

BETTE GREENE

*Summer of
My German Soldier*



30th
Anniversary

A National Book Award Finalist

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WHEN I SAW the crowd gathering at the train station, I worried what President Roosevelt would think. I just hope he doesn't get the idea that Jenkinsville, Arkansas, can't be trusted with a military secret because, truth of the matter is, we're as patriotic as anybody.

In front of the station house five or six Boy Scouts in full uniform circled their leader, Jimmy Wells, who was wearing the same expression Dane Clark wore as the Marine sergeant

in *Infamy at Pearl Harbor*. "This is the situation, guys," Jimmy said. "The sheriff told me it's the Army's job to get the Nazis off the train and into the prison camp, but I figger they'll be mighty glad to have us Scouts on hand. And if any of those rats try to make a getaway"—he slapped the leather-encased Scout ax strapped to his waist—"we know what to do."

I looked around for a friendly group to join. Mary Wren was holding onto the arm of Reverend Benn's wife as though that was going to provide her with the Lord's own protection. There are plenty of jokes going around about our town's telephone operator. People say Mary is so generous that she'll give you the gossip right off her tongue.

Then I saw old Chester, the colored porter from my father's store, closing his eyes against the brilliant June sun.

I walked over. "Hey, Chester, don't you think this is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to our town?"

His eyes jerked open. "I'm going back to the stock room right now, Miss Patty. Ain't been gone more'n two, maybe three minutes."

"Don't go on account of me, Chester. I won't tell my father. Honest." Chester smiled wide enough to show his gold tooth. "I've never in my whole life seen a German, I mean, in person. Have you?"

"I seen some foreigners once, but they was fortune-telling gypsies."

I looked over to where Sheriff Cauldwell, Mr. George C. Henkins, the president of the Jenkinsville Rotary Club, and Mr. Quentin Blakey, editor of the *Rice County Gazette*, were standing on the gray-white gravel. "I wonder what the sheriff is saying about all this," I said, heading toward them.

Mr. Blakey's head was pitched back to look into the sun-and-leather face of the sheriff. "I said, 'Captain, I know you're only doing your job as a public information officer, but I'll never understand why I'm not supposed to write about what everybody here already knows about.'"

"That's telling him, Quent," said the sheriff, looking amused.

"More to it than that," said Mr. Blakey. "Captain wouldn't tell me how many POW camps there are or where they're located, but after awhile he forgot about security—told me that up in Boston they got a bunch of Italian prisoners who do nothing but clean up after the elephants in Franklin Park."

Sheriff Cauldwell leaned his big head back and laughed the laugh of the healthy. "Captain wasn't talking security, he was talking crap."

From down the tracks, a whistle. Jimmy Wells ran over to one of the rails, dropped to his knees, and pressed his ear against it. His features were molded into Dane Clark's odds-are-against-us-but-we-can-do-it expression as he announced, "She's a-coming!"

All talking stopped and the small clusters of people began merging into one single mass. Even Chester, the only Negro, was now standing in arm-touching contact with whites.

Then amid hissing, steamy clouds of white, the train braked, screeched, and finally came to a halt.

From the crowd a woman's voice—it may have been Reverend Benn's wife—asked, "Well, where are they?"

Jimmy Wells pointed to the last passenger car. "There!"

Everyone hurried toward the end of the train in time to see two GIs with their side arms still strapped in their holsters

*It was a summer of love.
A summer of hate.
A summer that would last a lifetime.*



THE SUMMER THAT PATTY BERGEN TURNS twelve is a summer that will haunt her forever. When her small hometown in Arkansas becomes the site of a camp housing German prisoners during World War II, Patty learns what it means to open her heart. Even though she's Jewish, she begins to see a prison escapee, Anton, not as a Nazi—but as a lonely, frightened young man with feelings not unlike her own, who understands and appreciates her in a way her parents never will. And Patty is willing to risk losing family, friends—even her freedom—for what has quickly become the most important part of her life.

**A NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST
AN ALA NOTABLE BOOK**

ALSO BY BETTE GREENE
Morning Is a Long Time Coming

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