

The Orphan's Tale

Author Pam Jenoff has written a wonderful fictional story inspired by true historical facts about a traveling circus in Europe during World War II. It is a story about friendship, survival, bravery, secrets and sacrifices that the characters in the story endured during the time of the Holocaust.

The story is told in alternating chapters by two circus performers, Astrid and Noa. Noa is a young Dutch girl who was kicked out by her parents when they found out she became pregnant by a Nazi soldier. The orphanage where she stays takes the baby as soon as it is born. She runs away and finds work cleaning at a train station. One day in the middle of the cold winter she discovers a boxcar full of Jewish infants. Noa reaches for the baby boy closest to her and one that is still alive and she runs away with him. Almost froze to death she is rescued by a member of a nearby traveling circus. She and the baby, whom she names Theo and claims he is her brother, are allowed to stay. In exchange she must train and perform as a trapeze artist and is assigned to train with a girl named Astrid.

Astrid was Jewish and grew up in the circus that her family owned and operated all over Europe. She was married to a German soldier and lived in Berlin. One day her husband told her to leave since the Nazis did not allow Germans to be married to Jews. Astrid had no place to go because while she was in Berlin, her Jewish family had disappeared. The owner of a competing circus gave her a job as one of the leading acts on the trapeze and hid her from the Germans, changing her name to Astrid.

While Astrid is assigned to train Noa as an aerialist they learn to see past their differences and almost become like sisters. Though each has secrets reluctant to reveal to the other, they are there for one another when they are in danger.

I enjoyed the dueling narration that the author chose between Noa and Astrid and the Author's notes were also very helpful. Pam Jenoff was a diplomat for the State Department covering Holocaust issues in Poland. She found the stories about the *Unknown Children*, babies ripped from their parents, in the archives of the Jewish Holocaust Museum in Yad Vashem. In the archives she also found the facts about traveling circuses harboring Jews. These circus owners were in constant danger of being searched and arrested.

I kind of place *The Orphan's Tale* as a combination of the books, *The Nightingale* and *Water for Elephants*. But you, the reader, can be the judge. You will find this book in our Adult Fiction section of the library

Happy Reading!

Hella