

SCOTSBARSZCZ

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MAPS AND SHADOWS

Krysia Jopek,
Aquila Polonica
(Hardback £13.99,
Paperback £9.99)

■ LIKE a family scrapbook of memories,

this harrowing story of Polish parents and their three children being torn from their home and forced on to cattle trucks to be

trundled off to a Siberian labour camp is told through the eyes of Helcia, 14, her brother Henryk, 11, and mum and dad Andrzej and Zofia.

It's a fictionalised account of the actual experiences of the author's father and his family, pieced together from the recollections of her relatives, but set out in a very unusual way.

The narrative is interspersed with poetry, the lyrical language in stark contrast to the brutality of life during wartime for those exiled Poles.

Their journey from idyllic life on a pre-war farm to being rounded up as enemies of the state and carted off in what one of them describes as mobile barns with no lighting, heating or toilet on board to the frozen wastes of northern Russia is recounted

first by Henryk, then taken up by Helcia. Dad Andrzej tells of the years spent in the frozen wastes, the slave labour and starvation that many prisoners did not survive and mum Zofia's voice takes us from Siberia back on to trains as the family make their way thousands of miles south to Uzbekistan.

There are partings of the ways, long periods apart as individual members of the family go their separate ways – Andrzej and Henryk, then 14, to join the war, Zofia, Helcia and baby Józef left to try to establish a new life as they move from Uzbekistan to Tangyanika, then Kenya and finally by plane to London where they are taken to a temporary camp in Lancashire and, eventually, a final reunion of the family.

It's a beautifully written book you might find yourself wanting to dip in and out of long after you've finished reading the story.

aquila polonica: www.aquilapolonica.co.uk/