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ALLENDE

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THE
WIND
KNOWS
MY
NAME

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THE WIND KNOWS MY NAME

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Maya's Notebook

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In the Midst of Winter

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Violeta

The Wind Knows My Name

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

City of the Beasts

Kingdom of the Golden Dragon

Forest of the Pygmies

NON-FICTION

Paula

Aphrodite

My Invented Country

The Sum of Our Days
The Soul of a Woman

*To Lori Barra, Sarah Hillesheim, and so many others working for a more
compassionate world*

**THE
WIND
KNOWS
MY
NAME**

ISABEL
ALLENDE

TRANSLATED FROM
THE SPANISH BY
FRANCES RIDDLE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Here is my secret. It's quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.

— *The Little Prince*, ANTOINE DE SAINT - EXUPÉRY

There's a star where the people and the animals all live happily, and it's even better than heaven, because you don't have to die to go there.

— ANITA DÍAZ

THE ADLERS

VIENNA, NOVEMBER 1938

A sense of misfortune hung in the air. From the early morning hours, a menacing breeze had swept through the streets, whistling between the buildings, forcing its way in through the cracks under doors and windows.

“Just winter settling in,” Rudolph Adler murmured to himself in an attempt to lighten his mood. But he couldn’t blame the weather for the tightness in his chest, which he’d felt for several months now.

The stench of fear, like rust and rotting garbage, clung to his nostrils; neither his pipe tobacco nor his citrus-scented aftershave lotion could mask it. That afternoon, the stink of dread stirred up by the wind was suffocating, making him feel dizzy and nauseous. He decided to turn away the patients left in his waiting room and close up early. Surprised, his assistant asked if he was ill. She’d worked with the doctor for eleven years and had never known him to shirk his duties; he was a punctual, methodical man.

“Nothing serious, only a cold, Frau Goldberg. I’ll go home and rest,” he answered.

They tidied the office and disinfected the instruments, then said goodbye at the door as they did every evening, neither suspecting that they’d never see each other again. Frau Goldberg headed to the streetcar stop and Rudolph Adler walked the few blocks to the pharmacy at his usual brisk pace, hat in one hand and doctor’s bag in the other, his shoulders hunched. The sidewalk was damp and the sky cloudy; it had been drizzly and he predicted they’d soon see one of those autumn rainstorms that always caught him unawares, without an umbrella. He’d walked those streets a thousand times and knew them by memory, but he never stopped admiring his city, one of the prettiest places in the world

with its Baroque and Art Nouveau buildings coexisting harmoniously, the majestic trees that had begun dropping their leaves, the equestrian statue in the neighborhood square, the bakery's window display with its spread of delicate pastries, and the antiques shop crammed with curiosities. But that afternoon he barely raised his eyes from the pavement. He had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

The troubling rumors had begun that morning with news of an assault in Paris: a German diplomat shot five times and killed by a young man, a Polish Jew. Spokespersons for the Third Reich called for revenge.

Since that March, when Germany had annexed Austria and the Nazi Wehrmacht paraded its military pomp and circumstance through the heart of Vienna to a cheering, jubilant crowd, Rudolph Adler had been plagued with fear. His worries had begun a few years prior and only worsened as Nazi power was consolidated through increased financing and a growing stockpile of weapons. Hitler used terror as a political tactic, taking advantage of discontent over economic woes after the humiliating defeat in the Great War and the Great Depression in 1929. In 1934, Austrian chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated in a failed government coup, and since then eight hundred others had been killed in various attacks. The Nazis intimidated their detractors, provoked disturbance, and pushed Austria to the brink of civil war. At the start of 1938, internal violence was so untenable that Germany, from the other side of the border, exerted pressure to annex the troubled country as one of its provinces. Despite the concessions that the Austrian government had made to German demands, Hitler ordered an invasion. The Nazi party had laid the groundwork for the invading force to be met with open arms by the majority of the population. The Austrian government surrendered and two days later Hitler himself entered Vienna, triumphant. The Nazis quickly seized total control. Opposition was declared illegal. German laws and SS and Gestapo oppression, as well as antisemitic policies, went into immediate effect.

