

Mr Peacock's Possessions by Lydia Syson

5 Stars

What are possessions? Objects? People?

Mr Peacock is one of the many ex-members of the British army to settle in New Zealand after the Maori wars. He is the owner of a rundown and not very profitable hotel. He starts taking a special interest when one of his patrons tells him that there are islands out in the Pacific just waiting to be inhabited and the man mentions a specific one called Monday Island, with soil so fertile he'll be able to grow all types of crops, not just to feed his large family but enough to supply passing ships as well. He seizes this "golden opportunity" without much thought and as a ship is leaving almost immediately, he makes the family pack up their meagre belongings ready to sail off into the Pacific to an unknown, uninhabited overgrown chunk of land.

Mr Peacock has never really been able to settle down and accept a steady job. He has dreams, big dreams to make a name for himself and become famous. His family are not really given a say in the matter, because they know that to disagree with his decisions would only end with dire consequences for the person questioning his authority. This move will be the fourth time in five years that he's grown bored with a project (like owning a hotel) and insists they up-sticks and head off into the next "Peacock Adventure."

The family, father, mother and their six children - two boys, Albert and Billie and four daughters, Ada, Lizzie, Queenie and Gussie - together with all their worldly possessions, are dropped off by the vessel called The Good Intent. Mr Peacock quickly realises that he has taken on yet another project while hiding behind rose-tinted glasses. Unfortunately, stuck out in the Pacific Ocean means that they can't simply jump to the next "big idea." They are going to have to get started to build accommodation and clear land to grow veggies and other crops to sustain them.

Lizzie idolises her father and enthusiastically throws herself into helping him clear the wilderness they find themselves in. She is sure that he will succeed in turning this God-forsaken chunk of land surrounded by sea, into a paradise. Her sister Ada and brother Albert do not share her enthusiasm. Billie and the rest of the children are too young to be of any real opinion or indeed help with the clearing or building their accommodation.

Mr Peacock realises that they cannot do all the work themselves so sends out a message for a team of strong men to join them. The family are therefore pleased when a passing vessel arrives with Kanakas, men from one of the other many Pacific islands. The arrival of these converts to Christianity brings their own set of values and culture to add to the mix of this family.

The story is mainly related by Kalala, a very intelligent man, with quite a bit of education. His brother, Solomona, is a devout Christian who has almost completed his theology

studies, to become a minister. He comes with the hope that he will hold services on Sundays. The other men, too, have strong personalities to add to island's dynamics.

This certainly is one of the most powerful, brilliantly written books and I'm hoping, a wonderful book club read. The storyline is so powerful and so thought provoking. I can see these clubs having very in-depth discussions on everything from the style of writing to the very interesting characters. Lydia Syson managed to hook from the very first line that Kalala writes. I am however, left with the final conundrum; the word Possessions in the title. What are Mr Peacock's Possessions?

Treebeard

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review