



The German Boy

Tricia Wastvedt , Patricia Wastvedt

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A moving, inter-war family saga The German Boy from Patricia Wastvedt, the Orange Prize Longlisted author of The River. In 1947, Elisabeth Mander's German nephew comes to stay: Stefan Landau, her dead sister's teenage son, whom she hates and loves before she's even set eyes on him. Orphaned by the war and traumatised by the last, vicious battles of the Hitler Youth, Stefan brings with him to England only a few meagre possessions. Among them a portrait of a girl with long copper hair by a young painter called Michael Ross - and with it the memory, both painful and precious, of her life and that time between the wars. Spanning decades and generations, The German Boy tells the moving story of two families entangled by love and friendship, divided by prejudice and war, and of a brief encounter between a woman and a man that touched each of their lives forever. 'An absorbing literary saga ... a sophisticated and subtly woven story' Daily Mail 'Hypnotic, atmospheric and exquisitely written. A novel I won't forget' Lucinda Riley, author of Hothouse Flower 'A love story at its centre which will make your heart ache' Julia Green, author of Blue Moon 'A heart-rending story of epic proportions, thrilling and utterly captivating. I am haunted by it still' Suzannah Dunn, author of The Confession of Katherine Howard Born in 1954, Patricia Wastvedt grew up in Blackheath, south London, and spent her summers in Kent. She has a degree in Creative Arts and an MA in Creative Writing, and her first novel, The River, written in her late forties, was long-listed for the Orange Prize. She teaches at Bath Spa University, and is also a manuscript editor. She lives and writes in a cottage in Somerset.

The German Boy Details

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Paula R says

This is not so much about the German boy as a story about his mother, her sister and the man who complicates things.

Set in the years between the two world wars there are familiar themes in particular with the prejudice shown towards the Jewish artist. In those days it was not uncommon for people to have ideas we would find shocking and intolerable now. Such is progress.

With the premise that the story is about this boy, sent to live with his aunt's family in the aftermath of World War II it is somewhat jarring to suddenly realise that the majority of the book is back story. Instead of an insight into how a boy, raised in what was a truly oppressive and frightening society, adapts we have the history of what happened between three people.

I do think a fascinating tale has been missed as the German boy is sidelined in favour of the others.

David Lowther says

The problem with long drawn-out sagas is that they must be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. A German Boy wasn't.

After sorting out who was who in the opening pages, the story caught hold and kept you gripped until the conclusion. As befits a 20s - 40s set saga, it was written in an old fashioned style, rather like the novels of RD Delderfield all those years ago. This was exactly the right style of prose to use and it made for an enthralling read. There was a hint of sadness on every page and a whiff of tragedy just around the corner. The locations, especially those in Kent, were very convincing and all of the characters were credible. The picture painted of late 20s Munich, birthplace of the National Socialist movement, was chilling. I wish I found the ending more compelling. Of course, every story doesn't have to end happily but I do like loose ends tied up. The failure to do this was A German Boy's one shortcoming.

David Lowther. Author of The Blue Pencil (www.thebluepencil.co.uk)

Alexandra says

The story was a good one...but the ending could have been stronger...and I wish the author had chosen to focus more on Stefan rather than the earlier generations of the family, but it was still an okay read...

Susanna Walsh says

Got this on a \$1 cart at a used bookstore. I normally return those books to the wild after reading (to a Free Little Library or a friend) but I'm holding onto this one. It's one of the most empathetic books I've ever read. It draws you into the characters, pulls back the curtains and helps you understand all of them. It's a unique take on a post-WW2 novel and a moving read.

Tracy Terry says

Such a disappointment, here I was expecting a story that was largely about Stefan Landau, The German Boy of the title, when what I actually got was largely the story of Michael Ross and the two women, sisters Elizabeth and Karen, with whom his life became so entwined.

Concentrating on life between the wars and beyond, potentially this was a very good novel, the passages about the events leading up Kristallnacht (Night Of Broken Glass) being beautifully written and so poignant, it was just a shame that there were so many strands to the story.

Jumping from one incident to another, I confess that at times I did get lost off, something that wasn't helped by the numerous cast of characters, some of whom, not unlike Stefan, seemed to play no real part, their stories left unresolved.

DISCLAIMER: Read and reviewed on behalf of NEWBOOKS MAGAZINE, I was merely asked for my honest opinion, no financial compensation was asked for nor given.

Jeffrey says

Dear Reader, well,

This should be a Booker Prize level 5 star book...it isn't and you'll want to scream at a missed opportunity...or may not get to the end.

The story of two sister in rivalry over a Jewish lover is terrific and that alone would have made this a great read. There are points when it is utterly gripping (the race over the sands)and we are so engaged with our two sisters. The parts in Germany are also very well done.

It is beautifully written, way above average and the writer has a great gift that should place her in the top of her field...lyrical writing...but...

Backstory and more backstory...the sandcastles episode made me scream as what was the point? Just when we are gripped...back we go again.

Way too many points of view that add nothing to the story.

It isn't really about a German Boy...

A frustrating waste. I turned over page affter page with hisses of 'just get on with the damned story.'

