



Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



Vaclav and Lena, Haley Tanner
Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, September 26th, 2012.

The notion that things are not always what they appear to be forms the foundation of this week's book about two Russian newcomers to America, who meet when they are five years old. Vaclav is the brave little boy who wants desperately to be a magician – a Master of Illusion – and Lena is the shy reserved little girl who yearns to be the beautiful assistant in Vaclav's magic act. Vaclav lives in a secure loving home with his overly protective "old world" mother, Rasia, while Lena lives in a rundown apartment, neglected by her drug addicted young aunt. Her safety is ensured by Rasia who vows not to let any harm come to her.

Everything changes one day when Rasia must intercede in Lena's young life, when she is nine years old. The outcome is Lena's removal from her aunt's care and her disappearance from Vaclav's life. The middle part of the book fast forwards, as the reader encounters the two main characters living their lives apart as seventeen year olds who have never forgotten the ties that have connected them in their lives. They have moved on, but not beyond the firm belief that they will one day find each other and it is this remarkable reunion that forms the conclusion of the book, where some illusions are finally explained and a last one is staged.

This book will provide the reader with a valuable insight into what it is like to be a new comer in a world where a young individual's intellect is imprisoned behind language barriers. The book is, however, first and foremost a love story, one that is told in a very tender way. It is a coming of age story, too, as we watch two young people who begin their lives feeling alienated and apart, and who come together through the secrets they tell and the promises they keep.

Some people judge a book by its beginning, but I tend to place a lot of value in the way a writer ends a story and this ending does not disappoint. Any doubts or troubling loose ends are all taken care of in the last few chapters in a richly satisfying conclusion and the belief that sometimes truth can be magical wins, in the end.