

“*The White Rose Resists* is that rare and powerful story that rips your heart apart at the same time that it inspires you to live for something greater. With a lyrical and skillful voice, Amanda Barratt tells the amazing true story of the German students who dared to use their voices in a culture of oppression. This novel will have readers turning pages late into the night; it will have their blood surging and boiling with a need for justice. Most of all, it will remind them of what is truly important. A beautiful masterpiece of a novel!”

Heidi Chiavaroli, Carol Award–winning author of *Freedom’s Ring*
and *The Tea Chest*

“Woven with bittersweet delicacy, Barratt’s intimate voice holds you so closely you are surprised at an outcome history already taught you. A monument to courage and conviction, *The White Rose Resists* blends Barratt’s hallmark of immersive research with poetic resonance. This staggering portrait of love, danger, treachery, and unfathomable bravery in a time of sheer evil leaves us, in Barratt’s intelligent care, with the most potent sense of shimmering hope. This book deserves to be on every shelf, at the center of every book club conversation, and on the tip of every reader’s tongue for years to come.”

Rachel McMillan, author of *The London Restoration*

“Young, daring, faith-filled, in love with life, yet committed without reservation—this is the White Rose, a close-knit group of university students determined to defy Hitler and rouse the German people from their egocentricity and complacency, no matter the cost. With meticulous research and beautiful, brilliant writing, Amanda Barratt weaves tension, suspense, love, and loss with a skillful hand. A stirring reminder that courage should never be relegated only to the pages of history, *The White Rose Resists* kept me turning pages as fast as my eyes could read.”

Cathy Gohlke, Christy Award–winning author of *The Medallion*

“In *The White Rose Resists*, Amanda Barratt cherishes the past and honors true lives while inspiring this present generation to courage. Her storytelling deftly moves between perspectives of characters both real and fictional, portraying radiant hope against a backdrop of darkness. Painstakingly researched and masterfully rendered, this account deserves space in every mind and heart.”

Amanda Dykes, author of *Whose Waves These Are*
and *Set the Stars Alight*

“Amanda Barratt masterfully brings history to life, honoring the unforgettable stories of those who lived before us. In *The White Rose Resists*, Amanda draws the reader into the heart of World War II Germany and introduces us to brave men and women who put their lives on the line because they were compelled to do the right thing. Their story is challenging, beautifully told, and carefully researched. I was entrenched from beginning to end and won’t soon forget their sacrifice.”

Kelli Stuart, author of the award-winning *Like a River from Its Course*
and *A Silver Willow by the Shore*

THE WHITE ROSE RESISTS

A Novel of the German Students
Who Defied Hitler

AMANDA BARRATT



The White Rose Resists: A Novel of the German Students Who Defied Hitler
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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

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Somebody, after all, had to make a start.
—Sophie Scholl

*A man's moral worth is established only at the point
where he is ready to give up his life
in defense of his convictions.*
—Henning von Tresckow (1901–44)



*To the White Rose—
brave men and women who raised their voices
while their world fell silent.
We remember your sacrifice.*
*And to all whose hearts beat with a refrain for truth.
May we strive to be White Roses in our world.*

Soli Deo Gloria.

CHARACTER LIST

The Scholl Family

Sophie Scholl—A twenty-one-year-old biology and philosophy student in her first semester at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Hans Scholl—Sophie’s twenty-three-year-old brother. A medical student at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Robert Scholl—Sophie’s father.

Magdalena Scholl—Sophie’s mother.

Inge Scholl—Sophie’s twenty-five-year-old sister.

Elisabeth “Lisl” Scholl—Sophie’s twenty-two-year-old sister.

Werner Scholl—Sophie’s twenty-year-old brother.

The Brandt Family

Annalise Brandt—A twenty-one-year-old art student in her first semester at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Standartenführer Horst Brandt—Annalise’s father.

Marta Brandt—Annalise’s mother.

Horst Brandt—Annalise’s twenty-year-old brother.

Heinz Brandt—Annalise’s fifteen-year-old brother.

Albert Brandt—Annalise’s thirteen-year-old brother.

The Hoffmann Family

Kirk Hoffmann—A twenty-three-year-old medical student at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Pastor Paul Hoffmann—Kirk’s father.

Emilie Hoffmann—Kirk’s mother.

The Student Resistance

Alexander “Alex” Schmorell—A twenty-four-year-old medical student at Ludwig Maximilian University. Alex is sometimes called by his Russian nickname “Shurik.”

Christoph “Christl” Probst—A twenty-two-year-old medical student at Ludwig Maximilian University. Husband of Herta Probst and father of Michael, Vincent, and, later, Katja.

