

Ages 10-12

Children's Book Reviews


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Review: Rooftoppers

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Rooftoppers

By Katherine Rundell

Simon & Schuster, 2013

DESCRIPTION

Found floating in a cello case after a shipwreck in the English Channel, baby Sophie is taken in by bookish bachelor Charles Maxim, a fellow survivor. Knowing nothing of raising children, Charles gives Sophie great latitude, allowing her to write her thoughts on the walls of their London townhouse and to wear trousers instead of dresses. In 1890 Victorian England, girls wearing trousers is unheard of. Because of Sophie's penchant for breaking plates, they use atlases as plates instead of china. Her schooling is haphazard but she loves to read and Charles introduces her to Shakespeare. Miss Elliott from the National Childcare Agency is not happy with any of this and when Sophie turns twelve she is determined to remove the child from Charles' care and send her to an orphanage. Sophie has always believed that her mother is still alive and finding a Paris address in the old cello case, she and Charles flee the English authorities with hope that the cello maker will know of her mother's whereabouts. Tucked safely in the attic room of a hotel while Charles pursues the search through Paris authorities, Sophie finds her way to the roof where she meets Matteo, an orphan, who lives a dangerous and adventurous life on the rooftops. Intrigued by Sophie's story, Matteo allows her to be a part of his unusual lifestyle by showing her how to navigate the rooftop world. Hearing rumors of a woman who sits on a rooftop in the evening playing her cello, Matteo enlists the help of the other "rooftoppers" in the search for Sophie's mother.

CRITIQUE:

In lyrical prose Rundell has created a mix of fantasy and realism which will appeal to children's desire for independence and adventure. It is filled with strong characters who are not afraid to follow their own way. Charles' love, his willingness to go to extreme efforts to help Sophie realize her dream, and his motto to "never ignore a possible" encourage Sophie's determination to find her mother. Matteo and the "rooftoppers" show great ingenuity and determination to survive outside of the restrictive and uncaring orphanage system. The story does end rather abruptly. It would have been nice to learn more about Sophie's mother and to know what changes might come to Charles and the "rooftoppers" when their quest comes to an end. However, creating their own ending could make an interesting discussion or writing exercise for young readers.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

1800s, Adventure, Cellos, Cross-generational relationships, England, France, Guardians, Homelessness, Humor, Music, Orphans, Paris, Relationships, Rooftops, Runaways, Self-respect, Shipwrecks

CHARACTER THEMES:

Caring, Cleverness, Community, Coping, Courage, Creativity, Cunning, Determination, Encouragement, Fairness, Fearlessness, Friendship, Hope, Imagination, Independence, Inventiveness, Love, Loyalty, Passion, Perseverance, Resilience, Selflessness, Sharing, Spunk, Survival, Trustworthiness, Wonder

AWARDS:

Blue Peter Book Award (BBC), Capitol Choices, Carnegie Medal, Concorde Books Award (UK), Cybils Award, E.B. White Read Aloud Middle Reader Award, Great Stone Face Book Award (NH), Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, Nevada Young Readers' Award, Notable Children's Books, Oregon Reader's Choice Award, Quahog Book Award (ME), Read Alouds Too Good to Miss, *School Library Journal* Best Books, UKLA Children's Book Award (UK), Waterstones Children's Book Prize