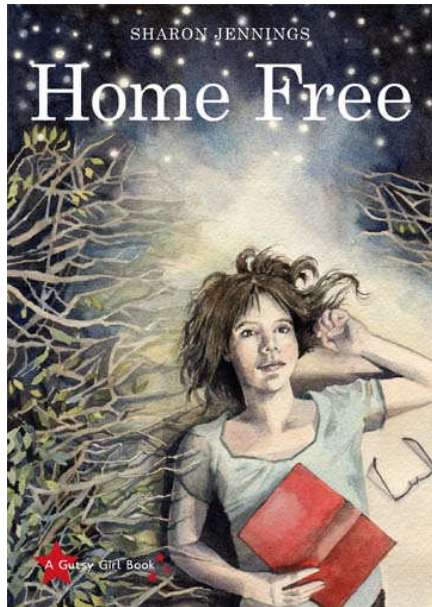


REVIEW CLIPPING



Quill & Quire

April, 2009.

Home Free

by Sharon Jennings

Published April, 2009
160pp, paperback, \$8.95
ISBN: 978-1-897187-55-5

* Starred Review

If Sharon Jennings' *Home Free*, the first volume in Second Story's new Gutsy Girl series is a sign of what's to come, then hurrah. This short, sharp story sets the bar high for its followers: it's subtle, wise, and energetic, an honest picture of childhood perceptions and the sort of nuanced fortitude it takes simply to mature.

An 11-year-old in the 1960s, Lee Mets is a spirited mixture of gossip and curiosity, frustration and creativity. She strives to get along with her repressive Presbyterian mother, negotiate schoolyard politics, and pursue her dream of becoming a writer. When she first hears that an orphan her age is coming to live with neighbours, Lee is thrilled. She thinks Cassandra will be a figure of romance and a kindred soul, *à la* Anne of Green Gables. And even though Cassandra isn't quite what Lee expected and refuses to talk about her parents, she does turn out to be an invigorating friend. Together, they stage a play, share opinions of other kids, and ponder adults' mysterious expressions and taboos. When Lee's father dies of a heart attack, though, Cassandra shares the shameful story of her "orphanhood," and the girls find consolation in each other.

Jennings' novel has numerous strengths: Lee's strong, intelligent narrative voice, simultaneously direct and multilayered in meaning; a period setting in the 1960s that's convincing without drawing attention to itself; and, most notably, a main character whose innocence, sturdy perceptions, and thirst for knowledge ring true to childhood experience.

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