



Walk the Web Lightly: A Novel

Mary Pascual

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A girl born into matriarchal magical power tries to forge her own way in the shimmering coming-of-age novel Walk the Web Lightly.

In Mary Pascual's inventive fantasy novel *Walk the Web Lightly*, a talented girl is torn between her family's artistic traditions and her desire to become a doctor.

Naya grows up in a neighborhood that, while it isn't affluent, is believed to be tougher and grittier than it is. Her grandmother and mother, in addition to being able to "walk" the lines surrounding other people, seeing into their pasts and futures and sensing their decision trees, are skilled at tailoring, painting, and textile arts; they run a boutique. While they expect Naya to follow in their footsteps, taking over their time-honored, even sacred practice that reflects beauty, fourteen-year-old Naya has other ideas: she wants to attend a science camp, even though she is the first girl in her family to desire another way of life. The women reach an agreement with Naya: if Naya makes her soul wrap (an artistic object likened to a coat of arms and a means to express dreams), she can head to the camp. When a mysterious man arrives, he further complicates the family's plans.

This is a grounded fantasy novel that's enlivened by its frequent hints of deeper magic: Naya can cause spools of thread to change colors in order to reflect her state of mind and interests, and the soul wrap is framed as an important rite of passage, if also one whose details are peripheral to Naya's more everyday concerns. And despite the family tensions, the women are an empathetic bunch. Indeed, Naya's grandmother is developed as a woman who is both powerful and fearful about the potential dangers of her family's gift; she knows that exercising it could weigh on Naya's heart as she learns too much about strangers.

The novel is also fleshed out with scenes featuring Naya's pleasant local excursions. She stargazes and attends a spring tea event; these experiences deepen her sense of community. She also feels light romantic interest toward a neighborhood boy. Still, many such scenes delay the book's resolution of its central conflict related to the mysterious man's plans. In the end, most of the tension is held off until the second half of the novel, which includes an eruption of unexpected violence that forces Naya to act, in danger-filled forays that are somewhat at odds with the book's otherwise entertaining explorations of magic-tinged, everyday adolescent curiosity and troubles.

In the shimmering coming-of-age novel *Walk the Web Lightly*, a teenager develops a deeper understanding of her heritage and gifts.

KAREN RIGBY (December 11, 2023)

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