



Swan Boy

Nikki Sheehan

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When Johnny moves house and starts a new school he has to deal with a bully who can't leave him alone. But help comes from an unexpected and surprising source and Johnny's growing power soon puts him in a very special place.

A chance encounter with a swan sparks a series of events that result in Johnny playing the lead in a school ballet. His teacher wants him to live the role, and when feathers start sprouting on his chest, Johnny begins to understand his true potential. But will he be strong or brave enough to beat his bullies, take care of his brother, support his mother and find a place for himself among all the chaos that is prevailing in his life.

Swan Boy Details

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From Reader Review Swan Boy for online ebook

Declan Miele-howell says

Swan Boy is eccentric author Nikki Sheehan's latest novel. It depicts a boy, named Johnny, whose father has died. He moves to London, just to find that his new flat isn't anything like what his mum said it would be. At school, nobody likes Johnny; to them, he's just the 'new boy.' One day, on a school trip to Regent's Park, the school bully puts a swan's poo in Johnny's sandwich. Just as the the bully starts laughing at him, a swan comes out of the lake. The swan looks at Johnny, like he's it's master, then attacks the bully.

At school the next day, people start to call Johnny "Swan Boy", because of what had happened the day before. Later on, Johnny gets bullied by the 'populars.' Somehow Johnny ends up in trouble. He has to choose between litter-picking duty and doing a men's version of 'Swan Lake.' In the meantime, Johnny has been growing feathers and turning into a swan!

The main characters in this book are Johnny, who has to leave his old life to start one without his dad; Johnny's little brother, who likes to pretend to be different types of animals, and who wants to find out more about their dad-he also loves drawing. Then there are the 'populars,' the group of bullies who are feared throughout the school. We also have Johnny's mum, a caring woman, who mourns the loss of her husband. Lastly, we have Mrs Cray, the dance teacher/librarian, who helps Johnny through, step by step.

Nikki sheehan has a beautiful sense of imagination, and this book brings out that quality creatively. She's also known for her best-selling novel, 'Who Framed Klaris Cliff.'

Swan Boy will captivate it's readers. I want to thank Nikki, for bringing another brilliant book into the world. Keep them coming!

Review by Declan Miele-Howell

Alex says

I just finished this book and I quite enjoyed it. It's a really sweet book that's all about finding your place and understanding that changing something in your life takes an incredible amount of bravery. It's about how change is most definitely worth it when the change is inspired by being your authentic self, as opposed to self hate and a need to fit in.

I was really impressed with how Nikki Sheehan had managed to take a huge amount of story and emotion and convey it so neatly. I definitely appreciated this book and it's message.

Sidenote: I think swans are a lot cooler now, probably not to the same extent as Johnny though.

Jemima Osborne says

From the cover I imagined the story to have something to do with Swans, a boy and London from the red bus.

I was not wrong.

Swan Boy is about a boy called Johnny who has recently moved from his home with his younger brother and mum after his dad sadly died unexpectedly.

Normally a book with a young child in can be a bit... put off-ish. But Sheehan captured the essence of what being a kid is- pretending to be anything you want! Drawing on tables, being told its your bedtime (when really its like 5 hours away). I adored Mojo (his brother) so so much!!

But anyway, the book begins when Johnny is being bullied by his schools bully Liam when suddenly a Swan comes to his rescue. Now Johnny is a boy whose recently had to support his mum, look after his brother, move schools and do his schoolwork. But rarely in books do things go to plan. And after being humiliated by Johnny and the Swan, Liam is out for revenge. Calling Johnny "Swan Boy" is just the start of many events from an incident in the library to ballet with the big bully himself, Liam!

