



The Trouble Begins

By Linda Himelblau

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Du Nguyen is finally home. Except he's never even met his family. And home is an ocean away from everything he's ever known. Du's mother, father, brother, and two sisters immigrated to California when he was just a baby. Du and his grandmother had to stay behind in the Philippines.

But now, 10 years later, Du has finally joined his family. And the trouble begins. What's so great about this place, anyway? Du wonders. Kids at school call him Doo-doo, and it's hard to muster a good comeback when he can't think of the right words in English.

Only his grandmother understands who Du really is. "You are a dragon," she says. But for Du to feel like a dragon, he must untangle the trouble he finds himself in and call upon the strength he knows he's always carried inside.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 4-8—After fleeing their native Vietnam and spending years in the Philippines recovering from TB, Du Nguyen and his grandmother have come at last to the United States to be reunited with Du's parents and siblings. The 11-year-old's life is filled with adjustments to his new family, school, language, and lifestyle. He finds refuge in a storage shed where he hides a cat and plots mischievous revenge on his spying neighbor. Du is rambunctious, impulsive, and stubborn. He harasses his brother and sisters, torments his neighbor, and frustrates his overworked father. At school, his lack of effort and sullen attitude mask his struggles with self-identity and assimilation. Only his grandmother sees Du as a dragon, lucky, smart, and resourceful. When he salvages parts to rebuild a bike, he is accused of theft. The elderly neighbor comes to his rescue and Du learns valuable lessons about truth, tolerance, and helping others. When his math prowess is revealed to the class, his annoying behavior and hyperactive demeanor begin to improve. Good deeds and positive thinking fuel his emotional growth. Du's voice is energetic, descriptive, and direct. His reflections on refugee life and coming to America are unadorned. His bond with his grandmother is strong. Du's perspective and story may help sensitize readers to the cultural and emotional hurdles facing many immigrant classmates. While his disruptive behavior belies his abilities, in the end he begins to mature, accepting and demonstrating his family's values of respect, hard work, and honesty.—*Gerry Larson, Durham School of the Arts, NC*

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About the Author

Linda Himelblau lives in San Diego with her husband, Irv, and their cat, Daisy. This is her first book for young readers.

From the Hardcover edition.

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A New Home

A bunch of people I don't know pat me on the head, which I hate, and tell me what a lucky boy I am and how happy I must be. I don't feel lucky and I'm not happy. I am shaking even though the sun is shining but when they pull a scratchy blanket over me I push it off because I am suddenly as hot as a lizard lying in the sun. I wish I was a lizard. I could lie down on the ground and not move for hours and sleep and sleep and not talk and I would run if anyone tried to pat me on the head.

My mother is in a hurry to go. "I need to get home before dark," she tells the people. "We must hurry. Good-bye. Good-bye." I wonder what bad thing will happen in the dark. A few minutes ago I saw my mother for the first time since I was a little baby so I stare and stare at her but she just looks like a regular woman to me. Maybe it is because my eyes are blurry and want to close and my ears are ringing so all the talking is blurred too. In the crowd of people that shouted at us in the airport she was the one who leaned down to me and whispered, "I am your mother, Du," so I could barely hear her. She stared at me too until a man who said he is my uncle pushed me toward the car. The American air outside smelled like gasoline. Five lines of cars crept by, starting and stopping, and the car they put me into blocked one of the rows. Car horns honked.

I see how carefully the woman who is my mother helps my grandma into the backseat next to me. We came

together on the plane and my mother has not seen my grandma for all those years either. My grandma is sick but she has been sick for a long time. I am sick from riding on the airplane while days and nights went by outside the little window. Being in America will make my grandma better, everyone says. When she was sick I took care of her. I don't tell them I'm sick in case she needs me to take care of her here.

"Hurry," pleads my mother to the girl who says she is my sister. Thuy or Lin? I don't know which one and no one tells me. She is hugging everyone and saying good-bye too many times. I don't know her either. When she gets in the front seat next to my mother I know she talks too loud. She shouts back at my grandma about food she cooked for her and a room she fixed for her but all my grandma wants to do is sleep. Me too. My loud sister can't see this.

The faces of the uncles and aunts and cousins come close to the window. "Good-bye, good-bye," they yell through the glass. I make sure my grandma is okay. I fold up my jacket to make a pillow for her. Her eyes are closed. As the car jerks away my stomach feels funny and I hear a high pinging noise in my ears that won't stop. I want to see America but when I look out the window my head sways and my stomach is tight like it's tied in a knot. I close my eyes.

"Fasten your seat belt," orders my loud sister. I keep my eyes closed. "You better do what I say, Du!" she says. "You don't know how dangerous it is not to fasten your seat belt." Days ago, on the way to the airport in the Philippines, my grandma and I rode in the back of a rattly truck crowded with people and bags and boxes. The bumpy road made us fly off our seats. I got in fast to get a good place for my grandma near the front but then I had to hang on sitting on the edge of the tailgate. Nobody had a seat belt. I don't do anything.

"Please, Du," says the woman who is my mother. "I am not used to driving a car and especially driving on the freeway. Please fasten Grandmother's too." The seat belts are like on the airplane. I dig behind the seat to find them and fasten my grandma's carefully so I don't wake her up. I don't fasten mine. I'm not scared.

My mother leans forward as she drives. I can see that the knuckles of her hands are white where she holds on to the steering wheel like we would fly away if she let go. She jerks the car one way and then another. My sister grabs a little handle above the door with one hand. Her knuckles are white too. She talks in a shrill excited voice. "Get in the right lane. Put on your turn signal. We have to get on here. We have to go south. Look out, look out." Other cars swerve fast around us. One of the drivers honks. My blurry eyes close. I think that I will learn how to drive. I will drive fast and swerve around all the slow people. I will drive my mother wherever she wants to go.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mark Frey:

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Rita Carter:

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