



## Like a River from Its Course

*Kelli Stuart*

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An epic novel exposing the ugliness of war and the beauty of hope. The city of Kiev was bombed in Hitler's blitzkrieg across the Soviet Union, but the constant siege was only the beginning for her citizens. In this sweeping historical saga, Kelli Stuart takes the reader on a captivating journey into the little--known history of Ukraine's tragedies through the eyes of four compelling characters who experience the same story from different perspectives.

Maria Ivanovna is only fourteen when the bombing begins and not much older when she is forced into work at a German labor camp. She must fight to survive and to make her way back to her beloved Ukraine.

Ivan Kyrilovich is falsely mistaken for a Jew and lined up with 34,000 other men, women, and children who are to be shot at the edge of Babi Yar, the "killing ditch." He survives, but not without devastating consequences.

Luda is sixteen when German soldiers rape her. Now pregnant with the child of the enemy, she is abandoned by her father, alone, and in pain. She must learn to trust family and friends again and find her own strength in order to discover the redemption that awaits.

Frederick Hermann is sure in his knowledge that the Fuhrer's plans for domination are right and just. He is driven to succeed by a desire to please a demanding father and by his own blind faith in the ideals of Nazism. Based on true stories gathered from fifteen years of research and interviews with Ukrainian World War II survivors, Like a River from Its Course is a story of love, war, heartache, forgiveness, and redemption.

## Like a River from Its Course Details

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Author : Kelli Stuart

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## From Reader Review Like a River from Its Course for online ebook

### **Jane says**

Moving, beautiful story of Ukrainians under Nazi occupation in World War II. After signing a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, the Nazis broke their agreement after only two years. We see the story from the viewpoints of two families; a girl with an abusive father; and several Germans, including one young soldier who proves a disappointment to his highly-placed Nazi father. The Babi Yar massacre and its aftermath hang over the whole novel. These characters were *so* lifelike; their emotions and feelings were so true. The story speaks of faith in God and the resilience of the human spirit despite adversity and devastating loss. The story is filled with love, forgiveness, compassion and triumph over evil. The writing was exquisite. The author interviewed Ukrainians who lived through that horrendous period; many of her characters are composites of the people whose stories she was told.

I thank LibraryThing for my copy in exchange for my honest review.

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### **Rachel McMillan says**

A chilling and lyrical look at a snatch of history not often told in inspirational fiction.

Stuart's resplendent research seeps into every page and into the experience of three main characters who haunt you while winnowing their way into your heart.

Deftly written, beautifully provocative, this is not just a piece of historical fiction: this is a work of art.

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### **Emily says**

{4.5}

Wow. This is one of- if not the most-heartbreaking books I've ever read. Compiled from true stories, Like A River From Its Course tells the story of a part of WWII and the German invasion of the Ukraine through four different characters, each effected by the war in their own personal way. The chapters are short and tell the story from the alternating viewpoints of a Ukrainian father, his fourteen-year-old daughter, a young German officer, and a sixteen-year-old orphaned Ukrainian girl. Most books with alternating viewpoints and chapters like these are hard to keep up with, but I barely noticed with this book! I also read this relatively thick book in only two days- it was that captivating. Like any book about war, it is grim, sad and at times, hard to read. However, anyone who has an interest in WWII would enjoy this sad and heartbreaking- yet beautiful- account of war, love, heartache, redemption, forgiveness, and faith.

A brief note: the book does contain some war violence, as well as a few other slightly disturbing scenes. Although not too graphic, I would only recommend this book for mature readers ages 14+.

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### **Jocelyn Green says**

I read this book in two days, which should not surprise anyone who begins reading it. Kelli Stuart draws you in from the first moment. There is a lot of World War 2 fiction out there, so it's impressive and refreshing to find in this novel a lesser-known slice of that history. The Ukrainian experience is compelling and heart-rending, and explored with such rich detail. The characters are deftly drawn and shaded, and achingly believable. Like a River From Its Course is a powerful read that I didn't want to end. I give this novel five stars and at least four kleenex. I can't wait to see what else Kelli Stuart has in store for us.

