



Prague, February 1943

Anna Zadoková held her mother's tiny body close. If only she could imprint the feel of her on her skin. She breathed in her scent, a combination of rose water and fried onions. Everything she loved best about her. A light mist dampened them both.

"Be a good girl, *beruško*."

"No, *Máma, ne*." She peered over *Máma's* shoulder and stared at her father. "*Ne, Táta*. I'm going with you. My deportation notice might not have come with yours, but it will come at some point. The entire family must go together. We won't allow them to separate us."

"And what about your grandmother?" *Máma* smoothed Anna's hair from her damp brow. "It's a blessing from God that neither of you got your notices. For now, you're safe. You can take care of *Babička*, and we can go in peace, knowing she'll be looked after."

Anna bit her trembling lip to keep away the tears clogging her throat. "Please, let me go with you. Over the years, we prayed together, laughed together, cried together. This, too, we should do together." Her heart drummed against her ribs with the knowledge of what she faced, what her decision might cost her. She turned and surveyed her younger sisters, Jana and Lada, standing to the side, clutching the two bags allowed them by the Germans.

Prague's exhibition hall loomed behind them, the large wooden structure nothing more than a run-down shack. Other Jews filled the yard, eyes wide, faces drawn. Outside, flimsy wooden partitions separated dozens of toilets. If you had to relieve yourself, you had to do it

in full view of everyone present. Anna couldn't say a word. Were the Nazis determined to degrade them?

*Máma* sighed, dark half-moons beneath her brown eyes. “*Ne, ne*. If you stay, at least I don't have to worry about you. Or my mother. That's one less burden for me to carry.”

*Táta* stroked Anna's cheek. Deep lines etched his face, lines that hadn't been there before. He took off his hat and rubbed his bald head. “Don't do this to your mother and me. In the middle of the sorrow of leaving everyone and everything for an uncertain fate, we're comforted that you and *Babička* will be safe. Perhaps you will survive. The Americans have joined the fight. Not long now, and they'll be here.”

“*Táta*, I can't survive without my family. I'll die of a broken heart. I, I . . .” She swallowed lest she give up control.

“We can't lose all of our children. David also got his notice. He'll be on the train with us. Why you didn't get yours, only the Lord knows. But we believe He did it for a reason.”

Anna pursed her lips and set her jaw. “What difference does it make if it comes today or tomorrow? The Nazis want to cleanse Prague of Jews. Even the Christian ones.”

*Táta* flashed her a wry grin. “I have your grandmother to thank for your stubbornness.”

“That stubbornness will serve me well in the camp.” She locked her knees so her parents wouldn't see her tremble. Should she go home, or go with her family? Her stomach clenched. At least if she went with them, she would have them to help her.

*Máma* squeezed Anna's hand and stood as straight and regal as ever. “Anna, turn around and go to the house. Now.”

Her sister Lada, only eleven years old, cried. “*Máma*, can't I go home, too? Why do we have to come here?”

*Táta* rubbed his youngest daughter's shoulder. “This is what God has planned for us. We'll submit to His will and pray for His protection.” A muscle worked in his cheek.

Anna clung to him. “We should have gone to America with Uncle

## THE MELODY OF THE SOUL

Ivan when we had the chance. We would have been safe. Why did you listen to me? Why did we stay?”

“That wasn’t God’s plan for us. It’s too much to explain now.”

But she didn’t understand. How could it be His plan for them to be parted this way?

A tall, scrawny young man approached them, his long, black coat flapping in the breeze. Anna gave Jakub Meles, David’s friend and a member of the Jewish Council, a half smile.

“What are you doing here?” He finger-combed his unruly black curls.

*Táta* set down his battered case and patted Anna’s hand. “We got our notices to report. We understand that David did, too. Have you seen him?”

“Why is Anna here?” He leaned in, and Anna only heard his words because she stood next to *Táta*. “You know the council draws up the deportation lists. David begged me, so I had her name and *Paní* Doubeková’s stricken. He was afraid his grandmother wouldn’t survive the camp, and he wanted Anna to stay and watch over her. I cannot save her if she shows up here. Send her home.”

