



Max Kowalski Didn't Mean It

Books Reviewed:

[Max Kowalski Didn't Mean It](#) [1]

Issue:

[238](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Stuart Dyer](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Max Kowalski's story describes perfectly the experience of a young person who simply cannot catch a break. Despite always meaning well and having good intentions, his actions never seem to result in anything other than disaster. But Susie Day's most recent family adventure is not a comedy of errors. It is an emotionally charged story about growing up and taking on family responsibility and many readers, old and young, will be spellbound by it.

After the death of his mother, Max knows that he has to step up and help his dad look after his three younger sisters. His dad, Big Pete, is the family hero, arriving late in the evening with pizza for tea and mysteriously acquiring wads of cash for occasional spending sprees at the seaside. His loving but unconventional approach to parenting illustrates the difficulty with which he is adapting to single parenthood, and it's no surprise when he disappears for a few days, leaving behind a suitcase full of dodgy cash and a few whispered instructions to Max to be the man of the house. Max and his sisters are initially excited about this novel adventure, but then Dad doesn't come back.

At school, Max's choices often land him in lots of trouble. He finds it hard to avoid conflict and never finds time for his homework. With Dad gone, Max is the decision maker for the whole family, and his bad luck continues. His attempts to hold the fort, keeping his sisters fed and happy, while keeping his dad's secrets safe, somehow result in him leading the three young girls to Wales, where an abandoned house, a freezing winter and a mystery dragon turn the story from a tense drama to a high-pace adventure.

Each of the children in the family are strong characters in their own right and, though the story's focus is clearly on Max, throughout, it is clear that his sisters are dealing with loss in their own individual ways, too, be it by accumulating as much stationary as possible, or by writing romantic fiction! Day understands the complex forms that grief takes, and even Big Pete's neglect and abandonment are somewhat understandable, given the powerful emotions of loss that are so carefully and accurately drawn.

In the end, it is the kindness and understanding of others - friends and strangers - that offer Max a way through his labyrinth of problems. When he finally begins talking to people and sharing his feelings, things start to slowly get better.

Max Kowalski Didn't Mean It is a stirring story about the impact of grief and loss, delivered through a narrative that

has tension, excitement and humour. It is a great book to share and discuss with a family member, but its deeply personal themes also make it perfect for independent reading.

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[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/max-kowalski-didnt-mean-it>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/238>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/stuart-dyer>