**The Women in the Castle
by Jessica Shattuck**

**About the Book**

Set at the end of World War II, in a crumbling Bavarian castle that once played host to all of German high society, a powerful and propulsive story of three widows whose lives and fates become intertwined—an affecting, shocking, and ultimately redemptive novel from the author of the *New York Times* Notable Book *The Hazards of Good Breeding.*

 Amid the ashes of Nazi Germany’s defeat, Marianne von Lingenfels returns to the once-grand castle of her husband’s ancestors, an imposing stone fortress now fallen into ruin following years of war. The widow of a resister murdered in the failed July 20, 1944, plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, Marianne plans to uphold the promise she made to her husband’s brave conspirators: to find and protect their wives, her fellow resistance widows.

First Marianne rescues six-year-old Martin, the son of her dearest childhood friend, from a Nazi reeducation home. Together, they make their way across the smoldering wreckage of their homeland to Berlin, where Martin’s mother, the beautiful and naive Benita, has fallen into the hands of occupying Red Army soldiers. Then she locates Ania, another resister’s wife, and her two boys, now refugees languishing in one of the many camps that house the millions displaced by the war.

As Marianne assembles this makeshift family from the ruins of her husband’s resistance movement, she is certain their shared pain and circumstances will hold them together. But she quickly discovers that the black-and-white, highly principled world of her privileged past has become infinitely more complicated, filled with secrets and dark passions that threaten to tear them apart. Eventually, all three women must come to terms with the choices that have defined their lives before, during, and after the war—each with their own unique share of challenges.

**About the Author**:

Jessica Shattuck is the New York Times Bestselling author of The Women in the Castle, The Hazards of Good Breeding (a New York Times Notable Book and finalist for the PEN/Winship Award), and Perfect Life. Her writing has appeared in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Glamour, Mother Jones, and Wired among others. A graduate of Harvard University, she received her MFA from Columbia University. Shattuck now lives with her husband and three children in Brookline, MA.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* We Were the Lucky Ones by Georgia Hunter
* Pachinko by Min Jin Lee
* Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate
* The Great Alone by Kristin Hannah
* The Alice Network by Kate Quinn

**Discussion Questions**

1. What does the novel reveal about the method and degree of Hitler's appeal to the German populace? In what way does it address the most problematic question of the War: how the German people allowed themselves to be swept away by Hitler and Nazi propaganda. Just as important, how much—and at what point—did ordinary citizens truly know about the impoundment and murder of Europe's Jewish population.
2. Describe each of the three women—Marianne, Ania, and Benita. Talk about their different views of the Hitler regime as it unfolded and their various reasons for supporting it. What was each woman's role, or position, in German society, and how did each experience the war? What about the years after the war?
3. Which woman's story do you find most compelling, frightening, or horrifying? Are you more sympathetic toward one than the other two?
4. Most of the recent books about World War II focus on the horrors of the holocaust, and for good reason. Yet ordinary Germans also suffered, especially as the war neared the end. What was it like for the country as Nazism collapsed? Consider the population at large, but most particularly the women at Burg Lingenfels. How are the three of them luckier than most survivors?
5. What roles do hope…denial…and forgiveness play in this novel? Is Jessica Shattuck's book an attempt to somehow exonerate the citizens who supported Hitler's rise to power?
6. Has reading The Women in the Castle, changed in any way your understanding of World War II?
7. Before the war began, Marianne was charged with being “the Commander of Wives and Children.” How does she uphold her duty? A passionate and deeply moral woman, Marianne was certain she always did the right thing. But did she?
8. Do you think the confidence and self-certainty that enabled Marianne to survive also blinded her to her own failings—and to the goodness in those who did not seem to measure up to her rigid standards? Was she a good protector and friend to Benita and Ania?
9. At the end of the war, each woman was in a different place, physically and emotionally. What ordeals did these widows face? What choices were they forced to make to survive? How did the years of fighting—and their nation’s defeat—change daily life for Germans like Marianne, Benita, Ania, and their children?
10. What insights does The Women in the Castle hold for our own time?