*Táta*’s drawn face brightened. “God’s provision.” He gathered Anna to himself like he had hundreds of times when she was a child. “Do as I say. Leave us. Be safe. May the Lord go with you.”

The tears, close to the surface all day, streamed down her cheeks in a torrent. “*Táta*. Oh, *Táta*.”

He held her a moment more before pulling himself from her embrace. Moisture shimmered on his angular face. “This is the hardest thing I have ever done. I have loved you from the moment your mother told me you were on your way. Your tiny face captured my heart and hasn’t let it go. My sweet, sweet Anna, my *beruško*, do this one last thing for me. Go home. Take care of your grandmother.”

Her father kissed her cheek, turned her toward their flat on Salvátorská Street, and gave her a gentle push in that direction.

After she walked half a block, she turned back. Her family strolled hand-in-hand into the exhibition hall.

In the distance, a train whistled.



## Chapter One

*Prague, early fall 1943*

Anna Zadoková clutched her violin to her chest. Her sheet music fluttered to the floor as she peered from behind the lace curtain to the street below.

“Well, child, don’t just stand there. Tell me what you see.”

Anna might laugh at her grandmother’s impatience if a black Mercedes emblazoned with a swastika didn’t sit parked in front of their apartment building. Instead, she sucked in her breath and turned toward her. “Nazis.”

“Here?” *Babička* didn’t open her half-closed eyes, but grabbed the carved arm of her chair tighter until her gnarled knuckles whitened.

“Yes, here. Of all places.” Anna couldn’t corral the wild beating of her heart. “But we won’t be here for long.” She turned her attention to the commotion on the road. “What are we going to do? *Máma* and *Táta* told me to keep you safe.”

A young, lean officer stepped from the car, unfolding himself to his full height. My, he towered over the others. He blew out smoke from his cigarette. A shock of blond hair peeked out from under his hat, visible to her even at this distance. He couldn’t be more than twenty-five. Handsome? Maybe under different circumstances.

But she couldn’t forget what the Nazis had done to her family. She might never see *Máma* and *Táta* again because of them. *Ne*, his outward appearance may be pleasing, but darkness and ugliness pervaded his heart and soul.

Just like his countryman Reinhard Heydrich, the Butcher of Prague.

The man who deported and killed an untold number of Jews. Friends from the conservatory. Neighbors. Her only cousin.

The man barked at his driver and pointed in the direction of their flat. Anna grasped her bow hard. He was moving into this building? She forced herself to relax her fingers lest she snap the bow in two. There were no empty apartments.

Anna's knees turned to mush, and she leaned against the window sill to keep from crumpling to the ground. There might not be a vacant flat now, but there would be one in a matter of minutes. Would he arrest the young family below them, or Anna and *Babička*? Or both?

She turned from the window, unable to watch any more of the unfolding scene. "He . . ." Her voice squeaked, and she swallowed to clear it. "He is coming here. We have to be ready to leave. I'll pack a bag for you and bring your coat."

*Babička* bit her lip. "Thank you, child."

Anna's heart skipped in her chest, unable to find a steady rhythm. "*Babička* . . ." And then she dove into her grandmother's arms, trembling like a child in a thunderstorm.

"Hush, now, hush." *Babička's* words flowed over her, gentle as a spring rain. "The Lord protected us before. He will again."

"I don't see how. I just don't see how. What about *Máma* and *Táta*?"

"They're safe in the palm of His hand."

If she could stop time and remain in *Babička's* embrace forever, finding balm for the ache in her chest. But soon, the soldiers would burst through the door and arrest them. They had to prepare. She stood, taking a moment to steady her wobbling knees and straighten her pleated, navy blue skirt. Not that it mattered. Not that it mattered one bit.

She moved to the back bedroom she shared with *Babička* and pulled the well-worn tan suitcase from under the large feather bed. She stuffed the small case with all their warmest clothes and sweaters. From the bathroom, she grabbed *Babička's* heart medicine and a bottle of vitamin tablets.

Where was *Babička's* Bible? She would want it. Need it. It wasn't on the small, round bedside table. Perhaps in the kitchen where she

## THE MELODY OF THE SOUL

had read it earlier this morning. But though Anna searched high and low and snatched the last of their *houskový knedlík*, bread dumplings, brought by a friend from their church, she didn't locate her grandmother's most treasured possession.

