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A Year of Borrowed Men

Michelle Barker



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When World War II "borrows" the men in seven-year-old Gerda's family, the German government sends them three new men in return: Gabriel, Fermaine, and Albert, French prisoners of war who must sleep in an outbuilding and work the farm until the war is over. Gerda knows they are supposed to treat the men as enemies, but it doesn't seem fair. Can't they invite them into the warm house for one meal? What harm could it do to be friendly?

Writing from her mother's childhood memories of Germany during World War II, Michelle Barker shares the story of one family's daring kindness in a time of widespread anger and suspicion. Renné Benoit's illustrations bring warmth to the era, showing the small ways in which a forbidden friendship bloomed: good food, a much-loved doll, a secret Christmas tree. Family photographs and an Author's Note give further insight into the life of Gerda, the little girl who proved that it isn't so far from Feinde (enemies) to Freunde (friends).

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