

SEARCHING
FOR
Lottie

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In memory of Charlotte, her spirit ever bright

Vienna, January 1936

"Keep your voice down, you will scare the children!" Mutti's muffled words drifted through the thick plaster walls of the small apartment.

Lottie stood in her tiny bedroom, practicing the violin. She lowered the instrument, straining to hear.

"The Nazis are gaining strength. We must act now, before it's too late." Papa sounded sad and strangely old.

"We cannot leave," Mutti replied. "Think of Lottie's future! Have you forgotten what her tutor called her? 'A bright star; the finest pupil at the music academy.'"

Lottie sighed and tucked the violin back under her chin. So much talk about the Nazis and whether there would be war. What did it all mean? She began the sonata again but quickly stumbled. "Miserable fingers!" If only it wasn't so very cold; she could barely feel her hands. But times were hard, and there was never enough coal to heat more than the parlor. The Winter Competition was less than a week away, and if she wanted to keep her scholarship, her performance

would have to be perfect. The bow must float on the strings; every note must sing.

The bedroom door creaked open slightly, and a small nose appeared.

"Is there a mouse at my door?" Lottie asked.

"Yes, squeak, squeak!" the voice responded. Chubby arms pushed through the doorway, revealing a tow-haired child in a nightgown. "I saw one today," Rose said, "a mouse in the kitchen."

"Don't tell Mutti." With a finger to her lips, Lottie smiled.

"May I watch you practice?"

"In a minute." Setting the violin on the narrow bed, Lottie grabbed her little sister by the waist, lifting her up into the air.

"Higher! I want to go higher!"

"Enough?" Arms reached toward the ceiling.

"More! Mice like to fly!" Rose giggled.

"Do they?" Two long twirls were followed by a bumpy landing on the carpet; the little mouse lay on the floor laughing and squeaking.

"Why is Papa so sad?" Rose asked, suddenly serious.

"What do you mean?"

"Mutti and Papa are always stern." Rose rolled up, her head propped on her knees. "Mutti won't play with me, and Papa doesn't smile anymore."

"Everything will be fine again soon, I promise." Dropping



to the floor, Lottie tickled Rose's belly and then pulled her into her lap. "Grown-ups worry far too much, that's all."

Rose nestled into the warmth of her sister's arms. "Can you rub my fingers, pretty please?" Lottie took the small, pudgy hands between her own and blew on them. She glanced at the frost accumulating on the long windowpanes; the sky was as gray as the buildings surrounding them, and tiny flakes of snow were beginning to fall.

When she was certain her sister's fingers were warm, Lottie sprang to her feet. "Now, that's quite enough talking!" She picked the violin up from the bed. "I won't win the competition by chatting idly on the carpet. You come keep the sheet music still for me, little mouse, and I'll get back to practicing."



CHAPTER ONE

Hillmont, Connecticut, September 20-10



“Is this the girl who died?” Charlie asked softly. She held up a faded black-and-white photograph of a young girl wearing a flowered dress with a white lace collar. The girl had large, shining eyes and a mischievous grin.

“What was that?” Mom stopped short, her arms full of laundry.

“Is this the girl I was named after?” Charlie sat cross-legged on the couch in the family room beside the kitchen. Headphones held back her long red hair; an oversized photo album rested on her knees.

Mom set the laundry on the kitchen table. “Let me see.” She glanced at the old photo and sighed. “Why are you looking at these today?”

“School report.” Charlie pulled the headphones from her ears and pushed her corkscrew curls to one side. “You know

how all the seventh-grade social studies classes do a family research project for the first assignment of the year? Jake did his on Dad's great-grandpa from Lithuania, remember? It turned out he was a lawyer just like Dad."

"Are you talking about me?" Jake bounded into the room, his mouth full of chips. He was endlessly tall and equally annoying. "And how I totally aced that project...?"

"Absolutely not and could you please go away?" Charlie's eyes flashed.

"Hey, what are you listening to?" Jake frowned as he strained to hear the sounds coming faintly from the headphones on the couch. "What the—Charlie, is that *classical* music? Why do you *listen* to this stuff? Is that like, an *opera* or something?"

