



Little Beast

Julie Demers

Rhonda Mullins, Translator

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Vigorously potent, *Little Beast* haunts the intersection of fairy tales with gritty realism.

When a full beard emerges on a nameless eleven-year-old girl's face, she and her mother conceal the development from judgment in their tiny Quebecois mountain village. But several villagers, including the mayor and the priest, inevitably discover their strange situation, and the girl flees before she can be attacked out of sheer superstition.

In the solitude of the surrounding woods, she navigates hazards and relishes the beauty of nature. A chance encounter with a pair of hunters and their captured bear forces her to reconsider her path.

The protagonist drifts through the Canadian woods like a wraith. A magical quality infuses her inner monologue; it is borderline stream of consciousness at times. There is an appropriate childlike innocence to her musings, even in the face of death and human corruption. Rhonda Mullins renders the lyricism well in her translation, resulting in prose that is both tight and enticing.

Underlying the concrete details of the village, the mountain forest, and the human hunters who cross the girl's path is a gentle surrealistic note. Amid mundane trappings, fantastical elements reside. The girl is on a self-imposed quest—not to find some powerful object or defeat a great evil, but to solve the puzzle that is herself, whiskers and all, and to reconcile herself to the rest of world.

As she wrestles with the insincerity and cruelty of humanity, she finds that she cannot exist in isolation forever. Despite the odiousness she observes in the hunters and the faults she recalls in her mother, she recognizes that others are a necessity. It is in relationships, no matter the kind, that growth is found.

Little Beast is a fierce yet subtle foray into the interplay of fantasy and reality, proving that great profundity can sometimes be found in small—and bearded—girls.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (May/June 2018)

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