

Mia and Nattie: One Great Team

Marlene M. Bell

Grace Sandford, Illustrator

Ewephoric Publishing (Oct 3, 2020)

Hardcover \$14.99 (32pp)

978-0-9995394-4-6

With its empathetic theme of caring for animals who are different, Mia and Nattie is an uplifting picture book about acceptance and belonging.

A young girl befriends and saves a special sheep in Marlene M. Bell's picture book, *Mia and Nattie*.

When Nattie, a lamb, is born tiny, Mia feels an instant kinship to her, as she is on the smaller side herself. She bottle feeds Nattie indoors. As Nattie grows, she's returned outside, though she's still too different to join the regular flock. Grandma tells Mia that a neighbor offered to buy Nattie, setting off a sweet plan to prevent this sale. Once Mia convinces Grandma that Nattie is a good nanny for other sheep, from the young to the sick, Nattie becomes a treasured part of the team.

Gentle artwork by Grace Sandford portrays Nattie's unusual horns and woolly charm alongside Mia's affectionate expressions. The farm and interiors are soft and idyllic, with rounded corners, appealing colors, and page embellishments, including flowers and a polka dot background that enhance the story's warmth. The interior design centers the text, however, resulting in orphaned words and uneven lines that are tougher to read.

Mia is determined and thoughtful; her grandma is brusque by comparison, walking to the barn "in silence" and shrugging. Though it's implied that a farm leaves little room for sentiment and that chores abound, her rendering is too practical. Elsewhere, the writing is clear and familiar; it often repeats what the illustrations already show, covering locations like the laundry room and the characters' pictured actions. An intriguing afterword details how the character of Nattie was inspired by a real premature sheep; this back story is rewarding.

With its empathetic theme of caring for animals who are different—which, for parents, can extend into valuable lessons about people, too—*Mia and Nattie* is an uplifting picture book about acceptance and belonging.

KAREN RIGBY (December 17, 2020)

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