



# The Baker's Daughter: A Novel

By Sarah McCoy

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**In this *New York Times* Bestseller, two women in different eras face similar life-altering decisions.**

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Sixty years later, in El Paso, Texas, Reba Adams is trying to file a feel-good Christmas piece for the local magazine, and she sits down with the owner of Elsie's German Bakery for what she expects will be an easy interview. But Reba finds herself returning to the bakery again and again, anxious to find the heart of the story—a story that resonates with her own turbulent past. For Elsie, Reba's questions are a stinging reminder of that last bleak year of World War II. As the two women's lives become intertwined, both are forced to confront the uncomfortable truths of the past and seek out the courage to forgive.

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

**Chris Bohjalian on *The Baker's Daughter***

Chris Bohjalian's most recent novel, *The Night Strangers*, was published in October. His novel *Skeletons at the Feast* is a love story set in Poland and Germany in the last six months of World War II.



Hitler's thousand year Reich lasted but twelve years and change, and has now been gone over six and a half decades. The survivors of the concentration camps are well into their seventies--and beyond--and even a teenage boy handed a Panzerfaust and pressed into service in the Volkssturm in 1945 is likely to be on the far side of 80.

But Nazi Germany will never fade into the collective mist we reserve for much of history: Its crimes were of a magnitude both too massive and too barbaric ever to be forgotten. At the same time, the generation that destroyed it was undeniably among the greatest.

Consequently, there will always be stories. There is a reason we are drawn to such poignant and powerful novels as Tatiana de Rosnay's *Sarah's Key* and Jenna Blum's *Those Who Save Us*.

Sarah McCoy's second novel, *The Baker's Daughter*, certainly belongs beside them. It begins with one of those footnotes to Nazi Germany that is as appalling as it is bizarre: The Lebensborn program. Wanting to expand the master race, the Nazis mated Aryan soldiers with young Aryan girls. (The program also kidnapped Aryan-appearing children from the occupied countries and brought them to Greater Germany to be raised by faithful Nazis, but that element does not figure in the novel.)

Hazel Schimdt, when the novel opens at the end of 1944, has already given birth to a son and a set of twins in the program, and is living in a combination Lebensborn brothel and nursery in Steinhöring, Germany. Her seventeen-year-old sister, Elsie--the young woman who gives the novel its title--is home with their parents, helping to run the bakery in Garmisch. Germany is on the verge of collapse, but defeatism will still get a person shot by SS diehards and the crematoria at the death camps are still turning to ash the victims of the Nazi's Final Solution.

And yet Elsie has a marriage proposal--and an engagement ring--from an older SS officer. She isn't sure she loves him, but she is hiding a small Jewish boy in her bedroom and fears that she and her family will need that officer's protection if the child is somehow discovered.

Elsie's story in 1944 and 1945 reverberates six decades later, in El Paso, Texas. A young journalist there, Reba Adams, is engaged to an agent with the U.S. Border Patrol, and--a bit like Elsie years earlier--she is not

quite sure she can marry the fellow. While writing what she views as a Christmas fluff piece on holiday traditions for a local magazine, Reba goes to a German bakery in the area and meets...Elsie.

Consequently, the novel travels back and forth in time, moving between Elsie's story and Reba's, often using the correspondence between Elsie and Hazel (and between Reba and her own sister back east). Many of McCoy's characters shoulder deep and profoundly painful secrets, including Reba's father and Elsie's mother.

McCoy is too intelligent a novelist to compare the U.S. Border Patrol with Hitler's SS, but Reba's fiancé nevertheless find the process of rounding up, detaining, and deporting illegal aliens an increasingly draconian and soul-killing operation. Moreover, McCoy understands that Reba's small dramas in 2007 pale before the dangers that confront Elsie in 1944 and 1945. But she deftly explores how easy it is to allow first one's integrity and then one's humanity to slip away.

Likewise, the parallels that McCoy draws between the present and the past--and how it difficult it can be to do the right thing--make for a thoughtful reading experience indeed.

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### ***The Baker's Daughter* Q&A: Lissa See and Sarah McCoy**

**Lissa See** is the author of the bestsellers *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, *Shanghai Girls*, and *Dreams of Joy*.



**Lissa See:** The novel moves back and forth between two vastly different settings: present-day America on the Tex-Mex border and Nazi Germany at the end of World War II. What inspired you to pair the two?

