



## Very Rich

*Polly Horvath*

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Ten-year-old Rupert Brown comes from an ordinary family. They live in a small house in the poorest section of Steelville, Ohio, and have little money or food. So when Rupert inadvertently finds himself spending Christmas at the house of Turgid River -- the richest boy in town -- he is blown away to discover a whole other world, including all the food he can eat and wonderful prizes that he wins when the family plays games, prizes he hopes to take home to his family so they can have Christmas presents for the very first time. But this windfall is short-lived when Rupert loses it all in one last game and goes home empty-handed. Each member of the Rivers family feels guilty about what happened and, unbeknownst to each other, tries to make it up to Rupert in their own unique way, taking him on one unlikely adventure after another.

## Very Rich Details

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Author : Polly Horvath

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Genre : Childrens, Middle Grade, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Time Travel, Adventure, Juvenile, Humor, Magical Realism

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## From Reader Review Very Rich for online ebook

### Suzy says

I received a copy of this book for free in return for an honest review.

First off, let me say that it was a very fast read. Polly Horvath is a good writer, and pages turned quickly. I found the families interesting, and the main character endearing and heartbreaking as well, which leads me to the problem I had with the book... all the characters that Rupert interacts with, while quirky and somewhat charming, are also very selfish and thoughtless, even when they claim they are trying to remedy an earlier injustice regarding the rules of a game he played at Christmas that resulted in him losing all the prizes he had won. I kept waiting for them to redeem themselves and notice Rupert, but instead they just seemed so self-absorbed and downright rude, using him more for their own benefit when it suited them, rather than actually trying to do anything to help him. Their charming qualities began to pale in the face of their selfishness and lack of concern over this young boy who clearly needed real help. How many of them noticed that despite the extreme cold he had no coat or boots, or that his clothing was in tatters, yet they did not even offer him a loan of clothing. It seemed to be all about what they wanted, or what was convenient for them and they rarely seemed to give Rupert a second thought once he had served his purpose.

Even his parents disgusted me. Going back in time to see their back story did nothing to change my impression of either of them. They both seemed incredibly selfish and uncaring about the hardships their children were enduring. The father was horribly lazy and couldn't even be bothered to sit and talk to Rupert without suddenly growing bored and telling him to go away. I felt like all the kindness and thoughtfulness resided only in Rupert and his caring about his siblings, his little sister in particular. He certainly seemed to care far more than either of his parents, or any of the other adults who had so much more in their lives than most. Rupert is a bright and inquisitive child who so desperately wants to have a true friend, and while he does forge some relationships with many of the adults in the strange Rivers family, they never feel genuine, but rather all about the adult and some goal they have. They make promises they don't keep over and over, and Rupert, as always make the best of the rare opportunities he has to see the world and be dazzled by the wonders he sees. The parable at the end rings hollow. I feel like the author was trying to make a sweet, uplifting story out of a horrible, ugly, situation in which a child is being horribly abused ... sleeping under a bed with no heat in the house and rarely enough to eat, improper clothing and extreme neglect, and praising him for still being able to see the beauty in the world. I just felt so sad for Rupert who deserved so much better. There was nothing sweet or cute about living in extreme poverty with parents who care more about themselves than providing for their kids. I kept turning the pages and waiting for things to turn around and the adults to learn something about how horrible they were... how self absorbed they were... but they don't. They just go on their merry way, thinking only of themselves. Money doesn't bring happiness, that's true, but neither does neglect, poverty and being hungry all the time, and being shamed for it. If meant to be an inspiration for children growing up in horrible homes, I feel like it fell short in giving them any real hope of any better from the adults around them or the world in general.

Readers who enjoy the books in A Series of Unfortunate Events might enjoy this book as it has a similar feel. I'm not a fan of that series either. Having grown up in a dysfunctional and abusive home, I tend not to find selfish and abusive adults particularly amusing, as others might.

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### Summer says

Sometimes I struggle with stories told in a somewhat episodic fashion and that was the case here as well, a

strong start though my interest waned with each subsequent adventure.

Ten year old Rupert comes from a large inattentive family with little money to spare for food or warm clothing. Cold and hungry, Rupert is frequently on the verge of collapse, and one day he does exactly that on the lawn of the richest family in town, leading to a Christmas celebration and other experiences beyond anything he's known.

