

FOR TWELVE-YEAR-OLD ROSETTA WOLFF, the war in Europe seems very far off, although she knows everyone has to do their part to support the war effort and the boys fighting overseas. Then Mr. Schwartzberg comes to tea. He brings news of the war, and asks Rosetta's parents if they will take in a young war refugee. Isaac joins the family and becomes a ready-made brother to Rosetta and her two sisters.

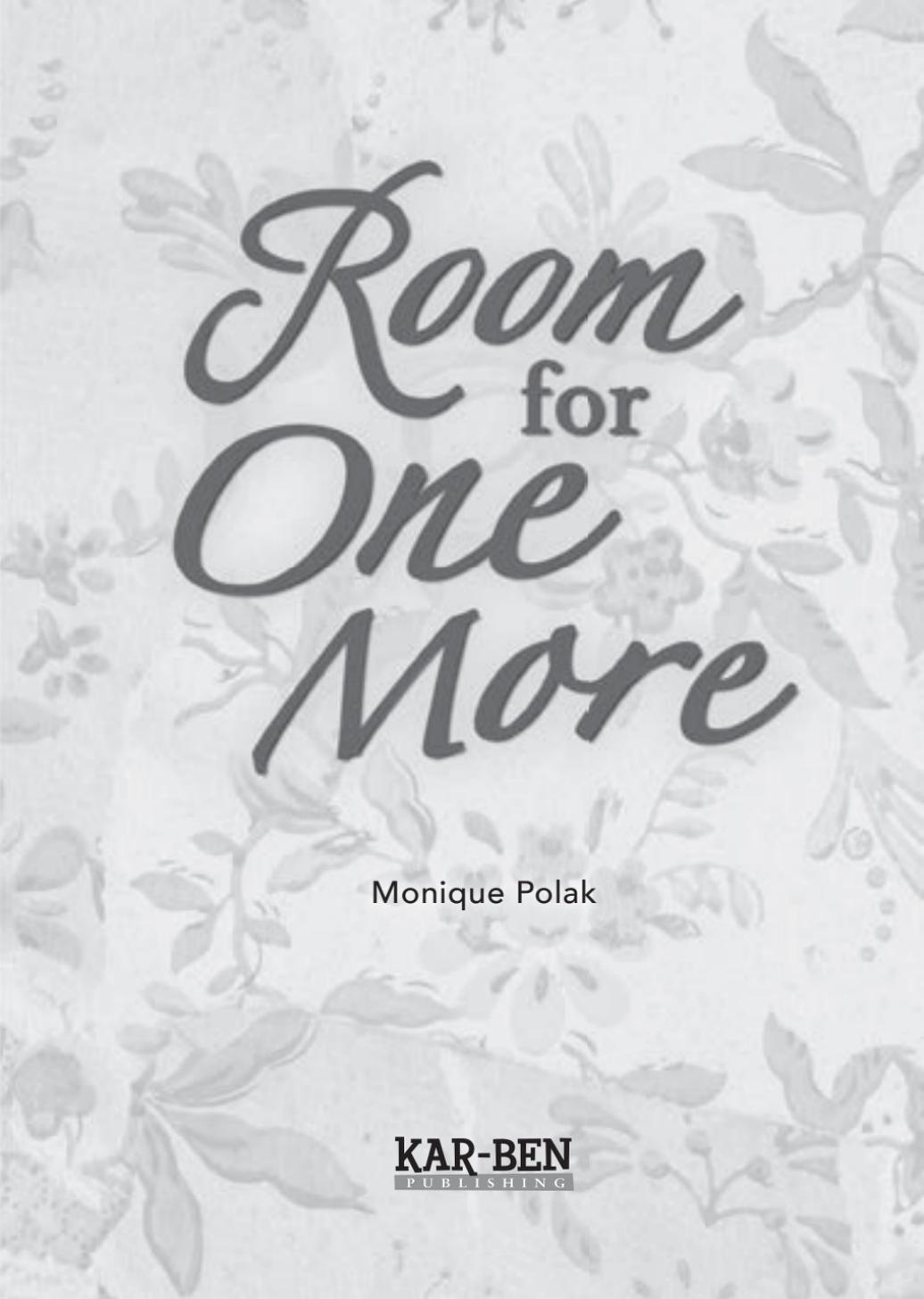
Isaac's arrival brings change: not only does Rosetta have to share a room with her older sister, but her world view is changed as well. Her best friend's handsome brother doesn't seem as attractive after he reveals himself as anti-Semitic, and Rosetta begins to suspect her friend shares some of her brother's views. As Rosetta and Isaac become friends and he shares his story with her, she aids him in learning the fate of his family and helps him shape a promising future in his new country.

