



Waffle Hearts: Lena and Me in Mathildewick Cove

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is a marvellous book. I could say that it is one of those rare books that capture the essence of childhood if I believed that there was such a thing. Yet there are books or films that, despite or perhaps because of their unfamiliar setting, seem to speak to you about a special quality of childhood, its anxieties, foolishness, recklessness, its joys and sorrows, and its place in a whole life. And this is a book that does that for me. The unfamiliar setting here is a remote Norwegian island village where we share a year in the life of nine year old Trille and his bold and impulsive next-door best friend Lena. We meet them as Lena balances precariously on a tightrope set up between their first floor windows. She eventually tumbles down, her fall broken by a mattress courtesy of the quick-thinking Trille. More leap before you look escapades follow, many comic and some truly alarming, including one where Lena attempts to emulate Trille's picture of Jesus rescuing a lost sheep from a mountain precipice. All are related by the fractionally more sensible, and more obviously sensitive, Trille, who is desperate throughout the book for Lena to admit that he is her best friend as he freely acknowledges her to be his. For most child readers, Trille and Lena's life will seem to be one of impossible freedom, supported by, for the most part, understanding, if not indulgent, and ever-forgiving parents, and grandparents who are always ready to act as co-conspirators. But this somehow fits with this small community, whose particular customs, history and mutual support run consistently but unobtrusively through the episodic tale. Above all, the sense of impossible freedom is balanced by Maria Parr's sensitive portrayal of friendship and family and her clarity of characterisation, even the bit players shine brightly if briefly. This is a wonderful life affirming book. I am grateful to Walker Books and translator Guy Puzey for making it available to us in English. Perhaps no childhood is ever like this. Perhaps we would like it to be. Or, perhaps, on just a few occasions, it really is; and that is how we would like to remember it.

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