

# WHEN THE SKIES RAINED FREEDOM

by Annette Oppenlander

## EXCERPT

While Mama gets in line, I address the first woman I see. “Do you know of a place to stay?”

She simply shakes her head, her eyes empty, her face powdered with dust. I continue down the line, repeating my question over and over. Most of the women don’t even look up.

“We need a place to stay,” I try again. The girl I’m addressing has to be my age, she looks a bit cleaner than the rest and carries two buckets. Gray eyes meet mine, not gray like the sky, but a light gray with a tinge of blue. In them lies a glint of something, a tiny spark ready to ignite.

“Who is we?” Her voice is surprisingly deep, almost manly, and in stark contrast to her delicate shape, the small hips and hazelnut-colored hair, swept upward into a shawl. She appears quite clean, even her hands are free of dirt. Unlike me; I look like I crawled from a dank hole. My palms are black and sticky with coal dust, my clothes stained.

“My mother and I.” It comes out too fast, almost defiant, but the girl doesn’t seem to be offended. She looks at me, apparently waiting for more. “We’re in a broken-apart cellar... too dangerous with all the Russian soldiers.”

To my surprise, the girl nods. “Get your water, I will wait for you.”