

Letting the Summer Go

Alice Teasdale

Júlia Both

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Letting the Summer Go is a dazzling story about accepting loss as part of the natural cycle of the earth.

In Alice Teasdale and Júlia Both's beautiful picture book *Letting the Summer Go*, a girl observes as a garden is revived following a devastating fire.

A girl loves gardening with her mother. A fire renders their garden barren; they decide to replant it. With the help of their opinionated chicken, Ember, they clean, dig, sow seeds, and water the garden. They hope to see color return to their scorched land. Over the course of the summer, the garden grows from a near wasteland into a vibrant, flourishing jungle of vegetables and fruit. In the process, the girl learns the value of working with nature to produce abundance from the ashes.

The prose is striking and expressive: green shoots "shoulder" aside "crumbs of earth" and poke "out their tongues to lick up the light." It also uses sensory language, evoking the smell of the color gray, for instance, to bolster its images. But some of the language is advanced, even grandiose: words like "intrepid" appear, as do opaque metaphors. Lines like "the flash and whoop of red and blue" hold the audience at a distance without corresponding images to confirm their meanings.

But the bold, bright colors of the illustrations mirror the book's visual language well, revealing the vibrancy of the once-more thriving garden. Vines tangle around each other and leaves curl in a lifelike manner. The kaleidoscopic garden is juxtaposed to the barren gray of the surrounding land to evoke wonder. And the girl's facial expressions elicit emotions that the sometimes cryptic text evades. Elsewhere, Ember the hen's quirky behaviors and comedic timing are a humorous counterbalance to the seriousness of the text.

The story progresses through the seasons until autumn's end, conveying the passage of time and the recovery from the trauma of the fire through the healing power of nature. In telling a story about accepting loss as part of the natural cycle of the earth, *Letting the Summer Go* is a picture book with dazzling moments.

AIMÉE JODOIN (August 24, 2022)

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