

To Come and Go Like Magic

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Twelve-year-old Chili Sue Mahoney has never been outside of her small Appalachian town. Momma says Mercy Hill, Kentucky, is her “true home,” but Chili longs to see the world—to have the freedom to leave and to explore.

So when Miss Matlock is brought in as the 7th grade substitute teacher, Chili and her classmate Willie Bright are thrilled. Everyone knows Miss Matlock has traveled around the globe. Why she’s come back to her childhood home after all this time is a mystery, but Chili and Willie are eager to befriend her despite the rumors. As the three spend time together, Chili learns about the jungles and deserts and cities of the world. But she also discovers that there’s more to Mercy Hill than she thought: beauty, in the people and places she’s known all her life, and secrets, sometimes where they’re least expected.

Told in vignettes and set in 1970s Appalachia, *To Come and Go Like Magic* is a heartwarming and hopeful debut novel about family, friendship, and the meaning of home.

To Come and Go Like Magic Details


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From Reader Review To Come and Go Like Magic for online ebook

Claire says

Chileda Sue Mahoney(Chili to you!) lives in Mercy Hill, Kentucky- coal country, a place where there is the Rich, the Poor (read miners, if they live through their job) and the just makin' it (Chili Sue's family).

The Mahoney's own the last mountain that could be strip mined in the area and they are holding out. They value the land, the community and the legacy of the hills more than the pittance the Rich would give them for the mineral rights. But this book is not about class, it is about Place, Home, Family and the static worldview of Chili's family. You are born in Mercy Hill, you will live, raise your family and die in Mercy Hill. Chili has a curiosity and wanderlust that her mother considers heresy and her father thinks will be consumed by 'life'.

Themes, family, faithfulness, abandonment, duty, and most of all-- shortening expectation to vanquish risk, the trade some make to assure easy success against achievement of something that is a risk; all set in the humid atmosphere of a southern backwater hollow.

Anna says

Though the story itself didn't particularly suck me in, the book gets 4 stars because what Fawcett is trying to do is so important to me. We need more literature that explores the tension between traveling and home, between going off to the big city and loving where you grew up. Chili Sue Mahoney is the type of protagonist I'd like to see more of: girls with big dreams who don't totally reject their roots.

Lauren says

I loved this book- the author's style of writing is beautiful. I've never read a book that's quite like this one: instead of using chapters, this author organizes her writing by ideas and small little passages of writing that just opens up your imagination... There actually wasn't much of a problem/solution situation going on, which is another unique thing about the story. I think that if an author is going to write a book without that situation, they have to be a pretty darn good writer! And this author is. To have a book published strictly on great writing alone is quite the accomplishment. :)

Phoebe says

Set in rural, 1970s Kentucky, and voiced by 12-year-old Chili Sue, whose house used to feel perfectly roomy until things changed suddenly, as they mostly do. Her pregnant, abandoned sister moves back in, and her broken-hearted Uncle Lucius is given the attic. Cousin Lenny arrives after his newly widowed stepmother makes it clear she no longer wants him. Chili Sue makes an unexpected friend in elderly Miss Matlock, who whets her appetite for a larger world and adventures outside her small town. Chili Sue struggles with trying to comprehend the people around her; their motivations and dreams are mysterious and interesting to her. Aside from the annoying chapter titles with ellipses, this is a gentle, rather lyrical read that stands out from the many, many books about the South. Very nice.

Alvera says

Cadence picked this one at the Berea College library. I found the characters interesting and the story a believable enough peek into the variety and culture that is Appalachia. I loved the part of the story of the "welfare" Willie and main character Chileda defying convention to go hang out with rich Miss Matlock and to hear her stories of traveling the world. Chili's love of words and desire to collect them resonated with me. And the tension between home and wanting to see the world away from home was portrayed well. Something felt very unfinished about the end of the story to me, though, like the author never quite got enough into what it might mean to come and go like magic. It felt a little like the story came and went like a sentence without a period; it was almost done, but missing a little something that would wrap it up.

