



The Music Thief

Sophie Armstrong

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FriesenPress

(40pp)

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A misanthrope denies her own pain but is helped by a child who encourages her to pray in the lesson-filled picture book The Music Thief.

In Sophie Armstrong's optimistic picture book *The Music Thief*, a witch tries to rid a city of its song and faces her own emotions.

Mysantha once loved music, but her parents decided that her passion for music would lead her astray and forbade her from enjoying it. In adulthood, she can't endure the sound of other people's merrymaking. She steals their musical instruments. When a girl, Faith, finds a lone violin, she is undaunted by the possibility of its disappearance. She plays it to draw others in and encourages them to improvise their own sounds. With Faith leading the way, Mysantha experiences a change of heart.

The book's trope of a misanthrope denying their own pain and later renewing interest in connecting with others through the help of a child impedes it. Its procession is straightforward and linear as well, and its rhyme schemes are prosaic. Further, its themes are overpronounced in the foreword, robbing it of surprises: it is about the importance of nurturing creative self-expression in children, and thus its ending is never in doubt. Its characterizations are also too light to vivify its messages, extending to Faith's transparent name and Mysantha being cast as a witch.

The book's playful typography is more distinguishing; the words dance across the pages, suiting the musical theme. And the illustrations also elevate it; they are whimsical interpretations of the cast's misery and cheer. In Mysantha's home, for example, the bedposts are made out of upturned broomsticks, and bats and crows fly around. In contrast, the city outside features flower-strewn lawns and dancing citizens, and their multicolored palettes evoke Marc Chagall. However, Mysantha herself is too stereotypical with her green pallor and pointed shoes.

In the familiar picture book *The Music Thief*, music has the ability to heal a community that's plagued by a witch.

KAREN RIGBY (July 15, 2024)

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