



Lights on the Sea

Miquel Reina

Catherine E. Nelson, Translator

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Strange and magical, *Lights on the Sea* follows a retired couple to the outer reaches of their unfulfilled dreams.

Once, Mary Rose and Harold Grapes planned to sail around the world with their son, Dylan—but that was before they lost everything. Awash in the flotsam of their formerly happy life, the Grapes retreated to a house built on the edge of a cliff, made of scavenged boards and secured to the rock with wires.

On the eve of their eviction from their precipitously perched home, a storm thrusts the house into the sea. The Grapeses awake afloat in strange, icy waters, unable to steer and headed toward unknown places. They are saved by strokes of luck—a board hammered in place at just the right moment, a helpful dolphin, a friendly seal pup, a generous band of icebound people—and by their own fierce determination not to die adrift. They are injured, they face starvation, and, at last, they must contend with their long-avoided grief.

Miquel Reina's book is surrealistic and stark, unexpected and intimate by turns. As the Grapeses' yellow house bobs toward the northernmost reaches of the planet, the story recalls Sara Gallardo's "Things Happen" and functions as an extended allegory of loss, aging, and forgiveness.

The text is replete with concrete and magical images: of a ship in a bottle that survives the crash, the aurora borealis dancing overhead, packed and flooded boxes, broken generators, stacked furs, and a hungry polar bear doing what hungry polar bears do. Some emotions feel exaggerated, some of the metaphors are overly sweet, and some of the realistic elements are underexplained, but the Grapeses' story holds attention regardless.

A novel in which a house may be a ship, and in which it's never too late to start living, *Lights on the Sea* is a delightful trip.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November/December 2018)

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