ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

The School of Possibilities
Seita Parkkola
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Deprived of his beloved skateboard and sent unwillingly to a school that "promises each year to offer a chance to a few desperate children," Storm Steele enters sixth grade at the School of Possibilities, where he is tormented by a social studies teacher who totes up punishments by drawing first a hangman and then a guillotine, line by line and infraction by infraction, for each student who crosses under her baleful eye. Storm is intrigued by the forbidden story of a girl named India, a girl whose very existence is denied by school authorities but whose name plants hope in the hearts of students facing the soul-crushing weight of their school's grim penal system. When Storm's gallows are complete, his punishment is "a new girlfriend." The teacher explains that girlfriends are a new punishment and that "the results have been promising."

When ordered to take Bridget to the movies, Storm is accosted by a pair of grimy twins who thrust a note from India into his hand. This missive follows Storm's initial encounter with India in an abandoned factory, but stealth is necessary because Bridget, the headmaster's daughter, is a "very dangerous" girlfriend who will report even the smallest infraction. As Storm soon learns, students reinforce official punishments with barrages of rotten garbage—and worse.

Storm's friendship with India buoys him when his mother disappears without a trace, followed quickly by his father. His father's new wife, Verity Poole, who works at the school, informs Storm that she is now his legal guardian. Their disappearance is Storm's fault, Verity informs him, because each misdeed causes financial penalties; his parents must slave to repay his enormous debt.

Events become even creepier when Storm's bodyguard shows him the school's basement, full of "deathmasks" of every student. When one of India's cohorts is captured and imprisoned in a glass cage, Storm and India mastermind a rescue attempt. They fail, however, and some fellow escapees are captured. Ingenuity and help from an unexpected friend are all Storm and India have to save their friends and expose the school's evil to the public. This story's suspenseful trajectory will keep readers turning pages as events spiral to a climactic finale.

Finnish author Seita Parkkola has written an engaging narrative reminiscent of her novel, *Usva*, and the Finlandia Junior Prize-nominated *Viima*. Jani Ikonen, who also illustrated *Usva*, adds an urban contemporary touch to Storm's adventures. Translators Annira Silver and Marja Glass have brought to life a winning story for American middle readers.

Elizabeth Breau