

Lost in the Ark

Valerie Agnew

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*In the coming-of-age novel *Lost in the Ark*, a teenager with an independent streak achieves self-worth by staying true to her personal beliefs.*

In Valerie Agnew's young adult novel *Lost in the Ark*, a traumatized teenager seeks refuge in a devout community and confronts its dark secrets.

Kate, who was raised without religion, wishes to join a local Christian community, the Ark, which is led by a charismatic preacher. But her combative mother refuses to allow it. When her mother dies, and her father becomes distant while her sisters decline, Kate decides to join the the Ark after all. She hopes to find belonging among its devout ranks. Indeed, the community welcomes Kate: she finds like-minded friends among her roommates, especially vivacious Bobbi, who brings out the most vibrant aspects of her own personality.

But Kate still has commitments to her family life that prevent her from fully integrating into the Ark. She takes a job outside of the Ark's ranks, even as she spends quality time with the Ark's preacher's nephew (while also taking interest in a coworker). When she begins to notice how the Ark subjugates its women, she comes to the realization that its preacher might not be as upstanding as he seems. Her search for personal meaning falters in this morass.

The novel includes a taut love triangle that is made to ably exemplify Kate's struggles between faith and independence. The preacher's nephew offers her a concrete future, but it's one whose fine points will be determined by the church, without any consideration of her desires; in contrast, her coworker speaks to her more passionate side, and also affords her respect. A harrowing discovery and a community expulsion force Kate to make a difficult, dramatic, and weighty choice about her future in the Ark.

Subtle in its pacing, the novel becomes more unsettling as Kate sinks into the Ark's devout community. By the time she's made aware of its painful truths, she's experienced transitions in her own life that forced her to grow; she is only able to confront the community's darkness because of these maturations. And throughout, her conversations with Bobbi and the preacher are a gripping narrative device, marked by simmering tension and (in the case of the latter) her faltering strength; their implications persist even after they've ended.

In the coming-of-age novel *Lost in the Ark*, a teenager with an independent streak forms a sense of self-worth by staying true to her personal beliefs.

JOHN M. MURRAY (February 5, 2022)

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