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Mirjam Pressler, Elizabeth D. Crawford (Translator)

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You should never hope for a miracle, for then you might count on it really happening.

In the two years Halinka has spent in a home for girls, she has learned not to hope for anything, and to hold tightly to what she has. But all Halinka has is herself, a blanket from her beloved Aunt Lou, and a secret notebook where she holds her sayings.

Just as she is losing hope of ever finding a home, and forgetting all she once loved, Halinka sees something that reminds her that everyone needs some beauty in their lives, like they need air, or food . . . and maybe a friend. But for that, Halinka would have to share her thoughts, secrets, and maybe even her memories. And she's not sure if she can afford to lose that much.

Halinka Details

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From Reader Review Halinka for online ebook

Melainebooks says

L'histoire d'Halinka n'est pas simple : sa mère polonaise l'a abandonnée et elle voit de temps en temps sa tante Lou avec qui elle espère vivre.

Heureusement, elle se fait une amie, Renate, et le récit est basé sur cette amitié.

Nina Mielke says

Dies ist die Geschichte von Halinka und ihrem Tagebuch. Doch in das Tagebuch schreibt Halinka nur Weisheiten. Niemand darf wissen, an was sie sich erinnert, wenn sie diese Weisheiten liest nur sie und vielleicht Tante Lou. Die Gefahr ist groß, dass jemand Halinkas Tagebuch findet, denn die 12jährige lebt mit vielen anderen Mädchen in einem Heim. Lange versucht sie, keine Freundschaften zu anderen Mädchen aufzubauen. Sie möchte zu niemandem Vertrauen fassen. Doch dann kommt alles anders. M. Pressler ist eine Meisterin in ihrem Beruf. Sie versteht die Welt der Kinder und weiß deren Gedanken in Worte zu fassen. Sie hat schon viele gute Kinderbücher veröffentlicht und auch mit *Wenn das Glück kommt, muß man ihm einen Stuhl hinstellen* hat sie ein Meisterwerk geschaffen.

Meaghan says

A sad, sweet tale of a lonely girl (I don't remember them mentioning her age, but I'd guess eleven or so) in an orphanage. Although the story is set in Germany in the early 1950s, it could come from just about any time or place.

Halinka's attempts to stay strong and find some joy in her Spartan existence ring true. At first she stays aloof from everyone, keeping her thoughts and inside her head and sharing them only with her secret book and a beloved aunt whom she occasionally visits. Eventually, however, Halinka lets her guard down and confides in a few select people at the children's home.

I thought the characterization in particular was very well-done. With the novel being set in an institution, all the orphan girls might start to blur together, but Pressler was able to make each child, and each staff member, distinctive. Although the movement in the story is largely internal, the fundraising contest added some suspense. I would highly recommend this for 9-to-12 girls.

A few notes: contrary to some of the descriptions of this book, the orphanage is NOT a home for "troubled" girls. I also don't think Halinka is Jewish, though the book wasn't entirely clear on that point. In any case it didn't matter whether or not she was.

Jess says

Halinka-Mirjam Pressler

Wonderful book about a girl at a foster home in Germany after the war (1950's?) . The character, Halinka, is a very thoughtful, cautious girl who's only wish is to have the chance to live with her beloved aunt. As I mentioned before, Halinka is a very cautious girl, and at the beginning of the book, she only confides in her "Sayings Book" where she writes a saying down to link to a memory. This is her way to prevent the girls in her dorm from accessing her journal and reading everything about her. Eventually she opens up and shares her history with a very select few friends. I really like Halinka as a character, and it is very interesting to see her history unfold as M. Pressler lets secret after secret, detail after detail leak out into the pages.

Martin says

Eine berührende Geschichte. Und um ganz darin einzutauchen, muss man selber wieder etwas zum Kind werden. Unsere verschlossene, mutige Protagonistin ging mir niemals auf die Nerven. Die Weisheiten, die sie sich teils selber ausdenkt, die größtenteils aber von ihrer Tante stammen, klingen nicht altklug oder unpassend; Halinka und die anderen Heimkinder werden glaubwürdig dargestellt. Kinder, die Anfang der 50iger in einem Heim (vermutlich in Mannheim) leben.

Meine Befürchtung war, dass die Geschichte allzu traurig wird und mich niedergeschlagen zurücklässt. Mirjam Pressler aber findet ein passendes Ende - weder schmalzig, noch unglücklich - eher hoffnungsvoll und schön :-).

Aisha says

I really loved this book because first of all, historical fiction is a genre that I don't really read but this book really interested me. It's about a girl named Halinka and her struggle living in a home for girls. I rate this book 4 stars.

Roya says

Lisa Vegan says

This was a perfect comfort read, especially for my 10-year-old self. I'm sure it would have been a favorite book of mine around that time.

I was immediately engaged. It was a very quick read and hard to put down.

I adore the narrator main character, with her strengths and flaws. I appreciate that she's a reader, and thoughtful and introspective, and a survivor, and that she's not always honest. In other words, she seems so real. I also like that the reader gets to know quite a bit about the other children in the home and things about

some of the adults too. I also appreciated that a lot is left unknown and up to the readers' imaginations and guesses. I think the way the story showed the girls and how they coped with their situations was very authentic. The characters are truly three-dimensional and have depth, the children and the adults too. The latter often isn't the case in children's books.

It reminded me a bit of *The Secret Language* though I thought this book was better than that one.

I felt emotionally touched, I was always interested, and I sometimes got hungry, typical of me when I'm reading books where food is described in great detail, especially when there are hungry characters and characters not getting quite enough food or not normally getting to choose what they eat.

The inside book cover mentions that the girls (in Halinka's room) are 12 (well they're in two grades so I'd guess different ages by at least a year) but they did seem a bit younger to me. Maybe 10? Maybe 11? Given their backgrounds and circumstances and given that this is historical fiction and not contemporary, I guess they could seem a bit younger to me than they are.

I'm not taking off any stars but there were things that bother me, such as the fat shaming, though in these girls' cases, getting not quite enough food to be fully satisfied, it's perfectly understandable.

I think this English language edition was translated with U.S. audiences in mind. The way they say the school grades is very American.

Anyway, I loved it and I'm so glad that I read it. This is the third book I've recently read that worked to get me out of a reading slump. Superb book!

Recommended for many readers, especially girls 9-12, and people who work with neglected and abused kids, institutionalized kids, and families in crisis.

ETA: I should think more before I write. I want to add that there is a lot of humor in this book despite its generally sad stories.

Pumsish says

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Hilary says

This is a very moving account of a young girl's life in a childrens home. The story is set in Germany, shortly after WW2. Halinka has been put in the home after being removed from her mother who was neglectful, Halinka also suffered physical abuse but it is not clear if this was from her mother or her mother's boyfriends. Halinka has one good person in her life, her mother's sister, who loves her but can rarely see her.

The story is about the day to day life in the home. Halinka struggles to make friends and finds it hard to trust. It is sensitively written and you feel for Halinka who seems to have had little joy or kindness in her life. As you would expect from children who have suffered loss and abuse, there is bullying, fighting and physical

violence. As the story is told from the perspective of the children, there are parts where views are expressed that are not correct or kind, for example when the children are expressing views on gypsies or prostitutes. There are some parts which make for uncomfortable reading. Despite the sadness of the book the small incidents of happiness were lovely and you feel that there is hope for the characters in the story.