I very much enjoyed the first section of this book, it nicely sets up a loving relationship between Rupert and his quiet little sister, and on Christmas day, the high stakes for Rupert to win those prizes, what the boots and books and even a simple deck of cards mean to him, had me eagerly turning the pages to see how it would work out and what would be the reception he would or would not receive upon his homecoming. I loved how many emotions were at play, the frustration of dealing with ever-changing rules and eccentricities, the tenderness and heartbreak, anxiety and exhilaration.

After Christmas, some members of this wealthy family continue to seek out Rupert, taking him along on whimsical escapades that involve magic and time travel, and though there is humor and imagination in those adventures, unfortunately, I mostly felt an emotional disconnect.

Maybe it's because I'm an adult reader that for the most part I just wasn't able to go with the flow of things, maybe if I were a kid I would have been more inclined to simply be along for the ride, maybe I wouldn't have thought how odd it was that Rupert went off with these adults he barely knows, or that most of the adults in the book didn't seem to care that this boy is starving and neglected. My concerns rarely meshed with the cavalier narrative, so maybe I was just too old for this, or too prone to overthinking, I don't know, though I do question whether children reading *Very Rich* would feel any more engaged than I did with adults towing Rupert along into their mid-life crisis' while they ignored his early-life crisis.

There is a cleverness in the tone of this book that's enjoyable, however, to me, the last three quarters desperately needed more of the balance between cleverness and heart that it achieved during the Christmas scenes.

I received this book through a giveaway.

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## **Janet Slipak says**

### **MY THOUGHTS:**

I received this book in exchange for my honest review.

Welcome to a world of extremes and extreme opposites. In one family, poverty rules the roost. No food, ragged clothing, no bed, crowded living quarters and a sense of foreboding.

In the other family, riches are everywhere. There's more than enough food with plenty to spare, clothes to cover a whole army, big rooms with lots of space and beds and a sense of fun and generosity.

So how would a boy from the world of poverty fair in the world of riches?

Polly Horvath introduces the reader to an abundance of possibilities/outcomes that are both sad and expected. When you have everything, losing isn't as severe as it is to someone who has nothing and loses what little they have. It makes you think about what is really important in life.

It's an interesting book with many different takeaways depending on how the reader perceives the outcome.

I love the characters. They are all well fleshed out and interesting. The plot transitions well but because there's so much happening, it can be confusing at times. Although one scene does occur at Christmas time, this is not a Christmas book.

The book did end with a happy ever after but was it really the one that Rupert really wanted?

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### **Allison ?hikes the bookwoods? says**

Thanks to NetGalley and Penguin Random House Canada , but man oh man, this book felt like a bunch of random ideas cobbled together. I often enjoy middle grade fiction, however there were so many things happening here that the plot never did pull me in. And Rupert's everlasting hunger, that was just too much for me to bear.

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### **Natalie says**

Release date - September 25, 2018

At first I thought this was a Christmas book, but while the first few chapters take place on Christmas Day, the majority of the book does not. The story follows Rupert Brown, who comes from a poor family, and his interactions with the wealthy Rivers family.

This reminded me a lot of A Series of Unfortunate Events, especially in terms of its portrayal of adult characters. They're quirky and somewhat ineffectual, while also comedic and entertaining to read about.

I liked Rupert a lot. He was really cute. I don't read a lot of middle grade novels, but this one was enjoyable with a good message.

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### **Shirley says**

I was very fortunate to receive a copy of this book in a giveaway. Thank you!

I read some of the reviews for this book prior to reading it (I really shouldn't do this!) and was prepared to be disappointed. However, after reading it, I was and I wasn't disappointed. Now, there is a contradiction for you. The book centres around 10-year old Rupert Brown who comes from an extremely poor family. They are so poor that they eat kitchen scraps gathered from restaurant garbage cans. The many Brown children are forced to share bed space meaning that some of the kids sleep on the bed and some sleep under it. In order to keep warm in the winter, Rupert wears all of his three shirts at one time. In other words, they are poorer than poor.

