



## Waiting for Normal

*Leslie Connor*

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# **Waiting for Normal**

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## **Waiting for Normal** Leslie Connor

This poignant and joyful novel is filled with meaningful moments and emotional resonance.

Addie is waiting for normal. But Addie's mother has an all-or-nothing approach to life: a food fiesta or an empty pantry, her way or no way.

Addie's mother is bipolar, and she often neglects Addie. All-or-nothing never adds up to normal, and it can't bring Addie home, where she wants to be with her half-sisters and her stepfather. But Addie never stops hoping that one day, maybe, she'll find normal.

## **Waiting for Normal Details**

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Author : Leslie Connor

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## From Reader Review Waiting for Normal for online ebook

### Josiah says

"But don't you think it's possible that every person is a hero to someone else?"

—Addie Schmeeter, *Waiting for Normal*, P. 46

This book was well conceived and executed, and I liked it very much. At times, there would be a line or two designed to really make the reader think in several short chapters in a row. This is a distinguished contribution to literature. It contains something for everyone. Kudos.

"The only bad thing about having a good time is when it's over."

—Addie, P. 56

"Keep crossing bridges and poking your nose behind gates, Little Cookie. It's a big, big world."

—Soula, *Waiting for Normal*, P. 274

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### Elise (TheBookishActress) says

Sometimes books come along that hit us in that specific way, where we end the book feeling run over by a train. This book is that for me. I don't know if it's *objectively* the best book ever written, and I don't care either.

Addie lives with her neglectful mother in a trailer by the train tracks. Her ex-stepfather, Dwight, has been awarded custody of her two baby sisters, and she misses them with all her heart. Addie is such a *real* character. She's optimistic, but she's not unreasonable. She knows what her situation is. She's been forced to grow up too fast and she desperately yearns for a normal life.

Every character seems so real and sympathetic, even when they make mistakes. Addie's mother is an incredibly flawed person, but she's not a villain. I also loved seeing more good relationships between children and step parents (which is still so rare in literature).

This book is so difficult to read, and yet it's **so, so hopeful**. Even the ending of this book is perfect - just the right amount of emotional catharsis, and yet ending with plenty of hope for Addie herself.

VERDICT: This is my favorite children's book of all time - maybe one of my favorite books of all time, too. I cannot recommend it enough.

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### Brooke Shirts says

A sweet story of enduring hardships and crazy family with endless optimism. Little Addie has apparently hit

bottom: her flake's-flake of a mother lost everything in the divorce except Addie. They now live in a junky trailer underneath a train overpass in Schenectady. Mommers surfs the Web all day, relies on Addie for cooking and cleaning, and takes off whenever she feels like it. Addie misses her responsible, loving ex-stepfather and his two daughters. Will Addie be able to find "normal" again?

This book has a lot going for it: Addie is the quintessential cock-eyed optimist, but she never comes off as cloying or goody-goody. She's just sweet and loveable; the quietish kid you liked sitting next to in the lunchroom. It's refreshing to see a book with good fathering -- Dwight the ex-step is rock-solid, but believable. You can see he's a good guy, but he's also flawed just enough to make it plausible that he ever hooked up with Mommers in the first place.

However, it's the plot that I've got problems with. This thing is darn predictable. What's that? Mommers says she's definitely going to be at Addie's Christmas concert? And then she ruins the whole thing? No surprises there. Soula the eccentric minimart owner belts out a cough in an early chapter, and it is later revealed that she has terminal cancer. Not that shocking. But I'm betting that most kids picking up this book won't be nearly as jaded as I am, so just ignore my patter and fire up this puppy for one tear-jerker of a read.