Wilhelm “Willi” Graf—A twenty-four-year-old medical student at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Traute Lafrenz—Hans’s girlfriend and a student at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Other Characters

Leutnant Fritz Hartnagel—Sophie’s fiancé.

Professor Kurt Huber—Professor of philosophy at Ludwig Maximilian University.

Gisela Schertling—Acquaintance of Sophie.

Katharina Schüddekopf—Friend of the Scholls.

Manfred Eickemeyer—Architect friend of Hans Scholl.

Falk Harnack—Member of the Berlin resistance.

Else Gebel—Inmate at the Wittelsbacher Palace.

Inspector Mohr—Gestapo interrogator.

Judge Roland Freisler—Infamous People’s Court judge.

Dr. Friedrich Voigt—Physician at Stadelheim Prison.

Katrin Voigt—Friedrich’s wife.

CHAPTER ONE

Sophie

May 1, 1942

Munich, Germany

MY FUTURE IS WAITING, a spark in the distance burning steadily brighter as the train approaches the city.

Scrunched into a window seat near the back, I fix my gaze on the smudged glass, my reflection an overlay. To some, the outskirts of Munich aren't what could be called beautiful, but to me they are. Perhaps it's simply because they're new. New, after so many months of bleak sameness.

As we near the Hauptbahnhof, the sprawling patchwork of the city comes into view, the skyline dominated by ancient churches with spires seeming to pierce the skies, the twin cupolas of the Frauenkirche soaring high above them all.

But even now, as the train carries me toward my new life, longing twinges through me for Ulm, the city of my childhood.

On the rack above rests my suitcase and, beside that, a satchel packed by Mutter last evening. Her face flashes before me, graying hair piled into a wispy bun, apron wrapping her waist, and eyes intent on her task. I came into the tiny kitchen and found her adding a large *kuchen* to the bag on the counter.

"Where?" Since the outbreak of war, such confections are a rare treat.

She turned with a smile I could tell was bittersweet. "I've been saving rations for weeks. You only turn twenty-one once. And I want you to have the best of birthdays, my dear daughter."

I hugged her. A goodbye embrace. Not only to her, but to the last vestiges of childhood. She smelled like fresh bread and soap. Frail though she is, she hugged me back with surprising fierceness. As if something innate tells her we will not see each other again for some time, and that when we do, much will have changed in me.

"Danke, Mutti," I whispered against the soft cotton of her blouse.

The memory fades. Smoke belches from the train, the whistle blows. I scan the blur of forms and faces on the platform as the train pulls into the immense brick station. Hoping, *knowing* Hans will be waiting for me.

The train jolts to a stop. I stand on legs that shake from the motion of the train and, I admit, a touch of giddiness. I grasp my well-worn suitcase in one hand, satchel in the other, and join the queue of passengers waiting to disembark. The narrow corridor is rife with the scents of too many bodies packed together—sweat, stale cigarettes, and someone’s cheap perfume.

I descend the train steps, feet shod in sensible brown lace-up shoes, and draw in a breath of warm, slightly smoke-hazed air.

The station is flooded with light, echoing with conductors calling out departure times, the brisk footsteps of travelers. An officer in crisp Wehrmacht gray catches sight of a young woman expectantly scanning the crowd and hastens toward her. A cry of delight. A kiss. A trio of soldiers stride toward the exit, duffel bags slung over their shoulders.

I stand off to the side near a board listing train fares and schedules, everyone certain of their destination, it seems, but me. The daisy in my hair, fresh this morning, faded now, droops lower, petals tickling my ear. The weight of my suitcase sends an ache through my arm. I swallow, glance both ways.

He’ll come. Of course he’ll come.

Then it all fades. Hans strides jauntily through the crowd. No longer does the vast city seem to gulp me in and swallow me whole. Hans is here.

With him, Munich is, will be, home.

I drop my bags and throw my arms around him. My brother, so dashing, so tall, hugs me back, then puts me from him, his warm, strong hands still in mine.

“You’ve arrived at last.” He grins down at me, brown eyes twinkling. “It’s taken long enough.”

It isn’t the train he refers to. I’ve wanted to attend Ludwig Maximilian University with Hans since passing my *Abitur*. But first I had to do my duty for Führer and Fatherland and complete a term of labor service, which ended up turning into a two-year ordeal before I was pronounced able to start my studies. Hans has been privy to my frustrations from the beginning, and the twinkle in his gaze seems to say: *It’s all behind us. The future is ours.*

He grabs my suitcase and satchel. It’s then I notice Traute Lafrenz lingering in the background. My brother’s girlfriend watches us with a half smile. Everything, from her stylish gray suit to the jet-black curls brushing her shoulders, suggests a cosmopolitan elegance I could never hope to attain.

