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# Captain Ming and the Mermaid; Imogen and the Ark

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Reading Mayne is always a challenge. The use of words and the shape of sentences are never quite as you might expect. Little can be taken for granted and certainly not the distinction between reality and fantasy. The heroines of both these stories would perhaps not be old enough to be able to read these books comfortably for themselves. They are both still of an age to see things with idiosyncratic eyes and to colour the everyday world with imagination.

Lucy, in **Captain Ming and the Mermaid**, sets off on a real enough adventure, helping to pilot a paddle-steamer down to Glasgow for repairs. There is plenty of excitement, you might have thought, in visits to the engine room, steering 'the puffer', and riding the big wave into the estuary: but there is the prospect of a more extraordinary event - meeting a mermaid, who may lure Captain Ming to live with her. The tale is so finely balanced between matter-of-fact and magic that the reader is kept guessing about whether the mermaid really will appear, and what can be done if she does.

**Imogen and the Ark** also concerns a voyage. Staying by the sea with her grandparents, Imogen chooses an old wooden ark to buy from the toy shop. During the night, the shop catches fire: the ark, wooden Mr and Mrs Noah and the animals are swept, by the fire hoses, into the drains and out to sea. An amazing tale follows, during which the ark and its inhabitants are shipwrecked, swallowed by a fish, and eventually and miraculously swept back up into the shop, now rebuilt and selling antiques. Here Imogen, who has telepathically kept in touch with the fortunes of Noah's family, reclaims them. This is a wonderful, enchanting story, with echoes not only of the Bible but also of **The Tempest** and **Twelfth Night**. Mr and Mrs Noah, with their resolute faith in their eventual salvation, are funny and touching.

Both stories are well served by their illustrators and will be enjoyed by 7-9 year-olds. **Imogen and the Ark** is something special.

Running Order:

5

**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/captain-ming-and-the-mermaid>
- [2] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/imogen-and-the-ark>
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