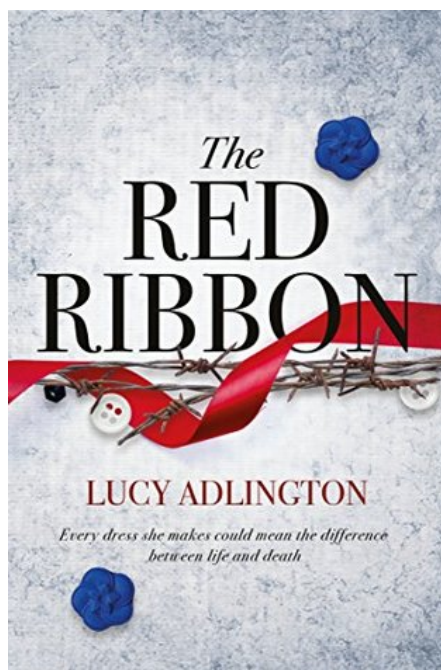




The Red Ribbon

Lucy Adlington

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The Red Ribbon Lucy Adlington

Rose, Ella, Marta and Carla. In another life we might have all been friends together. But this was Birchwood.

As fourteen-year-old Ella begins her first day at work she steps into a world of silks, seams, scissors, pins, hems and trimmings. She is a dressmaker, but this is no ordinary sewing workshop. Hers are no ordinary clients. Ella has joined the seamstresses of Birkenau-Auschwitz.

Every dress she makes could be the difference between life and death. And this place is all about survival.

Ella seeks refuge from this reality, and from haunting memories, in her work and in the world of fashion and fabrics. She is faced with painful decisions about how far she is prepared to go to survive.

Is her love of clothes and creativity nothing more than collaboration with her captors, or is it a means of staying alive?

Will she fight for herself alone, or will she trust the importance of an ever-deepening friendship with Rose?

One thing weaves through the colours of couture gowns and camp mud - a red ribbon, given to Ella as a symbol of hope.

The Red Ribbon Details

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From Reader Review The Red Ribbon for online ebook

Heather Copping says

Firstly I thought the cover of this book is much nicer than the picture online, as you read it you will find pictures of pins, buttons, scissors etc printed on the pages which at first I did find a bit off-putting, but after a while I was fighting my emotions as I did find this book to be quite disturbing and depressing, it's a sad story with its talk of subhuman people, chimneys, ash and red flames, even the hospital was described as the waiting room for the end! The main character is fourteen year old Ella who lived with her grandparents, before being "plucked" from the streets and she never knew her mother and father. Her best friend was Rose, who was from a wealthy family, her mother was an author and Rose has a love of books and she is often lost in her own world of imaginary stories. Ella, Rose and two other main characters are thrown together in Birchwood, which was Auschwitz in Poland. This is a story that certainly makes you think and ponder on life today and how it was for these poor unfortunate people during the war.

Laura says

Book reviews on www.snazzybooks.com

The Red Ribbon is a touching, emotional and shocking story, set in the concentration camps of WW2, but showing a different side of the camps. Not a nicer side, mind you, but definitely a little different to what we often read about or see in films – I knew nothing about the seamstresses and clothing studios of WW2 concentration camps before I read this novel.

The story centers around Ella, who has just started a new job at a sewing studio – in Auschwitz. It's a truly shocking story at times, and at other points it's quite sweet and touching as we see the relationship between Ella and her best friend, Rose. It also feels very poignant when Ella thinks back to life before the war, and about her family; you really feel for her and can't imagine the horror. She'll drop things into the story really casually – like she was picking lice off the seams of her dress, for example. This really shocked me – I re-read it twice – even though there were other horrible things happening. It made my skin crawl! It's just one of the ways Lucy Adlington illustrates the horrible living conditions for Ella and the prisoners around her.

I loved both Ella and Rose; they were both really sweet in their own ways, though Ella could be a very headstrong at times and at first I have to admit I found her a little annoying... Rose was also so likable, trying her hardest to create an imaginary world around her to attempt to block out the horrors taking place there.

I don't read a huge amount from the Young Adult genre and was surprised to see that The Red Ribbon is classed as YA – I hugely enjoyed it, anyway. The book itself is so aesthetically pleasing – it would make an amazing gift. Each page features illustrations of ribbons, scissors and pins, and the cover is beautiful! This provides a strong contrast compared to the stark, colourless world of Auschwitz.