He has the misfortune to get entangled one day in the electrified fence around the Rivers' mansion on the way home from school because he was so faint from hunger. When he comes to, he is invited into the house by Turgid Rivers (I know...the name is a bit much to get over but once you meet the rest of the Rivers, you

get it) a schoolmate, and so begins the quirky, weird interactions with various members of the well-to-do family. He does, in fact, eat his fill at this first visit (which just happens to be Christmas) but food becomes a little more elusive as the book goes on. Without giving away the adventures that happen in the rest of the book, it is this part that does not disappoint. The part that does disappoint is the conclusion (which I won't divulge) but you feel for Rupert. I felt a little let down by it but this did not stop my enjoyment of the book. It is an easy read and one I would recommend.

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## **Ms. Yingling says**

### Personal Copy

I was weirdly drawn to this book. Even though the description and reviews I read didn't make it seem like something I would enjoy, I checked out an e book version. I didn't get very far in it. When I had the chance to get a free copy, I grabbed it right away. Maybe it's the cover. No explanation.

It is a problematic title on so many levels, and even now that I've finished it, I don't know quite what to say about it. Pick it up and try it for yourself. It definitely has a Lemony Snicket vibe to it-- Rupert's life isn't just bad, it's SUPER bad.

And that's where I think this lost me. As poor as my students are, they don't faint from hunger. Even if Rupert's brothers are stealing the cafeteria ladies' cats, they aren't going to deny Rupert food. He only has three shirts and no jacket in Ohio? Even with a large family, surely his parents would have made some effort to obtain clothing, or he could have found some hand-me-downs. They was the poverty and the parents were described bordered on insulting to people who are actually poor. The Rich Rivers family doesn't come out looking any better.

As I said, there was certainly something about this title that made me pick it up. Perhaps I just don't grok Horvath's style or methods.

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## **Angie says**

Rupert is extremely poor. His family lives on oatmeal and kitchen scraps. He sleeps under the bed and wears all three of his shirts in winter. So it is really surprising when he finds himself at the richest house in town on Christmas. The Rivers family is very rich and very eccentric. They play games for their Christmas presents in a cut-throat fashion. Rupert is ecstatic when he whens all the presents; he is especially excited about the new pair of boots since his sneakers are wearing out. But then he loses it all in the final game and is sent home empty handed.

The rest of the the story consists of episodes where different members of the Rivers family take Rupert on adventures. Somehow he never gets enough to eat on any of these though. The Rivers are sort of well-meaning, but ultimately selfish and self-centered, never really thinking of Rupert. The story ends with Rupert realizing that being rich doesn't make you happy or satisfied with your life. However, his circumstances never change. He is just as poor and hungry at the end of the book as he was at the beginning.

I didn't get the point of it at all. It was an interesting and entertaining story, but I was put off by the thoughtlessness of the Rivers family. Not a single one of them truly helped Rupert or his family in any way. Definitely not my favorite book.

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### **Merrilyn Tucker says**

Rupert Brown's family is so poor that the younger children have to sleep under the bed of the older ones, oatmeal with scraps from the dumpster is considered a meal, and eucalyptus cough drops (which mother takes and eats) are birthday presents. Suddenly, Rupert is electric-shocked over the hedge into the yard of the richest family in town, the Rivers. He is taken in, fed, cared for, and included in the Christmas games. Never has he eaten so well! Never has he played games and won so many fabulous prizes! Upon losing the prizes in a surprise final quiz, Rupert heads home empty-handed. The many rich Rivers relatives try to make up the loss of prizes to him by taking Rupert on more and more fantastical journeys. In the end, Rupert winds up at home and happy to be there. Father now has a job and life may improve a bit. Some of the trips were fun to read about, but the desperate poorness of the Browns, the author's treatises on marriage, the school bullying, and the endless longing for food made me wonder what this book was really all about. Best for grades 4-6.

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### **Becky says**

First sentence: Rupert Brown came from a large family. They lived in a very plain small house on the edge of Steelville, Ohio. Rupert had so many brothers and sisters that it was like living in a small city-state.

