Chapter 12: The new way

My heart was pounding, my hands were all sweaty, and I felt hot all over. It was a pure panic attack. How could I have not foreseen being asked for the boys' IDs? On the other hand, why was I so nervous? At most, we'd spend the whole night in some burger joint. Either way, we had to find a way out of this situation.

I took the IDs from Marcel. I still wasn't sure what I was supposed to do, but I didn't really have a choice—I just handed them to the receptionist.

"Thank you," she said, quickly glancing at them and handing them back. I breathed a sigh of relief.

But a moment later, another question followed: "Are the boys your brothers?"

"Yes," I replied without thinking.

"Alright, then I also need parental consent for their stay at the hotel with you," she added, and I felt hot again. I shot a quick look

at Marcel, but this time his expression didn’t help—he stood there like a statue.

"Your turn," Gogo walked up to me, and I just waited for him to give me a "wink" now, but he didn't. Instead, he hummed "it’s time to sleep" and slowly walked away.

Okay, so now it’s my turn. I have one shot, and I have to be absolutely convincing.

I started slowly. In a quiet, low voice.

"We don't have such consents. Our parents are missing and the police are looking for them, and we’re on our way to family in Budapest. We just want to get some sleep and we’ll head out in the morning. If you understand Hungarian, I'm calling my aunt right now."

"Poor things, I'm so sorry for you. There’s no need. It’s late already. Go to sleep. Breakfast is from 6:00 AM. Do you need any help?" the receptionist replied immediately and handed me the room key.

"Thank you very much for your concern—besides missing our parents, we have everything we need, I think." I took the key, smiled gently, and we headed toward the room.

As soon as we reached it and closed the door behind us, I asked Marcel why he was so calm when giving me the original IDs.

"I was watching the lady the whole time. When you gave her the tablet with the EuroID, she looked at it for maybe half a second. At most, she read the last name. Besides, she wasn't writing anything down—not on the computer or on paper. She was staring at the phone lying next to her the whole time and smiling at it... I mean, well, at the phone or whoever was texting her there! She was repeating memorized sentences she had to say when checking in every guest, but in reality, she didn't care about us at all and wanted us to leave as quickly as possible."

"Hey, but you didn't use your 'powers,' did you?" Ignacy asked.

"No, I’m just always observant. Who knows, maybe I’ll be a detective someday," Marcel laughed and continued, "Sister, you’d better tell us why you were so nervous! After all, at most, they wouldn't have checked us in."

"Not exactly. First of all, we could have drawn attention to ourselves—I was afraid that if I didn't convince her, she would call the police or some other local authorities. For a few years now, the law has required verifying whether minors are traveling with parental consent. We could have been caught red-handed! It’s a good law, it looks out for children's safety, and I... you know how I

feel when I have to bend the truth. Just showing that fake ID of mine cost me a lot, and when she asked for yours, I just panicked."

"You were doing great, and you speak English so beautifully, will you teach me to speak that nicely someday?" Gogo asked, as if that was what mattered most now.

"Sure, we can practice," I smiled at him.

"Julia, lying is disgusting, but you simply had to take care of us—there was no other way, understand? No one will understand our truth, and we have a clear goal. To get to Italy. This isn't just an adventure; it goes beyond the logic we knew just a few days ago," Marcel concluded, and silence fell. Understanding this new "logic" was difficult for all of us.

"Right. Well, alright, listen, now seriously, 'it’s time for bed,'" I broke the silence and this time I winked at them, "we’re up in a few hours. GOODNIGHT!"

They fell asleep quickly. I decided I would keep watch. The way I convinced the receptionist definitely wasn't normal. I had used my new abilities and I was worried about whether we would be tracked. I sat in a deep armchair and looked at Vienna at night. I didn't know much about this city, though I immediately thought of the Vienna New Year’s Concert, which Aunt Ola and Marcelina told

me so much about. They always watched it, and I—it’s a shame to admit—haven’t even once yet. Someday I'll definitely make up for it, but now we can't stay here until New Year's. I also remembered that this city is considered one of the safest in Europe. Finally, I felt safe enough that I adjusted my blanket and I don't even know when I fell asleep.

My alarm clock woke me up; it was 3:50 AM. I felt a surge of fear that I had missed something, but luckily, everything was fine. The boys were slowly waking up, and the doors and windows were whole this time. It could mean that when we use our special skills for just a brief moment, the agents aren't able to track us. That was comforting. Especially since we didn't know what difficulties still lay ahead of us and what we would have to do to discover what is really happening and where our parents are. And also who they really are and what they haven't told us for years.

Unfortunately, it was still before breakfast, so we left the hotel on empty stomachs. At the station, we bought tickets for the train to Innsbruck, bought some snacks, and left promptly at 5:00 AM. In our compartment, besides us, there was only one middle-aged lady sitting.