

# ONE

New York City  
December 11, 1941

For better or for worse, Nick Fletcher knew his life would change tonight. He touched the small box in his coat pocket for the hundredth time as the credits to *Mrs. Miniver* rolled. He was sure he hadn't absorbed ten minutes of the film; he'd been too busy watching Evie. The way she cried at the latest newsreel of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The way she laughed, and then cried some more, with the Miniver family on the big screen as they faced life after the Blitz in Britain.

Her fingers had dug into the palm of his hand during an especially sad scene. Later, a smile replaced the tears when the stationmaster, Mr. Ballard, showed Mrs. Miniver a rose he had cultivated and asked her permission to name it after her.

*I don't have a rose, but perhaps you'll call yourself by my name.* Nick lifted her hand to his lips.

The houselights came up, and Evie turned to Nick, dabbing her eyes. “That was such a good movie.” She let out a low breath. “Look at me; I’m a mess.”

Nick stroked her cheek and gazed into her dark brown eyes. “I’m looking. I’m looking, Evie Kreig, and I can’t get enough, lady.”

Her cheeks reddened slightly, and she rose from the velvet chair. Her straight, silky brown hair cascaded over her shoulders, and she brushed it aside as she slipped on her blue jacket and buttoned it at the waist.

“So, you ready to get something to eat? I know the perfect place.” *This is it. The moment I’ve waited for.*

Evie shrugged. “I don’t know, Nick. It’s awfully late, and I don’t want Papa to worry. He was acting sort of funny today.” She grabbed her clutch and leaned close. “And we still have tomorrow, and the next day . . . and . . .”

Nick attempted to hold his smile. He offered his arm, then led Evie up the aisle. “The thing is, I found a wonderful restaurant and made reservations. They promised to stay open just for us.” He looked down at her. “Seeing that it’s late, we’d better hurry. What can I say to convince you?”

Evie squeezed his arm tighter. “Okay. You know I can’t say no to you.”

Nick kissed the top of her head. *That’s what I’m hoping for. . . .*

Nick's hand engulfed Evie's, and it took her two quick steps to keep up with his one as he pulled her through the city. The signs in the square buzzed past her peripheral vision like a neon dream. Above, a fluorescent billboard broke through the fog: *Lena Horne. Live Tonight.*

*Where is he taking me?* She wished she'd left a note for her parents. Papa liked Nick, but he always scowled, his dark eyebrows meeting in the middle, when she arrived home after ten.

"Nick, hold on. You're leaving me in the dust," she panted.

Nick slowed slightly, glancing back with a grin. "I love your Viennese accent when you're all worked up. But we have to hurry now before they close."

He rounded the corner, and Evie followed, full skirt swishing around her legs and high heels clicking across the littered sidewalk. While most of the businesses on 42nd Street were closed, a single warm glow beckoned from a small café.

At the door Nick released her hand, adjusted his Davenport jacket, and flashed his best smile. "Well, what do ya' think, my little chickadee?"

Evie laughed. "Oh, please, Nick. You are more Jimmy Stewart than W. C. Fields any day." She glanced at the sign. "Danube! Like my river! How did you find it?"

"A friend told me about it. It's new. An Austrian

chef, just immigrated.” He took a step back, jutting out his elbow. Evie entwined her arm in his.

The door opened with a jingle of bells against glass. Small tables were lit only by candlelight. A waiter dressed in Austrian lederhosen and an embroidered shirt hurried toward them.

“I feel like I’m back in Vienna,” Evie said.

“I checked the menu a few days back.” Nick helped her out of her coat. “*Wienerschnitzel* and beef goulash. Even braised pike in hazelnut sauce.”

“I would give anything for a good goulash. Americans never get it quite right.” Evie’s eyes feasted on the rich velvet draperies and Klimt reproductions.

“Mr. Fletcher, sir?” The waiter smiled. “This way, please.”

He led them to a candlelit table in a corner of the room. Nick pulled out the chair for Evie.

“Thank you.” She watched him as he took a seat across from her. There was definitely something on his mind. He kept looking at her as if he were about to speak.

