

is still entertaining and would be ideal for adults and children to read together as an introduction to chapter books.

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*Kathleen Donohue* received her Master's Degree in English from the University of Guelph and teaches in a private school in Aurora, Ontario.

### The Pleasures — and Perils — of Being Invisible

*The Invisible Harry*. Marthe Jocelyn. Illus. Abby Carter. Tundra, 1998. 128 pp. \$14.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-467-3 *Vanishing Act*. Cora Taylor. Red Deer College P, 1997 (Northern Lights Young Novels). 199 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-165-9.

Making someone, or something, disappear is a popular element in fiction for young readers. Our hero discovers a formula or a magic spell and literally works wonders. The joy and power, however, are soon tempered by the reality of unpredictable results. Two new novels by Marthe Jocelyn and Cora Taylor explore this theme. Though they are very different in approach, content, audience and style, both succeed in suspending the young reader's disbelief and in spinning believable and entertaining yarns.

*The Invisible Harry* is a sequel to Marthe Jocelyn's popular first book *The Invisible Day* (1997), though it easily stands alone. This time Billie Stoner makes a new puppy invisible, so as to buy herself enough time to convince her mother to let her keep him. Intended for eight- to twelve-year olds, this is a fast-paced funny story told throughout from the resourceful Billie's viewpoint. In twenty-one short chapters with large readable print and plenty of accessible dialogue and humour, we tumble from one escapade to another. In short, lively scenes, Jocelyn shows us the invisible puppy at school, at home, or on the street with other dogs. Again, the New York City background is well drawn, and the book sparkles with humour and with suspense to keep young readers turning the page.

While most of Jocelyn's characters ring true, Sam the dog-sitter, who agrees to "work" for Billie but never appears to be paid, perhaps too conveniently does what's needed without asking questions. Also, one of the joys of finishing a good story is to imagine what happens to the characters afterwards. The Epilogue tacked on here gives the author's view of "what happened next," but robs the reader of that flight of imagination. On the whole, though, this is a delightful story. The illustrations by Abby Carter are a perfect fit for the breezy, light tone of the text.

Cora Taylor's *Vanishing Act* aims at an older audience, and is, there-

fore, much longer and more densely plotted. Set in smaller print and divided into two parts with a total of forty-four chapters, it will appeal to young teens and fluent readers. The plot follows twin sisters Jennifer and Maggie and their friend Sam on a mystery which eventually takes them from Canada (Part One) to a Greek cruise (Part Two). The style is fluent and often leisurely, with plenty of background material woven in. Dialogue is believable, and the interactions between the young characters ring true.

The mystery elements in Part One — wondering about the father, and looking for the mother's lost watch, which has sentimental value — do not have the heart-thumping importance of the conflicts later in the book. The focus here is on discovering and perfecting Jennifer's ability to disappear and reappear at will, and achieving the kids' goal of going on a Greek cruise with "Grand," the mother of their missing father (another variation on the "vanishing" theme). The way in which the boy, Sam, is able to join the girls on their cruise — a convenient invitation to England, another to Italy, inherited money, etc. — seems contrived and awkward, but for the most part Taylor handles the intricacies of a complicated plot well. Part Two has a much faster pace, with the constant drama of mysterious strangers and hints of spies, plots, kidnapping, counterintelligence, and a beloved father in danger. Taylor writes deftly, letting these courageous kids stay in control: the twins switch for each other when needed; Jennifer disappears and reappears at will; Grand is always on the scene, helpful and understanding. Along the way, readers experience daily life on a cruise ship; though as with real travellers, they may sometimes feel overloaded by information about those ancient sites and places visited. Each chapter in *Vanishing Act* is told from a different viewpoint. This allows the reader to enter into the head of all three main characters in turn, and to revisit some scenes. Mostly this works well, though sometimes it can be confusing. The situation with regard to the missing father is also sometimes hard to keep track of, with a plethora of murky characters whose relationships and motives are unclear. But there is no doubt of the tension and drama as the young trio escape kidnapping and worse, and Taylor does well at keeping the story unpredictable. Both books, for two different age levels, work well for their intended audiences. Both authors do a wonderful job of describing the pleasures and perils of being felt, and heard, but not seen. The "vanishings" in both stories are totally believable, and beautifully handled. And in both books, by the end, the characters are pretty much the same as in the beginning — none the worse for their experience, not particularly changed by it, but ready for their next adventures, whether visible or not. Young readers will be eager to join them.

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*Margaret Springer is an author and writing teacher whose books for young readers include Move Over, Einstein (Puffin Books, 1997). She is also widely published in children's magazines.*