

CHAPTER ONE

Lauren and Isabella

New York City

August 2009

As Lauren O'Farrell hurried up from the subway on her way to visit Isabella Fletcher, she knew the moisture under her blouse, along her collar, and spotting her chest was as much the result of nerves as the heat that had invaded the city for the past several days. She had never done anything like this before. At times she had gathered information through slightly deceptive means, but she'd never lied in an attempt to find her way into someone's home. She reasoned that it was highly unlikely, if not impossible, that Mrs. Fletcher would have agreed to open her door to the accusation that her mother was a Nazi collaborator, a woman who had assisted Hitler in purging the state galleries of what he had dubbed *degenerate art*, then stood by as paintings, prints, and drawings considered unimportant were destroyed, while the more valuable pieces were moved about as political pawns in a game clearly headed toward war and the final solution. A woman who had possibly lined her own pockets with funds obtained from "disposing" of art, and who had most likely kept a painting or two for her own collection.

Mrs. Fletcher had sounded skeptical when Lauren called this morning and explained she'd been hired to do a private investigation relating to a liability lawsuit being threatened by a property owner in the building and she was interviewing residents to gather information. All lies. When the woman asked for the particulars on the lawsuit, Lauren replied that she was not at liberty to discuss this, as it would possibly prejudice the results of her random interviews. She supplied the number of her state investigator's license, which she legitimately possessed, but she could hear the uncertainty in Mrs. Fletcher's voice when she said she'd like time to consider this and would call back later. Two hours passed as Lauren mentally chastised herself for thinking the woman would fall for such an obviously bogus story. Then her phone rang, and without bothering to inquire if her schedule was open, Isabella Fletcher informed her that they would meet that afternoon at two.

The doorman at the building located just blocks from Central Park, a beefy fellow with a burly voice, greeted Lauren with a tip of the hat, asked for her identification, examined it meticulously and then sent her up, saying, "Mrs. Fletcher is expecting you."

As Lauren entered she felt that sudden, final rush of heat that often came over her when she stepped from outdoors on a hot summer day into an air-conditioned building. The lobby was deserted. A man and woman exited the elevator and Lauren got on. It ascended; her stomach dropped. She told herself once more that what she was doing was completely justified.

An elderly woman opened the door, security chain in place, and peered out with clear blue eyes set below stern-looking brows and asked, in a voice equally as firm, "You *are* the investigator, Ms. O'Farrell?" Isabella Fletcher had not a trace of an accent, something Lauren had noted during their call.

"Yes. Very pleased to meet you, Mrs. Fletcher."

Running her eyes over the younger woman as if having second thoughts, Isabella Fletcher asked to see her state-issued investigator's license, as well as her driver's license, which Lauren produced. For a moment she was sure Mrs. Fletcher would simply shut the door, but instead she said flatly, "You certainly aren't what I expected."

She'd heard this before, in a variety of ways. Generally it was, *You're much shorter than I thought*, as if her phone voice was several inches taller than her stature of five foot two. Or that she was much younger than expected, though she had just turned thirty-six, which she considered well into adulthood. Or, *I thought you were Irish*. Would it be that difficult to surmise that she had married an American man with Irish roots? She wondered why people seemed incapable of drawing this conclusion on their own. Often when a client, a museum official, or even the owner of a questionable piece of art met her face-to-face, she would catch a familiar reaction, seldom verbalized but easily read. She had her mother and Grandmother Goldman's stature and profile; her Grandmother Rosenthal's piercing dark eyes and thick, curly black hair. Or so her father said. She had never met her paternal grandparents.

Slowly, the door opened.

"Come in," Mrs. Fletcher said, motioning with an open palm, though her tone extended no invitation. She was beautifully dressed in a pale blue linen suit with a string of pearls. Her silver hair was styled as if she had just come from the "beauty parlor," as Patrick's Grandma O'Farrell always called it.

A teapot whistled from the kitchen as they stepped from the foyer. "Would you like tea?" Isabella Fletcher offered. Lauren wondered if the woman had timed the pot to whistle precisely as they entered the living room. Grateful she had arrived on time, though she usually did, Lauren guessed that tardiness would have been frowned upon.

"Yes, please, that would be wonderful," she told Mrs. Fletcher, though a cup of hot tea wasn't exactly what she would have ordered.

