FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ PICTURE BOOKS

Anna's Goat

Janice Kulyk Keefer
Orca Book Publishers (March 2001)
Unknown $15.95 (32pp)
978-1-55143-153-6

“Far, far away across the plains and over the mountains in a cold, dark country, Anna was born.” Mother, Father, and sister Wanda “almost forgot the war that had driven them so far from home.” So begins Janice Kulyk Keefer’s powerful tale of contrasts. Janet Wilson’s initial crayon illustration on colored paper glows with gentleness and grace. As the story unfolds, Mother tells Anna and Wanda about the beauty and prosperity of their homeland. The telling juxtaposes the pre-war memories of prosperity with the present poverty, coldness, and darkness of their one-room wartime existence.

Mother works in a factory; Father lives in another village. There is not enough to eat; they are cold. The author’s direct narrative reveals the brutal realities that the family faces as displaced persons, victims of war. Although none of Mother’s co-workers have anything to spare, they reach out to her with a solution to help her starving children. The nanny goat they give the family provides company, warmth, and milk to sustain the girls. Anna’s goat becomes friend and nurse and even spends the night in the hospital with her when she burns herself on the stove. Within the frozen world, the girls grow and blossom. The war finally ends.

With anticipation, the family returns to their home, only to find it in ruins from bombing. Other children find treasures in the rubble from the war, but Anna finds none. Mother gives Anna a blue towel with ragged fringe ends. Anna fondly remembers her goat, the comforting animal that saved her life. She keeps the towel, a symbol of survival and salvation, as her family begins to rebuild their lives. As an adult, Anna moves to Canada where she becomes a sculptor “of birds and suns and mermaids… and nanny goats, of course!”

An award-winning novelist, poet, and essayist, Keefer grew up in Canada. After an extended trip to Ukraine and Poland, she began to explore the past of her parents and grandparents, “to bring out of the silence some of their stories.” Keefer does not name the time of her story or the country of her setting, but tells us it is a “bitter time, and a hard, hard place” where it is “always winter.” It could be any country during any war. Keefer dedicates this book to Anna and Wanda and their parents. Anna’s Goat is a poignant portrayal of Ukranians displaced by the Polish during World War I. Keefer makes the story work on several levels, as a tribute to her ancestors and as an indictment of war.
PEGGY BECK (July / August 2001)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.