



## ***Chapter Eleven***

**I**n triumph, they watched the burning barn for a while.  
“They’ll be looking for us,” Ludwig warned.

Ludwig still carried the flashlight that the mechanic had given him. He pulled it out of his backpack. Luckily, he had found batteries in the barn, and he installed two new ones while throwing the old two to the ground. They huddled together while Kurt and Nikki pushed the wheelbarrow behind them.

They walked by the small circle of light emitted by the flashlight for about an hour, and then came to a clearing in the woods. Ludwig turned the flashlight off and they settled down for the night, with Kurt and Ludwig alternating watch.

The next morning they began walking in a westerly direction through the forest. Before the sun had reached its midday position, they saw a small structure in front of them.



*Anna Block*

“Luddie, what could that be?” questioned Ursula.

“It looks like a little house,” Ludwig answered.

They gasped in amazement.

“I wonder if anyone lives there,” Nikki said aloud.

“It looks abandoned,” Kurt replied, the overgrown weeds surrounding the structure lending credence to his observation.

“Might be abandoned, might not be. Let’s go see,” Ludwig said.

As they approached, they saw that the front door was invitingly wide open. They eagerly entered.

It was a small, brick hut approximately twelve feet square. It had one wooden door with an interior latch, and one small window. There was a shelf on one of the walls, and two items sat on the shelf: a metal stein and a ball of twine. The floor was made of concrete, and in one corner of the hut there was a chimney stack. The chimney stack started halfway up the wall and projected out through the roof. Beneath the chimney stack were three metal grates, positioned parallel one to the other. Two edges of the grates were cemented into the wall to support them. Ursula imagined that they were used for cooking. Underneath the grates was a hole in the concrete floor. There was a small pile of wood next to the hole. A musty smell permeated the shack, and as Ludwig investigated the walls he noticed a small amount of moss growing between the bricks along the floor, indicating water leakage.

“Do you think someone still lives here?” Nikki asked.

“Even though it seems this hut is abandoned, we still need to survey the area to see if there are any signs of the SS around,” Ludwig answered.



### *Ursula's Prism*

"Ludwig is right," Kurt came up behind him and patted him on the shoulder, "as always."

"So, let's investigate," Petr said impatiently.

"We will need a way to mark our path," Ludwig said. "I grabbed a pair of cutting shears from the barn. Give me something to cut up into small pieces, like a blanket or towel."

"I have a towel," Lise said. She rummaged through her backpack and found a towel. She handed it to Ludwig who then cut it up into many small strips.

"As we walk, we will tie these strips around tree branches to mark our way so we can come back to this hut," Ludwig explained.

Though the house looked abandoned, they took their wheelbarrow and their backpacks with them, just in case the hut's owner came back. Walking approximately fifty yards around the hut in different directions, they created a perimeter with the towel pieces. There were no signs of other people.

"It's getting late, Luddie. How about heading back to the hut?" Kurt suggested.

"Yes, I'm sure everyone is hungry," Ludwig stated.

"Yes!" they harmonized.

"Do you think it's safe to stay the night in the hut?" Kurt asked.

"So far, I'd say yes," Ludwig replied.

Lise and Nikki smiled at each other. They followed the towel strips back to the hut. A stream trickled its way close to the hut, so they washed their vegetables in the stream and filled their cooking pot with water. Inside the hut, Lise



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and Nikki divided the straw equally among them, piling straw on opposite sides of the hut.

“Boys sleep on this side, and girls sleep on this side,” Nikki clarified.

“Do you think this is safe for cooking?” Kurt asked, pointing to the grates.

“Let’s try it. Bring out your matchsticks,” Ludwig answered. “Urshey, hand me your coat.”

“Okay, but why?” she asked.

“The light of the fire may bring attention to us. I want to put your coat in the window to block the light.”

Ludwig stuffed Ursula’s coat into the frame of the small window. Then Kurt and Ludwig put a few pieces of straw into the hole in the floor to start a fire. As the kindling lit, they used the wood that was lying next to the hole to create a stronger fire. The grates seemed sturdy enough to bear weight, so they put their cooking pot filled with water and vegetables on the grate over the fire. Eagerly they watched the vegetables floating in the water, when suddenly they realized something was amiss. The aroma rose, filling their nostrils, but somehow the smoke that was also rising began filling the shack. The smoke rolled up the chimney but billowed angrily downward, refusing to empty itself out the smokestack. Suddenly the children found themselves smothered in a grey cloud. Heaving and coughing, they stumbled outside, leaving the door open as the smoke freed itself.

