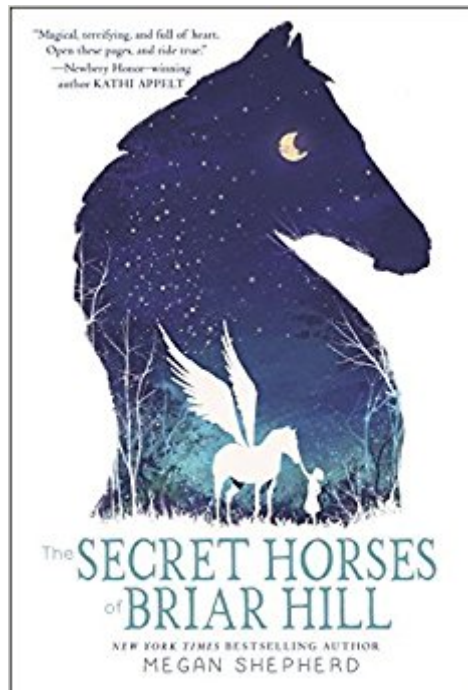




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# The Secret Horses Of Briar Hill



## Synopsis

"Deserves a spot on the shelf next to the most beloved children's classics" —yes, even *The Secret Garden*. "Shelf Awareness, Starred Review" Described as "reminiscent of the *Chronicles of Narnia*" in a starred review, *The Secret Horses of Briar Hill* shows readers everywhere that there is color in our world —they just need to know where to look. There are winged horses that live in the mirrors of Briar Hill hospital —the mirrors that reflect the elegant rooms once home to a princess, now filled with sick children. Only Emmaline can see the creatures. It is her secret. One morning, Emmaline climbs over the wall of the hospital, escapes abandoned gardens and discovers something incredible: a white horse with a broken wing has left the mirror-world and entered her own. The horse, named Foxfire, is hiding from a dark and sinister force —a Black Horse who hunts by colorless moonlight. If Emmaline is to keep him from finding her new friend, she must surround Foxfire with treasures of brilliant shades. But where can Emmaline find color in a world of gray? A Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2016 "Endearing characters, metaphors for life and death, and a slow revelation of the horrors of war give this slim novel a surprising amount of heft." —Booklist, Starred Review "In clear, gripping, flawless prose . . . this exquisite, beautifully illustrated middle-grade novel explodes with raw anguish, magic and hope, and readers will clutch it to their chests and not want to let go." —Shelf Awareness, Starred Review "Reminiscent of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Elizabeth Goudge, or a child's version of *Life of Pi*. . . Readers will love this to pieces." —Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review "Magical, terrifying, and full of heart. Open these pages, and ride true." —Newbery Honor-winning author Kathi Appelt "A remarkable book. Astonishing!" —Michael Morpurgo, author of *War Horse*

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0720 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Delacorte Books for Young Readers (October 11, 2016)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 50 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #122,943 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #35 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Holocaust #114 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Military & Wars #131 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Illness

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 5 • Featuring an unreliable narrator, this darkly atmospheric and humorless novel, set in a British countryside hospital for children with tuberculosis during World War II, blurs the line between fantasy and reality. Emmaline sees winged horses in the mirrors, meets a fugitive white-winged horse in the garden, and follows the Horse Lord's written instructions to steal a rainbow of brightly colored objects in order to protect the creature from a terrifying, menacing black-feathered horse. Mature and experienced readers might notice that the driven, earnest narrator stops seeing horses whenever she faces the painful realities of her life, but Shepherd deftly keeps the action going to distract from this fact. Chapters are all very short and well formed around single events, giving the book a choppy unevenness that emphasizes how silly Emmaline's quest really is; if it weren't so deeply psychological and gloomy, filled with vividly bleak imagery of bad weather, overworked nuns poorly supervising sick children mid-war in midwinter, and velvet-coated, warm-eyed horses, the story would border on absurdity. VERDICT Ideal for readers who love to immerse themselves in emotionally wrought period pieces. • Rhona Campbell, Georgetown Day School, Washington, DC

A Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2016 • "Emmaline's narration is unreliable, flawlessly childlike, and deeply honest; her faith in magic brings her solace and, possibly, healing. The magical realism is reminiscent of the Chronicles of Narnia, Elizabeth Goudge, or a child's version of Life of Pi... Readers will love this to pieces. • Kirkus Reviews, Starred review" In clear, gripping, flawless prose,... this exquisite, beautifully illustrated middle-grade novel explodes with raw anguish, magic and hope, and readers will clutch it to their chests and not want to let go. • Shelf Awareness Reviews, Starred review "Endearing characters, metaphors for life and death, and a slow revelation of the horrors of war give this slim novel a surprising amount of heft." • Booklist, Starred review "Magical, terrifying, and full of heart. Open these pages, and ride true." -Kathi Appelt, Newbery Honor-winning author of The True Blue Scouts of

Sugar Man Swamp" A remarkable book. Astonishing!" -Michael Morpurgo, author of War Horse

"A story that will stay with you long after you finish reading it."