The waiter handed them menus.

“Oh, look, Nick, they have Sacher torte. My favorite!”

Nick didn’t respond, and he hardly glanced at his menu. Instead, he ran his fingers through his hair, then took a sip of water.

“Nick, are you with me?”

His eyes locked with hers. “Of course, yes.”

She reached for his hand. “So, when are you going to tell me your secret?”

He leaned close, wrapping her fingers completely inside his. He tried to hide his smile, but one corner of his mouth refused to submit. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh yes, you do, Nick Fletcher. We’ve been together almost every day for a year. I know when something’s up.”

“Okay, you got me.”

He leaned close and lifted her hand to his cheek. She felt the slightest hint of stubble on his chin.

“I think you’re the most beautiful, caring, talented . . .”

Evie laughed and pulled her hand away. “There’s more to it than that, mister.” She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow. “Fine. We will just sit here until you tell.”

A childlike grin formed on Nick’s lips.

She laughed. “Okay, if you’re not going to tell me, will you at least order so we can eat?”

Nick’s finger’s tapped against the menu as he pretended to read it. “What are you having?”

“Goulash and Sacher torte for dessert. I told you that.” Evie placed her menu on the table and rested her chin on her hands. “Okay, really. What’s going on? Do you have news? Did Dr. Erikson put you on the surgery schedule?”

Nick put down the menu. “No, not that. I still haven’t heard. The residency schedule will be up next week.” He sighed. “But if you won’t let it go, I guess now is as good a time as any.” His face broke into a huge grin. The candlelight danced against his dark hair and eyes. He rose and reached into his jacket pocket.

Evie placed one hand over her heart, then without warning the bell on the front door jingled and a cold wind struck her.

Nick turned, and the color drained from his face. A man in a dark coat and hat hurried in. He lifted his head, eyes full of sorrow. Evie jumped to her feet, the chair toppling to the floor behind her.

The waiter rushed forward. "I'm sorry, sir. The restaurant is closed."

Nick waved him away. "It's okay. He's with us."

"Papa?" Evie rushed over. "How did you find us? What's wrong?"

Her father approached Nick. "I am sorry, Nicholas. If there were any other way—"

Evie grasped his hands. "Tell me, please."

"We must go home."

"Has something happened to Mother?"

"No. Home to Vienna. All of us. Our passports have been revoked, my job as ambassador nullified. Our ship leaves in the morning."

Nick's hands tightened on Evie's shoulders. She felt his breath against her ear.

"No," he whispered.

Evie grasped Nick's hand on her shoulder. "This can't be."

Her father turned to Nick. "I'm sorry, son. I can't let your plans happen now."

"I don't understand."

The older man shook his head. "They're closing the embassy. All Austrians must return to Europe."

“Congress declared war on Germany, not us!” Evie said.

“Austria is Germany’s ally.” Her father shrugged wearily. “They see us as the enemy too.”

“We’ve been kicked out? A man in your position? It isn’t as though Austria had a choice. The Germans annexed us!”

“I’m sorry.” Her father placed his hat upon his head and turned toward Nick. “I told you this might happen, son. I had hoped you would have more time—” He walked to the door. “A cab is waiting. Really, I am very sorry, but you only have a few minutes.”

The bell jingled again as the door closed behind him.

Evie turned to Nick. “I can’t do it. I can’t leave you. And your surprise—”

Nick smiled ruefully. He opened his suit jacket and tenderly removed a small velvet box, then placed it on the white linen tablecloth and opened it. An antique diamond ring sparkled in the candlelight. “Evie, this was meant for you.”



Evie pushed aside the porthole curtain and took in the Manhattan skyline. The ship’s engines purred from somewhere below, vibrating the floor. The sound made Evie think of the rumble of German tanks spreading over Europe. *War*. This war would soon be more than images in print or newsreels. It would be as real to her as New York had been for the past five years.

