

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Shadows of Berlin stemmed from my desire to dramatically explore the post-war consequences of the Holocaust, not only for those who suffered under the Nazis and lost family to the murder machine, but also for those who lived in safety an ocean away while six million perished. So I created Rashka Morgenstern. Rashka is a young Jewish Berliner who has outlived the terror of war, but carries her trauma with her like baggage as she crosses the Atlantic to a new life as a refugee in America. In New York City Rashka becomes Rachel, and in 1950 she marries Aaron Perlman, a man who spent the war in the catering corps in California, while Europe was being reduced to cinders.

It's through these two characters and their families (past and present) that I dig into the potent dynamics of guilt and regret, culpability and consequence that still shape the character of people's lives ten years after the war has ended. I wanted to investigate how a traumatic experience, on both a massive and minor scale, can invest itself in the hearts of those who survive it for the rest of their lives. How "survivor's guilt" can impact a person's continued existence -- overtly in the case of Rachel, and more subtly in the case of her husband. But profoundly so in both cases.

At home, Rachel complains that her husband can never understand the depth of her grief or how she endured the tragedies of surviving Berlin. But neither does she fully understand or appreciate Aaron's own struggles with his guilt and shame that, even though he spent the standard "duration plus six" in the army, he never spent a moment in harm's way.

Nothing separates their two perspectives more than the issue of children. They both entered into their marriage to fill voids in their lives. Aaron needed to be a hero -- a savior -- and who better to save than a survivor of the Hitler's campaign of extermination? Rachel needed in her way, to *be* saved. Not only from her past, but from herself, and her own clear sense of culpability. But children? The idea terrified her. For her husband, Aaron, children were a responsibility. Being Rachel's "savior" wasn't enough. He had to look "forward." He had to produce prodigy as a duty to the future. Only producing a child justified his own existence. But Rachel was so traumatized that she can only look backwards. How could someone so damaged ever produce something so beautiful as a child? It's only when she was finally forced to confront the dimensions of her guilt and culpability, that she was compelled to answer a single simple question. Can the past be redeemed by the future? It is the central question of Rachel and Aaron's marriage, and of the novel itself.