

TRAPPED
IN
HITLER'S
WEB

Also by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch

Making Bombs for Hitler

The War Below

Stolen Girl

Don't Tell the Nazis

**TRAPPED
IN
HITLER'S
WEB**

A novel by
MARSHA FORCHUK SKRYPUCH



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FOR TUSIO, MUSIA, OREST, AND ROMAN

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CHAPTER ONE

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

October 1942, Nazi-Occupied Lviv, Ukraine

I stood beside Nathan and stared at the ad plastered on the wall outside the Reich Employment Office. The poster urged Ukrainians to sign up for work in the Reich. The Germans would feed us, pay us, and give us free time on Sundays. It seemed almost too good to be true.

“We *have* to do it,” whispered Nathan, squeezing my hand. “I’ve got Bohdan’s identity papers. I’ll be safe.”

What choice did we have? If we stayed in the woods much longer, we’d freeze to death. But we couldn’t go back to our homes in Viteretz, not while the Nazis were killing Jews. It had started slowly, after the Germans occupied our town. Nathan was Jewish. And even though he was now passing himself off as Bohdan Sawchuk, everyone in Viteretz knew that the real Bohdan had been killed by the

Soviets. And what would the cruel German Commandant do to me, Mama, and my big sister, Krystia, for helping Nathan survive? No. We couldn't return there.

Mama and Krystia.

Just the thought of them made my heart ache. I longed to be home again, to snuggle up at night together, to share a story over a bowl of warm kasha. Poor Mama would have so much work to do without me there to help her. I even missed arguing with Krystia. Was she happy that she now got our bed all to herself? The sooner this war ended, the better, and then we could all get back to a normal life.

But right now, I had to help Nathan stay alive.

We had to hide, but Nathan's false papers would only work if we didn't draw any attention to ourselves.

Two Ukrainians going to the Reich for work would seem like a normal choice—even a good one—to a Nazi. Could going into the heart of Hitler's Reich be our salvation? I hoped and prayed that our plan to hide in plain sight would work.

So here we stood, wearing everything we owned. I had on my threadbare skirt and blouse plus the oversized jacket and boots that my Auntie Iryna had given me during the short time we were in hiding with the help of the Underground; my hair was in one long braid down my back. Nathan had escaped the Nazis with nothing but

his underwear. When he came to our house to beg me, Mama, and Krystia for refuge, we had dressed him in clothing from our relatives who had already been killed in the war—mostly Uncle Roman’s, but some from cousin Josip as well. In our pockets were some coins paid to us in the back streets of Lviv in exchange for things foraged from the woods—mushrooms, nuts, and berries.

How I wished I were as brave as Krystia. She wouldn’t hesitate, but would just plunge ahead in spite of danger. I straightened my spine and pretended I was her. I marched up the stone steps, pulled the door open, and stepped inside, Nathan beside me.

A few people stood in line and we got in behind them. The officer at the desk looked at both of our passports side by side. “You’re young to be going to Germany,” he said. “But you look healthy and I won’t argue.”

He filled out a form and handed it to me. As he worked on Nathan’s form, I held my breath, worried that he’d realize that Nathan wasn’t Bohdan Sawchuk. But he completed it with the same ease as mine and handed it back.

“Take these to her,” he said, pointing to a woman with a typewriter at the far end of the room. “She’ll make up your official work documents.”

As we waited our turn in front of the typist’s desk, I examined the officer’s handwritten form and realized with

a sinking heart that I had been assigned to a metalworks factory, which would be hard work even for an adult. Nathan's assignment was the same as mine. A hard fate, yes, but better than staying in Viteretz. We'd be paid and fed and have a warm place to sleep, which was more than we'd had for months.

The person in front of us finished, and I was now face-to-face with the typist, her dark blond hair coiled on top of her head and a pair of severe black glasses perched on the tip of her nose. I handed her my paper.

"You're not from Lemberg but from Liebhaft, I see," she said, using the new German names for Lviv and Viteretz as she smoothed the form out on her desk. "You've volunteered, and you're just eleven years old," she said in a lower voice, almost to herself.

"I'll be twelve in two months." The words burst out against my will.

She inserted a card into the typewriter and keyed in the words from the form, but she paused partway through. She slid open the top drawer of her desk and appeared to be looking at something in there before keying in more information. When she was finished, she pulled the card out of the typewriter carriage and set it on the desk in front of me. With her other hand, she flipped open a metal container, revealing a dark blue square.

“Put your index finger on this ink pad,” she said. “And then place your inky finger on this spot.”

I did as she said. She picked up the new document and waved it to dry the ink of my fingerprint. As she handed it back to me, her firm expression briefly flickered into a smile.

She took Nathan’s passport next. She put her finger on the year of his birth, and for a moment I nearly panicked. But then she looked up at him and said, “You’re a young one too. Just twelve and volunteering to go to the Reich for work.” Her tone sounded almost sympathetic.

I held my breath as she prepared Nathan’s papers, hoping and praying that his false identity would pass scrutiny. I exhaled in relief when she finished typing up his card and had him make a fingerprint just as I had done.

“You need to be at the train station by noon today,” she said. “Pack enough food for a two-day journey. I’m glad to see that you’ve both got shoes and a warm jacket. You’ll need them.”