

TOWARD MORNING

A Story of the Hungarian Freedom Fighters

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To Anyuka, Sara and Frank
with thanks for factual
help and friendship

CHAPTER ONE

What are you going to do, Janos?" Teresa Nagy's eyes were anxious as she watched her tall brother pull on his coat and stand waiting at the sitting-room window of their little apartment that October day in Budapest.

Janos had a tense, determined look that made Teresa sure something definite and probably dangerous was in the making. She had suspected it for several days—days when he had stayed longer than usual at the college, had brought home a group of young students to spend hours in his small room, talking, talking, talking in earnest voices.

"Hungary has got to strike for freedom, and there's no use waiting!" she had heard them say. "Eleven years they've bled Hungary, and that's enough! We can't stand this kind of tyranny any longer, and we're not going to!" Dangerous words, she knew that well enough. Janos and the boys were brave, but Teresa was very much afraid.

"The Poles have broken with Russia," Janos said to Teresa. "We students have permission to show our sympathy by standing in front of the Polish embassy, if we don't make any noise! A wonderful permission, and

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more than likely they'll yank that away before we've stood there five minutes!"

Janos looked at his sister, his dark eyes full of fire, and she thought he was going to say something more. Then a hail from the street made him turn and give a wave in answer. "Here they are!" he said. With a quick farewell, he hurried down the stairs and out into the street.

Teresa stood for a moment watching. There were Artur Zelk, the brother of her best friend, Piroska, her cousin Stephan, and several other college students. Ferenc Zelk was there too, she noted with special interest. She had a great admiration for Ferenc, barely sixteen but so full of zeal and fire and ideas that the older boys often allowed him in their meetings.

They swung down the street. Teresa shivered a little as she watched them. That permission—she didn't trust it, and it was plain Janos didn't either. She had the uneasy feeling that this whole affair was going to lead to trouble.

It was Teresa's job to keep the small apartment in order and prepare the meals, but today it seemed almost impossible for her to settle to any work. She felt restless and anxious and wished that her mother were at home.

"Anyuka" was what they called her—Little Mother. Janos had started it when he outstripped his mother in height, and the others had taken up the pet name. It fitted her well in some ways, but small and slender though she was, Anyuka had a quality of wiry strength and determination that had carried them all through more than one difficult time. Since their father's death, and until Janos

was old enough to be of some assistance, she had supported the family with her dressmaking shop in Budapest. Now that Teresa was fourteen, she was learning to help there. As soon as her work in the apartment was finished, she would hurry down to the shop.

But Teresa didn't get to the shop that day. She was in the midst of the dishwashing when the door flew open and her twelve-year-old brother, Belo, burst in.

"Teresa, they took away the permission—the Central Committee of the Communists—and the students are gathering in the colleges! I saw Janos—he was furious and so were the others! He said the Committee didn't want any political demonstrations, but they're going to get one that will surprise them."

"What are they going to do?"

"I don't know for sure—but they're going to do something. I think they're going to march to Petofi Square. I'm going over to see. You'd better come too."

"The dishes—" murmured Teresa mechanically.

"Phooey! Who cares about dishes today? Come on!"

Belo dashed down the stairs. Teresa jerked on a coat and ran after him to the square named for Hungary's beloved patriot poet, Petofi, who had written stirring poems of liberation during the revolution of 1848.

People were coming from all directions, and as Teresa and Belo stood in the square waiting, they heard the sound of marching feet. Then down the street came columns of students ten abreast, Janos in the first row.

A crowd had gathered now. Eyes were alert and watchful,

but there was little noise as the columns of solemn-faced students came marching on. Suddenly from somewhere in the crowd came the shout, "We vow we can never be slaves!" That was a line everyone knew—a line from a Petofi poem. Someone began to sing the stirring *Kossuth Anthem* written by another hero of 1848. Others took it up till everyone was singing. Then came the *Marseillaise*, and from the way the people sang, it was plain they meant every word. Song followed song, Teresa and Belo joining fervently in the singing. The urge for freedom spread like wildfire.

At first, Teresa and Belo managed to stay together and even to keep Janos in sight. But as the crowd surged and pushed, they could no longer see Janos, and soon Teresa realized that she had lost Belo.

It was impossible to look for anyone, but as Teresa struggled to work her way to where she could again at least see Janos, a voice she knew spoke in her ear. "Come on, Teresa. Janos has work for us to do."

How Ferenc had reached her in that tightly-packed, excited crowd, Teresa couldn't imagine, but somehow he had done it. That was Ferenc for you! "Zita'll meet us at your apartment," he said. "Come on. She's got a few hours' leave from the hospital. She knows what to do. So do I."

Zita, Janos' fiancée, was even now almost like one of the family. Teresa knew Janos placed great confidence in her.

Teresa's heart beat faster than ever at the thought that now she too was to have a real part in helping with whatever was afoot. She kept close to Ferenc as he worked

his way to the edge of the crowd, and together they hurried homeward.

Zita was hard at work in the little sitting room, and Anyuka was there too, her thin, intent face bent over a pile of narrow red, green, and white ribbons while Zita glued placards to slicks.

