

The Last Summer of Ada Bloom

Martine Murray

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In the febrile heat of an Australian summer, a girl learns that whole worlds lie beneath her hometown and family's careful facades. Martine Murray's novel *The Last Summer of Ada Bloom* travels landscapes that are metaphors to confront and deconstruct personalities who are fables.

Nine-year-old Ada is the youngest of the three Bloom children. Her perpetual romanticism helps to smooth her family's edges; all those around her seek to protect her in some way. But beyond Ada's naive demands that love last forever and loyalty be absolute, the Blooms struggle. Ada's mother laments her own abridged youth; her father craves affection, finds his home bone dry for it, and seeks substitutes. Ada's sister hungers for excitement; her brother wants to own the normalcy that he affects.

While the Blooms' circumstances at first seem cut and dry, their excursions and internal rumblings reveal inconsistencies. Old traumas and unexpected prejudices are revealed, and what seems ordinary is upended. Ada witnesses a betrayal, leading her to upset the stories upon which her truths are built. Blames shift, artifices crumble, and literal fires lick at the edges of her future.

Its settings and features as alive as its central cast thirsts to be, the book is driven by discoveries: of a hole in the ground that seems to have no bottom; of a fox unsated by hen houses; of a booze-fuzzed memory. First loves fall apart and old loves fray, like "old clothes that you kept because your life had been lived in them."

In Ada's world, happiness is achievable, but only once the brush that clogs new growth has been cleared away. The many comings-of-age in *The Last Summer of Ada Bloom* don't happen with storybook grace; instead, they demand stumbling, breaking, and brutal reformation.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2020)

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