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### **Betsy says**

Once in a while a reviewer of children's books likes to sit down and reassess their occupation. Here I am. I am an adult and I review books for kids. And most of the time I really enjoy it. I just have a fabulous time reading all these children's books and then spouting off opinions about why you should or shouldn't hand 'em off to the youngsters. But in the end I am still an adult and my opinion is that of someone over the age of 25. A lot of people in my position have a hard time separating their adult perspective from their knowledge of what kids like. Am I blabbering on here? Well, there's a reason for it. Nine times out of ten, when I read a children's book that mucks with my mind, I don't review it. Simple as that. I think, "Book hard. Me no review. Me watch Colbert Report instead," and that is that. But I felt compelled to push through my natural malaise to review *Waiting for Normal* by Leslie Connor. This is partly because the book has been garnering pretty much universally stellar reviews. The writing is strong, the characters interesting, and the plot tight. My problem? The audacity of hope, I guess. This book is awash in it. And so, I must pry my snide, callous, New York City sardonic self away from myself as a 12-year-old child and let these two components of my reviewer self duke it out.

Say what you will about Addie, she doesn't let a little thing like the complete and total dissolution of her family unit get her down. Addie's mom (or Mommers) and Addie's wonderful stepfather Dwight have just gotten divorced, and he is legally responsible for their children. Addie, on the other hand, is biologically just her mom's kid so she's left to live with Mommers in a trailer in the middle of Schenectady that Dwight has provided. Addie's always had a way of dealing with her mom's inconsistencies all her life, and now isn't any different. With Mommers disappearing for days at a time, Addie concentrates on the things she can control. Her flute playing, her hamster Piccolo, her friends at the corner convenience store, and getting to see her half-sisters and Dwight whenever she can. Yet as her sisters' lives get increasingly better without her, Addie's own world becomes more and more unstable. Strength of character is her best friend now and her eventual freedom will have to rely on danger.

What I'm trying to figure out is why I originally resisted this title. I think it may have something to do with the language that's surrounding the book. Phrases like, "one girl's giant spirit" and "will touch readers' hearts." Ew. We live in a society where real honest emotion is far harder to find than crass commercialized

Hallmark moments. Plus I read so many books that try to take advantage of a reader's feeling by shamelessly tugging at the heartstrings like they were marionette lines. Do that once too often and the strings get lank and loose. Then *Waiting for Normal* comes by and it isn't flashy at all. It's packaging keeps pronouncing in big shiny letters, "A heartwarming gem", and the like, and badda bing, you're jaded before you've even read a page.

What I would have preferred would have been to have received this book as a coverless, blurbless manuscript. Just black words on white paper, because the power of Connor's writing doesn't lie in promising you a rollercoaster journey of the soul. She's a good writer precisely because she is understated. Look at her other books. This is the woman who wrote the brave picture book tale, *Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel*. If you haven't read that book then you have a gap in your library. Fill that gap. In that story Connor's words are honed down to their pure essential core, telling a story without fluffy details and ridiculous razzmatazz. And the same feeling shows up in this book, but in a different way. Here, Connor's voice as Addie is what holds everything together. Addie's not laugh-out-loud funny but she is wry, self-deprecating, and the kind of person a kid would want to spend a whole book with. Come for the tone, stay for the writing.

There was one other obstacle to overcome before I declared the book a winner. It has what can only be described as the most hope-ritten child since Pollyanna herself. A 21st Century Pollyanna for the masses, that's what Addie is. But there's a difference between being hopeful and being blind or ignorant to the world's injustices. Addie has faith in a way that, somehow, is never annoying. Do you have any idea how hard that must be to write? And what's more, when the obligatory "our heroine loses hope" scene comes up, it's its own beast. Some kids would stop eating, going to school, or seeing their friends. Addie returns a flute, and somehow that carries more weight. I mean, she's still a pretty unbelievably well adjusted kid, for all that's happened to her in her life. For example, when she finds out that her beloved step-dad is getting married to a wonderful woman and that he and her half-siblings are going to be cheery, merry, and gay with this person, does she dislike the interloper or resent Dwight telling her this news? No, instead she punches his arm lightly and says, "Thanks for telling me everything," which is verging on the unbelievable. If you can overcome your skepticism when this kind of thing happens, you'll have an easier time reading the book.

