



Just after the Wave

Sandrine Collette

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Not to up your anxiety about climate change? But: read *Just after the Wave*, Sandrine Collette's postapocalyptic novel. The cli-fi thriller follows a large French family's plans for escape as a tsunami and endless rounds of "demented weather" threaten to swallow up their mountaintop home.

Told largely from the viewpoints of the mother, Madie, and the eleven-year-old middle child, Louie, the novel unfolds as one heartwrenching, disastrous event after another. The parents realize that their house, though well provisioned with food, fresh water, and a flock of chickens, will soon vanish underwater. Their rowboat is their only shot for safety, but it will only hold eight. The parents slip away at night, leaving three kids behind with a note, hoping to rescue them later.

Louie, one of the abandoned children, is a fascinating character study. He is a sensitive, intuitive, and resourceful survivor who works through the pain and stupor of his parents' betrayal to keep his diminished family alive and safe from an onslaught of nightmarish events.

Madie is also a fascinating and textured personality, her thoughts dissected as she reacts to harrowing levels of stress with a torrent of mingled guilt, horror, and numbness. Just when things become unbearable, Madie finds the strength to push through, even while her flaws and ambivalence about motherhood are apparent.

Beautiful, soaring prose captures the emotional intensity. When Louie and his siblings read their parents' note, it "crumpled their faces and stopped their hearts"; fear "keeps them sprawled in their beds, arms outspread, crucified."

Just after the Wave is an engrossing fable in which families and societies unravel and are refashioned. Sandrine Collette ratchets up the exquisite tension with each chapter, her dystopian world horrible to contemplate though it contains shining moments of hope and love.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January / February 2020)

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