



The Island at The End of Everything

Books Reviewed:

[The Island at The End of Everything](#) [1]

Issue:

[226](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Jane Churchill](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This story is set on Culion, an island off The Phillipines coast where a real leper colony existed for many decades. Ami lives with her adored mother Nanay who is 'touched' helping her mother plant special flowers to attract the butterflies she loves in their meagre garden.

Their lives are changed forever by the arrival of a Government official Mr Zamora who decrees that the island must be divided into clean and unclean - sano and leprosa. Sano children are to be taken from their families and sent to an orphanage on the next island in the belief they will be offered a better chance in life. So Ami finds herself ripped from all she knows and packed off on a boat with other children to the neighbouring island Coron along with Mr Zamora and his butterfly collecting paraphernalia as he is also a lepidopterist. Ami takes the smallest boy Kidlat under her wing as he is heartbroken to be leaving his family.

Although the nuns on Culon are kind Mr Zamora rules with a rod of iron. He is horrified by leprosy and avoids coming into contact with the children for fear he might catch the disease. He cruelly denies them letters from home and has a particular dislike for Ami. In Mr Zamora's room are hundreds of butterflies - the children are shocked to find he is chloroforming them to kill them and study them - the evidence pinned to the wall of his hut in rigid rows yet he becomes so animated when talking about them. Ami soon becomes firm friends with a rather lonely girl Mari. When Mari defies Mr Zamora and brings Ami a letter she found addressed to her friend hidden in a box he threatens Mari with the workhouse. The letter carries bad news for Ami as her mother is ill so the children decide their only way back to Culion is to escape. They repair a sunken boat and set off joined at the last minute by Kidlat who had secretly followed them. They manage to reach the island surviving the many dangers along on the way. Although Mari and Kidlat are captured by Mr Zamora who is furious at the children's defiance the kind nun Sister Margaritte creates a diversion to allow Ami some precious time with her terminally ill mother. The story ends ties up loose ends in an epilogue 30 years later.

It took a little while to get into the story but the beautifully written and jewelled prose creates a vivid picture of the prejudices, ignorance and everyday cruelties inflicted on a marginalised community. The bonds of family love and loyalty shine through although at times the emotionally charged story feels a tad over wrought. Butterflies suffuse the book with colour like a rich tapestry giving the impression of surface decoration weaving the story together. The

epilogue doesn't seem to sit quite as easily with the rest of the story however. Fans of [Girl of Ink and Stars](#) [4] will love this.

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[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/jane-churchill>

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