



The Odd Sea

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Frederick Reiken's carefully wrought first novel is at once a story about the loss of a loved one and a meditation on the role of art in reclaiming that which is lost. It also offers a strong hint of spiritual—or at least supra-rational—truth, and it is, in addition, a fine coming-of-age story.

When Ethan Shumway vanishes one day and never returns, each member of the family reacts in a different way. Over the course of the next five years, Ethan's mother has a breakdown and is hospitalized, but his father rediscovers his zest for life by pursuing his dream of building timber-frame houses. Amy, the most practical of the three sisters, quickly accepts that Ethan will not return, and advises her siblings to find him inside their hearts. Ethan's girlfriend at the time of his disappearance, Melissa, memorializes him through her art, as does his artistic mentor, Victoria, the director of a local school for the creative arts.

Thirteen-year-old Philip, the narrator, has the longest trek of all. Philip at first convinces himself that Ethan is alive and he concocts wild theories about his whereabouts. Eventually, he heals himself by keeping a journal (discovering in the process that he can write) and constructing a timber-frame cabin of his own, in which he places his mementos of Ethan. He believes Ethan continues to exist somewhere in the universe, although beyond Philip's ability to know him. On his way to this understanding, Philip goes through the usual adolescent rites of passage, from doing menial summer jobs to being dumped by his first girlfriend. He survives it all with his good sense intact, although at times he seems improbably mature for his age.

Sources for Further Study

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