



Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K. : A Novel

By Lutz Van Dijk



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Based on a true story of forbidden wartime romance, Damned Strong Love is framed by a letter to the reader from the real Stefan, who cooperated with Lutz van Dijk in creating the book. Together they have crafted a book that shows how love can fight against hate; a book that reminds readers of the importance of tolerance and passion today.

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Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K. : A Novel By Lutz Van Dijk Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2475009 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Henry Holth n Co (J)
- Published on: 1995-05
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.75" h x 6.00" w x .75" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 138 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The word "damned" in this novel's title is not just an attention-grabbing expletive—it quite literally describes the consequences of the love between a teenaged Pole and a Nazi soldier during WWII. Narrator Stephan is 16 when he realizes he is gay; only months later, he meets an Austrian soldier named Willi: "Before my eyes I saw only him, this tender, handsome man—without his uniform, without the war and all of world history. Only him." Willi, equally enamored, and Stephan shut out the war (and the Nazi persecution of homosexuals) and embark on a passionate affair until Willi's unit is sent to Russia. Despite the sophisticated themes, the most striking quality of this narrative is its unblemished innocence: Stephan's easy acceptance of his sexuality makes it virtually impossible for the reader to reject it; and his susceptibility to a single individual rather than to the inimical German regime raises valuable if painful questions. Stephan's artlessness proves his downfall: he sends Willi a letter ("I can't sleep, I think only of you"), which leads to Stephan's arrest and a brutal three-year imprisonment (he is freed only when the war ends). Willi's fate, ominously, is never discovered. German writer van Dijk, identifying his story as a true one, appends an afterword by the real-life Stephan. Wrenching—and profoundly illuminating. Ages 14-up. (May) q
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From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up?Set in occupied Poland during World War II, this novel is based on the true story of Stefan K., a Polish boy who, at 16, fell in love with a German soldier. When their liaison was discovered by the Gestapo, the teen was tortured and sentenced to a labor camp. Readers learn how he managed to survive there until he escaped during the chaotic days before liberation. Stefan K.'s afterword, written in 1994, tells readers that he still doesn't know whether his lover survived. By assuming the first-person voice of Stefan, Van Dijk is able to deliver the story in a matter-of-fact way that engages readers. Stefan is a likable, believable character. The limitations of writing fiction from another person's memories are nonetheless evident: the immediacy of the narrative varies, and at times one is only vaguely aware of the passage of time. Still, this unusual account is an important document regarding Nazi treatment of homosexuals. Stefan K. ends the afterword, "...it is always a crime to punish love and to tolerate violence." His story will be a useful addition to Holocaust literature and to gay and lesbian history collections.?Claudia Morrow, Berkeley Public Library, CA
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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 8[^]-12. The Nazi persecution of homosexuals is dramatized in this story, translated from the German. It's based on the life of Stefan K., a Polish teenager whose love for an Austrian-German soldier led to capture, torture, and imprisonment by the Gestapo. In the first-person narrative, Stefan describes the bigotry and violence, but he also celebrates love and romance. He tells his older brother: "I dream of men the way you do of women--and I love this soldier!" Stefan is blindly confident that his secret relationship with Willi will not be a problem in occupied Poland, but the partisans condemn Stefan as a traitor for consorting with a German. Then Willi is sent away to the front; Stefan writes him a love letter; the Gestapo intercepts it, and Stefan is arrested. He never hears again from Willi; to this day he's afraid that his letter cost his lover his life. There are some gaps in the plot, but the prose is as natural as that in Crawford's other translations, such as Barbara Gehrts' *Don't Say a Word* (1986). An important addition to YA literature about the Holocaust and about the gay experience. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lavinia Arthur:

The feeling that you get from Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K. : A Novel may be the more deep you rooting the information that hide inside words the more you get thinking about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K. : A Novel giving you buzz feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in particular way that can be understood by means of anyone who read the idea because the author of this book is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this specific Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K. : A Novel instantly.

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Andrew Spivey:

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