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Polonaise from page 53

spine. I was born in 1939, the year Germany invaded Poland.

I spent the long train ride back to Manhattan thinking about my parents and the burden they'd carried all these years. And I thought of Andrew and his terrible, hidden past. I closed my eyes and pictured him sitting next to me on the piano bench, felt my heart pounding as he massaged my fingers and guided my hands over the keys. And suddenly I knew. I loved him and I wanted to be with him. But when I knocked on his door, a young female student answered. Andrew had left and she was subletting the room. No, she didn't know where he'd gone, only that he'd left in a great hurry.

Andrew and I had exchanged a few postcards over the summer, but he'd never mentioned leaving New York. I was furious that he'd disappeared without a word. What did I expect? I scolded myself. He was inconsiderate and self-centered. By the end of the school year, when my parents came for my final recital, I'd almost convinced myself that Andrew wasn't worth my heartache.

I'd bought a new dress for the recital, white taffeta with a long skirt that swished around my ankles and a crimson sash that fastened at my waist with a red velvet rose. Music has always been my passion and I immersed myself in it that night. I'd never played better and as I stood to take my bow, I realized the audience knew it too. I searched for my parents but instead, my gaze was drawn to an elderly woman with a thin, wrinkled face and silver hair wound in a coil on top of her head. The dark-haired man sitting beside her smiled awkwardly, and I was engulfed by a wave of dizziness so strong that I had to lean against the piano for support.

There were three performances after mine but I didn't hear a note. When the house lights finally came on, I pushed through the crowd to where the man and woman were standing. "Andrew." Forgetting my anger, I threw my arms around him, almost knocking him off balance as he awkwardly returned my embrace. Then I turned to the woman. "Ilsa?"

"*Ja*," she nodded.

I gave Andrew a questioning look.

"I have been trying to find her since I left

Hungary," he explained, in an apologetic voice. "I had almost given up, and then in August, the Red Cross notified me that she was in a hospital in Hamburg."

"And you went to Germany to get her. Why didn't you write?" People stared at me and I lowered my voice. "How could you just disappear like that? Without a word." I blinked back tears.

"I thought you would not understand."

"Understand what, Andrew? That you wanted to help the woman who saved your life? Did you think I wouldn't appreciate what she means to you?"

"No. That helping her had to come first. Before my studies," he paused, "and, at that time, even before you."

"And now? What about now, Andrew?"

He took my hand and suddenly I was crying and he was holding me. My head was against his chest, and I felt his heartbeat through the fabric of his shirt.

"I'm sorry, Emily," he whispered. "You can forgive me?"

"I shouldn't. I shouldn't even speak to you."

"Please, do not be angry with me. I promise I will not disappear again."

He sounded so contrite, I started laughing.

"In that case, I forgive you." I glanced over his shoulder. My parents had followed me and were standing in the aisle, watching us while they talked to Ilsa. I was surprised to hear my mother speaking German, amused by the hand gestures she used in place of the words she didn't know. My father stood beside her, interjecting a phrase here and there, his hand resting lightly on her shoulder. Suddenly, I was filled with pride. I looked from my parents to Andrew and a rush of warmth flooded over me.

"Andrew, come and meet my family," I said, taking his hand.

"I would like that. And then, Emily," he said, with a fond look at Ilsa, "I will introduce you to mine."

Rona Arato is an award-winning author of more than 20 children's books including The Last Train, a Holocaust Story. *Her latest book,* Anti-Semitism and the MS St. Louis, *deals with Canada's apology for turning away Jewish refugees in July 1939. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.*