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Withering-by-Sea

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Review

While residing at a health resort with her three stingy aunts, Stella Montgomery witnesses the murder of an elderly hotel patron, Mr. Filbert. But before his death, Mr. Filbert entrusts Stella with an ancient bottle to keep away from his murderer—a magician known as The Professor. The Professor forces his young assistant, Ben, to use his seer-ability to discover the bottle’s location. When Stella’s part is revealed, The Professor kidnaps Stella and holds her at the local theater. Stella tricks The Professor’s goons and finds sanctuary with two theater performers: Mr. Capelli and the dancer, Gert. But before Stella is able to escape the theater, The Professor grabs her and Gert. This time he whisks the girls away to an abandoned island castle. Once there The Professor uncorks the mysterious bottle in hopes of receiving the stowed magical powers of a past wizard. Instead he unleashes a monster that kills him. The girls escape thanks to the help of Ben and Mr. Capelli.

Withering-by-Sea is the start of Rossell’s new illustrated middle-grade series. It is a tale full of danger, magic, friendship, death, and mystery. As the story opens, readers are introduced to young Stella Montgomery. Some might say she has a fabulous life traveling all over the world with her three wealthy aunts. But as readers take a closer, they realize Stella is a lost, neglected little girl who is literally searching for her place in the pages of her ruined Atlas. Surprisingly, after Mr. Filbert’s death, Stella’s life comes alive to new worlds, friendships, and adventures. Up to that point, she was just enduring the insults in hopes of receiving stray clues to her parents’ past. Afterwards, her intelligence, courage, and untapped magical abilities aid her to survive the terrors dealt by The Professor. A fun, intriguing read similar to such classics as The Little Princess and James and the Giant Peach.