



If I Should Die Before I Wake

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Hilary hates Jews. As part of a neo-Nazi gang in her town, she's finally found a sense of belonging. But when she's critically injured in an accident, everything changes.

Somehow, in her mind, she has become Chana, a Jewish girl fighting for her own life in the ghettos and concentration camps of World War II.

Han Nolan offers powerful insight into one young woman's survival through the Holocaust and another's journey out of hatred and self-loathing.

Reader's guide and an interview with the author included.

If I Should Die Before I Wake Details

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From Reader Review If I Should Die Before I Wake for online ebook

Elaina says

If I Should Die Before I Wake by Han Nolan is a book about not judging others until you've been in their shoes and known their suffering. It's about a teenage girl who joins a neo-Nazi group and spends her time hating and tormenting Jewish members of her community. When Hillary is in a motorcycle accident and lies comatose in a Jewish hospital, the only thing she sees is an old woman staring at her knowingly. Somehow, through this old woman, she is taken back in time to another life where she is a young Jewish girl named Chana, living in a Jewish ghetto. I think people should read this book I didn't like it a lot but other people might it was boring to me

Morgan F says

Possibly my favorite book about the Holocaust. I actually bought this at the Holocaust museum in D.C. It was a moving experience.

Hannah says

In If I Should Die Before I Wake, two girls' lives are forever connected when they themselves couldn't be more opposite. Hilary hates every Jewish person on the face of the earth. Part of a neo-Nazi gang, she is actively looking for a way to kill every Jewish person who lives. This is happening about 60 years after World War II. When Hilary and her boyfriend are riding home on a motorcycle in the rain, they crash violently into the car of another. Hilary's boyfriend leaves with only a few bruises; Hilary is left on death's door step. Put into a coma, she starts to live the life of a Jewish girl named Chana during World War II. As she fades in and out of her world, she realizes that it's not just a dream. This girl Chana really did live and Hilary is being sent back in time to live a life of a Jew and her paradigm is completely shifted. While she fights for her life in her world, she must also fight for Chana's life in hers. Will they survive the impossible tasks given to them?

I thought this book was absolutely amazing! I loved how Han Nolan really made you feel like you were in a concentration camp, suffering. He used emotions rather well to explain what it felt like to be in the two girls' positions. I give it five stars; it was one of the best books I have ever read! He also used details to his advantage; you could tell that he researched a lot about World War II. He knew what a Jew had to go through and how horrible their lives were. This book exceeded my expectations, being full of more than I ever expected. I loved how the author described the shifting of time and how Hilary came to realize how stupid she really was for hating the Jews. I expected this book to be good, but not that good! I loved how this book made me cry because it seemed so realistic! My favorite part was at the end when Nadzia got to meet Hilary. I can't explain this encounter because it would give away an interesting ending. I decided to read this book because it simply looked good. I was at Books A Million and had money to spend, so I started looking at books. I was down to three and I ended up buying this one. I'm very glad I bought it and would recommend it to anyone that wants to read a good story with some history thrown in.

Kajal says

Book: If I Should Die Before I Wake.

Author: Han Nolan

I like this book because I believe everybody should be treated right even if ur are different religions that person is also a human. Nobody should tortured the way she did, everybody is different you can't judge nobody unless you don't change yourself. We are all different, we all have our own beliefs, but that doesn't mean we can't live in harmony, it just takes work. You should never judge another person in any way because you can never fully understand their predicament until you have walked a mile in their shoes. The main characters in this book are Hilary, & Chana. The main conflict is Hilary has always been a lonely child. When she joins a Neo-Nazis gang in her neighborhood, she feels as if she fits in for the first time. The main setting is at a Jewish Concentration Camp, & a Jewish Hospital, during the Holocaust. I would recommend this book to people because it's very inspirational and holds a good message, the author of it is great with using emotion and could put anyone to feel the emotion she had put into it.