“Welcome to Munich, Sophie.” Traute smiles and embraces me warmly.

“It’s good to see you again.” Her Hamburg-accented voice is rich and slightly husky, not in a seductive way, but like a girl who isn’t afraid to laugh often or cheer her lungs out at a sporting event.

“And you,” I reply. “You look well.”

Hans turns to us with a broad grin. Curling strands of dark hair fall over his forehead. “Ready, ladies?”

We nod and he falls into step between us, one arm looped through mine, the other through Traute’s, our threesome leaving the station behind, merging into the crowd. For a glorious instant, I’m here with my beloved brother on the cusp of the world, and I forget about the grueling years of labor service, about my anxiety for Fritz, even about the war. Warm air stirs my hair against my cheeks. Munich bustles with streetcars, pedestrians, buildings of stucco and stone rising high.

A flash of red catches my eye. Flags hang at intervals from buildings along the street. Reality floods back, smacking me like a storm-tossed wave. In Munich, I’ll never have the chance to forget.

The sea of black and scarlet will always be near to remind me.

Gruesome spiders drenched in blood.



Hans’s flat is, putting it kindly, what one would expect of a bachelor who doesn’t have his mutter around to pick up after him. Books and papers piled onto a round table probably meant to be used for dining. Unemptied ashtrays. A coat with worn-in elbows tossed over the back of the lumpy sofa. Even Hans’s prized modern artwork hangs crooked on the walls, prints by artists like Franz Marc, Emil Nolde, Wassily Kandinsky—bursts of color in the otherwise dingy student apartment.

The Nazis are firm in their insistence such artists are degenerate. Whatever doesn’t suit the Führer is always dubbed by that term. Degenerate art. Degenerate swing music, books, authors. Degenerate humans—Jews, Poles, the mentally handicapped. A familiar knot twists my stomach.

Settled on the sagging sofa, I cross my legs and watch Hans and Traute rummage through my satchel. We’ve spent the past hour chatting, sharing family news, and catching up. Hans and Traute kept their arms around each other the whole time. I’m happy for my brother. Traute is lively and intelligent, a medical student like Hans. Though with his record of past girlfriends, I can’t help but wonder how long this one will last.

Traute pulls out the bottle of wine, brandishing it aloft. “Tell me, Hans, do any of your other sisters want to celebrate a birthday in Munich?”

Hans laughs, holding up the *kuchen* and inhaling its rich, buttery scent.

Seeing them together makes me long for Fritz. Leutnant Fritz Hartnagel, my fiancé. We exchange letters, as do so many couples separated by war. But pen and paper aren't the same as sitting in some sun-drenched spot in midsummer, his whisper in my ear, and my head against his shoulder. There's no denying that.

"The rest of the party will be here soon." Hans ambles over and sits on the edge of the armchair.

"Party?" I ask.

"Of course." Hans grins. "I wouldn't dream of marking this momentous occasion without a party for your birthday. I invited some friends, the ones I've told you about."

I gasp. "You mean Alex and Christl and Kirk?"

Hans nods, looking pleased. "I can't wait for you to meet them."

"You won't have to wait long," Traute calls. "I hear them coming up the stairs."

Instinctively, I tuck my hair behind my ear (I've since plucked out the faded daisy) and smooth my navy dress. I've never put much stock in my appearance, save to bob my hair in a daringly boyish cut during my teens. But I might start if I spend much time around the pulled-together Traute. Like all proper German girls, her face is bare of cosmetics, but her fine cheekbones and dark eyes need no accentuation.

A knock sounds on the door, and Hans rises to open it. In an instant, the room is bursting with three young men, all exchanging hearty handshakes and greetings with Hans and Traute. I stay where I am, on the sofa, watching the scene. The three arrivals fill the room with their broad shoulders and deep voices, an unmistakably masculine presence. I've missed being around young men. Much of the past two years have been spent in the company of dimwitted girls my own age or kindergarten students and fellow female teachers.

"Come here, Sophie." Hans motions me forward. Their gazes fix on me. *So this is Hans's little sister*, they must be thinking.

I cross the room and stand next to Hans.

"Sophie, meet Alex Schmorell, Christl Probst, and Kirk Hoffmann. Everyone, my sister, Sophie, arrived in Munich at last."

Lanky, blond-haired Christl is the first to step forward. His smile is gentle and warm, as is the handclasp he gives me.

