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Hope against Hope

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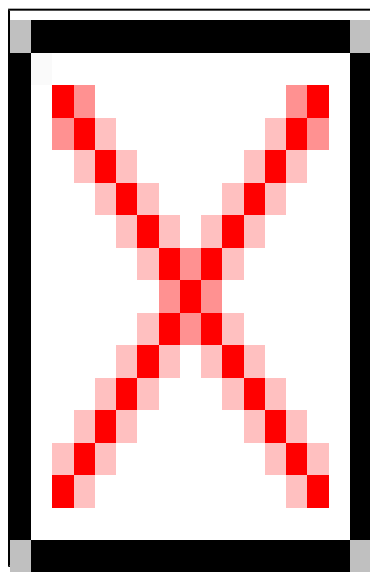
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The bitterness between the Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland in 1921 is laid bare in this story of Polly who runs away from her home on the border after her brother beats her, to follow her cousin to Helen's Hope in Belfast. Polly finds a community of young women from all backgrounds living together in harmony and trying very hard not to take part in sectarian activities. Belfast is riven with hatred as the elections for the new Northern Ireland Government are taking place. Polly's hot headedness results in an early confrontation and a subsequent encounter leads indirectly to the unfortunate death of a wounded veteran soldier in a fire. This makes Polly confront her relationship with her brother suffering what we would now call PTSD.

Sheena Wilkinson deserves praise for taking on this very difficult subject matter, and through the plot paints a picture of a very divided society, riven with extremism and total inability to see the other side. Polly herself with her wild hair and her devotion to her easily manipulated cousin, is beautifully drawn, and the reader follows her growth into a strong young woman, gradually beginning to understand the actions of Ivy the bully. Her encounter with Patrick a wounded

veteran, down on his luck, prompts her to comprehend the actions of her brother. The ending is a little pat and lacks the rawness of the story and does not ring entirely true. The book is very definitely for the upper end of this age range.

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