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Shadows of Berlin

by David R. Gillham



About the Book

A captivating novel of a Berlin girl on the run from the guilt of her past and the boy from Brooklyn who loves her.

1955 in New York City: the city of instant coffee, bagels at Katz's Deli, new-fangled TVs. But in the Perlmans' walk-up in Chelsea, the past is as close as the present. Rachel came to Manhattan in a wave of displaced Jews who managed to survive the horrors of war. Her Uncle Fritz fleeing with her, Rachel hoped to find freedom from her pain in New York and in the arms of her new American husband, Aaron.

But this child of Berlin and daughter of an artist cannot seem to outrun her guilt in the role of American housewife, not until she can shed the ghosts of her past. And when Uncle Fritz discovers, in a dreary midtown pawn shop, the most shocking portrait that her mother had ever painted, Rachel's memories begin to terrorize her, forcing her to face the choices she made to stay alive --- choices that might be her undoing.

From the cafés of war-torn Germany to the frantic drumbeat of 1950s Manhattan, SHADOWS OF BERLIN dramatically explores survival, redemption, and the way we learn to love and forgive across impossible divides.

Discussion Guide

1. Aaron is extremely impatient for children. Why is Rachel reluctant to start a family? Does Aaron respect her reasoning?

2. Rachel?s uncle, Feter Fritz, is an important character in Rachel?s life. Yet he is often manipulative and self-serving in his behavior toward her. Why do you think she puts up with him and continues to go out of her way to maintain his affections?

3. In many ways, Rachel resists thinking of herself as traumatized. What prevents her from feeling ?worthy? of her struggles with mental health?

4. Characterize the Red Angel. Did your opinion of Angelika change as you learned more of her story? In Rachel?s position, would you have accepted her help in New York City 10 years after the end of the war?

5. What does Aaron expect Rachel to get from her appointments with her therapist? What does she actually achieve through therapy?

6. What is the root of the rivalry between Aaron and his cousin, Ezra? What does the character of their rivalry say about Aaron? How does Rachel react to their rivalry?

7. Had you heard of Jews living as U-boats during the war before read-ing the book? How did hiding in plain sight provide safety, and how did it increase danger?

8. Compare Rachel?s and Aaron?s relationships to Judaism. How do they deal with the differences in their experiences?

9. Why does Rachel become so invested in Naomi and Tyrell?s rela-tionship? Do you think she helps them?

10. Rachel feels responsible for carrying on the legacy of the many Jews who lost their lives, including her mother. What actions does she take to fulfill this responsibility? How do you contribute to the leg-acy of your ancestors?

Author Bio

David R. Gillham is the *New York Times* bestselling author of CITY OF WOMEN, ANNELIES and SHADOWS OF BERLIN. He studied screenwriting at the University of Southern California before transitioning into fiction. After moving to New York City, Gillham spent more than a decade in the book business, and he now lives with his family in Western Massachusetts.

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