

Book of the Week

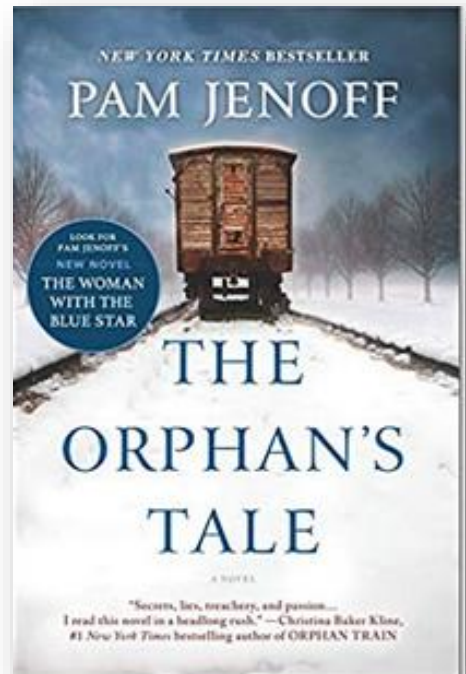
***The Orphan's Tale* by Pam Jenoff**

Book Review by Connie Forde

The World War II genre is popular genre today with many stories published that easily would have been forgotten. *Churchill's Secretary* by Susan Elia MacNeal was my first WWII I book; I found this gem among the donated books at the Friends of the Starkville Library. Through MacNeal's series, I have followed Maggie Hope from being a secretary to a math tutor to Elizabeth and Margaret, to a spy in Paris, to a confidant to Mrs. Roosevelt, and more.

The Orphan's Tale by Pam Jenoff is my most recent World War II read. One of the main characters is Noa, a 16-year-old girl originally from Holland, who after becoming pregnant by a German soldier is thrown out by her parents. Once her baby boy is born, he is taken from her and placed in the Lebensborn Program. So alone and so young, Noa's story continues with her cleaning at a German train station in exchange for a little food and a place to live. Her fate changes when on her break she finds a train car filled with Jewish babies—most are already dead from exposure to the freezing environment and having no clothes or blankets. Noa hears one small cry and sees little arms moving. Not thinking of what she will do with the baby, she rescues the baby from the pile and sneaks him back to the train station.

The second main character is Ingrid, a Jewish woman, who married a German officer before the war and moved to Germany to live the life of an officer's wife. When her husband is forced to divorce her because she is Jewish, she flees back home to her parents who own a Jewish circus. When she arrives, there is no sign of her parents or the circus. To learn news of her parents, she goes to Herr Neuhoff, the owner of the German circus who has always been the fierce competitor of her parents' circus. Ingrid is a very talented aerialist, so Neuhoff offers to hide her in the circus as she works for him as an aerialist. Her name is changed to Astrid, and she quickly regains her aerialist skills.



Peter, the circus clown and Astrid's lover, finds Noa and Theo (the baby from the train) almost frozen in the snow as they escaped the Germans who are searching for the baby. Noa can join the circus if she agrees to train with Astrid as an aerialist. In the beginning, Noa and Astrid are enemies; however, circumstances change, the mutual love of Theo grows, and friendship flourishes.

Reading of the experiences of these two courageous women was both heartbreaking and inspiring. At times, I thought of them as orphans. The story ends with one of these brave women returning to the circus exhibition commemorating two hundred years of circus magic. Her children join her there to bring her back home and to learn the final puzzle piece she has kept from them.

The book was especially interesting to read about the life of a circus. Last year I had the unique opportunity to tour the Ringling Museum of the American Circus (<https://www.ringling.org/circus-museum>) in Sarasota, Florida. In the museum is the Howard Bros. Circus Model, a 44,000-piece recreation of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey® Circus combined shows from 1919-1938. Having seen this circus model, I could easily picture Astrid and Noa working, living, and hiding in this setting.

The Orphan's Tale characterizes two very brave women, friendships, heartache, loneliness, fear, secrets, courage, love, passion, and perseverance. The book starts with a cold train with a little baby left surely to die, but that is only the beginning. Read the book to learn the rest of the story about Theo.

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