Isabella gestured to the sofa and left the room to fetch the tea, allowing Lauren to sit and settle her large bag—which doubled as her briefcase—at her feet, and at the same time do a quick once-over of her surroundings. The room smelled of fresh-cut flowers—there was a crystal vase filled with yellow roses just inside the entry on a table—and something she couldn't quite make out, a mixture of lemon furniture polish and a familiar but unnamed scent, vaguely medicinal, that she often noticed when visiting older clients. The drapes were partially drawn, the room quiet and poorly lit. Her eyes darted quickly, taking in the marble fireplace, and the built-in bookcases filled with hardcover books. A lovely upholstered sofa and chairs with silk and tapestry throw pillows were arranged over a hardwood floor spattered with an array of Oriental rugs, worn just enough to declare they were authentic. Though the furnishings were traditional, the art on the walls—numerous paintings, drawings, and prints, many not clearly visible due to the dim lighting—was all modern. Works by the Expressionists. The Impressionists. Paintings in an abstract style. Quick pen and ink drawings in a loose sketchy hand. Lauren's heart skipped a beat. Were they possibly originals?

She spotted what looked like a Franz Marc above the mantel, one of his colorful animal paintings. A Gabriele Münter, a bright village scene of Murnau. Maybe an Otto Dix etching, though it was too far away to make out the details. All German artists. All artists who would clearly have been among those labeled degenerate. She was about to get up and step closer when Mrs. Fletcher returned with a tray. There was an old-

fashioned, well-schooled graciousness about the woman, even if her mannerisms were rather stiff and formal. Lauren guessed her to be in her late seventies or early eighties, which would be exactly right if she was who Lauren suspected she was.

"This is very kind of you, Mrs. Fletcher," she said as the woman placed the tray on the table. Cookies were arranged on a small dish, set out beside teapot, china cups, cloth napkins, tiny spoons, and sugar. The cookies were perfectly round, obviously store bought.

"I seldom bake anymore," Mrs. Fletcher said, her words touched with the smallest hint of apology. She poured them each a cup of tea, offered sugar, which Lauren declined, and then lifted the plate of cookies. Lauren had eaten a late lunch and wasn't hungry, but she took one just to be polite and placed it on her napkin.

Then Mrs. Fletcher sat in a wing-backed chair, arranged at a comfortable angle to converse with Lauren, who found the sofa a little too soft for comfort. She adjusted herself, straightening her back, discreetly pushing one of the numerous throw pillows behind her. The woman added the tiniest amount of sugar to her tea, stirred, and then placed the spoon on her saucer.

"These pictures," Lauren started in casually, as if making small talk to warm up to the questions about her alleged investigation, "they are lovely."

Isabella nodded.

"Very modern," Lauren added, "and colorful." Stated as if she knew nothing of art. "Are they originals?"

"Modern." The woman laughed out the word. "Many are older than I am. And I'm no spring chicken. Many of these are more than a hundred years old."

Lauren shook her head in mock disbelief.

"Do you know how much they would be worth if originals?" Mrs. Fletcher replied to Lauren's second question with one of her own, clearly avoiding a direct answer.

She shrugged as if she had no idea, and then waited a moment hoping Mrs. Fletcher would go on, perhaps volunteer more about the paintings. Lauren could almost imagine the conversation she'd have with Patrick this evening after her visit.

"Well . . .," Mrs. Fletcher finally said, smoothing her skirt with her hand. The single word was delivered as if she'd just instructed Lauren to get on with it. The woman lifted a cookie from the plate and set it on her saucer.

Lauren reached into her bag and pulled out a pen and a notebook, ready to talk about the purported reason for her being here. On the subway she'd rehearsed possible lines such as, *How long have you lived in the building?* She hoped this would open up a discussion about Mrs. Fletcher's background. Lauren smiled, but the woman's expression remained grave.

"I know why you are here," Isabella Fletcher said without preface.

Lauren gazed down at her notebook, avoiding eye contact, wondering if the woman could possibly know why she was really here. "Oh?" she said, as she pushed back a strand of hair and tucked it behind her ear. She looked up.

"I'd prefer you not take notes," Mrs. Fletcher said. She eyed Lauren's bag. "You don't have a recording device?"

Lauren shook her head and slipped the notebook and pen back in her bag.

"It's about the Kandinsky," Isabella said.

Lauren sat silently, so surprised at the woman's words that she was at a loss for

her own. “The Kandinsky?” she finally asked, her eyes involuntarily moving along the wall again.

“No, no,” Isabella Fletcher said with a little chuckle. “It’s not here. It’s much too large for the room.” Then, before Lauren could reply, she added, “The art detective. You’re the art detective.”

