

Praise for *The Medallion*
and other novels by Cathy Gohlke

The Medallion

Cathy Gohlke has done it again – woven history with stories of two families that must face the unthinkable. *The Medallion* is timeless and gripping, taking readers on a journey of bravery and hope.

TERRI GILLESPIE

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, CUT IT OUT; COHOST, PROVERBS LIVE

The Medallion is a rich story about the deepest of loves, the most impossible of choices, the determination to live and love others in the midst of paralyzing grief. Some stories stick with me for a season, but these characters – and the strength of this beautifully written novel – will cling to my heart for a lifetime.

MELANIE DOBSON

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, HIDDEN AMONG THE STARS

Set against a backdrop of our world's darkest time, Cathy Gohlke's *The Medallion* seamlessly weaves heartache with healing. I read the story of these two women valiantly fighting for life in the midst of so much death, and felt myself humbled in the shadow of their strength. With every page, Gohlke reminds us that where there is life, there is hope.

ALLISON PITTMAN

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, THE SEAMSTRESS

A master storyteller, Cathy Gohlke has created unforgettable characters in unthinkable circumstances. This story completely undid me, then stitched me back together with hope. A novel that has grabbed my heart – and won't let go – for what I'm sure will be a very long time.

HEIDI CHIAVAROLI

CAROL AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, THE HIDDEN SIDE

Cathy Gohlke has done it again! *The Medallion* is a beautifully written story with a riveting plot, realistic characters and moving themes of sacrificial love, redemption and forgiveness. Highly recommended for readers who are willing to stay up late, because they won't be able to put this book down!

CARRIE TURANSKY

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, NO OCEAN TOO WIDE AND ACROSS THE BLUE

Cathy Gohlke skillfully weaves true stories of heroism and sacrifice into her novel to create a realistic portrayal of Poland during WWII. *The Medallion* is a stunning story of impossible choices and the enduring power of faith and love.

LYNN AUSTIN

AUTHOR, LEGACY OF MERCY

What a wonderful book, filled with characters I loved and cared about. *The Medallion* will grip your heart with its message of the sustaining power of faith in the direst of circumstances. Do not miss this book.

GAYLE ROPER

AUTHOR, A WIDOW'S JOURNEY

The Medallion literally took my breath away. Cathy Gohlke has beautifully intertwined the tragic stories of two Polish families in the darkest days of WWII. She masterfully transports her readers through characters so vividly portrayed, I felt as if I was walking in their shoes, facing their unspeakable choices and experiencing each and every one of their gut-wrenching emotions of love, sacrifice and loss. Absolutely brilliant.

DIANE MOODY

AUTHOR, OF WINDMILLS AND WAR

Cathy Gohlke's *The Medallion* is a masterfully created story of hope in the midst of war. Written with passion and love, the characters are ones we grow to cherish.

ALICE J. WISLER

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, RAIN SONG

Secrets She Kept

Cathy Gohlke's *Secrets She Kept* is a page-turner with great pacing and style. She's a terrific writer.

FRANCINE RIVERS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

This well-researched epic depicts life under the Nazi regime with passionate attention. While the Sterling family story serves as a warning about digging into the past, it is also a touching example of the healing power of forgiveness and the rejuvenating power of faith.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

Gohlke takes the reader on a compelling journey, complete with mystery and drama. She weaves in real stories from Ravensbrück, making this drama one that will be difficult to forget. It is well researched, and the multilayered characters demonstrate the power of love and sacrifice.

ROMANTIC TIMES

TOP PICK REVIEW

Gripping ... emotional ... masterfully told, this is an unforgettable tale of finding family, faith and love.

RADIANT LIT

A sweeping story! The deep characterization, striking settings and twisting story draw you in and raise poignant questions. If you lived in the claustrophobic terror of Nazi Germany, would you have risked your life – or compromised your values? And if you lived in post-war Germany, how would you deal with your past sin and shame? A lyrical tale of hope and light, even in the darkest places. Don't miss this book!

SARAH SUNDIN

BESTSELLING AND AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, THE SEA BEFORE US

AND THE SKY ABOVE US

Cathy Gohlke never fails to deliver wonderfully-woven novels of hope, resilience, and tenderness. A master storyteller, her prose is evocative and beautiful from first page to last.

SUSAN MEISSNER

BESTSELLING AUTHOR, THE LAST YEAR OF THE WAR

Secrets She Kept is a riveting tale of secrets and forgiveness, this historical story will engage readers of all ages. *Secrets She Kept* will be of particular interest to those of us who call North Carolina home.

