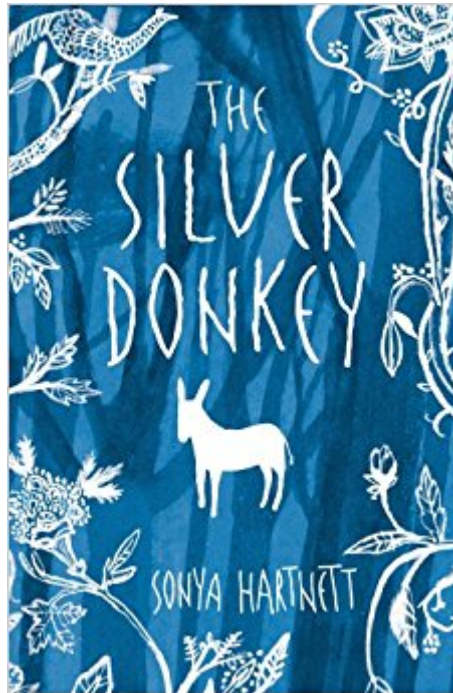




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# The Silver Donkey



## Synopsis

An inspirational illustrated novel for younger readers from the 2002 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize-winning author of *Thursday's Child*. One morning in the woods of France, a blinded soldier is found by two sisters, Coco and Marcelle. In return for their kindness the soldier tells the sisters marvellous tales, connected with the keepsake he carries in his pocket: a tiny silver donkey. As the days pass and they struggle to help the soldier reach home, the sisters learn the truth behind the silver donkey and what the precious object means: honesty, loyalty and courage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 4-6 – A lieutenant walks away from a battle in France during World War I. Tired of the fighting and unable to see, he wants to return home to England. Two French sisters living near the English Channel find him and provide him with food and other supplies. The girls quickly realize that caring for the soldier is more than they can handle and involve their brother and his friend. As the days pass and the boys work on a plan to help the man across the channel, the soldier shows the children a small good-luck charm in the shape of a donkey. During the course of the book, he tells them four tales about the creature, the first one being a version of the Christmas Story. Gradually, readers learn that the soldier is not blind, but that he has closed his eyes to the violence around him. This is a charming book in many ways. In spite of its setting, it's a gentle story that introspective readers will find satisfying. – Jane G. Connor, South Carolina State Library, Columbia Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights

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The language and evocative pencil pictures shine in this quiet tale of World War I with other stories nestled inside it. Marcelle and her little sister, Coco, find a soldier in the woods near their home. He cannot see; he is very hungry, and he wants to go home across the Channel. The girls spirit food out of the house for him: bread, jam, hard-boiled eggs. Each day he spins them a story evolving from the tiny silver donkey he holds in his hand. There's the donkey that carried Mary to Bethlehem when she was great with child; the donkey that prevented a monsoon; and the donkey that transported injured soldiers from the front. Then there's the explanation of the silver donkey itself, found by the soldier's small brother. The girls enlist their older brother, Pascal, to help the soldier, whose vision slowly clears as the fog of war recedes. There's some didacticism here, but it's softened by the story's extreme gentleness and the sweetness of its ending. GraceAnne DeCandidoCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A few of us inaugurated a book club for 3rd grade girls with this story and it was a great start for us. This story is beautifully written and has many layers, it was great for the adults and interesting enough for the girls, despite the backdrop of a war and subject matter that is difficult for young people to relate to: should you stay and fight in a war that has depleted you and made you question why you are there and hurt your psyche badly or go home to your family? There were a lot of unanswered questions at the end of our discussion. Who did the donkey represent? Did Lieutenant get home? Was John real or made up? What significance was the beetle in the end? Even though we didn't have clear answers, the girls were satisfied with the questions and were inspired to keep reading. All in all, a very good story to read with and explain to a child under 12. 13 and older can probably understand the subject matter and get more depth from it without a parent's input.

It was a beautiful story.

I bought this book for my granddaughter a couple of years ago and she said it was the best book she had read. Unfortunately, she handed it out to a friend and never got it back, so I ordered her another one because she always talks about how great this book was.