This is a powerful novel of friendship, determination and desperation which I would recommend to anyone. It's not an 'enjoyable' read as such, due to the subject matter, but I think it is an important one.

Many thanks to Readers First for providing a copy of this beautiful novel, on which I chose to write an honest and unbiased review.

Karina says

Absolutely stunning - one of the best books I've read in ages. If you ever doubted the importance of clothing - as I have - this will make you question that; in Birchwood, the Stripeys are stripped when they arrive. Everything is taken from these women; their clothes, their hair, their dignity - but they do their best to hold onto their humanity and sense of self, in whatever way they can.

Ella is a talented seamstress and along with Rose who becomes her best friend she uses her talents in the struggle to survive the nightmare of Auschwitz. Dressmaking becomes her passport to a little extra bread, an easier indoor job, and opportunity to see vivid colours beyond the grey and brown ash and mud of Birchwood.

Hope for Ella and Rose - and peril - are embodied in a scrap of scarlet silk ribbon...
Wonderful, evocative and heartrending - an incredible book.

Kirstie Ellen says

Thanks to Allen & Unwin for providing me with a review copy for this in exchange for an honest review!

Initial Thoughts Upon Finishing

This was seriously fantastic. It was not at all what I expected going into it as the blurb is fairly mysterious but oh wow, this blew me away. I can't recommend this book enough; if you've read or heard of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas then by golly you should be reading this one. Fantastic protagonist, fantastic story, unique perspective.

The Red Ribbon

This book was simply phenomenal. I can't get over it — like I'm seriously slumping over here, I can't just move on with my life after that. WHY YOU GOTTA BE SO GOOD, BOOK?

The Red Ribbon is a young adult book (that reads as though it could be children's fiction sometimes) set during WWII. It takes place in Auschwitz, the most infamous concentration camp, and follows a girl called Ella. If you want a book that presents to you the unique perspective of a young girl in a concentration camp that rivals the standard of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, you've found it. This is your book.

Ella is roughly twelve years old (I could probably look it up but hey, who has time for that). She's alone in the camp and seems fairly naïve to start with as to why she is there. She also doesn't seem to completely understand what the purpose of the camp is. She pretends to be sixteen and lands herself a "job" in the Upper Tailoring Studio (I think that's its name) where she becomes a seamstress.

The whole book centres around this being her passion — she loves sewing and she dreams of leaving the camp to open up her own dress shop. Ella is a very sweet character who learns quickly what it takes to survive this place. Along the way we meet three other girls: Rose, a young girl who becomes Ella's good friend, Marta, the head of the seamstresses, and Carla, a guard. Each is different to the other and brings something worthwhile to the story.

This has got to be one of my favourite books set in Auschwitz now for the brilliant way in which Adlington has brought the horrors and trials of this place to life in a very relatable way.

Historical Fiction Done RIGHT

My favourite thing about this book is the way that it's told. The blurb on the back of the book I have doesn't say "Auschwitz" in it and so, being told the characters were sewing for their lives and the general *atmosphere* of the blurb (if a blurb can have an atmosphere) I assumed I was diving into an epic fantasy story. Yeah, no. But I loved that, surprisingly.

It's a very *real* way of approaching the story. Adlington doesn't name-drop Auschwitz until a couple of chapters in. It made me realise just how much I love not knowing anything until the story gets going. It also meant that I gasped audibly, catapulted the book across the room and ran around the house going THIS WAS UNEXPECTED with dramatic flailing arms. That's a good thing, I promise.

The fact that it's coming from Ella's perspective and she is not in the know about everything that is happening makes it a really user-friendly read of what the camp was like. We find things out slowly through her character, so there is no excessive info-dump or overwhelming political confusions. She's in a camp, she has to be able to sew or she'll die, she has to stand during roll call (and is pleased if it is not "interrupted" by someone falling over dead) and if she plays the game right, she must just make it out alive.

The absolute best part about this book, however, is the lack of labels. This was an intentional thing done by Adlington for extremely well thought out reasons. The words "Nazi" and "Jew" are never used to describe the characters. Ella wears a star, which we as readers know to mean she is a Jew, but it's only ever explained as her crime being who she was. Rose has a red badge and Ella knows that to mean she is a political prisoner (but still doesn't fully understand that).

Why is this so clever? Because Adlington 100% achieves what she was aiming to by doing this. By deliberately not using labels, the characters instantly become relatable. I see a young girl who has done nothing wrong and didn't make it home from school one day when the "guards" came and took her away to that place. I can relate to that; she's just a girl and her crime was being her. When you slam down labels such as Jew, my brain takes a back seat and doesn't stress so much over the character's dilemmas, not deliberately, but simply because that character could not have been me.