"It's Mozart!" Hot-faced, Charlie hit the pause button on her phone to silence the music.

Jake mumbled something about musicians being temperamental and went to check the refrigerator.

Mom sat down beside Charlie. "Okay, I remember Jake's project now. Tell me more about yours, and what you're considering."

"Well, you know we have to choose a family member to research, right? So I'm thinking of picking the other Charlotte—the girl who died in the Holocaust. The one you named me after."

Charlie passed the album to Mom, who slowly turned the pages. Each one was filled with fading faces staring out from



a different time. The women wore calf-length dresses, and the men were outfitted neatly in suits, with vests and pocket watches. Mom paused at the photo of a smiling teenage girl with long banana curls pulled back in a large white bow; the girl was holding a violin. “Here she is again,” Mom said. “This is Lottie.”

“Lottie? Not Charlotte?”

“Lottie was a nickname for Charlotte, and that’s what everyone called her.” Mom hesitated. “We were going to call you Lottie, but your brother said it sounded too old—it was Jake’s idea to use the name Charlie.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that!” Charlie cocked her head as she examined the photograph. “She looks pretty.”

“She was very pretty, I think,” Mom replied. “She had lovely eyes like you and dimples around her mouth the same way you do. And of course, look at her hair—both of you have those gorgeous curls.” Mom smoothed the bangs of her own straight brown hair and smiled.

Charlie squinted as she inspected the picture. “I don’t think she looks *exactly* like me. I have red hair; hers is dark. Maybe our eyes are a little the same . . . hers might be blue.” Charlie looked up. “Lottie was Nana’s sister, right?”

“Yes, Lottie was several years older. Your nana told me how clever she was; how determined . . . just like you.” Mom smiled. “And here’s another thing you two have in common—Lottie played the violin. In fact, Lottie played so beautifully that she performed with the Vienna Philharmonic when she was a teenager.”



“Seriously?” That was a weird coincidence. Violin was *her* thing, too. Charlie had begged her parents for lessons when she was still in kindergarten. She’d always loved music, and she liked pop and hip-hop as much as any kid at Hillmont Middle School . . . but there was something about classical that made her heart skip. She could lose herself in a symphony in a strange way that she never tried to explain to her friends. Only her best friend, Sarah, understood that feeling, but Sarah had moved to Boston over the summer.

“I guess she must have played *a lot* better than Charlie does.” Jake stood in the arch between the kitchen and family room, gulping down a Gatorade. “Charlie stinks at the violin!”

Charlie flung a pillow, though it fell short of its mark. She might not be nearly as good as Lottie had been, but she sure didn’t *stink*.

“Jake, don’t you have homework to do?” Mom’s voice sounded strained.

Jake rubbed the cowlick at the top of his towering head and grinned. “Finished an hour ago.”

Charlie tugged on Mom’s sleeve. “What else do you know about Lottie?”

“Well, the family was from Vienna, the capital of Austria. Her father was a math professor at the university.”

“And . . . what *exactly* happened to them?”

Mom hesitated, then let out a long sigh. “Honestly, I’m not entirely certain. When the Germans invaded Austria, the Jews



were at the mercy of the Nazis. I know that Lottie was lost, along with my grandfather. My grandmother and Nana Rose were lucky to escape. They came to America on a ship.”

“So Lottie died . . . right?” Charlie swallowed hard.

“Yes, I guess she must have.” Mom looked uncomfortable.

“You guess? You don’t know for sure?” Charlie sat up straight. She searched her mother’s blank face and glanced down at the photo. Lottie’s eyes were bright, with long dark lashes, and they were staring up at her.

“The truth is that nobody knows exactly what happened to Lottie,” Mom finally answered. “But entire families perished. Nearly all of our family members who couldn’t leave Europe were killed.” She began carefully folding laundry.

Charlie took a deep breath and frowned. “If she lived, Lottie would have to be very old by now.”

