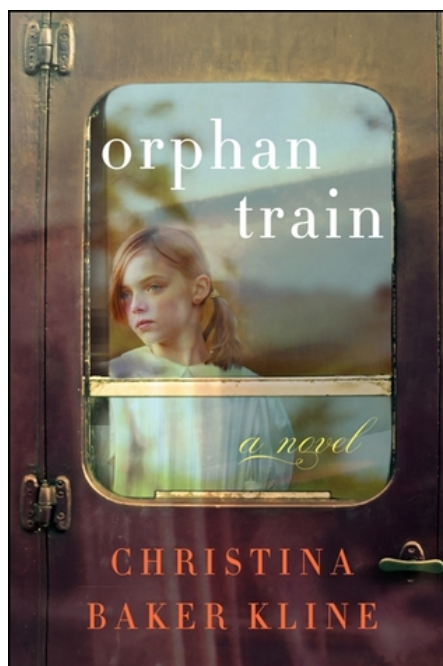




Orphan Train

Christina Baker Kline

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Orphan Train Christina Baker Kline

The author of *Bird in Hand* and *The Way Life Should Be* delivers her most ambitious and powerful novel to date: a captivating story of two very different women who build an unexpected friendship: a 91-year-old woman with a hidden past as an orphan-train rider and the teenage girl whose own troubled adolescence leads her to seek answers to questions no one has ever thought to ask.

Nearly eighteen, Molly Ayer knows she has one last chance. Just months from "aging out" of the child welfare system, and close to being kicked out of her foster home, a community service position helping an elderly woman clean out her home is the only thing keeping her out of juvie and worse.

Vivian Daly has lived a quiet life on the coast of Maine. But in her attic, hidden in trunks, are vestiges of a turbulent past. As she helps Vivian sort through her possessions and memories, Molly discovers that she and Vivian aren't as different as they seem to be. A young Irish immigrant orphaned in New York City, Vivian was put on a train to the Midwest with hundreds of other children whose destinies would be determined by luck and chance.

The closer Molly grows to Vivian, the more she discovers parallels to her own life. A Penobscot Indian, she, too, is an outsider being raised by strangers, and she, too, has unanswered questions about the past. As her emotional barriers begin to crumble, Molly discovers that she has the power to help Vivian find answers to mysteries that have haunted her for her entire life - answers that will ultimately free them both.

Rich in detail and epic in scope, *Orphan Train* is a powerful novel of upheaval and resilience, of second chances, of unexpected friendship, and of the secrets we carry that keep us from finding out who we are.

Orphan Train Details

Date : Published April 2nd 2013 by William Morrow Paperbacks

ISBN : 9780061950728

Author : Christina Baker Kline

Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Book Club

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From Reader Review Orphan Train for online ebook

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

3.5 stars. "Orphan Train" is a book set in both the present day and the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Vivian traveled from NYC to Minnesota as a young girl on one of the infamous "orphan trains" that was used to get orphans out of the cities into the country where they might have a better opportunity to find families and to be able to make a good life. I've read a couple fictional accounts of what these orphan trains were like and it always amazes me that there was something like that in this country. The present day story also focuses on Vivian and her relationship with Molly, a teenager who is has been bounced around from foster home to foster home and is about the age out of the foster care system.

As with many stories that take place in both the past and the present, I preferred Vivian's story in the past. This book is very much a character driven book but it is much more driven by Vivian than by Molly. I loved all of the historical detail that I Kline put into the book. I also really liked the descriptions of the families that Vivian went through and the people that she met along the way. Some parts of the newer story seemed a little forced. Vivian's story also had a lot more twists and turns than Molly's story (I love being surprised by book events). The ending of the book especially seemed a little rushed. I really wanted more detail about Molly and who she was and the motivation for the things that she did in the book.

Overall, this book is a good read that will appeal to historical fiction lovers!

Jules says

I was going to say this book reads like a YA novel, but then I realized that is an insult to some really well-written YA novels (The Giver, To Kill a Mockingbird, Flowers for Algernon...)

Like many other readers, I thought the book had potential with a very interesting subject (orphan trains), but the writing was amateurish, with incredibly stereotypical characters, a predictable plot and way too much sentimentality. I doubted throughout the book that the author had any firsthand experience with orphans, Native Americans or the modern day foster care system. (If she does, it did not come through in her writing.) The plot lines wrapped up so neatly that I thought I was watching a Hallmark Channel movie for a minute.