“Luddie, what happened?” Kurt asked.

“My guess is something is clogging the smokestack. We won’t be able to cook inside anymore. As soon as the smoke clears we will douse the fire.”



*Ursula's Prism*

"I hope this smoke doesn't bring attention to us," commented Nikki with Petr clutching her side.

*How true*, Luddie thought.

"C'mon everyone, to the stream for water," Ludwig said. They fetched their cups and the gallon jug and walked over to the stream. After filling them, they came back to the hut and, holding their noses, went inside to pour the water on the fire. More smoke billowed upward, forcing the children to run outside. Kurt carried the pot of vegetables.

"We'll have to finish cooking this outside," Kurt said. So they finished cooking the meal outside, and when they had ladled portions for themselves into their cups, they looked longingly at the shack.

"Can we sleep inside the hut?" Lise asked.

They gazed at each other. Somehow, Lise had spoken their silent desire.

"Positively," answered Ludwig.

Happily, they all headed indoors.

The cooked meal, the roof over their heads, and the ability to lock the door gave the children security. It almost seemed like a real home.

*But the people left*, thought Ludwig, and suddenly the scenes from Glashütte, his hometown, flashed into his mind. The horrible memories of people crying as they were being pulled out of their homes by the Nazis and pushed into military trucks haunted him. People were taken away and never seen again. As he watched from the safety of his living room window, speculating about where they were taken, Ludwig had then hoped it would never happen to him and his family. He shook his head.



*Anna Block*

When they finished eating, Nikki said, "Winter is coming."

Ludwig stared at her, wondering why she mentioned that.

"Why don't we just stay here for the winter?" Nikki continued.

Lise, Petr and Ursula nodded their heads. Ludwig was aghast.

"We need to get out of Germany as soon as possible!" Kurt agreed with Ludwig.

"But with the cold and the wind and the rain and the snow, we could die on the way!" Nikki pleaded.

The boys were silent. Ludwig thought, *She is right. It must be November by now and the elements could be harsh. How much more can they take?*

Ludwig glanced at Kurt who shrugged his shoulders.

"She has a point, Luddie," Kurt said. The children looked at each other excitedly.

"I guess we can stay here for the winter, as long as the SS doesn't come near," Ludwig decided.

Lise and Nikki clapped.

"Maybe we can try making just a small fire," he continued, "you know, for heat, since we are staying here for the winter."

With just a few pieces of straw and twigs, they started a fire in the hole. They waited to see if the smoke would rise into a billowing cloud again, but it didn't. A few small flames playfully flickered over the twigs, their light dancing on the children's faces. Kurt and Ludwig looked at each other, nodding in satisfaction.



*Ursula's Prism*

"Looks like if we keep the fire small we won't get smoked out," Kurt suggested.

"It appears so," agreed Ludwig.

Then they bedded down for the night, girls on one side, boys on the other, while Nikki serenaded them with stories of Poland, her homeland.

Days passed and they ran out of provisions.

"We must go out and see if there are houses or farms close to us," Ludwig began. "We need to find food and straw. We'll start early in the morning and come back here at night."

So, in the chill of the winter months, they headed out each day in exploration. Ludwig and Kurt had agreed that they would only walk until the late afternoon, and then head back to the hut, regardless if they had found anything or not. Fortunately, they did find provisions. They found that if they headed in a southern direction, there was farmland. If they headed north or west, there were more bombed houses. In this manner, they were able to furnish themselves with the supplies they needed. Some days they would walk to a farm where they would steal vegetables and straw for their bedding and fire. Other days they would scour the bombed houses, searching for food and clothing. They walked silently and watched carefully, keeping alert and scrambling to hide if any German soldiers neared.

One day, as they were leaving the houses, they walked by a huge ditch with a large pile of turned up soil next to it. It looked like freshly dug excavation.

"Luddie, what could that be?" Ursula asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "Let's look."



*Anna Block*

They walked over. As they got closer their nostrils were stung by a horrific odor, and they heard a low, buzzing sound.

“Ew, what is that smell?” Lise asked.

“I’ve smelled that before,” Nikki acknowledged.