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The background of the entire page is a light-colored, repeating floral pattern. It features stylized leaves and small flowers, possibly hydrangeas, in a muted sage green or greyish-blue color. The pattern is dense and covers the entire surface.

Room for One More

Monique Polak

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Chapter 1

I know it isn't right to listen in on other people's conversations.

But I can't resist.

My arms go goosebumpy with excitement when I am eavesdropping. It's the same feeling I get when I am making a speech.

I feel about eavesdropping the way my big sister, Annette, feels about new clothes. Or the way my little sister, Esther, feels about doing the long jump. It's how Mom feels about poetry and how Dad feels about Mom's Yorkshire pudding, the one she makes from Granny in England's recipe.

To me, nothing's so delicious as an interesting conversation.

The kind of conversation Mom and Dad are having tonight.

They have a guest—a man named Mr. Schwartzberg, whose dark, piercing eyes remind me of a fox's. He is small and thin and drags his leg behind him when he walks.

When Mr. Schwartzberg arrived, Dad and Mom called the three of us downstairs to shake his hand, but then they whisked him into the parlor and sent us upstairs with Anne-Marie, our housekeeper.

“Off you go, Andy, Ronald, and Eddie,” Dad said, patting our heads.

Mr. Schwartzberg looked confused when Dad called us by boys' names. So Annette, who is sixteen and enjoys explaining things, explained: “It's because Dad wishes he had a son. If I'd been a boy, they'd have called me Andy, Rosetta would have been Ronald, and Esther, Eddie.”

Mr. Schwartzberg nodded as if all this made perfect sense.

Dad objected, of course. “For the record, Mr. Schwarzberg, I want to state that on this August day in 1942, and for that matter, on every other day, I consider myself the luckiest man in all Montreal. Imagine living surrounded by so many talented, lovely females! My darling wife, Irene, devoted wife and mother, and part-time poetess; Annette,

our resident *artiste* and fashion plate; Rosetta,” (Dad smiled in my direction) “reigning public speaking champion of the grade-six class at Roslyn School; and Esther, our outstanding athlete.”

Anne-Marie had trouble rounding us up for bed. “*Les filles!*” she said, clapping her hands. *Les filles* is French for “girls.” Anne-Marie speaks to us mostly in English. But when she gets upset, she switches back to French, the language she was brought up with.

Annette and I were gossiping. She was critiquing Mr. Schwartzberg’s clothing. “Has that man never heard of a tailor?” she whispered. “Those trousers are several sizes too large, and the jacket is unfashionably long.”

“Are clothes all you ever think about?” I asked her. But because I knew that if Annette was angry with me, she’d never let me practice my speech in front of her, I added, “The new Eaton’s catalog came in today’s mail. I left it by your bed, open to the fall fashions.”

“You did!” Annette squealed. “How wonderful! I can’t wait to see it!”

Esther wanted to go outside to practice her long jump one more time. She also wanted her stuffed

rabbit to watch her. Only then she realized she didn't know where she'd left him.

Anne-Marie shook her head and muttered, "This house has too many girls in it! *Il y a trop de filles!*"

"Well, you're one more girl!" Esther pointed out, which made all of us laugh, except Anne-Marie. Lately, Anne-Marie has been even more sour than usual. Mom says it's because Anne-Marie is worried sick about her big brother, Jean-Claude. He's part of Le Fusiliers Mont-Royal, and Anne-Marie's family has had no word of him since the Canadian troops raided the French port of Dieppe last week.

Maybe that's why when Anne-Marie brought Esther upstairs for her bath, she didn't notice when I snuck back downstairs.

Dad and Mom had shut the double doors behind them, which is how I knew they were going to have the sort of conversation we girls are not supposed to know about.

I slipped into the dining room and hid under Granny's table. Ever since the table, which is black mahogany and has been in Granny's family for generations, arrived, Mom has treated it like a new baby, inspecting it for scratches and warning us not to kick its legs when we're seated round it. Mom keeps the

table covered with a linen cloth. The cloth has a long overhang, making it hard for anyone to tell when I am hiding underneath.

Since the dining room opens into the parlor, Granny's table is the perfect spot for eavesdropping.

I also come here sometimes for a little peace and quiet. There's a lot of giggling in a house with three sisters. Sometimes that makes it hard for me to think when I am in my room upstairs. I know I should be grateful that at least I have my own room. My friend Bertha Etkowitz has to share hers with her big sister Tova. I'd hate sharing a room with Annette. She is the moodiest person on Earth. Mom blames Annette's age. I just hope that when I turn sixteen, I won't catch whatever it is that Annette's got.