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### **Sloane Mayberry says**

Excellent book which I highly recommend for those who like learning different perspectives of WW2. Though the cruelty in it is tough to get through in places, the vibrancy of the human spirit on all sides of this war really shines though. This one is similar in flow and character depth to Salt of the Sea - both are excellent!! The female characters are especially vibrant.

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### **Sarah says**

First, I must applaud Kelli Stuart for doing her homework and writing a very well-written, detail oriented and true story based on extensive research. This historical fiction is one not to miss this summer and in fact is one I intend to read again because the story does not leave you. Oh, the rawness, faith and redemption in this book are beautiful. If you like historical books, especially books that have to deal with World War II, I highly recommend this novel. You will be moved with great emotion. I give this book 5/5 stars. Thank you to publishers for providing me a complimentary copy for review purposes. I was not compensated for a positive review.

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### **Kav says**

The kind of story that seeps into your bones and makes your heart hurt and rejoice all that the same time. Gripping. Evocative. Raw. This isn't a novel for the faint of heart, but it is one that deserves to be read and celebrated in memory of the many victims and survivors of the atrocities inflicted on the Ukrainian people by a brutal Nazi regime.

Heartbreaking tales told from the perspective of four main characters. The first person, present tense narrative isn't my favourite point of view to read, but it worked really well in this instance. Rushed me right into scenes that felt so urgent I was left holding my breath and gritting my teeth for most of the read.

The author has done extensive research and these four lives are inspired by true stories of real survivors. That's what makes this book so startling, I think -- the fact that events like these actually happened. That real people survived and lived to bear witness to what happened to them and those they loved.

Yes, Like a River from its Course is a sombre read. My heart was heavy when I finally closed the book. I couldn't help but make parallels to the modern world we live in and am still wondering if we have actually

learned anything from that horrid war and the actions of the maniac who started it all. That's why books like this one -- the kind that reach into a reader's heart to testify of both pain and hope -- are so important.

At the time of the German occupation, Ukraine had already born the ravages of a revolution that destroyed their churches. Priests were killed or sent to work camps in Siberia, churches turned into public buildings so the spiritual landscape is bleak at the start of this novel. But the author still manages to incorporate a soul-stirring faith thread in the midst of turbulence and heartache.

"We are openly discussing God in a place that not so long ago killed many of my friends for similar conversations. God cannot be suppressed under the evil of man. The world is harsh and cruel and full of pain. But God is real. The Holy Spirit and Mary and the saints -- they're real. To believe is to trust, and when you trust, your life has meaning and purpose outside of the mere endurance of hardship."

(p. 263)

And perhaps my most favourite quote from a longsuffering, all-believing priest: "You would be surprised, my friend, at the power in believing in something outside of yourself. When you acknowledge that the pain of this world is unbearable, you're able to finally surrender to the One who alone is worthy of carrying the weight." (p. 263)

Startling truths and riveting fiction. A definite must read.

My thanks to Kregel Publications and Litfuse Publicity Group for providing me with a copy of this book.

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### **Alicia says**

This was one of the saddest and most heartbreakingly beautiful books I've ever read. I didn't know much about Babi Yar before I read this book, and the event (where thousands were lined up and shot in Ukraine) was nothing short of an atrocity. The things that happened to these people after are also too horrible to comprehend.

Most of the book is grim for those reasons. But there are moments of strong compassion, love, bravery and hope. These moments are moving and are amazing to read, because these people never gave up.

The author made their stories come alive. I thought that the writing was very smooth and while each chapter alternates between several different stories, it never got confusing. It's a hard read because of the topic, and so get ready to feel a lot of emotions. 5 stars!

\* I received this book for free in a Goodreads giveaway and was not required to write a review

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### **Joleen says**

Less than two years after Hitler signed the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, Germany broke it and invaded in Operation Barbarossa, affecting millions of Soviet lives. This story focuses on Kiev, Ukraine.

The story is told in 4 voices.