They walked closer and looked down into the hole. Lise and Ursula yelped. Dozens of decomposing bodies lay strewn in the bottom, some clothed, some not. Flies and maggots dotted the bodies, while rats scampered across. It was a mass grave.

Ludwig and Kurt looked around, alarmed.

“Quick, let’s get out of here,” Kurt said. They turned quickly.

“We won’t come this way again,” Ludwig stated.

Lise and Ursula cried as they walked away. The image of Little Hanrie’s lifeless body flashed into Ursula’s mind. She cried louder.

“Shh, girls, I know this is horrible, but we must be quiet. The SS may still be around.” Ludwig and Kurt held their fingers up to their pursed lips.

*How, Luddie, Ursula screamed silently, how can I get Hanrie out of my head? And Mumma...MUMMA!* Ursula closed her eyes. She bowed her head and shook it. *Maybe I can shake them out!* Ursula clamped her hand over her mouth to muffle her cries as they hurried back to the hut.

When they arrived back at the hut, Lise and Ursula exhaustedly slumped to the ground.

“I will never forget that,” Lise said between breaths.

Kurt looked up into the sky.

“Those clouds look like snow clouds,” Kurt announced.

“Gather as many sticks as you can,” he charged everyone.



### *Ursula's Prism*

He picked up a stick about one inch in diameter. "About this size. As many as you can find."

"Why?" asked Ludwig.

"You'll see," Kurt smiled.

Curious, they complied with Kurt's request and gathered armloads of sticks. They took them into the hut and laid them down in a pile under the window.

"That's a big pile of sticks, Kurt. Why do you want them?" Ludwig asked again.

"Nothing right now, let them sit there. I'm too hungry to work with them, but tomorrow, you'll see."

They stuffed Ursula's coat in the window and ate their meal. Then they lay down on their straw beds. When they awoke the next day, they opened the door, revealing that an inch of snow had covered the ground overnight.

"Wow!" Lise and Ursula chanted.

"Aha, I knew it," Kurt exclaimed with glee.

He grabbed the twine from the shelf.

"I know I have more string in here," Kurt said, as he searched through his backpack. "Yes." He pulled the ball of string out then sat down next to the pile of sticks with the two balls of string. "We need to go outside, right?" he asked Ludwig, as he began to lay the sticks in a flattened row.

Ludwig nodded.

"We'll need snowshoes."

They gathered around Kurt and watched as he lay the sticks in parallel groupings and tied them together. When he was finished, he had created twelve miniature rafts. "All we need to do is tie one to the bottom of each foot," he demonstrated.



*Anna Block*

"That's wonderful, Kurt," Ludwig said, patting his back. "Thank you."

"Yes, thank you," the others replied, as they tried on the snowshoes.

So now they were able to venture out each day, whatever the weather, wearing the snowshoes Kurt had made. And during the long winter nights, they stayed in the hut huddled together in their blankets around the small flame.

Winter had come quickly, but gently, with only one snowfall that persisted for a week. But even with the mild winter, food was scarce. The snow melted away, but the edible plants were dormant, and notably less rabbits hopped about. If the children caught one rabbit, they considered it a feast. They battled continuous hunger pangs and, some days, had nothing to eat at all. Their energy dwindled. Still, Ludwig insisted they go out each day in search of provisions.

"I don't want to go," Lise moaned. She sat against the hut's wall, clutching her stomach. "I'm too tired, and I hurt. We won't find anything and the farmers will chase us off."

Ludwig turned away from her.

She was right. They had despoiled the outlying bombed homes, and they were now as empty as their stomachs. Last time they went to a farm, the farmers ran them off, cursing and threatening them.

Ludwig was tired, too. He didn't want to go outside of the hut either.

*I know there's nothing outside to eat, but we have to look, we have to try. We have to do something besides just sit here,* thought Ludwig.



### *Ursula's Prism*

They were running low on matchsticks, so they tried to keep a constant but low fire burning. "We have to get more straw for the fire," he told Lise.

"Oh," Lise groaned, "why can't I just stay here?"

"We have to stay together," Ludwig explained.

"Come on, Lise," Nikki offered Lise her hand. "I'll help you."

Luckily for the children, spring was impatient. Sadly, it rained almost every day. Ludwig was amazed at how sturdy the hut was as the rain pummeled against it. Ursula's coat in the window retained some condensation, and just a tiny amount of water leaked inside on the floor where the moss grew.