On the plus side, I commend the author for choosing a subject that is not well known to many people. I live in Minnesota, where many of the orphans in the book found homes after leaving the train, and I was not familiar with this history at all.

Julie says

The Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline is a 2013 William Morrow Paperbacks publication.

I had heard such wonderful things about this book and have wanted to read it for a long time. Finally, with the decision to push the pause button on so many review copies and float back into reading for pure pleasure, I found the time to work this one in the TBR pile.

This is just one of those really awesome stories that weaves historical details within a contemporary setting

and enriches the lives of all who read it.

The orphan trains were indeed real, and Vivien's experience was certainly plausible. I loved Vivien's voice, her courage, and the way touched Molly's life in a way no one ever had before, which drew Molly out, giving her a role model and inspiration all in one, giving her a new lease on life. I only had one complaint about her story, which can't be explained here, but it was so improbable it affected my star rating.

While the story is bleak at times, and certainly captures the incredibly hard lives orphans were subjected to in the past, but it also made a nice parallel with how those who wind up in the system today are equally at risk and suffer some of the same prejudices and abuse, being tossed around from place to place, used for labor or for money.

I am so glad Molly met Vivien and enjoyed watching them forge a bond and enrich one another's lives. Molly can be petulant and immature, unable to control her words or discipline herself, but also has the courage to stand up for herself and refuse to sacrifice her convictions. However, I think Vivien's influence will be long reaching and Molly's maturation is evident by the story's end. By the same token, Molly's influence on Vivien is also profound, as the elderly woman finds her whole world is open to new possibilities for the future, proving it is never too late to learn something new or try new things, and to never give up hope.

I am also grateful the author chose this topic and period in history, informing many of us about the trains, something many, including myself, were unfamiliar with, and how she took such a sad and heartbreaking situation and turned it into the ultimate feel good story.

4 stars

Monika330 says

With some tweaking and editing, this might be a good young adult book as that's how it reads. I certainly didn't find it an adult book. I was disappointed that more history and information about orphan trains wasn't included. The author did appear to do her research, so I'm not sure why she chose not to include more of it.

The book was painfully predictable. I knew pages beforehand what Groate was going to do. At the first hint of hint of World War II, I knew what would happen to Luke. Dina was labelled a conservative, and I immediately knew she'd be written as a one-dimensional, stereotypical witch. My attraction to chick lit fiction is that it hasn't been politicized as everything else has been, until this book.

The bit about Vivian on the computer (Amazon, Netflix, etc.) was awkward and uncomfortable, and had me wondering if the author was paid for literary product placement. The texting, the business with the wifi, Twitter, Facebook....these are all things that belong in a book for teens, not in an adult book.

What bothers me the most, however, is that years ago I recall reading a book that very much follows the lines Vivian's younger life. It was a juvenile fiction book. Those parts were so familiar, so either that goes back to the book's wrenching predictability, or it's highly derivative.

It also ended abruptly. What happened to Molly? There weren't any final thoughts from her to give us any ideas of what direction her life would take. Disappointing.

There just isn't much subtlety, maturity or elegance to this book.

Diane Yannick says

I find the orphan trains to be an interesting/horrifying time in our history. I thought this book would give me a deeper understanding of what it was like to be a child enslaved by this plan concocted by the Children's Aid Society. Instead, I found this to be a fluffy, shallow story chock full of huge stereotypes. Let's see, we have the sexually perverted foster dad, the Goth girl, the upstanding drafted man, the 91 year old lady who hoarded her life in the attic. Each character was painted with broad strokes that created no space for this reader to wonder or develop compassion.

The two narratives did not work for me at all. Although it was very easy to keep the stories straight, neither story was compelling. Both story lines were painfully predictable. The events which allowed the plot to plod along were often ridiculous. Molly (modern day character) had to do 50 hours of community service for stealing a battered copy of Jane Eyre from the library?? That's how she met Vivian who needed her attic cleaned out? That's how the stories eventually merged?

All of the characters' personal epiphanies seemed forced. Vivian reflects that "the people who matter in our lives stay with us, haunting us in the grocery store, as we turn a corner, chat with a friend. They rise up through the pavement; we absorb them through our soles." Overwrought, in my opinion.

Another author to cross off my list. However, she has plenty of fans who will continue to absorb her words right through their soles.

Hanna Gichard says

From what I can tell, this book is not classified primarily as a young adult novel. It definitely should be. The writing style is very simplistic and elementary, which is fine for a YA book. I was just expecting something a little more adult in terms of the writing style.