**Ivan Kyrilovich:** The father of one son and two daughters. Watching his best Jewish friends being marched out of town, Ivan was accidentally caught up in a march to Babi Yar, a ravine in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev where the invading soldiers marched thousands to their deaths. Somehow he survived.

**Frederick Herrmann:** A German soldier tried desperately to win his father's approval and be a great man in the Nazi party as his father was. If that meant killing anyone he was ordered to kill, he did.

**Maria Ivanovna:** Ivan's daughter is another voice, and her story was heartbreakingly inspiring.

**Luda Michaelevna:** A sixteen year old suffered at the hands of her unloving father for years, then at the hands of three German soldiers. Her life was forever altered. But the love of a family who took her in and others who were kind and caring was what kept her going.

This is a haunting story I will not soon forget. I don't think I've ever used the word *haunting* in my reviews before. But it's apt. *Like a River From Its Course* is stunningly moving. There is such tragedy, but there is also deep love and will to live. It was hard to read at times, but the hope that it would have a better ending kept me reading. "Happily ever after" was never an expectation, but at least survival and restoration was a hope.

Whether or not it's *Christian Fiction* is unclear. Only one character expresses faith, and I'm assuming he's a Russian Orthodox priest. He shares the Orthodox creed almost word for word to an agnostic in the book, and tries to encourage this couple by saying his belief helps him to release the doubts and fears, the captivity that wars inside his heart. *Life is a series of trials, all strung together by moments of beauty. But when the string of joy and beauty breaks, what is left to hold life together if there is no God?*

Kelli Stuart is a realistic writer with a serious grasp on history. I will read her books again... when I'm ready to handle another very serious read.

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### **Carole Jarvis says**

Reviewed at The Power of Words: <http://bit.ly/29QLDb5>

When it comes to *Like a River from Its Course*, there's no way any words of mine can do it justice, so I'll let Kelli Stuart and her characters do some of the talking. But if I had to express my thoughts in only one sentence, it would be this: If ever a book cried out to be read, it's this one.

What's most amazing is that through extensive research, debut author Kelli Stuart has drawn from personal stories of survival to write this moving work of fiction, based on historical events that weren't that familiar to me – the Nazi occupation of the Ukraine. The story is told from the first-person perspective of four main characters – and rather than me trying to describe them, I encourage you to read about them in the book's overview above if you haven't already. Here are some expressions of their thoughts . . .

Frederick: "Ending one life to preserve another is not killing. It is saving."

Ivan: "Sometimes horrors are too great to be put into words."

Luda: "When you grow up without love, accepting it becomes almost burdensome."

Masha: "I'm scarred and emotionally beaten. The girl who left was swept away in the flood of war, but I think that girl is still somewhere inside. If only I could get back to find her."

Like a River from Its Course is riveting, dark, raw, yet hopeful and redeeming. It reflects the essence of humanity, from total depravity to selfless, tender kindness. It's not a light read, nor is it an easy one – but it is compelling, relevant for today, and hard to put down. Truly unforgettable.

I'm amazed at the literary quality of Kelli's writing, for it sparkles in its beauty. She has a gift for pulling you right into the story, compelling you to experience the people, setting, and all the horrors of war in a way that is palpable. I marked several quotes that really spoke to me; here are just a few . . .

"If love gives flight to the soul, hate kills it completely." (Ivan)

"You would be surprised, my friend, at the power in believing in something outside of yourself. When you acknowledge that the pain of this world is unbearable, you're able to finally surrender to the One who alone is worthy of carrying the weight." (Father Konstantin)

"To believe is to trust, and when you trust, your life has meaning and purpose outside of the mere endurance of hardship." (Father Konstantin)

And finally, one that is true yesterday, today, and tomorrow . . .

"God cannot be suppressed under the evil of man." (Father Konstantin)

For me, Like a River from Its Course is a story not to be missed.

Highly recommended.

