surrogate for her dead son.

Pearson's best book so far, *A handful of time*, which also takes place at a lakeside summer home, offers a more tightly-plotted and thematically-coherent story, but in *Looking at the moon*, Pearson's sensitive portrait of Norah—no longer a girl and not yet a woman—is acute and often very moving.

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TRUTH AND RESPONSIBILITY

The girl in the well. Cecil Freeman Beeler. Red Deer College Press, 1991. 125 pp., $8.95, paper. ISBN 0-88995-075-X; **Loyalist runaway**. Donna Smyth. Formac Publishing, 1991. 136 pp., $16.95, $8.95, cloth, paper, ISBN 0-887800-087-4, 0-88780-086-6.

The girl in the well takes place in the winter of 1934, in rural Saskatchewan and Alberta. In this setting, where survival itself is a real struggle, the need for resourcefulness and courage is captured by the struggles of the main character, Corinne Kragh. The winter is so severe that schools have been closed, but for Corinne there is not time for school anyway. The story opens with her hard at work with farm chores; because her father has gone away, she has had to become her mother's "little man." Much of the book occupies itself with the mystery of her father's absence—though she masks her anxieties with fierce shows of independence, Corinne is beset with doubt about her father. Alternating between images of resentful arguments and small flashbacks of emotional family scenes are little scenes where Corinne turns to imaginary discussions with her father to help her solve problems and deal with the responsibilities she has taken on.

Gradually, as the story unfolds through Corinne's internalised narrative, the reader comes to an understanding that Karl, her father, has gone away to the city for the winter to find a job to supplement the family's scanty income. Throughout this period of revelation, however, Corinne continues to fight against acceptance of the fact, choosing indiscriminately most of the men with whom she comes in to contact to "adopt" as her parents. Early in the novel, Corinne says mournfully "I never know the best way to do anything until I go ahead and do it all wrong." This certainly holds true throughout the book as she chooses and rejects family after family as unsuitable for her needs.

Through the comparison of these families with Corinne's own ideas of what constitutes a proper family structure, the reader gains more and more of an idea of Karl's character. The most decisive turning point of the novel comes during a short visit that Corinne and her mother make to the city to see her father. There, she meets a young boy whose family life is abusive and insecure. Realising that her own over-dramatised remembrance of a spanking just before Karl's departure is scarcely significant in comparison, Corinne begins to trust her feelings of love for her father, though at the same time effectively expressing the maturity and independence she has developed in his absence. The relationship, though affirmed, is placed on new terms, with altered responsibilities and obligations on both sides.

In *Loyalist runaway*, on the other hand, the steps to maturity are by no means as clearly set out as in *The girl in the well*. The setting is Nova Scotia and Boston during the American Revolution. Kitty Byles, an impetuous eleven-year-old, runs away one afternoon from her Loyalist home in Nova Scotia to find her young uncle, Tommy, outcast from the family since he joined up with the Yankee rebels to fight for independence from British rule. Every bit as much as she is running to find Tommy, Kitty is running away from a new life as a refugee, and from a new "stepmama," Sarah. Secretly she dwells on her "Great plan," an adventure planned as much for adventure's sake as it is to try to reunite the family, and one day abruptly leaves to carry it out. Cutting off her long hair and borrowing some of her brother's old clothes, she boards a ship bound for Yarmouth, the beginning of her long trip to Boston, a trip which eventually leads her to the Rebel encampment outside New York City.

Tommy, however, is no longer the brotherly figure we've come to expect from Kitty's reminiscences, and Kitty's blossoming romantic visions of life spent caring for her uncle in the midst of the action are rudely dispelled. Instead of the life she has anticipated, she, along with a young runaway slave that Tommy has rescued, are sent home in the care of a British sea captain. Kitty is coming to a gradual realization that life in these times is not all fun and adventure, and that the life she has left behind, for all its lack of excitement, is the life where she belongs. As she thinks to herself at one point, "things had changed and it was time to go home."

Her journey and arrival home, however, are disturbingly unsatisfying—Kitty slips into a decidedly feminine dress, apologises in a docile and yet sincere manner to her stepmother, and hugs to herself silently a letter from Tommy, resolving only to discuss with her father later the possibility that not all Yankee rebels need be considered the enemy. The signs of her development and maturity are very subtle indeed, almost unconvincing, and all the reader comes away from the book with is the same pervading sense of disappointment and uncertainty as does Kitty, who reflects that "...someday it was just possible that she, Kitty Byles, would have another Great plan."

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