In addition to this, it makes the other plot aspect that Adlington is angling for, work. She has four girls and the idea is that they could have been friends if it weren't for the war. I think if labels had been used and Carla, the guard, had been called a Nazi, it would have just been a little harder to imagine that. But guard is an inoffensive term and therefore I can make the leap, just a bit easier.

I loved having the four very diverse characters for other reasons, too. As they *were* so different, we were able to see the different types of people and how they responded the situation they found themselves in. It was a good way of showing just how wonderful Ella is given that throughout her ordeal, the integrity of her characters holds fast. AND, she holds onto her dream. I loved this.

Spoilers

So now, let's discuss some specifics. But before I do, I want to start this section by saying that I absolutely adored the ending. It was so refreshing to read a book with this sort of setting and have the happiest ending you could have hoped for — without it being too unrealistic.

(view spoiler)

Summary

I highly recommend this book to anyone out there who finds war stories interesting. If you liked [The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas](#) then certainly read this one! It's really well executed with such an interesting plot line and an extremely interesting way of telling the story.

Happy reading!

Wendy says

From beginning to end, and everything in between, *The Red Ribbon* is truly unforgettable. It's nurtured with a sensitivity and thoughtfulness that encourages hope, even in the darkest of places. The contradiction of captives wearing their shapeless, faded uniforms while sewing exquisite clothes to adorn their captors provides an opportunity for both admirable and shameful attitudes to surface.

Chapter headings of specific hues emphasise the stark contrast to the otherwise colourless and heart-wrenchingly grim world of Birchwood – also known as Auschwitz. The headings themselves are tailored to draw inspiration from the vibrant fabrics being bought to life, the natural landscape, and prisoners' distant memories, all of which are cruelly divided by barbed wire.

The implications for those in camp whose arduous work duty is considered a privilege are **balanced with optimism as distinctive of one of young Ella's designs**, without ever losing touch with the reality that war has literally stamped upon them. These prisoners are acutely aware that their only reward is being allowed to exist for another day simply because they were 'useful', appreciating that any extra time could bring them one step closer to freedom.

I'm ashamed to admit that it took me a while to warm to Ella. She appears selfish, quickly identifying with her situation and manoeuvring accordingly to ensure SHE was one of the 'useful' ones and could hold on to her dreams and the future. As I read on I began to ask myself, "what was the alternative? Would others give way for her?" **The roots of her self-preservation not only grow stronger but become an anchor for others and I realised it would be impossible to comprehend anything under those circumstances, except that first impressions can be deceptive.**

I can't leave without saying how this **wonderfully expressive and moving read** is presented as the most elegant hardcover I have ever seen. Its pages display traces of sewing embellishments like buttons and pins, and even the symbolic red ribbon itself leaves a visual impression as it swirls through the printed text.

(I received a copy of this title from the Reader's First website courtesy of the publisher. It is my absolute pleasure to provide this unbiased review.)

Ruby Granger says

A beautiful tale of friendship, kindness and love within the harrowing camp of Aushwitz-Birkinau. I really love reading Holocaust literature -- I think that we have a duty to at least TRY and understand what happened in the second world war. We need to try our best to empathise, despite the fact that this not only seems but IS impossible.

We never learn how old Ella is because she lies about her age, but she is a young (under 16) Jewish girl with a passion for dressmaking. After securing a job in the sewing rooms, she starts making dresses for the commander's wife and female guards, a task which helps her to escape from the cruel chaos which surrounds her.

Adlington's attention to detail was impressive and, as a result, I would recommend her book to those trying to learn more about Death Camps and how they worked. The only thing which I am critical of is how unrealistic the story is. If you keep in mind that this is fiction, however, and that (whilst Ella's experiences are certainly harrowing) many suffered to a much greater degree, I would highly recommend it.

Bookread2day says

I loved reading Red Ribbon because I found many things that were the same in Red Ribbon, that was a long time ago the same things in my own childhood.

I related to the girls working on the sewing machines. My aunt used to work in a very small place sewing baby bibs and rubber pants. The scene in Red Ribbon about Grandma's house stunk of fish for days after, brought back my own memories. When I used to stay with my nan we visited my great Nan taking her kippers. It's strange because I now clearly remember that my great nan's place always used to smell of kippers. I loved the way the author Lucy Adlington brought to life Marta the boss in being razor sharp and extremely bossy. Pay attention her bossiness came across it scared even me reading about her.

