



Oddity

Eli Brown

Karin Rytter, Illustrator

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Eli Brown's *Oddity* is a delightful, action-packed fantasy featuring a colorful cast and magical trinkets.

All Clover knows about her mother is that she died when Clover was a baby, and that she was fascinated with oddities—objects with strange properties that Clover's father, Constantine, loathes. Constantine has tried to carve out a stable life for his daughter, but all of this is snatched away when he is murdered. Forced to flee, Clover hopes to find her mother's old colleague. Along the way, she is forced to uncover her past and face the most dangerous oddity of all.

The frantic pace of Clover's flight mirrors her inner turmoil as she comes to terms with who she is. Other characters, including a hot-tempered doll, Susanna, and a pompous rooster, Hannibal, add comic relief while also providing Clover with a new, albeit untraditional, family.

While the focus is on Clover's self-discovery, the book also touches on sensitive subjects, including racism and dilemmas around making a living; dishonest behaviors raise the age-old question of whether the ends justify the means. Alongside Widow Henshaw, a former slave and a mother figure to Clover, Clover wrestles with tough questions to decide what it means to be who she is.

The book is set in an alternate America where territory disputes with France ended in war, rather than with the Louisiana Purchase. While the setting and names are changed, the American spirit, all about hard work and freedom, rings strong, along with less desirable elements, like a power-hungry senator who warmongers and who raises questions of what true patriotism entails, making the world believable, even as magic abounds.

A fiery heroine, a cruel twist of fate, and a few strange friends make *Oddity* a fantasy novel not soon forgotten.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (March / April 2021)

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