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***The Christmas Rose* by Wendy Blaxland illustrated by Lucy Hennessy**

Publisher: Walker Books

RRP \$27.99

This exquisite picture book offers a child-centred interpretation of the Christmas story with an uplifting, poignant resolution.

The tale is told by the niece of one of the shepherds who sees a bright star over Bethlehem. Madelon's uncle says she is too small to travel with them to follow the star and leaves with his men. But the young girl is determined to go and sets off to walk on her own. The gentle story intimates that Madelon is a lonely young girl, perhaps an orphan.

Finally, Madelon arrives at an inn where she sees a woman cradling a newborn baby. Other visitors have already arrived to pay homage. Lyrical descriptions add atmosphere to the ancient tableau.

“Bridles chimed as the camels folded their legs and the strangers dismounted.... A rich scent drifted from the second stranger's robes.... Mirrors twinkled as the last king bowed....”

Madelon longs to approach the mother and baby but is embarrassed as she doesn't have a gift to give the child. The symbolic finale embodies the warmth of love, kindness, and inclusion.

Evocative oil paintings shimmer with the radiant light of the star and illuminate the night-time scenes. The glowing, muted colours of the heavenly creatures cause the reader to look deeper into the illustrations and wonder if the angels really are there - or is it a trick of the light?

The Christmas Rose is a beautiful hardback publication to share with others, or to give as a gift that will be treasured for many years.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

Author's website:

www.wendyblaxland.com

Illustrator's blog:

<http://artodyssey1.blogspot.co.nz/2013/02/lucy-hennessy.html>