That said, I think the subject of the book is very interesting. I found Vivian/Niamh's story fascinating, and I learned a lot about something in our country's history I knew nothing about. The ending was a little too neat and contrived, but I can forgive that because the rest of Vivian's story was so rich and fascinating.

I'm not rating this book higher because of Molly. Her perspective seemed completely gutted of any depth. It's pretty clear that the author only intended Molly to be a vehicle for Vivian's story, which is disappointing to me because I think the juxtaposition of Molly's and Vivian's stories would have so much more depth if Molly's character was developed more. The conflicts she goes through are too hastily resolved and her character development seems to happen out of nowhere. There is a sense of an ending for Vivian's character, but really none for Molly's - not even a hint of what might lie ahead. Molly's foster parents were unbelievably one-sided characters. Also, the author's attempts to write in Molly's teenage voice frequently came across as awkward - they are written pretty matter-of-factly and then all of a sudden there is random swearing or a makeout scene or her political differences with her stepmom. I think these things would be

more easily reconciled if Molly's character were more fleshed out.

All in all, an enjoyable, fast, easy read. Interesting historical fiction; just fell flat in some places.

Rachel says

As a Midwesterner, I was really interested in this book after hearing it featured on NPR. However, it was ruined by a small, and to some, insignificant character and narrative. The main narrative about Vivian, an Orphan Train rider, was excellent. The second narrative of Molly, a teen foster child, is marred by the way the author, Christina Baker Kline, portrays her oppressive foster mom.

"...Dina listens to conservative talk radio, belongs to a fundamentalist Christian church, and has a "Guns don't kill people--abortion clinics do" bumper sticker on her car...Dina is constantly rolling her eyes, muttering under her breath about Molly's various infractions--didn't put away her laundry...all of which are part and parcel of the liberal agenda that's ruining this country..." (Page 48).

"Dina says, 'Oh, how the mighty have fallen...It's sad what happens to people, y'know?...Terry Gallant used to be Miss Popular. Homecoming Queen and all that. That she got knocked up by some Mexican scrub--and now look at her, she's a maid.'" (Page 130).

These are just a few examples of the egregious stereotypes Baker Kline embodies in one character. It's the most shallow character I've encountered in a long time, and, as an English teacher, I read mostly Young Adult novels. This could've been such a highly esteemed literary novel if she hadn't let her personal agenda abound in this minor character and second narrative. A character analysis of the foster mom is incredibly simple to sketch: white, Christian, conservative, meat-eating-vegetarian hater, petty, shallow, ungrateful, judgmental, racist. She's especially easy to hate because Molly, her foster daughter, is so easy to sympathize with. It seems awfully judgmental and petty given one of the themes is not to pass judgment so quickly. Obviously, Baker Kline has her own judgments she couldn't leave out of this novel.

I'm so tired of the judgmental subtlety authors creep into otherwise great works. Baker Kline, your agenda did not go unnoticed, and I will not be recommending this book. You took a powerful literary and historical narrative and choked it with a judgmental and shallow second narrative of your own agenda.i

Melissa says

"Time constricts and flattens, you know. It's not evenly weighted. Certain moments linger in the mind and others disappear."

There's no sugar coating it - **this story broke my heart**. I had no idea there were orphaned children that faced this fate; being thrown on a train from New York to the midwest in order to find a "family". I say "family" because these people were looking for free labor as opposed to a child they were going to love.

The past is told from Niamh's perspective, an Irish girl that emigrated to America with her family, only to lose them all in a fire and end up an orphan. In Niamh/Vivian's case she was moved from one home to the next and suffered quite a bit. I could feel her loneliness seeping off of the pages.

The current time period is told from Molly's perspective, a 17 year-old foster kid, struggling in her current

situation. She's been taken away from her mother, bounced from one home to the next, and landed with a couple that wants nothing more than the check. She put up a good front, standing strong and sticking to her beliefs, but boy there were times it was tough to watch. I absolutely HATED Dina. Why is it that the foster mothers were always so mean?

It's community service that brings Molly and Vivian together, but it's a school project that ultimately drags out the truth and cements their connection. First of all - Luke! **He was my very favorite part of the story!** He added the heart, something I felt was missing and desperately needed to connect more with the story. Vivian was basically a shell of person until he showed up.