She rubbed her puffy eyes, then quickly pulled the pins from her chignon, dropped them into the nightstand drawer, and shook out her hair. She wished she could unbind her life as easily. From the first word of *Anschluss*, Evie had a hard time believing Austria was a sovereign land no longer. As a diplomat's daughter, she had spent nearly as much time in New York City as she had in Vienna. She'd sampled American freedoms and had flourished in lived-out democracy. The culture appealed to her taste. Only Nick understood these things, loved these things, about her.

A quick knock sounded at the door, and Evie jumped. It must be Mother reminding her to air out a dress for dinner in the captain's quarters, or Papa checking to make sure she'd acquired suitable accommodations.

She rebuttoned her jacket and opened the door.

A tall, broad-shouldered man leaned against the doorjamb, wearing the common gray cap and wool vest of a cabbie. The cap's bill was pulled over the man's face, and his gaze was turned downward to a small satchel in his hand.

Evie squared her shoulders. "I'm sorry, but you must have the wrong room."

"Wait a minute, ma'am. Dis cabin here is where I was told ta go."

"Sir, you have the wrong room," she repeated, moving to close the door.

The man jabbed his foot in the doorway. "No, ma'am, I don't believes I do." The scruffy cab driver lifted his head. Dark brown eyes glanced down at her.

Evie gasped—then socked him in the stomach with a soft fist. “Nick Fletcher!” She grabbed his free hand, pulling him into the room. “What on earth are you doing? How did you get on board? And where did you get those clothes?”

A familiar grin lit up Nick’s handsome features, displaying a hint of a dimple on his left cheek. He dropped both the satchel and his cap to the floor, then swooped Evie into his arms.

“First off, I told the porter a pretty little lady left a satchel in my cab. And second, would ya hate me if I told you I traded my fancy threads for these?”

Evie caught a whiff of roasted wieners at the same instant that she noticed a smudge of ketchup on the white shirt collar. “You’re not talking about the hot dog vendor on the docks, are you? I recognize these clothes. What am I going to do with you, Nicholas? You are going to get both of us in awful trouble. The boat is set to disembark in just a few moments.”

“Disembark, eh?” Nick’s cultured speech slid into a New York cadence. “Dis here could be a problem. I wish I could go wit’ ya. Bein’ as how I’d follow ya to da ends of de earth.” His face grew somber as he caressed the scar on her jawline.

Evie’s skin sparked under his touch.

“Seriously now.” His voice was low. “Do you know how hard it was sitting in church, realizing this ship was still anchored? I know our official parting was last night, but I remembered a few more gifts.” He opened

the clasp of his satchel and plunked down on the red cushioned chair.

“You’re not talking about the ring, are you? Honestly, as much as I love it, I don’t feel it’s safe taking your grandmother’s keepsake with me. And you’ve already given me so much.” Her hand reached to her collar and the French cameo pendant hanging around her neck.

“No. Nothing like that. Just some little things to remember me by.” He reached into the satchel. “First, a little lady for the lady.” Nick’s fingers opened to reveal a miniature model of the Statue of Liberty. He placed it on her palm. “This is to help you remember that day when we gazed up at *her* and you gave that wonderful diatribe on just how lucky I was to be born under the lady’s torch.

“Next . . .” Nick placed a foot-long hot dog—piled with kraut and relish—in her other hand.

Evie took a big whiff.

“This is to remember our many fine dinners together.

“And finally.” He reached into the bag and pulled out a small book.

Evie recognized the burgundy cover worn from the touch of a hundred hands. “Nick, you didn’t!”

“But I did.”

“You stole a hymnal from church?”

He laughed. “No. I asked Pastor Simons if I could buy one. When I told him who it was for, he gave it to me.”

Evie placed the hot dog and tiny statue on the small

table, and then she grasped the book. The pages were soft from use, and she could barely make out the gold words on the cover. “Songs of Praise,” she whispered.

Nick placed his hands over hers. “This is to remind you of all the services when we sang side by side.”

Evie pressed the hymnal to her chest and reached her other arm around his neck. “Thank you. I will remember and will pray that we’ll be together soon.”

Nick’s eyes studied hers. “Did you talk to your father? Does he know of a way we can communicate?”

Evie sighed. “He says that receiving and sending letters from the States will draw too much attention. He promised to think of a way, though. Maybe we should just write anyway, then when we’re able, mail them all at once.”

