



Milkweed (Random House Reader's Circle)

By Jerry Spinelli

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A stunning novel of the Holocaust from Newbery Medalist, Jerry Spinelli

He's a boy called Jew. Gypsy. Stopthief. Filthy son of Abraham.

He's a boy who lives in the streets of Warsaw. He's a boy who steals food for himself, and the other orphans. He's a boy who believes in bread, and mothers, and angels.

He's a boy who wants to be a Nazi, with tall, shiny jackboots of his own-until the day that suddenly makes him change his mind.

And when the trains come to empty the Jews from the ghetto of the damned, he's a boy who realizes it's safest of all to be nobody.

Newbery Medalist Jerry Spinelli takes us to one of the most devastating settings imaginable-Nazi-occupied Warsaw during World War II-and tells a tale of heartbreak, hope, and survival through the bright eyes of a young Holocaust orphan.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Newbery Medal-winning author Jerry Spinelli (*Maniac McGee*, *Stargirl*) paints a vivid picture of the streets of the Nazi-occupied Warsaw during World War II, as seen through the eyes of a curious, kind, heartbreakingly naïve orphan with many names. His name is Stopthief when people shout "Stop! Thief!" as he flees with stolen bread. Or it's Jew, "filthy son of Abraham," depending on who's talking to him. Or, maybe he's a Gypsy, because his eyes are black, his skin is dark, and he wears a mysterious yellow stone around his neck. His new friend and protector Uri forces him to take the name Misha Pilsudski and to memorize a made-up story about his Gypsy background so that no one will mistake him for a Jew and kill him. Misha, a very young boy, is slow to understand what's happening around him. When he sees people running, he thinks it's a race. Nazis (Jackboots, as the children call them) marching through the streets appear to him as a delightful parade of magnificent boots. He wants to be a Jackboot! (Uri smacks him for saying this.) He compares bombs to sauerkraut kettles, machine guns to praying mantises, and tanks to "colossal gray long-snouted beetles." The story of Misha and his band of orphans trying to survive on their own would have a deliciously Dickensian quality, if it weren't for the devastation around them--people hurrying to dig trenches to stop Nazi tanks, shops exploding in flames, the wailing of sirens, buzzing airplanes, bombs, and human torture. Spinelli has written a powerfully moving story of survival--readers will love Misha the dreamer and his wonderfully poetic observations of the world around him, his instinct to befriend a Jewish girl and her family, his impulse to steal food for a local orphanage and his friends in the ghetto, and his ability to delight in small things even surrounded by the horror of the Holocaust. A remarkable achievement. (Ages 11 and older) --*Karin Snelson*

From School Library Journal

Grade 5 Up--In Warsaw in 1939, a boy wanders the streets and survives by stealing what food he can. He knows nothing of his background: Is he a Jew? A Gypsy? Was he ever called something other than Stopthief? Befriended by a band of orphaned Jewish boys, he begins to share their sleeping quarters. He understands very little of what is happening. When the Nazi "Jackboots" march into the town, he greets them happily, admires their shiny boots and tanks, and hopes he can join their ranks someday. He eventually adopts a name, Misha, and a family, that of his friend Janina Milgrom, a girl he meets while stealing food in her comfortable neighborhood. When the Milgroms are forced to move into the newly created ghetto, Misha cheerfully accompanies them. There, he is one of the few small enough to slip through holes in the wall to smuggle in food. By the time trains come to take the ghetto's residents away, Misha realizes what many adults do not--that the passengers won't be going to the resettlement villages at the journey's end. Reading this unusual, fresh view of the Holocaust as seen through the eyes of a child who struggles to understand the world around him is like viewing a poignant collage of Misha's impressions. He shares certain qualities with Spinelli's *Maniac Magee*, especially his intense loyalty to those he cares about and his hopeful, resilient spirit. This historical novel can be appreciated both by readers with previous knowledge of the Holocaust and by those who share Misha's innocence and will discover the horrors of this period in history along with him. *Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA*
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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Reviewed with Uri Orlev's *Run, Boy, Run*. Holocaust survivor stories for teens run the risk of being either too brutal or too sentimental. These two novels avoid sensationalizing the violence because, in each case, the protagonist is a child too young to understand what's going on, which distances the horror. In both books the child is saved, but there's no radiant uplift about rescuers. Yes, some heroes do hide the

children and help them, but as John Auerbach shows in his adult autobiographical story collection, *The Owl and Other Stories* [BKL S 15 03], which centers on escaping the Warsaw ghetto, luck and wild coincidence were a large part of what enabled a few to live.

Part survival adventure, part Holocaust history, these novels tell their story through the eyes of a Polish orphan on the run from the Nazis. Orlev is a Holocaust survivor, and his award-winning novels about being a child in the Warsaw ghetto, including *The Man from the Other Side* (1991), are widely read. This new story is not based on his own experience, but it does come from real life--the experience of an illiterate ghetto survivor who escaped into the Polish countryside, stealing, foraging, begging, working. The boy is nurtured by some and hated by many. He hides his circumcision and invents a Catholic identity; he forgets his real name, his family, and the street where he lived. In one unforgettable incident, he loses his right arm because a Polish doctor refuses to operate on a Jew. He survives, immigrating to Israel, where Orlev hears him tell his story. The narrative is simple and spare, factual about everything from hunting with a slingshot to making a fire with a piece of glass, and it's always true to the viewpoint of a boy who thinks he is "about nine."

In contrast, Spinelli's narrative is manic, fast, and scattered, authentically capturing the perspective of a young child who doesn't know if he's a Jew or a Gypsy; he has never known family or community. He lives by stealing; his name may be Stopthief. Unlike Orlev's protagonist, this boy lives in the ghetto, where the daily atrocities he witnesses-- hanging bodies, massacres, shootings, roundups, transports--are the only reality he knows. His matter-of-fact account distances the brutality without sensationalizing or lessening the truth. He first finds shelter with a gang of street kids, where one fierce older boy protects him, invents an identity for him, and teaches him survival skills. Later he lives with a Jewish family. The history is true, so although Spinelli's narrator is young, the brutal realism in the story makes this a book for older children. Both novels end with what seems to be a contrived escape, though in Orlev's story, the ending is true. Add these stirring titles to the Holocaust curriculum; the youth of the protagonists allows them to ask questions and get answers that will help readers learn the history. *Hazel Rochman*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tanisha Goss:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive currently, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated it for a while is reading. That's why, by reading a reserve your ability to survive enhance then having chance to stand than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this kind of Milkweed (Random House Reader's Circle) book as beginner and daily reading book. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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Renee Middleton:

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