Kim says

From February 2010 SLJ:

As disparate pieces of cloth can be turned into a captivating quilt, Fawcett has arranged carefully-selected fragments of Chili Sue Mahoney's thirteenth year to form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Chili lives with her parents and her older brother Jack in the hills of Kentucky. Within a matter of months, her married and pregnant sister Myra moves back home, orphaned cousin Lenny comes to stay, and old Uncle Lucius takes up residence in the attic. The little house is full to overflowing, and Chili dreams of exotic travel and far-flung adventures. But in 1975, folks don't leave Mercy Hill—while they may disparage their more poverty-ridden neighbors, at least the "welfares" can be trusted more than those citified northerners. Even old Miss Matlock, who left Mercy Hill when she was young and eventually came back, is viewed with suspicion as an "outsider." Chili, however, is thrilled when Miss Matlock is assigned to their seventh grade classroom: finally, she can learn from someone who has seen the world. Miss Matlock's accounts of her travels open up new possibilities for Chili, but as she discovers more about Miss Matlock's early life, she has to question whether her teacher's actions were truly courageous or remarkably self-centered. Chili is a likeable protagonist, and her descriptions of family and friends make them fully-realized characters in their own right. The brief glimpses into seemingly mundane events over the course of a year allow readers to realize how much she has grown in her relationships. Give this appealing novel to readers who enjoy the poignancy and lyricism of Barbara O'Connor or Deborah Wiles.

Rachel says

Twelve year old Chileda (aka Chili) Sue Mahony has always lived in Mercy Hill, Kentucky. She loves living there, but also wants to leave, doesn't want roots. Or at least she thinks she doesn't. When Miss Matlock returns to Mercy Hill and teaches English, she really teaches geography. See, she left for a couple of years to travel the world. Welfare child, Willie Bright, and Chili often go visit Miss Matlock, esp during the summer. They learn together, but Chili has to come to her own judgments about the past, the future, leaving and letting go, or staying. Chili loses her best friends, Ginny and Prissy, but makes new ones. She even gets her first kiss and clears out a plot and plants a garden. She dances with her cousin Lenny, and goes fishing with her Uncle Lu. Everyone she knows, even the annoying boy with a crush on her and her very pregnant Aunt Mimi will teach her something over the course of the summer. And Chili will make decisions and choices

that will impact whether or not she can come and go.

At its core, *To Come and Go Like Magic* is a buildingsroman. The people in this book are carefully crafted and have a lot of wisdom to share. I love the way it's written in vignettes, which make it so much more beautiful. That's really what it is. A beautiful novel. I enjoyed it, because I am so much like Chili. I don't know what I want, but I think I do. I, too, want to come and go like magic. I want to travel the world. I will. I know I will. But I also have roots, and I'm not afraid to settle down in one place. Because in all of us there is a place called home.

Kirby says

On the recommendation from my GoodReads bud, Pam, I ordered *To Come and Go Like Magic*, by Katie Pickard Fawcett. Thank goodness for that recommendation because I never would've picked up this book with its cover that irrationally reminded me of *The Silence of the Lambs* (a movie I've never seen, mind you; the ads were enough to keep me up nights).

Silly me. Haven't I learned by now not to judge books by their covers? In truth: I felt the novel tackled well-worn material -- the story of a young girl's first steps out of girlhood -- and the southern setting, complete with veering on cute quirky names (the main character is Chili Sue Mahoney) also had a slightly familiar feel.

Until I finished the first vignette.

And then I knew I was in the hands of a storyteller with heart, an eye for that exquisitely perfect detail and a deft hand with painting her characters. I **ADORED** my time (much too short!) with Chili and her family -- which is expanding faster than her pregnant sister's belly-- and her friends, even Willie Bright, the "welfare" boy.

Though no one else gets it, Chili has no patience with a future tied to Mercy Hill, Kentucky. When Momma reminds her the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence, Chili replies, "I don't care. . . I want to see what it looks like, see if it feels the same and smells the same someplace else."

Through a twist of fate, Chili gets her wish and in learning about that great big mysterious world out there, she comes to see that life is not as stale and stagnant in Mercy Hill as she once believed. And she discovers that the people she thought she knew best end up being the ones who surprise her the most. This book is like a long tall drink of sweet tea -- and some of the sips taste of the sugar -- like when Chili figures out how to mend a broken friendship -- and some of the sips taste of the bitter brewed tea -- like when Chili finds out that someone she truly admired was far from perfect.

On second thought, maybe that cover is a good one after all. It leaves plenty of room for an award sticker or two!

Renee Wallace says

I cannot recommend this book highly enough, for upper-elementary/tween readers. The dialogue, the pace,

the events, all ring very true, and have the note of authenticity to them. The story takes place in the Appalachia of the seventies, and deals with not only the familiar coming-of-age angst which awaits all tweens, but does it in the unique setting of these eastern mountains of Kentucky. The faithful attention to detail (residents' feelings about VISTA; attitudes toward welfare recipients; matters of class, education, poverty, and wealth) holds the reader's attention, but the main event, to me, seems to be the theme of forgiveness. This one thread ties together the story lines of Myra, the unwed (?) mother; Miss Matlock and her murky past; Willie and his family's story; and even the attitude that will have to be adopted toward the past owners of now-defunct coal mines, and the strip-miners just coming onto the scene. Chili, the protagonist, herself is faced with the ordeal of forgiving someone who destroys something very precious to her.

