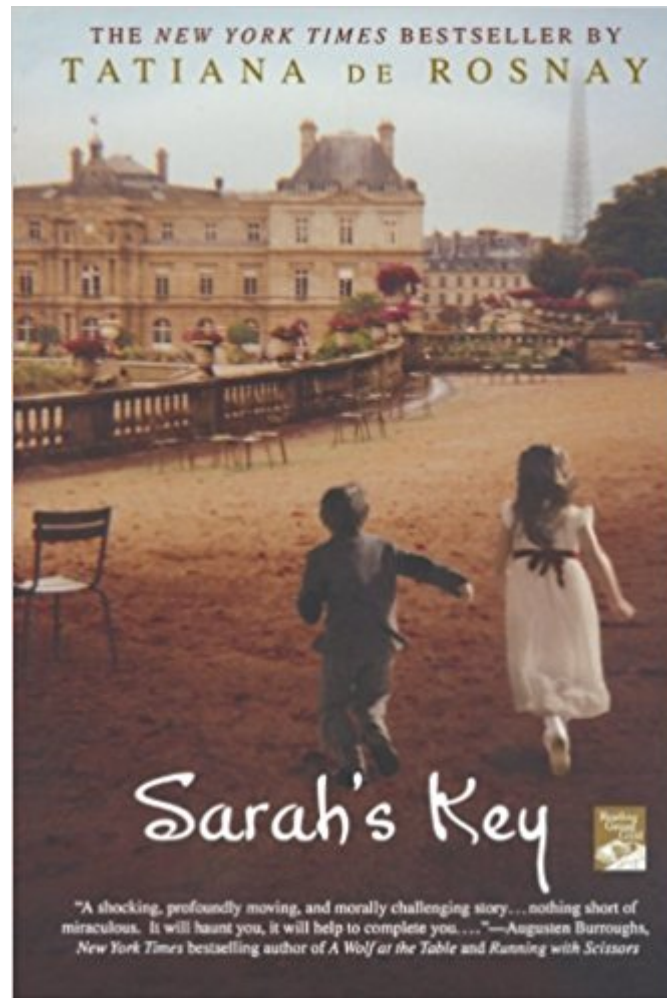


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Sarah's Key



Synopsis

Paris, July 1942: Sarah, a ten year-old girl, is brutally arrested with her family by the French police in the Velâ™ dâ™Hivâ™ roundup, but not before she locks her younger brother in a cupboard in the family's apartment, thinking that she will be back within a few hours. Paris, May 2002: On Velâ™ dâ™Hivâ™s 60th anniversary, journalist Julia Jarmond is asked to write an article about this black day in France's past. Through her contemporary investigation, she stumbles onto a trail of long-hidden family secrets that connect her toÂ Sarah. Julia finds herself compelled to retrace the girl's ordeal, from that terrible term in the Vel d'Hiv', to the camps, and beyond. As she probes into Sarah's past, she begins toÂ question her own place in France, and to reevaluate her marriage and her life. Tatiana de Rosnay offers us a brilliantly subtle, compelling portrait of France under occupation and reveals the taboos and silence that surround this painful episode.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

July 1942 marked a dark period in the history of France where thousands of Jewish families were rounded up and forcibly kept in the Velodrome d'Hiver. They were then sent off to transit camps in France such as Drancy, before being packed off to Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp. What is so unnerving about this whole incident is that the rounding up and mobilisation of Jews for deportation was done by the French authorities. Based upon this seldom mentioned, little known piece of French history, author Tatiana de Rosnay has crafted a well-written novel that alternates between the past in 1942, and the present. The past centers around a 10 year old Jewish girl Sarah Strazynski who is

forced to go to the Velodrome d'Hiver with her mother and father, innocently leaving behind a 4 year old brother Michel locked in a secret cupboard with the assurance that she would return to let him out when it was safe. The present revolves around writer Julia Jarmond, a transplanted American who is married to a Frenchman and finds herself being consumed by the story of the Vel d'Hiv incident. As she digs deeper, she uncovers dark secrets surrounding her husband's family which are connected to the deportations of Jews from France. As the truth emerges, the author deftly handles the question of guilt caused by suppressed secrets and how the truth can sometimes not only bring about pain and disrupt the regularity of life, yet also have the ability to heal and move forwards into the future. The method employed by the author, which alternates between the past [1942] and the present is an effective tool for it ties both periods together and brings the story to a satisfying conclusion.

In the first half of this book, two stories interlace with each other in short alternating chapters. Sarah Starzynski, a ten-year-old Parisian girl born to Jewish parents, is captured in the round-up of June 16, 1942, and imprisoned with almost 10,000 others in an indoor cycling arena, the Vélodrome d'Hiver, awaiting transportation to Auschwitz. When the police arrive, she has just time to hide her younger brother in a concealed closet in their apartment, locking him in and promising to return. Sixty years later, Julia Jarmond, an American journalist married to a Frenchman, researching for a story on the "Vel d'Hiv," stumbles on the trail of Sarah's family, and becomes obsessed with trying to discover her fate. She is struck by the fact that the round-up and subsequent disposal was carried out, not by the Gestapo, but by ordinary French policemen, enabled by a citizenry that for the most part looked the other way. A coincidental discovery leads her to question the involvement of her husband's family at the time and to re-examine her own marriage. Apart from this one coincidence that one has to grant for the sake of the novel, Tatiana de Rosnay mostly avoids melodrama, excessive sentiment, or plot surprises. Sarah's story may be merely a variant on the Holocaust narrative often told before, but its child's-eye viewpoint gives it a moving authenticity, and the short chapters keep it bearable. Especially touching are the glimpses of individual concern and kindness among the general indifference of the French people; the novel honors those unsung saints and heroes who put aside their fear to help in individual ways.

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