Foreword Review JUVENILE FICTION

The Sisters of Straygarden Place

Hayley Chewins
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Hayley Chewins's fantasy novel *The Sisters of Straygarden Place* is filled with magic and danger—and love that overcomes all.

The Ballastian sisters seem to have everything they need, including a magic house that feeds them. But they don't have their parents, who left them years ago with strict instructions never to go outside or touch the sinister silver grass. They have obeyed. But then Mayhap sees Winnow leave the house; she returns ill. With the help of magic mistress of the mansion, Mysterissa, Mayhap searches for answers and learns that nothing—and no one—is what they seem.

Winnow is in the grass when the book begins, and the story's background comes alongside its action, balancing narrative with movement. Its characters, including Tutto, a helpful hippo, and Seekatrix, an excitable dog, are a delightful addition to Mayhap's serious situation. Tension hangs in the air until the book's final sentence.

The book's language and structure is variously direct and complex, and the effect is poetic. Its shorter sentences mirror Mayhap's conflicting fears and resolve; its longer lines concern what Mayhap previously thought to be true. This effect is further enhanced by the book's effective similes, which help to clarify the Ballastians' unusual world.

Touching lessons regarding the power of family bonds couple with reminders that one's identity is more about whom one chooses to be than where one comes from. Symbolism abounds in the book's magic: the hissing grass represents the burden of unshared power, while the hole in Mayhap's sky-and-bone-woven heart illustrates her desire to be loved.

The Sisters of Straygarden Place weaves its unusual tapestry with elegant prose.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (July / August 2020)

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