•MARY BROWN, BOOKS, BYTES & BEYOND, NJ

"A classic magical feel with a heart-pounding story."

•RAE ANN PARKER, PARNASSUS BOOKS, TN

"The seven-to-ten-year-old version of myself would have been in love with this book, reading and rereading until it fell apart as badly as my well-worn copy of The Secret Garden."

•KARI MEUTSCH, PHOENIX BOOKS, VT

"The Secret Horses of Briar Hill has all the elements of a lasting classic."

•CHRISTOPHER ROSE, ANDOVER BOOKSTORE, MA

"A masterful novel."

•CINDY NORRIS, MALAPROP'S BOOKSTORE/CAFÉ, NC

"A moving and magical story not to be missed."

•Leslie Hawkins, Spellbound Children's Bookshop, NC

I got this book for Christmas. I have really enjoyed a lot of Megan Shepherd's YA series so I was curious to read her debut middle grade novel. This was a beautifully written book that is full of magical realism and has a bittersweet story. Emmaline has been moved to a hospital for children with tuberculosis during World War II. As she watches her best friend fade away taken by the "stillwaters" of tuberculosis she notices there are winged horses that live in the mirrors throughout the hospital. When one of the horses shows up the garden wounded, Emmaline is given a quest to drive an evil Black Horse away until the wounded horse can heal and flee. The book is overshadowed by World War II; the kids are on their own and many have relatives and parents that have died in the war. Food is short and illness is prevalent throughout; in general things are drab and grey. The book is beautifully written with wonderful descriptions. There are beautiful black and white illustrations interspersed in the story. It's a somewhat dark story with bursts of brightness and light throughout. The ending is somewhat ambiguous leaving the reader to make up their own mind about what happens with Emmaline (Shepherd addresses this issue in the Afterword). I have mixed feelings about the book. I liked how it addressed some of the issues of World War II and I loved the magical horses in the mirrors. I thought overall it was a bit depressing and too much of a tear-jerker (I am not a huge fan of this type of bittersweet story). There is just too much sadness in the idea of these kids having to leave their families and of what everyone goes through as war time progresses. Overall this was a well done story. It's beautifully written and illustrated. It was a bit too sad and melancholy for me, but I did think it was a good magical look at some of the things that happened during WWII. I am giving it to my 9 year old son to read and will try to update this review with his thoughts once he

reads it.

3.5 stars I got this book for the horses. They've always had a special place in my heart, and *The Secret Horses of Briar Hill* looked like a middle grade novel after my own heart. The story was very touching and should be read by many. Emmaline is our narrator. She is both naive yet worldly, a child who had to grow up quickly as she makes a new life in a hospital during World War II. She is surrounded by children who also have "the stillwaters," but she's different from them in one way: she can see winged horses in the mirrors of the hospital. While they serve as a positive note in Emmaline's life, their presence has a meaning even Emmaline couldn't imagine. This is a story of how war shapes people. The location may be a hospital but the children are just as affected by the war as their families. Some of the children have fathers fighting. Some are war orphans. Emmaline herself has been affected by the fighting. The characters each bring a history to the hospital that defines them. This is a middle grade novel, but *The Secret Horses of Briar Hill* packs powerful meaning for everyone. It is a story of loss and death. Emmaline's life is not easy. She's surrounded by illness. Her dearest friend Anna is very sick. When she meets one of the winged horses in the hospital garden, it brings danger. But this book is also about hope. There are many heartbreaking moments, yet as Emmaline protects Foxfire, the winged horse, from a sinister Black Horse, Emmaline proves she has inner strength to fight for what she believes in. The ending is ambiguous. I don't like this considering the circumstances of Emmaline and the other children. Are the horses real or imagined? Megan Shepherd has an author's note at the end where she states that it's up to the reader to decide what happens. I needed closure, and yet I can't help but think that it's for the best that it is left up to the reader to decide.

Got this for my daughter as a birthday present. She read it within 2 days and she absolutely loved it!!!

Enjoyed reading this book, it was a quick read but with many thought provoking imagery throughout. I really liked that the writer left the decision about what really happened up to the reader, I still think about it from time and time and wonder.

Beautiful, poignant little story. Lovely book that I will happily pass along to middle grade students. Shower it with awards and recognition please!

This book is awesome! Bought for my daughter for Christmas, she so enjoyed it and asked me to read it as well. I had a hard time putting it down!

Interesting, and cute, although the most major questions never got answered. I liked Thomas the best out of them. Good job.

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