



# Hana

## Alena Mornštrajnová

We were by now students at the secondary school, and still best friends. We both knew now what it meant to be a Jew but neither of us thought it was important.

Although the recent war was still vivid in people's memories, people were not keen to recall the past. And while fallen resistance fighters, partisan commanders and their helpers were being commemorated and fresh monuments to the Soviet liberators were being unveiled on every anniversary, there was never any mention of where Grandma Elsa had disappeared and what Aunt Hana had been through. As I pieced together a picture of what had happened from various scraps and snippets, I began to gain some appreciation of the horrors that had been branded onto Aunt Hana's wrist along with the number, leaving her unable to live and reducing her to a mere shadow. I understood why she always kept a slice of bread in her pocket and turned away whenever she saw a uniform in the streets. And I realized why in the first year of living with her, I once caught her burning my striped pyjamas in the kitchen stove. "I left it to be washed, not burned," I yelled but all that was left of the pyjamas were the scorched buttons. "You don't understand! These are the pyjamas my mum bought me!" Tears of rage welled up in my eyes. My aunt said nothing to defend herself, and that annoyed me even more. "Why won't you answer me?"

Hana frowned and slowly opened her mouth to reply but no sound came out. She opened her toothless mouth a few more times, like a carp out of water. Her lifeless eyes started rolling around strangely and on that occasion I was the one who ran out of the kitchen. The look on her face told me that my aunt was right and I was wrong, and I felt guilty.