Lauren felt a prickly sweep of tension brush over her at this announcement, and that was exactly how the words had come out of Mrs. Fletcher. An announcement. Neither spoke, but they exchanged a quick glance. The older woman was aware that she had just taken the upper hand—Lauren could see it in the purse of her lips—and was allowing the young woman as much time as necessary to digest this.

The art detective? There was only one place where that information could have come from, Lauren realized. A small article had appeared in her university alumni magazine a couple of years ago, describing how she helped locate pieces lost in the war, particularly paintings looted from Jewish families. Her searches included delving into private collections, even into inventories of reputable museums. Sometimes the museums would hire her to investigate an acquisition of questionable provenance.

Lauren had never called herself the art detective, but this was the heading on the article.

After completing her doctorate, working as a museum intern, and teaching a university night class one semester, she’d taken a position as Assistant Curator of Modern Paintings at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Her duties included cataloguing the collection and studying new acquisitions. In researching the history of a painting, she’d come to understand that you could learn as much from the back of a work of art as from the painting itself. She discovered seals, numerical markings, custom stamps, inscriptions, and inventory stamps. She learned that the Nazis were particularly adept at keeping detailed records.

Her pregnancy—unplanned but welcomed by both her and her husband—was followed by a job offer in New York City for Patrick, and Lauren decided she would go into business for herself, using these skills to locate lost art. She could set her own hours and arrange her work to allow more time with the baby. After Adam arrived, she often felt overwhelmed by it all, but she had persisted, balancing work with motherhood. Adam was now three, a bright, happy child, and she’d been successful in her work, recovering numerous pieces of lost art. Court action was pending on others.

“As an investigator,” Isabella Fletcher finally said, “one might think you would do a more thorough background check. It seems we both attended the same university.” A smugness laced around her words in a polite, well-bred tone. She picked up the cookie, took a small nibble, then placed it back on her saucer. Wiping her thin lips on the napkin, she left a small spot of pink lipstick on the white linen.

Lauren could feel a pulse directly behind her left eye and wondered if the woman could see this nervous twitch. “Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian,” she said, needing to find some words to fill the conversational void.

“Yes, he was Russian, but he studied in Munich. He did some of his most important work in Germany. If one is to look upon the artist’s body of work, Germany should be given credit for his early training and inspiration.”

She wondered why Mrs. Fletcher told her she knew Lauren was here about the Kandinsky. Lauren knew nothing about a Kandinsky. Could it possibly be one of the

state-owned pieces confiscated by Hitler? There were large gaps in the inventories from Berlin, blank spaces regarding the pieces taken to Lucerne. Or did Mrs. Fletcher think she was here to recover looted art? This was the topic of the university article; the story was about her efforts to return stolen art taken from the Jews during World War II.

“Your family is from Munich?” she asked, guessing now that Mrs. Fletcher had invited her to present a defense for ownership of a painting Lauren hadn’t even been aware of.

“My father was born there,” Mrs. Fletcher told her. “That’s where my parents met.”

“And your mother?” Lauren asked. “Where was she born?”

“In Bavaria. My mother’s family was engaged in dairy farming in a region known as the Allgäu.”

It was really her mother whom Lauren was interested in learning more about. Would Isabella Fletcher possibly reveal information about her mother, unaware that this was exactly what Lauren was looking for? *Tread carefully*, she warned herself.

“They still make wonderful cheese in the area,” Isabella said. “My aunt and uncle continued the business here in the States. Koebler Creamery?”

“Oh, yes.” Lauren flashed her a quick smile. “They make wonderful ice cream.” It was through the Koebler family that she had actually tracked down Isabella’s mother, Hanna Schmid, a woman gone now for over sixty years, a woman who Lauren believed had attempted to hide her true identity the entire time she lived in America.

“The Kandinsky has been in the family for many years,” Isabella said.

“Acquired in Germany?” Lauren asked.

Isabella blinked once, twice, and then glanced at a photo on the end table next to her. “Andrew and I never had children.” A handsome man, most likely in his mid-fifties at the time the picture was taken. Andrew Fletcher, Lauren assumed.

The old woman’s eyes took on a moist, glassy film. “There’s no one left in my generation on my side of the family. My brother, my sister—half-sister actually—all long gone. Years and years ago. All my cousins, those in Germany, those in America. All deceased. Andrew’s sister is still with us, though not doing particularly well.” Her voice had taken on a softer tone. “The younger Fletcher nephews and nieces—I don’t know these young people coming up now. They’ve never even set eyes on the Kandinsky. Never even been here for a visit,” she added with an indifferent shake of her head. “The business will be passed down to Fletcher family members. But the painting . . .” Her voice trailed off.

