



Belle Prater's Boy

By Ruth White

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Around 5:00 a.m. on a warm Sunday morning on October 1953, my Aunt Belle left her bed and vanished from the face of the earth.

Everyone in Coal Station, Virginia, has a theory about what happened to Belle Prater, but twelve-year-old Gypsy wants the facts, and when her cousin Woodrow, Aunt Belle's son moves next door, she has her chance. Woodrow isn't as forthcoming as Gypsy hopes, yet he becomes more than just a curiosity to her - during their sixth-grade year she finds that they have enough in common to be best friends. Even so, Gypsy is puzzled by Woodrow's calm acceptance of his mother's disappearance, especially since she herself has never gotten over her father's death. When Woodrow finally reveals that he's been keeping a secret about his mother, Gypsy begins to understand that there are different ways of finding the strength to face the truth, no matter how painful it is.

Belle Prater's Boy is a 1996 Boston Globe - Horn Book Awards Honor Book for Fiction and a 1997 Newbery Honor Book.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

There's a mystery at the heart of this lyrical novel for young adults: what really happened to Belle Prater, the aunt of 12-year-old Gypsy Arbutus Leemaster? When Gypsy's cousin, Belle's son Woodrow, comes to live in tiny Coal Station, Virginia, he sets off a chain of events that precipitates a solution to this enigma, as well as the mystery of Gypsy's own father's death seven years earlier. Ruth White's characters, particularly the cross-eyed, brilliant Woodrow, are sharply drawn, and the small-town life of rural Virginia is wonderfully described.

From Publishers Weekly

Returning to the early '50s, western Virginia setting of *Sweet Creek Holler* and *Weeping Willow*, White serves up a novel so fresh that readers can practically smell the lilacs and the blossoming fruit trees. Gypsy, the 12-year-old narrator, is all excited when her cousin Woodrow moves in with their grandparents next door—Woodrow's mother, married to a coal miner in a remote holler, has disappeared without a trace, and Gypsy hopes that Woodrow will divulge some new clues. Instead, she gets a best friend, someone who, in spite of unwelcome attention for having crossed eyes and being "Belle Prater's boy," charms everyone in school with his good-natured if mischievous wit. Gypsy cannot understand Woodrow's self-possession in the wake of his mother's desertion, but Woodrow, on the other hand, understands Gypsy's pain at her father's long-ago suicide better than Gypsy does. Pitching her narrative in a genial, mountain-folks twang, White creates vivacious, memorable characters whose openheartedness should not be mistaken for naivete. She gives her protagonists the courage to face tragedy and transcend it—and the ability to pass along that gift to the reader. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 6-9?Belle Prater becomes the stuff of local legend in Coal Station, Virginia, when she disappears, leaving everyone mystified. Because his father drinks, Belle's boy, cross-eyed Woodrow, comes to live with his grandparents on the finest residential street in town; and 12-year-old Gypsy, his cousin who lives next door and narrates the story, is glad to get to know him. Like everyone else, she is curious about his mother; but Woodrow will only tell her a fantastic story about a magical place. Nevertheless, the girl comes to admire her cousin for the way he uses his superior intelligence and pleasant personality to adapt to a more affluent life, fend off rude questions about his mother, and handle the local bully. Gypsy seems to lead an idyllic life, but when a schoolmate puts a face on her recurring nightmare, she collapses in the rush of long-repressed sorrow. White paints a vivid picture of small town Appalachia in the 1950s, from the ostracism of a blind "sin eater" to the preening of social "wannabes." Characterization is superb. Gypsy's evolving understanding of her late father's values and her stepfather's virtues is especially well done. White's message?that there is no protection for any of us from pain, only a variety of ways to handle it?is delivered with just right dollops of humor and love. What's important, as Gypsy's grandmother puts it, is to let our true selves shine. A delightful read by a real truth teller.?Cindy Darling Codell, Clark Middle School, Winchester, KY

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Kenney:

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Jason Cook:

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Faye Pearson:

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Frances McKay:

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