Ellen says

I only gave it a 2/5 for a number of reasons. I felt there was hardly any plotline and, if I was frank, by the end I didn't care what happened to any of the characters. The story went back and forward in time, the earliest being 1927 and the latest 1947, that's a WHOLE 20 years of story. The majority of the 1920's in the story was backstory, which was interesting in one aspect as we got to know the character a bit more, but did we really need to know about Lydia in 1881? Personally I found it irrelevant to the story (even though I did like

the character Lydia.)

There were lots of stuff that bugged me about this book, which I have touched on a few above, but there was some stuff I did like. Although I found the book hard, It was well written and I liked the detail she used to try and involve you into the characters lifestyle. Also I liked how she used the majority of characters POV's so you could see what they felt at certain points of the novel.

If you like books by Lyn Andrews and authors like her, I can see you liking this book but it just wasn't for me.

Meinwen says

Enjoyed story but felt kept skipping over events.

Dawn Folley says

This is a difficult one. Whilst the prose is complex and beautiful, the multi voice of the book overcomplicates the narrative structure. The brittle nature of many of the central characters and their faithlessness rendered them unsympathetic. I found myself not caring about the characters, for me, always a sticking point.

Maddie says

I was conflicted by this novel. I don't mind so much that it's not really about the titular character, but after all of the build up and tension, it felt that it came to an abrupt - and dissatisfying - conclusion.

In terms of strengths, I felt that most of the characters were beautifully drawn. They were complex, flawed and fleshed out. They were all so sad; melancholy wove them together as much as lies kept them apart. The settings were rich and visual, and the time period was almost tactile, such was its vibrancy.

That said, I feel as though the author got to a point where she was approaching her word count, or something, because it finishes abruptly. I have issues with a few things, spoilers to follow:

1. Where did Stefan go? He didn't appear to have gone back to Germany; he was clearly suffering from PTSD and had no money or contacts. Are we to assume a violent end for him too?
2. Did Stefan know that the man he shot and killed was Michael Ross? Or did he just think it was an accident with a kind stranger?
3. I am disappointed at the absolute lack of resolution between Michael and Elisabeth. There was just... nothing. Not in a bittersweet way, either.
4. Karen. We get hints from Gerda about her demise, but after being shown so much detail of her life and manipulations, her death is just something that happens, without being made as real as, say, the moment when Hede finds the rifle, or her stay in the hotel. Also, Karen had the opportunity to tell Elisabeth so much, and she never, ever did! Why?!

5. Did anyone find Michael? Or did he just fade away in the studio and be lost to them all, forever?

I am frustrated with how so much seemed to have a beginning and a middle, but the ends seemed rushed. She could have still given a sense of life continuing for the surviving characters while providing a sense of closure and resolution. I'm disappointed by the promise - half way through, I thought I was going to be moved by this novel, but I was just... not.

Josie says

While I read this quickly, and found most of it interesting, the ending was VERY unsatisfactory (so many things left unresolved), and, as other reviewers have pointed out, it really wasn't about the German boy at all. It was also a little bit plotless and meandering, as we jump from one character's life to another, as well as forward and back in time. It was written well however, and the characters well-drawn - all except for Karen, who I found changed too drastically from a very independent, bold, free-spoken single woman, into a weak-willed, gullible and needy wife, and then a strange Jew-hating matron.

Ro Hart says

This is a stunning read. I hated finishing it!
Highly recommended!!!!

Marina says

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Jane says

The story begins with the German boy.

He arrives in Britain, an orphan clad in a tattered Hitler Youth uniform, terribly traumatised by what he has seen and what he has had to do to survive.

His mother had been English, and his German father had risen high in the Nazi party.

Now he is to live with his Aunt Elizabeth and her family.

The opening pictures paint pictures of Stefan's arrival, and his new family's reaction. It is very well done, beautifully written and picking up just the right details.

Elizabeth is apprehensive, and not just for the expected reasons. Stefan's arrival stirs painful memories.

And so the story moves away from the German boy and into the past.

The lives of two young sisters, Elisabeth and Karen, their half-Jewish friend, Rachel, and her brother Michael were twisted together.

In their stories, themes of love, passion, sisterhood, friendship, loneliness, compromise, are all explored with intelligence and understanding.

And those stories are set in a changing world, moving through the aftermath of the First World War, to bohemian life in twenties London, to family lives in the thirties, to the rise of Nazism in the thirties, to the Second World War and beyond.

The scope is quite wonderful, but it is the lives that are important. Ordinary loves lived in extraordinary times.

So many things were right.

There were perfectly drawn characters that evolved as the story advanced. I understood their feelings, their actions, their relationships.

So many places came to life, and the period was perfectly evoked.

The prose, the storytelling, the telling details everything was there.

And yet I could not quite love The German Boy.

Because that boy in the title wasn't there. I wanted to understand the boy I met at the very beginning of the story. I wanted to know how he would grow, what would happen to him.

In the end there were some answers. But Stefan's story was compromised, playing second fiddle to the story that came before.

And then he disappeared, his story unresolved.

I might have liked this book more if it had been explained – and titled – differently.

As the story of a group of family and friends it was of the highest quality.

But I had been led to expect something different, something a little less usual ...

B says

The German Boy was a beautiful novel. It started off quite slow but, and the ending did irritate me a little. But all in all I did enjoy it.
