

The Dark Tunnel: A Tale of Childhood, Passion and War

Patrick Henderson

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This lyrical tale is a satisfying glimpse into Europe between the wars and the enduring bonds of family.

Patrick Henderson's *The Dark Tunnel* is the epic, heartwarming, and heartrending story of three cousins whose bonds are strained to the breaking point by the horrors of World War II.

Robert Rutherford is a dreamy and sensitive boy growing up in idyllic upper-class English splendor after World War I. He lives for the long summer holidays with his grandparents in Holland, where he can be his true self with his German cousin, Karl, and their cousin Lisa. Swimming, roughhousing, and hijinks fill their long summer days. They are as bonded as siblings, despite living in three separate countries. But Robert's father, General John Rutherford, doesn't understand him as well as his cousins do. Robert longs to make his father proud but can't rid himself of the feeling that deep down, especially compared to his war hero father, he is a coward.

When World War II dawns, it tears the three branches of the family apart. Lisa and Karl's belief in Robert's courage and remembrance of their shared childhood gives Robert the strength to complete a dangerous mission deep into enemy-held lands that only he can complete. That mission takes him back to his grandparents' home. When the three cousins are once again united at the summer sanctuary of their youth, they must struggle to survive the betrayal that war demands of them.

Main characters have depth and dimension, and their personalities move the story along. Young characters grow and mature, each presenting realistic versions of coming-of-age stories. While the three cousins and their relationships are the primary focus of the story, the subplot of Robert and John struggling to communicate in their father and son roles also plays a key part and is highly sympathetic. The first section of the book describes the beginning of those relationships that will affect Robert as he grows into manhood, providing insight into later character development. A few of the characters ring too good to be true, especially Robert's mother, Elizabeth. Her role appears to be the nurturing mother and always understanding wife, more of an archetype than a flesh-and-blood character.

The narrative is well paced and progresses smoothly through the time period. Leaps in time are handled efficiently, with the prose remaining respectful of the period and its norms. The dialogue flows between characters with authenticity, though it's a bit formal. World events are integrated thoughtfully, including the rise of Hitler and its effects on families that do not agree with Hitler's agenda. The falling action and the resolution feel rushed, though they remain true to the arc of the story.

A lyrical tale of coming of age during World War II, *The Dark Tunnel* is a satisfying glimpse into Europe between the wars and the enduring bonds of family.

KELLY DEPIN (September 7, 2016)

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