"We're so happy you've joined us, Fräulein Scholl."

"Please, call me Sophie." My smile is easy.

"Very glad to meet you. Hans says you're enrolled at LMU for the sum-

mer semester.” Brown-haired and broad-shouldered, Kirk has the look of one who makes feminine pulses flutter while being oblivious to it. His welcoming grin and strong handshake endear him to me instantly.

“*Ja*, and I can’t wait to get started.”

“At long last we meet the famous Sophie.” Alex takes my hand, but he doesn’t shake it. Instead, he bows low, reddish-blond hair falling into his eyes, lips grazing my skin. When he looks up, there’s a twinkle in his blue-gray gaze.

“I feel as if we already know each other, Hans talks about you so often.”

“All good things, I hope.” His mouth tilts in a sideways grin.

Unlike the others, who wear suits, a coffee-brown turtleneck sweater encases Alex’s shoulders. His voice has a cultured quality, with intonations that mark him as not altogether German. Hans has told me of Alex’s Russian heritage; he’s the son of a German vater and Russian mutter, the latter who died before Alex’s second birthday. Alex lived in Russia until he was four, when his vater took him and a Russian nursemaid back to Germany. Yet Russia remains the land of Alex’s heart, and he was never more grieved than when our country invaded his.

“There’s another grand thing about Sophie. Along with her lovely self, look what she brought us. Wine and a birthday *kuchen*.” Traute brings the *kuchen* from the table, Hans, the wine. They place both, along with plates and glasses, on the low table in front of the sofa. Traute claps her hands. “Gather ’round, everyone.”

The young men waste no time. Traute settles on the sofa, along with Hans. Christl takes the armchair, and the rest, the floor, sitting cross-legged on the carpet near the table. The casual atmosphere loosens the tension between my shoulders, almost unrelenting since the day I started labor service.

“Do the honors, Sophie.” Hans slips his arm around Traute, and she leans her curly, dark head against his shoulder.

“Your birthday is soon?” Christl asks, as I move to cut the *kuchen*.

“*Ja*, my twenty-first. On the ninth.” I cut and plate generous slices of the brown, sweet-smelling confection.

Once everyone has been served, Hans lifts his glass.

“Everyone, a toast. To Sophie. May she have the happiest of birthdays, enjoy her time in Munich to the fullest, and get high marks on every exam.” He winks at me.

“To Sophie,” the group choruses with lifted glasses.

“Danke.” I smile, sipping the fruity, earthy wine. I settle on the floor beside Kirk, smoothing my skirt over my knees.

“Mmm. Wonderful.” Traute dabs the corners of her mouth with a handkerchief. “You must take a piece home to Herta, Christl.” To me, she adds. “Herta is Christl’s wife. They have the two sweetest little boys.”

“I actually can’t stay long. I haven’t seen them much lately and promised to tuck them in.” Christl sets his glass on the table, a look of deep fondness in his eyes. As if, even now, he’s not with us, but in some lamp-lit bedroom, kissing his little sons’ fresh-from-the-bath hair and reading them a bedtime tale.

“I hope I have the chance to meet them sometime.” The *kuchen* is sublime, buttery and rich. I savor another bite.

“You will.” Christl smiles, his words as genuine as if it’s already done.

“So what do you think of Munich, Sophie?” Kirk turns to me.

I hesitate. Honesty is not a virtue in the Germany in which we live. Unless one’s honest opinions align with the Führer’s, of course. But these are Hans’s friends. I trust him enough to know he would never add someone to his close circle who didn’t share our beliefs.

Plate balanced on his knee, Alex swirls the wine around in his glass. The reddish liquid reminds me suddenly, uncannily, of swastikas rippling bloodred in the wind.

How long has it been since I’ve been able to give free vent to my feelings, trusting that no ideology-tuned ears are within range? Too long.

“Red and black everywhere.” I meet Kirk’s eyes, sensing the gazes of everyone upon me—these bright young university men. “There’s not a great building in the city that isn’t plastered with one of Hitler’s symbols. It’s disgusting, scars on our beautiful architecture. Of course, Ulm isn’t much different.”

“I wonder how long before it becomes our symbol of defeat, instead of victory?” Alex sets aside his half-finished plate as if he no longer has an appetite.

“That”—Kirk’s tone is quiet, but distinct—“depends on the people.”

Alex’s eyes, twinkling moments ago, now blaze with inner fire. Looking into them makes me start. Embodied in their depths is a passion the whole army of Hitler’s goose-stepping minions, puffed up with propaganda, can’t match, much less quench.

I cannot tear my gaze away.

