

Kinderland

Liliana Corobca

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In Liliana Corobca's provocative novel *Kinderland*, unsupervised children navigate a Moldovan village under the dutiful eye of their elder sister.

Cristina, Marcel, and Dan are siblings. Their parents left to work in Italy and Russia. At twelve years old, Cristina toughens her resolve. She telescopes from her household's immediate concerns, including handling bullies and preparing pastries, into wider details about her neighbors, many of whom also experience disruptions in their families. They are resourceful, thieving people. Cristina also shepherds beaten children who seek her home as a waystation and encounters relatives.

Cristina's letters to her parents are interspersed with her recollections. It's a tender mix: she yearns for guidance, is frustrated that her mother cares for foreign children as a nanny, and attempts to pretend that she and her brothers' less-coddled lifestyle makes them more adept. As the story progresses, heartbreak mounts: Cristina matures, introducing notes of steeliness despite her desire to cry. She fends off people who try to take advantage of her. She manages money and shows her brothers how their situation could be even worse: they witness other people's worse privations as well as marital violence.

Evocative phrases arise throughout: "long money" is what many villagers left to pursue. In this dark fairy tale, livestock and prowling strays coexist with absent adults, rituals, and the wisdom of children. Yet Cristina's energetic anecdotes evade bleakness, forming a captivating vision of a rural outpost in modern Moldova. Here, survival depends on clear-eyed practicality. Amid such trials, the narrow bridge between childhood and adolescence still affords momentary pleasures for which Cristina can be grateful.

Kinderland is a literary novel about growing up amid economic decline; in it, a savvy girl lives according to her love for her family.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2023)

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