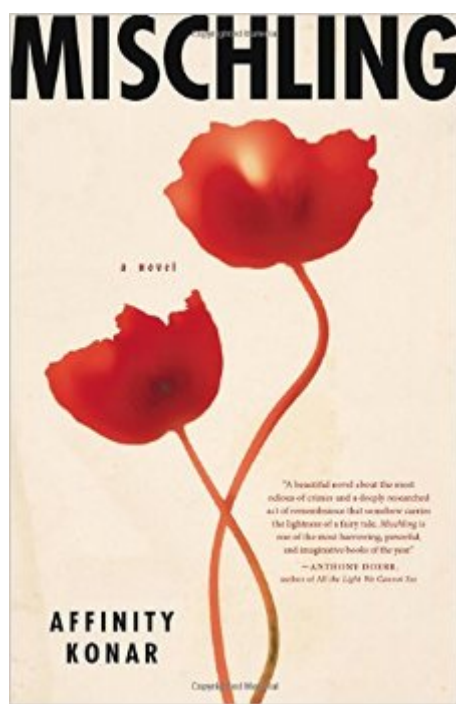


The book was found

Mischling



Synopsis

"One of the most harrowing, powerful, and imaginative books of the year" (Anthony Doerr) about twin sisters fighting to survive the evils of World War II. Pearl is in charge of: the sad, the good, the past. Stasha must care for: the funny, the future, the bad. It's 1944 when the twin sisters arrive at Auschwitz with their mother and grandfather. In their benighted new world, Pearl and Stasha Zagorski take refuge in their identical natures, comforting themselves with the private language and shared games of their childhood. As part of the experimental population of twins known as Mengele's Zoo, the girls experience privileges and horrors unknown to others, and they find themselves changed, stripped of the personalities they once shared, their identities altered by the burdens of guilt and pain. That winter, at a concert orchestrated by Mengele, Pearl disappears. Stasha grieves for her twin, but clings to the possibility that Pearl remains alive. When the camp is liberated by the Red Army, she and her companion Feliks--a boy bent on vengeance for his own lost twin--travel through Poland's devastation. Undeterred by injury, starvation, or the chaos around them, motivated by equal parts danger and hope, they encounter hostile villagers, Jewish resistance fighters, and fellow refugees, their quest enabled by the notion that Mengele may be captured and brought to justice within the ruins of the Warsaw Zoo. As the young survivors discover what has become of the world, they must try to imagine a future within it. A superbly crafted story, told in a voice as exquisite as it is boundlessly original, MISCHLING defies every expectation, traversing one of the darkest moments in human history to show us the way toward ethereal beauty, moral reckoning, and soaring hope.

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Customer Reviews

"Mischling", the German word for "half-breed", is the title of Affinity Konar's debut novel. Thirteen year old identical twins, Pearl and Stasha Zamorski are the eponymous mischlings in this unusual Holocaust novel. In the fall of 1944, Pear and Stasha are placed in the Auschwitz "Zoo" which is the laboratory of Dr. Josef Mengele, who conducted hideous experiments on captive Jews; he was particularly interesting in twins. It goes without saying that many scenes in this novel are deeply disturbing - no recounting of the Holocaust can be otherwise. But be warned, there are scenes of children being starved, children being made sick and disfigured, children enduring unspeakable torture. Promised that their family (Mother and Grandfather) will have better treatment as they are being studied, Pearl and Stasha plot to survive their plight. These are young girls who love Judy Garland and Shirley Temple, who play games with each other to distract from the horrors of their circumstance. To "justify" torture, murder and war, we must first de-humanize and deny person-hood to our enemies/victims. They must be seen as both "other" and "less", and this is certainly what Mengele's experiments intended to show. Stasha gets it when she says: "These Nazis had such stupidly vicious ideas of what constituted a person - I knew well enough to never underestimate their whims." Pearl is attracted to another prisoner, fourteen year old Peter, as any normal teen would be under normal circumstances, but she feels it is a mistake to become "too human" to anyone in this horrible place - that they must even become less than human to each other to endure. Why do I call this novel *unusual*?

Mischling "the term was used during the Third Reich to characterize those who bore both Aryan and Jewish blood" is not for the faint of heart. It is nightmarish and shattering. It is also "dare I use the term?" uplifting. It resists limpid sentimentality and the contortion of history and pays witness to the darkest of times from an entirely new perspective. In short, I found the book to be astounding. Inspired by the non-fictional book *Children of the Flame*, Affinity Konar focuses on a particularly horrific ongoing Holocaust event: the torture and experimentation on twins by the Angel of Death, Dr. Joseph Mengele. The heroines of this book are twins Pearl and Stasha, who divide the responsibilities of living between themselves. Stasha takes on the funny, the future, the bad, while Pearl takes the sad, the past, the good. But it soon becomes evident that Stasha and Pearl are two halves of survival "the part that must cope with loss and despair and the part that against all odds, experiences wild hope that cannot be extracted from her or punctured by a needle. The twinning of two young girls "of hope and despair, life and death, fortitude and triumph" is a theme that is interwoven throughout. The narrative is told in alternate chapters by Stasha and then Pearl as they

hauntingly describe how a hideous and morally stunted doctor tries to irreparably break the longing for attachment and destroy the most important part of living – the need to be close to another living being. Auschwitz becomes not just a physical hellhole of despair, but also a state of mind. At one point, Stasha reflects, “This is my belief. Auschwitz would end when Pearl returned.” When they are together, they are whole. Given the duality, it is not surprising that Ms.

Recorded history is replete with stories of those who tortured other living creatures in the name of medical and scientific research, but few match the horrors of Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz Angel of Death. Among his most famous experiments were those conducted on thousands of twins, few of whom survived the war. Affinity Komar’s fictionalized version follows identical preteens Pearl and Stasha during their months at Auschwitz and shortly thereafter. Books about this place and time can be tough to digest, and even the thickest skinned among us may have a tough time with Primo Levi. Komar eases readers into her story with deft language bordering on poetry and her focus on the twin relationship. The zoo, as the twins and other test subjects refer to their quarters, is a relatively benign place amidst the mass murders occurring elsewhere in the camp. Mengele takes care of his twins, we are reminded many times, and they are provided with adequate food and shelter, their lives scented by the omnipresent smoke from the crematorium. Occasionally, twins are summoned to the lab, needles are injected, extractions performed, but since we are seeing the world through young eyes, we’re never clear about the purpose, and it becomes increasingly apparent that there may be no purpose beyond the gratification of one particularly creative torturer. Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviets, soldiers who were somewhat less than compassionate in this telling, months before the end of the war in Europe. The most interesting part of the book for me was the description of the challenges faced by former prisoners during that period. Although they had escaped the camp, their lives were still in peril; they were often cold and hungry and mostly dependent on the kindness of strangers.

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Mischling

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