Premise/plot: Rupert Brown is very poor. When he mistakenly walks to school on Christmas day-- which brings him through a very rich neighborhood--an accident leads him to spending the whole day with the richest family in town. The Rivers have their own unique--own CRAZY--notions of how to spend Christmas. And Rupert soon finds himself caught up in their madness--their quest to win all the prizes. Was Christmas just the beginning of his adventures with the other side?

My thoughts: I have very mixed feelings about Polly Horvath's Very Rich. It is a comic novel with dark undertones. The message seems to be that rich or poor most humans lack empathy and compassion. Most remain trapped in a world of me, me, me. OR else trapped in conditions completely out of their control.

I couldn't help being reminded of Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Rupert spends every single day hungry. Rupert sleeps on the floor because there aren't enough beds--let alone bedrooms--for all the kids. Rupert is always cold; he's dressed in rags with no winter clothes. When Rupert is introduced to the Rivers it is to him just as bizarre and surreal as the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory is to Charlie. Could anyone really live like this? Rupert finds himself swept up into this fantasy that now that he's met the Rivers his life will change forever and ever. He's been found and rescued. But that isn't necessarily the truth. Charlie may have won it all--been permanently removed from his troubles and hard times. Charlie may have his own crazy happily ever after. But Rupert, well, he's left with nothing but a memory that confuses as well as haunts.

Love is achingly absent throughout the novel. The Browns do not love Rupert. The Browns do not have the capacity to love--to want--any of their children. The only Brown children to be noticed are the trouble-makers, the cat-stealers. The Rivers don't have much love to share either. They have an abundance of stuff, an abundance of staff, but no connections to one another, and no connections to the world.

Hope is absent as well. Rupert certainly has only the dimmest notion of it. He doesn't dare hope that he can be happy in his own home. Hope that he will be loved by his parents--actually seen, known, valued. Hope that he and his brothers and sisters will have food to eat on a daily basis, or clothes to wear that actually keep them warm. To live with that hope might prove too much. The tiny bit of hope that Rupert has is that somehow, somehow the Rivers will save him from his mess of a life.

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I guess what bothered me about this one was how Rupert is taken on and treated by the family. He's seen not as a person with emotions and feelings, with real-life needs. He's an amusement--a temporary amusement. He's like a throw-a-way toy in a Christmas cracker.

Original (intended) audience born circa 2007 to 2010.

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### **Lynne Edwards says**

Summary: This chapter book starts off with Rupert, a very poor boy whose family is living off table scraps from local restaurants his dad collects. He is lucky to get to eat a few bites of oatmeal in the morning and sleeps under a bed since there are so many children in one house. He walks to school everyday in ragged cloths that don't stop him from freezing in the winter. As he walks, he goes from the poorest people, to the not so poor, to middle class, and finally the rich. On Christmas morning, he doesn't realize it is a holiday so he walks to school. When he sees that it is closed, he is so cold and hungry that he only makes it back to the rich people's homes before he is hooked on an electric gate that brings him inside the property of the rich. A boy from school drags him inside and gives him warm cloths and food. Rupert is invited to stay for Christmas dinner and almost makes himself sick eating so much food.

Afterwards, the family plays their annual Christmas games. Rupert ends up winning more prizes than he has ever seen in his life and is really excited to take them home to his family. However, he first has to win a game of Poker (which he does) but he also has to answer a random question from the encyclopedia. He ends up answering the question right, but passes out right before and misses the time hack. He loses everything. Random people in the family then feel bad that he lives in such poor conditions and they start to randomly pop up and take him to fancy places and involve him into their personal lives. He goes on multiple adventures and trips with different family members but is not actually benefited in anyway from them except the feeling of inclusiveness. The Rivers (rich family) benefited more from his insight than they did. The story ends with the Rivers moving away and not telling Rupert until he goes to them to hoping they could help get his mother's job back. They go back to their house, defeated, until his dad comes home with a job!

Reflection: I really enjoyed this book, but it was hard to read sometimes. I wanted to just reach into the book and tell the Rivers to help Rupert and his family. They are literally starving and freezing and even though the Rivers felt bad that he had left with no prizes, they could not understand the fact that if they only gave them some food they would have been grateful. They only need basic things to survive.