"Now that winter is over, we can concentrate on getting out of Germany," Kurt said.

"Yes, we need to leave soon," Ludwig agreed, "just as soon as the rainy weather stops."

One day, as they sat in the hut, Ursula waited quietly for the rain to stop. Then she approached her brother.

"Luddie, I need to go to the bathroom," she told him.

Ludwig reached into his backpack and pulled out one of the knives.

"Okay, let's go," he said as they walked outside of the hut together. They had made rules – no one was to be alone at any time, any place, no matter what. When someone had to relieve themselves, either Kurt or Ludwig was to go with them. When one of them wanted to wash themselves, they would use the tiny bits of soap that Lise had found and bathe in the cold stream water with Kurt or Ludwig standing by.



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They had specific areas they deemed safe for bathroom use. Ludwig and Ursula walked to one of them now. It was a large bush just over an embankment, a short distance from the hut. Everyone knew the procedure. Kurt or Ludwig would climb up the tree next to the bush. After they got to the top and scanned the territory, Kurt or Ludwig would whistle if it was safe.

Ursula stood at the bush quietly waiting for Ludwig's whistle. Finally he whistled and Ursula commenced to relieve herself. Just as she finished, she heard a twig snap. Ursula jumped in fright.

"No, no, don't be afraid little girl," a voice sounded. It was a German soldier. He was smiling at her, but his eyes, protuberant and maniacal, scared her. Ursula was so frightened that she couldn't move. She tried to scream, but her throat tightened as she gasped for air.

He came closer while his hand unbuckled his belt. "That's right, don't move." He reached for her arm and grabbed it.

Then, suddenly,...

"No!" Ludwig yelled as he jumped from the tree. The German soldier looked up and saw Ludwig with the knife in his hand about to fall on him. The soldier quickly reached for his own knife and scratched it across Ursula's forearm. She cried out.

Ludwig fell on top of the soldier, knocking him to the ground. He sat on top of the fallen soldier and plunged the knife into his chest. Kurt exploded out from behind Ursula. He joined Ludwig on top of the soldier and pushing the soldier's head to one side, he stabbed him in



### *Ursula's Prism*

his neck. The other children ran over. They picked up stones and threw them at the soldier then kicked him in his sides. Ursula entered the fight and finding, a big rock, she ran over with it and smashed it onto his face. The soldier's legs kicked and he tried to move, but Kurt and Ludwig relentlessly dug their knives into him. Finally, he was still. Kurt and Ludwig stood up, panting. They stripped him to his underwear, and took anything of value from his dead body. That's when Ludwig felt it.

The holster's buckle had ripped across Ludwig's skin. It startled him. Pushing aside the dead soldier's overcoat, Luddie stared at the pistol with awe. *Should I take it?*

With trepidation, he unsnapped the leather strap that held the gun. The silver shone brightly and his hand trembled as he pulled it out. *Mumma and Poppa would whip my hide if they saw me holding this. But I have to be strong.* He looked over at Ursula, wide-eyed and opened mouthed. "I'll take this for our protection," Ludwig announced to the group.

They all nodded in agreement. He took the clip out and shoved it and the gun into his pocket.

Kurt and Ludwig lugged the dead soldier into a clump of bushes. The other children covered him as well as they could with stones and leafy branches.

"There, that should do it," said Kurt.

Then they walked back to the hut.

Inside the hut, Ludwig slid the gun carefully into his backpack. He turned and saw blood dripping from Ursula's arm. "Urshey, you're hurt! Quick, someone give me a towel!"



*Anna Block*

Lise brought a towel over to Ludwig and he wiped the blood away. "Good, it's not too deep. We'll just bandage it and you should be fine."

As Ludwig cut the towel into small strips for her arm, the events whirled in Ursula's head.

"Luddie," she started.

"Yes, Urshey?" Ludwig wrapped her arm.

"What was that man going to do to me?" she asked.

He stopped. *What should I tell her?* He grabbed her gently by her shoulders and looked directly into her eyes.

"Were you scared?" he asked.

"Yes, very scared," she nodded.

"That's because he was going to hurt you very, very badly and your common sense knew that. Ursula, always trust your intuition, promise me that."

He finished tying the towel strips around her arm.

"I will," she nodded. "But...you whistled."

His face flushed with redness. *How could I have not seen him?* He backed away from her, shamefully lowered his head, and turned.