Absentmindedly Lauren fingered the edge of a silk pillow, soft and soothing like the satin trim on a baby’s blanket. She could feel her nerves on edge. Excitement over a possible discovery mixed with equal shares of anxiety and confusion. She was startled that Isabella Fletcher was sharing this information with her.

Mrs. Fletcher said, “I trust that your intentions are honorable, though I assure you the Kandinsky was acquired legally.” Lauren detected a slight quiver in her voice. She offered a nod of reassurance, encouraging the woman to go on.

“I understand perfectly well that art was stolen during the war. We continue to hear such stories.” Mrs. Fletcher’s voice was even now, though the woman patted her chest with a nervous flutter and ran her fingertips over her pearls. “Valuable art that disappeared during the war, assumed destroyed by bombs or looted by the Nazis,

turns up and suddenly families come out of the woodwork to claim paintings that the present owners believed were legitimately acquired. Why, the other day I saw an article about a Van Gogh purchased by a famous movie actress, and it seems it had been gained illegally—I assure you this is not the case here. Our Kandinsky was legitimately purchased by my family. There are no claims to be made, which is quite obviously why you are here.”

After a moment, cautiously Lauren asked, “Your family purchased the Kandinsky in Munich?”

Isabella nodded.

Again Lauren studied the many pictures on the wall. “May I see it?” she ventured.

Isabella Fletcher laughed, a chuckle really, which transformed into a somewhat unladylike snort. Again, she wiped her mouth with the linen napkin. “No, I don’t think I’m quite ready for that.” She cleared her throat before continuing. “I’m not getting any younger, though I am still in excellent health. But soon, I must decide what will become of the painting. I could sell it, divide the sizable proceeds among family members. But as far as the world is concerned, this painting no longer exists.” She gazed at Lauren, fully expecting another question.

Lauren was attempting to remain calm, receptive, not overly eager. She had so many questions, but didn’t want to say the wrong thing, something that might turn off this flow of information. She picked up her cookie and took a bite, then took a sip of tea. Such delicate china. Hoping Mrs. Fletcher would go on, she remained silent.

“I should clear all this up before I’m gone,” the older woman said, “or, heaven forbid,” she added, with a dismissive wave, “before I lose my memory and senses. No one knows the story behind the Kandinsky. It would be difficult to sell the painting if the provenance was misunderstood.” Abruptly she rose and went to the window, pulling the drapes open farther to let in more light. For a moment she gazed down as if studying something on the street.

“I have never shared the entire story,” Mrs. Fletcher said, sitting again. “Perhaps it is time.”

Lauren was struck by this, wondering if Isabella really intended to share something she had shared with no one else. Why would she trust a stranger who’d entered her home under false pretenses?

“Tell me a little about the painting,” Lauren said, her voice tight, but calm.

“It’s one of his earlier works, not that geometric . . .” Isabella paused and shook her head as if envisioning something distasteful. “His later work, produced during his Bauhaus period, all circles and squares. I’m not fond of this period of the artist’s work. I much prefer the paintings he did in Munich.” She let out a little laugh. “But to each his own. I’m sure that’s what my father would say. My mother, too. Everyone should be allowed the freedom to choose what he or she likes or dislikes. Our Kandinsky was painted about 1910, long before I came into the world.”

Again Lauren waited, hoping Mrs. Fletcher would add more, but the woman said nothing. Finally Lauren asked, “Will you tell me how this painting came to your family? When it was purchased?”

“Originally the year my brother was born, nineteen eleven. A gift to my mother from my father in celebration of my brother’s birth. It hung in our music room. We

called it 'Willy's Colors.' He loved it."

"Willy? Your brother?"

Isabella nodded. "Wilhelm. He's been gone many years."

"Originally purchased?"

"Originally, yes. It was actually purchased twice."

Twice? Lauren wondered. What did this mean? "You inherited the painting from your parents?"

"Yes."

"You came to America with your parents?" Lauren asked just to see what she'd say.

"My father died in Germany."

"Your mother?"

"She escaped."

"Escaped?" Lauren was intrigued by Isabella's use of this word. Left illegally, with false documents, her pockets stuffed with cash, her luggage with art—that would be a more accurate description. "Escaped with the painting?" she asked

"It came later."