There's a lot more involved in Red Ribbon to read about. But I don't want to spoil it for any reader who is about to start the journey into reading Red Ribbon.

Christina Reid says

What a beautiful, bleak, heartbreaking yet hopeful story. Should be required reading. Full review to come!

Kelly says

I think WWII books are very important to read and I don't find myself reading them often even though I have a few on my shelves. This one, unfortunately, was **just okay** for me. I read it in two months (well, I started it in October then put it down for two months before finishing it) and that's because this story didn't interest me all that much. I was a little bored to be honest. There were moments I liked reading it but most of the time I was reading it because I had to.

I did find the story to be **unrealistic** at times (and happier than what might have really occurred). This book wasn't as heartbreaking as you might expect from a WWII book but I guess it's meant to be read by younger readers? Also, I wished the one sentence where the FMC said she might kiss her best friend would have been developed but that didn't happen. However, I did like the friendship they had.

(I received a copy from the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for my review)

Alice-Elizabeth (marriedtobooks) says

The Red Ribbon is an emotional, poignant and incredibly well-written YA Historical Fiction that I was just looking for. Set during the end of WW2, in the concentration camp Birchwood, it follows two young girls called Rose and Ella. Both have been arrested and start work in the tailoring workshop controlled by Marta, brutal and angry. Ella has a passion to have her own dress making shop but with no freedom, that is only a dream. She and Rose cross paths with Carla, a guard who looks nice but has multiple personas. The imagery from the writing style was clear to see as I read on, wanting to find out if the girls survived and were liberated from the camp. I think the novel was well-researched and overall, left me blown away by how much I enjoyed it.

Sorry for the short review, just finished reading it a few minutes prior to typing and I'm still recalling from the last page. Just pick this book up if you haven't already.

Sandra "Jeanz" says

REVIEW

So approaching this book I wasn't sure what to expect, I was hoping for a personal level story not just a retelling of the atrocities. I personally think that the Holocaust is something that should never ever be forgotten. I have read a few books, both fiction and non fiction that are set in this era of history. This book is actually based on facts though it is a work of fiction as are the people portrayed in it. It brings home to you that those horrific acts were carried out on normal people every day people that belonged in families. These people didn't do anything to warrant being treated in the horrendous ways the German army treat them.

The background of the cover is a bleak grey/white colour, which I think represents the nothingness of the world the prisoners are forced to exist in. There is a red ribbon as a main feature of the cover and it is twined around some barbed wire. Also on the cover are some different buttons, which have an important significance in the book. The cover also features the byline "Every dress she makes could mean the difference between life and death" which you realise when reading the book that this is a stark truth. Something as simple as one of the female guards, the male guards wives or the Commandants Wife not liking a dress you have made them, or you may have not made it quickly enough could result in you being shot, or worse having your job & it's meagre perks taken away from you. Losing your job could mean a slow death from starvation and heavy back breaking work. I did find the cover interesting and it certainly made me curious about the red ribbon and the pretty buttons and how they were a part of the ugliness of a concentration camp. I felt compelled to read the book, we owe it to both the few that survived and the ones that didn't to read their stories and pass them on to the next generation. I really did feel pulled into this book immediately and it held me captive and on the edge of my seat until the very end.

So the book's main character is a fourteen year old girl called Ella who is picked up on the street whilst running an errand and taken to Birkenau-Auschwitz. No one has a name anymore, just a number you must remember and be able to recite to any guard or prominent that asks you for it. Ella manages to fake her age as sixteen, as anyone below that age is considered useless and usually ends up either doing back breaking work that kills them or being sent to the "showers". I would describe Ella as being an optimist, always hoping for the best, seeing the good in people. There is very little in her surroundings to find good or hope in but she manages to battle on through whatever is done to her or taken from her. Ella's character, and seeing

the awful acts being committed around her give us the reader a very realistic insight into the era covered by the book.

Another central character in the book is Rose, who is described as looking like a la-di-da who wears odd shoes, one is a sickly green satin slipper with a metal buckle, the other is a leather brogue with broken laces. The thing that stands out about Rose is she really doesn't care what she may look like. She has shoes to wear and that's fine. Rose ends up sharing a bunk and mattress with Ella. Rose tells Ella all about how her mother is a famous writer, that she will be waiting for her. Rose also likes to make up stories which become a quite popular way the girls while away time until they finally fall asleep in their bunks. They come to rely on each other for hope. Rose and Ella even plan for "after" their time in Auschwitz-Birkenau. They list family they want to see, books they want to read, clothes they wish to make and wear as well as having a dress shop and working there together. They even plan where to meet up, a place which their famous dress shop will be.

