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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ JUVENILE FICTION

A Mermaid's Journal

Melissa G. Goodmon
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A Mermaid's Journal *is a sweet middle-grade fantasy in which mermaids live among us.*

In Melissa G. Goodmon's middle-grade fantasy, *A Mermaid's Journal*, a young mermaid writes about friendship, love, and being true to yourself.

When a young girl washes up on the shore, a seven-year-old named Morgan takes the girl under her wing. No one questions where the mysterious new girl came from or where her parents are. She spends most of her time at Morgan's house, doesn't speak, and is also called Morgan; later, she is called Moonstar. She's taught sign language and is accepted into the family.

The two Morgans keep each other company, with only Morgan's grandmother being privy to the truth—and she takes the secret to her grave. When Morgan's family moves away, Moonstar is taken into custody by a doctor who studies mermaids. She is asked to interpret for other merpeople, and falls in love with one. As she starts to better appreciate where she comes from, she decides to rejoin her mermaid kin.

The story is slow to pick up. Moonstar narrates through her journal, but it is without much drama. She speaks believably as a young girl and teenager, and her scenes with Morgan are emotional and familiar, often attentive to details like the fact that Moonstar doesn't have a birth certificate. The girls experience common events like learning to drive together. Over nine years, the journal records Moonstar and Morgan's strong friendship; Moonstar knows "in her heart that Morgan is the only reason she stays" on land.

The girls' maturation is natural, but quiet. These parts of the story don't hold attention. It's only when Moonstar is captured that the story becomes engrossing, though it still does not capitalize on her budding relationship with another mermaid, Dour, or her struggle with returning to the sea. Mermaid mythology is discussed, and elements of the mermaids' interactions with people ring true.

Most scenes don't include enough conflict to be entertaining, even when another mermaid tries to win Dour away from Moonstar. Grammatical errors and tense shifts make the story choppy, and dialogue doesn't read like actual conversations. The story moves forward mostly because of Moonstar's journal's timeline, and the pace is slow. By the end, friendship and love stories are resolved, and the ending is happy—if unlikely.

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REBECCA MONTERUSSO (October 31, 2018)

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