“Don’t you get it, Charlie?” Jake asked, suddenly serious. “She must have died. You couldn’t possibly find her alive, and you probably wouldn’t find out anything new about her, either. You’d be better off picking somebody else.”

Charlie threw another pillow from the couch; this time it soared slightly shy of Jake’s head.

“Sweetheart,” Mom said gently. “You have to understand that even if you do learn something new, the ending of this story will be very sad. The Holocaust was a tragedy that touched every Jewish family.”

“Mom, I’m twelve. I’m old enough to know.”

Mom smiled a sad sort of smile—proud and worried at the



same time. “Are you *absolutely* sure you want to research Lottie? Because you could do a terrific report on—”

“I’ve decided, Mom. I want to find out more about Lottie—who she was and what really happened to her.” Charlie crossed her arms. “I’d better get in touch with Nana Rose to get started. I’ll think up some questions to ask her.”

Mom nodded. “Well, we’ll be visiting Nana at her new retirement community in Florida in a couple of weeks. Do you want to call in the meantime?”

Charlie shook her head. “Not for this. Nana Rose has trouble hearing me. And she always gets mixed up over the phone.”

“Once, she thought I was her accountant,” Jake added.

“Do you have time to write?” Mom suggested. “She loves getting letters.”

Charlie nodded. “Yeah, I have a whole month—the report’s due the first week in October. Hey, what’s this?” Mom had flipped to the last photograph in the album, which was a picture of Lottie in the park. She looked about six or seven and was playing with an old-fashioned top dangling on a string. Charlie touched the plastic covering the photo. “I think Nana gave me a toy just like this when I was little!”

“It’s called a diabolò,” Mom replied. “You loved tossing it way into the air and catching it above your head, remember? You practiced and practiced all summer and wouldn’t come inside, even when it got dark.”

“It’s funny that Lottie and I liked the same toy.” Charlie paused, then slipped her headphones back on. Music filled her



head once more. She could see Jake out of the corners of her eyes, conducting in the air with a fake baton and snickering.

Charlie looked the other way and turned up the volume for the last movement of the symphony. It was her favorite part—the string section swooping and swelling until her pulse raced along with the music.

Lottie must have been amazing on the violin if she had performed with the Vienna Philharmonic! Charlie got nervous just playing at her school concerts.

Charlie shut her eyes and shuddered. How could a girl like *that* simply vanish?



CHAPTER TWO



Dear Nana Rose,

I hope you're feeling well and that you like your new home at Clover Manor. We'll be coming to visit you soon, and I can't wait. I have a question. I am doing a school report about our family, and I want to learn more about your sister, Charlotte, the girl I was named after. Could you tell me a little bit about her?

Mom says she was a great violinist. What was her favorite music? What happened to her?

I hope this doesn't upset you, because I already know that it's a sad story.

Love, xoxo,

Charlie

After mailing the letter to Nana Rose, Charlie taped a sign on her bedroom door: JAKE KEEP OUT.

She set the timer on her phone to exactly one hour, took out her violin, exercise book, and sheet music, and began to practice. Auditions for the school string orchestra were in two weeks, and she had to be ready. For now, seating in orchestra class was relaxed and informal. In the half-moon of folding chairs surrounding Mr. Fernandez's podium, students could take any stand they wanted, so long as it was in their instrument section. But after auditions, Mr. Fernandez would organize the orchestra according to skill. The best violinist would become concertmaster, and the best cellist and violist would take first stand in their sections.

Charlie had practiced nearly every day all summer and knew she was one of the most advanced violinists. She'd picked a challenging audition piece—a section of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major—and she thought she had a decent shot at making concertmaster. Her only real competition was Tommy Lee, an eighth grader who claimed to practice his violin two and a half hours every night after school and three hours on Sundays. Tommy's bowing skills were first-rate, and his rhythm was good, but his intonation wasn't perfect—every once in a while, he played slightly out of tune. Charlie thought if she tried hard enough, she could do better. But there were no guarantees.

After an hour, Charlie's bow arm started feeling heavy and her shoulders began to ache, but she only stopped to stretch her neck once to either side before turning the page. Sarah would be proud of her for working so hard, Charlie thought.