The ending of this beautifully written and illustrated story left me grieved and disappointed. The very

virtues of goodness, strength, bravery, and trustworthiness that the donkey embodied were negated in the the soldier by his desertion. I had expected that as his vision cleared so would his sight of what his duty was. Think of how disillusioned his ill brother John would be to find what his brother had done in order to come home to him! I appreciated the depiction of the hellishness and wastefulness that war often is. I wanted the soldier's internal struggle not to be similar. I wanted to have had him win over his fear and horror to go back and face his cowardliness, do what he needed to, and then come home a trustworthy and brave brother. I wanted the French children to respect and honor him all their lives, especially when they were mature enough to understand his whole story. I feel sad that in the end the little silver donkey was left badly tarnished.

The book arrived quickly and in good condition. However, there was no dust jacket and that minor fact was omitted in the description of the book...

This morning I had every intention of reading just the first few chapters of *The Silver Donkey*, a novel from Australian author Sonia Hartnett. I had a long list of things to do, and so I promised myself that I'd be good and put it down after just..the..first..few..chapters. (When will I ever learn?) Cut to: Several hours later, and I'm slowly turning the last page as my eyes greedily drink in the closing words. Wow. What a tremendous book this was. Sure, it's pushed back every other important thing I'd planned to accomplish today, but who cares? It was worth it, and then some. The spoiler-free plot..The story is set in a rural community in France during World War I. Two young sisters, Marcelle and Coco come across a blind, British soldier curled up in the woods close to the sea. Fascinated by their discovery, the girls introduce themselves. As a deserter, the soldier is initially nervous but the girl's endless innocent chatter allows him to relax enough to admit that he's trying to get home across the Channel to his gravely ill brother. Coco notices something twinkling and gleaming like a jewel in the soldier's grasp. He unfurls his fingers, and in his palm is revealed to be his good luck charm, a shining silver donkey. The girls are awed. They promise not to tell anyone about the soldier, though eventually they bring their older brother Pascal to the hiding place in the woods in the fervent hope that he can think of a idea to get the soldier back home. The children visit the soldier regularly, bringing him food and warm clothes pilfered from their home. To thank them for their kindness, the soldier regales them with four engrossing tales - some mythical, some real - all involving donkeys. Each of these fables highlights the stoicism, courage, humility and integrity of these gentle animals. In spite of the danger, Pascal sets a plan in action to move the soldier in the dead of night. This is an exceptionally easy book to read, and I imagine readers of \*all\* ages will find

much to love. Admittedly it doesn't shy away from the horrors of war and there is a brief segment which is rather graphic in its description of trench warfare..but to my mind, I think children could handle it and hopefully learn to empathise with the soldier, leading to a more well-rounded appreciation of his character. Sonia Hartnett's prose was delicate and uncomplicated, and I was impressed with her persuasive, moving imagery. I surprised myself by suddenly bursting into tears as the end snuck up on me in one of the fables. It's a book full of compassion and decency, and I think a lot of people will respond to these powerful motifs. This is a charming little story with a big, big heart and everyone who loves books ought to read it. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to find a donkey to hug...

A very well written tale, I was first attracted to this book by its very classic looking cover. It has its own little built in ribbon bookmark, so it already is a very attractive book. The story, two little french girls find a blind english soldier who has had to leave the war. He is blind and trying to get home. At first he is just a fun secret for the little girls to have to themselves, though they are always trying to help him (their father's second best razor, a lot of food from the pantry, etc) He has one possession that, Coco, the younger of the two finds especially appealing, a very small silver donkey. Each day as the girls help him he tells them a story that involves a donkey essentially as the hero, each of them has a sort of bitter sweet twist to them (there are four total). Its a very well written story, Hartnett's prose has a lyricalness to it and the illustrations on the inside are very fitting, they appear to be rendered in charcoal, so they are black and white, very sketchy looking. One is amazing, it is of the two sisters and their brother walking along the edge of a dock, all of them balancing with their arms out. The image is perfectly in time with the text. This would be a good holiday gift to a child (no younger than 3rd grade I'd say, probably 5th)--as it does have some war time issues in it (WW2) I can see this as a Hallmark Holiday movie if they were so inclined, it has that sort of mood to it.

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