

## Chapter 1

Rain lashed the windows as Rolf Dahlmann heard the gale above Mozart's 21st Piano Concerto on his radio. He looked up from writing his journal, pushed his chair away from his desk and shivered, although the heat from the tiled oven was adequate.

"More than fourteen years," he murmured, running his hand through dark blond hair that was receding at the temples. Yet a night like this brought it all back in minute detail. He saw her face... pale, horror-struck, and those eyes...

Someone had tipped them off. When he and his colleagues from the Gestapo went to search the attic, they'd found her in the cavity of the roof. Schmidt pulled her out while another one had a tight grip on the young man who'd sworn that no one was there but him. His face was distorted by

fear as he stretched out his arms helplessly towards the girl.

She reached out to him.

“Come!” Schmidt shouted at her.

She pleaded to let them say goodbye.

“You come now... immediately!” Schmidt seized her roughly by the wrist.

That’s when he, Rolf Dahlmann, stepped in. Strangely moved by compassion, he commanded Schmidt to let her go. She stumbled into the young man’s arms, while Rolf watched them embrace, their lips locked in a final kiss.

“Come now, that’s enough!” Schmidt thundered, and the girl followed him. In the doorway, she turned to her young man once more, eyes wide with anguish. Schmidt dragged her into the passage. With Rolf walking behind her, she staggered downstairs clutching the banister. As they reached the truck, the ferocity of the storm made her stumble. When Rolf took hold of her arm to steady her, their eyes met. She looked at him, not accusingly, not with hatred, only with a profound sadness that sent a shiver down his spine. She was so young. Eighteen, he’d read in her papers.

In the ensuing years, he had often wondered

where they had taken her. Whether she was among those still alive.

A gust of wind rattled the window. Rolf tried to resume his writing but couldn't. Other faces moved past him, shadowy faces that he fought to forget. And always this girl's face remained imprinted on his mind. He knew it was futile to stop these troubled thoughts, so he let them happen. They would pass, would never be as severe as they were during those first years when they haunted him until he teetered on the verge of madness.

A knock on the door jolted him back to the present. He pulled himself together.

"Come in, Frau Friedrich."

"It's only 5.30, Herr Dahlmann, but I thought since you're going out..."

"That's very thoughtful of you. Thank you." He pushed his notes aside so that Helga Friedrich could place the tray with his tea and sandwiches onto the desk.

"It's a bad night to be driving. Best go slowly," she remarked. Like so often, she felt concern for her employer with his appealing but stern features that only softened when he was with the children.

"I will." He managed a smile.