Alex Goins says

If I should die before I wake by Han Nolan, This book is about a teenage girl named Hilary who is part of a Neo-Nazi gang and her experiences as a little girl named Chana in poland during the holocaust while she is in a coma. In her gang (The Great Warriors) everyone in the gang hates jews and Hilary believes that only her boyfriend and the gang understand her. When Hillary becomes Chana and has to go through all the hardships she faced being a jewish girl in poland she realizes that other people truly care about her. Once she is put in a coma she has to learn to accept people for who they are inside and not on the outside. This story gives Hillary a lot of time to grow and to accept that all lives are equal and that she is not above them because of her ethnicity. Hilary finds her true self and learns the value of friendship along the way.

Jaonna Miller says

September/October Review

Book Title: If I Should Die Before I Wake

Author: Han Nolan

Review: If I Should Die Before I Wake by Han Nolan was a great book. I loved this book because the book seemed so real like every piece of it was true. This story took place in a jewish hospital, Poland, and a slaughterhouse at Auschwitz. This is a story about a girl named Hilary who hates Jews but ends up taking on another life of a jewish girl named Chana after going unconscious from an accident. During this time Hilary/Chana is fighting for her survival along with her grandmother Bubbe to being sent from the terrible Lodz ghetto to the slaughterhouse at Auschwitz by the Nazis. I recommend this book because it teaches a valuable lesson using a nazi changing and having love for the Jews, it teaches not to hate by the race.

Ruby Tombstone [With A Vengeance] says

If you are reading this, I am deleted. Or you have nothing more urgent to do.

At some point soon, I will have to sleep. I haven't been doing much of that as late. This has been mostly out of concern for what's happening on GoodReads (and the 17 hour time difference between the site and myself). Every night when I go to bed, I wonder how much of my account will be remaining when I log on in the morning.

As I write this, the curlews outside are shrieking persistently. If you've never heard a curlew, they are very common in Northern Queensland, and sound something like a cross between a banshee and a slide whistle. Or sometimes like every cat toy in the world is being simultaneously squeezed. It's goddamn creepy. The local Aboriginal people believe that the curlew's cry foretells of a person's imminent death. Brrrr. Dramatic much?

So I've been making some back-up plans.

Firstly, I don't intend to go anywhere until they pry my freedom of speech out of my cold dead account. But let's face it - this may well happen. I made a decision yesterday morning to go nuclear. Post what I feel and make sure the fuckers hear me. Otherwise, there's no point being here.

Censorship cannot be tolerated on a site that relies on honest reviews

This is not just a moral statement, but a financial imperative for Amazon. (See my Sorry review - if it still exists by the time you're reading this).

I don't want to leave GoodReads. What we had here was unique. I'm sure we'll all one day move on to better things, but this was a terrible way to go. Death by censorship. I could've dealt with the corporatisation, but censorship is just plain stupid, when you're dealing with a bunch of literate people. Anyways..

In the event of my account's demise, you will find me here: <http://RubyTombstone.booklikes.com/>
Be warned: My BookLikes account isn't very well set up yet. At last estimate, they should have finished importing my books in around 17 years. But it'll happen.

My group, Chaos Reading, will be in excellent hands. I have appointed a co-moderator, who I trust to run things in my absence. Her name is Ruby ('s Shadow). Do whatever she tells you to do. I think you're gonna like her.

While there is still a chance we can salvage something from this mess, I won't give up. I urge you to do the same.

And if you become aware that I have been deleted in my sleep.... REPOST, REPOST, REPOST.
Repost everything I've ever written, stick a hydra on it, and go for gold.
NEVER SURRENDER!

Deletion before dishonour! Grraaarrggggghhhhhh!

Alexxa Owen says

This book is one of my favorite ones about WW2! I got it from my sister who passed away a few years ago so I treasure it. It has good voice and makes everything personal. Very clever too!