The woman's answers were becoming more terse. One moment Mrs. Fletcher seemed ready to share, opening up. The she closed like a blossom deprived of light. Lauren waited patiently, busying her hands again along the edge of the pillow.

Isabella said, "To understand the history of this painting, my parents' story must be understood. My mother's story. Yes . . ." She let out a small quiet laugh. "Mother always considered Kandinsky *her* artist." The woman fixed her eyes on Lauren, and once, then twice, she blinked, her wrinkled lids skimming moist, soft blue eyes. "The truth must be known."

"I have nothing against the truth," Lauren replied, the edge to her voice much sharper than she'd intended, so sharp it cut like a challenge.

Mrs. Fletcher nodded and her gaze, steady on the younger woman, did not waver. The firm set of her mouth, the slight lift of her chin seemed to be telling Lauren that she was up to this challenge.

"Paintings by Kandinsky," Isabella said, "as well as work by other progressive artists, were considered elitist art by Hitler, as if one needed some kind of pedigree to understand it. His theory was that if the common man off the street didn't get it, it was *crap*."

Lauren swallowed a laugh, surprised at Isabella's use of the word *crap*. The older woman let out a small refined chuckle, as if she had surprised herself.

She continued, "He often associated the word *elitist* with the Jewish race."

Lauren touched the rim of her still-almost-full cup of tea, running her fingers over the fine, fragile edge. She could feel her breath going in and out with a quick, uneven rhythm.

"My mother," Mrs. Fletcher said, "she certainly didn't come from an elitist background, yet she had a great love for this type of art."

"You said she was born in the country, on a farm. How did she end up in Munich?"

Isabella pondered the question, as if deciding how to reply. "It began because she was unhappy. I guess she was probably searching for something."

“Like what?”

“Independence. Excitement. A better life. What do any of us search for?”

“Did she find it?”

“I believe there were moments of true happiness.” A faint smile flickered across the woman’s face. “She grew up as part of a large family with a strict German father. When her mother was alive she was very happy. After she lost her mother, her father remarried. I know my mother despised her stepmother, though later I think she might have had some regrets that they never established a real relationship.”

“What year was that?” Lauren asked. “When she went to Munich?”

“She was just sixteen.” Isabella thought for a moment. “Nineteen hundred.”

“Turn of the century. She was just sixteen? She went alone?”

Isabella nodded. “Yes. Well, no, not exactly. My aunt Katie—Käthe then—was already working in Munich. Mother hoped she too might find a position in the house where her older sister was employed as a cook. She used to write home to my mother—they were very close. Their home in Bavaria was set in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. As a child I often visited my uncle and cousins on the farm. Have you ever seen the Bavarian Alps, Ms. O’Farrell?”

“Yes, I have. They’re beautiful.” She’d spent a semester in Europe, studying art, taking advantage of every opportunity to travel, and she’d been back to Germany twice, going through Nazi archives.

“The Munich house was lovely,” Mrs. Fletcher said. “Quite exotic, particularly for a girl from the country, but something you might expect to find somewhere on the Mediterranean rather than in the heart of a German city. Red tiled roof. Marble floors. Handwoven rugs. Sleek walnut banisters.”

Isabella closed her eyes as if imagining this scene, as if returning in her mind to her homeland. And then her eyes opened wide and again she looked directly at Lauren.

“The story must be told. The true story.” These words were delivered with a heaviness that Lauren could actually feel, as if the older woman was about to hand over something of great importance, as if it were Isabella Fletcher now issuing a challenge.

CHAPTER TWO

Hanna

Munich, Germany
September 1900

Bright reds, then muffled tones of blue, flashed before Hanna's eyes—the train screeching to a halt, the rustle of passengers gathering bags and parcels. The man sitting beside her stood, lifted a small case from overhead, handed it to his wife, and nodded a farewell to Hanna, who had nothing to gather.

“Enjoy your visit, dear,” the woman said sweetly, touching Hanna's arm.

Passengers filed down the narrow aisle of the train carriage. Hanna remained seated, pressing her fingers to her ears, closing her eyes, seeking protection in the muted light beneath her eyelids. When she opened them, the passenger car was empty, save for a young mother and child who had occupied a seat in the back. Clutching a bag in one hand, pulling her small daughter by the other, the woman made her way down the aisle. The girl looked back at Hanna, her eyes growing wide with concern as if to ask, *Are you not getting off?*

Hanna forced a smile, nodded, and then rose, walked down the aisle, out the door, down the steps and planted one shaky foot and then the other on the wooden platform of the Munich Bahnhof.