Teaching Idea: I would use this book to help my students understand perspective and just how much of a cultural influence wealth can have on people. What do people living in great amounts of wealth see versus people who have a moderate amount or people who have none at all? I would ask my students to tell me what they think a day in the life of a person with a lot of money is like and what a day in the life of a person

who doesn't have much money is like. How are their perspectives going to differ when it comes to how they dress, what they eat for breakfast, and even on their schoolwork?

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### **Barbara says**

I'm sure many upper elementary readers will love this book, but all I can say is that it made me terribly hungry. I felt so sorry for the protagonist, ten-year-old Rupert Brown because every time he got close to being able to eat a decent meal, the chance slipped away from him, and back to his regular life he went. One thing the story definitely has to recommend it is Rupert and the very quirky and seemingly-selfish Rivers family. Rupert's family is struggling financially, and neither of his parents can summon much holiday spirit at Christmas. His mother is downright cruel, and while readers eventually come to realize that this cruelty stems from her disappointment about how life has turned out, the scenes featuring her made me wince. When Rupert finds himself inside the Rivers' family's property on Christmas, he plays a strange game with them, at first winning and then losing everything. But the various members of the family feel guilty about what happened, and each one secretly approaches him later to make up for what happened. Crazy doings ensue as he visits an exclusive restaurant, is involved in a robbery, and travels back in time. Although he has plenty of adventures and comes to terms with life as it is, he realizes that each person's life can still be filled with small joys, no matter how full or empty one's bank account. I liked the message and this quote that sums all that up ["Some lives contained more money, but all lives contained equal wonder. Although to see it you had to see everything else as well, and seeing came at the terrible price of feeling" (p. 293)], but I still was left with the feeling of wanting more and wishing for Rupert to have a cupboard full of groceries. And yes, given the present state of the world, I wouldn't say that money buys happiness, but it can make life a whole lot easier. It's clear from the book that being very rich is no guarantee of contentment, and yet...

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### **Jill Jemmett says**

This was an unusual story. It follows many adventures that Rupert has with the members of the Rivers family.

Rupert comes from a very poor family. They eat oatmeal for every meal because they can't afford much else. The Rivers family is the opposite. They have every extravagance possible. Rupert ends up spending Christmas with them, but his great evening takes a horrible turn when Rupert loses all of the prizes he won in the games. Then over the following weeks, the members of the Rivers family try to make up for taking all of Rupert's gifts away.

I found this story very strange. The Rivers family kept dangling gifts and food in front of Rupert but didn't actually give them to him. It was so cruel. There were some fantasy elements like time travel, but these moments didn't fit in with the rest of the story because the rest of it was fairly realistic.

This story reminded me of some other children's stories. Rupert's family is in the same unfortunate situation as Charlie Bucket's family in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The narration style and circumstances of Rupert's life were like the Beaudelaire children in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. However, I found this book was missing the excitement and redemption that these stories had.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley.

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## **Jay says**

I'll start this out by admitting I was confused for the majority of the book. There was A LOT happening. Yet I still enjoyed it!

The writing is super easy to read, and I flew through this book in less than 24 hours. Now that might be because the target audience is younger than I am, but I've read some middle grade books that read like molasses. Way too slow to keep even my attention, let alone an actual middle grade student. However, this one is something I would have loved as a 12 year old!

There are quite a few characters introduced but you only really need to keep track of a few, and I love that they all maintain different personalities well enough to not confuse them even when there is so much going on. The main character, Rupert, goes on some incredible adventures with members of the Rivers family and it all starts on Christmas day. Perfect little magical book that also addresses a handful of real life concerns in such a fun way.

This book was all around just better than I anticipated!

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## **Martha Meyer says**

A hilarious read about poverty and wealth, hunger and hamburgers from Polly Horvath. Rupert is very poor and always hungry; there is never enough food at home. A ridiculous accident happens on Christmas Day that introduces him to the ultra-wealthy Rivers family. The book is a series of bizarre adventures hungry Rupert goes on with various members of the Rivers family, from time travel to a simple restaurant. None of the Rivers understand how badly Rupert just needs to eat. In the end, it is his father who understands how important the next meal is. This one is not as fabulous as her classic, *The Trolls*, but it does supply some horvath-esque humor when you need it.

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