ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Runaway Pony
Krista Ruepp
Ulrike Heyne, illustrator
Marianne Martens, translator
North South Books
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Nuance and understatement deepen this story about an Icelandic girl's developing relationship with her pony, and teach an important lesson about how an animal's needs must always take priority, even over the desires of an eager child. The beauty of natural landscapes and a grandmother's guidance combine to create the poignant story of an afternoon adventure.

Anna knows that she cannot ride Prince, her pony, until he is two years old. Eager to begin his training, however, she halters him and takes him for his first walk on a lead line. Soon, the noise of a passing tractor frightens him so much that he panics and runs away. Anna and her grandmother set off on the backs of more experienced horses to find Prince, whose journey gives readers a tour of Iceland's lava fields, hot springs, and geysers.

Prince ignores Anna's call because he now associates her with the noisy tractor. Children will identify with Anna's feelings of hurt and confusion in this moment, but they will also empathize with the pony, whose fears suddenly prevent him from trusting a girl he knows well. Grandmother explains that Anna must be patient and "earn back his trust." As they tempt Prince nearer with carrots and apples, the girl learns to place her pony's needs before her own. When Anna is finally able to lead Prince home—past the tractor once again—readers can see that her patience has been rewarded with her pony's confidence.

Although the character of Anna's wise grandmother invokes a stereotype of older women that often stands in for individual characterization, the device works here because her advice is so practical. Illustrations of Anna and her grandmother—on horseback, feeding Prince, and hugging—are lovingly executed in warm watercolors that paint Iceland's summer landscapes in broad strokes while lavishing detail on the characters' faces and windblown hair.

The internationally known author and illustrator both live in Germany, and have collaborated on four previous children's books: *Horses in the Fog*, *The Sea Pony*, *Midnight Rider*, and *Winter Pony*, which first introduced young readers to Anna and Prince. This

charming volume, originally written in German, is ideal for young animal lovers, and will spur daydreams of horseback riding in imaginative readers and listeners.

Elizabeth Breau