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The Land of Forgotten Girls

Cynthia Frazier

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Book Review

Title: The Land of Forgotten Girls
Author: Erin Entrada Kelly
Reviewer: Cynthia Frazier
Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers
Publication Year: 2016
ISBN: 9780062238641
Number of Pages: 299
Interest Level: Primary, Intermediate, Young Adult
Rating: Outstanding



Review

This is a story of children, Sol and Ming, whose mother and sister dies in the Philippines. After moving to the United States, their father abandons them to their stepmother's abusive care. Their neighborhood is a poor one; the park has no grass or playground and rats infest the walls of their four room apartment. Few people speak English and rarely do any ethnically diverse people speak to one another. Sol learns to cope with their hard situation by retelling and embellishing the bedtime stories her mother once told her about Auntie Jove who traveled the world having fantastic adventures. When these imaginative stories become all too real to her small sister, Sol has to do something to make the reality of their lives worth living. As Sol searches for ways to do this, she discovers that she isn't alone, that there are people who care, that everyone has problems, and that there are glimmers of hope shining in the darkness.

Author Erin Kelly's mother immigrated from the Philippines, and perhaps this is why the cultural references in this story are so realistic. Told through the eyes of twelve year old Soledad, this account illustrates the lives of two Filipino children in a new country. Believable characters such as Veal, the stepmother trapped in her role as the children she inherits; and Manny, Sol's young Mexican American friend, help to move the plot along. Introducing the stereotypical 'rich kids' who attend private school displays a great contrast in the way people live, but also shows the reality that the rich girls are as deprived as Sol and Ming of real love and caring. Escaping reality into imagination is central to the charm of this book. The book is well written, full of humor and the sometimes impaired judgments of a young person forced to grow up too soon. Unlikely heroes come forward when Sol breaks down barriers of fear and tradition to help her sister. This book would be a good one for parents to read and discuss with their children as it deals with difficult and timely subjects. The impression upon finishing the book is one of poignant optimism.

*Contains insults, racial slurs, domestic abuse, and bullying.