



Rue Ordener, Rue Labat (Stages)

By Sarah Kofman

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Rue Ordener, Rue Labat is a moving memoir by the distinguished French philosopher Sarah Kofman. It opens with the horrifying moment in July 1942 when the author's father, the rabbi of a small synagogue, was dragged by police from the family home on Rue Ordener in Paris, then transported to Auschwitz—"the place," writes Kofman, "where no eternal rest would or could ever be granted." It ends in the mid-1950s, when Kofman enrolled at the Sorbonne.

The book is as eloquent as it is forthright. Kofman recalls her father and family in the years before the war, then turns to the terrors and confusions of her own childhood in Paris during the German occupation. Not long after her father's disappearance, Kofman and her mother took refuge in the apartment of a Christian woman on Rue Labat, where they remained until the Liberation. This bold woman, whom Kofman called Mémé, undoubtedly saved the young girl and her mother from the death camps. But Kofman's close attachment to Mémé also resulted in a rupture between mother and child that was never to be fully healed.

This slender volume is distinguished by the author's clear prose, the carefully recounted horrors of her childhood, and the uncommon poise that came to her only with the passage of many years.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Kofman, a French philosopher and the author of *Freud and Fiction* and *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, began this recollection of her childhood years during the occupation of Paris in January 1943. In October 1994, she killed herself. This is not a deeply emotional book, although the subject is and Kofman clearly found it difficult to deal with her memories of those years. Encountering a schoolmate who stood up for her against anti-Semitic bullies, she couldn't bring herself to mention the event or her gratitude until a second encounter decades later. After Kofman's father was rounded up in July 1942, never to return, her mother sent her six children to hiding places in the country. Kofman, however, was a clingy, sickly child who, when she wasn't trying to escape, refused to eat food that wasn't kosher, a stubborn tribute to her father that threatened those around her. Eventually she was brought back to Paris and her mother, but when they had to flee their home on the Rue Ordener, Kofman's mother turned to the "Lady on the Rue Labat," who had once been their neighbor. There Kofman was torn between her increasingly difficult Jewish mother and the slightly obsessive coddling of the Christian woman whom Kofman called Meme. Kofman's rather dispassionate record of the occupation isn't one of rationing and hiding, though both are involved. Instead it is the story of the dissolution of a family and the end of childhood, set against a background that neither the adults of the story and certainly not the child could begin to comprehend.

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From Library Journal

Kofman, a philosopher-theoretician of art, philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis at the Sorbonne until she died by her own hand in 1994, describes the horrors that she and her family endured in Paris during the German occupation after her father, a rabbi, was dragged from their home on the Rue Ordener and deported to Auschwitz on July 16, 1942. (He was bludgeoned to death there with a pickaxe a year later by a Jewish butcher turned Kapo.) Throughout the occupation, Kofman and her mother lived on the Rue Labat, protected by a Christian woman whom Kofman calls Meme. Meme detached Kofman from her mother and from Judaism, but she saved them both from Nazi raids. The memoir ends with Kofman's enrollment at the Sorbonne in the mid-1950s. Published in France in 1994, this short, gripping memoir, adeptly translated, offers a vivid account of one person's struggle in Vichy France. Recommended for all libraries. ?Bob Ivey, Univ. of Memphis

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From [Booklist](#)

Kofman, a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne and author of more than 20 books, was one of France's most important contemporary thinkers, best known for her works on Nietzsche and Freud. Kofman wrote this short memoir--an account of her childhood between the ages of 8 and 18--in 1993, and it was published in France in 1994. It begins on the last day she ever saw her father, July 16, 1942, the day that Vichy police picked up Rabbi Kofman in the family apartment in Paris, and ends when she enrolled at the Sorbonne in the mid-1950s. That day in 1942, some 13,000 French Jews were rounded up and taken to Auschwitz. A Christian woman hid the author and her mother until the liberation of Paris. In October 1994 Kofman killed herself, leaving behind a haunting and painful chronicle of the Holocaust. *George Cohen*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willie McCorkle:

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