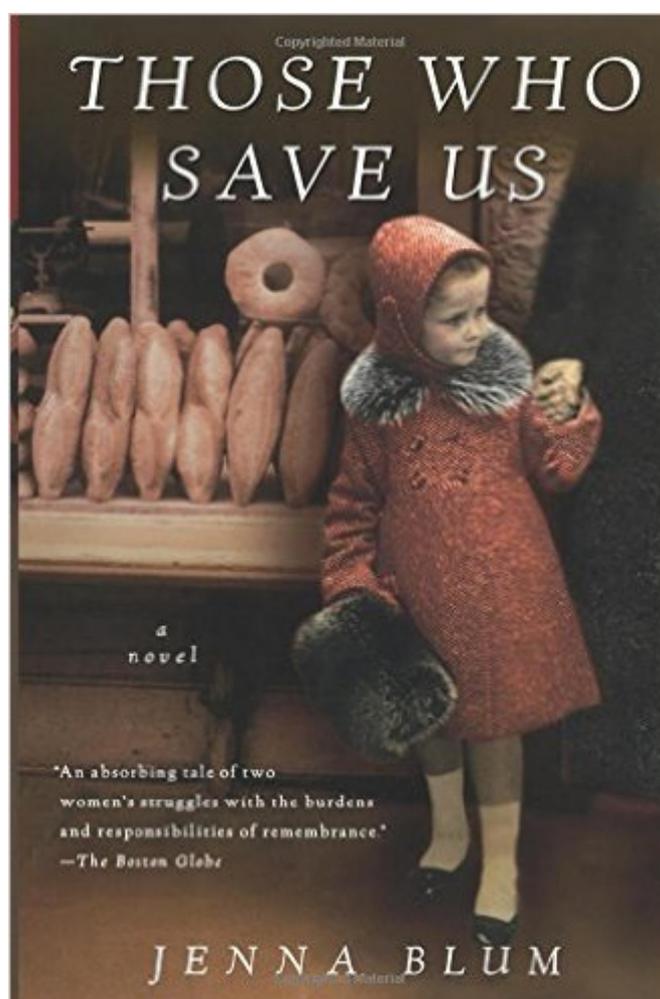


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Those Who Save Us



Synopsis

For fifty years, Anna Schlemmer has refused to talk about her life in Germany during World War II. Her daughter, Trudy, was only three when she and her mother were liberated by an American soldier and went to live with him in Minnesota. Trudy's sole evidence of the past is an old photograph: a family portrait showing Anna, Trudy, and a Nazi officer, the Obersturmführer of Buchenwald. Driven by the guilt of her heritage, Trudy, now a professor of German history, begins investigating the past and finally unearths the dramatic and heartbreaking truth of her mother's life. Combining a passionate, doomed love story, a vivid evocation of life during the war, and a poignant mother/daughter drama, *Those Who Save Us* is a profound exploration of what we endure to survive and the legacy of shame.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"*Those Who Save Us*," Jenna Blum's courageous and chastening debut novel, investigates two themes that are at once profoundly historical and deeply personal. With elegant, fast-paced prose, Blum narrates a story that reveals the enduring impact of the Holocaust while bravely exploring the intergenerational transmission of trauma. The two damaged women who are the focus of the novel, a mother permanently ruined by the course of actions she pursued during the Holocaust and her daughter, ravaged by a sense of incomplete identity and derivative pain, travel eerily parallel paths. Both struggle with identity, grapple with ethics and lead isolated, unfulfilled lives. One willingly needs to obliterate the past; the other desperately requires the past in order to form a coherent sense of her present self. This triumphant novel enables the reader to see the world through both

protagonists' eyes, to suffer their pain and to ask existential questions the answers to which may only result in more suffering. The daughter of an officious, sycophantic lower-level Nazi lawyer, Anna Schlemmer violates the Reich's prohibitions against carnal relationships with Jews. The resulting pregnancy and her father's subsequent repudiation, occurring at the onset of World War II, force Anna to find a means of survival. Anna's decisions, and the long-term reverberations those choices engendered, compose one of the two interwoven strands of the novel. From her decision to involve herself in the resistance to her wrenching degradation at the hands of an SS officer, Anna's focus narrows. Despite a near complete loss of self-respect, she keeps her cherished daughter alive.

Review of *THOSE WHO SAVE US*, by Jenna Blum It's been quite some time since I've read a novel that I had difficulty putting down, and I read a lot of contemporary fiction. Perhaps the toughest criticism Jenna Blum will face is that her readers will complain they couldn't get anything else done until the book was finished. Of course, the story is compelling all on its own--the German/German-American take on Nazi brutality and the whole experience of guilt and shame as survivors in their own right--BUT, there are many compelling stories and not all of them make a reader hunger for the next intelligent, unusual turn of phrase. The experience of reading such rich, vivid language--words that have the power to create a certain tangibility in place and character--is what distinguishes her novel from others I might also say are "page-turners." The prose is lush, here, palpable in a way that brought me inside each and every scene. Given her topic, readers will do a significant amount of hand-wringing until the last page is turned (crying, gasping, cringing at the brutality). There's Horst's sexual shenanigans and then the violence aimed at children (Rainer's brother's murder and Trudy's German subject with the eye patch). Within my Jewish community I know many, many Holocaust survivors, their children and also their grandchildren; while all support the idea of keeping this kind of history alive through well-researched fiction and non-fiction, some shy away from actually reading about such things (too painful, especially for those who survived the conflagration themselves or who, like my husband, listened to parents crying out in their sleep with nightmares).

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