

DURING ANGELA'S RIDE back to Sopron, the reality of her situation hit her in full force. She was alone, nearly four months into her pregnancy that already started to show. So far she managed to cover it up, but given another month, it would be impossible to hide her condition anymore.

Otherwise she was fine; she was over her cravings and morning sickness, and if her tuberculosis test turned out negative, she could carry on with her household chores and continue her sewing business without difficulty until the birth of her baby. It also helped that caring for her siblings was much easier by now. The oldest boy, sixteen-year-old Henrich, was already apprenticed to a shoemaker, and although her younger brothers, Franz, Jozsef and Miska, ages fourteen, eleven and nine, were still in school, they could do more or less without her fussing over them. Little Mitzie in kindergarten, and Lizzie in first grade still needed looking after, but they never gave her any problem. As the children were growing older, her clients often teased her about what would she do after they all flew the nest and she was left with an empty house? They probably imagined Angela in her late thirties or early forties as a matronly figure, surrounded by nieces and nephews, a sort of substitute grandmother. Well, they were in for a surprise once the truth came out about her situation, Angela thought and shuddered, her spirits sinking further and deeper with each passing day.

But what she dreaded most was the confrontation with her father, when she must tell him about her predicament. He did not have a forgiving nature and although he never raised a hand to strike any of his children, he could mete out

punishments much too harsh to fit the wrongdoing. She knew he would react violently, and there would be ranting and accusations for bringing shame on the family. It was futile to count on him being sentimental about the birth of his first grandchild when he was never much of a father to his own children.

She stalled for time trying to muster up courage she'd need to fend against his anticipated angry response, until one clear, crisp February morning, getting dressed she looked in the mirror and realized she could no longer postpone the face-off with her father. Her clothes did not fit anymore, and the holidays were too long gone to take the blame for the extra pounds she put on. It was time to come clean and have that dreaded talk with her father. Before he left for work she asked him to make time for her in the evening so they can talk about something important. She spent all day thinking what would be the best way to approach him, but at the end she decided there was only one way, and that was to come straight to the point.

Hoping to put him in a good mood, she prepared his favorite dish, and he did look pleased after finishing his supper. He remained at the table and asked what she wanted to discuss.

"We need to talk in private, Father, please."

"What's the big secrecy?" he asked, raising an eyebrow, but got up and followed her into her room. Angela pulled a chair for him, bracing for what was to come.

"Papa, what I am about to tell you will shock you, I know, but tell it I must. I am going to have a baby in May, and because of special circumstances it is impossible for me to marry the father of the child until later, after the birth. What makes it more—"

"You are what?" her father cut her short, leaning out of his chair, his face dark with stunned disbelief. "You are pregnant? Is that what you are telling me?" he roared, his voice rising with each word.

"Papa, please, I don't want the children to hear us! They should not be involved in this."

"But they are going to be involved if what you are saying is true! Innocent as they are, they will be involved!" He was on his feet by now, shouting and punching the air with angry gestures.

"Please Papa, calm down and let me tell you about my situation."

"All I want to hear from you is the name of the man who did this to you and where he lives!"

"I can't tell you that, but I am sure, once you hear me out you will understand better and—"

"The only thing I could possibly understand is if somebody forced himself on you, which can happen to any woman in today's loose world. If that's the case, you just leave everything to me. I need all the information you can give me so I can take it to our office for investigation. We will do everything to find the scoundrel and he will pay for what he did to you, believe me, he will pay! You should have come to me with this right away; it would have given us a better chance to catch him, and enough time to do away with the unfortunate

result!” He had already convinced himself that this was what happened and was seemingly regaining his composure.

Angela stood there in numb disbelief. Her father could justify her pregnancy if it was the result of rape, and would have subjected her to an abortion as the best solution to her problem? She knew he was not the most loving father, but he could not be this heartless! Perhaps she should tell him the truth, but how could she? It would only make things worse. She could only try to explain why the marriage had to be postponed.

“It’s nothing like that father; I was not raped! I fell in love with a man, and we love each other very much. We made a pledge to marry, it’s just unfortunate that he fell ill and we must—”

“He fell ill? Now isn’t that convenient!” he punctuated each word with a voice full of sarcasm. “And you believe him, you foolish girl? Don’t you know that this is one of the oldest excuses men use to get out of a commitment? It comes especially handy when a child is on the way! How stupid, how gullible can you be?”

“You can call me names, Father, but it won’t change anything. We love each other and will marry as soon as he is well again.”

“And when is that supposed to be? When you are fifty? Face it, he is feeding you a lie, and you apparently swallowed every word of it. Well, I see what I can do about all this. Just tell me who the man is and where can I find him. I will tell him to his face that he can snowball you but I see through his chicanery, and when I am through with him, he will marry you, and do it now, not sometime in the future! Hah! What a joke!” he spit out the words contemptuously. “Ill, is he? Indeed! But should he be really sick, I will drag him out of his sickbed by the ears, long enough to say, ‘I do.’ I know how to deal with his type!”

Angela shook her head slowly. “You are not listening, Papa. I’ve told you, I can’t do that, not yet, and when the time comes for the two of you to meet, you will understand why. What I can tell you is that he is an honorable man and that he loves me and will come for the baby and me when he is released from the hospital. He has tuberculosis, Papa; he needs good care and lots of rest and it will take a while before he gets well, but he will come for us, I know he will.”

“Tuberculosis?” The word stopped him cold as he paced the room. Grabbing Angela by the shoulders, he shook her hard. “He has tuberculosis? What do you know about that disease? Do you know that it is contagious? That he could have passed it to you? You could be infected! And the rest of the children, too! How long have you known this man? When did you find out that he has TB?”

“I’ve known him a long time, Papa, but it was only in Vienna where I met him again and that’s when we fell in love. He got sick just recently, and you don’t have to worry, I’ve seen the doctor, and I tested negative.”

“Well at least some good news in all the mess you are in,” he said sarcastically. He was still angry but seemed to be cooling down, which made Angela think that the worst was over. But she was wrong; he was not through with her. The worst was yet to come.