

Beyond the Land of Dreams: Beryl's Awakening

Susan Bruck

Soul Blossom Living

(326pp)

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Beyond the Land of Dreams is an imaginative coming-of-age fairy tale set in a struggling, storied land.

In Susan Bruck's charming series fantasy novel *Beyond the Land of Dreams*, a girl comes of age in a fairy-tale setting.

Darkness is growing in the land of Floredelis, and fifteen-year-old Beryl's struggles seem to mirror the nation's. Indeed, both the nation and the heroine are moving toward important stages in their development—stages that are intertwined with the tales of others. The actions of Jocasta (a character from the series' past) echo on; and Doctor Hami, who has been soured by life, seeks power and control over Floredelis and its people. Thus Beryl steps up, determined to stop Doctor Hami herself—with the help of her interesting friends.

Beryl is an endearing heroine—both saucy and full of questions. Still, she shows restraint that outweighs that of the adults in her life. Indeed, Beryl is more than she appears to be—or even than she understands herself to be. As she confronts lies, betrayals, secrets, love, and loss, she grows and comes into her own. She also faces internal conflicts: she's been having dark dreams that foreshadow coming events.

The book is structured in a manner that makes its lessons clear. Its chapter titles contain clues to what's ahead, and its scenes flow together well. Snippets of wisdom are also included before each stage of the narrative—lines from *Jocasta's Book of Fairy Tales*, a book that is among Beryl's favorites. These solidify the continuing influence of Jocasta's own story on Floredelis's future, deepening the mystery of the evil that's attacking the land and adding dimension to Beryl's plight.

While it contains some repetitive word choices and sentence fragments, the descriptive, imaginative prose fleshes out Beryl's world in a compelling manner, as when it remarks on “the blush of the morning ... still on the cheeks of this day.” Fairy-tale elements wind in too, including a godmother, themes of good versus evil, royalty, castles, magic, and magical creatures. Still, with its scenes involving battles, romance, and big revelations, this is a story whose stakes shift—and with them, the audience's level of involvement. Nonetheless, the various storylines are resolved well, and the volume feels rounded out by its end.

Containing hints of portal magic, *Beyond the Land of Dreams* is a pleasant fairy tale in which a girl comes into her own while confronting the struggles of her land.

SHARI MARSHALL (June 29, 2023)

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