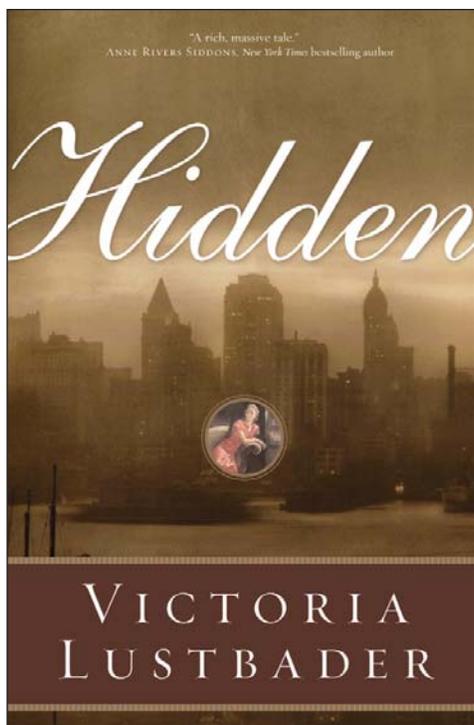




Victoria Lustbader

Hidden



“In this remarkable and accomplished debut, she [Lustbader] takes us as near as most of us would care to get to the conditions and backbreaking toil of the immigrant garment workers on the Lower East Side and also lets us sit at the candlelit dining tables of the rich and famous.”

—*THE WASHINGTON POST*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: Sigrid Estrada

Victoria Lustbader was for many years a fiction editor at Harper & Row and The Putnam Publishing Group. Following that, she enjoyed a second career with The Nature Conservancy on Long Island and New York State. She is now a full-time writer, living in New York City and

Long Island, and is married to novelist Eric Van Lustbader. *Hidden* is Victoria Lustbader's first novel.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Both panoramic and intimate, *Hidden* marvelously re-creates New York City in the 1920s, from the hustle and bustle of the Lower East Side to the hushed hallways of the homes of the rich and powerful. And it is here, concealing their passions and innermost thoughts even from those they love most dearly, that the Warshinskys and Gateses love, lust, seize power, do battle, and strive to rule themselves and their city during a decade of turmoil at home and abroad.

The battlefield traumas of the Great War cement an improbable friendship between Jed Gates, scion of the wealthy Gates family, and David Warshinsky, first-generation American from New York's poverty-ridden lower East Side. David sacrifices his family and his Jewish heritage in pursuit of his untamable ambition, while in eerie parallel, Jed sacrifices his private desires to assume the burdens of familial expectations.

Brilliantly evoking time, place, and person, *Hidden* draws readers deep into the past to illuminate the present. For nothing is more eternal than human feeling, and nothing more important to the human heart.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Hidden* begins and ends with David Warshinsky/Shaw, the character who most obviously hides in plain sight, living an entirely new life only blocks from his estranged family. Jed and Zoe also harbor secrets around which their lives are structured. Who do you think is the most “hidden” in this story? What secrets do other members of the families hide, and what, if anything, ultimately reveals those truths? Is it a relief or a catastrophe when that happens?
2. The family relationships in *Hidden* are rife with reversal of the relationships between parents and children, as seen in Libby’s desire to protect her mother from her father’s violence. What are the boundaries between parents and children in the Gates and Warshinsky families? Do you think that the qualities of these relationships are primarily a function of the era in which the book takes place, or are they more determined by the personalities of the characters? What obligations do you think children have to their parents, realistically? Who in *Hidden* fulfills some or most of those obligations, and what cost, if any, does that person pay?
3. Sexuality and sexual desire play an enormous role in the lives of most of the adult characters in *Hidden*, sometimes with disastrous results. How does sex influence the choices that these characters make? What are the forms their urges take, and what are the different ways they find to express, tame, or otherwise cope with them? Do you think that sexuality exerts as powerful an influence on human behavior as it does in this story? How might these characters’ struggles with sex and sexuality be different if the story took place today?
4. Monty seems to be the serpent in the garden of the wealthy and privileged Gates family. But does he have another role in the arc of the story? Is he a truth-teller? A foil for other characters’ arrogance? How do you feel about the punishment that Joseph and David ultimately mete out to him? Is it sufficient to his crimes?
5. David vanishes from the world in which he grew up and transforms himself into a new person. Yet he never leaves the city of his birth and ultimately lives in splendor within walking distance of his discarded and impoverished past. What does this say about the stratification of New York in the 1920s? Does that stratification still exist in American cities and towns today? Where in the story do people of different classes and different cultures intersect? What happens when they do?