This book has sparked so many emotions in me, particularly when it comes to child bereavement. Now for me, growing up I've only had a mum (and a pretty fab nana would was just the most amazing woman of all time) but I never had a dad. So I can really see how Mojo and Johnny would struggle without having a figure in their life they should always have had. It's terrifying and sad that suddenly these key things in life that you should have with your dad are no longer going to happen. Sheehan dealt with this topic exceptionally. Particularly how Johnny told Mojo that their dad wasn't ever coming home was told in such a way that children could understand but not in a abrupt or harsh way. It was delicate and well-written.

So was the dragon ride! When I have kids I'll tell them the tubes are multi-coloured dragons. Such a unique way to get a kid on a tube and so much fun too!

Back to the Swan.

After Johnny joins the school ballet production (of which he is given the lead), he starts to become more and more confident, makes friends with Stefan another boy who is bullied by Liam. But then the feathers start sprouting out of his chest, totally feathers normal really.

Joan says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. Thank you OneWorld Publications for the copy.

This book took me by surprise. I don't regularly seek out books about dance and I thought, when I requested for this, that it would be interesting to try and see how it goes. Well, this book is about dance all right, yet it is about *so much more*. This is about bullying, fitting in, finding yourself, and being brave. It is a wonderful piece of literature that will speak to everyone who feels like they don't belong.

The writing flows effortlessly to deliver a story that is partly realistic and partly fantastical. I had to suspend my beliefs for a moment because the swan thing can be a bit creepy, lol. The characters' voices urge the reader to hear them out and empathize with them. I think Johnny is such a strong central character. He was realistic, you can't help but cheer him as you read more about him. Meanwhile, the swan is completely out of this world, and yet it was like a metaphor to rising above your present trouble so you can grow into this beautiful and strong creature that will conquer the world.

Anyway, Swan Boy is definitely recommended to early YA readers who enjoy stories about growing up and facing your demons, with a touch of magical realism.

Lucija The Reader says

I love this book so much. It was a fast read filled with emotions. I think that this book is for everyone, but especially for people who are bullied, feel like they don't fit in and for people who are bullies. This book is very important because it has a very important message. I loved the characters, especially Mojo, he is so adorable. The writing was really nice. I think that this fun, quirky book definitely deserves 5 stars!

Tanya says

A book about learning to be yourself - against the odds.

Johnny has moved, with his mum and younger brother Mojo, to a new part of London following the death of his dad. Settling into a new school, with the extra responsibility of collecting Mojo while mum works, are challenges made harder for Johnny by bully, Liam Clarke. But neither teenager reckoned on the clever intervention of dance teacher Mrs Cray.

Superbly written by second-time novelist Nikki Sheehan, this book explores forging new friendships, the impact of bullies and of losing a parent, with a quirky underlying theme of swans.

Highly recommended – to suit ages 9+.

Kendra says

Swan Boy follows thirteen-year-old Johnny as he starts a new school. Johnny has a lot to deal with — the recent death of his father, a new house, a troublesome little brother he often has to take care of — and doesn't need to be bullied on top of everything else. At the same time, there's something going on in his life that he can't share with anyone; something set in motion by an encounter with a swan.

I love magic realism, and the fantasy elements in *Swan Boy* were some of my favourite scenes. Nikki Sheehan uses those scenes skilfully, illuminating Johnny's response to the real-life issues he's facing without distracting from them. The fantasy elements add a lightness and hope, and I finished *Swan Boy* feeling like I'd been entertained, but had also read something important.

Swan Boy is a story about the various faces of bullying, about the importance of trying to understand why people act the way they do, about being yourself. Highly recommended!

Lucy May says

This book is so good!!!!!!! In this day and age most authors are writing books on real subjects like bullying and the way Nikki Sheehan has portrayed the message that you can beat the bully if you have the courage to spread your wings and fly. Normally, the books i read about bullying are written as if you shouldnt stand up to the bully and let your life become a misery but with *Swan Boy*, Sheehan has told the reader that if they are being bullied like Johnny was they should stand up and have the courage to tell the bully they arent scared any more. I finished this book with a tear in my eye because of the message throughout the book. If you are

looking for an amazing book to read or you are being bullied yourself, pick up this book and smile as we go on Johnny's journey with him!

