



# Between Two Seas

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[Caroline Heaton](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

When Marianne leaves England for Skagen in Denmark, she is fulfilling a promise to her dying mother, Esther. All her life she has heard tales of the Scandinavian sailor who wooed her mother and left after a family quarrel. He promised to return, but never did so, leaving Esther and Marianne in thrall to an idealised figure ? a man ignorant of his own daughter?s existence.

Life in the nineteenth century is harsh for an unwed mother, turned out from her prosperous family home, and Esther has earned a perilous living as a seamstress in industrial Grimsby, assisted by Marianne. Taunted by all but one friendly neighbour, 16-year-old Marianne faces a stark future after her mother?s death. If she remains in Grimsby, she can eke out a living on the small savings left to her, but will the Skagen of her mother?s hopes promise more? Skagen on the Jutland peninsula is a spit of land between the ?two seas? of the book?s title, but Marianne is also poised between the seas of her dual heritage and must voyage in more ways than one, before she can realise her destiny.

A challenging sea-passage brings Marianne to Denmark with little more than a letter to the unknown Lars Christensen and her mother?s string of pearls. Once in her father?s country, she faces further trials before she can reach Skagen only to find that her father is apparently dead, while her only remaining relative, her harshly puritanical Uncle, appears to take a dislike to her on sight. Scarred by earlier responses to her illegitimacy in England, Marianne decides initially not to reveal herself to him, but is left with the problem of how to survive in this beautiful region, where livelihoods depend largely on the vagaries of the sea. A kindly townswoman, Anna, offers her a little hope in the form of a meagre living as help in one of the poorer houses, while young Peter Hansen offers the promise of real warmth and tenderness.

This mesmerising story is told in a spare, understated prose, which builds its effects quietly, but surely. In outline, **Between Two Seas** superficially appears to have its lineage in fairytale, but Marianne?s fierce independence and integrity in the face of hardship and ostracism more particularly recall other impoverished classic nineteenth-century heroines making their way in society.

Carving out new fictional territory in the Denmark of the period, the book is infused with the spirit of the wind and sea-scoured landscape it depicts. The narrative rises to poetry in its description of Marianne?s final trek along the coast to Skagen and its depiction of the ever-changing Nordic light, which has attracted a summer community of artists to the town. Marianne?s search not only to establish her identity, but also to realise her own dreams of becoming an artist is

paralleled by the struggles of other characters, sympathetically portrayed.

**Between Two Seas** presents a fresh new voice in teenage fiction, offering a narrative which combines tenderness with rigour ? Marianne?s determination to mould her own destiny will be inspirational for young readers of 14 upwards.

Running Order:

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