Thank you to Litfuse Publicity and Kregel for providing a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

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### **The Loopy Librarian says**

Like a River from its Course begins intensely with a bombing raid, so the book is immediately arresting. The tragedies and horrors that unfold as the Germans invade the Ukraine are reflected through four characters experiencing a myriad of emotions and reactions. Three of the narrators are Russian citizens and one is a young German Nazi. The author personalizes the stories in such a way as to cause the reader to experience events as the characters do. I felt the horror. I felt the fear. And later, I also felt the hope. The book is well-written and obviously well-researched. Though the characters were fictional, their experiences were compiled from those of real people. The reader feels this in the way the stories are told. My only complaint is that I was left hungry for more information. Stuart obviously knew the history of the Babi Yar event quite well, but it was also clear that she knew other historical truths about the war in the Ukraine that she only shared a bit of in the book. The Ukrainian nationalists or rebels were mentioned only once when a character expresses the opinion that they were worse than the Nazis. The author also mentions, almost as an aside, that some in the Red Army could be trusted and others could not. No other details were given about this, and I was disappointed that the author didn't share more. While each character is fully fleshed out and their experiences detailed and well-told, the overall war raging around them was not always as clear.

Nevertheless, it was a fascinating, emotional read that kept me turning the pages well into the night. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in WWII historical fiction. In fact, I already have a friend in the wings waiting to borrow it. In accordance with FTC guidelines, please note that I was given a free copy by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Toni Osborne says**

Based on true stories gathered from years of research and interviews taken from survivors this epic journey told through the eyes of four unforgettable characters takes us to Ukraine at the height of the WW11. The characters are composites of hundreds of men and women that have been interviewed and their combined stories brought a heartbreakin and inspiring novel exposing the ugliness of war and the beauty of hope.

June 22, 1941 Hitler violated the Nonaggression Pact with the Soviet Union by launching Operation Barbarossa. By July, Ukraine became an occupied territory and Kiev under siege.

The story has three parts: The Beginning, The Darkness and Home and is told in the first person narrative of each character. In alternate chapters Ivan, Maria, Luda and Frederick (a German soldier) tells their perspective as they see it. Their stories show us the worst of humanity as well as the very best but most of all their life highlights the resiliency of a people, their courage, their hope, their faith and the power of love for family, friends and strangers.

Although this is fiction, the circumstances and horrors the people faced were very real. The population was scared, starving and dying. A well-known horror happened in September 1941, when 34,000 Jews were massacred at Babi Yar by the German forces and local collaborators. The characters wonderfully depict what they faced and the battle that raged with each one. The well-researched plot line, the intriguing characters and their distinctive voices is what makes "Like a River from its Course" "an outstanding read."

I received an ARC from Kregel Publications through the Early Reviewer Program in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Staci says**

This debut is told from the perspective of four different people. Maria is a teenager living in Kiev, Ivan is Maria's father, Frederick is a fervent Nazi Soldier and Luda is a teenager living with her drunk and unstable father in Ukraine. The author does a beautiful job of speaking in each of their voices and sharing their perspective of events that happened during WWII.

While painful scenes are expected in a book like this, it doesn't make the cruelty any easier to read. Fortunately, there are also many instances of loving people caring for others.

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### **Carrie Schmidt (Reading is My SuperPower) says**

Kelli Stuart's historical fiction debut, *Like a River From Its Course*, is simultaneously heartbreakin and

inspiring; it is also much more than a story. It honors the men and women from the Ukraine who fought to keep living amid the ravages of a war they didn't ask for. It honors the memory of those whose lives were brutally snuffed out long before they'd dreamed all their dreams. It honors those Germans and those Red Army soldiers who didn't let evil do their thinking for them but instead offered kindness and compassion and respect. And it reminds us living in our world today, where evil seems to dominate every news report, that "for all the evil, there is an awful lot of good."

