

The Home for Unwanted Girls

In the novel *The Home for Unwanted Girls* by Joanna Goodman, the author touches on some very dark and controversial events in the history of the province of Quebec in Canada in the 1950's. The province has both English speaking and French speaking sections. As a rule they do not mingle but tolerate each other. In this story they do mingle.

The father of the main character, Maggie Hughes, is English and her mother is French. Maggie's father owns and operates a seed store and she loves to spend time in the store. Her father has big plans for his daughter that do not include getting mixed up with a French boy named Gabriel Phoenix. He lives in a crammed shack next to the cornfield that borders Maggie's family's property. Even though Maggie's father forbids her to see Gabriel she falls in love with him. She becomes pregnant at age fifteen. Her parents give her two choices either give up her baby to an orphanage or live in poverty with Gabriel and be estranged from her family. Maggie chooses to give up her baby daughter Elodie, and the baby is put into a Catholic orphanage run by nuns.

The author now alternates between Elodie's and Maggie's stories. Elodie's story is very sad. The nuns call the children in the orphanage "Children of Sin". When the orphanages are turned into mental institutions the children are declared mentally ill. The cruelty that these children have to endure at the hands of the nuns is very hard to read and to imagine. Nuns are supposed to show compassion but in this story they are out right cruel.

When Elodie is older and she asks who her mother is and how to find her she is told that her mother is dead. When Maggie tries to find her daughter Elodie she is told that Elodie died.

Will these two women ever find each other?

To find out, visit the library and check out the book, *The Home for Unwanted Girls* by Joanna Goodman.

Happy Reading!

Note - I searched online for the historical background about the Canadian Orphanages turned into psychiatric institutions and I found that in the 1950's under the reign of the Catholic premier, Maurice Duplessis, orphanages were turned into mental hospitals. They received more federal funding for mental patients than they would for orphans (\$2.75 for mental patients and \$1.25 for orphans).