Danii says

It's only because I'm feeling especially generous that this book is receiving a two-star review.

It may work for 12 year olds, but not for me, unfortunately.

The first thing I noticed was that the story is written in both third-person and past-tense. The story clearly belongs to Johnny and should be narrated by him, but the author uses the third-person point of view as an excuse to randomly switch the focus onto another character for a couple of paragraphs, before switching back to Johnny. This happens a few times throughout the novel and it's really off-putting.

This book is clearly aimed at a younger audience than myself, but reading this as a 20 year old, the language and dialogue was so basic and, in my opinion, not well written, that I was constantly bored and had no motivation to continue reading.

The story was barely held together, and just about everything that happened within the school was completely unbelievable. Yes, kids get bullied, I know that, but there are multiple points in this story where a 13 year old kid is being obviously bullied and harassed by a group of people, and *not one teacher ever notices or cares*, in fact some of them *blatantly ignore it*. To the extent that the bullied child gets in trouble and the bullies get off scot-free. That might happen sometimes, but not *every time*. Also I'm 100% sure a dance teacher can't just pull kids out of lessons for entire days at a time to practice for an impromptu ballet. They are at school to *learn*.

This paragraph is likely to be mostly under a spoiler cut, but honestly this story doesn't know whether it's fantasy or reality, and neither do I. (view spoiler)

There's so much forced reference to:

1. Swans - they're *really* not that relevant to daily life, and
2. Johnny's dead dad - yes, we get it, he's dead. Throughout the whole story, the dad-references feel forced and unbelievable, and the only glimmer of any true emotion we're given is right at the end of the story, with Mojo.

On a related note: what the fuck kind of name is Mojo?

The friendship between Johnny and Stefan also felt rushed and forced; they went from Stefan hating Johnny to best friends within about a chapter, with no real bonding besides "hey we're both kids who get beaten up", which isn't even relevant because that's the reason Stefan dislikes Johnny in the first place.

Nothing within this book felt real.

I would say something about Johnny and Stefan being good role models for kids, teaching them not to be ashamed of themselves - if they want to dance, they can dance! Which would be a nice message, if it was the one the book gave. Except the only reason they continue with the ballet is because they're there under duress, and Johnny doesn't even want to dance - he wants to be a swan. Also they're definitely not good role models, as the book seems to promote fighting your way to popularity, which is just... not good in the slightest.

I went into this book with so much hope for greatness, and came out sad and disappointed. I'd say it might be

better aimed at a younger audience, but with reflection on my last point, maybe not.

Hizatul Akmah says

And he flew.

THIS IS SO AMAZING. i like the family theme, the siblings vibes (esp when johnny being a great brother to mojo) and when the journey where he is becoming himself. OH GOSH. it's beautifully plotted & craved and i liked the author's writing style. i wish everyone would pick this up and have the feels as much as i had :-)

Angelina says

Originally on Fable's Library

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review!

This month is bullying awareness/prevention month, and Swan Boy is the PERFECT read for not only this month, but every month. I really did end up loving this book, so let me break it down!

NOTE: I'm having a hard time reviewing this book because I DID enjoy it that much. I'm going to do my best to explain my thoughts, but I'm sorry if this ends up as a lot of rambling.

-Swan Boy, as the title of this review says, was a roller-coaster of feelings. This book focuses on our main character Johnny, and his move to a new school... I don't want to spoil anything, but the main focus is bullying, change, and what it means to grow up. At least, that's how I interpreted it. Swan Boy is highly impactful, and I really wanted to cry sometimes.

-Nikki Sheehan is a really good writer! I loved how we got into not only Johnny's head, but a few of the other characters too. We were able to get an idea about Johnny's world, and the people around him which I really appreciated because it gives a better sense at what's going on.

