



The Boy Who Fell Off the Mayflower

Books Reviewed:

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This first person narrative account is a much longer than normal picture book text wherein young lad, John Howland tells how he left England along with other Pilgrims, and as a servant, sets sail on board the Mayflower for the New World. There they were hoping to find a fresh start and freedom to worship in their own way. 'You will find sir,' he tells the first mate Bob Coppin, 'that we are civil people and we hope to give no offence to God or man. We hope only for a measure of civility in return.'

Little did he realize that he was about to embark upon an adventure of a lifetime as the ship finally leaves port. A few weeks out from Plymouth, John is washed overboard during a wild ocean storm 'Down and down I went into the darkness under the icy waves It was quiet down there, no raging wind or rain like up above' he says.

But by enormous good fortune, he is miraculously saved and what we are shown in a wonderfully scary, almost spectral underwater scene is the boy reaching out for a rope above which, just visible, is the ship's keel. Although John survives the journey, others are less fortunate, dying from fever on board the ship. Once land is finally reached, (not where they'd hoped to end up), the travellers find themselves in an alien environment: harsh winter weather, lack of food, illness and hostility between them and the native people were among the challenges that contributed to the decimation of their number but finally with the coming of spring, things improve. Peace is made and at this point, the idea of Thanksgiving is introduced into the narrative.

The whole thing is masterfully and precisely told in short chapters and with meticulous detail, verbal and visual, transporting readers back into early 17th century England and America with enormous success. Those watercolour and gouache illustrations are both stunning and at times 'take for instance the scene where the newly arrived are watched by the 'native people' from the menacingly shadowy woods' unnerving.

This is artist Lynch's first book as both writer and illustrator; seemingly his voice is as powerful as his illustration.

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