At first, the conversation in the parlor is about the weather. Dad asks Mr. Schwartzberg what he thinks of our Canadian climate. Mr. Schwartzberg has a thick accent, which makes it hard for me to understand him, but the longer I listen, the easier it gets. He explains that he hasn't yet experienced a Canadian winter, but that in Moravia, where he was born, the summers are as humid as the one we're having now. He admires our standing fan. There isn't one in the rooming house where he's staying.

When I peep out from behind the linen tablecloth, I see that Mr. Schwartzberg is looking around the room worriedly, as if he half expects someone to jump out and pounce on him at any moment.

“So you’re staying at a rooming house, are you?” Dad asks.

Mom taps his arm. “Do you think there is some way, Martin dear, that we might be able to find a fan for Mr. Schwartzberg?”

“Let me see what I can do,” Dad says.

“No, no, please no,” Mr. Schwartzberg waves his hands in front of him. “That won’t be necessary. Besides, I’m not planning to stay long in Montreal. I’m hoping to travel around Canada and also to the United States. You see I’m here on a mission.”

“A mission,” Dad says, a question in his voice.

I hear the clinking of the teapot. Mom must be checking to see whether the tea has steeped. “Would you like a little Earl Grey?” she asks Mr. Schwartzberg. “What about a maple scone? We’ve had to cut back on sugar on account of the new rationing system. Luckily, I managed to hold on to a few cans of maple syrup from last spring. We’re all doing our part for the war effort.” Mom lowers her voice when

she says *war*. Ah-ha! So that's why Mom and Dad whisked Mr. Schwartzberg off the way they did, and also why he has such a thick accent. He's come to talk about the war in Europe.

Mr. Schwartzberg accepts the tea and a scone. He slurps his tea and then takes such a large bite of scone he almost chokes. A piece of scone comes flying out of his mouth and lands on the carpet, only an inch or so from my hiding place. I cover my mouth so I won't laugh out loud.

Mr. Schwartzberg reaches down to collect the piece of half-chewed scone. His face is very red. "Forgive me," he says, looking around the room again, and for a moment, I worry that like a fox sniffing for a goose, he has sensed my presence. Then he looks at Dad. "I've come to see you, sir," he says, "because I heard you are the treasurer of the oldest synagogue in Montreal. And that you are a good man. A decent man."

"I'm only the acting treasurer at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. As for being a good man, I do my best. Now Mr. Schwartzberg, please tell us about this mission of yours."

Mr. Schwartzberg sucks in his breath, and I move closer to the edge of the table. I can tell he is getting

to the interesting stuff. “Mr. and Mrs. Wolfson, I am sure you’ve heard that there are terrible things happening to Jews in Germany and Poland. And in other countries too. I’ve come to tell you more about these things, because I’ve witnessed them myself. Unspeakable things.”

Mr. Schwartzberg snuffles, and I wonder if he’s going to cry. I’ve never heard a man cry. What sorts of unspeakable things can Mr. Schwartzberg mean? I wish he’d hurry up and get back to his story!

“I’m so very sorry for what you must have been through,” Mom says.

“Of course, I echo my wife’s sentiments,” Dad adds. “Now please, if it’s not too difficult”—Dad hesitates for a moment—“tell us more.”

Dad has a point. Telling all this is probably hard for Mr. Schwartzberg. I’ve been so interested in his story that I did not think about Mr. Schwartzberg’s feelings.

I hear the teapot clink again. Mom must be pouring Mr. Schwartzberg more tea.

“I suppose you’ve heard of Hitler.” Mr. Schwartzberg spits out the name.

“The German chancellor. Of course we’ve heard of him. We read the newspapers. We’re doing all we

can to support our brave boys overseas. May God be with them,” Dad says.

I’ve seen photographs of this man Hitler in the *Gazette*. He has a short black moustache and a furious look in his eyes.

Mr. Schwartzberg clears his throat. “As you know, Hitler and his party—the National Socialists, or Nazis as they call themselves—blame all of Germany’s troubles on the Jews. But that’s not the worst of it. The Nazis have been singling Jews out, then rounding them up and transporting them to dreadful places. Places where Jews are treated like animals and worse.”

Mom sucks in her breath.

I feel my shoulders getting tense. What does Mr. Schwartzberg mean when he says Jews are being treated worse than animals?

“How do you know these things?” Dad asks.

“I was on one of the transports. But I managed to escape. I jumped off a cattle car, which is how I injured my leg. My parents were too afraid to jump. And my brother,” Mr. Schwartzberg sucks in his breath, “the Nazis shot him in the head while we were still in Moravia. He didn’t line up quickly enough for their liking.”

How could anyone shoot a man for not lining up quickly enough? It makes no sense! Why, it's the most awful thing I've ever heard.

Mr. Schwartzberg pauses to collect himself. "And so"—I can tell he needs all his courage to go on—"it has become my mission to let other Jews know the truth about what is happening overseas. So that you can find some way—any way—to help."