

Last Train from Kummersdorf by Leslie Wilson.
Faber and Faber 2003.

As Nazi Germany dissolves under the twin allied assaults from East and West, two children encounter each other and forge an alliance which takes them through ordeals a plenty until they are united with their surviving loved ones.

Contrary to first assumptions though, the two are not Jewish survivors but Germans, and the boy in question has been in the Hitler Youth and seen his twin brother killed by the Russians. From this starting point, challenging our conventional sympathies, Leslie Wilson weaves a powerful, touching, amusing story of survival against the odds. Her leading characters, Hanno and Effi, are well drawn and wholly credible, and the development of the relationship between the two, children made older than their time by forces beyond their control, is wholly credible.

This is a wonderful story for children, though it will appeal to adults too, and all readers will emerge from the story with their understanding deepened not only of the horrors of war, but of the way in which good, and love, can triumph over the most dreadful of circumstances.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh