



Halsey Street

Naima Coster

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A modern-day story of family, loss, and renewal, Halsey Street captures the deeply human need to belong—not only to a place but to one another.

Penelope Grand has scrapped her failed career as an artist in Pittsburgh and moved back to Brooklyn to keep an eye on her ailing father. She's accepted that her future won't be what she'd dreamed, but now, as gentrification has completely reshaped her old neighborhood, even her past is unrecognizable. Old haunts have been razed, and wealthy white strangers have replaced every familiar face in Bed-Stuy. Even her mother, Mirella, has abandoned the family to reclaim her roots in the Dominican Republic. That took courage. It's also unforgivable.

When Penelope moves into the attic apartment of the affluent Harpers, she thinks she's found a semblance of family—and maybe even love. But her world is upended again when she receives a postcard from Mirella asking for reconciliation. As old wounds are reopened, and secrets revealed, a journey across an ocean of sacrifice and self-discovery begins.

An engrossing debut, Halsey Street shifts between the perspectives of these two captivating, troubled women. Mirella has one last chance to win back the heart of the daughter she'd lost long before leaving New York, and for Penelope, it's time to break free of the hold of the past and start navigating her own life.

Halsey Street Details

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From Reader Review Halsey Street for online ebook

Rebel Women Lit says

Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* is an ode to all art forms. The author's voice is fresh and powerful, and their literary craft is truly exquisite, one that is descriptive without being verbose. Coster's skills allows the carefully conjured images to shine, whether in the dimming light of a New York sunset or the midday sun of a Caribbean isle.

Set against the backdrop of a changing Brooklyn, this contemporary novel is a no-holds barred critique of gentrification, as well as a passionate, nuanced analysis of family and self-discovery. Told in alternating points of view, *Halsey Street* gives readers a main character whose story is fresh and extremely timely. The characters and their experiences are extremely relatable and fully drawn. Our protagonist is flawed, vulnerable and realistic. She is the twenty something of this millennium, the same as we are, the ones who have been vastly underrepresented in literature. In a similar vein, her father Ralph is idealistic, proud and true-to life. Readers will find that they easily connect to Penelope's love for art, to Ralph Grand's passion for vinyl, or Mirella's love for her garden and her intense desire to be untethered.

More broadly, *Halsey Street* engages its audience. This analysis and character studies are expertly delivered without feeling heavy handed or distracting. This debut is a standout among its literary peers, and we look forward to reading more of Coster's work. Rebel Women Lit highly recommends adding *Halsey Street* to your Christmas 2017 book wishlist.

Thank you to Little A Books for sending Rebel Women Lit a copy of *Halsey Street* in exchange for an honest review.

- Kaymara Barrett

Dominique says

It was great reading about Brooklyn and the setting is so familiar that I somehow felt connected to the characters. Connected enough that they all left me feeling annoyed and depressed. The protagonist Penelope is incredibly lonely, and so that's my starting point to understanding her behavior and choices. There's an avoidable mistake in here that I still can't wrap my mind around what purpose it serves for the characters involved because it honestly doesn't push the story forward, but is just a sour spot in the book. The dynamic between Penelope and her mother Mirella seemed promising at one point, but just pushes at its calloused surface, never actually breaking through.

I guess there's a point about gentrification, but it's overshadowed by such unlikeable characters on both sides of the gentrifying coin. And I know, I know, characters don't have to be likeable, but my goodness give me just one. The plot is depressing and thematically the book tumbles and flips between lonely realities and this evasive notion of freedom that never truly sticks its landing.

Vivian says

From my editor's letter:

If you are bilingual like I am, you know that your brain can work on two parallel paths simultaneously. Both paths tell the same story but in a different way. It's no coincidence that I was thinking about this experience while devouring Naima Coster's debut novel, *Halsey Street*. The main character, Penelope Grand, flits between parallel worlds—her mother's in the Dominican Republic and her father's of jazz and record shops and bars where everyone knows your name in Bed-Stuy.

