



Imaginary Things

Andrea Lochen

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Imaginary Things invites big imaginations and generous spirits and welcomes them in with peculiar charm.

Andrea Lochen's *Imaginary Things*, as ethereal as it is familiar, explores the spaces between the known and the imagined, where enchantment sometimes takes hold. It's an intriguing story about a harried young mother who retreats to the safety of home, only to be confronted with the forgotten, mysterious forces that lurked at the edge of her childhood.

At first, Anna thinks of her return to her grandparents' house, in its one-church, one-stoplight, five-bars little town, as a failure. She never expected to find herself back here at twenty-two, much less with a child in tow. But her son, David, has become her whole world, and Salsburg, Wisconsin, seems like the best place to ensure his safety, not least of all from his estranged, tortured father.

At first, Salsburg is the perfect refuge. Anna's grandparents run a happy household, and David has a taste of normalcy for maybe the first time in his life. Until Anna starts seeing strange things: a shadow that moves through the fields while David plays; green eyes materializing in thin air; a creature with scales; dinosaurs in the corn. The line between David's imagination and reality has grown too thin.

The materialization of David's imaginary friends is a complication in and of itself, but it also unearths memories from Anna's own troubled childhood. Then there's the complication of Jamie, the boy next door who's loved her always, and on whom early adulthood has also left its scars. Anna is torn between wanting the life she once abandoned and needing to protect her son from enigmatic forces that defy her understanding.

Lochen sets the stage with skill, capturing life in midwestern towns capably and poignantly. The complexities of parent-child relationships, particularly in single-parent homes, are thoughtfully presented.

Though *Imaginary Things* is rooted in magical realism, the bulk of the work draws more from reality, particularly during the final showdown Anna and David have against their shadows. As Anna and David learn to confront what they fear most, the need to conjure help fades, and the book becomes as much about growing up quickly as it is about the world beyond our own.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2015)

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