Was some of it predictable? Of course! Because (and this is what I, for some reason, have to keep reminding myself here) this is a children's book and if you read a certain amount of them then elements are going to crop up more than once. Addie's mother kept reminding me of negligent mom or pop characters in other books, but she certainly had a manic depressive style of her own. And none of this is to say that I wasn't delighted to see some of my jaded assumptions just go higgledy-piggledy out the window. The rule in children's literary drama is that if the child with a bad housing situation receives a cute fluffy animal (say, a guinea pig) in Act One, then that same fluffy animal is going to die sometime in the next fifty pages. I call this the Chinese Cinderella rule. A rule that Connor wasn't afraid to use to ratchet up the tension without actually pulling the trigger.

I would recommend reading the first chapter of this book (it's only five pages) in a children's literary course or a class on how to write for children as an example of showing, not telling. Our slow realization that Addie's mother is selfish and self-centered isn't crystal clear from page one. All the same, you're getting hints of it. It's like when you meet someone on the street and as the conversation continues you get that slow dawning sense that the person across from you is one Brady short of a Bunch. That's what Ms. Connor does. She draws you into her characters so that your faith in them is reliant on where a scene goes from one moment to the next.

Now I began this review by mentioning that an adult reviewer who talks about a book for kids should always remember that the intended audience is (shockingly) not twenty-nine-year-old librarians. So here's the

million-dollar question: Are kids going to like this book? And the answer is: Darn tooting. Darn tooting they will, because if nothing else *Waiting for Normal* is infinitely readable. Here's why I think the book is going to work for the kiddies. It's clocking in at 304 pages, but it reads zippy quick. I didn't feel a lull or a gap in action at any point. The drama is focused pretty squarely on the family situation, which means we don't have to have the rote scene where the best friend at school suddenly befriends the popular snob. Also, my library often hosts a pack of sixth grade girls who only want one thing: realistic girl books. Finding titles for the tween set is always difficult because you don't want to hand them stuff that's too mature and you don't want babyish fare either. *Waiting for Normal* is going to be perfect for all parties involved, and I cannot wait to get it into their hands.

All right, I give in. It's a good book. Maybe even a great one, though I think it would take a rereading or two to know for sure. Kids will dig it, adults obviously do already, and as a reader I'd just like to say that if you or your kids aren't into "heartwarming" tales, I think you'll still enjoy this book. It's definitely been bitten by the honesty bug. A title that deserves attention.

Ages 10-14

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### **babyhippoface says**

Whew! Made it through without throwing my iPod through the windshield after hearing the word "Mommers" for the 89th time. Didn't think the iPod would survive this audiobook.

That said, I liked this audiobook, it's just that "Mommers" was making me insane. My main gripe about the recording was that the narrator made Addie's voice sound too young for a 12-year-old. Just my opinion. Now on to the story itself....

Addie was quite likeable, but I wanted her to stand up for herself more. I wanted her to quit calling her mother "Mommers", a cutesy nickname which represented Addie's cheerful approach to life. I wanted her to get angry at Denise's neglect and call her "Mother"--babyish nicknames left behind in the harsh realities of life. Plus, I wanted Denise to grow up. But we don't always get what we want.

This book surprised me several times. I assumed it would be predictable in certain spots. Example: every time Addie went to Dwight's for a while and asked Mommers to watch Piccolo, I'd say out loud, "That hamster's gonna be dead when she gets back." But he never was. And I was genuinely surprised. So I applaud Connor for not relying on that kind of dramatic sentiment. (Denise wasn't *all* bad. Just ALMOST all. Selfish, self-centered, lazy; I'll stop there.)

When I was just beginning this book, I read a review written by a teacher, somewhere on goodreads. I can't remember who wrote it, I just remember she said something like this: "glad to see a book that tells the story of so many of my students' lives". And so all the way through this book, I kept thinking, "this is reality for a lot of kids," and that kept me listening and thinking about students in my school. How many of them live with someone like Denise every day? How many of them wear dirty clothes and have unwashed, uncombed hair because their parents don't care what happens to them, or even leave for days at a time? How many of them act out at school because that's the only way they've ever learned to behave? If nothing else, I think *Waiting for Normal* will remind me to look into my students, not just at them, to try to hear their hearts louder than their words.

**steph says**

Addie is a little too understanding and easy going for me, at the beginning I was a little annoyed with her actually. Her mom and stepdad are divorced, her step dad has custody of her younger half sisters but not her, her mom and her have to move into a a old trailer under a railroad pass and still Addie sees rainbows and sunshine everywhere. So not me at that age.