I love this book, and its gentle handling of so many pre-teen anxiety-ridden situations. The author never flags; my interest never waned. There was no temptation to skip ahead, nor were there unwieldy paragraphs which may discourage the young or reluctant reader. Unjust attitudes are squarely faced, and our heroine, Chili, never stops questioning the why's and wherefore's of those attitudes, and the past events which are shaping her present life. She is believable, and real, and by the last page, I wished I could know how things turned out for her! (Yes, she is a fictitious character!)

I hope we hear more from this author, and soon!

Caren says

Because the author grew up in eastern Kentucky, I have the impression the feelings of Chileda, the protagonist, were feelings the author felt. Even growing up in the "big city" of Louisville (as the book's characters describe it), I remember wishing to fly away and see the world. While so many in her town, including her mother, tell Chili the "grass is not greener", she is enchanted by the stories her substitute teacher tells her. This older woman also grew up in Appalachia, but left to travel extensively. One town resident tells Chileda that when you leave, you become an outsider. This older teacher, having lived away from the town for forty years, has become an outsider. The teacher shares stories of her travels with Chileda and inspires her to "dream big". This book brought back so many memories of being twelve and just beginning to realize life's possibilities. It was a beautiful book.

Candy Wood says

This is the third YA book set in southeastern Kentucky I've read recently, and it's the best of the three. Told through first-person vignettes, it also has a coherent coming-of-age plot, beginning with the arrival of a substitute teacher and leading to the narrator's starting a program that may help her achieve her goal of travel and adventure. The narrator, Chili, is an appealing character who gradually overcomes prejudices she doesn't know she has. She doesn't think of herself as smart (and, in the way of young teenage girls, is unwilling to be seen as a "brain"), but readers see that her curiosity about the world and her love of collecting new words will take her in that direction while her best friends are devoted to cheerleading and happily imagine themselves in the future doing exactly as their mothers do (it's the 1970s). Other characters can also surprise, especially Miss Matlock, cousin Lenny, and Willie Bright "the welfare." Excellent.

Angela says

Reminded me a bit of *The Wonder of Charlie Anne*, with its look at rural, poorer families just trying to get by, though Chili lacks a lot of Charlie's charm and wonder, for lack of a better word.

However, I think Chili's story will speak volumes to anyone who has ever felt they lived in the smallest, boringest town *ever* and wants nothing more than to escape at the first opportunity. As someone who went from the suburbs in Michigan to New York City, I totally understood Chili's desire to go somewhere, anywhere, outside of Appalachia, and was frustrated with many of the adults in Chili's life on her behalf as they tried to dash her dreams.

Found the presentations of class to be interesting, even if not entirely new at this point. Despite being poorer than the average American, Chili, her family, and her community are fiercely proud and resent any attempts to paint them as truly poor. There's also a lot of prejudice towards "the welfares," both by children and adults that was painfully true.

Jenn Estepp says

there are some really lovely lines and moments in this quiet, thoughtful kids book, but overall i think fawcett's ambitions are bigger than her abilities. it seems to be aiming at a sort of polly horvath sort of story, but it doesn't quite work. a of coming-of-age historical novel set in 70s appalachia, which i feel a bit of a personal connection to (not my history, but that of family members) and my relatives were definitely "mountain people" that these characters totally looked down on, so maybe i'm taking it personally.

Daniel Tackett says

“‘I wish I could be like a butterfly,’ I say. ‘I’d like to come and go like magic.’” Chili Sue Mahoney’s words accurately and succinctly describe the driving plot behind this coming-of-age novel. Chili’s life in 1970s Appalachia is suddenly changed with the arrival of her pregnant sister and her deteriorating uncle. A new friendship with a “welfare,” Willie Bright, and a budding relationship with the recently returned Miss Matlock, who is said to have seen the world, help to form Chili’s dreams of leaving Mercy Hill. As she listens to Miss Matlock’s stories, Chili realizes that when she does leave, the town will continue to be home. Katie Fawcett’s debut novel incorporates a series of social issues, such as poverty, lack of education, and pride, that continue to plague the Appalachian region today. In addition, she presents a narrative that is written in a series of short vignettes that the growing teenager can relate to and enjoy.

Bridgett Pennington says

Being from eastern Kentucky and understanding this book makes me love it more! I recommend this for anyone that is country or from Southern states!
