



Homeless Bird

By Gloria Whelan

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Gloria Whelan's National Book Award-winning novel, chronicles the breathtaking story of a remarkable young woman who dares to defy fate.

Like many girls her age in India, thirteen-year-old Koly faces her arranged marriage with hope and courage. But Koly's story takes a terrible turn when in the wake of the ceremony, she discovers she's been horribly misled; her life has been sold for a dowry. In prose both graceful and unflinching, this powerful novel relays the story of a rare young woman, who even when cast out into a brutal current of time-worn tradition, sets out to forge her own remarkable future. Inspired by a newspaper article about the real thirteen-year-old widows in India today, this universally acclaimed best-selling novel, characterized by spare, lyrical language and remarkable detail, transports readers into the heart of a gripping tale of hope.

Ages 10+

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"What if I don't like him?"

"Of course you will like him."

"But what if I don't?"

Maa impatiently slapped at a fly. "Then you must learn to like him."

But Koly never gets a chance to find out if she does care for her intended groom. Married and promptly widowed at 13, Koly finds herself in the grim position of being cast out by a society that has no place for girls like her. With a seemingly hopeless future in India, this courageous and spirited young woman sets out to forge her own destiny. Through perseverance, resourcefulness, and sheer luck, she manages not only to find a niche for herself, but even to find happiness again.

Gloria Whelan's tale of a remarkable girl in an extraordinary situation will linger with the reader long after the last page is read. The shaping of Koly's life, as anyone's, is in her own hands, as well as the hands of the society in which she lives. Her ability to express herself--and ultimately support herself--with her exceptional skill in embroidery is a symbol of the creative ingenuity that will serve her well throughout her tribulations. (Ages 8 and older) --*Emilie Coulter*

From Publishers Weekly

Whelan (Miranda's Last Stand) blends modern Hindu culture with age-old Indian traditions as she profiles a poor girl's struggle to survive in a male-dominated society. Only 13 when her parents find her a husband, Koly can't help feeling apprehensive about leaving home to live in a distant village with her in-laws and husband, none of whom she has met. The truth is worse than she could have feared: the groom, Hari, is a sickly child, and his parents have wanted only a dowry, not a wife for him, in order to pay for a trip to Benares so Hari might bathe in the holy waters of the Ganges. Koly is widowed almost immediately; later, she is abandoned in the holy city of Vrindavan by her cruel mother-in-law. Koly, likened to a "homeless bird" in a famous poem by Rabindranath Tagore, embodies the tragic plight of Hindu women without status, family or financial security. She is saved from a dismal fate by her love of beauty, her talent for embroidery and the philanthropy of others--and by Whelan's tidy plotting, which introduces a virtuous young man, a savvy benefactress and a just employer in the nick of time. The feminist theme that dominates the happily-ever-after ending seems more American than Indian, but kids will likely enjoy this dramatic view of an endangered adolescence and cheer Koly's hard-won victories. Ages 8-12. (Mar.)

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-Thirteen-year-old Koly's arranged marriage seems a blessing for her impoverished family. Her mother embroiders a wedding sari, while the girl stitches her family memories into a quilt. But when she arrives at the home where, according to custom, she will live for the rest of her life under the supervision of her mother-in-law, she discovers that her 16-year-old husband Hari is gravely ill with tuberculosis. She learns that her dowry was needed to finance a journey to Benares, with the hope that the holy water of the Ganges River will cure him. Hari dies there and she is trapped, a widow with no future. Luckily, her father-in-law recognizes her desire to learn and teaches her to read. A few years later, when he, too, dies, her mother-in-law abandons her in another holy city, Vrindavan. Raji, a young rickshaw driver, helps Koly find a place to live and keeps track of her progress. Eventually, she finds work embroidering saris. Raji has a

plan, and a dream. He wants to make enough money to buy seed and tools and return to his village, with Koly as his wife. In a happy ending that suggests that established custom can be challenged in positive ways, she agrees. Whelan has enhanced a simple but satisfying story with loving detail about traditional Indian life, the harsh reality of feudal customs that persist today, and the complexity of cultural change. Readers with a curiosity about other worlds and other ways will find Koly's story fascinating.

Kathleen Isaacs, Edmund Burke School, Washington, DC

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dianne Tripp:

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Raymond Smith:

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