

Jakob's Colors

Lindsay Hawdon

In poetic, illuminating prose, debut novelist Hawdon sheds painful light on an underreported part of the Holocaust, when more than one million Romany gypsies across Europe, deemed “hereditarily sick” and “defective” by the Nazis, were targeted for elimination. When we first meet eight-year-old Jakob, he is on the run in Austria, desperately trying to cross the Swiss border using only his wits and the help of an old man who feeds the boy and hides him in a cupboard. Hawdon intercuts his story with “before” chapters set one year earlier, when Jakob, his mother, and two siblings search in vain for Jakob’s father, a gypsy painter who advised Jakob to “see the colors” and use them to ward off fear; there are also “long before” chapters that introduce us to Jakob’s parents when they meet in an asylum, fall in love, and start a family. This narrative technique is jarring but lends tremendous tension and pathos by novel’s end, which is unavoidable in its bleakness but still manages to carve out hope for Jakob as he prepares for his final escape. **VERDICT** A stirring, finely observed tale that recalls the less fantastical parts of Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* and deserves its place alongside other notable Holocaust stories.

Copyright ©2015 Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. Reprinted with permission.