

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

STORY GLASS

Billy Baldwin

Illus. by Liesl Bell

Decozen Books (213 pp.)

\$35.00 hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-9791882-1-3

July 20, 2019

BOOK REVIEW

A girl on vacation stumbles upon a magical puzzle in this illustrated middle-grade adventure.

Jen is going to her grandmother's for the summer. Grandma is "adventurous and wild, with a mischievous streak." It will be a change of pace for the girl, because ever since her father passed away in an accident, her mom has been terribly cautious. Grandma picks up Jen on a motorcycle with a sidecar for the trip to Goose Neck Lane. In the seaside home, Jen feels lighter and happier than she has in months. When she learns that Grandma has an art studio in her shed, the girl asks to visit it; "Perhaps," Grandma answers, and gives Jen "a tear-shaped pendant made of blue sea glass" before bed. The next morning, they go for a walk on the beach, and Jen spies the neck of a bottle in the sand. As she touches it, she encounters a "milky darkness" and the sensation of falling. A sand fairy named Gleeby coaches her on how to fly and then explains that the glass piece that she touched belongs to his Story Bottle. It's the Key Piece that "activates the adventure" of finding the rest of the pieces and learning the secret of the Wizard King of Lillimount. The king, however, watches Jen's progress by making use of another piece of the bottle, and he plans to stop her. Jen, meanwhile, isn't sure she wants to have this adventure after what happened to her father. However, Gleeby says, "The danger is living an unchallenged life. In not taking risks."

Baldwin, author of *Wipeout the Wave* (2017), once again joins illustrator Bell in a sumptuous middle-grade fantasy. On the way to Bottletown, Jen and Gleeby sail on a storm-tossed ocean; the dangerous waves that batter their vessel are the perfect metaphor, for adults and children, of how life happens to us whether we're ready for it or not. Bell's scratchy art features figures with round, expressive eyes and wild hair that are reminiscent of Jim Henson's Muppets, and the backgrounds are full of nature elements, such as flowers and trees. The prose is also very visual: "Drooling bugs as big as dogs hung from [flower] stalks, their sharp jaws and pincers snapping." Frequent double-page spreads provide long-lasting visual interest. The Bottletown map reveals sand fairies in action as they farm sand, shape bottles, and perform enchanted spells, but the most charming and detailed spread of all is a cross-section of the king's castle as he chases Jen through its many rooms, including the ghost-filled attic. Throughout the well-paced narrative, valuable lessons shine, such as the importance of doing things that scare you and of not judging someone by their appearance. The latter lesson is exceptionally illustrated with Oggie, a monstrous-looking character. In befriending him, Jen enhances Oggie's life and her own in ways she doesn't initially imagine. The king's secret, and Jen's response, flips the script of most fairy tales by introducing Prince Chadwick. However, the author and illustrator save their sweetest surprise for the final pages.

A vivid story for young readers with just the right amount of danger.

EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indie>.

Kirkus Indie, Kirkus Media LLC, 2600 Via Fortuna Suite 130 Austin, TX 78746

indie@kirkusreviews.com