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# Lalani of the Distant Sea

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A lyrical and richly imagined literary fantasy drawn from Filipino folklore.

Lalani lives in a village on the island of Sangalita with her mother, bullying stepfather and stepbrother under the authoritarian rule of the village elder, the menyoro. Her mother is a village mender of nets and clothes, a skilled but dangerous job. Lalani adores listening to the stories told by her best friend, Veyda's mother - stories about two mountains, one dark and fearful, the other, full of light and goodness. Lalani's village lies under the shadow of the dark mountain, Mount Kahna and the so-called beast of the mountain. Every year the strongest and most able men in the village sail off to look for Mount Isa to bring back some of its vitality and good fortune but no-one has ever returned.

The village is in the grip of a terrible drought so Lalani goes up the mountain in the hope of appeasing the beast even though it is forbidden to venture there. But she is tricked and when heavy rain and then a mudslide buries part of the village Lalani is blamed. She decides to take matters into her own hands, particularly as her mother is now gravely ill. She realises the only way she can hope to save the village is to set sail and look for Mount Isa. Her journey is one of extraordinary courage and she faces much peril and danger in her quest.

Lalani is an intrepid and plucky heroine, literally and figuratively paddling her own canoe. There is much to explore on the theme of kindness and compassion and standing up for what you believe in. The bond of friendship between Lalani and Veyda is central to the story and the magical animals are marvellously inventive. My only gripe is that the frequent stopping of the narrative to explain the magical animals and the background stories is a distraction and fractures the story somewhat. This beautiful tale would be more suitable for confident readers.

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