Clarion Review

General

Hermann's Ruhe
Karin Harrison
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

“I don’t know about you sometimes. You have gotten very hard,” Rosa Schmidt tells her daughter Helen when an American Army officer wants to rent the family’s cottage, which is named Hermann’s Ruhe.

With her husband Fritz off to war, Helen must protect their three children as they try to survive the horrors of World War II and the early days of the Allied occupation.

Karin Harrison’s novel begins in Wildenheim, Germany, in the spring of 1945, as the family once again rushes to the bomb shelter to escape an air raid. Helen’s parents, Hermann and Rosa, share an apartment with her and the three children. Paul is fourteen years old, Bessie is nine, and Anne is four. Together, this multigenerational family must cope with the harsh living conditions and near starvation brought on by years of war. The family’s wholesale textile business has long ago been destroyed.

Even though they are required to hang a photo of Adolph Hitler in their home, they risk their lives by their refusal to openly support him.

As the Allied troops march closer to Wildenheim, Hermann announces that they must flee their home for Hermann’s Ruhe (ruhe means quietude). The small, rustic cottage in the mountains above Wildenheim was built as a family haven. During the next week, they look down on the valley and watch the invasion. When their city falls, Hermann says they must leave the cottage. They head to the tiny town of Wasserdorf and spend the next seven days in the local schoolhouse with all of the village’s residents.

When the family receives news that the war has ended, they decide to return to their home. There, they face near starvation and untold hardships as war-torn Germany is slowly occupied by Allied troops.

Throughout the story readers witness the growth, strength, and courage of each family

member. Helen, for example, experiences fear, anger, resentment, and hatred even as the American troops show kindness and fairness. Her journey to forgiveness is often slowed by her strong maternal instincts. During it all, she longs for word from her husband.

Harrison writes with an understanding of the human heart. Her characters come to life as their future is challenged. *Hermann's Ruhe* is filled with the details of a life that most readers will find unimaginable: "She scraped together meals from the most bizarre sources for her family. Rosa was an expert on botany and herbage and made daily excursions into the nearby forest, which yielded mushrooms, berries, nuts, and all kinds of odd-shaped plants that were cooked into soups and stews."

Harrison has created a fictional story that chronicles the real-life misery heaped upon ordinary people when war destroys the necessities of life and all that people hold dear. She presents a view of the unspoken heroes who survive through extraordinary courage and hope.

Pat McGrath Avery