Cari says

If I Should Die Before I Wake is a book about not judging others until you've been in their shoes and known their suffering. It's about a teenage girl who joins a neo-Nazi group and spends her time hating and tormenting Jewish members of her community. When Hillary is in a motorcycle accident and lies comatose in a Jewish hospital, the only thing she sees is an old woman staring at her knowingly. Somehow, through this old woman, she is taken back in time to another life where she is a young Jewish girl named Chana, living in a Jewish ghetto. The book alternates between present time with Hillary in her comatose state, listening to visitors in her hospital room, and to the past as Chana and her family are taken from the ghetto and into Auschwitz.

Like all books about the Holocaust, *If I Should Die Before I Wake* is very sad and mind blowing as it tells about the monstrosities committed against millions while the rest of the world stood by. It was a little similar to *The Devil's Arithmetic*, another book where a girl travels back in time to the Holocaust, but there was a very big difference that set this book apart.

The beauty of this book is the irony of someone from present day who wears clothing covered in swastikas and is constantly touting hate against the Jewish people, being taken back in time and made to suffer as a Jew. During her experience as Chana, Hillary learns that all people love, hate, hurt, bleed, and suffer in the same way. What a huge life lesson! A lot of people could benefit from being put into the shoes of the people they hate. This is a good piece of historical fiction and a great eye-opener.

Mirrani says

For some reason, I expected this book to be more about Hillary and less about Chana. I felt a little left out of Hillary's story, the life of a neo-Nazi. We learn snips of her life, parts of her past, but never really see the whole picture and while I certainly recognize the need to tell Chana's story of being a Jew during WWII, I felt as if leaving Hillary out of the book so often made her sudden change from hateful to kindhearted a little sudden and somewhat unbelievable. I doubted that someone with that much hate in their heart could simply be shown the life of a person they hate and suddenly repent and heal deep down in their soul.

This is not to say that I disliked the book. I enjoyed reading every page and easily found myself within Chana's life, experiencing her struggles and heartaches. So many things were done in the war and it is important to remember them. *If I Should Die Before I Wake* is a good book for remembering all of what happened. It manages to put every stage of life for the Jews into 293 pages, from wearing the star and walking the streets freely to leaving for the ghetto, to finally being in the camps. Inside the camp it shows all the ways of life most people have heard of, the struggle for survival, the fear of the gas chamber, illness and inner strength. The reader also gets to glimpse the selection of workers and the kinds of mostly meaningless jobs they were sent to. One of the most interesting features in the telling of this story was the ability to see

how the Germans worked people against each other to bring them down, putting one person against another so that even a friend could betray you. It was something I had rarely experienced in any form of Holocaust retelling and having experienced it now, I am surprised that it could have been left out so often elsewhere. We often see how Germans treated Jews, but not how they made Jews treat each other. It brought another dimension to a very human story of remembrance.

Alexandra Carpenter says

I almost wish this would've been written solely as a plain holocaust novel. The Hilary plot that lay over Chana's story was completely pointless -- even frustrating -- until those last few pages. And it was certainly not worth the wait, it was just confusing. Additionally, I picked up this book expecting more details of Hilary's Neo-Nazi involvement, and on the rare occasions that it was brought up, the activities of the Neo-Nazi group were laughable. Locking Jewish kids in lockers, and slashing themselves to prove their loyalty to the group? Stereotypical motorbiking, leather-sporting, distraught badboys? I don't think so. I've spent my fair share of time researching these groups, and this is not how most Neo-Nazis in America are. Many of them aren't even primarily anti-semites; it's a lot of color racism and immigrant prejudice nowadays. They're not usually quiet groups performing blood rituals in their basements, they're outgoing, right-wing extremists living normal lives except the days that they're under the command their radical racist leaders. Most of the higher-ups in these groups don't even come from traditional Nazi groups or anti-Semitist families; they come from the KKK! In short, this book gave a very surface-level (and poorly researched) look at Neo-Nazis, which basically ruined the whole plot.

As for Chana's story by itself, I found it very well put together. I enjoyed that it followed her life for longer than most stories would. The Auschwitz scenes in particular were very good -- vert reminiscent of Wiesel's Night.

