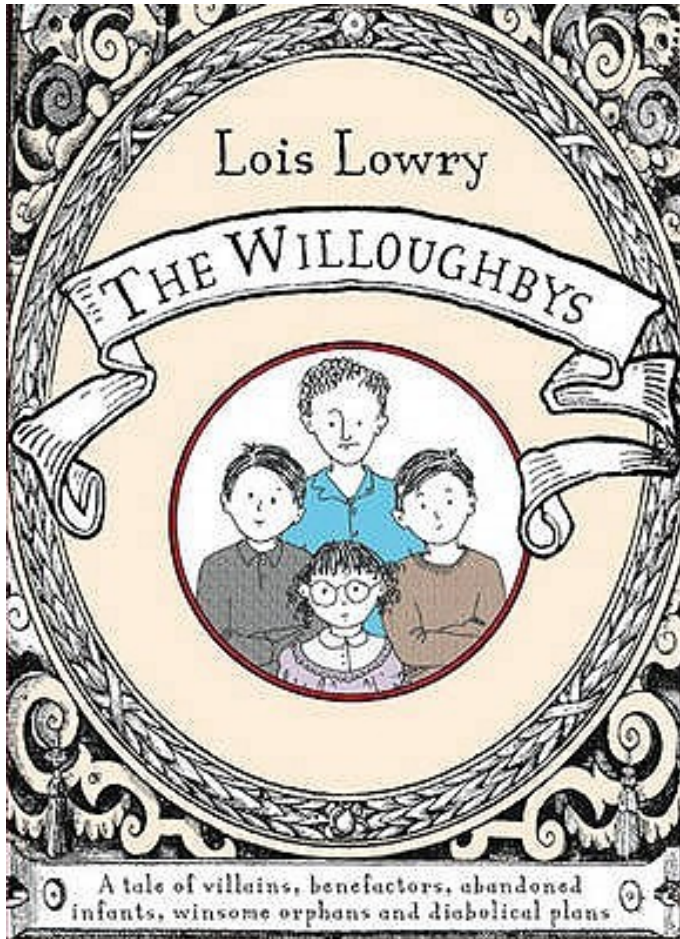

Lois Lowry

The Willoughbys



Title: The Willoughbys

Author: Lois Lowry

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Description

'Shouldn't we be orphans?' one of the Willoughby children suggests one day. The four are, after all, part of an old-fashioned kind of family, and their parents -- well, their parents are not all that one would hope for.

Insightful reviews

Julie: This book seems like it fits neatly into the category with *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. It has an old-fashioned dime novel sort of feel, with tragic events brushed off easily (for the most part; see below) and lots of crazy, crazy happenings that wrap up fairly well at the very end.

Some of the characters are cardboard cutouts, like the parents. This is kind of important because their children are trying to kill them. You're supposed to feel greater sympathy for the children, and the author succeeded with 5 out of the 6 kids present in the book. However, I do not see the point of telling us that the eldest son "has a heart of gold" which he hides, and then making him a COMPLETE AND UTTER JERKWAD (thank you to Shannon Hale for the term jerkwad - it's just so useful!). I mean, he's a total misogynist and tells his little sister she shouldn't bother practicing code because "she's a girl and therefore will never be asked to do anything important." I mean, really? I'm then supposed to maintain sympathy for this kid?

Then there are the seriously weird, awkward moments, like with the statue of Aphrodite (shall we say - I'm trying to remain spoiler-free). Uh, kinda creepy.

The redeeming moments are ones like the sensitive observation that "squalor doesn't have anything to do with money. It happens when people are sad." Moments like this, the Lois Lowry I'm familiar with shone through.

In the end, it's meant to be light-hearted, and it ends in a traditional old-fashioned story sort of way. It just takes a bumpy, kind-of-horrific road to get there.

Oh! I almost forgot to mention that the book uses huge words for a middle-grade novel. Unlike *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, where the big words are explained within the same paragraph, this one has a (fairly entertaining) glossary at the back. The only problem is, I'm not sure how you're supposed to know it's there until you get to the end of the book.