ALICE J. WISLER

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, RAIN SONG

**THE
MEDALLION**

CATHY GOHLKE



Muddy
Pearl

Prologue

The violin cries softly from the summer garden, weaving its notes among the gathered guests – a lament of the bride's passing youth and the leaving of her father's house.

Itzhak, his breath groom-tight, watches from the kitchen stoop, waiting for his Rosa. The door opens behind him, and he turns. A gasp escapes. Overcome by her beauty, he whispers, 'Do you hear, my Rosa, the singing of the violin for us?'

Rosa nestles close, and though her veil obscures her features, he can hear her smile. 'Itzhak, my love, I hear only the beating of my heart.'

He lifts her veil in this one private moment, revealing her beautiful face. He wants only to run his finger down her silken cheek, to touch her lips with his own, but steps back and quickly winks before lowering the lace once more.

'I saw that! Itzhak, don't make me laugh.'

'I cannot help it. It's really you, my beautiful Rosa! Even your papa, who knows I'm not good enough for you –' he makes sure to whisper this – 'has not played the trickster like that old Laban.'

'Hush, now. Don't say such a thing. Pay attention, Itzhak. Your mama hears.'

Itzhak presses her hands in hope and promise, then walks ahead to link arms with his father and mother. Heads high, they approach the chuppah. Ducking beneath the fringes of the grandfathers' prayer shawls, Itzhak's parents step to his right.

The violin still sings, but Itzhak cannot focus on its notes. Instead, he turns and watches his Rosa as she links arms with her parents, though he's not meant to. He cannot breathe as she walks towards him, a white cloud in summer.

They enter the chuppah, and her parents step to her left, now one family beneath the families' prayer shawls. Rosa lifts the edge of her skirt from the ground and begins her ritual. For Itzhak's ears only she whispers, 'I circle you seven times, my tall and

handsome Jericho. Smile as I do this, but do not dare to laugh. Listen for the cantor.'

Forcibly, Itzhak swallows his smile. *If I laugh, I laugh for joy. You broke down every defence, each wall and barrier to my heart, long before today, my Rosa. I am a city captive, surrendered to your love.* As she finishes her final circle, he reaches for her fingers.

Together, they face the rabbi, who prompts them in Hebrew, 'Ani l'dodi v'dodi li.'

Itzhak repeats the words to his Rosa. 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.'

She responds, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.'

The rabbi encourages, 'Itzhak, speak to your bride the words that you've chosen.'

'In the words of King Solomon, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away"'

'Now, Rosa,' the rabbi intones, 'speak to Itzhak the words of our mother Ruth.'

Clear and steady, like the deeper, surer strains of the violin, comes Rosa's vow. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me"

Itzhak holds her gaze for a moment, his throat too full to speak, then remembers what he is to do next. He takes the ring from his father and slips it on her finger. 'I give you this ring, my wife, with no adornment, its symbol eternal. And I give you this medallion, for you and for our children's children – the best and greatest hope my heart and hands possess.'

He places his hand on the small of her back and turns his new wife, gently, firmly, as he would in dance. He clasps the slender golden chain around her neck.

She turns to face him once more, taking the medallion in her hand to examine its intricate and delicate filigree. ‘The Tree of Life, Itzhak! I vow, my husband, to wear it always.’

From the wedding of Itzhak and Rosa Dunovich

August 17, 1938

Warsaw, Poland

Chapter One

Warsaw, Poland
September 1939

Plummeting from the ceiling, the library dome's chandelier exploded into a million crystal shards as it crashed to the floor – the floor polished three days before to a high sheen. Sophie Kumiega dived beneath the reading table as the bomb hit, shielding, as best she could, her stack of first editions and the baby in her womb. A second bomb rocked stonework and shattered the floor-to-ceiling window, despite row upon row of cross-hatched tape. Marble busts exploded. Great chunks of plaster crashed to the floor. Acrid flames burst from the shelves.

'Get out! Get out of the building now!' Stefan Gadomski, the library's junior officer, cried.

'Move those books first! We must save the books!' insisted the librarian in charge, shoving a cart at breakneck speed to the far end of the building.

'If we move them, the next bomb is likely to fall there!' Pan Gadomski shouted.

'Then we will move them to the basement,' the librarian shouted back.

