

Into the Wind

William Loizeaux

Laura Jacobson, Illustrator

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Into the Wind is a poignant novel about an unexpected, enriching friendship between a young boy and an elderly woman.

Rusty lives with his family in a New England coastal town. During the summer before he enters sixth grade, he is in summer school, and is also burdened by the fact that his mother is in a psychiatric facility to treat her depression. While Rusty's father struggles to hold it together, his older sister unleashes her anger on him.

Rusty has few friends; his solace is sailing. Then he meets Hazel, an elderly woman in a wheelchair who surprises Rusty with an unusual request: to go out for a ride on his sailboat. Rusty accompanies her home, only to be invited inside for lunch and dessert. Hazel's instincts hone in on Rusty's loneliness, and she hires him to do odd jobs around her house in exchange for money, lunch, and company. The two form a tenuous connection that strengthens over the summer.

Featuring an advanced vocabulary, the book deals with heavy themes, including maternal depression, loneliness, sibling difficulties, and death. Its conflicts are resolved, even for Rusty's mother, though its ending is nonetheless somber. Despite its melancholy tone, the novel forms an uplifting whole, acknowledging that Rusty and Hazel's unconventional friendship was a gift needed by both. It balances the often confusing emotions that children grapple with well, thanks to its bold, honest storytelling. Soft, pencil-shaded illustrations are diffused throughout, helping to express and enhance elements of the tale.

Into the Wind is a tender middle grade novel about an unconventional, multigenerational friendship formed across one significant summer.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (March / April 2021)

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