barked out of a crooked mouth. "You can't leave her here all day. This is no place for a little girl." He looked at Amalia who was pretending to ignore the two adults. Air hissed through his teeth with irritation as he saw a jeep overloaded with crates approaching. "I got things to do,

lady.” He saluted as the jeep bounced through the gate with a great revving of its engine.

Anna took advantage of the distraction and bolted toward the museum, waving her pass at the GI. “You won’t even know she’s here. It is just for today, sir. Thank you.” She felt sick to her stomach but ran up the stairs to the back entry. Only then did she peek over her shoulder to see the small figure of Amalia, sitting on the bench where she had left her, knees pulled up to her chest, head buried, like a wounded animal playing dead. *She’s hiding*, Anna thought and turned to enter the building, wishing she could do the same.

The small wooden desk had just enough room for a typewriter and a sheaf of paper. Two stacked wooden crates served as Anna’s chair, and as soon as she sat down, she remembered that she had wanted to bring a cushion from the old settee in Madeleine’s house, but had forgotten. She had forgotten it every day for the last three weeks. The room was large. Sunshine streamed through the windows overlooking the entry and its constant bustle of cars and people. From her desk she could see the bench where she had left Amalia, but only if she stood and craned her neck—an activity not encouraged in the typing pool run. Frau Obersdorfer ran things with an exuberant military precision that annoyed Anna. She looked at her watch. Three hours until her next break.

“Good morning, Frau Klein. Here are the custody receipts for this morning. And we have good news! The plumbing is working now,” Frau Obersdorfer bellowed. Anna took the stack of forms and placed them to the left of the typewriter, ready to be transcribed.

“I thought it smelled better,” Anna mumbled. She put down the old, brown leather bag that held her papers, her empty wallet,

a packet of rationed cigarettes and the photo she carried of her and Thomas, taken before they were married, when none of what her life had become had seemed remotely possible. She shoved the photo back into the bag without looking at it. If she looked, she would remember, and there was no time for thinking of her husband and her former life now. She looked at her tiny workspace, with only room for the stack of forms and nothing else. After rolling the first sheet onto the drum, she picked up the notes. She typed the date—9 August, 1945—and the place—Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point. The form provided receipts for the piles of objects, books, paintings, rugs, furniture and household items that were being secured by the Americans for safekeeping and protection. At least supposedly. Every item had to be accounted for—every saucer, every spoon, every lamp. Anna wondered why any of this mattered when everyone had lost so much. She had heard that stockpiles of valuable art had been stolen and hidden and that the Americans were finding them. She typed list after list of items, none of it very interesting and all of it hard to read. The American officers had such bad handwriting, and it was slow-going deciphering both the script and the words. Two chairs (baroque), three Piranesi prints, four silver cups with matching saucers, one brass standing lamp, one table (Biedermaier). Received by: Joseph Foster, Capt. Anna pulled the form from the machine, placed it to her left and began on the next one. She documented the endless things left floating, homeless and without protection, which, like their owners, were now either dead, sick, or dispersed into the landscape like spores from a million dandelions.

Before she knew it, Anna had completed fifty forms and was ready for a new pile.

“Frau Klein.” The voice pierced Anna’s concentration and she jumped. Frau Obersdorfer loomed over her. With her was an American Anna had not seen before. She had not even seen them approach.

“Yes?” Anna stood up, out of habit.

“Frau Klein, Captain Cooper needs to speak to you,” said Frau Obersdorfer. She turned on her heel and was gone. She did not abide interruptions well. Anna’s stomach knotted up with a familiar, dull cramp. Any unexpected turn of events was almost always bad news, especially when it involved someone in a military uniform. She looked up at the soldier, who gestured for her to step out into the hall. She obliged and he followed, closing the door to the typing pool behind him.

“Anna Klein? You speak English?” he said, peering at her through eyes squinting with either anger or anticipation, she could not tell. She nodded.

“You have a daughter?” The American’s voice was soft, but carried some force. His palms turned upward in a frustrated, questioning gesture. He was quite tall, so she felt at a disadvantage right away, even though he did not seem to use his height to his advantage. Unlike so many of the Americans, he did not take up a lot of space, either with his voice or his demeanor. His hair was mix of dirty blond and brown, and his features sat easily on a well-proportioned face. He was older—maybe close to forty—and looked like he had not been “in-country” for too long. Most of the Monuments Men didn’t look like regular soldiers. This man looked rested and clean, like he’d been waiting in the wings of the great theater of operations for the last four years before making his entrance.

“Yes,” said Anna in perfect English, the one enduring legacy she still carried from the secretarial school in London that had been her home until the Anschluss in 1938. Then Herr Hitler and Mr.

Chamberlain had agreed, each his own way, it was time for her to come home, only Hitler had decided her new home was Germany, not Austria. The annexation of her homeland into the German Reich had been a foregone conclusion that most of her neighbors welcomed. But Anna's mother never got over the insult, and until she died, she refused to call herself a German. Anna had not seen the distinction herself. As far as she could tell, she and people like her were nothings, just pieces of a board game, beholden to some greater will they did not control.

She focused on the American's stare, trying to appear calm. "Has something happened?"

"You left her waiting outside the front gate?" His heavy eyebrows darted upwards, wrinkling his forehead.

"Has something happened to her?" Anna's heartbeat shifted into a higher gear, and she immediately thought the worst. The blood rushed in her ears and she cursed herself for making such a stupid decision.

"Listen, ma'am, you can't just leave a little girl sitting out on the street all day. It's just not safe. Are you understanding me? What kind of mother does such a thing?" He glared.

Anna nodded. "I understand. Captain, please tell me, what has happened?"

"Nothing happened." He gave the second word a generous dollop of sarcasm. "She is perfectly fine. She's just sitting there, bored out of her little mind. But I am telling you, it's not right to leave her there. She's just a kid. What were you thinking?"

"You are right. I am sorry, sir. But I had no choice. You see, I had nowhere to take her today and I thought at least this way she would be close by." Anna wished he would go away. Why was it his concern what she did with Amalia?

The captain's hands moved to his hips and he cocked his head. "Well the United States Army is a lot of things but it is not a babysitting service. This will not do at all. Don't leave her there again. This is no place for a kid." Having made his point, his body language softened, revealing something that could be nervousness. He was squinting at her again as if she were a puzzle he was trying to solve.

"Don't you know anyone at all who can take care of her?" he asked.

"Yes of course, I will find someone. I won't bring her again," Anna lied. Madeleine was in the hospital for at least another week. Even on a good day, it was a lot to ask of the old woman to keep up with a six-year-old.

"All right, see that you don't." Captain Cooper took a step back to indicate that the conversation was finished. Anna didn't know if she was supposed to go back to work or go fetch Amalia. She pointed at the door to the typing pool. "Shall I?"

"Yes, yes, go ahead," Cooper said with irritation. "I've got an eye on her for now. But just for today, you understand?" He turned and strode down the hall in that military way, his shiny boots squeaking on the stone floor.

"Thank you, sir," she called after him.

Cooper raised a hand in an acknowledging wave. "Just for today," he shouted over his shoulder.

She opened the door and walked back to her desk, avoiding the smirking stares of the other girls in the pool.

Sitting down she realized that she had sweated through the back of her blouse. Her heart was still pounding. She stood back up, pretending to straighten her skirt, and stole a glance down to the bench outside. Amalia was slouching with her head resting on her hand. She was bored. So far, so good.