



# The Girl in the Blue Coat

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

The scene is Amsterdam, 1943. Hanneke Bakker is eighteen years old. She works in a funeral undertaker's business. But she has an extra-curricular task locating black market goods such as lipstick, cigarettes and chocolate for her undertaker boss and delivering the contraband to his customers.

Hanneke delivers goods to Mrs Jansen, an old lady whose husband ran a furniture shop. He has now disappeared, probably held by the Nazi invaders. Mrs Jansen asks Hanneke to undertake a dangerous mission. A young Jewish girl, Mirijam Roodvelt, was hidden in a secret room under Mrs Jansen's protection, in the manner of Anne Frank. But now she too has disappeared. Mrs Jansen begs Hanneke to try to find her. So Hanneke sets out on a dangerous mission.

The great merit of this book is the accuracy with which it shows just how complex and threatening life becomes under military occupation. Hanneke's search for Mirijam is fraught with threatening episodes and frustrating obstacles such as misidentification. The narrative skill with which Hesse outlines the life of the Netherlands under Nazi rule is utterly convincing. At times the reader feels herself to be under the heel of the oppressor and the Dutch collaborators. The text conveys a genuine sense of fear.

Hanneke's father was severely wounded in World War I and is now partially paralysed. He refers to himself as 'an invalid'. It is not possible to guess from the text whether he is simply yielding to an irritating self-pity or whether he is mocking his own impairment. This kind of subtlety adds another dimension to Hesse's text.

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