Overall, had this book not included Hilary's story, I would've enjoyed it much more.

Jenna says

One of my classroom bulletin boards features this book and *The Book Thief* side by side as recommended WWII fiction.

I go crazy over WWII stories. I've been to Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam. It was so cramped and crowded. I loved teaching Elie Wiesel's *Night* until it moved down to the ninth grade curriculum. Mostly I think my reading obsession comes from disbelief. The disbelief that humanity could be so cruel, and despite overwhelming evidence, some still say the Holocaust was all made up.

How dare they?

Those people are ignorant idiots.

I love the title, from the prayer little children often say before bedtime. In this instance, it takes on an eerie meaning. Hilary is trapped in someone else's body. She might really be killed before she returns to present day.

This book reminded me very much of *The Devil's Arithmetic*. Even though I read that in fifth grade, I seem

to recall some sort of time travelling experience. Hilary really doesn't care what happens to the Jewish people around. I could feel her hatred seeping from the pages. It was very hard to read the first few chapters and see what her gang did to a poor Jewish boy. Nothing was funny about it. In some ways, I thought back to the pain I experienced while trying to watch American History X.

Everything changes after a motorcycle accident with her boyfriend. In the hospital, she goes in and out of consciousness. She becomes Chana, a young girl forced from her home and eventually to Auschwitz. Some of the punishments or jobs given to Jews were ones I hadn't remembered reading in other books, particularly when it came to women washing/scrubbing things.

I felt the desperation as Hilary tried to convince herself she was not Chana. That nothing around her was real. But she also feels real hunger pains. She feels sadness at the deaths of friends and loved ones around her. She doesn't want to die, but she's afraid she might have to.

Even her annoying, Bible verse spouting mother can't bring her to wake up from her nightmare.

Powerful. Interesting. Beautiful imagery. Ending I didn't expect.

If you're tired of paranormal or dystopian, pick up this historical fiction.

Amy Hustead says

Really great read and I'm saddened I took this long to read it! Should be a must read for high schoolers for sure!

The story as a whole makes you realize that no matter how bad I think I have it, someone somewhere else has had it worse. This is a great book to teach kids how to appreciate differences in religion/race/etc.

Melissa says

Loved how the neo-Nazi current times and the Jewish experience in a concentration camp were lived by the same character... and the explanation for that in the end. I've always loved these types of stories where you're not sure which reality is reality or where the character will end up. Well-written, and realistic enough that it gave me nightmares.

Melissa Delatorre says

I believe everyone should be treated right like everybody else. This historical fiction book is very sad at a point.

It takes place in the civil war time at night and morning because then we know where they are at. Hilary a 16 year old wanted to kill all the Jews alive but she is critically injured in an accident and everything changes. So Hilary has become Chana with a different family. Then she us a Jewish girl fighting for her life in World War II. the conflict is person vs person because Chana is trying to fight for life in World War II against other people.

I didn't agree with Nazis mistreating Jews because in the book Nazi's always thought violence is the way to fix problems with others. In the story it said they killed Chana's dad because he was complaining that he was tired. I've read once that Nazi's were horrible people to Jews. Also I was surprised when Chana said she will take her dads place in his job because like some people really do care for family while others don't. Also in the book she hated Jews now she thinks she was wrong all along. I love the way she then knew she was wrong.

Next my favorite part was when Chana realized how bad Jews suffered because that's a good thing to not just think about yourself. That's also how i felt before because then i noticed how my parents couldn't get me everything i wanted. To me at first i thought Chana was a bad person now i think she is a loving person. Also, when Chana realized that,I was very shocked and thought she would always hate Jews.Then I couldn't understand why Hilary who turns into Chana doesn't like Jews in the first place because she never knew what they went through. In the book it said in the beginning Hilary who changes into Chana said Chana looks at her really weird. I understand she hated them but not why she hated them.That's how i felt until my parents explained to my why they couldn't get me everything i wanted.

