

★ **Brown: My Alter Ego is a Superhero**

Håkon Øvreås

Øyvind Torseter, Illustrator

Kari Dickson, Translator

Enchanted Lion Books (Jun 4, 2019)

Hardcover \$16.95 (136pp)

978-1-59270-212-1

Håkon Øvreås's *Brown* is a touching, timeless story that captures the unbounded imagination and uncertain innocence of youth.

Originally published in Norway, *Brown* has been translated into more than thirty languages and is the first book in the My Alter Ego is a Superhero trilogy. It centers on Rusty, whose grandfather recently died. When bullies destroy the fort he's built with his friend Jack, Rusty is inspired to grab some old paint and deliver justice as "Brown," a caped vigilante who paints the culprits' bikes brown. He's later joined by "Black" and "Blue"—Jack and Lou, who also take up the superhero mantle. Rusty also visits with his grandfather's ghost; he eases the boy into accepting the permanence of death.

Brown achieves a perfect balance between excitement and introspection, melancholy and humor—seen from the first page, where Rusty is staying with his aunt while his parents are busy at the hospital. The mood is somber, but when Rusty balks at eating fish and his aunt questions him, Rusty replies "I like Swedish Fish." Torseter's drawings, with the light washes of color that accompany them, deliver laughs and other emotions as needed.

Dickson's translation is swift and assured. Sentences are direct, with nary an adverb to be found. Aside from the universality of its themes—death, bullies, friendship, and growing up—the book's power and charm arise as much because of what's left out as what's included. The presence of technology, for example, is distant; this could be a story from 50 years ago, and the book benefits from the absence with an increased focus on its characters.

Brown is a wonderful book that deserves the many awards it's received, among them the Norwegian Ministry of Culture's Literature Prize. English-speaking audiences will eagerly await translations of the next two books in the series.

PETER DABBENE (July/August 2019)

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