What have I done? she asked herself as she threaded through the crowd and followed the bustle into the station. Gazing up at the wide expanse of ceiling, she nearly tumbled over a small boy stooping to pick up a pfennig.

“*Entschuldigen Sie, bitte,*” she said, patting the child on the head. She continued past a family sitting on a bench sharing sausages and bread, around a man and woman engaged in lively conversation, and moved along with a collection of people leaving the station as an assortment of hurried travelers came in. Some were dressed as Hanna in Bavarian country clothes: women in dirndls, crimped skirts, and country shoes; men in lederhosen, jankers, warm woolen socks, and alpine feathered caps. Most wore dark city clothes.

She stepped out of the station into the busy Bahnhofplatz. Light reflected off the windows of tall stone buildings surrounding the square. Puffs of smoke rose from chimney stacks. Horses' shod hooves clicked heavily against the cobblestones, sending off a splash of color.

Moisture hung in the air, clouds dimming the pale blue sky. Hanna reached up and slid her hand down one braid then the other, giving each a little tug to smooth out the frizz. As always, she had braided it that morning, after helping Dora and then Leni with their hair. Unlike her step-sister and sister, who both possessed agreeable fine straight hair, Hanna's hair was a mass of unruly curls, and even when confined to braids it seemed to protest. On a humid day her hair was most rebellious, red spirals and wisps

attempting to escape.

She made her way through knots of carriages outside on the wide street. She had been to the city just once, four years ago when she was twelve and had come with her father, mother, and older sister Käthe. Their mother had presented the trip to Munich as a grand adventure for her two eldest daughters, though Hanna had little recollection of the city other than that it was large and noisy with many sounds and colors. She had been preoccupied with fear for her mother, and the memory that stayed with her was the smell of the doctor's office, and then the long, silent train ride back home.

She dipped her hand into her left pocket, fingering her remaining coins. After the train fare she still had enough for something to eat. She imagined her family sitting down for dinner. By now her father and older brothers, Frederick and Karl, would have returned from the upper pasture where they had gone to check on the cattle. Her stepmother, Gerta, would be home from Weitnau, the fabric and notions she'd gone to fetch tucked into her shopping basket. Would Leni tell them when they asked—for surely they would notice the empty seat at the table—that Hanna had simply walked out of the house and left them? She shivered at the thought of what she'd done.

She reached into her other pocket for Käthe's letter. Perhaps Hanna, too, could find work in Munich. And then she chided herself for thinking such thoughts. She had not come to Munich seeking employment. She was just off for a little holiday in the city.

She walked, gazing into one store window after another, finally stopping at a bakery. Her empty stomach rumbled as she admired the cakes, breads, and tarts in the window. Buttery smells, the aroma of cinnamon and apples wafted out as she opened the door.

"*Guten Tag*," the woman at the counter greeted Hanna. Her plump round cheeks dimpled as she offered a smile.

"*Guten Tag*," Hanna replied, surveying the fresh pastries. She bought a raspberry marmalade tart and stood as she ate. She licked the sugary jam from her fingers, then pulled the letter from her pocket again and asked where she might find the street address on the envelope from Käthe, which she showed the woman to make sure she understood.

"My sister Käthe Schmid is employed by Herr Moses Fleischmann," Hanna explained proudly.

"The Jew. His gallery is on Theatinerstrasse," the woman replied with a wave of the arm, as if the gallery might be just down the street.

Hanna nodded. "Yes, but she works in his home as a cook." She pointed again to the address on the envelope and then read it aloud, guessing from the woman's quick squinty glance that she could not read.

She instructed Hanna to go to the Marienplatz, which she described with gestures, her hands going this way and that. "Catch the tram with the number one hundred eighty-seven painted on the front, then get off at the fifth stop and walk left about two blocks."

"*Danke*," Hanna thanked her and stepped back out onto the street. She walked, following the woman's instructions until she arrived at a large square. Her eyes spun, first to the enormous Rathaus with its spiky steeples, then to the lovely golden statue of the Virgin on the tall pedestal in the center of the square. The Marienplatz—dedicated to the mother of Christ. People scurried about, stylish women in dark skirts and fitted jackets, hair arranged neatly in sophisticated chignons; men in long pants and tall city hats, hailing carriages, greeting friends. Busy people with events to attend, invitations to

honor, business to deal with. Hanna felt a sudden rush of excitement. Surely this was the adventure her mother had intended for her in Munich.