Penelope moves back to her once-familiar but now rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn to care for her ailing father, but her life is turned upside down when her estranged mother, Mirella, sends a postcard asking to reconnect. Naima expertly drew me in to Penelope and Mirella's worlds and inspired deep reflection. What happens when you move back home and don't recognize your past? Is change—in a neighborhood, in your situation, in life—necessarily bad if it benefits everyone? How do you mend two halves when they've been fractured for so long?

The two cultures are never at odds—like two languages, they complement each other. I can't think of a changing Bed-Stuy without also thinking about the lushness of the DR nor can I think of Penelope without thinking of Mirella. I was struck by the emotions I felt for these complicated and passionate women, both of whom I was rooting for despite realizing they are also both at fault. The contradictions, struggles, and connections we make in life are not easy but *Halsey Street* walks these parallel paths confidently.

Gabrielle says

3.75 stars. *Halsey Street* had all of the elements that I love in a good novel: a woman of color navigating the world, complicated family dynamics (especially mother/daughter relationships), and multiple character perspectives, but still something was missing. Each of the main characters were deeply flawed which is not a bad thing, but they each remained selfish and unchanged throughout the story. The structure of the book was a bit disorienting to me - I believe I would have connected more to the book had some of the flash backs come earlier - I found myself being really invested in the story and then it would switch from past to present day. I wonder if Coster was intentional in having none of the characters grow - almost as a cautionary tale. Though the writing was good, perhaps Halsey's greatest accomplishment was forcing the reader to question or challenge their thoughts on motherhood, marriage, friendship, love, and happiness. I look forward to discussing this book with others - maybe they can help me read the characters more deeply. This is a worthy attempt for a debut novel and I would recommend it to a friend.

Joel Nygard says

I tried, and then I tried some more to slog thru this book's main characters' unhappiness and selfishness because I was sure there would be growth and reconciliation ..eventually. 68% through I gave up, and I never give up on a book. I love reading immensely. I couldn't relate to the characters. I couldn't understand how they were supposed to be strong, good women when they were so petty, immature and selfish and antisocial, yet so stupidly dependent on someone else to tell them they are worthy when they.

I tried, I really tried to be patient with these stupid vapid, selfish women in the hopes that their pending and hoped for happy reunion would redeem them for me. 68% of the way into this poorly paced novel there was only more whining about how no one loves them, when they won't ever be happy and that it was someone else's fault. I find them immature, petty, selfish and antisocial. I never write reviews, ever. This is my first because I was so disappointed in this novel. The author writes well, tells good antidotes, creates good imagery, but I am done with her whiny, gloomy characters, I won't have them wasting anymore of my time.

Christina Kline says

In this lovely novel, Naima Coster captures, with depth and nuance, the yearnings, ambivalence, and insecurities of a woman on the brink of adulthood. In the process of healing old wounds, Penelope Grand must mend complex fractures in relationships with her estranged mother in the Dominican Republic and her father in Brooklyn. An exceptional debut that limns the perils and hard-won pleasures of connection.

Cynthia says

In the end, I wanted to shake both Penelope and Mirella hard, and then pull them into a hug. Both beautifully flawed, complex, and dynamic characters. I'm still gathering my thoughts on this one, but I can't wait for everyone to read this come January.

Full review 12/23: Looking back, it is fitting that I binge-read *Halsey Street* the same weekend that I binge-watched *She's Gotta Have It*, the Spike Lee-directed television series based on his film from the 1980s. Both feature black Millennial women stumbling as they try to figure out the direction of their professional and personal lives, against the backdrop of gentrifying Brooklyn. Nola Darling and Penelope Grand are both complex characters—at times incredibly frustrating, often very relatable, and ultimately deeply flawed (i.e., human).

I don't want to compare the book and the show too much, because I loved them both in different ways. But what they share, and what spoke to me most about this novel, is a deep sense of place: Brooklyn is vibrant and dynamic, a character in its own right that means different things to each person who encounters it. Like Jacqueline Woodson's *Another Brooklyn*, this book was transportive in the way all good stories are.