“It’s our fault, you know.” Our casual circle seems to shrink, until we’re leaning forward, hanging on Hans’s words. “We’ve allowed ourselves to be governed without resistance by an irresponsible faction ruled by dark instincts. Worse than children. Children, at least, sometimes question their parents’ decisions. But have we questioned? Nein, we’ve let ourselves be led

like dogs on a leash, panting after Goebbels's every speech, *Sieg Heiling* like trained monkeys." My brother spits out the words.

Christl nods. "Yet some have spoken out. Bishop von Galen, for example."

"Who's reading him?" Darkness creeps through the window, a shadow falling on Alex's features. Soon, it will be time to draw the blackout curtains. "He preached three sermons, which a few brave souls dared to duplicate, resulting in a few hundred copies, likely little more. That's not enough. Germany has been allowed to nap in the middle of carnage. It's time to wake up, for this country to rub its eyes and look around and see the truth."

Christl glances up. He's no longer the gentle family man, smiling at the mention of his little ones, but a revolutionary with a fervor Goebbels, no matter how many stupid speeches he gives, could never emulate. His hands draw into fists. "It's not just 'this country.' It's *our* country. When this madness has ended, those who are left will be judged by the world, no matter what they thought amongst themselves. It's action that will stand the test. Only action provides absolution."

The words remain in my mind long after the men leave for their lodgings. I stand at the window, peering through a crack in the stifling blackout curtain, the evening chill soaking into my bones.

"Only action provides absolution."

CHAPTER TWO

Annalise

May 3, 1942

Berlin, Germany

BERLIN IS A PRISON. My vater, my jailor.

I'm leaving—escaping both—today.

I descend the stairs, case in hand. My new low-heeled black shoes make little sound against the carpet of our family's Berlin mansion. Before Hitler claimed power, we knew nothing of such riches. We lived in a cramped apartment in a low-rent district of the city, where the faucet leaked and the queue for the communal bathroom snaked down the corridor.

Now our residence boasts suites for each member of the family. Now I have new clothes to wear at university, a real leather suitcase.

But at what price do these luxuries come?

They wait for me near the front door. Mutter, the model German *hausfrau*, dressed in a serviceable gray dress. Wide hipped, big boned, blond haired. Once she may have been pretty, but birthing four Aryan children has left her worn and faded. At twenty-one, I'm the oldest, the only girl followed by a string of boys.

Vater stands beside her. On two weeks leave from the eastern front, he isn't in uniform today, though one wouldn't know it by his posture. Shoulders square, back straight as a broom-handle, hands behind his back. Angular face, steel-blue eyes. Ever the standartenführer. With his blond hair, he's far more the model German than the Führer. Hitler is squat and dark, and his mustache makes him appear cartoonishly absurd.

I've already said "Auf Wiedersehen" to my brothers who are off to school for the day. My twenty-year-old brother, Horst, I haven't seen since Christmas. He's away, doing the duty of an able-bodied German son, serving the Fatherland in the Wehrmacht. Offering himself like the sacrificial lamb to be shot, blown up, or destroyed in whatever method our enemies are making use of at the moment.

“You’re ready, dear?” Mutter’s eyes are two wide question marks in her round face. This parting is not easy for her. I hate to cause her pain, but cause it I must.

I will break free of this cage.

I nod. I set down my suitcase and wrap my arms around her. She hugs me back, doughy arms clinging as a child’s would, as if she wishes she could stop time and keep us frozen in this moment forever. A rebel knot nooses my throat, though I’ve already vowed not to cry. Without me, Mutter will be lost, the only woman in a house of Nazi-crazed men and of boys pushing to become Nazi-crazed men.

She’ll survive, I tell myself. She’ll find strength.

“You’ll write and tell me everything?”

“I’ll write. And call. You’ll hear from me so often, you’ll forget I’m even away.” I kiss her gently on her smooth cheek. Her skin smells like faded lavender.

Mutter nods. Her chin quivers, but no sobs escape. Vater says only the weak shed tears. Weak, meaning those not of the Aryan race. Poles, Jews, and the mentally ill are always termed weak. It’s one of Vater’s most scathing epithets. I suspect it’s why my littlest brother, Albert, no longer cries. Not even when he fell down the stairs and broke his arm last year. He only lay there, gritting his teeth. So brave it was almost eerie.

Off to the side, Vater views our parting without emotion. I retrieve my suitcase and let its weight strengthen me.

“Auf Wiedersehen, Vater.” We could be two associates bidding goodbye after a business meeting. The coal of anger in my stomach gathers tinder. How little he cares for me.

How foolish I am to even want him to.