Sarah played the viola and went to music camp in Maine every summer. When they used to practice together, which was nearly always, Sarah would insist they keep going until neither one of them missed even one note or went off tempo.

The girls had been a musical duo ever since meeting in orchestra in fourth grade. They'd made a pact to form a chamber group someday called the Chamber Chicks. Whether or not to include chamber dudes was the source of endless discussion.

Charlie knew it was going to be lonely in orchestra this year without Sarah, but already, only a few days into seventh grade, it was even harder than she'd expected. Charlie had two other close friends, Hannah and Amy, but Hannah was into sports and Amy was president of the science club. Neither one played an instrument. They'd come to watch Charlie and Sarah's spring orchestra concert last year, but she could see them poking each other and whispering during the performance. Classical music wasn't really their thing.

When the timer went off, Charlie took a deep breath and kept practicing. Five more minutes! She played a section from *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, the performance piece that her orchestra class was working on, four times over without any mistakes and finally stopped. Not too shabby! Tomorrow, she promised herself, she would practice even longer.

Charlie rubbed the calluses on her fingertips and thought about her family history report. She wanted to talk to Sarah about her project, too. Only Sarah would understand how



badly Charlie wanted to be like Lottie—the very best on the violin.

Charlie picked up her phone and texted:

Doing research on Nana's sister, Lottie. She disappeared in the Holocaust and nobody knows what happened.

Sarah responded with a broken emoji heart. **Wish I was there to help! Keep me posted.**

Charlie smiled and stretched out on the green shag rug under her desk. Time to focus. She opened a new red binder and printed *FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT* in black marker on the front. In it, she intended to write down every detail she could remember about Nana Rose and their family.

What was Nana's mother like? Charlie chewed the top of the marker, thinking. The highlight of Jake's bar mitzvah had been an enormous Viennese table overflowing with fancy layer cakes and cookies. Nana Rose was practically world-famous for her apple strudel; did she use her mother's recipe? Charlie made a note to find out.

And what about Nana's father, the math professor? Charlie had somehow always known that he had been killed by the Nazis, but she couldn't remember who told her. Was it Jake? Mom and Dad didn't ever talk about sad things. Sometimes, Mom would even turn off the TV if a show was too violent or depressing. And Nana Rose almost never said anything that wasn't happy or cheerful.

Once, when her parents were away, Nana Rose had helped



Charlie with her math homework. The last problem was especially tricky, but when Charlie got the answer right, Nana smiled and said that a mind for figures was something you got from your genes.

Charlie sighed. Was that all she could think of? She tapped the page with the end of the marker, trying to remember more.

A tiny sliver of memory seeped into her brain. It floated in with strands of music, a Brahms concerto from a moment nearly forgotten. Every winter before Nana Rose moved to Florida, she used to take Charlie to a concert at Lincoln Center in New York City. It was their special outing, just the two of them. Nana Rose would carefully explain the program and tell Charlie all about the conductor, the wonderful musicians in the orchestra, and the pieces they would play.

One time, when Charlie was little, a young soloist came onstage to perform. Charlie remembered that she was tall and pretty, with long wavy hair that fell below her waist. The girl was breathtaking on the violin. Her body seemed to melt into the instrument while her bow moved backward and forward like a graceful extension of her arm. The concerto was difficult, but the melody rang out pure and joyful.

When the girl finished playing, the whole audience jumped to its feet and cheered. Charlie clapped and yelled “*Brava!*” but when she turned toward her grandmother, she was shocked to see that tears were rushing down her face faster than she could wipe them away.

“I am sorry!” Nana’s voice was trembling. “That lovely



girl reminds me of someone very dear, that's all." Nana Rose touched her chest. "Her music comes from here, inside the soul." She traced Charlie's forehead with her fingertips. "You, too, have this gift, my darling. Someday it will be you upon the stage."

For Hanukkah that year, Nana Rose bought Charlie her first violin. On the card, she wrote: *Carry music in your heart, and love will never perish.*

