

Pearl

Brian Kindall

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In Brian Kindall's imaginative and artful fantasy *Pearl*, a young girl carved of stone is released from the depths of the ocean to experience human emotion and to explore universal knowledge and her desires and dreams.

For centuries, the pretty girl carved of milk-white stone has rested at the bottom of the sea. When she is harnessed and brought to an island grotto by a diving boy named Niko, Pearl's fears quickly turn to desire. Pearl dreams of a real life with her rescuer. Niko envisions this possibility too but ultimately realizes he must leave behind his solid treasure; he is a maturing young man of flesh and blood, but Pearl will remain a girl frozen in time.

Placed on display with other ancient statues, Pearl soon finds herself under the tutelage of Sage. Here, the story makes use of a clever twofold dialogue wherein Pearl's conversation with humans is only in thought, but communication through "the old language" is possible with others made of stone. The dialogue is eloquent, poetic, and reflective of timeless wisdom. Pearl welcomes the mentoring, learning that "there is a magic hidden in this enormous universe. There are opportunities ... little doorways out of darkness that bring us into light."

From warring rebels and grave robbers to bourgeois tourists, danger and the consequences of human greed are ever present. This fantastical narrative is heightened with moments of anticipation for both the central character and her new stone mates. Like a cat with its proverbial nine lives, Pearl is brought to wonder, "How many times must a girl come close to death ... before death finally takes her away?"

Pearl's journey moves the plot along at a continuous yet gentle pace, from a vibrant seascape of mirror-eyed minnows and purple-tentacled creatures to the world above, ignited by the moon and stars. Pearl's subtle voice and demeanor command this narrative venture, whether from the darkness of a burial tomb or the tranquil view from a lakeside retreat.

Vivid detail helps enhance the visual imagery. Attire descriptions, such as that of a boy in knickers, ladies in formal gowns, and men in uniform suggest both a historic time frame and a world in conflict. While the lyrical writing seems well suited to the middle-school age group, there are a few instances where sound effects pared down to the exclamatory "Hisssssssssss!" of a halting train or the "Bink!" of a sledgehammer against a statue seem too slight in contrast to the enhanced prose.

The book is charmingly brought full circle as Pearl's hopes and desires, expressed in her early meeting with the diving boy, are surprisingly entertained in the final chapters. *Pearl* is a creative and imaginative juvenile fantasy with memorable characters who tap into the magic and mystery of the universe. This is an enchanting, literary dive into the lightness and darkness of the world, its beauty and casualties, and a glimpse of the emotions that can arise out of young love.

CAROL DAVALA (March 1, 2018)

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