She returned to the bedroom and stood by her dresser, tracing the painted rose trailing down the Bohemian glass jug her parents gave her on her sixteenth birthday. Had that been only seven years ago? Of all the treasures begging to be stuffed in the suitcase, this was the one calling the loudest. But it might break during the journey. She left it alone.

Before her melancholy grew, she turned away and shut the door. The old parquet floors squeaked under her feet as she returned to the living room. Much to her relief, *Babička* sat in her chair, her Bible open in her lap.

They were Christians, yet the Nazis arrested and persecuted them for their ethnic heritage. For the blood which flowed in their veins, no choice of theirs. What had they ever done to the Germans to deserve this treatment?

"We're ready to go, *Babička*." Anna draped her grandmother's scratchy, gray wool coat over a chair and placed her grandfather's on top of it. A fall chill hung in the air, winter biting at its heels. Two coats would keep *Babička* warmer than one. Anna brought her own long, brown coat from the large walnut wardrobe, the yellow star sewn onto it proclaiming their identity to the world.

They sat beside each other on the rose-sprigged, Victorian-style sofa, the soft ticking of the Bavarian cuckoo clock on the wall the only sound in the room. Anna clasped her grandmother's cool, fragile hand. What would life have been like in America? They should have gone.

*Babička* bowed her head, closed her eyes, and moved her lips without uttering a sound.

Then, from downstairs, shouts and screams rang out.



Horst Engel studied the Baroque-style brown stone building adorned with ornate triangular pediments above each window and carved

wreaths beneath each one. A large, engraved swag accented the arched main entrance. But even his attempts at an architectural analysis of his new home weren't enough to shut his ears to the screams of the small child ripped from his mother's arms.

Horst couldn't turn away.

The little boy's face reddened. Fat tears raced down his dimpled cheeks. The mother, a conspicuous yellow star on her coat, lunged for her son. His fellow officers rewarded her instinct with a gun butt to her head.

He averted his gaze at the sight of blood gushing from her temple. That wasn't necessary. None of this was. *Vater* said this assignment was better than fighting in a trench somewhere, but Horst had a difficult time understanding how that might be. Nevertheless, his father, an influential man in the Nazi party, had paid for this commission for his son.

This was not what his life was supposed to look like. Not any of it. And it wasn't because he was afraid to fight or even to die. For a right and just cause, he would give his life without hesitation. That's what a good officer did. But not like this. Scenes like this churned his stomach. Reminded him of his past. Brought on the nightmares.

He crossed his arms over his midsection and leaned against the black car, the metal warm on his cheek.

"Are you ill, sir?"

Horst startled at the voice of his young driver and snapped to attention. It would not do for him to be caught slouching. "*Nein*. Just fatigued."

"I'll tell them to hurry removing this Jewish family. It might take some time to clean their filth, though."

"Don't." Horst turned to the soldier whose name he couldn't remember at the moment. "Give them what time they need."

"Very good, sir. We want all to be in readiness for you."

The man misunderstood, but Horst didn't correct him.

A soldier, armed with a rifle, led the father from the home, his shoulders slumped, a muscle jumping in his cheek, his hands clenched. Horst gritted his teeth.

Something fluttered in an upstairs window. A lace curtain parted

## THE MELODY OF THE SOUL

for a moment, a flash of time. The slightest glimpse of a young woman with dark brown hair and pale skin. Like an apparition, she vanished. Who was she?

He returned his attention to the family his soldiers led away. The guards shoved the father, a bright yellow star on his coat, inside the canvas-covered truck. He drew his wife and child to him, tears coursing down the woman's battered and bloodied face.

Horst swallowed hard.

The truck revved its engine and screeched away down the narrow street.

He couldn't take it anymore. Squaring his shoulders, he strode to the building and entered the first-floor flat.

For many years, *Vater* drummed into him how vile and filthy the Jews were. But not these. A large bow window brightened the cheerful living space, a bright red rug on the floor, a well-worn green sofa along one wall. Only his mother kept house this well, this clean. The lady of the home must have worked very hard.

