

## BOOK 2:

### ETCHED ON THE HEART

#### Chapter 1: The First Farewell

Cologne, October 1885

*Maria*

Maria slipped her already-packed bag from under her bed. She checked the contents one last time. Her mother's lace dickey was on top; ribbons and head scarves were wrapped around it. The next day, they'd leave early for the train station.

When morning came, Maria splashed her face with cold water at the washbowl. She had cried herself to sleep. She pulled the bag wearily from under the bed in which she would no longer sleep. After she'd changed into her traveling clothes, she put her nightdress in her bag and then latched it shut. The sound seemed so final. A chapter of her life, shut. She put on a smile; then she called Nicklaus to come and get it.

"Good, Maria, we're running early," he said as he picked it up and cheerfully took it to the front door. He put it next to his, which was already there.

Marta, Greta, and Helga, her trusted friends she'd lived with for almost two years, gathered at the door, preparing for their goodbyes. In the strained moment of silence, Nicklaus put out his arms to end the uneasy quiet.

"Well, what, no *Auf Wiedersehen*? No goodbye?" They hugged Nicklaus.

Suddenly, an unexpected knock on the door meant that the carriage had arrived that would take them to the Cologne *Hauptbahnhof*. A rush on the roof told them a heavy rain had begun. Nicklaus moaned, put on a slicker that Greta handed him, and went out with the driver to load their bags.

"Since Mutti invited me to visit them months ago, we'll go to Berlin first," Maria said, as Nicklaus stood in the rain. "After that, we'll go to Luxembourg to see Nicklaus's parents."

"Promise me that you will write me," Greta pleaded.

"I promise, *mein guter Freund*. You have been more than a friend, Greta. You have been like a *schwester* to me."

They all choked up and looked like they would cry in unison.

Nicklaus came back to the door. “Hey, you think you will marry the *marzipan* man?” Nicklaus asked Greta.

“*Marzipan* what? Oh, Hans?” She waved her hand in the air. “*Nein! Nein!*”

They all laughed. But Maria hoped that Greta would accept Hans’s love and settle down with a good man.

Maria looked at them all through her tears. *I cannot bear saying goodbye to them*, she thought. *What will I do without them? They have supported me for more than a year.* “Thank you, Helga, for sewing for me. But more than that, for your friendship,” Maria said, hugging her outside at the edge of the porch.

“Oh, *ein bisschen!* No thanks needed!”

“Oh, Marta,” Maria whined, feeling the tears. “You always cheered me up. Thank you, for more than I can say.”

Marta hugged her and then put her fist to her mouth.

Nicklaus opened an umbrella for Maria. She rushed to give each of her dear friends one more hug. Then she stepped under the umbrella and hurried through the rain.

Maria stared through the stream of raindrops as the horses galloped and splashed down the road. She watched to see the last of her beloved friends. They came out in the downpour to wave. She waved too, as they grew smaller and smaller. *The corner will soon come. It will turn, and then I will see them no more. I would give anything to see their faces forever.*

Maria’s tears flooded, like the rain pouring down outside the carriage. Nicklaus put his arm around her as she turned. The sloshing horses’ hooves matched the throbbing of her heart. She imagined yelling to the driver to stop. Leaning into Nicklaus’s shoulder, she willed her grieving away by focusing on the joy of the moment.

*I finally am married to my precious Nicklaus!* There had been so many challenges. She gazed into his sweet eyes, and he returned her longing gaze. When she smiled at him, he leaned to kiss her but had to wait for her to wipe her nose.

On the train station’s platform, the humid air hung thick with sad goodbyes, goodwill wishes, and nervous anticipation. The passengers huddled against each other under a metal roof, waiting. The wet, slick rails caught Maria’s eye. Even this small detail worried her on this, her first train ride.

A whistle blew from far away, and the passengers turned. Then, after saying their last goodbyes, they arranged themselves in a line. As the giant machine chugged closer, it became larger, taller, wider, and more formidable, like a black iron dragon. Steam burst from underneath

its belly; the rods turned. Maria clutched Nicklaus's arm, feeling rattled. A lengthy hiss signaled the final stopping place before the platform. Then the pushing began.

After they'd settled on the wooden bench, and the last passengers had seated themselves as well, Maria nuzzled against Nicklaus's warm body. The high-pitched whistle blew once more, and Maria cringed at the ear-piercing sound.

As the chain of cars rolled down the iron tracks, it picked up speed. The landscape flew by. But the air inside began to reek. *Too cold to open a window*, she thought as she was jostled about like a toy in a box. To get her mind off her growing discomfort, she looked out at the scenery.

The shy sun had peeked out from behind the clouds and now glimmered on the river flowing alongside the track. Raindrops sparkled on the tall grasses, where flocks of ducks nested. But when the train roared through their serenity, they lifted up into the air. Maria watched as the train passed, the ducks' wings aflutter to find a quieter place.

