

Pure Wander

Batsi Lamola

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Elements of a mystery and realistic teen fiction combine in the suspenseful young-adult romance *Pure Wander* by Batsi Lamola. The novel addresses large and dramatic themes of family, betrayal, and friendship, zeroing in on a relationship between Hunadi and Jay, whose friendship evolves over time.

Hunadi begins the story as a person on the run, hoping not to be seen by anyone. She grapples with many unexplained circumstances. She is distressed by chance encounters with people she used to know, but there are only faint clues as to why this is so. She winds up in contact with someone she thought was dead, her old friend Jay.

Hunadi and Jay were separated in childhood only to reunite after their very different adolescences. Ensuing drama finds them becoming acquainted with the people they have become since they last met. In the process, they solve problems from their pasts and uncover dangerous secrets.

Strong details come out in the interactions between Hunadi and Jay as they process their feelings of friendship and more for each other; the two-perspective point of view helps bring out the feelings behind seemingly simple interactions. Their miscommunications feel realistic. When they are happy and relaxed, description tends toward telling rather than showing, describing Hunadi and Jay as close rather than showing them being so.

Dialogue is overly formal at times, though references to technologies like Instagram are a reminder that these are modern teenagers. Hunadi and Jay are developed in depth, but other characters, especially the adults in their lives, are more caricatures. Though their situations are acknowledged as extreme, they are still hard to believe at times, particularly near the climax and with choices made by Hunadi's mother.

The tone alternates as the story moves between scenes of bliss between Hunadi and Jay and the harrowing experiences that Hunadi's past and present bring into their lives. The stakes are serious from the first, with immediate questions about Hunadi's perilous position and what would motivate her mother to lie about Jay. While all is revealed eventually, most answers come very close to the end, which feels unexpected after the slow build.

Pure Wander puts a suspenseful twist on the teen romance. The story's conclusion will send hearts racing, as Hunadi and Jay carry the story.

LAURA LEAVITT (December 7, 2017)

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