Rudolph's wife, Rachel, who had always been rational and practical, without the slightest tendency toward catastrophic thinking, was now almost paralyzed with anxiety and only functioned with the help of medication. They both tried to keep their son, Samuel, in the dark about what was happening, to protect his innocence, but the boy, who was about to turn six, had the maturity of an adult; he observed, listened, and understood without asking questions. Rudolph had initially prescribed his

wife the tranquilizers he used to treat anxious patients, but when they seemed to have no effect, he turned to other, more powerful drops, which he obtained in opaque unmarked bottles. He could've used the sedatives as much as his wife, but he would not risk jeopardizing his professional acumen.

The drops were provided to him in secret by Peter Steiner, a pharmacist and friend of many years. Adler was the only doctor Steiner trusted with his own family's health, and no government decree forbidding interaction between Aryans and Jews could change the respect they had for each other. In recent months, however, Steiner had been forced to avoid Adler in public, since he couldn't afford any trouble with the neighborhood Nazi committee. In the past, they'd played thousands of games of poker and chess, exchanged books and newspapers, and taken regular hiking and fishing trips together to escape their wives, as they said jokingly, and in Steiner's case to flee from his horde of children. Now Adler no longer participated in the poker games in the back room of Steiner's pharmacy. The pharmacist met Adler at the back door of his shop and provided the medication for Rachel without registering it on the books.

Before the annexation, Peter Steiner had never questioned Adler's roots and considered the doctor to be just as Austrian as he was. He knew the family was Jewish, as were 190,000 other Austrian citizens, but that meant nothing to him. He was agnostic; the Christianity he'd been raised with seemed to him as irrational as all other religions, and he knew that Rudolph Adler felt the same way, though he upheld some Jewish customs out of respect for his wife. Rachel felt it was important that their son be raised in the Jewish community and traditions. On Friday evenings, the Steiners were often invited to Shabbat at the Adler home. Rachel and Leah, her sister-in-law, spared no detail: the best table linens, new candles, the fish recipe that had been passed down from a grandmother, fresh loaves of bread, and abundant wine. Rachel was close to Leah, who had been widowed young and had no children. Leah was devoted to her brother Rudolph's small family, and although Rachel begged the woman to move in with them, she insisted on living alone, visiting often. Leah was sociable and participated in various programs at the synagogue to help the neediest members of the community. Rudolph was the only brother she had left, since the youngest had emigrated to a kibbutz in Palestine, and Samuel was her only nephew. Rudolph presided over the Shabbat prayer, as was expected of him as head of household. With his hands on Samuel's head, he asked God to bless and protect him, to grant him grace and peace. On more than one occasion Rachel caught a wink exchanged between her

husband and Peter Steiner after the prayer, but she let it slide, knowing it wasn't meant in mockery but merely a gesture of complicity between two nonbelievers.

The Adlers belonged to the secular and educated middle class that characterized Viennese society in general and Jewish society in particular. Rudolph had explained to Peter that for centuries his people had been discriminated against, persecuted, and expelled from many lands, which was why they valued education over material wealth. They could be robbed of their belongings, as had occurred repeatedly throughout history, but no one could take away their intellectual assets. The title of doctor was more highly prized than a fortune in the bank. Rudolph came from a family of craftsmen, proud to count a physician among them. The profession afforded him prestige and authority, though in his case it indeed did not translate to material wealth. Rudolph Adler was not a sought-after surgeon or a professor at the storied University of Vienna, but a family physician, hardworking and generous, who treated more than half of his patients for free.

The friendship between Adler and Steiner centered around mutual affinities and deeply held values. Both men had the same voracious curiosity for science, were lovers of classical music, inveterate readers, and clandestine sympathizers of the Communist Party, which had been outlawed in 1933. They also shared a visceral repulsion to Nazism. Ever since Adolf Hitler had moved from chancellor to proclaiming himself absolute dictator, they would meet in the back room of the pharmacy to lament the state of the world and the century they'd been born into. They consoled themselves over glasses of brandy so strong it could've corroded metal, which the pharmacist distilled in the basement, an underground cavern neatly organized with every thing needed to prepare and bottle many of the medications sold in the pharmacy above. Sometimes Adler would bring Samuel to the basement to "work" with Steiner. The boy could entertain himself for hours mixing and bottling leftover powders and liquids of all different colors, which the pharmacist gave him to play with. None of the pharmacist's own children was granted such a privilege.