Sophie could take no more. She'd worked hard to obtain her position in Warsaw's library – a coup for an English foreigner, a greater coup for a woman. But she would not risk their baby – the baby she and Janek had prayed for, saved for, planned for every day of their married lives. Even now, Janek played cat and mouse in his Polish fighter plane, dodging the Luftwaffe in bomb-bursting skies above. The least she could do was save their unborn child.

She dropped the first editions into their designated crate and had nearly made it to the door when the librarian thundered after her, 'Pani Kumiega, come back! If we lose our library, we lose everything!'

But Sophie didn't turn. She feared she might relinquish her purpose, as crazy as such hesitancy was. She'd always submitted to authority, but not now. Two children had perished within her in two years. This child must live.

Sophie cowered in the shadow of the library door, uncertain which way to turn, to run. Day after day, more of Warsaw was being reduced to a war zone, and still the relentless bombs fell on new targets or punished old. Low-flying Heinkels strafed men, women, children, without mercy, without discrimination.

Finally she dodged between buildings, crouching beneath overhangs and awnings and in the crevices below steps as far and as long as she could. If they could not see her, would she be safe? Which could be worse? To be crushed by a familiar roof or gunned down in the street by German planes? Street after street she alternately crept and ran through the rubble city, praying for the safety of her husband, praying for their baby, praying that their apartment building had not been obliterated. She reached their street and had glimpsed her apartment ahead when a brief whistling came from high overhead, a sudden silence, then a brilliant flash of white light and fire before her, opening a chasm without end.



'Sophia! Dear girl, you must wake up. Please, please, wake up.'

Janek, dearest Janek. Sophie barely heard him through dense fog and a constant rumbling in her ears. She tried to open her eyes, but her lids lay too heavy.

'She's coming round.' Another voice – Pani Lisowski, her neighbour from across the hall, surely.

'Thank God! We thought we'd lost you. I thought ...'

Through slits Sophie did her best to focus, to find her husband's face, but it wasn't there.

'You're alive. That's all that matters.' It was her neighbour, her friend, old Pan Bukowski.

Her heart caught. 'Janek? Am I bleeding? Am I bleeding?' Fear pushed her up.

‘No, no, my dear, lay back – only your forehead and knees.’

‘I’ll find bandages. You musn’t get up, not yet.’ Pani Lisowski again.

‘Your Janek is in the skies, still fighting for us.’ She heard the pride in Pan Bukowski’s voice.

Sophie pushed hair from her forehead; her fingers came away sticky and red. ‘An explosion. I remember an explosion.’

‘The whole street is gone ... rubble.’

‘Our apartment?’

‘The front blown off – open, like a doll’s house,’ Pani Lisowski insisted.

Sophie tried to remember if she’d washed the dishes that morning. What Pani Lisowski must think if she’d left a mess upon the table for all the world to see.

‘Stay here, stay quiet,’ ordered Pan Bukowski. ‘I’m going to get help and then salvage what I can. I’ll come back.’

‘Don’t leave. Don’t leave me, Janek.’ Her mind reached for his coat, but her arms refused to obey.

‘Your Janek will be back before you know it. I won’t be gone long. I promise.’

‘Bring me –’

‘Yes, I’ll bring all I can. Whatever is still there, I will place in your hand.’



When Sophie opened her eyes, she lay on a pallet in a room smelling of smoke and scorched metal, burned paper and wood, smouldering hair. The only light came from a shielded lantern on a small table in the centre of the room. Ash crusted her teeth, her tongue, matted the hair stringing her face. The rumble of explosions came from farther away, as if her hearing had dimmed. A dark form huddled in a chair beside her pallet. It was too slight, too slumped, too round to be Janek.

‘Pan Bukowski?’ she whispered.

The form stirred, sat up, lost its roundness. She heard the vertebrae pop in his neck. ‘Ah, you are awake, Sophia Kumiega.’

‘Pan Gadowski?’ She had not expected her co-worker, but then, the man was also godfather to her Janek.

‘*Tak*, it is I. It’s good to see you in the land of the living. You’ve slept for three days.’

‘What are you doing here? Where am I?’

‘You are in a storeroom in the basement of the library – the safest place I could find at the moment. Though here we’re likely to be buried in all the knowledge of the ages if this bombing continues. Still, that is better than the rubble of the meat market. At least, I like to think so.’

