

Book report

Melinda Marchiano:

Grace

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The 13-year old Melinda is an energetic young school girl and a passionate ballet dancer. While she is extremely busy practicing for the Christmas season's Nutcracker performance she realizes that 'something is wrong'. Her doctor believes she is – just like so many girls her age – anemic and that she will be cured by taking some iron supplement. But nothing helps and she feels increasingly tired. Finally, a more intense check-up with a battery of tests at the children's department of the nearest hospital reveals the cruel truth: she has Hodgkin's Lymphoma and will have to be treated immediately.

The first shock is replaced by the relief that something can be done against the awful condition. Soon she is intensely involved in the new - but in its own way interesting - world of the pediatric oncology ward. Her mother accompanies her to all treatments and stays with her in hospital when necessary. Melinda is a basically vivid and creative young girl who makes the 'best' out of her situation. Her diary of this journey through the disease is the basis of this book in which she reports in details about every aspect of the treatment and the emotional roller coaster - her anxieties, joys and desires.

Melinda is not just any ordinary teenager but – certainly due to the experience of the life threatening disease - a very mature young person entangled in a turmoil of emotions.

When by the end of the intensive treatment, life should turn to normal again, she finds herself trapped in yet another disaster. First due to a problem with one of the drugs she has to take in maintenance therapy, she becomes increasingly obsessed with her body weight and develops a very severe eating problem and a depression. Back to regular ballet practice it is obviously important to keep a skinny figure, but she almost stops eating at all and is close to lose her life (again). She is slowly convinced to accept professional help and as part of her therapy she writes this book. Very eloquently and meticulously she gives the reader a detailed insight into her personal struggle of getting out of the vicious circle. Finally – with therapeutic help, a lot of support by her family, especially her mom - , she makes her way back from to the 'normal' world.

This book is a dense report about the struggle of a young person through a very disturbing time of her life. Full of gratitude for everybody who helped her along the way, she would like to help those in a similar situation by her report.

Gerlind Bode