

The Ways of Water

Teresa H. Janssen

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In Teresa H. Janssen's impressionistic historical novel *The Ways of Water*, a girl comes of age in the American Southwest, facing multiple family struggles.

In the early 1900s, Josie's family lives in the New Mexico desert, where water is a too-rare necessity but whose landscape still teems with life. Her father works with freight trains and is prone to extended absences; her mother languishes while waiting for her father to come home. Curious and adaptable, Josie takes care of her siblings, who sometimes require her rescue. She also experiences the desert's emptiness and splendor; learns to ride a horse; watches her mother's seamstress work; and makes note of the mystique of the dangerous railway, about which she hears stories.

Then Josie's father loses his job. For a brief time, her mother moves the family to Austin, Texas, to live with Josie's grandmother. Later, they rejoin Josie's father in Mexico, where births and departures are used to vivify a still-bustling, but also fading, boomtown.

Josie is a sharp, perceptive lead. As her settings change, she senses subtle tension and comes to recognize that her parents' marriage is strained. She is guided by strong women, though, and learns to cherish her troubled roots. She is also a witness to history, observing the passing of Halley's Comet and the Mexican Revolution with wonder and fear. But when Josie is still only a teenager, she faces a death that leaves her with even greater responsibilities, and her adulthood recollections are imbued with a sense of what she lost.

Nostalgia overlays the eloquent family saga *The Ways of Water*, in which a girl is hastened toward independence by tragedy.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2023)

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