2003

Stop the Train!

Laura Wadley

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Reviewer: Laura Wadley
Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Historical Fiction; Adventure Stories; Humorous Stories;
Subject: Frontier and pioneer life--Oklahoma--Juvenile fiction; Oklahoma--History--Land Rush, 1893--Juvenile Fiction;

*Stop the Train* is a fictional version of historical events in Enid, Oklahoma. In McCaughrean's renamed Florence, Oklahoma, the railroad, as a corporate entity, is not allowed to stake claims during the 1893 Land Rush, so they try to buy out the claimants of Florence, who refuse.

Consequently, the owner of the Red Rock Runner Railroad swears in his wrath never to allow the train to stop in Florence, dooming its residents to go bust. The remainder of the book devotes itself to stories of how the Florentians (who elect a "doge" rather than a mayor), try to get the train to stop in Florence, including taking potshots at it from the water tower, and a snow hedge in a blizzard. Characterizations are even more important than plot in Ms. McCaughrean’s delightful tale: the Swedish baker chooses between two prospects for his new wife based on the coolness of her hands (better for pastry); Herman the Mormon quotes a relevant scripture on each of the signs he paints for local business; and the undertaker's son fills the town with satin-lined furniture. How the British born and bred McCaughrean so totally captures the charm and syntax of frontier speech is a mystery, but her remarkable characters, and this story of loyalty, determination, charming idiosyncrasies, and love is a delight.