

LEAVING HOME

Windward Island. Karleen Bradford. Kids Can Press, 1989. 145 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-921103-75-1.

Windward Island is a tender, realistic, and sometimes painful vivification of the emotional impact on two teenagers of having to leave forever the island-home they love. The friendship of Caleb Landry and Loren Randall is severely tested by their differing reactions to the news that their small island may soon become nothing more than a tourist retreat; that their only secure future lies in a move to the Nova Scotia "mainland". Loren accepts this as a necessary reality; Caleb fights it with stubborn determination.

As a story – readable, entertaining and exciting – *Windward Island* is nothing short of excellent. Equally impressive, however, is Karleen Bradford's ability to make the action of her novel reveal the emotional dilemma of her characters. The tensions created between the two friends, resulting from a natural inability to express true feelings, are dramatized rather than described. The several plausible accidents and misadventures which befall them serve to define attitudes and focus personal relations. As well, Bradford very deftly introduces a third character – a female teenager visitor to the island – who inadvertently brings the boys' pent-up feelings into the open and eventually helps them realize how deep their friendship is.

Described that way, the novel may seem rather contrived and sentimental. It is not. There is nothing stereotypical here: there is grief and anguish, bitterness and anger, mingled with genuine love. Not all solutions are happy ones, and the ending itself does not entirely resolve the issue, no more than does life itself: "Ahead of [Loren] lay the mainland, the neat shingled cottage he and his father had bought, and high school. A new life. Not for him, now, the job of lightkeeper. Not for anyone on Windward Island ever again. He had fought, but he had lost. The light was automated; the island was going to change. But the island would still be there. And the sea. And the birds. And he would be back."

Windward Island is not only about an endangered birthright, as important as that may be, but it vivifies also that inevitable (though often unrecognized) moment which marks the passage from youth to adulthood. Karleen Bradford evokes the anguish and hope of that moment with true understanding, without forfeiting the excitement and suspense so necessary to a good teenage novel.

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