

## **Synopsis of *The House on Schellberg Street***

Renate Edler thinks she is going to live in the house on Schellberg Street. Instead she finds out only a few days before she comes to England on the Kindertransport that she is officially a Mischling, a mixed-race German-Jewish child. She has to become English.

Renate struggles with not belonging. As a Mischling she cannot even feel truly Jewish, worries that her English friends will see her as the enemy and worries about her father in Nuremberg and her mother in London. She eventually has a breakdown but her friends help her to overcome her fears and worries. She almost becomes English. When her father writes to say he has remarried and her mother seems keen to stay in England, she is relieved. However, there are still people she cares about in Germany.

Renate has to leave her classmates at the Wilhelm Löhe School behind. This school eventually closes and the girls decide to stay in touch by writing letters in an exercise book which they send to each other. Renate actually writes the very first letter but then disappears. Most of the girls' story is told in letter form with just one other scene near the beginning and two near the end being in a third person narrative. In the first scene they find out about Renate going to England. Their class teacher joins in writing the letters and in a scene near the end of the story she is poised to tell them about some of the darkest aspects of what has happened during World War II.

Hani is disappointed when Renate cannot come and stay with her during the Christmas holidays. She is told that Renate has chicken pox but is suspicious that this is not true. A puncture brings her in contact with Renate's grandmother, Clara Lehrs, who eventually tells her the truth but only after Hani has been helping her run a school for children with severe learning difficulties in the basement of her house on Schellberg Street, Stuttgart. As Clara protects these persecuted children she does not consider her own safety.

Inevitably she is forced to sell the house and move to a ghetto. Hani and her parents, who are careful but are Nazi resisters, stay in contact with Clara until she is transported from Stuttgart. The school continues to function, with a few tense moments, and opens triumphantly after the war ends. Hani is offered a scholarship on a teacher-training programme.

The action takes place between December 1938 and August 1947. The three threads of the story come together again as Renate travels to Stuttgart for a conference and plans to meet up with Hani and her former classmates. Although she is now very happy to be English she realises there is a little about her that is still German.

Even the young reader will probably guess what has happened to Clara though the characters in the story do not yet know. Their naivety is a main theme in the text.

Renate's story is quite true, Hani's is completely made up but offers an explanation about how Clara's school survived and the girls of class 5b of the Wilhelm Löhe school really did write a round robin letter very similar to the one contained here.

Even though this deals with a tricky subject, there is some humour, with Clara Lehrs being a particularly colourful character. I am currently working on her story for a second book on this theme.

Beyond the end of the novel Renate will try to find out what has become of her grandmother. A neighbour is keeping an eye on the house on Schellberg Street.