

Penguin



Readers

The background of the poster is a cinematic scene from the movie 'Ashes in the Snow'. It shows a man and a woman in a snowy, mountainous landscape. The man is on the left, wearing a dark coat, looking towards the woman. The woman is on the right, wearing a red knit hat and a blue coat, looking upwards with a concerned expression. Snow is falling around them. In the background, there are snow-covered mountains and a small red building with the letters 'CO' on it. At the bottom of the poster, three small figures are walking through the snow, carrying backpacks.

*Ashes in
the Snow*

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CHAPTER ONE

The first night

They took me at night. Looking back, the signs were already there. Mother had **sewn** coins into her coat and burned the family photos. Father had not returned from work. My younger brother, Jonas, was asking questions. I asked questions, too, but perhaps I did not want to see the signs that Mother and Father planned to escape.

June 14, 1941. I was sitting at my desk and writing to my cousin, Joana. It was a nice evening, and I could smell the flowers that Mother and I had planted in the garden.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK! It was so loud that I jumped in my chair. I left my desk and looked into the hall. My mother was standing against the wall, facing our map of Lithuania. Her eyes were closed and I had never seen her look so worried.

“Mother,” said Jonas. He was standing in the hall. “Are you going to open it?”

“Yes, love,” Mother said. She was trying to smile. “I will open the door.”

Mother was very beautiful, and her smile lit up everything around her. I was lucky because I had the same bright blue eyes as her. Jonas had her smile.

The knocking grew louder.

“**NKVD**,” whispered Jonas. He was scared. “They are **arresting** people.”



“No. Not here,” I replied. The **Soviet** secret police wouldn’t arrest us in our house.

Mother opened the door. Jonas was right; it was the NKVD. There were three of them, all wearing **uniforms**, and blue-and-red hats. One of them was carrying a document with our photographs.

“We need more time,” Mother said to the men. “We’ll be ready by the morning.”

“Twenty minutes — or you won’t live to see the morning,” said one of the officers, throwing a cigarette on to our living-room floor.

I ran back to my bedroom. Mother arrived at the door, with Jonas behind her.

“Where are we going? What have we done?” Jonas asked. “Are we being arrested?”

“It’s a mistake. But we must move quickly and pack things that are useful. Do you understand? Things like warm clothes, gloves, and shoes,” said Mother.

“Where is Father?” Jonas asked.

Mother suddenly stopped. “He will meet us soon. But now you must pack!”

One year ago, the Soviet army entered the country. I did not like the Soviet army. I said this once at the dinner table and Father shouted at me. He told me to never say anything bad about the Soviets.

I took our family photo from the shelf and put it in my suitcase. The happy faces stared back at me. Grandma was in the photograph; she was still alive then. I wanted her to come with us.

“Coats and shoes!” Mother shouted as she left my bedroom.

I packed some clothes, two books, and a hairbrush, and put on my shoes. I could not find my drawing book, but I took some pens.

After twenty minutes, the NKVD came back and took us outside. It was very dark. Jonas was having a difficult time

carrying his suitcase. It was too big and heavy.

“Davai!” shouted the officer. It meant *hurry*, always *hurry*.

They **forced** us into a truck. There were other people sitting inside it on their suitcases. One of them was Miss Grybas, an older teacher from my school. Some of them were my father’s friends who I had seen him speak to on the street. There was also a man in a suit, and a **bald** man. We were all on a **list**. I did not know what the list was, but we were on it and so were the other people sitting with us.

“We’re all going to die,” said the bald man.

“No, we aren’t!” said Mother, quickly.

“But we will!” he shouted. “This is the end.”

The truck started to move very fast. Suddenly, the bald man stood up and jumped out of the moving truck. He fell into the road and screamed, and the people in the truck screamed, too. The truck stopped and two officers jumped out to get the man. He was in a lot of pain, but the officers did not care. They **grabbed** him and threw him into the truck. His leg was bent and broken; it looked horrible. Then, we were moving again.

The men had been in the living room for hours, smoking cigarettes and talking quietly.

“Love, take them some coffee,” said Mother.

“Repatriate,” said Father, stopping quickly when he saw me enter.

“Would anybody like more coffee?” I asked.

“Lina, I hear that you’re an artist,” said a friend of my father’s.

*"Yes, she is!" said Father. "She's a very **unique** artist."*

"What do you think of this new Lithuania?" said my father's friend.

"That's not really a conversation for a young girl," said my father, quickly.

"It'll be a conversation for everybody, young and old," my father's friend replied.

*"**Politics** is boring and I do not like **politicians** but I think the Soviets are horrible," I said, not looking at my father. "I think they shouldn't be allowed to come and take what they want."*

"That's enough, Lina," said Father.

"But it's true!" I said.

"Enough!" said my father.

I returned to the kitchen, stopping to listen to the rest of their conversation.

"She worries me," Father said to his friend.

*"Well," the man said. "She has learned from you. She knows what is right and what is **wrong**."*

Father was silent.

"Are you the wife of Kostas Vilkas, the teacher at the university?" asked the man in the suit.

Mother nodded.

"The university?" said the bald man. "He'll be dead."

I felt like somebody had hit me in the stomach. Jonas looked at Mother with a frightened face and **tears** in his eyes.

"Actually, I work at the bank," said a man with gray hair.

“I saw your father this afternoon.”

I knew that he was lying.

After a few hours, the truck stopped at a train station that was very busy. There were many people and officers, all making lots of noise.

“Stay close to me. Hold on to my coat. We must stay together,” said Mother.

“Davai!” the officer shouted. He pulled one of the men off the truck and pushed him to the ground.

“We need a doctor,” said Mother while pointing to the bald man. “His leg is broken.”

“You can carry him,” said the officer, laughing.

Two men from the truck carried the screaming bald man.

“Mother, is Father here?” asked Jonas.

I thought the same thing. Where was he? Did they take him from work, or while he was eating his lunch? I looked at the people on the train platform. There were children crying, and old people being moved around like animals.

“Davai!” An NKVD officer grabbed Jonas by the shoulders and pulled him away.

“No!” screamed Mother.

“Mother! Lina!” Jonas shouted, waving his arms.

“Stop!” I screamed back.

Mother grabbed the officer and began speaking in Russian. She could speak it very well. The officer stopped and listened but I could not understand a word. Then the

officer pulled Jonas toward him. I grabbed his other arm. Jonas began to cry, and a big wet mark appeared on the front of his trousers. Mother took some money from her pocket and gave it to the officer. He reached for it and then said something. She quickly took the necklace from her neck and put it in the officer's hand. The officer was still not happy. Mother then pulled a watch from her other pocket. I knew that watch. It had been her father's and his name was written on the back in the soft gold. The officer grabbed the watch and pushed Jonas toward us. My brother's life was worth a watch.