

light of an Italian village and glower with the primeval forest palette of fairy tales.

Troon Harrison creates a haunting parable about the inevitability of change in *The Floating Orchard*. The main character is Damson, inheritor of her family's magical plum orchard, a place she plans to never leave. During a terrible flood, the hero Bartlett arrives. This pear farmer convinces her to cut down the tallest, most magical plum tree in order to make a mast for the boat that will carry Damson and her animals to safety. She does so regretfully and the boat carries Damson and Bartlett to a new land where they begin anew, creating an orchard of pear trees and plum trees for their daughter, Anjou Victoria, to inhabit. When Anjou says that she will never leave this home, the narrator concludes with the moral of the story: "She didn't know yet that life is full of surprises." The illustrations by Miranda Jones are well integrated, a magical wash of purples and blues, and each picture is framed, somewhat like the art of Jan Brett.

Topics of loss and change are dealt with gently and imaginatively in *The Floating Orchard*. The heroine Damson never forgets her origins and instead feels nostalgia for them; there is no glossing over the loss of childhood in this text, and, in fact, those feelings of pain are transformative. On the other hand, there is nothing heavy-handed in the treatment of these topics. The ideal audience for this text will be those readers who are at once in and out of childhood, able to imagine themselves at a point in the future when their childhood will be a memory. In *The Floating Orchard* and in *The Wolf of Gubbio*, sensitive young readers will see themselves reflected through the eyes of thoughtful adults and may begin to recognize the complexity and richness of the world they will inherit as adults.

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Sex and Spirits

Before Wings. Beth Goobie. Orca, 2000. 203 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-163-7.

Before Wings bravely confronts two issues about which adults resist talking to their teenagers: death and sex. Adrien is fifteen years old and sure she's going to die any moment. She may be right, having suffered a brain aneurysm two years previously. Adrien has been treated as a fragile object, even by herself, so it's a good thing that she's sent to work at Aunt Erin's summer camp. Aunt Erin doesn't baby her; as Adrien finds out, she has her own demons or, we should say, spirits. Since her aneurysm, Adrien has seen spirits and has felt a strong pull to the spirit world. Standing between worlds makes it "difficult to focus on the here and now."

Goobie's roots as a poet are evident everywhere. Her lyrical style is at once compelling and leisurely. Goobie moves smoothly to connect the dots between the natural world, Adrien, and the spirit world: "Again, the lightning forked the entire horizon. It was like watching her own brain, the knife lines of electricity that sliced through its heavy mass. Come, the sky was calling her into the gray pulp of its brain, the dazzle of its forked currents." The use of the mayfly as a metaphor for the ephemeral works well.

Goobie brings to life the anger and morbidity of the typical teenager. Adrien's

response to her aunt's offer of hot chocolate is spot-on age fifteen: "I'm dying for some." Like many fifteen-year-olds, Adrien feels that the rest of the world is fake: "The whole place was a scam. If she reached out and actually touched someone, the person would probably dissolve into mist and fade away."

Adrien meets Paul, a psychic boy convinced that he, too, will die young, and they fall in love. Here Goobie is very frank about sex and, through Adrien's roommate Darcy, offers sensible advice: "Feelings are strong, but you've still got a mind. You can take it in stages. Have fun with it. Play."

Adrien is haunted by a cabinful of spirits who have died in a boating accident that implicated Aunt Erin. The spirits are just a shade too exuberant for my taste. The ending of the book brings together the plots connected with Aunt Erin, Paul, and the bully Conner. It's too pat and sentimental, jarring somewhat with the edginess of the rest of the book. Perhaps that's the reaction of a cynical adult, though. Fifteen is a lot more optimistic despite the tough posing.

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Starting Over: A New Country, A New Life

A Bushel of Light. Troon Harrison. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 224 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6140-3. *A Group of One.* Rachna Gilmore. Henry Holt for Young Readers, 2001. 184 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8050-6475-3. *If I Just Had Two Wings.* Virginia Frances Schwartz. Stoddart Kids, 2001. 221 pp. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3302-7. *We Followed the Stars to Canada.* Debi van de Wiel. Illus. Bruce J. Brown. Nimbus, 2000. 64 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55109-342-1.

The immigrant experience is familiar to many Canadians. These four engaging novels all tell about or examine the experience of changing countries and cultures with the hope of capturing a brighter future. In *A Bushel of Light*, a young orphaned twin named Maggie is forced to travel from a British seacoast town to work as a Barnardo "Home child" on an Ontario farm early in the last century. In the case of Phoebe, in *If I Just Had Two Wings*, freedom from slavery during the time of the American Civil War drives her to flee to Canada along the underground railway. For Canadian-born Tara Mehta, coming to grips with racism in her twenty-first-century Ottawa high school while trying to accept her family's cultural ties to India connects her to her family's immigrant past in *A Group of One*. In *We Followed the Stars to Canada*, the Donkers family set sail for farm life in Nova Scotia, away from war-torn, crowded Holland in 1950. All four books address important family issues, such as the loss of family members through death, slavery, and immigration; cultural differences within the family as well as within the community; giving up personal freedom in support of a principle; taking on responsibility; and cooperation between generations.

When Maggie's parents die one after the other, she and her twin sister go to live with their mother's brother, his wife, and their brood of children. When their relatives are not able to keep them, one twin is sent to an elderly aunt's and the other to Canada. Maggie learns about betrayal and loss at the tender age of eight.