Steiner was deeply pained over each new law aimed at destroying his friend's dignity. He'd purchased the doctor's apartment and office, in name only, to keep them from being confiscated. The office was very well located on the ground floor of a stately building, and Adler lived above with his family. The doctor's life savings were invested in those

properties; transferring them into someone else's name, even if it was his friend Peter, was an extreme measure that he took without consulting his wife. Rachel would've never agreed to it.

Rudolph Adler had long tried to convince himself that the antisemitic fervor would soon die down. This vulgarity had no place in Vienna, the most refined city in Europe, birthplace of the world's greatest musicians, philosophers, and scientists, many of them Jewish. Hitler's incendiary rhetoric, which had become increasingly extremist in recent years, was yet another expression of the racism that his ancestors had suffered, but it had not kept them from living together and prospering. Still, as a precaution, he'd removed his name from the sign outside his office, only a minor inconvenience since he'd been treating patients there for many years and was well known in the neighborhood. He'd lost his Aryan patients, who'd had to stop seeing him, but he was certain they'd return once the political climate shifted. Adler was confident in his professional abilities and his well-earned reputation. Nevertheless, as the days passed and things grew ever more tense, he began to weigh the notion of emigrating to wait out the tempest unleashed by the Nazis.

Rachel Adler dropped a pill into her mouth and swallowed it without water as she waited for her change at the bakery. She was dressed fashionably in beige and burgundy tones, with a jacket that cinched at the waist, hat perched on one side of her head, silk stockings, and high heels. She was not yet thirty and very pretty, but her grave expression made her look mature beyond her years. She tried to hide her trembling hands in her sleeves and respond lightly to the baker's comments about the attack in Paris.

"What was that boy thinking, killing a diplomat? Stupid Pole!" the man exclaimed.

She'd just come from the final class with her best student, a fifteen-year-old boy to whom she'd taught piano since age seven, one of the few who took music seriously. "Sorry, Frau Adler... you must understand," the boy's mother had said when she let Rachel go. The woman paid Rachel three times what was owed for the class and leaned in for a hug before seeming to think better of it. Yes, Rachel understood. She was thankful that the woman had employed her for several months more than she should have. She swallowed her tears and walked away with her head high; she was fond of the boy and didn't judge him for proudly donning the black shorts and brown shirt bearing the slogan "blood and honor" of the Hitler

Youth. All the young men belonged to the movement; it was practically obligatory.

“Look at the danger that Polish boy has put us all in! Have you heard what they’re saying on the radio, Frau Adler?” the baker continued pontificating.

“Let’s hope they’re only empty threats,” she said.

“You should get home quickly. Groups of boys are causing a ruckus on the streets. You shouldn’t be out alone. It’ll be dark soon.”

“Good evening. See you tomorrow,” Rachel muttered, placing the bread in her bag and depositing the change in her coin purse.

Once outside she filled her lungs with cold air and tried to shake off the sense of foreboding that had plagued her since dawn, well before turning on the radio or hearing the alarming rumors circulating through the neighborhood. She looked up at the black clouds that threatened rain and tried to recall the errands she had left. She still needed to buy wine and candles for Friday, when her sister-in-law would be coming over for Shabbat, as she did every week, along with the Steiners and their children. But she worried that despite the medication she’d just taken, her nerves might betray her—she needed her drops—so she decided to leave the shopping for another day. Two blocks farther she arrived at their building, one of the first built in the pure Art Nouveau style at the end of the nineteenth century. When Rudolph Adler first purchased the office on the street level for his practice and the apartment for his family above, the organic lines, curved windows and balconies, and delicate stained-glass flowers had been considered bad taste to polite Viennese society, accustomed to Baroque elegance. But Art Nouveau soon caught on and the building quickly became something of a landmark.

Rachel was tempted to stop into the office to confer with her husband but immediately discarded the notion. Rudolph had enough worries of his own without her loading him down with her troubles as well. Also, it was time to pick Samuel up from his aunt’s house. Leah was a teacher and had begun giving classes to a group of Jewish children who could no longer attend school. Samuel was a few years younger than the others but was easily able to keep up. So many children had been badly mistreated in school that the mothers of the community had arranged to have the younger ones instructed privately at home, while the older students received an education at the synagogue. It was a temporary emergency measure, they were certain. Rachel continued on her way without noticing that her husband’s office was closed up at that unusual hour. Rudolph generally treated patients until six o’clock in the evening, except for

Fridays, when he went up for dinner before sunset.