BUT then I kept reading and I understood Addie more and her backstory (HER MOM IS THE WORST BTW) and her sunny disposition started to become charming and more understanding to me. And then the middle of the book happened and I was all "WHERE ARE THE ADULTS IN HER LIFE?" and I wanted to hug Addie. And then the ending happened and there were tears and anger but it also went the way I hoped the ending would go (thank goodness) so all in all, this was a an enjoyable lunchtime read.

But ugh, every scene with her mom killed me because every other adult in the book KNEW she wasn't a responsible parent but no one could do anything. Which is realistic but also super annoying because I wanted to fix things for Addie NOW and couldn't.

## Melika Khoshnezhad says

## Marika Gillis says

This little gem of a novel will tug at your heartstrings. Twelve-year-old Addie lives in a trailer in Schenectady, NY and her family is "hard to follow- like a road that keeps taking twists and turns." Addie's mother divorced Addie's ex-stepfather, Dwight, two years earlier and Dwight has custody of Addie's two half sisters. Addie's real father died when she was young and her dad's dad, Grandio, lives nearby. (Sound like a modern day family or what?) Since Addie is not Dwight's birth child, she lives with her mom. At the opening of this novel they are moving into the trailer that Dwight has provided for them. Addie quickly befriends the

neighbors who run the minimart across the street and is accepted into the Stage Orchestra at school (even though she can't read music).

It doesn't take long for the reader to recognize that Addie's mother is bipolar (though the word is never used in the book). While there is no physical abuse, life gets complicated for Addie when her mom begins to leave her alone in the trailer for days at a time.

This story deals with many "big" issues- guilt, belonging, sickness, death, homosexuality, and neglect. And on top of everything else, Addie has severe dyslexia. But, the truly amazing thing about this book is the utter simplicity of the story. Leslie Connor is a fantastic author who draws out her readers' understanding of the characters simply- through their actions. Her writing is straightforward and sincere. She has given Addie uncharacteristic optimism for a child in such sad circumstances. Luckily, throughout the novel, the reader is acutely aware of the adults in Addie's life who are watching out for her (even when Addie is not) and, in the end, Addie realizes what it means to be cared for as every child deserves.

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### **Ainsley says**

Wow. Long after I forget key plot points and character names, I'll remember the visceral reaction I had to Waiting for Normal. Leslie Connor really nails the feeling of a kid forced to grow up too fast and waiting for her family to somehow turn around and be ok. If your childhood experience somehow fits this description, you will feel the authenticity on each page. Addie's story felt devastating, spunky, familiar, and hopeful. Devoured this in a few hours. Seriously, wow.

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### **Tracey says**

Children's fiction / realistic fiction; ages 10-14. A moving story about 12-year-old Addie's attempts to make the best of her new living situation as she and her dysfunctional mom (she reminds me a lot of the mother in Jeannette Walls' The Glass Castle) move into a trailer following a divorce. Addie makes friends quickly with the kids at school as well as with her neighbors at the the gas station/convenience store across the street-- Soula, a woman fighting a losing battle with cancer, and Elliot, the man that helps Soula manage the store (and also happens to be gay). Though it wouldn't seem likely for Addie's mother to get a happy ending, the story closes on a hopeful note, with Addie eventually being adopted by her stepfather and taken back to live with her half-sisters in the lovely country home they've created with the stepdad's fiancee, and the mother receiving "parenting lessons" from the state (she's pregnant again, and apparently the father-to-be is willing to stick with her despite being lied to, etc.).

During the story Addie reaches several epiphanies, coming to terms with her dyslexia, her notion of heroism (Soula, who in the end had to call social services, takes a big role here) and normalcy (which Addie defines as having enough stability in her home so that she doesn't have to wonder if her mother will be around this week or whether she'll have enough food left in the cupboards to feed herself).

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## Rana Heshmati says

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## **Stephanie Anze says**

3.5 stars

Addie is a twelve-year-old girl that lives with "Mommers" (her mother) in a trailer. However, living with Mommers is a challenge as she has an all-or-nothing approach to life (either there is too much food or none-at-all type of situation). Its Addie's step-father, Dwight that watches after her but from a distance as he lives farther away. Despite a tough upbringing, Addie holds onto an unshakeable optimism.

