



Larkin on the Shore

Jean Mills

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In Jean Mills's insightful *Larkin on the Shore*, a sixteen-year-old struggles to overcome an assault and the gossip and cyberbullying that follow it.

While her father visits her sick mother in Vancouver, Larkin is sent to stay with her grandmother in a seaside Nova Scotia town. In Turtle Harbour, she is expected to help open her grandmother's new coffee shop and organize the gift books that will be shared with the townspeople. But Larkin is also trying to heal, physically and mentally, after a popular boy in school assaulted her and denied the attack.

Larkin's classmates' gossip leaves her feeling isolated. Just as she begins to find footing with Turtle Harbour's teens and with her grandmother, there's a fire at the coffee shop. The fire is blamed on Billy, a local handyman, but without evidence. Larkin is hurt by the parallels she sees between Turtle Harbour gossip around Billy's drinking and her classmates' gossip after her assault.

Tranquil Nova Scotia is a peaceful setting for Larkin's story. She spends a great deal of time on the beach and kayaking with Billy's son Will; she finds comfort in the natural landscape. Turtle Harbour's beauty becomes an important factor in her healing. Larkin's reflections on the pain caused by her assault, and the hurtful damage felt in its wake because she was not believed or supported, are emotional and complex. They come through in her every thought and action.

Larkin on the Shore is a gripping coming-of-age story whose compelling senses of pain, loss, and healing are navigated with skill.

CATHERINE THURESON (March / April 2020)

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