...

Leah's apartment, modest but well located, consisted of two rooms filled with secondhand furniture, framed photographs of her prematurely deceased husband, and souvenirs from the trips they'd taken together. On the days she received students, the air always smelled of fresh-baked cookies. Rachel Adler walked in to find three other mothers who had come to pick up their children and stayed for tea. They were listening to Samuel play "A Song of Joy." The child was adorable, small and thin with scraped-up knees, untamable hair, and a wise expression of concentration, swaying to the music of the violin, unaware of the effect he had on the audience. A chorus of exclamations and applause exploded with the final notes. It took Samuel a few seconds to stir from his trance and return to the circle of mothers and children. He thanked them with a slight bow and as his aunt rushed to give him a kiss, his mother hid a smile of satisfaction. It was a fairly easy piece, which the boy had learned in under a week, but Beethoven always sounded impressive. Rachel knew that her son was a prodigy, but she hated boasting of any kind so she never mentioned it, waiting instead for others to do so. She helped Samuel put on his coat and place his instrument safely in its case, bid her sister-in-law a quick goodbye, and left for home, estimating that she'd have just enough time to pop the roast in the oven and have it ready by dinnertime. For the past few months she hadn't had any domestic help, since her Hungarian housekeeper, who had been with them for several years, had been deported. She hadn't had the heart to search for a replacement.

The mother and son passed the doctor's office without stopping and stepped into the building's wide foyer. Water lilies on the glass lampshades lit the space in blue and green tones. They walked up the wide staircase, waving to the concierge, who watched from her cubicle at all hours. The woman made no response—she rarely did.

The Adlers' apartment was spacious and comfortable with heavy mahogany furniture designed to last a lifetime but that clashed with the delicate, simple lines of the building's architecture. Rachel's grandfather had been an antiques dealer and his descendants had inherited an array of art, rugs, and adornments, all of exceptional quality, all out of fashion. Rachel, raised with luxury, managed to live in elegance despite the fact that her husband's salary, supplemented by her music lessons, did not

compare to her grandparents' wealth. Hers was a discreet refinement, since ostentation repulsed her as much as arrogance. The risks associated with provoking envy in others had been instilled in her from a young age.

In the corner of the living room, near the window overlooking the street, sat her grand piano, a Blüthner that had been in her family for three generations. She used it to give most of her lessons and it was also her main source of entertainment in her hours alone. She'd played it with great skill from a young age, but in adolescence, when she'd realized she lacked the talent necessary to become a concert pianist, she turned to teaching, for which she had a natural ability. Her son, on the other hand, possessed a rare musical genius. Samuel had sat at the piano from age three and could play any song by ear after hearing it only once, but he preferred his violin, because he could take it with him wherever he went. Rachel could not have more children and she had invested all her motherly love in Samuel. She adored her son and couldn't help indulging him because he never gave her any trouble; he was kind, obedient, and studious.

Half an hour later, Rachel heard a commotion on the street and peered out the window. It was getting dark. She saw half a dozen young men shouting Nazi slogans and insulting the Jews, calling them disgusting bloodsuckers, parasites, and murderers—epithets she'd heard many times and even read in the press and in German propaganda. One of the boys was carrying a torch and others were armed with sticks, sledgehammers, and pieces of metal pipe. She ushered Samuel away from the window, closed the curtains, and headed for the stairs to call her husband, but the boy clung to her skirt. Samuel was accustomed to being alone but was now so frightened that his mother could not leave him. The noise outside soon quieted and she assumed that the crowd had passed. She took the roast out of the oven and began to set the table. She didn't want to turn on the radio. The news was always terrible.