Told in three parts (The Beginning, The Darkness, Home) from the perspectives of several different characters, *Like a River From Its Course* immediately captivates and invests the reader in the lives of its main players. Ivan Kyrilovich and his family – Tanya, Sergei, Anna, and Maria. We meet them first, experiencing with them the terror that descended on Kiev, Ukraine on June 22, 1941 when Hitler violated the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and invaded the Soviet Union. As Maria states at the end of her first vignette, "We're at war. Nothing will be the same again." Frederick Herrmann – the Nazi soldier who lives to make his father – a friend of Hitler's – proud. He wants to be a part of history, though by the time it's over he might advise comrades with similar goals to be careful what they wish for. Ludmilla Michaelevna – her story may be the most tragic of all the characters we meet on these pages and at the same time perhaps the one filled with the most hope.

These are the main narrators in this novel that is rich with history and imagery. Ivan. Maria ("Masha"). Frederick. Ludmilla ("Luda"). But no man is an island and no character here is either. Embroidered into the fabric of each of these beautifully haunting lives is a network of family and friends and associates who leap just as vividly off the page and into your heart. Some will warm your heart. Others will break it. But they will all etch themselves there to stay.

*Like a River From Its Course* shows us the very worst of humanity as well as the very best. And for a large chunk of the novel, hope seems a very distant thing. But in the middle of the darkness, light breaks through. Quietly. Gently. Persistently. In the resiliency of a people. In the power of love. In the words of a babushka. In the faith of a priest. To be honest, at first I wasn't sure faith would factor much into this book at all. But oh my heart. When it arrived, it did so with triumph and in such a way that I may never be the same.

I know that several quotes from the book will be rolling around in my heart for a long time, my spirit pondering them and reflecting on their truth and wisdom. They are just as timely for today as they are for the dark days of WW2. It is the kind of book that continues to breathe deep inside you long after you've closed the last page. In *Like A River From Its Course*, Kelli Stuart gives us a glimpse into a part of WW2 we don't often see – the beautiful people of the Ukraine, their courage, their hope, and their faith. It's not a book I'll recover from easily.

(I received a copy of this book in exchange for only my honest review.)

Read my full review at [Reading Is My SuperPower](#)

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### **Victor Gentile says**

Kelli Stuart in her new book, "Like a River From Its Course" published by Kregel Publications gives us A Novel of World War II.

From the back cover: An epic novel exposing the ugliness of war and the beauty of hope

The city of Kiev was bombed in Hitler's blitzkrieg across the Soviet Union, but the constant siege was only the beginning for her citizens. In this sweeping historical saga, Kelli Stuart takes the reader on a captivating journey into the little-known history of Ukraine's tragedies through the eyes of four compelling characters who experience the same story from different perspectives.

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Luda is sixteen when German soldiers rape her. Now pregnant with the child of the enemy, she is abandoned by her father, alone, and in pain. She must learn to trust family and friends again and find her own strength in order to discover the redemption that awaits.

Frederick Hermann is sure in his knowledge that the Führer's plans for domination are right and just. He is driven to succeed by a desire to please a demanding father and by his own blind faith in the ideals of Nazism. Based on true stories gathered from fifteen years of research and interviews with Ukrainian World War II survivors, *Like a River from Its Course* is a story of love, war, heartache, forgiveness, and redemption.

In reality Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939 signed the German-Soviet Aggression Pact in which the two countries agreed to take no military action against each other for ten years. In 1941 Hitler violated that pact launching Operation Barbarossa, an invasion of the Soviet Union. In September 1941 the decision to kill all the Jews in Kiev was made and almost 34,000 were killed at the Babi Yar. Let me start out by stating that this is a terrific story. It is everything that it could be all rolled up into one terrific package. It is a World War II thriller. It is a story that shows us the depths that a human soul can sink to but it also shows us the heights that the human soul can rise to. Ms. Stuart has given us a historical fiction which means that the events actually happened it is just that she has fictionalized them. Ms. Stuart has given us marvelous, well-written characters that you will get involved with Maria, Ivan, Luda and Frederick. This story will have you flipping pages as fast as you can read them. I believe you are going to enjoy this book and our heroine and that you are not going to want to put it down until you have finished it! It is just that good. I highly recommend this book!

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from Kregel Publications. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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