He moved toward the couch. If he could put his feet up—

He tripped. A tin train engine sat on the floor in the middle of the room, one a child pulled with a string. He'd had one similar when he was young, fascinated by locomotives.

Horst picked it up and turned it around in his hands. Much of the black paint had peeled off. It had been loved. Treasured. Perhaps by more than one generation. He searched the flat for a bedroom and stashed the toy into the deep recesses of the wardrobe, behind several dresses.

The woman's flowery scent reached him and he slammed the door shut. His heart raced.

Boots sounded on the scarred wood floors. He once again donned his Nazi officer persona and went to meet his compatriots.

"Are the accommodations to your liking, sir?"

The boy's name eluded him. "*Ja, danke.* That will be all for now."

The house fell silent, and that was fine with him. His head pounded. Oh, to be home in his room with the smell of his mother's cooking and the scent of edelweiss filling the air.



LIZ TOLSMA

He sat in the old, overstuffed chair in the corner of the living room and sank into its depths. If he closed his eyes, he could almost feel the warmth of *Mutti's* potato soup in his middle.

His stomach growled. What had they left him to eat in this place? He wandered to the kitchen. Neat and spotless, just like the other rooms. The cabinets, however, produced little for dinner. He discovered a tin of ersatz coffee and put the pot on the stove to brew.

As he waited for the water to boil, a strange sound floated around him. Beautiful. Haunting.

Mozart, if he was correct. He listened a moment more. Yes, *Violin Concerto Number Three*.

And played to perfection, the technique impeccable. His mother loved music and often dragged him to symphony concerts. When he was a teenager, it had been against his will. First he was soothed, then he learned, then he appreciated. Now, reached out to recapture those days.

He needed that beauty.



Anna allowed the last note of the concerto to float on the air and die away. She closed her eyes and held her breath for a moment, letting the quiet wash over her.

For that instant, and that instant only, she was free. The world was a good and happy place.

Yes, it was risky to play when the Nazis declared it illegal for Jews to have instruments. But she kept her violin's voice quiet. Right now, the music calmed her.

A knock on the door brought her crashing to earth like a flaming fighter plane. Her breath whooshed from her lungs.

These days, anyone might be on the other side. Did she get careless, lost in the music when she played? Did the Nazi downstairs hear her?

She glanced at *Babička*, sleeping in the chair, mouth wide open. Beside her sat the run-down brown suitcase, the leather handle worn, the fabric frayed at the edges. Would it even survive the trip to the camp?

Was this the time they waited for? Anticipated? Dreaded?

## THE MELODY OF THE SOUL

She wiped her hands on her deep blue skirt, sucked in a deep breath, and opened the door.

The officer from the street.

She locked her knees to keep them from failing her.

He strode into the flat, his eyes icy blue. In one sweep, he assessed the room. And them. He removed his peaked cap, an eagle on the crown, and tousled his dark-blond hair. He nodded at her. "*Hauptmann* Horst Engel. And you are?"

As she released the air from her lungs, she prayed the words would not squeak out of her throat. She never expected the Nazi deporting them to introduce himself. She answered in German, a language she and many Prague Jews were fluent in. "Anna Zadoková. And my grandmother, Jana Doubeková."

*Babička* stirred and opened her eyes, startling for a moment.

He nodded in *Babička*'s direction, then returned his attention to Anna. "You played that music?"

She stepped back, grasping at a wobbly side table for support. He'd heard. How could she have been that reckless? What should she say? Denying it would only bring on his ire. Acknowledging it would, at the least, add their names to the deportation notices.

After a few moments of silence, *Hauptmann* Engel cleared his throat. "Bring your violin and come with me."

She again glanced at the suitcases, packed, ready to go. And what about *Babička*? If only her voice worked. "Sir?" The word squeezed out between her tense vocal chords.

He turned toward her, his eyes the color of steel. "*Ja?*"

"My grandmother? And our suitcases?"

"The grandmother may come. The suitcases? You won't need those where you are going."

*The*  
*Melody*  
*of* *the*  
*Soul*

MUSIC OF HOPE SERIES

*Book One*

LIZ TOLSMA

[Order Now](#)

 **GILEAD**  
PUBLISHING

Grand Rapids, Michigan