

Listen for the Singing

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*For Ellen S. Rudin, my editor
and
for Ellen, my friend.*

Several years after I finished writing From Anna, I wondered what happened to the Soldens when Canada and Germany went to war. I was especially curious about Rudi, Anna's brother, who left Germany when he was twelve. He would be old enough to enlist. I wanted to know how they were and, in order to find out, I knew I would have to visit them. I could write just a page or two, I thought, to see what was going on. I began to type and found myself writing about Anna starting high school. Before I knew it, I was writing this book.

— Jean Little

Chapter 1

ANNA WAKENED TO HEAR SOMEONE walking from the bathroom back along the hall.

“Is that you, Papa?” she said.

She did not need to ask. Even half-asleep, she knew his step.

“Yes. Go back to sleep, child. I’m sorry I disturbed you.”

“I was awake already.” It wasn’t a lie exactly, just a polite fib. “Why are you up so early?”

This time, he made no reply. Anna, from the curtained-off alcove that served as her bedroom, heard him going back down the stairs.

She was settling down, preparing to doze off again, when she realized that this might be the very chance she had been hoping for: time alone with her father. As far back as she could remember, whenever she was in trouble too big to handle alone, she had gone to him for help. The two of them were so close that often he understood before she was well into her explanation. And if ever she were facing trouble, it was right now, looking ahead to

school beginning on Tuesday morning. Maybe Papa could think of some way to make it less terrifying or her more courageous. Even if he couldn't, simply talking it over with him would help. She could count on him to take her seriously when someone else might scoff.

But could she? Hadn't Papa changed lately? When had he last taken time to listen to her as though she mattered to him in a special way?

"Papa's Pet," her big brother Rudi used to call her. He had teased and taunted her with other names too — Awkward Anna, *Dummkopf*, Pickle Face, Little Stupid, and always Baby because she was the youngest. Those mean names had hurt and humiliated her, making her sometimes feel as awkward and stupid as Rudi said she was. "Papa's Pet," however, she had never minded. Each time he said it she smiled inside, knowing it was true.

At least, it had been true. Now . . . ?

It's still true, she told herself sharply. It's only that Papa's been so worried about the news. I'd better get down there before the paperboy comes!

Before she sat up even, she reached for her glasses and put them on. The world around her, a blurred, unreal place before, sprang into sharper focus as she looked at it through the thick lenses. Suddenly she was able to distinguish the pinkish stripes in the faded wallpaper, the many-coloured squares in her patchwork quilt, the kitchen chair on which she had laid her library book face

down, open at her place. Less clearly, she could make out the chest of drawers at the foot of her bed and the tall, narrow wardrobe jammed up against it, in which her dresses hung.

Although she had worn glasses for nearly five years, it still astonished her that she had ever managed without them. Now, putting them on was the way she started every day, and she did not take them off, except to clean them, until she was in bed for the night. Even while she slept she kept them placed within easy reach.

But this was no time to be thinking about her eyes!

She got out of bed and was feeling about for her slippers when she heard something that made her freeze.

Please, let it be only my imagination, she prayed. Please, don't let it . . .

Her prayer went unanswered. She heard it again, an unmistakable, all too familiar, sharp crackle of sound. Static! Papa had turned on his detestable radio! She was already too late to talk to him.

Anna climbed back into bed. She punched her pillow to make it the right shape to lean back against. Then she pulled the sheet over her knees and sat glaring into space. No, she was glaring at her father, even though he could not see her. She could see him! She did not have to be in the same room to know exactly what he was doing and how he looked doing it. She must have seen him a million times. He was sitting in the shabby, sagging

armchair, his head bent close to the big shortwave set he had bought for himself over a year ago, his face closed off from everyone and everything around him as he listened to the latest news broadcast.

How amazed they had all been the night he brought that radio home, Papa who never bought anything for himself unless Mama made him. The set was expensive too, even though he had got it secondhand.

“Is the Depression over?” Fritz blurted out, staring at it.

Everyone understood why he asked. For years and years, there had been hard times. There was always enough to eat, but seldom second helpings. There had been no money for extras for anyone. How Anna had begged for an Eaton Beauty doll the Christmas she was ten! Till Mama told her sharply to stop hurting Papa by asking him for something he couldn’t afford to get for her. Yet, that night, there stood Papa with this big shiny radio!

“No, the Depression’s not over. Not yet,” her father had said, clearing a place of honour for his new possession. “But it will be before long.”

“When?” Fritz asked.

“When the war begins,” Papa answered matter-of-factly.

As though he knew there was no way out, Anna thought now, with the same quick shiver of fear she had

felt that evening. Yet so far there was still a depression and Canada was not at war.

Of course, there was some fighting going on in Europe. Over the last many months, Anna had seen it in newsreels at the movies. They showed Adolf Hitler screaming speeches at wildly cheering mobs, German troops goose-stepping and giving the now famous "Heil, Hitler!" salute, and German forces moving across borders to occupy neighbouring countries.

As she sat in the darkened theatre and watched the flickering black-and-white pictures, Anna felt nothing in common with the people she saw there, even though she and her family had come from Germany to Canada only five years ago. She dimly remembered a time when Frankfurt had seemed the whole world and German the language everyone spoke. Now Toronto was the real place, and she spoke, thought, and even dreamed in English. The hysteria of the German people caught by the newsreel camera mystified her as much as it did the rest of the audience. Papa claimed it was a madness which threatened the peace of the world, but Mama scoffed at such foreboding. Anna did not know what to think. If Mama went to the movies and saw for herself, she might be more afraid. Still, it was all happening on the far side of an immense ocean.

The day before yesterday, German soldiers had invaded Poland. All that meant to Anna, right at this

minute, was that Papa was too worried to remember that she, his youngest, his “pet,” was about to start high school — and she was terrified at the prospect.

How can he forget? she thought, feeling betrayed by her father for the first time in her life. I’ll bet he doesn’t know a single, solitary person in Poland!

Downstairs the clock chimed the hour. Anna counted the strokes. Why, it was only six o’clock! Papa must be crazy.

She yawned. It was far too early to be awake. She slid down a little so her head rested against the pillow. She would go back to sleep after all, since Papa had no time to spare.

What was that? Had someone cried out?

“Klara! Klara, come!”

Then, before that made any sense to her, Anna heard her father calling from the foot of the stairs.

“Rudi! Anna, wake Rudi. Call everyone. Quickly! Do you hear me, Anna?”

“Yes, Papa.”

Springing out of bed, Anna ran not to waken the others but to stand where she could look down from the landing. Her father had not waited. He was back in the living room. She could hear, faintly, a slow measured voice speaking. Not Papa’s. A British voice. Frightened, she strained to catch the words:

“. . . God bless you all and may He defend the right.”

“Papa,” she cried out, starting down to him, “what is it? What’s wrong?”

Her father appeared in the doorway which joined the living room to the front hall. Anna, two steps down, stopped where she was and stared at him. What had happened? He stooped as though he were old, old or sick. He looked like a stranger.

“It’s come. Britain has declared war on Germany,” Ernst Solden said.

So Papa had been right. All those times, when he had warned them war must come, and Mama had been angry with him for talking so foolishly — he had been right. For one instant, Anna felt glad, glad her mother had been the foolish one and her father the one who really knew. Stunned by what he had just told her, still not really understanding anything of what it meant, she almost smiled.

Then the light from the window shone full on her father’s face and, in spite of her poor vision, she saw the shine of tears on his cheeks.

She fled back up the stairs.