Jackie: As a scholar of 18th and 19th century children's literature, I was immediately drawn to a book purporting to be a parody of "old fashioned" books. But I was unimpressed by Lowry's actual novel. Perhaps because I had in mind a definition of parody that means something beyond just a "funny" imitation; most parodies are written to ridicule or satirize the genre they imitate. Lowry's book doesn't imitate to critique, or to satirize. Or perhaps it is because Lowry's idea of "old fashioned book" is just a broad one, stretching from Dickens and Charlotte Bronte to Roald Dahl, that her "parody" doesn't really hold together. The book seems confused about just what it is making fun of -- mean parents? Sexist children? Improbable events? Latent sexual content? -- and the fact that it ends happily, as do all of the old fashioned books she makes fun

of, seems to belie its parodic nature. Or perhaps it is just because many of the "old fashioned" books she draws upon would not be a part of many contemporary children's reading matter, making the audience for her book more of an adult than a child audience. All in all, I'd take E. Nesbit's THE STORY OF THE TREASURE SEEKERS, or Lemony Snicket's work, over this confused volume...

Betsy: As in all good old-fashioned stories, this one involves the four Willoughby children. There is Tim, the oldest, who is very bossy. Jane is the youngest and has a hard time sticking up for herself. And then there are the twins A and B. The children are essentially good kids, but their parents are the worst sorts. Negligent and wasteful, they concoct a plan to leave on vacation and sell their house while they're gone (hopefully ridding themselves of the children in the meantime). To the young Willoughbys' aid comes a nanny of remarkable talents, a rich but sad benefactor, and a host of odd characters. In the end a happy medium is reached and everyone is happy, though perhaps not in the way you might expect.

When Lemony Snicket referenced works of children's literature from the past in his own books he did so with the express purpose of showing how orphans in dire straits are more appealing when they are miserable than when they are happy. He was eventually able to mold this into larger themes touching on ideas like "What does it mean to be good?" and "To what extent are you culpable when you engage in an evil act, no matter how pure your intentions might be?" "The Willoughbys" does not stretch so far and, in fact, takes an entirely different tactic altogether. I'll admit that for the first twenty or thirty pages of this book I felt that I was reading a slightly skewed Unfortunate Event. Then, all at once, it hit me. This wasn't a Lemony Snicket knock-off! This is a book that reveals the ludicrous nature of any classic work of children's fiction. It plays with the tropes like they were taffy in the hand. Orphaned babies, malevolent parents, sad rich benefactors, it's all here. There are more hearts of gold than you can shake a fist at, but all the while you get the distinct feeling that Lowry is playing with you. She is perfectly aware of what she is doing and whether she intends to or not, she's making a mockery of those current children's novels that purposefully try to invoke the staid seriousness and style of classic literature from the past.

If I were a person prone to predictions, I might say that this is precisely the kind of book that is going to divide people. Some parents are going to enjoy this book tremendously (particularly those that make it to the Glossary at the back). However, there are just as many people out there who are going to take one swift glance at the Willoughby children's heartfelt desire for dead parents and flip out. Kids who cheer on the deaths of their parental units do not always charm the hearts and minds of readers everywhere, I am afraid. Even when the parents deserve it entirely it's still unnerving to hear a sweet six-year-old girl implore, "do let's wish for a helicopter-and-volcano disaster!" It's utterly silly but not everyone will get the joke.

If you stick with this book you're bound to enjoy it. And if children can enjoy the massive hoards of pseudo-Victorian/Gothic novellas currently being churned out then they'll probably get a lot of the jokes in this book. They'll love the boy who doesn't speak German but thinks that he can ("Schlee you later, alligatorplatz!"), and the nanny that disguises herself as an Aphrodite statue

to scare off potential buyers of the Willoughbys' home. It's a great book for kids and adults alike. Perhaps it is not for all takers, but those with a keen sense of humor and a taste for the bizarre will enjoy this winsome tale of the beastly, the diabolical, the irascible, and the unkempt. An auspicious departure.

Stefan Bachmann: This one's in simple terms approximately a hundred and forty pages so through the tip it *might* think a tiny bit fleeting and superficial. I do not believe that is a nasty factor at all, though. It really is great enjoyable to learn and that I loved the black humor and how the various characters are particularly simply terrible and hilarious. I ponder if there will be a sequel. If so, I desire it.

