

*The Forest of Vanishing Stars* is Kristin Harmel's fascinating new novel. The plot is based partially on true World War II survival stories and centers on a woman named Yona who lives in the forest. It is 1922 when two-year-old Yona is stolen from her crib in the Berlin home of her wealthy German parents. Yona's kidnapper, Jerusza, is an 82-year-old clairvoyant who lives in the forests of Eastern Europe. Jerusza kidnaps Yona believing Yona has been born for the sake of repairing the world-*tikkun olam*. She foresees Yona's parents as a threat to Yona's future acts of heroism. Jerusza takes Yona to the Nalibocka Forest and teaches her how to survive and thrive in the wilderness. When Jerusza dies in 1942 Yona loses the only human contact she has ever known. Yona is shocked when she realizes she is no longer alone in the forest. She encounters Jewish refugees escaping Nazi atrocities and initially doesn't know how to interact with these trespassers. She knows only of a struggle against nature, and nothing of war. Once Yona learns of the horrors these Jews have confronted she vows to help them survive. As she teaches the refugees how to establish lives in the forest, Yona learns about love and bonds between people. Unknowingly, danger awaits Yona outside the forest as a secret from her past threatens everything she has established. *The Forest of Vanishing Stars* is compelling and gripping. As Yona constantly risks her own life to protect others she becomes a luminary.