“Auf Wiedersehen, Annalise.” He looks me up and down, as if I’m one of his troops on review. I hold my breath, skeptical I’ll pass inspection. My blue skirt suit is new, a rarity in these days of rationed clothes. Upon Vater’s return from the front, Mutter happened to broach the subject at dinner about my getting some new things for university. A couple of days later, a box appeared on my bed with the suit, two skirts, two dresses, a blouse, and a sweater. All exceptional quality and just my size. Mutter purchased the matching hat atop my short curls—short because I hacked off my reddish-blond braids with the kitchen shears when no one was around. German girls are supposed to wear their hair braided or in a simple bun, though I can’t see why. I like my chin-length hair. It makes me feel confident, like a film star, though my skin is bare of cosmetics.

Right now, I do not feel confident. In front of Vater, I shrivel.

“You’ll study for a year.” Our agreement issues from his lips, a reminder. I need none. Agreeing to our arrangement is the only way I’ve convinced him to allow me to attend university. I’m to get my fill of “whatever it is I’m going to school for” and return to Berlin after a year’s time to perform the real task of an Aryan woman. Vater will choose a marriage candidate. I’m to submit, my body given over to childbearing like a good broodmare for the Reich.

“A year.” I hesitate, looking up into his iron gaze. What am I waiting for? A hug? A handshake?

Nothing. I’m waiting for nothing.

He doesn’t even touch me. Just stares, no doubt counting the seconds until he can return to his study and dwell on military maneuvers for the Fatherland. I won’t embarrass myself by waiting any longer. He doesn’t need to see the hurt I strive so desperately to hide. He isn’t worth it.

I flash Mutter a smile. She returns it faintly. I stride toward the door, turn the knob, cool metal pressing into my damp palm.

Vater’s black Mercedes waits at the curb to drive me to the train station. I clatter down the steps in my new shoes, the warm May air soothing my skin. The driver takes my suitcase and opens the door. I climb in, settling onto the smooth leather seat. The door closes with a firm bang. I sit straight, fingers clenched in my lap as the driver stows my suitcase. My breath comes easier now. I relax my hands, flattening them against my skirt.

A rumble as the engine starts.

Just before we turn down the street, I glance once at the house, the stately brick, manicured shrubs, and mullioned windows. How do prisoners regard the bars that once kept them captive? Loathing? Triumph?

A mix of both stirs through me as the house disappears from view. I do not call it home. Home, if any place in my life could be termed such, is the little apartment in the low-rent district where we lived before the National Socialist German Workers’ Party sank its teeth into our family. Vater smiled there sometimes. Mutter spoke louder, more freely, her laughter honey warm.

Munich, my destination, will be home. There, art and study will encompass my life. I intend to drown in it, soaking in hue and texture before my world becomes a black-and-white landscape of a husband I do not love and childbirth and the endlessness of doing my duty.

But not yet.

“I will be free,” I whisper. The driver glances over his shoulder, but I doubt he catches my words. I say them again, a smile blooming on my lips.

“I will be free.”

CHAPTER THREE

Kirk

May 6, 1942

Munich

WHAT IS THE MEASURE of my life if I stand by and do nothing? Does the blood of Jews stain my hands any less because mine did not pull the trigger? How can I go on, day after ceaseless day, occupied with study, friends, concerts, lectures?

How can any honest German continue with life as usual while our country sinks deeper into the mire of dehumanization?

I remember the moment these thoughts first turned through my mind as clearly as if it were yesterday. November 10, 1938. My life is two parts—divided down the middle in a sweeping, chilling slice. The tenth of November is that slice.

Sitting at the desk in my apartment, staring at a blank page on which I'm supposed to be writing a research paper, I see their faces, burned into my soul with searing clarity. Their eyes . . .

Their eyes haunt me.

It was after midnight when it began. I was nineteen, home after completing my term of National Labor Service—six months of manual labor building the new autobahns. I did not intend to remain home long and would soon begin the next round of required service, this time in the Wehrmacht. My parents' way of life—their piety, their distrust of Hitler's Reich—dug beneath my skin like splinters I couldn't pluck out.

I'd never denounce them. Nor did I agree with them, a state of affairs that led to years of arguments and tense silences. Including that night. I had escaped at ten p.m., slamming the front door, leaving my mutter standing in the hallway, arms folded against her sweater-clad chest, pain etched upon her features. I ended up at a nearby *bierhalle*, planted on a stool, nursing my second drink, the yeasty scent heavy in the air, its taste in my mouth. Smoke hazed the dim-lit room, familiar raucous laughter sounding at the

other end. The source of that laughter stumped across the room, carrying an empty tray. Herr Koch.

He leaned burly arms on the bar, smelling like he'd just eaten a keg of sauerkraut. Sweat shone on his apple-cheeked face. No matter the weather, the man always seemed to glisten with perspiration.

"Keeping yourself scarce around here lately, Hoffmann."

"I've been away," I muttered into my drink, fingers clenched around its handle.

Herr Koch said something else, likely starting in on a joke, and I stood, knowing the only way to escape him was to leave. I plunked a few coins down on the bar's grooved wooden surface. As I headed toward the door, I sensed Herr Koch's gaze on me. Once, I'd enjoyed nothing better than swapping stories with him, one of the few times I felt like more than the Lutheran pastor's son. But tonight, I was riled. Angry at Vater for his refusal to embrace National Socialism. Angry at myself for the words I'd flung at him. *Traitor. Disgrace. Ashamed to have you as my vater.*

I pushed through the door, its hinges groaning. Cold air slapped my face. I pulled up the collar of my coat, shoving my hands in my pockets. The wool of my collar chafed my skin as I walked, long strides eating up the distance, alone with my simmering thoughts.

I glanced up. The moon glimmered, a silver oyster in the sky. A strange glow emanated in the distance. It gave the inky sky an orange tinge. A gust of wind bore the faint, acrid scent of smoke.

Something was on fire.

Footsteps pounded the cobblestones, rushing past me. I walked doggedly on as a group of men jogged down the street, rounding the corner. I kept walking, turning the opposite way, headed toward my parents' house.

A crash, like the contents of a china cabinet smashing. I started. It came from somewhere nearby, perhaps the next street over. A shout followed.

Light gleamed from a nearby two-story business—Wollheim's Fine Furniture. A greenish-gray van sat parked next to the building. Instinctively, I slipped into the shadows, pressing myself flush against the clammy brick of a building across the street.

The windows. I'd traveled this route dozens of times, always noting the shop's stylish window displays. This night, a spider web of cracks pockmarked the glass, punctuated with gaping fang-like holes. Crystal shards littered the ground.

But not only the windows. Broken and battered furnishings lay in front of the shop like debris after a storm. A chair with one leg. A lampshade. An end table.

Had they been vandalized? My heart beat faster. I should get the police.

Figures emerged from within the shop, forms vaguely illuminated. Two women, a man between them grasping one arm each. Both women wore kerchiefs over their hair and bulky coats.

I took the risk of getting closer. My curiosity had vanished. I don't know what replaced it. Maybe it wasn't my mind that forced my feet to move nearer to the group across the street, but a divine hand.

An elderly man walked behind the two women, also held by force, his left arm gripped by a uniformed Brownshirt. Behind him, the only member unescorted, toddled a little boy. The child looked hastily awakened from dreamland. A tiny nightcap sat crooked on his head, his shoulders covered by a coat several sizes too large. In one hand, he clutched a toy bear.

The Wollheim family. And three SA, swastika armbands reddish smears on their biceps.

Each breath seemed to squeeze my lungs as I bore silent witness to the scene.

Dear God, what is going on? Not a prayer so much as a plea.

"*Schnell!*" barked the man carrying a flashlight. "Out, *Juden*. Out!"

Juden? These people were Jews? My brain hadn't made the connection until that moment. My stomach knotted.

One of the women stumbled, tripping over something. Her skirt? The curb? The man with the flashlight noticed. He marched over.

Fear is an odor, rank and ugly. It crouched here in the air, radiating from the young woman. Her breath clouded in short puffs. Surprisingly, she didn't shrink back or cower as the man loomed in front of her. Just stood there, face pale in the white beam of light, regarding him. Resignedly? Defiantly?

He leaned in, face pressed toward hers. "When I say *schnell* I mean it. You filthy Jew whore."

The elderly man behind her balled the hand loose at his side into a fist. But he uttered no protest. Only his eyes marked unspent anger.

The SA man noticed. "What are *you* looking at?" But he didn't hit the old man. I expected him to, could see it coming.

Instead, he turned, raised a fist, and struck the girl in the midsection. She cried out, doubled over, and crumpled to the ground. The older woman pulled the little boy to her side. The SA man laughed. Much as Herr Koch had only an hour ago.

Thinking back, their laughter blurs in my mind. Herr Koch, face beet red and chuckling; these men, their visages contorted in a display of hate; until they become one and the same. The laughter of November 10, 1938.

The laughter of Kristallnacht.

“Get up.” He kicked her huddled form with the toe of his boot. “Onto the truck.”