**Sarah McCoy:** I found their association captivating: both moments in time allowed me to explore racial themes, the courage needed to do right, and the complexity in deciding just what that may be. I spent a portion of my childhood in Germany where my dad, a career military officer, was stationed. My husband also grew up in Germany, speaks fluent German, and worked there during his summers in college. When we moved to El Paso, the local magazine asked me to write a feature article on the German community. "There's a German community?" I asked. Yes--a thriving one. Way out on the corner of Texas, barely clinging to the edge of the United States, is a sizable German air force base. Apparently the Luftwaffe has trained fliers in the United States since 1958. In 1992, they consolidated their troops at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, just up the road from El Paso.

Not long after that article ran, I went to a local farmer's market and met an 80-year-old German woman selling bread. I was completely smitten by her, and all that I imagined she might have experienced in her life.

While picking out my brötchen, I asked how she came to be in El Paso. "I married an American soldier after the war," she told me. Voila! Elsie, my 1945 protagonist, was born. My memories of living and traveling in Germany served as my imaginative landscape and fueled my hunger to research the country and its people during those last awful months of World War.

Teaching at the University of Texas at El Paso, many of my students wrote about their fear and anxiety regarding the deportation of family and friends. I imagined many in Germany (Aryan, Jewish, etc.) felt similarly.

**Lisa:** There's a great deal of research that went into both storylines. Did anything surprise you?

**Sarah:** I was shocked and surprised at nearly every document about Germany and El Paso. I'd yell to my husband, "Oh my God! Did you know...." And despite living and working in Germany for years, despite living and working in El Paso now, he never once answered yes. Of course the research into Nazi Germany unearthed deeply disturbing facts. The Lebensborn Program, for one, took me months to emotionally process. I searched for every opportunity to disprove its existence. I didn't want to believe. Then I realized that disbelief, unwillingness to confront the truth and take a stand, was a similar reaction to many German citizens. It was so unfathomable that it pained the soul. Not possible, I said. How could any human being do such things? Instead of pushing it away, I tried to harness that response and use it to shed light on dark secrets.

The same was true of our present-day border issues. Living within a mile of Juarez, Mexico, I've witnessed firsthand the dire struggle of illegal families. I see it on the news, at the grocery store, in my neighborhood. I felt it incumbent on me to speak--to tell the story and share what I've seen.

**Lisa:** So we have two women protagonists: Reba in present day and Elsie in the past. Which perspective did you find was the easiest to write? Which was the most difficult?

**Sarah:** The leading female characters came pretty organically to my imagination. The Josef chapters were the most psychologically taxing. I had to take all the historical information I'd gathered about the Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) and the horrors of the Nazi regime and flip my psyche--try to imagine it from the perspective of someone within. I had to remind myself that these weren't barbarous demons; these were men. They knew right from wrong, just as we all do. They weren't beyond human compassion. So then, I asked myself, how could they? Or, in this specific case, how could Josef rationalize and live with his actions. As the author, I had a responsibility to present his perspective without my own emotional judgments. That was difficult, but I believe those dark chapters are essential to the book. It's important to remember the innocent as well as the evil--so that we can immediately recognize the latter if we see it again.

**Lisa:** Familial relationships play a significant role in the novel, specifically daughterhood. There are many similarities and some stark differences between how Reba and Elsie appear as daughters in the novel. Do you think that's a product of culture or time or more?

**Sarah:** All of the above. The dynamic between mothers and daughters--women of varying generations--seems to be a reoccurring theme in my writing. Each new generation believes it is more advanced than its predecessor. However, history has proven to be a gigantic record spinning round on different threads but in the same motion. Our lives overlap whether we chose to acknowledge it or not. Both Reba and Elsie struggle to find themselves, to establish their own beliefs and make choices in alternate environments. Their places on earth may differ, but their journey is the same. The deep love and deep conflicts of daughterhood are undeniable. We accept, forgive, and learn from our mothers or we reject, condemn, and disregard. That choice is mirrored on the large-scale, too--in how we act as a people, as nations.

**Lisa:** I think this novel would work wonderfully for book clubs. What issues do you imagine readers discussing after they turn the last page?

**Sarah:** Oh, there are so many--love, forgiveness, exclusion, passivity, family dynamics, independence, courage and cowardice, and the list goes on. But mostly, after turning the last page, I hope all the issues in the novel penetrate and resonate in readers' hearts and minds, thereby paying tribute to the memory of those who lived through those war-torn years and honoring the men, women, and families going through them now. I hope this book is a powerful illustration of just how influential one convicted person can be in changing the world--for good and for evil. All of history can be altered. If each of us took up the cause of good, imagine what we could do individually and together.