In addition, I thought the development of the family dynamics at the center of this story, especially the painful, complicated mother-daughter relationship between Penelope and Mirella, was skillfully done. I've read few books that focus on the internal life of a mother, particularly a mother like Mirella who chooses her own freedom and (sort of?) happiness over her husband and daughter. Generally, I don't like when novels switch character perspectives, but here it felt right and necessary. I needed Mirella's point of view and voice in order to empathize with her and understand her. (view spoiler)

I really enjoyed *Halsey Street*. It is introspective and empathetic, in addition to being beautifully and assuredly written. I look forward to reading whatever Coster comes up with next.

Thanks to Little A and the author for the ARC in exchange for an honest review.

BookOfCinz says

I wanted to love this book. I wanted to let everyone know how amazing this book was. I wanted to sing praises about this book but it just fell flat. I felt the book was slow, the character development was limited and I generally just lost interest 30% in.

Hasley Street is told from the perspective of Penelope, a failed artist who is currently living in Bed-stuy and seeing all the gentrification taking place. She is trying to find her footing in a world that seems to be changing all around her, added to that is taking care of her father, not to mentioned her ruined relationship with her Mom Mirella. We meet Mirella, Penelope's mother who resides in Dominica, she muses about her time in Brooklyn, her marriage and her relationship with her daughter.

Overall, this book fell flat. I did not like or felt anything for the main character Penelope. I felt she was sulky, angry, and a little immature especially for someone that is thirty. I understand that she is going through a lot, she is misunderstood but I felt I just do not know her. Her character development was limited and I think that was a major flaw of the book.

This was an ok debut novel, I might read something else by Naima Coster in the future but this book did not do it for me.

Janani says

4.5

First published at The Shrinkette.

Thanks so much to Netgalley and Little A Books for providing me this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Plot: Penelope Grand is a young black failing artist who moves back home from Pittsburg to take care of her ailing father, Ralph. Her old neighborhood has been gentrified and taken over by affluent white people, and her mother Mirella left them to return to the Dominican Republic. So when Penny moves into the attic of the wealthy Harpers, she hopes for some semblance of family again. But a postcard arrives from Mirella, who is seeking reconciliation, and Penny's world is once again turned upside down as old wounds are reopened, secrets are spilled, and she sets on a path of self-discovery.

It is the mark of a good book that has you still thinking about it days after you've finished reading it, and Halsey Street certainly fits the bill. For what comes across as a simple plot, Coster has by no means presented us with a simple novel. Layers upon layers upon layers are available for the reader's contemplation.

The novel's told from the perspective of both the Grand women- Penny and Mirella. Penny is a millennial who is flawed, vulnerable, and pragmatic. From her perspective, we are witness to a changed Brooklyn, the

very real effects of gentrification- in the houses, the murals, the schools, the walls, her disdain for the mother that abandoned her, while Ralph Grand keeps his home as a shrine, unchanged from when she'd left it, while he drinks his days away hoping for Mirella to return. Her vulnerability is seen in her yearning and interactions when she stays with the Harpers, seeking connection and love. Through Mirella's eyes we see how she and Ralph met, the changes in their relationship as Ralph focused on his record store, her gradually deteriorating relationship with Penny, how she felt in Brooklyn and the events that led to her departure, and her life in DR and how she makes it her own without being an extension of somebody else's life. When Mirella writes to Penny seeking reconciliation, Penny is not immediately forgiving, a lot of stuff comes up for the both of them (together and separately), and we get to see where both women choose to go from there.

Coster has portrayed gentrification as a metaphor for broken families, and her execution of this is what makes this novel so phenomenal. You see it in Penny's observations of the neighborhood, the school she teaches at, the rich white Harpers who are her landlord, and Ralph, who is a relic of old Brooklyn. She brings nuance into the conversation by inserting conversations of race, gender, and class- in Mirella's chapters we see how she felt that Ralph and his friends never saw her as equal, and how her opinions on art and music and such were never taken seriously. Coster's narrative power comes through also in her demonstrations of gentrification and its effects rather than statements of it. For instance, there's a particular scene where Penny meets a classic white-pro-gentrifier Marty, who makes a statement about the neighborhood being a "blank canvas" with a plethora of possibilities, to which Penny rails back with a poignant speech on the literal erasure of the neighborhood and its systematic removal of working-class black people.