In conclusion, i would give this book a 4 out of 5 stars because I thought it was a had a good theme of not judging others. I would recommend this book to someone who likes to read about history of the Nazi's and the Jews or has a report on those people. If you feel like you are being treated differently then tell someone how you feel that they are treating you differently. When you do so always remember of how Hilary when the Nazi's treated her family badly.Now you get to know how I feel about the book.

Emily says

Since I had to read this for a class, I didn't like it as much as the other books I had to read for class. This one was hard to get into, but the character switches didn't give me any trouble. I don't remember the book ever going into much detail about why Hilary hates the Jews except that her father was killed because of the supposed dirty trading his possibly Jewish boss might have been involved in. Her anger at her mother is evident in the dialogue because readers learn that her mother abandoned her for three days in their home while she went to find Jesus. I think Hilary is trying to find comfort anywhere so she joins the Great Aryan Warriors and falls for one of the boys involved. Of course, young Hilary becomes wrapped up in her relationship with the boy, Brad, and she ends up endangering the life of her schoolmate Simon and risking her own life on Brad's motorcycle. I had many theories about who Chana may have been in this book. I'm the kind of person that likes to know and understand the relationships between people in the novel and this one was definitely hard to put together. I don't think the end even gave me much more closure. My theory that Chana was the patient in the room with Hilary seems to be correct for the most part. I liked how at the end of Chana's life she tells Hilary that she can change the world if she changes herself but I still didn't like the ending of the book because it doesn't really explain why Hilary is now calling her own mother "Mama" when she never did before and I don't like how Hilary's memories all seem to jumble together. There is no real explanation for why Hilary sees Chana's life and then how or why she remembers her own life as well. I think this would be a hard book to teach in school because the end didn't give me enough answers to help my students find the answers to their own questions that they will have. I feel like the ending is letting me down. I will have to re-read this book in the future to better understand the ending. It just seemed like Nolan was getting tired of writing and needed a way to end the book in a way that doesn't do enough justice to Hilary's own survival.

Arielle says

I have read a number of books specifically on the Holocaust, so reading about the torture and the horrible things these people had to go through was nothing new to me. Yet even as I read it, I still got chills every time Hilary/Chana would describe some horrible act. This book didn't go into much detail about the torture the Jews faced in the camps, at least not compared to previous books I have read, but if you know anything about the Holocaust and what the Jews faced everyday of their lives, you know it was a terrible time for all of them. Chana's story is heartbreaking and moving. Her family is ripped apart one family member at a time. Some leave and some die. Going back and forth through Hilary, who is a neo-Nazi and Chana, who is a Jew, is extremely interesting. The relationship that grows between them is one to learn from and to take to heart. Just because someone doesn't think the same way as you, and doesn't have the same feelings towards something as yourself, doesn't mean they aren't important or that they don't have feelings.

For some this book will be hard to read since it deals with the Holocaust and for others this book won't seem like anything, like it's just a normal book. And if you do read this, I hope you get something out of it. We are all different, and we all have our own beliefs, but that doesn't mean we can't live in harmony, it just takes work.

-Arielle

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

Hilary Burke, 16, is an angry girl. She is angry at her mother for not being there for her while she was a child. And she is angry at her father for dying when she was 5. Hilary blames his death on his Jewish boss, believing that he skimmed on construction material causing the building her father worked in to collapse. So she is angry at all Jews and has focused it on her Jewish neighbors including their son, Simon Schulmann, for being part of a happy, close family.

To deal with all this anger, Hilary joins a group of Neo-Nazis called the Great Warriors. But then, irony of ironies, Hilary is almost fatally injured in a motorcycle crash with her Neo-Nazi boyfriend, Brad, and ends up in a Jewish hospital. Now, unable to speak or move, she is at the mercy of her own mind, and the only thing she can see is the face of an older woman looking at her.