I have to admit, the ending took a turn I didn't expect. I still can't wrap my mind around one of the decisions that Vivian made. After everything she went through - no way! Who would do that? I wish we were left with a little more closure. An epilogue even. It felt too abrupt.

B the BookAddict says

The real truth behind this wonderful story is actually quite awful in magnitude. Between 1854 and 1929, more than 200,00 homeless, orphaned or abandoned children were sent to the Midwest: ostensibly for adoption but often more became indentured servitude, to people who wanted a worker rather than a child. It is a little known fact of America's history and one I knew nothing about. I love it when an author sends me hurrying to Google in order to learn more about certain facts I've learned from their books. Christina Baker Kline has definitely achieved that here: how could I possibly finish the novel and not need to know more about these orphan trains. Kline very courteously relays many other facts and her sources in the Acknowledgements including photographs; the little bootblack of New York 1924 particularly brought tears to my eyes. I finished the book at midnight and spent another two hours on the internet searching and reading information on the orphan trains. My thoughts: **In child welfare, we should never rest on the laurels of our success stories, we should chastise ourselves for our failures.**

Molly and Vivian have both been failed by the system. A very unlikely friendship arises out of a need. In 2011, 17yo Molly needs to do fifty hours community service and 91yo Vivian need someone to help organise her attic. As they sort through the attic, Molly begins taping the story of Vivian's *portage* (what she carried with her) for a school assignment. Different items signify certain people and events in Vivian's long and interesting life. 1927 begins the 7yo Vivian's story; her family has been helped obtain a passage from Ireland to America but New York is no pot of gold and the family struggles; in 1929, there's a fire and Vivian loses the family she loves. Taken to a Children's Aid Society orphanage, she soon finds herself boarded on an orphan train bound for Minnesota where prospective 'parents' will choose a child they want. After two less than advantageous *placements*, Vivian's luck changes and a happy life finally begins for her. But, as Molly will learn, it is still not all plain sailing for Vivian.

Penobscot Indian Molly's story begins in 2011: a father deceased, mother a drug addict, she's been in more foster homes than you can poke a stick at, countless schools where she never fits in and she's developed a tough Goth exterior in order to survive. A theft sees her with the choice of either juvie or community service. She meets Vivian through her boyfriend and this very unlikely friendship follows. As Molly discovers, she and Vivian have more in common than she would have ever thought and they can both provide something very special for each other. **People need to tell their stories; it is often a matter of waiting for the right audience.**

The Children's Aid Society, to me, is a misnomer; I wonder how many of these children actually had

advantageous placements. The Society may have had the best of intentions but the children may have lost more than they gained in this venture. Prospective parents checked their eyes, limbs, inside their mouths; sounds more like they are inspecting cattle rather than children. Although Kline does acknowledge that in talking to and reading oral histories of these orphans:

“they tended not to dwell on the considerable hardships.....they focused on how grateful they were for their children etc - lives that would have not been possible if they had not been on those trains.” That is comforting to hear.

Kline alternately weaves two not dissimilar stories together very competently. She is not overly emotive in language, rather leaving the story itself to draw the emotion from you. And, dare I say, it would be only a very cold person who is not affected by this story. Strangely, considering the subject, it is not a depressing novel; moreover, it's about tenacity, it is about people hanging on to hope when hope is the only thing they have left, it is one of inspiring and lasting friendships. Kline is brilliant in that she doesn't just tell a story sourced from historical fact; she provides you with the fact in her eight pages of not in the least bit boring Acknowledgements complete with photographs. I commend her for bringing history to our notice.

You know, the elderly have the most wonderful stories to tell, if only we would take the time to listen. This is a novel I would not hesitate to recommend to all readers. 4★

Emily May says

"In my nightmares I am alone on a train, heading into the wilderness. Or in a maze of hay bales. Or walking the streets of a big city, gazing at lights in every window, seeing the families inside, none of them mine."

After my book club chose Orphan Train for our next meet-up, I picked up my copy and started reading just a little of the first page to get a "feel" for what the book would be like. I didn't intend to finish it right now, or even read any more than the first page, but I somehow ended up getting completely sucked into this story for the last few hours.

Firstly, it is a **page turner**. The pages just flew past as I devoured this story about two very different women who find they have a lot more in common than they could have imagined. It switches between the present day (2011) and the 1920s/30s, and it manages to be horrifying enough to hook you, but ultimately uplifting and charming.