**Lisa:** And lastly, because I know readers will be wondering based on your title, do you have any recipes you regularly bake at home? You've taken us into *The Baker's Daughter*'s kitchen, would you mind giving us a glimpse into your own?

**Sarah:** I'd love to! I greatly enjoy baking and cooking. I try to do it as often as possible. There's something therapeutic in the culinary process. To me, recipes are like prescriptions. When I'm feeling stressed or anxious or simply need a mental reprieve, I head to the kitchen. I like to cook alone. I know this is different from many, but it's a Zen space for me. I don't have to talk or think too much. I can dream while I measure, crack, whisk, and pour. So long as I follow the instructions, I have guaranteed success. Baking satisfies all of my tactile senses: colors, textures, tastes, sounds, and smells. In under two hours, I've created something start to finish. It's an instant gratification achievement.

That was a long-winded answer to the question: what do you bake? On a weekly basis, I bake a lot of savory dishes. My go-to's are Mediterranean chicken and roasted veggies with parmesan cheese. But I love the holiday season when I get to try my hand at elaborate, sweet ones--Black Forest Cake, macarons, gingerbread and Springerles. Truthfully, however, I'm pretty easy to please. The smell of almonds, sea salted and cinnamon sprinkled, roasting in the oven is just about the ultimate for me. When it comes to family traditions, my mom bakes a lean, mean peanut butter chocolate kiss cookie that my husband calls "the best cookie in the history of mankind." As her daughter, I'm privy to the secret recipe.

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## Review

"Replete with raw emotion and suspense, *The Baker's Daughter* is a fascinating journey through a horrifying time in world history that will resonate long after you close the book." —**Historical Novel Society**

"A beautiful, heart-breaking gem of a novel written just the way I like them, with the past coming back to haunt the present, endearing heroines and a sunny, hopeful ending. You'll wolf it up in one delicious gulp." —**Tatiana de Rosnay, international bestselling author of *Sarah's Key* and *A Secret Kept***

"*The Baker's Daughter* was a constant warm companion to me during cross-country travels, a novel I looked forward to returning to night after night. The rare book in which the modern-day story is as compelling as the wartime tale it contains, *The Baker's Daughter* offers a look at Nazi Germany through the lens of the immigration issues of our own time. El Paso, TX and Garmisch, Germany make for an unexpected harmony of flavors." —**Jenna Blum, international bestselling author of *The Stormchasers* and *Those Who Save Us***

"A sensitive, multilayered novel, this is a moving examination of the effect war and the politics of exclusion, have on the human heart." —**Amanda Hodgkinson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *22 Britannia***

## **Road**

“A haunting and beautiful story... Spanning sixty years, and taking on forms of human cruelty and indifference ranging from the Nazis to modern-day immigration reform, McCoy forces us to examine the choices we make. I was riveted from start to finish.” —**J. Courtney Sullivan, New York Times bestselling author of *Commencement* and *Maine***

“This is a beautifully told, richly detailed story that grabs your heart from page one and keeps its hold long after the last page. It is a book to discuss, to share and ultimately to savor.” —**Sarah Jio, author of *The Violets of March***

“Elsie Schmidt is the brave and unforgettable heroine of Sarah McCoy's beautifully written tale of family, friendship, and love. *The Baker's Daughter* demonstrates how the past can teach us--if only we will listen.” —**Kelly O'Connor McNees, author of *The Lost Summer of Louisa May Alcott***

“Sarah McCoy's *The Baker's Daughter* explores what happens when our loyalties (to country, cause, family, religion) clash with our intuition. A complex braiding of mystery, history, and personality, this novel is engaging and wonderful.” —**Sheri Reynolds, New York Times bestselling author of *The Rapture of Canaan***

### **About the Author**

**SARAH MCCOY** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the novel *The Time It Snowed in Puerto Rico*. She has taught at Old Dominion University and at the University of Texas at El Paso. The daughter of an Army officer, McCoy spent her childhood in Germany. She currently lives with her husband in El Paso, Texas.

Visit her at [SarahMcCoy.com](http://SarahMcCoy.com)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Sarah Ruff:**

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or read a book titled *The Baker's Daughter: A Novel*? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have additional opinion?

#### **Robert Penrose:**

The publication untitled *The Baker's Daughter: A Novel* is the book that recommended to you to see. You can see the quality of the e-book content that will be shown to an individual. The language that creator use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The copy writer was did a lot of study when write the book, so the information that they share for you is absolutely accurate. You also can get the e-book of *The Baker's Daughter: A Novel* from the publisher to make you considerably more enjoy free time.

**Harold Dalton:**

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**Shelly Sampson:**

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