"Hungary Wants Freedom!" "Give Us Back Our Church!" "Russians, Go Home!" were some of the slogans Teresa read.

"You can help me with these, Ferenc. They're doing a lot more over at your house, but your uncle and father and mother and Pirooska are there to help," said Zita.

"They're doing them all over Budapest. Somehow the students got hold of a printing press and turned a lot out," answered Ferenc, setting at once to work.

Anyuka looked up, such hope and determination in her dark eyes that Teresa felt confidence and some of that same determination replacing the wild excitement and restlessness that had swept over her in the crowd.

"Come, Teresa, your fingers are quick. We are making armbands for all the patriots. Who knows what these red and white and green emblems will see in the next few days? We expect it to be Hungary's freedom."

"Listen! You can hear them singing and shouting!" cried Zita. "Oh, how I'd like to be with them!"

"You can be more use right here at this minute," Anyuka said. "They want these placards and emblems just as soon as they can get them."

"I'll be carrying one!" Zita's voice was triumphant.

“Believe me, I will too,” said Ferenc. “I wouldn’t be here now, I can tell you, if they didn’t want these in a hurry.”

“I wish I knew where Belo was,” said Anyuka. “He’s so daring.”

Everyone was relieved when Belo rushed in not long afterward shouting, “I’m to help. Janos and Artur are going to try to get back in an hour or so for the stuff. Janos sent me to tell you. Here, I can help glue!”

Everyone worked with feverish haste, and when Janos and Artur burst in, they found a pile of slogans and another of emblems ready.

“Come on, Ferenc. You too, Zita. We’re going to pull down old Stalin’s statue. The cadets and army officers have been coming out of the military academy to join us. We’re sure some of the army is going to be with us. Come! You coming, Belo? You too, Teresa, Anyuka!”

“We have more emblems to make—” Anyuka began. Then she stood up. “But we can keep on with these all night if necessary. This is a sight we must see.”

Janos and Zita, Ferenc and Belo, were flying on ahead of them, but Teresa and Anyuka were soon on the edge of the hurrying crowd.

Others too must have been working to good purpose, for placards were lifted high everywhere in the crowd, and like magic the red, white, and green armbands appeared and were speedily fastened on sleeves.

The crowd, still singing, surged on. From somewhere came ropes, but the twenty-five foot bronze statue of Stalin refused to budge. Then acetylene torches appeared, and

cables and ladders. The statue gave at the knees, crashed, and people rushed to grab small pieces.

“There’s Belo—you might know!” cried Teresa “He’s getting a piece for a souvenir.”

“Good for him!” said a man near her. “That statue stood for slavery. This is only a beginning!”

Students and workers were tearing the Soviet hammer and sickle from Hungarian flags, pulling down Red stars from buildings—working with almost hysterical speed.

After that, things happened so fast, Teresa didn’t know what would come next. News flew through the crowd that Party Leader Gero had spoken over Radio Budapest, condemning the demonstrations and the demands for freedom.

Someone up in front was speaking rapidly and distinctly and loud enough for all those around to hear. “We’re going to the radio station!” he called out. “We’re going to have our demands made public! We’re going to tell the world the truth!”

On rushed the people, Teresa and Anyuka being swept along with the crowd. As they came to a halt in front of the radio station, there were angry murmurs, excited protests. “There are the Security Police!” “They’re arresting the delegation!”

“Anyuka, do you think Janos was in that delegation?” Teresa asked, her face very white. All Hungary knew what to expect from the dreaded Security Police.

Anyuka’s face was white too; Teresa couldn’t hear her answer. The crowd was rushing onward now, storming

the building, and the police opened fire on them. A group of students were climbing up to the balcony in front of the building. Fighting had begun.

Suddenly Teresa heard the sharp zing of a bullet and felt a swift, stinging pain. Blood was running down her arm. For a moment she felt faint. Then a man nearby steadied her, and Anyuka's voice, sounding far away, said, "I must get her home."

"I don't want to go home! Not now!" Teresa tried to say. "We don't know about Janos."

But no one listened. The crowd made way for her, as they had made way for others wounded by those shots of the police. "Shooting children!" cried one. "Firing on an unarmed crowd!" exclaimed another.

Tearing her kerchief into strips, Anyuka bound up the arm as well as she could. One or two in the crowd, indignant and concerned, insisted on helping the two home.

"I wanted to stay," said Teresa, as Anyuka washed and bound the wound properly. "I wanted to see what happened to Janos."

"They'll let us know," Anyuka answered, though her face was tense. "Thank God this is just a flesh wound and will soon heal. You sleep now, Teresa."

"I don't want to sleep. I want to stay awake and know what's going on," objected Teresa. "I want to wait and watch with you."

But the excitement and pain and loss of blood had wearied her more than she knew, and in spite of herself she fell asleep.

In Budapest, fourteen-year-old Teresa and her family live through the terror of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

Her brother, Janos, leads a small band of Freedom Fighters as they bravely help defend their city from Russian soldiers.

The boys' effective guerrilla tactics prompt the Russians to ruthlessly hunt them down, forcing the group and their families to flee the city.

Teresa's clever ways play a crucial role in this engrossing story of their dangerous flight to freedom and the safety of the Austrian border.

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