‘But, Pan Bukowski – the last I knew, Pan Bukowski –’

‘The radio reports one hundred people have been killed. You won’t recognize the city. The zoo is a shambles. Zebras, lions, tigers, wallabies – they’re saying all the wilds of Africa, of Australia, of the world have escaped. A pedestrian’s nightmare and a hunter’s holiday.’

‘What? They bombed the zoo?’ It made no sense.

Pan Gadowski shrugged, as if he could read her mind. ‘What of reason is found in this? Jan’s heart must be broken – he’s poured his life into that work – not to mention Antonina’s.’

‘The zookeepers. I know them. Janek and I love to ...’ But she’d heard nothing of Janek since the bombing began. Her eyes must have shown her pleading.

‘We’ve heard only that they’re fighting, called back, regrouping, doing all they can. Janek is a good man, a strong pilot. You must trust that, my dear.’

Sophie swallowed, her throat thick. She knew Pan Gadowski worried for him too. He loved her Janek, almost like a son. She wanted to trust.

‘Mayor Starzyński is pleading with the citizens of Warsaw to dig trenches – there are signs everywhere, calling us to arm ourselves, to cross the Vistula and regroup for a defensive line. Shovels and trenches against German panzers,’ he chided. ‘Still, I must go and help.’

‘Here? Now?’

‘Not yet, but they’re coming, crawling their way across Poland, preceded only by hundreds – thousands – of refugees pouring

into the city. Ironically, they believe themselves safer beneath German bombers than in the countryside. No matter that most of Warsaw is now without running water, many without electricity.' He shook his head. 'All is chaos, but all is not lost ... not as long as Władysław Szpilman continues to play Chopin for Radio Poland.'

'Pan Bukowski?'

Pan Gadomski looked away. 'France and England have declared war on Germany. Between explosions and the rubble of fallen buildings, our citizens rejoice in the streets – they even tossed the French military attaché into the air outside the embassy, all the while singing the *Marseillaise*. Do you know how poorly Poles sing in French? Thank God in heaven, at least we won't be alone now. But we must wait it out. Victory will take time.'

'Pan Gadomski – where is Pan Bukowski?'

A long moment followed. 'He had his son bring you back to the library when you passed out, thinking there might be refuge among the stacks. Apparently your apartment building is no more. I'm sorry.'

'Janek ...' Every picture, every book, every memory of Janek and their life together was in that apartment.

'Your friend sent these for you. There is a photograph of your husband.' Pan Gadomski pointed to two bags. 'After he sent you back, he salvaged all he could for everyone on your floor, before ...'

'Before what?'

Pan Gadomski moistened his lips, hesitating again.

'Where is Pan Bukowski?' Sophie insisted, while her heart quickened.

'I'm sorry to tell you that your friend was hit, strafed by a plane as he left the apartment for the last time. His son was with him, caught him as he fell. He did not suffer long, so the son said. He brought these things for you yesterday.'

'No ... no!' Sophie's heart stopped. It wasn't possible. Pan Bukowski, her friend, her only real friend besides Janek since coming to Poland.

'He said his father's last words were for you. "Tell Sophia to fight, to keep faith." Something about, "Remember the Red Sea".'

The Red Sea ... how Adonai will make a way where there is no way ... It was what he'd always reminded her of when she was tempted to despair.

The tension and the worry, the anguish Sophie had suppressed ever since Janek left for the battle, ever since the first bombs fell on an unbelieving Warsaw, finally ruptured in her chest. The cry came first as gasping breaths, then deep heaves, bursting from a place she'd known only in the losing of her babies – primitive, naked keening.

Pan Gadowski slipped from the room as the storm played out.



When Sophie woke again, the lantern still burned, casting weird shadows on the wall. There was a small loaf of bread and some cheese on the floor beside her pallet, and a cup of water. The smells of burned clothing and hair were still there, but the silence was new. She heard only her own breathing ... slow, fluid.

And then she remembered. Pan Bukowski. Silent tears escaped her eyes, rivuleting her sooted cheeks, dripping down her neck. She swiped them away and sat up, her swallow painful. Had he been hit while saving her treasures? Nothing she owned was worth that.

Sophie had no idea of the day or the time. She must be in an inner room – no windows. No wonder the bombing had sounded far away. Now she heard no bombing. Whatever that meant, it was a relief.

A cramping in her belly brought her wider awake. She felt for the mound of her baby and breathed, relieved again.

She must get up, must find the bathroom, must eat something. But when she pushed back the blanket, her pallet was covered in blood.