Diana: While I first learn the again of the book, a definite line quite stood out. "Shouldn't we be orphans?" This stunned me and that I was once on how tragic this publication was, became out it wasn't so tragic. The Willoughby kinfolk test reside like they're in an quaint book. The children, Tim, Barnaby A and Barnaby B, and their sister Jane, hate their mom and dad simply because simply, their mom and dad hate them. Truly they hate young children in general, so after they discover a child on their doorstep the kids are ordered to be rid of it whereas their mom and dad ponder a plan to be rid of them. They depart the kid on a neighbor's doorstep. The fogeys choose to lease a nanny to take care of them whereas they move on a "short vacation". The youngsters are disillusioned once they obtain postcards mentioning that the oldsters are alive and good after rafting throughout alligator infested waters, and surviving a helicopter crash right into a volcano. The youngsters quickly locate that their mom and dad have been promoting the home they have been staying in and as soon as it truly is bought they (and Nanny) haven't any the place to go. Nanny ultimately reveals them a spot with an previous Billionaire (who seems to were the neighbor the left the infant with; he named her Ruth,) who had misplaced his spouse and boy years prior to in a avalanche. Nanny marries the outdated guy and so they undertake the kids after researching that their mom and dad iced over to demise mountaineering the alps. They later discover the man's kin continues to be alive while his boy turns up at his door. (His identify is usually Barnaby.) The man's spouse had divorced him and had despatched their son into the realm on his own, and he had determined to discover his father. It used to be a superb book, however it did disappoint me that they have been regularly short of their kin to die. Total though, it was once lovely good.

Jamie: I've been a Lois Lowry fan in view that I used to be a third grader and Mrs. Sanders learn us "All approximately Sam," which nonetheless reigns best as possibly my all time favourite book. I will nonetheless be mindful wishing the ten mins of learn aloud time after recess may final ceaselessly and the sensation the cool Formica less than my palms as I rested my head to shut my eyes and picture it all—The Krupnick's lounge with a stomped pile of broccoli underneath the rug, Sam's pan-tree and later the Victorian gareth that grew to become Anastasia's bedroom. I went directly to love "Number the Stars, The Giver," all of the Caroline and J.P. books and of course, Anastasia's personal sequence (please note, the inscription of "All approximately Sam" says "To Jamie, who's much like Sam." Perfect). I even bought into lesser recognized titles like "Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye," which I learn in heart tuition (when the librarian eventually informed me "you should still problem your self and never learn child books—" that's an important cause I grew as much as turn into a librarian myself—and usually shake my head on the terseness of individuals within the profession. I am getting that it's

usually fitted to those that like solitude and quiet, however the very nature of a librarian is to interact...nicely.) Anyway, now that i've got a child of my own, and he or she is, of course, simply that, a baby, no longer an age acceptable eight year-old, yet oh well, I've been taking her to the Silver Lake library to try books. final month we learn "The whole stories of Winnie-the-Pooh," and after we lower back it and went to select another, I recalled Lois Lowry had a brand new book, "The Willoughby's." child A and that i powered via it in a couple of week. We learn ahead of naptimes and if she will stay up or must wind down a bit, for a bankruptcy sooner than mattress too. And, whereas this wasn't my favourite Lowry book, it's definitely lovely and a enjoyable read. Lowry makes use of "old fashioned" children's books as a platform during this booklet a l. a. "A sequence of unlucky Events," and that i do just like the academic rundown on a few undying classics like "Little Women, Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn" and "The mystery Garden." (The oldest Willoughby tells his sister she must tragically die like Beth for a "proper quaint ending," and the lonely Commander Melenoff is known as a filthy rich father or mother like Archibald Carven). I'm a massive believer in studying through osmosis—I wish my daughter to invite questions like "who's Beth in Little Women," at which element we will be able to pull down my well-worn replica from the bookshelves and provides it a looksee. However, my simply feedback used to be the inability of intimacy in the book. My absolute favourite characteristic of Lowry's paintings is her warm, loving characters. The Krupnick mom and dad are believable—they tease one another, they're amusingly, calmly sarcastic with their childrens or even have attention-grabbing jobs—a professor and a children's publication illustrator. Likewise, Caroline and J.P. have mystery options and feelings. The very formulation of "The Willoughby's" removes this—the publication is narrated within the omniscient and not one of the characters is especially "viewed" through the narrator (although Jane is defined because the considerate person who aspires to be extra assertive, which was once nice). All in all in lacked the heat i like in a Lowry book. It felt a bit forced, like an editor had given her the belief to jot down this new, darkish kind of novel and she'd obliged. possibly hot households are a specific thing of the 80s, yet I overlooked them.

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