Peter Steiner chatted with his friend in the back room of the pharmacy, where the game of chess they'd started the previous afternoon sat beside a bottle of brandy, half full. The well-respected Steiner Pharmacy had been in the family since Peter's grandfather established it in 1830, and each subsequent generation had worked to maintain it in perfect working order. It still had the original carved mahogany shelves and counter, the bronze accessories brought over from France, and a dozen antique crystal jars, which more than one collector had offered to purchase and which, according to Steiner, were worth a fortune. The window displays were

framed with painted flower garlands, the floors were Portuguese tile worn down from more than a century of use, and a tinkling of silver bells on the door announced each customer's arrival. The Steiner Pharmacy was so picturesque that it was visited by tourists, and had even appeared in magazines and a book of photography, as a symbol of the city.

Peter had been surprised to see Rudolph Adler so early on a workday.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can't breathe. I think I might be having a heart attack."

"You're too young for that. It's just nerves. Have a drink; it's the best remedy I know," Steiner replied, serving his friend a double shot.

"We can't live in this country anymore, Peter. The Nazis have us fenced in, they're drawing tighter and stricter circles around us. We can't even enter certain restaurants and stores. They bully our kids in school, they're firing us from jobs in public office, confiscating our businesses and properties, prohibiting us from exercising our professions or loving a person of another race."

"The situation is utterly untenable. It will have to get better soon," said Peter, without much conviction.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken. Things will only get worse. It takes selective blindness to think that we Jews will ever be able to live here with anything resembling normalcy. Violence is inevitable. There are new restrictions every day."

"I'm so sorry, my friend! Is there anything I can do?"

"You've done a lot already, but you won't be able to save us. To the Nazis we are a malignant tumor that has to be excised from the nation. My family has lived in Austria for six generations! The humiliations only pile up. What else can they take from us? Only our lives. We have nothing else left."

"No one can take away your medical degree. And your assets are safe. It was a good idea to put your office and apartment in my name."

"Thank you, Peter, you've been like a brother to me. But I'm very worried. Baser instincts seem to have taken root. Hitler is going to be in power for a long time and he wants to conquer all of Europe. I think he's leading us straight into war. Can you imagine what that would be like?"

"Another war!" exclaimed Steiner. "That would be collective suicide. No, we learned our lesson from the last one. Remember the horror... the defeat..."

"We Jews are the new scapegoat. Half the people I know are trying to get out. I have to persuade Rachel that we should go too."

"Go? Where?" asked Steiner, alarmed.

“England or the United States would be the best options, but it’s almost impossible to get visas. I know of several people who have gone to South America...”

“How can you think of leaving! What would I do without you?”

“I suppose it will only be for a time. And I still haven’t made up my mind, nor will it be easy to convince Rachel. She can’t imagine leaving this life we’ve built over years of hard work, abandoning her father and her brother. My sister won’t like the idea either, but I can’t leave her here.”

“It seems like a very drastic decision, Rudy.”

“I have to think of Samuel. I don’t want my son to grow up as a pariah.”

“I hope you don’t have to leave, but if you do, I will take care of your things, Rudy. When you return, it will all be safe, waiting for you.”

They were on their second glass of brandy when they heard the commotion outside. They looked out the door and saw a crowd had filled the street: men, boys, and even some women shouting obscenities and Nazi party slogans as they brandished sledgehammers, clubs, and other heavy objects. “To the synagogue! To the Jewish Quarter!” shouted the ones in front. Rocks flew through the air and they heard the unmistakable sound of breaking glass, met with a clamor of celebration. The mob moved in unison like a single animal blazing with murderous glee.

“Help me close up the pharmacy!” Steiner exclaimed, but Adler was already in the street, running toward his house.

Terror invaded the night. It took Rachel Adler all of ten minutes to comprehend the gravity of the situation. She had closed the curtains so that the noise outside was muted and at first she thought that the gang of boys had returned. To distract Samuel, she asked him to play some music, but the boy seemed paralyzed, as if he were witnessing a tragedy that she was still unwilling to acknowledge. Suddenly something exploded against the window and glass rained across the floor. Her first thought was of the cost to replace the beveled glass. Immediately a second rock crashed through another window and the curtain fell from the rod, hanging loose from one corner. Through the splintered glass she glimpsed a fragment of orange-tinted sky and inhaled a whiff of smoke and fire. A wild racket howled through the apartment and then she understood that they were dealing with something much more dangerous than a group of drunk boys. She heard furious shouting and shrieks of panic amid the continuous din of shattering glass. “Rudolph!” she exclaimed, terrified. She took Samuel by the arm and dragged him to the door, the boy reaching for his violin case on the

way out.

