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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

Sparrow Migrations

Cari Noga
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Debut author Noga uses the "Miracle on the Hudson" to tell a masterful story about family love and fate.

Sparrow Migrations is a riveting debut that explores the lasting impact of near tragedies. Cari Noga, an accomplished journalist, delivers a compelling first novel, one which makes intelligent use of an event in the headlines to explore contemporary human challenges.

A chance accident is the catalyst for dramatic changes in the lives of Noga's central characters: the infamous "Miracle on The Hudson." In 2009, a plane hit a flock of birds, forcing the pilot to land in New York's Hudson River. Though the crash claims no human lives, the real casualties of such accidents, Noga shows, are not always immediately apparent.

Robby, a preteen boy on the autism spectrum, sees the crash from the deck of a Circle Line cruise and becomes fixated on its details. Brett, a resigned preacher's wife, is in the midst of an exciting, secret vacation on the day of impact. She stands on the same ship as Robby, helplessly watching as immediate media attention pushes her toward a personal precipice. And Deborah and her husband, Christopher, who are on the plane and headed toward family, end up shivering on its wing, making spontaneous life decisions of tremendous import.

In the months that follow, each character is forced to navigate thrilling new territories, all uncharted, most unimagined, before that pivotal day.

Robby is enthralled by the birds that were the plane's only terminal victims and becomes, with the support of a respected Cornell professor, something of an amateur ornithologist. His newfound fascination presents challenges for his parents, though it also becomes a way for him to build stronger interpersonal relationships.

Brett must decide whether she's willing to remain a closeted, unhappy preacher's wife, or if she'd rather view her near exposure as an opportunity to pursue independence, even the possibility of authentic love. And Deborah, who insisted that her husband commit to one more round of in vitro before they were rescued from the waters of the Hudson, finds herself miraculously pregnant, albeit at risk of a fatal inherited condition, and is abandoned by her husband, who feels terribly wronged by these circumstances.

Noga is masterful at teasing out the nuances of these situations. In terse, engaging chapters, her characters are presented with a variety of considerable challenges. They're forced to reconsider the relationships they've taken for granted, often even to dismantle them, if with hope for systematic rebuilding.

The subjects central to *Sparrow Migrations* are heavy ones—autism, coming out later in life, beginning families equally late—but Noga investigates them aptly. The end result is a poignant, robust novel that explores with refreshing honesty the ebbs and flows of family love, along with the tumultuous nature of fate.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (August 1, 2013)

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