Fluffy, bedraggled sheep and energetic goats skittered across a hill of green, with a couple of boys in bibbed shorts and knee-high stockings nearby. They looked young and happy; their calf muscles bulged under the stockings. Would she and Nicklaus ever have children? She knew how Nicklaus was. His drive for his career would never allow that kind of distraction. *He already told me that much, and I must wait till he's established.*

Brown and black cows nibbled in a pasture farther on. Wildflowers colored the expanse with patches of yellow here, pink there. But the beautiful panorama moved too quickly for Maria. And the morning sun shone through the smudgy window, directly into her eyes. With the heat and stench rising inside and her temporary dizziness, her stomach lurched a few times.

Not long after she lay her head on Nicklaus's shoulder, closed her eyes, and began to rest, the whistle startled her. The brakes let out their steamy hiss as the train chugged to a stop at a small, red-painted wooden building. The sign read "*Dortmund*," and beneath it, bundled-up peasants with bags and packages lined the platform to get on board.

"Nicklaus, I must stretch my legs," Maria said, as she wiggled her toes in her shoes.

"Someone might take our seats, Maria," Nicklaus said curtly. "I'll stay. But be quick, then! Listen for the whistle."

Maria whispered. "But I might not be able to move, so do not worry!"

"Well, don't go off either," he chided.

"*Ach!*" Maria walked off, ignoring his tone. *So, he bosses me now? Now that I am the wife? And so soon after our honeymoon!* She walked to the door. *Ugh, that reminds me of the one who scolded me for things I had not even done! But I must remember. They are two separate men.*

When she stepped down the steep platform stairs, the blood rushed from her head. The sun was too bright. She stopped before stepping off the bottom rung, still gripping the handrail.

“*Bist du gut?*” an older woman asked, noticing Maria’s white knuckles. “Might need *Wasser?* A drink?”

*Can’t she see I am German and not a tourist? Checking if I understand!* “I only sit for too long,” Maria answered. *Ach! Now I answer to a strange woman!* But then she asked herself, *Am I irritable myself! I’m not used to this.* The whistle blew before Maria expected it. She climbed back up into the stuffy compartment and then looked for a bellman.

“*Wasser, bitte?*”

“*Sicher, Fräulein,*” he said, hurrying away.

She sat down next to *kommisch* Nicklaus, who dozed with his mouth open. *He may look odd right now, but he is my strength.*

When the bellman brought her water, she looked to her husband again. He sleepily gave her a coin; then he leaned back again. Her own eyes felt heavy, so she leaned on his shoulder.

Later, eating *Mittagessen* at their seats, Nicklaus stared at a piece of meat on his fork.

“Nicklaus, why do you stare?” Maria asked.

He blinked out of his thoughts. “I’ve been thinking—”

“You do that?” Maria popped her eyes wide. “*Meine Güte,* what a surprise!”

Nicklaus snarled and popped the meat in his mouth. “Anyway.” He feigned disgust. “I need to ask you.” He chewed, then swallowed. “What do I say to a person like your father who was so unkind to my precious Maria?” he asked, focusing his eyes on hers.

Maria felt her heart melt. “We wait and see how Frederick acts,” Maria said, adjusting herself. “If he is mean, then we will just leave.” Nicklaus nodded at her. “And I cannot even imagine this, if it is even possible”—she shook her head— “but if he is nice to us, well, then, we will be nice back!”

“Like we are normally!” Nicklaus quipped. “I only wanted to understand what you want to do in both cases.” He kissed her nose. “But Maria, it’s so hard for me to understand. How could a father be that way?”

Maria sighed, looked out the window, and bit her lip. *It is all I know. How can I explain?* “German ways,” she said, shaking her head. “Maybe his parents were strict, stubborn.”

“Does that include ‘mean’?” Nicklaus added, and Maria tightened her lips. “You know? Maybe the man felt ashamed,” Nicklaus said, “because of losing his job. That is hard for a man. A man’s work is part of”—he looked at the ceiling— “part of himself. Maybe it ate at him.”

Maria tilted her head. “He needed help to pay the bills. Perhaps. Yes!” She grinned. “You have made me think about it in a new way.”

Nicklaus poked a piece of meat off her plate. “My parents were so good. Uh, sorry. That doesn’t make you feel any better.”

“I really am glad you had a happy life, Nicklaus.”

“Umm. Ja,” he answered.

She wondered if she heard a tone of doubt in his voice. “*Bist du sicher?*” she asked.

“Of course, I’m sure,” he said with a chuckle. “I’ve told you about my childhood many times.”

“That is how you are able to cheer me”—her eyes sparkled for him— “as you always do. Because you are one happy person.” She giggled, tickling him in the ribs with her finger. *He has longed to see his parents since I first knew him, but we go to see mine. I wonder how long we should stay?* She looked at him. *He is so kind. But how long will be long enough for me?* “How long should we stay in Berlin, Nicklaus?”

“Who knows, Maria? Let’s not plan everything. This is our first—”

“Adventure!” Maria knew what he meant and said it along with him.

END OF BOOK TWO, CHAPTER ONE