Halsey Street is an evocative and thought-provoking novel, one that will keep you thinking for days, and Coster is a fresh and talented voice. The writing complexity with a seemingly simple plot make this novel an absolute standout piece of literary fiction, and I'm looking forward to read more of her work in the future. Do not miss out on this one.

Evette says

"Halsey Street" is the first book I've read about Black families since "The Turner House," and it was worth it.

Gabriella says

Naima Coster's debut novel centers around a family in Bed-Stuy and the Dominican Republic, whose members know loss as well as their backyards, and have learned to hold nothing sacred because of it. The POV characters, Penelope Grand and her estranged mother Mirella, are especially skeptical—of marriage, of hometown nostalgia, and even of maternity.

I enjoyed reading Halsey Street right after Another Brooklyn, since they're both reflections of changing life in the borough (this time, Bed-Stuy instead of Bushwick.) While I was excited by this book's premise, I never could find the emotional core of these characters. We learn about their past (and present) traumas, but don't learn how they impact their current behaviors.

Despite Penelope's (righteous!) indignation at the way gentrification has rendered her neighborhood nearly unrecognizable, it's hard to find examples of what, exactly she misses. In some ways, her apathy and irreverence is so deep that we never uncover the beauty of the Bed-Stuy she once knew, only her anger for what it currently is. To me, she seemed unreasonably sulky for a woman going on thirty.

We understand that her grandmother's passing (and mother's refusal to attend the funeral) deeply hurts her, but we never receive a nuanced understanding of their connection, besides the fact that Ramona is nicer to Penny than Mirella is. We also never exactly come to learn why Mirella bears so much hatred for her mother, yet returns every year to visit (she feels compelled? She misses the DR? Your guess is as good as mine.)

Her affair with her landlord is predictable—one of their first interactions literally involves them holding hands before hearing the jangle of the wife's keys downstairs! :(I never understood why this particular entanglement was happening—maybe because it could, or because Penelope doesn't hold marriage in high esteem? Maybe if their relationship wasn't immediately rushed to adulterous territory, there would've been more about Penelope to gather from it.

I think part of the beauty of writing about "difficult women" is the ability to surpass this label by highlighting their complex stories and hidden inner emotions. To her credit, Naima Coster definitely creates engaging, difficult women, but for all the time spent with them, I'm not sure I got to know them any better than the people they push away.

Stacy says

Review coming soon.

Diane S ? says

3.5 The oftentimes complicated relationship between mother and daughter is fully explored in this wonderful novel, that takes us from Brooklyn, New York to the Dominican Republic. This is not a quick read, the pace is rather slow in fact, but it covers the gentrification of a neighborhood, the disintegration of a marriage, and of a daughter who may wait too long to reconcile with her mother.

What made this a special read for me is that I could picture all this happening, it is so vividly written, seemed so realistic.

Mirella, the mother, and Penelope, the daughter are complex characters, sometimes likable, many times not. Their misunderstandings, years in the making are not easily resolved, especially as Penny seems only to understand and relate to her father. They narrate their stories in alternate chapters, and I have to admit loving those set in the Dominican Republic, the colors, the flavors of the Caribbean, so lush. We find out what happened between Mirella and Ralph, how they came to live in different countries. There is an iconic record story whose closing will start the downward spiral of marriage and neighborhood. We see how gentrification changes things, makes them unrecognizable, neighborhood and people.

Most of all this is a realistic portray of the dynamics, flaws and all, of family relationships. Was a slower read but a good one.

ARC from Netgalley.

Valerie says

[It wasn't until reading glimpses from Mirella's point of view that the everything began to really come alive for me. What I found

Yasmin Silva says

Wow... 12 hours..couldnt put it down.

A book has never done this to me.. I'm from Williamsburg.. Born in Park Slope and moved here when i was 3.. This book had a heartbeat. The cover and title drew me in.. In tears.. Superb.
