



Elske

Cynthia Voigt , Jan Vermeer (Illustrator)

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Two Women

***Elske* -- a girl with no future, until her grandmother's sacrifice saves her from certain death**

***Beriel* -- an imperious princess, determined to claim the kingdom that is her birthright**

Fate brings them together, both exiles, one servant to the other. To Beriel, the mistress, Elske offers steadfast loyalty and courage -- hard to come by in her dangerous quest to regain the throne she has been denied by treachery. To Elske, the handmaiden, Beriel's proud example provides a perhaps even more precious gift -- the strength to find her true self.

Elske Details

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Author : Cynthia Voigt , Jan Vermeer (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Elske for online ebook

JM says

Elske escapes the cruel, savage Wolfer society of her birth, and takes up a position as servant in a merchant town. There she is swept up in the world of a difficult and cold princess who is in desperate need.

I wanted to like this, because I do love Voigt, but ... it's not anything special. It's set in the same world as Jackaroo, On Fortune's Wheel and The Wings of a Falcon, and the protagonist's grandmother, Tamara, seems to have been a character in one of the other books, but I can't remember most of them well enough to know which. I hope she wasn't anybody I cared about, since her backstory here was that she was kidnapped and kept as a slave for the rest of her life by Wolfers. Her story is rape and violence and vengeance, basically.

Elske herself is a survivor and a heroine and so forth, all good things, and everybody around her sees her gentleness and purity and goodness, a sort of halo of honey-warmth. I can't see it, though. She didn't leave much of an impression on me at all. Her mistress, the Princess Beriel, is more interesting, but not any easier to connect to.

Sps says

Yawn. Voigt is skillful, but this book felt like a combination of Redwall-esque obsessions (gowns and tankards of ale, kingdoms and guilds), wannabe girl-power, and a sort of steamy romance novel without the romance. Elske's character was both fearless and humorless, making her flat and unsympathetic. We're told that most of the male characters want to marry her or otherwise install her in their bed, maybe because she doesn't want them back? We're told that she's proud and skillful with babies. Also with killing babies when necessary. Then, we're told over and over again that she's willing to give everything she has and follow Lady Beriel to distant lands because...why?

I was baffled, and found Beriel a brat. Maybe there was some sort of Nietzschean protocol going on here, wherein she who acts haughtiest wins. If Beriel were a man, or if Voigt permitted Elske some overt same-sex attraction, this would be a potboiler complete with blood running hot. Elske's final het marriage didn't convince me. Without believing in this key relationship between mistress and maid, I couldn't sustain interest or willingly suspend disbelief in the rest of the tale.

Heather says

Ugh. Dry, dry, dry.

I found this and read it because I'd remembered liking Jackaroo (the first in the Kingdom books) so much as a kid. But either because my perceptions were a lot different then, or that was just a better book, Elske did not live up to my expectations.

The book does depict a cleverly imagined kingdom, and the various nations and people within peaked my interest. But almost everything else -- Elske, Beriel the future queen, their adventures (or lack thereof), and the brief descriptions of everything around them -- bored me. There just wasn't enough character development to make Elske relatable, or even likeable, and Beriel was far too aloof, in the author's efforts to

make her noble, to be anyone you really felt like cheering for. Even the brief romance seemed thrown in, at the end, as a concession to readers.

Stephanie says

As I was reading this, I felt very detached from the characters, especially Elske, from whose POV the story was being told. I also felt like something in the pacing was off, that too much time was spent on some things (like setting the scene in Trasadad - it takes about 100 pages before we finally get to the main event, her service to Beriel) and not enough on others - for instance, the romances, squeezed in at the end, didn't feel believable at all.

That being said, this book did have a very captivating setting, and I think it was that, more than anything, that compelled me to continue reading. Also it does touch upon some weighty subjects like rape and murder, though those could also have been developed in some more depth.

Nancy Thornton says

Another one I read of my daughter's. Enjoy young reader's selections very much. easy reads and well written.

Katie M. says

Bah. I adore Cynthia Voigt on principle. But this one just didn't do it for me... dark and grim with a weirdly happy ending, it was full of stereotypical "ethnic" clans and mostly unlikeable characters. I couldn't muster up much emotional investment in anyone, not even Elske. Give me *On Fortune's Wheel* any day over this one.

Summer says

Really Elske you are just dull. Yes your earring is enchanting but you're just dull. Maybe in another time, another place. But not today. I'm sorry.

Elske is the story of a girl who grows up in a barbaric wolf man society. She officially belongs to the king and when he dies, she will be sent into his tomb and will be abused by wild men, then burned alive with the dead king's body. It's put in more tactfully in the book but that's basically the deal. Ya I know. Yuck. So her grandmother takes her place as she runs away and she makes a new life in a world where people look at her differently for her honey skin, grey eyes, and over all good looks. It's a society where women fear men and are clearly unsuperior. But then this girl comes along, claiming she's a queen and pregnant. Elske gets caught in her messes and eventually must protect and return this girl to her kingdom and her crown.

Loved the cover but the story lacked a lot. It was a simple tale but it was spread out to thin in a many paged, tightly printed book that took forever to get through. Some of the themes were not of my taste. The book was littered with comments about rape and pregnancy. Abortion is considered and just an over all defiling of motherhood in my opinion, until the girl begins to want to see her child but Elske already swore not to tell

her the whereabouts of the girl. It does go to a good home for you consolation.

