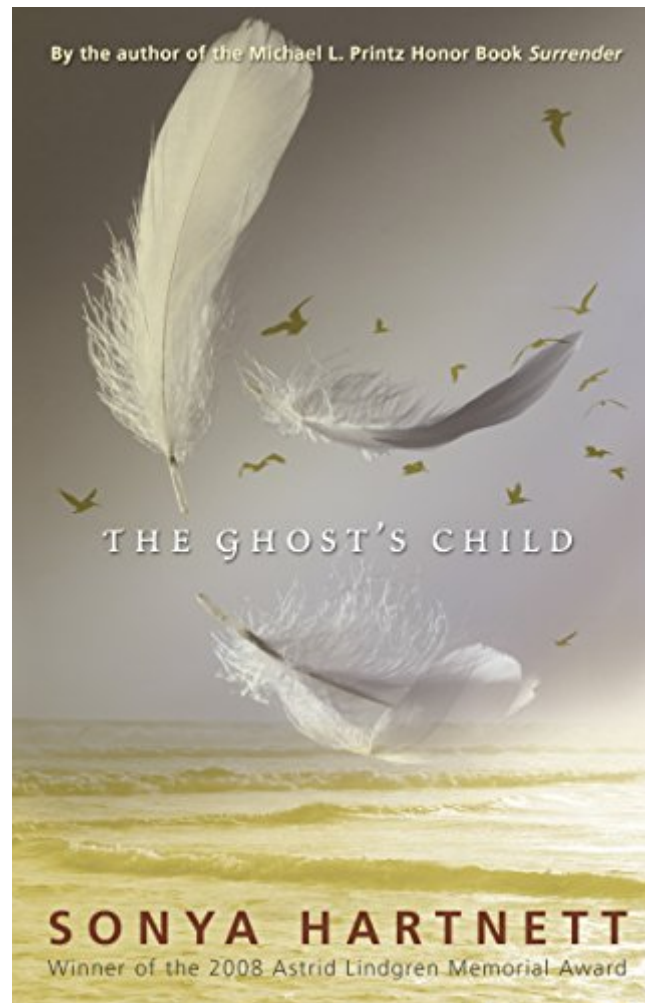




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The Ghost's Child



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Synopsis

"A one-of-a-kind love story...Those who enjoy fables or magical realism will be spellbound by this redemptive story of a search for love, love lost and love (of a sort) found again...exquisite prose."

— Publishers Weekly

Maddy, an old lady now, arrives home one day to find a peculiar boy waiting for her. Over tea, she tells him the story of her life long ago, when she wished for her days to be as romantic and mysterious as a fairy tale. It was then that she fell painfully in love with a free spirit named Feather, who put aside his wild ways to live with her in a little cottage, conceived with her a child never to be born, and disappeared -- leaving an inconsolable Maddy to follow after him on a fantastical journey across the sea. In a beautifully crafted tale, currently shortlisted for a 2008 Commonwealth Writers Prize, Sonya Hartnett masterfully explores the mysteries of the heart, the sustaining power of memory, and the ultimate consolation that comes to souls who live fully and fearlessly.

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Myths & Legends

Customer Reviews

Pristine and peculiar, this book is infused with Sonya Hartnett's style and brought me back to my childhood when I'd drift along in an inner world full of wonder. The surreal elements fit beautifully with the narrative, and there is a hypnotic rhythm to the book. The plot becomes almost secondary as we're carried along this wistful and wonderful tale through the storytelling of the ageing Matilda to her unexpected child-guest.

There are few books that come to me the way in which this book came to me. After reading the book I question more whether I am the fantasy filled Maddy searching for the answers to her questions, or the character Feather who is always looking to escape to his Island of Stillness, away from the troubles and worries of this world. Both of the characters speak to me on so many levels, and I see myself tied to both of them as much as both the sun and the moon are indicated by Maddy to be of importance. I began reading this book with a question, for it came to me in my dreams, so I wondered what this book might tell me about the answers I have sought after. In the dream, a person close to me, who I later discovered could not have children of her own, handed me a slip of paper and said, "I think this is for you." On the piece of paper was written, "Ghost Child." These words surfaced in my consciousness while I slept and upon waking up I Googled the words, which led me to this book. And so I approached this book looking for answers myself, and rather than receiving an answer, which perhaps I have, I received a question: Will you be a Feather, or will you like Maddy turn suffering into joy? Perhaps Feather was true to himself, and there is something to be said in that, but on the other hand one might feel a certain kind of disdain for him, even though I have pondered living a similar life myself. Perhaps many have considered escaping to their little safe haven where nothing could do them harm, and there was nothing. Perhaps many throughout history have pondered, are the troubles of humanity so consequential, or are they really just trivial affairs to be washed away with time? The great majority of humanity considers this life to be of importance, and they are willing to suffer for it, given no other choice but to live or do nothing and die. A small minority though, has no walls, no home, no doors, no shoes, no shirt, and all that we are told to value by society, these people claim has no relevance for them. Maddy thought she could keep Feather locked in the prison of her heart, though as Feather interestingly asserted, there was no prison. He could have left at any time. The fact that he had stayed was a sign of his love. And so Feather and Maddy represent two striking paradigms, which I can relate to. I was spellbound by the parallels between the book, my own life, and my dream. In the book the gift of life and children play a central role. In my dream, the person who handed me the note, herself experienced this loss or inability to have children, which the book indicated is one of the most beautiful things in the world,