In the book Ella tells her story of how she came to be where she is, which is Birchwood. Though Birchwood is much better known and most often referred to in history as Auschwitz-Birkenau. A one sentence description of Auschwitz within this book stood out for me "The place where everyone arrives, and nobody leaves." Those people dispatched to Auschwitz soon realise that their lives have changed forever, and to survive, they have to adapt quickly. These prisoners find out that what before seemed trivial can be something that is very important when it is taken away. All prisoners are stripped of all their clothes and possessions and given identical stripey garments to wear, their hair is shaved and the women given a piece of fabric to use as a scarf. Then you are thrown some shoes from a large pile of them, so there's a scramble to get a pair that fit let alone a pair that match.

A typical day for Ella began with being woken in her barracks at four thirty am, she had to climb from the top of the three tier damp wooden shelves, leaving her dirty straw mattress behind. With around five hundred women squashed in each barrack block, it meant at least six women to a bunk, with just one mattress shared by at least two women. There was no other furniture in the barracks block, just some toilet buckets. Each Barracks has a "Barracks Boss", who is a prisoner themselves but rules the Barracks. "Bull" is the boss of the Barracks that Ella exists in. With cramped conditions like this it was inevitable that disease, infestations and illnesses spread rapidly. Though being sent to the camp hospital was the last place you wished to be sent as it was rare for anyone to return from hospital. Once up, there was Roll Call. You really was just a number in a list, not a human being. Stripeys had badges made of different colour cloth sewn onto their dresses. The badge showed the reasons why "They" has decided you weren't fit to live in the real, free world anymore, such as a green triangle for bosses. Rose aka Squirrel/Princess has a red triangle which means she is a political prisoner. In Ella's opinion it's crazy, how can Rose be a political enemy!? She was such a dreamy, dipstick, who loved stories. Ella has a gold star, but this gold star was not like one you could receive at school for good work, and to be worn with pride. This star meant you were classed and treated as the lowest of the low, not even a full human, they were treat below human and were totally disposable! At roll call everything had to be perfect, everyone had to look the same, the guards made sure. Ella recalls a woman who had dared to attempt to slick what was left of her hair to try to make herself look/feel better. The guards pounced on this woman who had dared to try to make herself look and feel better and she was punished by being beaten unconscious. This book is packed with incidents where stripeys are put in their place by the guards for the most trivial things possible.

There are other jobs available at the camp, such as working in the "washery" or sorting through possessions for valuables and for items that can be reused, or the back breaking work in the surrounding fields. You had to be tougher to work in the "washery" so it is a very big change from working in the sewing room. Ella still refers to those around her in terms of animals. There's Bear, the boss of the washery who is in charge of giving out the specific tasks. Then there's Hyena who assists Bear, they both make life difficult for Ella and Rose insinuating they are "too soft" to do the work. Ella and Rose are given the worst jobs day in and day out but they still remain grateful for the work as it means a little more food at the end of the day as well as

another day not having to do the back breaking work that eventually kills you. They do eventually earn the respect of the tougher women in the "washery" too.

By faking her age and keeping her eyes and ears open she hears about a job going in the sewing room. There is a kind of frantic race to the sewing room, Ella and a female she names "Rabbit". Rabbit even loses one of her shoes in the process. Those wanting the job have to impress Marta, the Prominent in charge of the sewing room. (Prominent's are prisoners who have been given privileges and power. They have just enough power to rule the other prisoners making the majority of them into successful bullies.) Marta put Ella and Rabbit on trial, they are each given a task. Ella to make a dress from scratch for a blonde client called Carla. Where as Rabbit as Ella names her (is 24 years old, and stutters and shuffles about like a rabbit) is tasked with letting out a designer blouse for a client who doesn't want to admit how plump she is. There is much more to the trial than I have shared but I don't want to giveaway too much, so I'll just say that Ella manages to impress the "Prominent" Marta and her client Carla. The sewing and dressmaking skills Ella has were learnt whilst sitting with her Grandmother end up coming in really useful. It means Ella has a good chance at a relatively good job that is coveted by many. When Ella is in the sewing room her thoughts often stray to memories she made with her Grandmother, such as where her Grandmother is now? If she wonders where she (Ella) is? If Grandmother is waiting for her to return? Ella also asks herself what her grandmother would say or do in the situations she finds herself in.

