



★ **Louis Undercover**

Fanny Britt

Isabelle Arsenault, Illustrator

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Groundwood Books (Oct 3, 2017)

Hardcover \$19.95 (160pp)

978-1-55498-859-4

Louis Undercover tells the touching story of a boy's efforts to summon the courage to say hello to a girl, and to survive his own crumbling family life.

Louis is a boy hopelessly infatuated with Billie, a classmate; however, he lacks the confidence to talk to her. While Louis and his friend Boris ponder ways to make first contact with Billie, the home lives of Louis and his younger brother, Truffle, are affected by their alcoholic father. Louis and Truffle form their own identities largely in response to:

*What I see in his eyes right then,
something like an earthquake or drowning,
makes me think that I might have to be like him and drink all kinds of wine to forget.*

Louis's desire for a relationship with Billie represents a path out of turmoil and a sense of hope for the future. It carries him through the ups and downs of his father's attempts to conquer alcohol dependency and win back his family. But Billie is more than just a romantic interest. Though Louis has idealized her, she is strong and brave, qualities he sees himself as lacking.

Fanny Britt's writing is full of apt metaphors, such as the raccoon Louis finds and nurses back to health—a parallel for a damaged boy who needs to heal before he can move on. Isabelle Arsenault's artwork combines this natural storytelling style with occasional bits of expressionism, such as a scribbled-out page that conceals most of the art underneath, but reveals much about Louis's feelings.

Louis Undercover is a deceptively complex book—simple enough for children, but with enough layers to reward repeated readings by adults.

PETER DABBENE (November/December 2017)

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