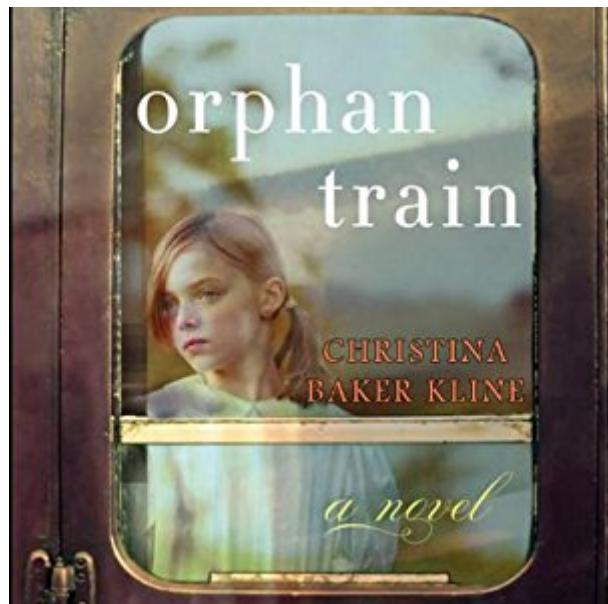


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Orphan Train: A Novel



Synopsis

Orphan Train is a gripping story of friendship and second chances from Christina Baker Kline, author of *Bird in Hand* and *The Way Life Should Be*. Penobscot Indian Molly Ayer is close to "aging out" out of the foster care system. A community-service position helping an elderly woman clean out her home is the only thing keeping Molly out of juvie and worse.... As she helps Vivian sort through her possessions and memories, Molly learns 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. 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 unexpected friendship, and of the secrets we carry that keep us from finding out who we are.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On the coast of Maine lives a wealthy ninety-one year old woman named Vivian Daly. Yet in her attic are trunks that reveal the secrets of her turbulent past. It is the year 2011, and nearby in the same town of Spruce Harbor, lives a seventeen-year-old girl named Molly Ayer who has bounced from foster home to foster home, and is now in a situation involving petty theft that will require some kind of community service. Told in beautifully evocative prose, the story unfolds in alternate perspectives, revealing what has happened to each of them, and how the parallel lines of their lives now converge to spotlight the similarities between them. From Vivian's early childhood in Ireland, to

New York City, comes her passage on the Orphan Trains in 1929. A journey that will take her to Minnesota, from one home to another, never really knowing what home feels like, as she is treated like a slave and seldom has enough of anything, much less affection or love. What Molly sees when she meets the elderly woman is a wealthy person who could not begin to understand her or her issues. But as the two of them clean out the boxes in the attic, the stories they share with one another reveal so much more than either could have suspected. The characters, both the primary ones and the supporting ones, brought so much color and emotion to the stories that I could feel as though I were sitting in their midst, observing and listening to them. And as I neared the end of *Orphan Train: A Novel*, I really could not have imagined a more beautiful or satisfying conclusion, and with it came a feeling that these characters would live on in my memories. At one point, Molly is at Vivian's home, taking in her recent good fortune: "Sitting in the rocker in the kitchen, looking out at the water, Molly feels oddly at peace. For the first time since she can remember, her life is beginning to make sense. What up until this moment has felt like a random, disconnected series of unhappy events she now views as necessary steps in a journey toward...enlightenment is perhaps too strong a word, but there are others, less lofty, like self-acceptance and perspective...." It is impossible to read this story and not take away from it the knowledge that wonderfully unexpected moments can happen in a life, even in one that is full of turbulence, pain, loss, and the sense of being an outsider. And when such moments occur, it is also impossible not to celebrate. Or feel the sense of exuberance that comes with the gifts of love, acceptance, and second chances. A story with a perfect ending that I won't share here, for fear of spoiling it for the reader. Suffice it to say that you will love Vivian and Molly and will feel the joy of their unique connection. Five stars.

I continue to be amazed at the things I learn about the history of this country from reading books. *Orphan Train* is based in fact; from the mid 19th century through the first quarter of the 20th century there was no system for dealing with orphans or what we would consider foster children today. It was left to churches and charitable organizations. And for those who feel that they are best left to deal with these social issues, I suggest you research the orphan trains because their solution was to take the children into various cities and give them away to anyone who wanted a child. No background checks, no follow up, no nothing. These children were left with people in the hopes that they would be given a good life. Some were, many were nothing more than house slaves. I'll get off the soapbox now. The book juxtaposes two lives - that of young Molly, a foster child of the current generation who lives with a family that is divided as to her presence. The "father" is pleasant to her and sees the good in Molly but the "mother" would rather she be gone and in all truth is only doing

the foster thing for the money it brings into the household. The second life is that of Vivian - born Niamh, who becomes Dorothy and ultimately Vivian as she is left alone in New York after her family is killed in a fire. She is taken in by Children's Aid and sent West on an Orphan Train to hopefully find a new home. What she finds at first is mistreatment, suspicion and abuse. While on the train she meets some other orphans one of whom will play an important role in her life. Most of the other characters, though fade into the background as the story focuses on Vivian and Molly and how the two of them reconcile their pasts which are not as different as they might think. I sped through the first 2/3rds of this book totally enthralled with Vivian's story. Molly's life was really not as interesting or as fleshed out as Vivian's and I suppose that since the book IS titled Orphan Train it should be focused on Vivian. Once the book hit the point in the story that moved it to the present it was as if all the rich detail that made the first part so compelling went out the window. There was an OMG moment in the book and then everything was rushed and it became, at least to me, a book of what could have been. It was as if the author had only so many pages left and had to fit in more information than allotted space. I felt cheated somehow and very disappointed. The book could have been so much more and I feel the loss of what I know I've missed. Rating: 3.5

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