Those employed in the sewing room don't get chance to speak to each other very much, they are their to work and provide a dressmaking service primarily to the Commandant's wife. So when Ella works there she gives her fellow workers names that remind her how they behave. There's Marta, the prominent in charge who loves giving orders, her name is "Shark". The other girls that applied for a job the same day as Ella are "Squirrel/Princess" (Rose) who gets put on trial with Ella. Then there's "Rabbit" who lost a shoe in the race to get to the sewing room as quickly as possible to be interviewed for the vacancy. Rabbit is 24 years old, and stutters and shuffles about like a rabbit. Already working in the sewing room that Ella originally notices is Francine "Frog" who is wide and squat with blobby skin.

Ella is quite successful in her sewing and making garments, but with success comes more danger. Though Ella becomes a more trusted prisoner, she has to be careful to act meekly and as expected to act by the guards or she will be immediately slapped down. What is given can quite easily be ripped away.

I loved the way the character of Ella shares some of her Grandmothers sayings in the book. They seem to envoke happier memories for her. Grandmothers sayings are things such as, "Clean hands means clean work", "Waste not want not", and "Better than a smack in the eye with a wet kipper". Ella also remembers her Grandmothers advice such as "Don't think failure, you can do anything you put your mind to", "Sorry doesn't butter any bread"and "Cross that bridge when you come to it, or swim the river if you have to".

As you will probably have guessed by now Ella was my favourite character, she knew what was happening around her,she could see it and hear it all but to cope she manages to shut the bad things out as much as she can. It is something she has to do to survive. When one door is quite literally slammed in her face she doesn't give up and looks around until she can find another job. Ella is a character that needs to work and keep busy in order to block out the horrors taking place around her. Ella may only be a teenager but she quickly adapts to her surroundings and learn when to speak up and when to turn a blind eye even when she really wants to stand up for herself and those around her. In the unlikely surroundings Ella manages to make both a best friend and other friends, some of which she doesn't realise she has until she is at her very lowest. Ella's best friend is Rose aka Squirrel/Princess. Rose came from a well to do, wealthy family. Rose loves telling stories and claims her mother is a famous author. The actions of those around her lead you to perceive Rose as living in her own little, self created world. Though I would say don't be so quick to judge some of the characters in this book as there are a few surprises. I did grow to love Rose as a character, though she came across as a little "air headed" she truly ends up helping Ella survive when things are tough. I won't go into how the red ribbon comes into the book, but will say it becomes a treasured beacon of hope in an increasingly dark, stark world.

For characters I "hated" I would have to choose Marta the head of the sewing room, who takes credit for the hard work of the other girls. Marta also constantly refers to the fact she was "trained by the best." Also Carla who is a tough guard that enjoys having clothes made for her by Ella. Carla at a couple of points in the book seems to genuinely care about Ella, almost becoming a friend to her. Then Carla also is instrumental in Ella losing her job in the sewing room.

As to what I thought about this book it feels wrong describing the book as an enjoyable read because of its subject and content. I think though I have read other books and watched movies on this subject, I still found the book enlightening. The cover piqued my interest, the blurb made me even more curious, I hadn't heard of the "sewing room" at Auschwitz so wanted to know more. It is one of the few books on this subject I have read that is from the point of view of a young female character. It was at times heart-breaking when Ella, is reminiscing about her grandmother, especially the "sewing machine incident" which I won't go into within the review but you will almost certainly know what section of the book I am referring to when you read. Another part of the book I will not go into in detail is the "liberation dress" incident, again the feelings it gives you are a mixture of good and bad, so many tears and a few smiles.

I was reading this book through tears at some points, it is a very honest account of such horrific incidents from the point of view of a child torn from her family, no chance to say goodbye and no knowledge to where her family is whilst all this happening to her. I became attached and instantly cared about Ella and what was happening to her as well the sometimes awful choices she was confronted with. I really didn't want to put this book down once I began reading it.

I don't know about anyone else but I always read the sections such as acknowledgements, or letters/note from the author. In this book the author Lucy Adlington reveals that the sewing room featured is in fact based on the real one that was based in Auschwitz. Coincidentally the head of the real sewing room was actually called Marta, though the name is the only similarity between the characters. I also discovered that Lucy Adlington is not only a writer but a costume historian, something I find extremely interesting. So I will certainly be checking out other books both fiction and non fiction by this author!

