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# THE VANISHING SKY

By **L. Annette Binder**

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***A New York Times Book Review Summer Reading Selection***

**For readers of *Warlight* and *The Invisible Bridge*, an intimate, harrowing story about a family of German citizens during World War II.**

In 1945, as the war in Germany nears its violent end, the Huber family is not yet free of its dangers or its insidious demands. Etta, a mother from a small, rural town, has two sons serving their home country: her elder, Max, on the Eastern front, and her younger, Georg, at a school for Hitler Youth.

When Max returns from the front, he is in the depths of despair—his eyes ghostly and unseeing, his cheeks sunken, and his visions tormenting. “His sickness was a fire,” Etta thinks. “It parched him and filled his chest with ash.” Etta strives to create order and protect Max from the Nazi rule, even as her husband Josef becomes more nationalistic and impervious to their reality.

Meanwhile, miles away, her gentle younger son Georg is raised on hatred and the inevitability of victory. Already grappling with the longing, shame, and uncertainty of adolescence, he also faces devastating violence—bodies piled like pyramids, swinging from trees like lanterns. Georg ultimately takes his fate into his own hands, deserting his young class of battle-bound soldiers to embark on a perilous journey home. Like many young people in Germany who weren’t adults at the end of the war but weren’t small children either, he is left with a ravaged country and the realization that the leaders he had trusted were evil.

*The Vanishing Sky* is a World War II novel as seen through a German lens, a story of the irreparable damage of war on the home front, and one family’s participation—involuntary, unseen, or direct—in a dangerous regime. Drawing inspiration from her own father’s time in the Hitler Youth, L. Annette Binder has crafted a spellbinding novel about the choices we make for country and for family.

**L. Annette Binder** was born in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. as a small child. She holds degrees in classics and law from Harvard, an MA in comparative literature from the University of California at Berkeley, and an MFA from the Program in Writing at the University of California, Irvine. Her short fiction collection *Rise* received the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction, and her stories have been included in the Pushcart Prize Anthology and the O. Henry Prize Stories and have been performed on Public Radio’s Selected Shorts. She lives in New Hampshire.

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## Early Praise for *The Vanishing Sky*:

“A masterful story of war, horror, and love. . . . Binder provides a family’s-eye view of the terror and trauma, offering readers a unique perspective on the war.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“A fresh take on the madness of war.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“This stark accounting of the personal damage inflicted by war draws its power from its homey details, as one family’s life is blown apart.” —*Booklist*

“[Georg] is the book’s Odysseus, his mother its Penelope. Binder creates a believable, lost world with Etta and Georg. The ending is inevitable, and we are left with an overriding—and poignant—sense of loss.” —*BookPage*

“Packed with rich detail, Binder’s well-chiseled prose is understated and clear-eyed. . . . *The Vanishing Sky* is masterful and deeply moving.” —*New York Journal of Books*

“L. Annette Binder's *The Vanishing Sky* is so fiercely imagined, so wondrously conjured, that what you hold not only pulls you into its history but into a world of pure yearning, determination, struggle, and hope. This is a story—in all its rich layers—that dazzles, breaks your heart, clutches you, and gets you back up again.” —**PAUL YOON, author of *The Mountain***

“The challenge in humanizing the Western world’s most tortured history proves no match for Binder’s intellect, compassion, and unflinching gaze; one gets the feeling this writer, in the stunning precision of her painterly details, would prove virtuosic with any material she was handed to use. A hugely ambitious novel whose consummate, patient artistry is moving beyond measure.”  
—**MATTHEW THOMAS, *New York Times*-bestselling author of *We Are Not Ourselves***

“In her intimate and epic debut novel, L. Annette Binder lifts the lid on one family’s darkest story to offer vital insight into daily life under the last days of the Third Reich. *The Vanishing Sky* is a heartrending and blazingly lucid depiction of Nazi Germany as not a simple monolith of evil but as an oppressive, fanatical political regime that was encountered, accommodated, rejected, and survived by ordinary people, people just like you and me.” —**MIRIAM TOEWS, author of *Women Talking***