Two sets of tracks ran along one side of the Platz and a cluster of single train carriages, attached to a line overhead, stopped and then started in an orderly fashion as passengers stepped off and others got on. Hanna walked between a line of horse carriages and the trams, until she spotted the car the woman had told her to board. She paid for a place with her remaining coins, sat, and watched the street signs as they passed, Käthe's envelope clutched in her hand. At the fifth stop she got off just as the woman at the bakery had advised her. Then she walked two blocks, and a small but ever growing twist of delight turned in her stomach, pushing aside the shame and trepidation that had sat like two stones in her belly since she'd stepped onto the train in Kempton.

When she approached the large house with the red tiled roof she knew she had found the Fleischmann home. It was just as Käthe had described. A fountain with mermaids and sleek winged horses carved about the base stood in the garden in front of the house. The horses spewed water from their mouths, creating a lovely, colorful rhythm. The grounds still held a hint of late summer bloom.

Hanna thought of Käthe's earlier letters, telling of the modern kitchen with the latest equipment, the rooms with electric lights, silk drapes, flocked wallpaper, marble and wood-carved moldings around the doors, upholstered furniture, and lovely paintings and drawings hanging on the walls. Her letters were filled with details of the beautiful gowns and jewels worn by the wife of the distinguished Herr Fleischmann, of dinners and parties, of entertaining wealthy and famous guests who stayed long into the evening, eating, drinking, conversing about topics of great interest, playing games, and listening to music. Käthe's letters were so descriptive Hanna could smell the dumplings and strudels as she read, and she could hear the music Frau Fleischmann played on her piano. Now as she walked along the street in front of the house, she tried to imagine which window she might gaze through to look into the kitchen, the dining room, the parlor, the music room. It was an enormous house with so many windows, so many rooms.

She walked around to the side of the building, staring up, wishing her sister's face might appear. A woman stepped out on an upper balcony, stared down, then walked back in. Finally Hanna decided she must go to the back, to the servants' entrance.

After several knocks an older woman came to the door. "*Guten Tag,*" she said, greeting Hanna with a smile.

"*Grüss Gott,*" Hanna replied.

"You've come to seek work?" the woman asked.

"I've come to visit my sister Käthe."

A smile of recognition spread slowly across the woman's face. "*Ja,* I can see you are Käthe's sister. *Bitte,* do come in." She stood back, holding the door for Hanna.

There was a narrow hall just inside the door and two sets of stairs, one leading up and one leading down. She motioned for Hanna to follow and they started down the steps. The smell of roasting meat laced the air, and Hanna imagined Käthe at work, preparing one of the lavish meals she had described in her letters. The woman asked her to sit in a room that appeared to be a dining area for the help, as there was nothing fancy about it. Two long wooden tables with roughly hewed benches were arranged in the center of the room. A fireplace stood against one wall, and a door on the other. The woman went through the door and the warm smells grew stronger as the aroma of dinner drifted out

and into the room where Hanna waited.

Within seconds Käthe appeared, wiping her hands on her apron, brushing a dusting of flour from her cheek, a wide, surprised grin lighting up her pretty, round face.

“Hanna,” she shrieked, throwing her arms around her sister. “Whatever are you doing here in Munich?”

“I’ve come to visit.”

“You’ve grown!” Käthe exclaimed, still smiling as if this were a good thing.

Hanna realized that she was now taller than Käthe. Bigger, too, in every way. Over the past months Hanna’s chest had gotten larger, as had her hips, causing her to question if she’d ever stop growing.

Käthe’s grin turned to a look of concern. “Everything is fine at home?”

“Fine?” Hanna replied with a sharp edge, wondering if Käthe understood that nothing had been fine at home since their father married Gerta, the tailor’s widow from Kempton, with her commands and demands and her whiny little daughter Dora.

“You should have informed me that you were coming,” Käthe said.

“I didn’t know myself,” Hanna replied, the words catching in her throat, “that I . . .” How could she explain that she had simply left? Without telling anyone, not even Leni. She had not planned this visit, so she could not have let Käthe know she was coming.