The best kind of historical fiction, in my opinion, is that which introduces you to **little pieces of history you'd never known about**. I knew that many Irish immigrants arrived in the United States in the 1920s, hoping for a fresh start and a better life, but often received a less than warm welcome. What I didn't know, is that many orphaned children from crowded Eastern cities were boarded onto trains and taken to rural areas of the Midwest.

Families looking for servants, farm labourers, or occasionally more children would come check out the orphans and see if they wanted to take them home. In this book, Vivian is an orphaned Irish immigrant at just nine years old, and she finds herself on one of the orphan trains. The 1920s/30s part of this book tells the story of her life, being moved from one family to the next in Minnesota. In the present, she is a 91 year-old

woman with an attic full of painful memories.

So what could she possibly have in common with a bratty teenage goth girl? **Well, quite a bit actually.**

Molly is in the foster care system and knows her current family only keep her for the extra money they receive. She rebels constantly: with her image, with her attitude and, finally, by stealing a book from the local library and earning herself some community service. That community service turns out to be helping an old lady clear out her attic.

As Vivian's story is revealed, the relationship between the two of them grows. I admit that I felt so much more sympathy for Vivian, though I did understand the importance of Molly's story too. Vivian deals with being constantly unwanted, being underfed, living in a farmhouse without any heating through the winter, and the leery eyes of her foster father. I felt sorry for Molly at times, but she was bratty and not easy to like, though I still quite enjoyed the insight into her mind. Like this:

"But it kind of feels nice to nurture her resentment, to foster it. It's something she can savor and control, this feeling of having been wronged by the world."

I do think that things felt a little rushed toward the end. A lot seemed to happen in a short space of time, presumably because the main story had already been told and the author was just tying up loose ends. But, overall, that didn't bother me much. I really enjoyed this book; both the emotional journey and the history lesson. And I have to say, in a world that loves sword-wielding heroines no older than 21 and pretty-faced broody boys, it's refreshing to see such an interesting and fleshed out elderly character.

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James says

4 stars to Christina Baker Kline's Orphan Train. It is a beautiful book - everything from the story to the imagery. Two parallel stories being told about what happens to a young girl when her family life is threatened. The elder, a 90-something year old woman remembering her past. The younger, a teenager doing community service for the 90 year old. They bond. They fight. The stories nearly become one. And perhaps one of them will get to answer the question "who am I, really?" You feel so connected to the characters... want to help them, feel awful for what happens to children. And then at the same time, you recognize yourself in parts of their emotions.

About Me

For those new to me or my reviews... here's the scoop: I read A LOT. I write A LOT. And now I blog A LOT. First the book review goes on Goodreads, and then I send it on over to my WordPress blog at <https://thisismytruthnow.com>, where you'll also find TV & Film reviews, the revealing and introspective 365 Daily Challenge and lots of blogging about places I've visited all over the world. And you can find all my social media profiles to get the details on the who/what/when/where and my pictures. Leave a comment and let me know what you think. Vote in the poll and ratings. Thanks for stopping by. *Note:* All written content is my original creation and copyrighted to me, but the graphics and images were linked from other sites and belong to them. Many thanks to their original creators.

Jennifer says

Before I became a foster/adoptive parent, I would have ranked this book much higher. But it rankled that yet another novel characterizes a foster mom as racist, shrill, emotionally abusive, and selfish. Oh, and the foster parents are just in it for the money.

And of course Molly is just misunderstood, with no serious behavioral problems or alienating qualities. Except for a nose ring (gasp!), and a tendency to steal high-brow literature (oh my!).

And of course, everyone ends up happy and joyful on the final page--with the message that all the trauma and strife was a necessary part of the story, required to bring them to this place of understanding. Yuck--oversimplified and naive.

Edited to add: many people in the comments have told me, in no uncertain terms, to get over it. That the foster care system is horrible, that the book is from Molly's perspective, that I'm extrapolating. And maybe I am particularly sensitive about the foster mom. However, I stand by my initial opinion that the characters are flat, over-simplified tropes. The foster mom is horrible. The foster dad is weak. The foster girl is just misunderstood. The old rich lady is the perfect savior. While I enjoyed the historical story about the orphan train (which is why I didn't give it 1 star), the modern day counterpart seemed like it was slapped on at the last minute, using every available stereotype to awkward and absurd effect.

TL;DR: The modern day half of the story is poorly written.

Candi says

"They call this an orphan train, children, and you are lucky to be on it. You are leaving behind an evil place, full of ignorance, poverty, and vice, for the nobility of country life."

