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The Dam

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

With this author, with this illustrator (and with this publisher) you should expect something remarkable, and, if anything, this exceeds expectations. David Almond's spare poetic text opens on a Pinfold scene reminiscent of the brilliant time-bending opening of Almond's **Kit's Wilderness**. A man and a girl walk away from us through the long grass and mist of a moorland dawn. The girl has a fiddle case on her back. It could be then. It could be now. They are going to the valley for the last time: 'The dam was almost done.' And they will stop, and she will play, at each deserted house, to honour the music and the people of the place. Then: 'The dam was sealed. The water rose. This was covered over. This was drowned.' And ? 'The lake is beautiful.'

This is entirely Almond country. Yes, it's his beloved Northeast and the book is dedicated to the wonderful Kathryn Tickell and her husband Mike, but it's not just that. It's that potent mix of the elegiac and the lyrical: in which what we have lost and what we love, what we have been, what we are and what we will be, are dissolved into dreams and visions. And music: 'It flows through all the dams in us. It makes us play. It makes us sing. It makes us dance.' Almond's text makes generous space for Pinfold's illustrations, setting out the theme and stepping back, waiting to see what will be made of it. And Pinfold's not only in harmony, not only in step, he's stepping right up, with his own take on the real and the numinous. We see a flower, blades of grass, in close up. Each empty building emerges from the early shadows into sunlight stony solidity. There is the sweeping immensity of the dam itself: a man-made cliff that, at the book's beginning, blends into its misty surroundings, as if in anticipation of the book's end. The man and the girl move in and out of the times, now in the country fashion just before the closing of the dam, now long ago, now exactly now. The music spills from the fiddle into the empty rooms like the wraiths of the other singers, players and listeners who have gone before and will come after. And, on the last page, old and young dance in silhouette in a ring under the moon, like an image from the end of Ingmar Bergman's **Seventh Seal**. Music, creativity and life go on. I am at that stage of life when downsizing looks inevitable, and some books, perhaps a lot, will have to go. While this is one of my most recent acquisitions, I will keep it and wonder at it for as long as ever is.

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