



Gib Rides Home

By Zilpha Keatley Snyder

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Gib Whittaker's life at Lovell House Orphanage in the early 1900s is pretty bleak. But along with hours of chores, bad food, and paddings, the boys do get some schooling, and reading and writing are better than scrubbing floors. Still, Gib's fondest dream is to have a real family. So when Georgie Olson is adopted, Gib can't help being jealous, even when he finds out that the "adoption" really means being farmed out to work as unpaid labor until the age of 18.

Then one freezing January morning Gib finds Georgie hiding in the barn, his hands heavily bandaged. Constantly whipped by his master, then sent to work outside without mittens, Georgie ran away when they threatened to cut off his frostbitten hands. Is this the only kind of adoption there is? When Gib himself is farmed out, he arrives at the home he has always dreamed of. But he's soon aware of barely concealed tensions and secrets kept hidden from him. Will Gib end up like poor Georgie?

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a starred review of this story about an orphan growing up in Nebraska at the turn of the century, PW predicted that readers "will want to devour this meaty novel in one long stretch." Ages 9-12. (Sept.)

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From School Library Journal

Grade 4-8?Gib is six when he arrives at an orphanage in the early 1900s. He dreams of having a family, but discovers that the older he gets, the less likely it is for him to be adopted, and that most of the older boys are "farmed out" as cheap labor. At 10, that fate befalls him when Mr. Thornton takes him to help with his farm and his horses. Gib, who remembers very little of his life before the orphanage, is surprised to recognize the hired man as someone he knew as a small child. Despite having been warned not to ask any questions of the Thorntons, the boy slowly begins to piece together his early childhood as a neighbor of the family. Although the work is difficult, Gib is well fed, comfortable, and happy; he loves caring for the horses and has an amazing talent for working with them. Not everything is perfect, though. Mrs. Thornton is crippled and often ill; her husband is extremely cold; and their daughter resents him. Slowly Livy and Gib become friends as he teaches her to ride, but when Livy decides to ride the high-strung horse that caused her mother's paralyzing fall, Gib is blamed and returned to the orphanage. Kinder and gentler than Susan Beth Pfeffer's *Nobody's Daughter* (Delacorte, 1995), this story has the pathos and hopefulness of Joan Lowery Nixon's "Orphan Train Quartet" (Delacorte). In a book inspired by the life of the author's father, the novel delivers an engaging glimpse of history as well as a compelling story. With well-drawn, complex characters and a touch of mystery, it has surefire appeal. Janet Hilbun, Sam Houston Middle School, Garland, TX

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5[^]-8. Snyder's take on the orphan tale is rooted in her father's stories of his childhood in a Nebraska orphanage, where a boy was more likely to be farmed out to perform grueling menial tasks than he was to be adopted. Gib Whittaker's calm, steadfast personality helps him survive both the petty meanness and larger cruelties of living in the Lovell House Home for Orphaned and Abandoned Boys. When he is sent to the well-to-do Thornton family, his life improves considerably. Even though he works from dawn to dusk, he still has the opportunity to discover an inborn love of horses, to learn more about his own circumstances, and to see firsthand the tensions and compromises of family life. Deft pacing and characterization, along with a background rich in sensory detail (as in most orphan stories, food plays an especially important role), make this a touching, satisfying tribute to Snyder's father and to all children who face difficult lives with courage.
Susan Dove Lempke

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clyde Welch:

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Jennifer Bryan:

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Jeffrey Price:

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