The target audience for this novel is kids ages 10-14 years old but its apt for everybody. Heartbreaking, this works will tug at your emotions. I do believe that Connor did an excellent job chanelling a twelve-year-old girl dealing with a parent that clearly has some type of mental imbalance. The prose is well written and the characters were believable. My issue has nothing to do with the novel itself. If I was in the target audience, I'd rate this higher however its more difficult for me to buy into this hope-beats-all attitude. Its just that certain personal experiences have made me more jaded than I am willing to admit. The book is, indeed, wonderful and powerful. It can be summed up as follows: "Normal.....is when you know what's gonna happen next. Not exactly what, because probably nobody gets that. But normal is being able to count on certain things. Good things". True for Addie and anybody trying to navigate through life. A worthwhile read.

**Donalyn says**

Even though my tears have not dried, I feel compelled to dash off a review of *Waiting for Normal*.

Twelve year old Addie has never had a normal life. Her father died when she was three and her mother remarried. Although her new stepfather, Dwight, was a great father, the marriage did not last. After Addie's mother leaves her and her little sisters alone for several days, Dwight gets custody of his daughters and moves away.

Addie is left to live with her mother, who is possibly bipolar (the book never comes out and says so, but you get the hint). Addie's mother spends all of their money, wanders off for days at a time, and spends most of her days in chatrooms on the computer.

Dwight tries to take care of them-- paying their bills and finding them a home in a beat up old trailer. Addie misses her little sisters and despairs that her life will ever be normal with a mother who is such a mess.

Addie makes friends with the cast of characters who live in her neighborhood and tries to pretend that everything is OK, but the chaos surrounding her mother eventually builds to a dramatic climax.

While Addie is a survivor--resilient--Dwight would say, she is still a child struggling with the reality of desperate circumstances, trying to make the best of a bad situation.

My favorite line, "Everybody can be a hero to someone." Addie is definitely a hero I will remember.

I cried through the last twenty pages. What a great book! If you liked books such as *So B. It*, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, and *Hope Was Here*-- you will love *Waiting for Normal*.

My students would say this is a "chick book," but hey, chicks need books, too.

**Chloe J says**

I loved this amazing book about a young, hopeful girl named Addie living with her mom (mommers) in a small trailer. Addie's mom and step father are divorced but she knows her step dad (Dwight) as more of parent than mommers. Mommers always is gone on "work" trips for days at a time so Addie spends her time at the market across the street with Soula and Eli. Will Addie ever find normal?

This book made me feel sad, hopeful, and even excited at times. I really liked that whenever you thought it was beginning to get normal for Addie another problem came along and changed her life. I recommend this book to anyone who likes to be pulled into a book so deeply that you feel their hope and dread. This book is very similar to *Okay for now* because of the main characters strength and endurance for people who don't deserve them.

**Roya Fourstar says**

<http://fourstar.ir/1393/11/06/waiting...>

**Kelly says**

This story was very cute and very positive. Addy has a ridiculous amount of positive energy and a great attitude about her tough life. The writing is fairly tight (amid some weak editing), and the story line itself does not have holes I have found in so many other YA books recently. Although I am not necessarily a huge fan of a happy story with a "happily ever after" ending, this story doesn't necessarily end happily ever after, but, it ends with a positive note. This book will definitely appeal to girls between 9 and 14, as the narrator is in 6th grade and her character is definitely true to age.

I'm glad this one earned a few nods from the Youth Media Awards. It's definitely a family-friendly book. Conner does an excellent job throughout the book of building characters and situations rather than telling the reader about them. Soula, Mommers, and Addy all come into their own through their development, and as a reader, I was able to anticipate but not entirely guess what was going to happen.

