

The Curious Case of Seaman Garber

B. K. Mayo

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The Curious Case of Seaman Garber is a reflective novel in which a thoughtful boy works to understand a reclusive veteran's story.

The discovery of a dead Vietnam veteran hastens a boy's maturation in B.K. Mayo's engrossing novel *The Curious Case of Seaman Garber*, which is about growing up through one's compassion for a stranger.

Seth spends his summers in Oregon shooting at cans, exploring the outdoors, and picking cherries. These meanderings are accomplished alongside his friend, Collin, whose harsher home circumstances are hinted at. Their long days aren't all idyllic: they wind up finding a man's body floating in an abandoned reservoir. Though they're shaken by their discovery, they're also drawn toward the ensuing investigation, and Seth observes its forensic details from a distance.

It is revealed that the deceased was Henry, a local fisherman and a veteran about whom little is known. Seth searches for Henry's missing dog, and he expresses concern about what will happen to Henry's remains. He ends up urging his father to intervene and ensure a proper burial, but he still can't stop thinking about Henry's life.

Seth, who is both precocious and cautious, is a boy of strong convictions. He treats others with respect, and his natural curiosity propels the story's stages—each of which shows him remaining true to his honest nature. His empathy is extraordinary.

Seth's father is also a grounding presence in the book: he both informs and supports his son, as does Seth's grandmother. In contrast, Seth's mother delivers a bevy of anxious warnings. The cast's mood changes through the story's shifting events, as people experience both everyday delights and apprehension and fear.

The book's chapters are brief and taut. Their momentum builds as their focus on what happened to Henry tightens. But they also include diversions, as with a consideration of what PTSD is, and how it can last across decades. Still, an affecting secondary story line is drawn out of the lasting effects of war in particular: the prevalence, and misunderstood nature, of PTSD directs it.

But the novel also includes an unexpected bequest and large revelations concerning Henry's connections to people who lived nearby. These are handled via an excessively convenient confession, in which facts are doled out in an abrupt, emotional way to drive home messages about the tragedies of postwar traumas. Late in the book, information about Henry's war experiences is also introduced, with the aim of interjecting hope—and a message about the importance of bravery.

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KAREN RIGBY (May 27, 2022)

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