Nick pulled Evie close and whispered in her ear, but his words were lost amid the loud shrill of the ship’s whistle.

She took a step back and looked into his dark eyes. “What did you say?”

“I said, sounds like a good idea. I’ll be thinking about you, loving you, no matter how far apart we are.” He replaced his cap and pulled it low over his brow. “Now, I better get outta here before I end up on the other side of the world—although that doesn’t sound too bad, if I could be with you. I love you, Evie.”

He kissed her again, whispered “Be safe” in her ear, and disappeared out the door.

“I wish I could promise such a thing,” Evie murmured as she moved to the doorway and watched him

jog down the narrow hall. Her chest tightened, and she imprinted the blurry image of Nick into her mind . . . one last time.



Vienna, Austria  
December 12, 1941

From the shadowed doorway, SS *Sturmmann* Otto Akeman observed three Reich officials gathering around a small wooden table. Apprehension stirred in the pit of Otto's stomach over the privilege of guarding these men tonight. He'd heard rumors about the mystical events that often took place inside this bunker but had a hard time believing them. Now was his chance to know for sure.

A few years ago, Otto would have never guessed that he'd be safeguarding important men in Hitler's regime. He'd been a performer, not a soldier. Wielding a violin, not a weapon. But music mattered little now.

A low moan rose in the room, vibrating off the walls. The sound hummed in Otto's ears like a dog's injured cry. He scanned the dark recesses before realizing the laments came from the leader. Like a dark magician of old, the officer's hands punched the air as low, guttural chants rose from deep in his throat. Otto blinked and was sure his eyes deceived him.

The voices of the other men joined in. The three sounds merged, spinning around the room, increasing

with speed and intensity. They uttered chains of meaningless words and scraps of sentences. Ice came over Otto's limbs, followed by a great heat, as if an unseen presence had suddenly entered the bunker. Otto longed to run, to escape the hungry presence that desired to consume him, yet he stood straighter and refused to budge.

Then, just as quickly as fear had overtaken him, curiosity replaced it. Who were these men? And who, or what, were they summoning? *Focus on the men. Learn their secrets*, he told himself.

Then he spotted it. On the table before them, a bloodred swastika had been carved into the wood. For a thousand years the swastika had been symbolic of life force, solar power, and regeneration—yet wasn't it simply a symbol? Heat moved through Otto as if energy radiated from the swastika's crooked rays. He blinked again and dared to lean closer, partially into the light.

Then the three walked to a large, rectangular table in a far corner. Scattered over its scarred, wooden surface, maps, charts, and diagrams waited.

Otto strained to listen to the men's words. They spoke of dates and times, of places and people, and of deportment. Words like "death squad," "transports," and "key supporters" caused Otto's ears to tingle.

One officer plotted his plan with a simple graph. The jagged, black line plunged sharply, like a lightning bolt rune striking the earth. For the Reich. For *der Führer*.

Just yesterday, Otto had joined hundreds of soldiers

in an official parade as they'd goose-stepped in rhythm, carrying banners bearing swastikas. Yet even as he'd marched, with the uniform rhythm of hobnailed boots pounding, Otto had not sensed the same presence as in this room. *Ultimate power*. His curiosity birthed into longing.

*Here's where the power lies*, Otto thought an hour later as he escorted the three men into the frigid night. And with each step, perception filled his mind, until suddenly he understood. *What the world sees in parades of men is just a distraction . . . what I've seen here is where the real power lies*.

The four quickly strode through the fenced-in compound. Otto's precisioned steps led the way. He cocked his head as a sound emerged, cutting through the silence. In contrast to the Celtic-like chanting of the bunker, a dreamy cello melody drifted through the midnight air as if someone were trying to lull the city to sleep.

Otto straightened his shoulders and tightened his grip on the handle of his Lugar, considering the player. *I pity you, poor man. While you birth notes and tempos, I have seen the birthing of power*.

And at that moment, walking amongst these men of influence, Otto vowed to acquire the knowledge of this secret power. No matter what it took.