**Megan says**

Addie is a wonderful character. She's sweet, gregarious and funny, the bright star in what was a somewhat predictable but enjoyable book. Yes, I think anybody could probably predict the last ten pages of the book by reading the first ten, but the journey there is fun. The setting is cool - a tiny sixth-grader sized trailer across the street from a convenience store manned by adults who actually have a sense of humor - and the

characters are... well, I guess gentle is the word I want to use here. Maybe even a little too saccharine sweet, as in the character of Addie's youngest sister. I like that the book provides perspective on some alternative viewpoints while still remaining true to Addie herself.

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### **Cara says**

It was refreshing to read Addie's story. Too many protagonist her age seem.... I don't know unlikable, but Addie is different.

First of all I should say that I liked Addie to pieces. I could only wish I could have been good of a kid as she is.

Addie always seem to be walking on eggshells (even though she doesn't know it at first). Her mom (which she calls Mommers) is an all or nothing person, which bring the both of them lots of problems. At the beginning of the book we see her and her mom moving into a small trailer that her stepfather (Dwight) is letting them live in. Before all this happened she use to live in a house with her mom, Dwight (who she really sees as her father since her biological father died when she was small)and her half-sisters Brynna and Katie. Of course though, mistakes that her mother made changed all that.

I was surprised by how resilient Addie is and how much support she has from the adults around her when her mother can't be there for her. I can only hope that other kids in her situation have adults that care about them as much Addie is cared about. She has Dwight, Grandio (her grandfather from her biological father's side), Soula, Elliot, Rick, and Helen to help her grow through both the physical and emotional changes she has to deal with.

As the story progresses we come to learn that Addie has dyslexia, and I applaud her and how she deals with it. I was glad to see a main character that wasn't automatically brilliant but had to work hard for what she gets.

The author did an excellent job of having you believe that Addie was a real 12 year old girl with these problems, and help you sympathize with what she is feeling. I don't want to give the whole plot away but suffice to say that Addie does find her normal in the end.

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### **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by The Compulsive Reader for TeensReadToo.com

Addie has never had a normal life.

It's an impossible feat when she lives with a woman like her mother, who is either extremely happy or extremely sad. They either have what they need to survive, or they don't. But Addie tries to not let these extremes get to her too much. She still dreams of a place where everything's normal and she has a safe home.

Now if only she can hold on to that dream.

Connor's wonderfully poignant and eye-opening novel is told with the utmost clarity and sensitivity. Addie's down-to-earth and sensible nature is a beacon to readers, and they will fall in love with her immediately.

As this story unfolds, your heart will break for her, but will also rejoice as she finds her niche and a place that she can call home. **WAITING FOR NORMAL** is a story full of love and hope.

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### **Claire says**

I've been hearing great things about this book, so perhaps my hopes were too high. This book irked me in the same way as *The Higher Power of Lucky* did: cutesy, too-good-to-be-true, innocent kids in hard-knock lives just drive me nuts. Addie is on the brink of puberty, has severe dyslexia, and lives with her unmedicated, bipolar mom in a trailer in a grim corner of Schenectady; her two little sisters and loving stepdad have started a new life in the country, but her mom has custody of Addie. But thanks to Addie's unfailingly positive outlook, everything is bathed in sunshine: she makes an instant BFF in her new school, gets a flute solo, and develops a deep friendship with the folks at the convenience store across the street. The stuff of Newbery awards ensues (the convenience store owner is fat and has cancer and her best friend is gay, both circumstances that allow the reader to appreciate just how nonjudgmental Addie is... but also guarantee some tears near the end).

First of all, Addie and I (or maybe the author and I) started out on a bad note: I was irritated from the first mention of "Mommers" on page one. "Mommers"? From then on, I couldn't believe her as a character. Could any seventh-grader in this situation be so naive, terminally cheerful and UN-resourceful ("toast dinners" notwithstanding)? She never considers putting aside money for Mommers's long absences; it doesn't occur to her that letting her unreliable mother take care of her beloved hamster is a bad idea? It's hard to respect a character who's... sort of pathetic.

Then I felt guilty, because this is undeniably a terrible situation for a child to be in, and I think a good number of kid/YA books propagate a dangerous myth that children in bad situations can and will cope without adult intervention. But jeez, Addie, grow a backbone! Make some smart decisions! And please, Newbery committee, don't give this one the medal this year.

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