My thoughts as I finished reading the book were that I had just read an amazing book. The author has written a fictional version based on the extremely real facts that took place at the horrific prisoner of war camp that is better known as Auschwitz. This is the sort of history that should be taught about in schools so the atrocities and those who died are never ever forgotten. Sure it's not a pretty light hearted story, it's as close to the facts you will ever get other than reading a book or speaking to an actual survivor.

C.G. Drews says

Books about concentration camps always hurt to read. This one had *pain*, but also a lot of hope?! I've seen it pitched as "like the The Boy in the Striped Pajamas!" but it's actually only 13% as sad as that. And it was interesting reading about a concentration camp where they took seamstresses from the prisoners and made them sew for their captors. So it was honestly a new angle!

+ I also liked how the whole story was stitched (SEE WHAT I DID THERE) around some big moral questions.

Okay so these women are like: work or die. Right? And Ella is desperate to sew because her #1 dream before she was imprisoned was to own a dress shop. She fights tooth and nail to get the job and then throws her EVERYTHING into sewing...for...the...enemy. So like her friend Rose points out how horrible this is?! Like why should their talents (making gorgeous and inventive dresses) go towards their captors? **So is it worth doing something you love for terrible people, or deny those terrible people these artistic delights?** I

think there's so many options to answer that and it REALLY made me think.

+ ALSO, Ella was freaking awesome.

I'm calling it, she's a Slytherin with a heart. She was so bouncy and adorable and a *little* naive and only 14 so basically I absolutely loved her. Such a strong voice!! **And I loved her friendship with Rose, who is like the world's most delusional smol bucket of crossstitching.** She wants to be a writer so constantly tells stories to keep them alive. But it did end up with her a bit delusional.

+ I just...a bit of queer baiting?

There's one line, literally ONE where Ella and Rose are excited and Ella just thinks "*omg I want to kiss her*". Then it's never brought up again and Ella never seems to have any other feelings. So like???? IDK is she queer? Did the book mean anything by that throw away sentence? **I'm honestly annoyed at it.** Either make a book queer or don't, mate. (Also I got really excited thinking it was going to have lgbtqia+ rep but ya, not really.)

+ Okay so SEWING.

Sewing is a MASSIVE theme and takes up a LOT of chapters and do you know how much I sew? HAh haah haha. Yeah. Once I sewed a button to my dog's raincoat and also sewed him into the raincoat but it's ok. He's fine. We're speaking again and the emancipation papers have been put aside. BUT ANYWAY. **I did find my eyes glazing over in those scenes.**

+ Other little things that didn't work for me?

- The language is EXTREMELY MODERN. Which I liked but I didn't like that they used phrases like "fat chance". I mean it is NINETEEN NINTEY FOUR.
- THIS IS A LITTLE BIT RIDICULOUS.
- (Also they said "sunglasses" which I checked *were* invented but holy heck I've never read a book about WWII and concentration camps that mentioned sunglasses? It was weird.)
- The book purposefully (see author's note) skipped talking about religion.
- um.
- I am confused that is like 80% of the reason for concentration camps and I think the word Jew was maybe mentioned once. (Or actually maybe not??)
- I felt the prisoners had a LOT of freedom for a concentration camp.
- And from what I've read of other books to actual memoirs...this *really* toned everything down.
- And as much as I thought the ending was cute, it was frikkin unrealistic. BUT IT WAS CUTE SO LET'S LET IT GO LIKE ELSA.

This was a bit of a toned down look at concentration camps in WWII, but Ella was the kind of fantastic character that'll break and make your heart. I sooo loved her! And also it's a good book for lower YA to introduce them to WWII as well (keeping most things low(er) key). There are beautiful dresses and hope and sadness and stolen apples and a beautifully strong female friendship.

Maureen says

Birchwood - more commonly known as Auschwitz, is where we meet 14 year old Ella, starting her first day as a seamstress in The Upper Tailoring Studio, making beautiful dresses for Officers wives and female Guards.

Ella was snatched from the streets on her way home from school. She was walking in the gutter at the time,

because as a Jew she wasn't allowed to walk on the pavement. In Auschwitz she is a non - person - insignificant, names are not allowed, everyone is identified by a number. She soon discovers that to stay alive she must work hard, but with watery coffee for breakfast and watery soup for supper it's difficult to maintain the energy needed to keep going. Some prisoners (or Stripeys as they are known) are much worse off, having the same meagre diet but with really hard physical work to carry out. However if a Stripey doesn't prove their worth they are put on a List, and everyone knows that those on the List are taken away and never seen again.