and yet is one of the happiest people I have ever met. And myself, I have always looked at such loss in a rather negative way. I always imagined that if I were a soldier who lost his arm or leg, I would just want to give up and die. I have had this thought, and so I was spellbound to find a chapter about this topic that spoke directly to me. And this is the paradox of life that the book showed me (in reference to the soldiers), "She saw men struggling to surface from drowning despair; men who, suffering dreadfully, nevertheless managed to laugh. These men had lost much, but had somehow kept their humor, their goodness, their trust. They had not let anyone take from them these things that were most worth keeping. They made Maddy, sometimes, ashamed of herself." (pg. 158) And I have felt the same feelings when looking upon others less fortunate than myself. People have told me, why are you miserable or sad when you have so much to be happy about. They say, look at the soldiers, look at the disabled, and look at how much you have that they do not. I feel the shame, and at the same time, like Maddy a sense of indignation. Maddy felt shame because she knew the soldiers were worse off than herself, and by definition most people would say to the Maddys of the world, be happy, what do you have to be sad about? For the Maddys though, they seem to struggle with the very concept of life and suffering, and finding true happiness and beauty in life. And I think this leads to one of the key points in the book, "When she could not give sight, she'd tried to give mettle: change your sorrow into joy." (pg.166) I can only hope that I can like Maddy in my own way help others and find ways to make positive changes. I have often imagined that the thing I wanted most, like Feather, was peace and serenity, and perhaps that is why this quote by Zephyrus, the west wind, sticks out, "I like you, you know. You remind me of me, and I really like me. You don't want peace or sameness. You know that life is for going, not for stopping. Maddy asked, "Do I?" The wind said, "You do. But when life goes, it goes fast, Maddy: so be careful. Don't waste your time wanting what you can't have." (pg.152-153) To affect the suffering in the world, it seems there is a cost to pay, and Maddy came to understand it, you have to give up your peace and serenity, or at least come to find it through suffering and loss. You have to be willing to take chances and lose. As a character, I admire her for trying and never giving up. Like her, I see myself as a searcher and a dreamer who finds his way not by compass or map, but by dreams and wind, and I am glad that I read this book. I am certain that it will continue to speak to me in the future. I have discovered some answers to my questions, but as Maddy notes in her old age, "I searched for the answer to a question. I sailed the world trying to find it, and eventually I did. But some answers don't finish a quest - they merely start it." (pg.14) The Zephyrus of my dreams brought me to this book, and perhaps too will you be led to reading it.

Words sparkle like jewels in Sonya Hartnett's lovely little book. I listened to 'The Ghost's Child' as a Bolinda audio book which was beautifully read by Caroline Lee. In spite of the ghost in the title, the book harbors no house haunting apparition. It is a poetic evaluation of a long life with all of its hopes and fears, loves and losses. Some readers may be put off by the writers blend of fantasy and metaphor to tell the tale, and by the imperfections of the characters. I thoroughly enjoyed being carried along by Sonya Hartnett's exquisite prose. The character's choices were not always the right ones, and their love was possibly misplaced. But isn't that the way life tends to go? This book is presented as a young adult novel, but I think it's a book that the right reader can enjoy at any age. Like 'Skellig' by David Almond and 'The Graveyard Book' by Neil Gaiman, 'The Ghost's Child' is an enchanting book to read and read again.

Maddy was an innocent little girl her whole life, and always tried to look at the brighter future ahead. She could not simply chose one thing that was beautiful in the world whenever her Father asked her. She was a child of beauty and wisdom; a girl who always stood up for what she believed in and tried to make things better. On the other hand, Feather - the one she loved- was a confusing character. Although he was always truthful, from the story it could be seen that maybe he cared for himself and his happiness more than others. A young man from the beach who fell in love with the birds and the world, just as Maddy had done herself, but differently. Both Maddy and Feather are from completely different worlds which makes this story a remarkable one to remember. The Ghost's Child, by Sonya Hartnett, is a wonderful tale that dragged me in from the first page. I admire the way how an old woman, like Matilda (Maddy), can recall such a wonderful world and life she had through her years when she grew up. I find this a trait in reality with many old people. I find, just like the book said, your life is short and it will go in a blink, so you should live life with what you have, not what you want. This meaning I grasped from the book was incredible. The descriptions in this story was amazing. I felt quite like I was in Maddy's shoes the whole time I was reading. I was saddened at the end when Matilda was leaving with the boy, but my overall impression was that this book had a flawless ending.

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