She could barely believe it was just this morning that she was digging potatoes and baking bread with Leni, arguing with Dora over bringing in wood for the stove, commending Peter for his helpfulness, an image playing in her head all the while—her stepmother sitting in a café in Weitnau, sipping a nice warm cup of tea, nibbling on a bakery-made pastry. Hanna had told Leni she was going out to pee, but had instead run upstairs to the girls’ room, dug into the middle drawer of the dresser she shared with her sisters, slipped the coins—saved from her egg money and hidden under her pantaloons—into her pocket, placed Käthe’s most recent letter in the other, and then quietly tiptoed down the stairs, stepped out of the house, hurried down the lane toward the main road and caught a ride with their neighbor Herr Hinkel. She told him she was going to Kempton on an errand for her father.

“Father is well?” Käthe asked in a soft voice.

Hanna nodded.

“The others? The children?”

“Leni is fine.” Leni was ten, still so much a little girl, the obedient daughter. Hanna doubted she would ever want to do anything other than tend to *küch* and *kinder*, kitchen and children, that she was perfectly content to peel potatoes, look after the little ones, and do exactly as she was told by Gerta. “Peter, as sweet as ever.”

Käthe smiled. At five, Peter was a delight. He had been so young when their mother became ill that he had received much of his tending from the two older girls.

“Dora, as spoiled as ever,” Hanna added. Their stepsister was just two months younger than Peter, but whined like a baby. “Karl is almost as tall as Father, and Frederick is in love with Helga Merkel.”

Käthe nodded knowingly. Käthe the romantic. Then she sighed with what Hanna perceived as homesickness. Neither girl mentioned their stepmother. “It is so wonderful to see you, to have news from home, but you have not chosen the most joyful time to come for a visit.” She took Hanna’s arm and led her down the hall. “The mistress,” she

whispered as they entered a tiny nunlike cell, one of many off the long narrow hall, “she is not well.” She patted the quilt spread over the narrow bed butted up against the wall and the girls sat. Taking her younger sister’s hands in hers, Käthe asked, “You’ve brought nothing with you?”

Hanna shook her head and lowered it, the excitement of this grand adventure again overtaken with the enormity of what she had done. “Father doesn’t know,” she said softly.

Abruptly Käthe released Hanna’s hands, and her own rose to her mouth, reminding Hanna how everything had been so dramatic with Käthe. She wondered if life in the Fleischmann household was truly as exciting and lively as she’d written in her letters, and if her sister, who surely must have been confined to the kitchen, could really be aware of the activities she’d described taking place in the dining room, the parlor, and the music room.

“Oh, Hanna, you haven’t run away from home?” Käthe squealed in horror.

Hanna nodded.

“Father will be so worried.”

“If he should even notice I’m missing . . .” Hanna giggled nervously, but wondered how she could ever face her father again. She replayed the thoughts that had moved in her mind on her walk through the city. “Is there work for me here? Could I get a position like you?”

“You plan to stay?”

Hanna raised her shoulders.

“Perhaps,” Käthe replied thoughtfully. “Brigitte has gone back home to tend her mother who is very ill. I will ask Frau Metzger, the head housekeeper. But first we must send word to Father. We must post a letter immediately to let him know you are safe, that you are here with me.” Again she took her sister’s hand and held it tightly, then touched Hanna’s face. They had not seen each other for almost six months, since Käthe had come to visit last Easter. “You have grown into a lovely young woman. You look very much like Mother.” She reached over and lifted a braid, wrapping it around Hanna’s crown. “So very much like Mother,” she said.

Everyone in the family had hair with a touch of red, from Frederick’s dark auburn to Leni’s blond, which in a certain light held a hint of ginger. But Hanna’s, more than anyone else’s, resembled their mother’s, which was a fiery red. Hanna generally covered it with a good bandana because people stared, but she had neglected to cover it in her hurry.

Käthe planted a kiss on her cheek. “Oh, my dear sweet little sister, what have you done?” She studied Hanna for several moments, and then said, “I will speak with Frau Metzger, but first a letter to Father.” She knelt on the floor, pulled a box from under the bed, and took out paper and pen. She scribbled a note and sealed it in an envelope. “I will ask Frau Stadler to post it when she goes to market early tomorrow morning.”

Having brought nothing other than the skirt and blouse she wore, Hanna slept in her chemise and bloomers that night, snuggled against Käthe’s side. She woke often, an excitement jumping inside her, anticipating this new life that she was about to begin.

The following morning, Käthe talked to Frau Metzger and came back with a long dark skirt, white blouse, and starched apron. “You are about the same size as Brigitte and these should fit perfectly.” She handed the uniform to Hanna. “Congratulations, you

are now an employee of Herr Moses Fleischmann.