-Basically, the big thing about Swan Boy to ME was the fact that it did a great job portraying bullying and the impact it has on people. What Johnny and his friend go through was realistic. Actually, everything about his situation was realistic from his transition to a new school, to him having to deal with his little brother and a recent death. You could feel the emotions on the page, you could see the situation and it was all just handled so well!

-In short, I really think this book should be read. Again, Swan Boy SHOWED what it's like to be bullied.

Serendipity Reviews says

Recently I read that magical realism was coming back into fashion. Well, Nikki Sheehan is most definitely waving the flag for the new phase, with Swan Boy. The magical realism in the story is so subtle and realistic that you question whether it is truly there. It reminded me of *The Girl With Glass Feet* by Ali Shaw. Nikki Sheehan makes magic seem like it is a natural part of every day life.

This book has a Billy Elliot feel to it. As Johnny finds himself dancing in a modern version of Swan Lake, you watch him go from disbelief in himself to completely believing in his abilities. I could easily imagine

Johnny soaring through the sky as he leapt.

There are elements of this story that will stay with me forever. Purely because they are so unusual. I won't give anything away because I don't want to spoil it for you, but you will know when you reach these elements.

The main characters are soulfully written, each burrowing into your heart. Johnny showed such inner strength as he dealt with all the bullying that occurred. Mojo completely stole my heart. His drawings and how they meant so much to him - it was like he was completely opening up his insecurities and worries and laying them out for everyone to see, they just had to open their eyes and look closely to really see. We can only stand as spectators as the family work their way through the five stages of grieving as they deal with the sudden loss of their father.

I loved the inclusion of the swans, real and metaphorically throughout the book. Such a majestic and mystical bird that added strength and determination to Jonny's character.

By the end of the book we see a transformation within Johnny. I honestly believe he becomes the person he is supposed to come. This is a true coming of age tale as Johnny transforms from the boy he once was to the man he will become. Through his decisions and actions he faces the consequences of his choices to really be who he is supposed to be.

This book is beautifully written with a surprising element of quirkiness and smatterings of humour. Truly an original.

Beadyjan says

I don't read many childrens or young adult books but I spotted this up and coming novel and something about the description appealed to me.

Swan boy is obviously going to draw comparison with Billy Elliott with the young lad and dance connection, but Billy Elliott didn't captivate me as much as Young Johnny Emin did. The lovely writing reminds me very much of David Almond David Almond (of Skellig fame)

13 year old Johnny doesn't have an enviable life, his Dad died recently, his Mum moved them to a tower block miles from all his mates, he has to look after his little brother Mojo, whose name I really don't like :(Mogjo's just a little kid, 5 years old and half the time pretending to be a dog, or is he a cat today? He spends his free time drawing elaborately on the kitchen table and Johnny agrees to keep this hidden from Mum as at least it keeps Mojo occupied and helps with him missing his dad too much.

To crown everything, Johnny had to change schools with the home move, and is now the new boy that everyone loves to pick on, at a rather rough school where he can't seem to fit in.

Gosh I loved Johnny, I really wanted to make everything ok for him, but it isn't and it's going from bad to worse. The gang of kids known as the populars have chosen Johnny as their pet project and making his life even more miserable is the little gangs leader Liams ambition. Liams a nasty little bully boy with a few hangers on who aren't any better than he is. But one day as Liam has a massive go at Johnny a rescuer appears in the unlikely appearance of a Swan who scares off Liam and seems to be protecting Johnny. Rather inevitably this marks him out even more and he becomes known as Swan Boy and not in a nice way!

Johnny's not the only kid being bullied, there's the lonely overweight kid Stefan from whom the gang are extorting cash and both he and Johnny end up in the schools strict punishment regime of being made to pick litter after school as reparation for any misdemeanour a hated rule from which there no escaping. Except that this time there is an alternative that is.

