

★ **Wildful****Kengo Kurimoto**

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A teenager explores the wide world of nature as it's seen in her neighborhood in the graphic novel *Wildful*, a magical showcase of non-verbal storytelling.

Poppy's grandmother died; her mother languishes on the couch. Poppy escapes, taking her dog, Pepper, on walks. But Poppy is distracted by her phone and music; she pays little attention to her environment until Pepper chases a fox past a fence.

Following Pepper and the fox, Poppy winds up in an old forest. There, she meets Rob; his enthusiastic curiosity about nature is infectious. He shows Poppy flowers and birds. They begin meeting in the forest on a regular basis to observe and enjoy nature. And as Poppy becomes more attuned to the daily lives of the plants and creatures around her, she seeks to help her mother out of her malaise by sharing her wonderment.

The book is short on text; instead, its narrative unfolds through detailed, dynamic art in which animals and plants are depicted with stunning realism. Birdsong contrasts with recorded music; watching deer forage is a grand alternative to looking at a screen. And the book deals with grief in a subtle, tender way, as with Poppy's mother pointing out the stars and remembering her mother.

Modeling pure innocence, *Wildful* is an outstanding graphic novel in which people discover the healing power of nature.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2024)

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