



The Borrowed House

Hilda van Stockum

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During World War II a young German girl, who has been indoctrinated into the Hitler Youth, travels to occupied Amsterdam to rejoin her parents then comes to realize the truth about the war.

"So, you're falsifying papers?" said Janna. "You belong to the Dutch Resistance." She looked at him curiously.

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "You could call it that. I'm just helping the van Arkels rescue innocent people from certain death. They need these identification papers and food cards to keep alive. If you betray me, all these people will either starve or be forced to give themselves up to be sent to the gas chambers of a concentration camp."

"Gas chambers?" Janna looked at the boy with horror. "You mean ... they are killed?"

The boy looked sternly at her. "Do you think," he said, "that Germany is sending Jews to a nice vacation spa, or to pretty villages with geraniums in the windows? That's what they told us at first, though in Holland we never believed it."

The Borrowed House Details

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From Reader Review The Borrowed House for online ebook

Luisa Knight says

3.5 Stars

Review and Cleanliness Report coming soon.

Erin Pierce says

This was really a very good read. However, to me, the ending seemed to lack closure. I would have liked to know what happened to Sef, Mina, and the Van Arkels, not just Janna and her family.

R.J. Rodda says

This is a great book. I read it when I was young, and have reread it several times since. Really eye opening about life for a young girl during the war. A beautiful friendship story.

AlixJamie says

I loved the snappy characters, engaging dialogue, and well-paced action and suspense of this novel. It also gave an interesting view on Hitler's side of WW2. Since the main character is one of the brainwashed children the things she says really open up your eyes to what they were being convinced was right and true. Highly recommended!

Katie Hanna says

Mixed emotions. ALL THE MIXED EMOTIONS.

Guys, I'm not really sure what to think about this book. It wasn't a bad book. It was really a good book, as books go . . . But here's the thing: It could have been better. It could have been SO MUCH BETTER. And it wasn't.

The whole premise--having the narrator be a young Hitler Youth girl who whole-heartedly believes the Nazis' lies because they're all she's ever known--that was a fantastic, awesome idea. And the main character herself, Janna--she's really strong and vibrant and life-like. You hate her for some of the stuff she says and does, especially at the beginning of the book; but when she starts realizing that all the adults she trusts have been lying to her for years and years . . . and embarks on her own hunt for the real truth about Hitler . . . you're cheering her on the entire time. I loved Janna, I really did. AND YET. Her story could have been so much MORE powerful if it wasn't mostly "told" instead of "shown." The writing is kind of flat, in other words; detached, rather than immediate and urgent. A ton of stuff happens in this book, stuff that should be super-gripping and exciting . . . but it's not, because you don't really FEEL it the way you're supposed to. It

never quite becomes real in your mind.

I don't know why this particular novel was like that--I mean, I've read other books by Hilda van Stockum that were much, much more vivid. "The Winged Watchman," for example (which I would highly recommend) and "The Cottage at Bantry Bay." I guess this one just isn't quite up to standard. I was disappointed by it, because I usually expect much more from Hilda van Stockum; but I still enjoyed reading it.

Also . . . I ship Janna and Sef. A lot. :-)

Audrey says

Hilda van Stockum is an amazing writer. I'm not sure why her books aren't better known. As both a child and an "adult", she is one of my favorite authors. I absolutely LOVED this book. I'd read it before, but it was a long time ago so the story was mostly fresh to me. I love how Janna's world view evolved as she learned more about what is really going on. I greatly enjoyed the characterizations of Hugo (his lectures were brilliant; I could've read a book just of them), Mina (how she kept spouting Bible passages) and Sef. I kind of wish there was a sequel to find out what happened after the war with Sef and Janna (hopefully they made it through all right). I also would've loved to learn more about the Baron, and the Junker class in general. I thought his character was really complex and interesting, though I understand Janna's contempt towards him. I admit that when I first read this book (when I was a lot younger) the fact that her mother was having an affair (though *SPOILER* it was never fully realized) kind of went over my head. I never really understood Herr Oster; I think he was basically a good guy but just in denial about what his country is doing. I hope that with the help of his wife and daughter he eventually wakes up to the truth. First Narnia, now this--I think I've come to the conclusion that I need to get a wardrobe and then play hide-and-seek in it. I cried at the part where Janna gets that dream about all the stars. So moving. I thought the inter-weaving of the Norse fairy tale was really brilliant, especially how it kind of comes alive for Janna when she finds the ring. Oh, and one question: in the last scene, if it was raining wouldn't that put out the fire? Okay, to summarize: this is one of the best books I've ever read. I **highly** recommend it.

[added Oct. 7] One passage in particular from this book has really stuck with me, and I think it summarizes what the heart of this story is about:

"It is much easier to believe lies than the truth."

"Why?" asked Janna.

"Because lies are manufactured to satisfy the emotions. A mother would rather believe her pretty girl lazy than accept the fact that she's a dumb cluck. Germans would rather believe they were stabbed in the back than that they lost a fair fight. And anyone would rather blame someone else for his misfortunes. The truth is hard. Don't fool with it unless you realize that."

(p. 114)

Julia says

The Borrowed House by Hilda Van Stockum

Is a wonderful book that I think everyone should be able to read . It's about a girl who is a Hitler youth and through some friends (who aren't German) she learns what Hitler is really like. I read it about 3 times. I

couldn't put it down!!

Jaye says

This is a really well-written book which contains so many elements attractive to the middle-school and up reader; history, mystery, romance, conflict.

The main character really begins to come of age in the book, as she learns to see for herself what life is like in her time and place.

I really like that the romance in the novel is chaste and that there is ultimately respect for the value of marriage.

Steph (loves water) says

Finally Finally Finally found the name of this book, I read it in sixth grade and LOVED it! I'm sure this book came out far before 2000, I read it in the 70s.

John Tepper Marlin says

This story is about a young German girl experiencing occupied Holland as an occupier. It is based on a true story and opens realistically with the girl (Janna) for several pages soaking up German legends as part of Hitler Youth. It can be viewed as a sequel to *The Winged Watchman*, which is about two boys in rural Holland in World War joining the Resistance. *The Winged Watchman* has been praised for its handling of evil in a wholesome way, and is therefore appropriate for younger children in the fourth or fifth grade. Some families might not be ready to read out *The Borrowed House* until at least the sixth grade.

Lisa Blair says

Hilda van Stockum does an amazing job highlighting Hitler's propaganda in comparison with the reality of everyday life.

Seen through the eyes of young Janna who leaves Germany and the propaganda of Hitler's Youth to live with her parents in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, Janna comes face-to-face with Hitler's embellishments, real Dutch resisters, real Jews and her own families opinions and wrongdoings.

Done through the eyes of a youth, this book is appropriate for young people. It shows the wrestling of a young heart for truth. And truth wins.

Melissa says

This author is so wonderful, and this is another book of hers that I love. It's written from a very interesting point of view. A young German girl is in the Hitler Youth Organization as she faces the tragedy of World War II.

Rachel says

This book was really good. It centers around a young German girl named Janna. She starts out in a small village in Germany until she is summoned to the Netherlands to where her actor father and actress mother are currently performing. Upon arriving she is dealing with missing her home in Germany and her friends; in the Netherlands she deals with confronting the way Germans are perceived outside Germany. Janna has to come to learn about life and make some tough decisions. She needs to decide if the truths she learned growing up in Nazi Germany are actually true. She experiences and learns things that challenge her belief system which makes her question what Hitler, her teachers, and even her parents might tell her.

This book is written by a Dutch woman who does a great job of portraying a young German girl on the cusp of adulthood trying to figure out where the truth lies in this crazy world.

It is a children's book but very good. Can be a quick read. Will be worth your time.

One thing I will say. I wish it had an epilogue. This is one of those stories where I added on my own ending! It was good it just needed a little more to show us after the war how everyone fared! Especially the Van Arkel family whom we never meet but are central to the story since it is set in their house.

Julie says

3 1/2 stars

The Borrowed House is a coming of age story that deals with the horrors of WWII in a gentle enough way to make this a good introduction for younger readers. As Janna and her family move to Holland and occupy the home of residents that were forced out to make room for German citizens, Janna begins to learn the truth behind the war through various relationships and encounters including a friendship with a Jewish boy who lives in hiding in the house. The transformation of the main character, from a product of the Nazi propaganda machine, to a freethinking, compassionate individual was believable and well portrayed.

Starry says

Like the Winged Watchman, this story by Hilda Van Stockum tells a great story and is under-recognized. These two books share a time and place: the Netherlands during Nazi occupation. The author captures the hardships of hunger, of fear, of extreme danger to Jewish residents and the Dutch underground of resistance fighters. Both books are told from a child's point of view. The difference is that this book is narrated by a young German girl thoroughly indoctrinated by the Hitler Youth propaganda in her hometown before joining her actor parents in Amsterdam, where they live in a fancy house requisitioned by the German government.

Janna, the 12-year-old narrator slowly begins to see the lies that have been forced on her and learns the truth through the people she meets and events she witnesses. And then she has to make her own decisions about

what is right and where her loyalties should lie and what she needs to do to be heroic.

This book is well-written in terms of literary style (the story parallels Wagner's Ring Cycle, in which Janna's parents are acting) and in terms of pacing (both emotion and action). As I read it, I kept wondering why this book isn't better known and celebrated. Then I found out why: toward the end, the book is hard-hitting in religious language, which makes people queasy these days in juvenile fiction. I thought it was lovely though over-simplified. Besides, if we can deal with violence and sex in modern young adult fiction, why not religion?

I would recommend this for young adults (over age 11) due to some violence and Janna's concern that her mother might be having an affair (she's not).