Only the wide marble staircase with its bronze handrail separated the apartment from the doctor's office below, but Rachel didn't make it there. Theobald Volker, her neighbor from the apartment above, a retired military officer with whom she'd exchanged barely more than a few words, was standing in the hallway, blocking her path. He gripped her shoulders. Flattened against the wide chest of the old man, who was muttering something incomprehensible, Rachel struggled and called for her husband. It took her over a minute to understand that Volker was trying to keep her from going downstairs because the building's carved wood and stained-glass door had been beaten down. A violent group had gathered in the foyer.

"Come with me, Frau Adler!" he ordered with the voice of a man who knew how to lead.

"My husband!"

"You can't go down there! Think of your son!" he answered as he urged her up the stairs to his apartment, a place she'd never set foot.

Volker's home was identical to the Adlers' but had nothing of its brightness and elegance. It was somber and cold, with sparse furnishings and no decoration other than a few photographs on a shelf. The man led her to the kitchen, as Samuel, hugging his violin, followed behind, mute. Volker opened the narrow door to the pantry and instructed them to hide inside without making a sound until he came for them. Then he closed the cabinet and Rachel and Samuel stood huddled together in the small, dark space. They heard Volker drag a piece of heavy furniture across the floor.

"What's happening, Mama?"

"I don't know, my dear. We have to be very still and keep quiet..." she whispered.

"Papa's not going to be able to find us when he gets home," said Samuel without lowering his voice.

"It's only for a little while. There are some bad men in the building, but they'll leave soon."

"They're Nazis, aren't they, Mama?"

"Yes."

"Are all Nazis bad, Mama?"

"I don't know, son. There might be good ones and bad ones."

"But there are more bad ones than good ones, I think," the boy said.

Theobald Volker was already a career military man when he'd been called

on to defend the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914. He had come from a family of farmers with no military tradition, but he made a name for himself, moving up the ranks. He was six foot two with the physical strength and disciplined nature of someone born for battle, but he wrote poetry in secret and dreamed of a peaceful retirement in the country planting crops and raising animals alongside his childhood sweetheart. In the four years the war lasted he lost everything that gave meaning to his life: his only son, who died on a battle field at age nineteen; his beloved wife, who, stricken with grief, committed suicide; and his faith in his country, which in the end was nothing more than an idea and a flag.

When the war ended, he was fifty-two years old, had reached the rank of colonel, and was heartbroken. He couldn't remember what he'd been fighting for. He was forced to accept defeat, tormented by the ghosts of twenty million dead. There was no place for him in that ruined Europe, where the broken remains of soldiers, women, children, mules, and horses all rotted together in mass graves. For a few years, he supported himself through a series of undignified jobs, enduring his misfortune, until old age and ailments forced him to retire. Since then he'd occupied himself by reading, listening to the radio, and composing lines of verse. He left his apartment only once daily to purchase a newspaper and enough food to make his meals. His war medals were still pinned to his old uniform, which he put on once a year for the anniversary of the armistice agreement that had dissolved the empire he'd defended during four horrific years. Each year on that date he shook out and ironed his uniform, shined his medals, and cleaned his guns, then opened a bottle of aquavit and got drunk, cursing his loneliness. He was one of the few Viennese citizens who had not taken to the streets to cheer for the German troops on the day they annexed Austria. He did not identify with those goose-stepping soldiers. He'd learned from experience to distrust patriotic fervor.

The adults in the building avoided the colonel, who didn't even respond to a passing wave, and the children feared him, with the exception of Samuel Adler. Rachel and Rudolph were often busy with their respective jobs and the housekeeper who used to come left at three o'clock each afternoon. When he wasn't with his aunt Leah, the boy would have to spend a few hours alone, doing his schoolwork and practicing music. He soon realized that whenever he played the piano or violin, his neighbor discreetly brought a chair down to the first floor and sat in the hall to listen. Without a word, Samuel began to leave the door open. He made an extra effort to play perfectly for that audience of one listening in respectful silence. They'd never spoken, but when they passed in the building or on