



[Home](#) > Birdsong

Birdsong

Books Reviewed:

[Birdsong](#) [1]

Issue:

[241](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Carey Fluker Hunt](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Simply narrated in a child's voice and illustrated with luminous, pared-back images that depict her growing friendship with a neighbouring artist, **Birdsong** addresses some big ideas but feels like a quiet hug from someone you love.

Katharena and her mother are leaving their city home for a new life in the country. A long drive takes the two of them to a cold and creaky hilltop house. 'I don't feel like drawing,' says Katharena, looking at the desk in her new room. 'My hands are cold.'

But the house is surrounded by snowdrops and Katharena's sense of dislocation doesn't last. Against a backdrop of the changing seasons and Flett's paintings of the natural world, Katharena and the elderly Agnes develop a touching friendship. They are like-minded: both have a deep connection with nature and enjoy creating art, and age is not an issue until the final pages, as winter sends everyone indoors and Agnes's health begins to fail. By spring, when Agnes can no longer leave her bed, Katharena papers the bedroom walls with drawings to bring the outside in. 'Agnes says it's like a poem for her heart,' says Katharena, in a phrase that could be used to summarise this book. Older readers will sense the coming sadness, but the story is left open for younger readers to reach their own understanding of what is happening.

Julie Flett is an award-winning Cree-Metis author, illustrator and artist who lives in Vancouver. **Birdsong's** cultural and physical setting may be unfamiliar to UK readers - a small number of Cree words occur naturally, and we see coyotes walking along the road. But care has been taken to provide gentle explanations or a visual context, and readers are unlikely to find these elements distracting.

Flett's palette recalls the subtle colours of antique samplers, evoking a sense of timelessness, and her beautifully painted and collaged artwork depicts the beauty of the natural world in all its moods and seasons, from the 'mucky' wet city to a peach-pink country sunset.

Birdsong is a warm and deeply sensitive story with the air of something that has been honed and crafted until it shines. As a celebration of the creative force, our connection to nature and the value of true friendship, it helps children see change and loss in a wider context, and feels utterly authentic.

Source URL (retrieved on *May '20*): <http://ww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/241/childrens-books/reviews/birdsong>

Links:

[1] <http://ww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/birdsong>

[2] <http://ww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/241>

[3] <http://ww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/carey-fluker-hunt>