This was a very interesting story about a piece of American history that was previously unknown to me. According to the author, between the years 1854 and 1929, two-hundred thousand orphaned or abandoned children were transported from the East coast to the Midwest on these so-called orphan trains. They were supposedly sent there to find loving homes and a sense of security that the system felt would be best for them; but in reality, the outcomes were quite questionable and the futures of these children were very uncertain. This story is about one of those children, Niamh, as told through the eyes of her older self - Vivian, a name she was given once eventually adopted by a caring couple. Before this adoption, however, Niamh's story was anything but sweet and untroubled. We learn about her harsh life as the 91-year old Vivian relates the details to a modern day teen and foster home drifter named Molly. Molly has been assigned to community service due to a minor transgression and is given the task of assisting Vivian with cleaning out her attic. As Molly and Vivian sort through a lifetime of belongings, their two stories are brought to life and Molly is able to see the similarities between her own life and Vivian's past life. The book alternates between the voices of these two that have more in common than initially meets the eye.

The voice of Molly appealed to me less than that of Niamh, or Vivian. Full of teen angst, which was quite understandable, Molly's character was not as well developed. *"... it kind of feels nice to nurture her resentment, to foster it. It's something she can savor and control, this feeling of having been wronged by the world."* Eventually we do get to see another side of her, but I would have liked a bit more - particularly at the end of the novel. Molly's Penobscot Indian heritage was only lightly touched upon, and further delving into this historical aspect would have appealed to me. There is a twist to the story that I found to be a bit unbelievable, given the circumstances, but I can't say more here without giving away too much. Needless to

say, this did bring the book down from 5 stars. However, the Orphan Train still held my interest throughout, so I have rated it a solid 3.5 stars rounded up to 4. I would recommend this to readers of historical fiction, or even those interested in a young adult sort of story, as the portion with Molly often felt that way to me personally.

I have to throw in another favorite quote: *"Vivian has come back to the idea that the people who matter in our lives stay with us, haunting our most ordinary moments. They're with us in the grocery store, as we turn a corner, chat with a friend. They rise up through the pavement; we absorb them through our soles. So very true.*

Theresa says

"Orphan Train" by Christina Baker Kline completely tugged at my heartstrings. Vivian and Molly might have a huge age gap between them, (Vivian is 91, Molly is 17) but both these sweet and sensitive ladies share a similar childhood. Both come from toxic families, and were later placed in foster care after becoming orphans. I found myself drawn to Vivian's chapters more than Molly's (not that Molly's chapters were boring or anything). Vivian's turbulent life aboard the orphan train had me in tears, and the families that took her in were nothing but disappointments and heartaches. It's amazingly tragic how screwed up the foster care system really was in America during the late '20s-early '30s. The same can be said about Molly's upbringing in foster care in the present day. My only gripe with this book is, it's WAY too short, (only 273 pages) I didn't want it to end. Beautifully written (Vivian's story is 1st person narrative and Molly's story is 3rd person narrative) and shockingly truthful about what it means to come from a family that NEVER felt like family to begin with. Sometimes the people we end up connecting with on an emotional level are those who are not blood-related. The power of friendship can be an ultimate life saver for someone who is lacking a solid foundation of family/stability. Vivian and Molly's surprising friendship feels sincere and respectful. I hope to read more of Kline's novels in the near future. Enjoy! :)

Marla Mutch says

When I was 16 my Great Aunt Pauline told me the saddest true story. I asked her about her background, she was of Polish decent in a completely German town in Washington State. She told me that when her family came over from Poland her mother had pink eye, and was sent back to Poland to try again. She was pregnant and when she got back, she had a child that was not listed on the papers. She put the baby in a suitcase to keep the officials at Ellis Island from finding her and separating her again. That baby was Pauline. They went out west, and her mother died several years later in child birth. Pauline remembered being set out on the porch with her younger siblings, the babies in a laundry basket, and her father standing on the porch as people came by to pick out who they wanted. She was older and chosen last and by a couple with a different language and moved to this area she ended up in. She said, "They picked us out as if we were puppies in a basket. I am not a puppy in a basket." I am crying just remembering the pain in her voice when she told me this. She told me she didn't see any of her siblings until she was an adult, and that the couple trained her in how to be a good worker. What a childhood for one of the sweetest women I ever knew. I wish I had recorded her story, asked more questions, there is never enough time. This book told a similar tale, and I could not put it down. It rang so true. Read it!