Suddenly, in the midst of her angry internal anti-Semitic tirade, Hilary feels herself spinning backwards. When she stops spinning, she finds herself in Nazi-occupied Poland, where her name is Chana Bergman and she is somehow in possession of all of this girl's memories. She is on her way to school with a best friend, when the two are stopped by Nazis and Hilary/Chana is forced to spend the day washing steps with her own brand new woolen tights. On her way home, she finds her beloved father has been suspended from a tree with his coat by a group of laughing Nazis. It is his punishment for not shoveling a pile of dirt fast enough. Hilary/Chana picks up the shovel and does the job, hoping the Nazis will let her father go, but in the end, they just shoot him to death anyway.

Hilary's memories continue to swing between the past and present. In the present, Hilary continues her hateful rhetoric about Jews, in the past, as Chana, she is on the receiving end of this same hateful rhetoric from the Nazis. And each time she is in the present, she continues to only see the face of the elderly woman looking at her.

Slowly, Chana becomes the dominant memory for Hilary. Living at home with her are her grandparents, Bubbe and Zayde, her mother, older brother Jakub, sister Anya, 6, and the baby Nadzia. Rumor has reached

the family that the Nazis are rounding up Jews and the family is preparing to give up Nadzia to a non-Jewish family that will protect her.

Shortly after Nadzia is gone, the family is rounded up and moved into one room in the Lodz Ghetto. The horrors of the ghetto are sometimes described by Chana in very graphic detail, as are the struggles of the family to stay alive. Sadly, Zadye eventually dies, then Chana's mother and sister are rounded up for deportation and we never hear about them again. Jakub, who has gotten involved in smuggling people out of the ghetto, eventually helps Chana and Bubbe escape, but Chana is recognized by an old schoolmate, who thinks that turning her in will get her better treatment.

Chana and Bubbe are interrogated by the Nazis trying to find out who they got their illegal papers from, but neither one breaks. Eventually, they both end up in Auschwitz.

Yes, you do find out who the older woman is that Hilary keeps seeing and the story does have a bit of a surprise ending, which has already been 'spoiled' online, but I don't read any reviews about books until I have finished reading them. Even so, I have to confess, it wasn't a hard ending to figure out before I was halfway through the book, yet it still doesn't detract from the story of Chana and the novel's impact.

I found this book to have an interesting premise by adding the Neo-Nazi element. Hilary wasn't really a Neo-Nazi at heart, but it shows how easily a person can be drawn into something like that when they don't feel there is anywhere else to turn and they are made to feel important to the cause. Often, it is really no different than the way children were drawn into the Hitler Youth in 1930s Germany. And although this book may feel a little dated since we don't hear much about Neo-Nazis anymore, but don't be fooled by that – they are still out there.

Some people have compared *If I Should Die before I Wake* to *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen. I have not read this book yet, because I thought the movie was so awful, I was turned off to it, but do plan to read very soon. I suspect the real similarity is the time travel back to Nazi-occupied Poland.

All in all, I found this to be a truly worthwhile novel and would highly recommend it, though maybe not to middle grade readers, or even for that matter, to immature YA age readers because of the disturbing, graphic descriptions.

If I Should Die before I Wake won the following well-deserved honors:

1995 International Reading Association/Children's Book Council Book Award

1995 New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

1999 A YALSA Popular Paperback for Young Adults

This book is recommended for readers age 13 and up.

This novel was purchased for my personal library.

Morgan says

I would consider this book some sort of confusing because it takes place in modern day and the past. I would recommend this book for seventh grade and older because of the language used. The book is a little boring but once you get further into it the story becomes more intense. "If I Die Before I Wake" is a story about Hilary Burke who is a troubled teenage girl that is apart of a Neo-Nazi gang. Hilary thinks she's found herself ,ever since her grandma and dad died, by joining this organization. But, a tragic accident and near

death experience changes Hilary's outlook on everything.

CaptainKitten2004 says

I loved how this changed someone to be something better.