6. Redemption is a major theme in *Hidden*. Many characters look to other family members to save them from unhappiness or painful experiences, to redeem their terrible losses or shattered dreams. Which characters seek redemption, and to whom do they look for it? Are human beings ultimately responsible for their own happiness? What responsibilities do family members have in securing happiness for one another?
7. David and Jed are best friends, devoted to one another as to no one else. What binds them? How much of that bond is honest and altruistic and how much unacknowledged or selfish? How do you think the love between friends differs from the love between family members or partners? Despite their devotion, David and Jed ultimately cannot help one another deal with the most difficult issues in their lives. Why not? What are the responsibilities of friendship? What do you believe would have happened to this friendship if David had learned the truth about Jed while Jed was still alive?
8. How are different religions portrayed in *Hidden*? Are Judaism, Christianity, and Christian Science helpful and strengthening to the characters who practice them, or are they oppressive or misleading? Does anyone disavow religion and, if so, why? Does religion function differently for the Gateses than for the Warshinskys? Are the various religions in the story portrayed in sufficient depth to allow you to understand their beliefs and precepts? Anti-Semitism is a subtext throughout the book. At what points does it come to the forefront of the story, and who displays it? What sort of a Jewish life, if any, do you think David will go on to have after the story’s end?
9. David’s presence in the Gates family creates, as the author says, enormous ripples of consequence. How does David influence the lives of various family members? What roles does he play within the Gates family? Do you think that he, more than other characters, is a catalyst for change? What do you think would have happened to the Gateses if David had not become part of their lives? Do members of the Gates family find him easier to relate to precisely because he isn’t a blood relative, and does David feel the same way about them? Which characters in the story do you think are most truly kin?
10. Family expectations play a huge part in how both the Gateses and the Warshinskys raise their children. Do you think that parents’ expectations can be helpful in guiding children? Are they ever helpful in *Hidden*? Who flouts family expectations most consistently, and, conversely, who suffers the most from the burden of those expectations? How do expectations differ in the two families, based on socioeconomic class, culture, and religion?

11. *Hidden* takes place at the dawn of feminism.

Which female characters are feminists? In what ways do the women in the story try to obtain and assert power? Does their ability to do so change due to the burgeoning of the women's movement during the years in which the book takes place? How do you think that these women's lives would be different if they lived decades later? How many of the issues faced by the women in the story are still faced by women today?

12. Though the book is filled with highly emotional characters and situations, the value of emotions is constantly in question in *Hidden*. What role does emotion play in the Warshinskys' family and community, and how does it differ for the Gateses? Who suppresses emotion most vigilantly, and why? Typically, women are said to be more in touch with and guided by emotional life than men are. Is this true in this book? Does class play a part in determining whether displaying or even feeling emotion is a virtue or a weakness? Which of the book's many emotional moments do you find most affecting?

13. *Hidden* seems to wrangle with the character of Joseph Gates. Is he an admirable and decisive leader and mentor or a rigid, hidebound dictator with unflinching expectations of his family? Or is he both? How much esteem do you think he deserves, and why? Toward the end of the book, we discover that Joseph believes his grandson did the right thing by committing suicide to avoid disgracing the family with the revelation of his homosexuality. How does this affect your opinion of Joseph? What qualities set Joseph apart as a leader, and how do those qualities color his family life? How is David—the heir Joseph believes is most like him and best able to continue his leadership—similar to Joseph, and how is he different?

PRAISE FOR *HIDDEN*

"Lustbader has revisited the family-saga format that was so popular in the 80s. She reminds you of why we loved those stories, and her characters are vibrant and full-bodied.... This is a gripping story that's lots of fun."

—ROMANTIC TIMES BOOKREVIEWS, 4½ STAR REVIEW

"*Hidden* is a rich, massive tale....

What a fine first effort for Victoria Lustbader."

—ANNE RIVERS SIDDONS,

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

"Readers who enjoy epic, historical family sagas will not be disappointed.... This hard-to-put-down, historically accurate tale is filled with conversations that are both realistic and entertaining." —LIBRARY JOURNAL