The old man bent to help her. The Brownshirt pushed him away. The other SA watched, arms folded, gazes approving.

“The whore can get up by herself.”

Slowly, the woman rose, pressing her hands against the cobblestones and standing. A streak of dirt marked her pale cheek.

They herded the three adults into the back of the van. The little boy stood behind them, clutching his toy, looking up at the grown-ups. He didn’t seem afraid, waiting as patiently as if standing in line for his turn on a carousel.

What possessed me to stand there, shadows shrouding me, and do nothing? Was it the rhetoric inbred from my years in the Hitler Youth that the Jews had evil running through their veins like blood? Nein. If any emotion could be named, it was fear. Fear at the unfolding horror, at what would happen if the men unleashed their anger on me.

Coward is too kind a word for what I was then. What I am still.

The man climbed in with little help, as did the younger woman. But the other struggled, clambering in her long skirt. One of the SA pushed her hard in the rear. Not a helping hand, but a weighty shove that sent her floundering. A thud, as she landed in the van.

Even cattle, on the way to the slaughterhouse, were given more courtesy.

The tallest SA, the one who’d struck the young woman, reached down and picked up the little boy, hefting him into his arms like a sack of flour. The motion jarred the teddy bear from the child’s grip. It fell to the ground. The boy let out a wail, chubby arms and legs flailing.

“*Teddybär!*” he screamed, hysterical. “*Teeeddybär!*”

The man threw him into the back and slammed the doors. The others followed, climbing into the front, talking and laughing. The engine started and the van trundled down the street, turning the corner and disappearing from sight. Leaving the street barren, save me, the sole witness to one of hundreds of crimes that would take place that night in Munich and across Germany.

Finally I could move, and I did, emerging from the shadows and crossing the street to stand in front of the shop. A home and a business, now empty, their occupants stolen away in the middle of the night like criminals. Criminals whose only crime was to have been born God’s chosen people. I stared at the building, fighting to breathe, hands clenched at my sides. *Why?* Why did these people deserve this while my own parents were allowed to sleep in their warm bed, undisturbed?

Growing up, I'd witnessed mild injustices—stronger schoolmates pranking on the weaker, an angry man kicking a mangy dog. Compared to this, I'd been sheltered. This made my breath seize in my lungs as if frozen by shards of ice. This . . . changed me.

There on the damp ground, surrounded by fractured glass, lay the toy bear, empty eyes staring up at me. I picked it up, holding it in both hands. Its fur was matted and worn, smelling of clean sheets and little-boy kisses.

I never discovered the fate that befell its owner.

That night, as I wandered further through Munich, I witnessed more horrors. Burning synagogues, bearded men forced to dance like schoolchildren while crowds pointed and laughed. The Star of David painted in ugly smears across buildings. Women screaming hysterically as their men were hauled away.

Glass. Thousands of shards strewn across the cobblestones, diamonds of desecration.

That night, I went into my parents' room, and wept great, wracking sobs, begging their forgiveness for my blindness. I'd been caught up in the banners and marching and songs of the Nazi Party, eyes closed to the brewing evil. All along, they'd known the truth, and tried to make me see it. It had taken Kristallnacht to rip the scales from my eyes and force me into the light of day.

A week later, before leaving for the Wehrmacht, I bowed my heart and surrendered my life to a God greater than Adolf Hitler.

The years passed. Kristallnacht was only the beginning. The war began in 1939, our triumphant army trampling Poland in a month. After completing basic training, I'd joined the Wehrmacht as a medic in the hope it would enable me to mend, instead of destroy. In 1940, during the invasion of France, I witnessed Germany's suppression of a rich and beautiful country while tending to hundreds of our wounded. In France, I met Hans Scholl. In the following years, my request to study at university was granted, and I was assigned to Ludwig Maximilian University's Second Student Medical Company.

But what did I do? Was it a coincidence I was there that November night?

I stare at my blank paper, the faces of those lost receding. At university, I'd made friends, reunited with Hans Scholl, and been introduced to Alexander Schmorell and Christl Probst. Young officers and medical students like myself. They grappled with the same questions, all of us unwilling to remain part and parcel with criminals by our complicity. So far, all we'd done was talk at cafés or late-night conferences in Hans's apartment and the Schmorells' villa.

Christl is right. Only action offers any hope of absolution.

But I hadn't acted. I'd witnessed the horrors of November 10 and done nothing as a result of what I'd seen.

No longer. I won't spend another day going through the motions of life while others journey through hell itself. I will rise up and fight, not for, but against Hitler's regime.

I will, I must act.

God help us, we will resist.