This a place where it's not just the Guards that you have to watch out for though, as there is a hierarchy among the Stripeys, and each hut as it's own boss who rules over the others.

Ella becomes friendly with some of the other girls in the sewing room, but her special friend is Rose. Rose irons the clothes in the sewing room, and is an eternal optimist, she loves making up magical stories to help them escape the reality of where they are. The girls talk about owning their own dress shop when all this is over, but there is no certainty any more, just hope, that's all they have - hope.

This is a lovely story of two friends just trying to survive one of the darkest periods in history. It was well written in a sensitive manner, and the main protagonists were engaging. We're all aware of the unspeakable things that happened in Auschwitz, but because 'The Red Ribbon' falls into the YA genre we're spared the details.

On arrival at Auschwitz, families were separated - wives from husbands, babies torn from their mother's arms, and if just one sentence in this book epitomised this horror for me, it was this - 'There - already sprinkled in dust - a single shoe - for a baby's tiny foot'. Can't add anything after that.

Thank you to Netgalley and Bonnier Zaffre for my ARC in exchange for an honest review

Ben says

Lucy Adlington's 'The Red Ribbon' is a very worthy addition to the canon of young adult Holocaust novels and it well deserves its place alongside 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas', 'The Book Thief' and the Morris Gleitzman trilogy.

It concerns a group of women inmates at Auschwitz who are deployed as clothes makers and is narrated by a young Jewish lady who is deported there in the latter years of the war.

I had heard of the musicians of Auschwitz before but not the clothiers although as someone who has visited the concentration camp it is poignantly ironic to contrast the mounds of clothing there with the thin striped outfits the inmates were forced to wear and as the novel shows that some were able to prolong their survival because of their dressmaking skills.

Adlington does not shirk from conveying the horrors of such a place but portrays them in a sensitive manner never forgetting her target audience. She also manages to show that even in the darkest of situations compassion, friendship and humanity can never be totally extinguished.

Her characters are well drawn, the prose skips along and the novel is cleverly divided into sections represented by a colour. I was particularly moved by the final part with its emphasis on hope and looking to the future without ever forgetting the past rather than on despair and retribution.

This is a finely written novel about a delicate subject and one that like two of the aforementioned novels would I have no doubt translate well to the screen.

This unbiased review is based on an advance proof copy sent to the reader.

Miriam Smith says

"The Red Ribbon" by Lucy Adlington was a truly eye opening read, which I'm not sure if 'enjoy' is the right word but I thoroughly devoured this book in a day and found it a very emotional but enjoyable read. Knowing nothing about the seamstresses of Auschwitz or even that clothes were made for the Officer's wives and female guards of the camp I was very intrigued by this and quite surprised that this even happened. Although this is not a truly harrowing book it does still get the facts across during the story of the atrocities that happened during the war but it is a much more suitable read for younger readers or people not wishing to be exposed to really distressing and disturbing events. It's still a very saddening and emotional read and I truly had goosebumps when I finished the last few sentences, just showing how well the author conveyed the emotion and sensitivity of the story.

Fourteen year old dressmaker Ella starts her first day working at 'Birchwood' (Auschwitz-Birkenau) in the Upper Tailoring Studio, but this is no ordinary workshop with ordinary clients. Every dress made could be the difference between life and death. Everything is now about survival.

I loved Ella, her immaturity excused her bolshy behaviour at times and Rose, delightful graceful Rose - survived by living inside her lovely and creative mind in fantastical dreams and far away places - she ensured she captured her friends in her imagination too when they were in dire need of encouragement to keep going.

The author admits her aim was to allow us to revisit a time in our past that clearly and categorically happened, highlighting the possible moral choices the inmates had to choose about surviving and thriving and show how acts of kindness can be seen as heroism. She certainly achieved this and you could fully understand the decisions made when it was a choice of life or death.

The hope for liberation was heartbreaking and you truly hoped all the characters would make it out when war was over. I very much felt I was there in the camp with the girls, listening to the sewing machines whirring and Marta shouting 'pins!' An excellent read that without a doubt makes you stop and think about how many suffered during the holocaust and just how a good life we have now.

"The Red Ribbon" is one of the most beautifully printed and designed books I have ever read.....a red ribbon is printed and intertwined throughout the pages with pictures of scissors/pins and buttons etc spread across the pages. Truly a masterpiece inside and out! An easy 5 stars for this incredible read.