The large group of youngsters on litter picking duties, which also includes Liam and his cronies are offered the chance to escape the litter crew by taking part instead in a dance group which quirky drama teacher Mrs Cray has formed. It's Hobsons choice for Johnny, either he picks litter wearing a bright green uniform and become even more noticeable and likely to be bullied, or learn to dance and get picked on for that. But when he reluctantly goes to Mrs Crays class she offers him a starring role in the dance - which just turns out to be ballet and it's based on Swan Lake! Swans become an over riding influence to Johnny and he keeps coming across them in unusual places as he eschews litter picking to learn dancing and even a piece de resistance move which will be almost like flying. Day by day he grows and develops and it really is a coming of age story in this respect.

There are a few slightly intangible elements to the story, although many things fall into place very neatly a couple of things remain inexplicable. The whole story is beautifully told, just the right balance of nastiness and a touch of niceness to counteract it and the everyday alongside the otherworldly. Utterly charming and wonderfully readable I recommend this enchanting book to readers of all ages from 8 to 80.

Stephen Davies says

I read Swan Boy in a couple of sittings and really enjoyed it. The hero Johnny and his five-year old brother Mojo are such likable characters, and their love for each other is awkward and touching. Johnny is doing his best to look after Mojo and his mum and to muddle through at school, where he has become a particular target for school bully Liam. Nikki Sheehan has written Johnny and Liam really well - her characters display all the insecurities, posturing and gruffness of teenage boys, and their potential, too.

Swan Boy contains echoes of About a Boy, The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender, and (of course) Billy Elliot. But ballet is Billy Elliot's natural talent and passion, whereas for Johnny it is initially just a way to avoid litter-picking in detention. We do get a sense early on though that it could become more than that - perhaps even a route to to the freedom and self-confidence that Johnny so desperately needs.

To call Swan Boy a coming of age story is too trite. This is magical realism at its best, with the ordinary and the extraordinary deftly and inseparably interwoven. Watch out for the swan in the lift - so well written!

I wish I had read this book when I was fourteen. I would have taken strange courage from it.

Emma says

REVIEW BY BETH

An intriguing novel which has more than a hint of Billy Elliot about it (but this can never be a bad thing) Sheehan has brought a story similar to Billy's into the 21st century and Johnny Emin and his family are every bit as endearing as that of Melvin Burgess' cast of Elliots. There are many differences between the two novels and it is mainly the ballet element that made me think so much of Billy Elliot, although the way Johnny feels as he dances and the power it gave him also made me think of Burgess' work. Anyway, onto Swan Boy and Sheehan's clever and magical way of giving a grieving teenager a chance to find his way in his new life.

There are plenty of strange and quirky magic moments thrown into Swan Boy which make it stand out from your average contemporary trying-to-fit-in novel. Johnny is struggling in his new school and during his struggle he finds himself feeling more and more of an affinity with swans. As he is relentlessly bullied and 'Swan Boy' becomes a taunt, Johnny feels closer and closer to swans and less and less like the others around him. This comes at a time where the school is also planning to put on a performance of Swan Lake and to avoid litter picking detention, Johnny takes on one of the lead roles.

There is a traditional setup of Populars vs everybody else at school and there is a cast of characters who are impossible not to like, especially Mrs Cray, the dance teacher and another of the bullied pupils, Stefan, who was perhaps my favourite character.

As the novel expands it becomes clear that all of Johnny's family are grieving and as much as he is 'the man of the family' it is a lot to handle for a young teenager and his mum soon realises the same. As well as Johnny and his mum there is his little brother Mojo who exhibits strange behaviour, even for a five-year old, and is obsessed with drawing on the kitchen table, another imaginative and wonderful feature of this novel which comes into its own in a truly bittersweet way as the novel progresses.

I was captivated from page one and needed to know if things would improve for all the characters as they try to adjust to their new life. Sheehan deftly shows us grief at many different points in life, but it's not all sadness, there are plenty of funny moments too.