Just a dull book. It didn't really arouse any feelings except guilt at reading a book about this stuff. Then there was all this other stuff. It was basically about the vulnerability of a strong girl and I don't really recommend it to any one just because you'll drown in tears of boredom and if people thought they should read it from this review, then I've caused several drownings that I don't want to be accountable for.

Bookwyrmgryl says

SPOILER WARNING!!!

Elske, the main character, appeared very one-dimensional and flat in the beginning. This may have been on purpose, so that later, as she developed emotions in her story life, her character developed depth too. (Oddly this flatness actually reminded me of the original girl with the pearl earring, who seemed very one-dimensional as well in her story, and who was made famous by use of the same Vermeer painting on the front cover of her book.)

I am a big fan of Voigt's Jackaroo, and even though I didn't like the violence in the next two books in the series, I did take a chance on reading this fourth book. It is dark, due to the extreme violence and disregard for human life displayed by the Wolfer culture, but was told in an unemotional way that was plain and matter-of-fact.

This book was interesting enough to keep me reading into the wee hours of the night, eager to find out what would happen next. I liked Beriel's character pretty well, on the surface. She was imperfect, and yet regal. However, much of the storyline around her didn't seem plausible - like marching into Pericol with just Elske at her side. I know it's historic fantasy, but I couldn't buy into all of it.

I also liked Elske, but wished she were more human, and more emotional. Voigt's brevity with her is one of the strengths of the book, but at the same time I wanted Elske to feel more, and I wanted to know what she was feeling. That said, I liked the understated relationship between Elske and Lord Dugal. It reminded me very much of Gwyn & Burl.

One thing I really enjoy about this series are the names of the characters. I think they are well-created, and not too flashy or contrived. When I read them, I wish I had thought them up for some of the characters in my own stories!

One more note - the relationship between Beriel and Elske put me in mind of two young women in *Book of a Thousand Days* by Shannon Hale.

Hannah says

This was one of the first books I read when I "rediscovered" fantasy in high school.

It follows a maid who escapes from the fantasy-Vikings and acts as a fixer and spy for a pregnant princess in fantasy-Netherlands' Season.

It's also a fine example of a fantasy world that handles itself just fine without the addition of magic. See also:

my tendency to pick up books in the middle of a series instead of the start - it still works as a standalone.

It's held up to several rereads, but I'm about due for another.

Sophiemaile_fischersesd.Org says

This book is truly inspirational, and I love it so much. You love fantasy? You like romance? You like danger? Read it, I dare you, and you will never forget it. READ IT!

Sylvia McIvers says

Minor character from previous book grows old and dies among the Wolfers. Her grand-daughter Elske runs away, meets some men, becomes a servant, becomes a better servant, and learns that she has honor.

Also from last page of Previous Book: The baby that was destined to be Earl had a granddaughter, who now has to marry. There are many many plot twists.

Elske and the Granddaughter learn to trust each other, for the most part, and to work around each other's egos.

Fun times.

Finished all four books and realize that there is no religion at all in any of them. Even though "Priests" are mentioned in the Kingdom, there are no ceremonies or rituals.

LauraW says

I didn't realize this was the fourth book in a series, until I came to Goodreads to add it. So, I guess that means that, for the most part, the story stands by itself well enough. There were some references to Jackaroo at the end that rather puzzled me - and now that I know that the first book in the series was called Jackaroo, that makes a bit more sense.

The book drew me in with the character of Elske. Beriel, on the other hand, mostly annoyed me. In some ways, the story reminds me of the books by Tamora Pierce and other historical fantasy books. One of the things that especially intrigues me about books like this is that they are often accompanied by maps of the various lands. For some reason, I really enjoy this.

Maybe, if I ever try to write a story myself, I should start by drawing a map.

Kelli says

I give two stars for the superb use of words and unique writing along with the world building. However, the story lacks heart and more importantly it lacks an ability to make me care about the characters. What

Jackaroo had, this story doesn't. I thought the themes of abortion, poor taste, as well as the many times rape was mentioned as the cultures way of life. I understand that this is a barbaric society, I just don't want to read about it when I care nothing for the motives nor did I think it was necessary to what else was happening. There were times, when I would get a glimmer of a story that I thought the author should have told, especially when writing about The Kingdom's system of government, the description of the Kingdom and city, Volkcaric warriors, and especially Lord Dugald, who I wish I could have read more of. However, this story was never told. So it left me disappointed.

Jamie Dacyczyn says

4.5 stars. This is how you do medieval adventures for teens. The writing style feels authentically historical, but still accessible and easy to devour in an couple of afternoons. Add not one but TWO badass ladies to pass the Bechdel Test and you've got a pretty great little book.

El says

I think this is Voigt's best book. It's like a beautiful fairy tale.

(NOTE: you do not have to read the other Kingdom books to read this - it stands alone)

I've found that some of Voigt's other books tend to drag on and cause me to lose interest in the characters and their challenges. I think her writing can sometimes be a bit too removed when what I really want to know is how the characters feel and what they are thinking. This book is more focused. From cover to cover it is a joy to read. Elske is a captivating character and one of my all-time favorites. She is everything that is easy to love: a determined heroine whose very loyalty, honesty and steady purpose achieve miracles. The writing is beautiful, the plot is solid and the characters are intriguing.

I love that the story focuses on friendship and loyalty while the characters face impossible odds together, and yet their relationships (according to status and situation) remain realistic.

And, of course, the touch of romance at the end is beautifully done. Overall, I think this book is nearly perfect. Five stars!
