



The Mennyms

Sylvia Waugh

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The Mennymys are a family of life sized rag dolls who live in a modest British town. Their forty year long secret threatens to be exposed when a distant relative of their landlord visits from Australia. "Good old-fashioned fantasy at its finest."-Publishers Weekly

The Mennymys Details

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Sally Derby says

If I had my way, the Mennym series would be in every middle school library. I fell in love with the first one, in 1994--so much so that I wrote a fan letter to Sylvia Waugh, the author. I subsequently met her at the Children's Literature New England conference in Cambridge, England, and we have been corresponding ever since. But even had I never met her I would love these books. Each of the Mennym (human-sized rag dolls who have been mysteriously endowed with life) is such a complete, well-rounded person that their world becomes as real as a fictional world can be. Teen-ager Appleby, especially, is not to be missed!

Craig says

I think this book explains postcolonial Britain pretty cogently. Forced to turn back to methods of domestic production, a family of dolls stands in as an allegory for the British who are concerned that their methods of enchantment will fail without their history of empire. Furthermore, the landlord, visiting from the former penal colony (now a post world-war melting pot) threatens to hold the old mother country economically responsible for debts incurred on its former colonies. Where's the line between stodgy old tea parties and brute colonial force? Does a child's imaginary, fertile and untainted, hold the key to stitching a new postcolonial patchwork?

Deb says

CLM introduced me to this series by kindly giving me one of her extra copies, and I adored it. Geo and Holly love it too. There's nothing quite as "just right" as British fantasy for tweeners, is there? 13 year old HP/Narnia fans should like this understated series.

Susan says

The Mennym are a family of dolls who have come to life. The family consists of grandparents, parents, five children, and a friend--and, later, another child. It's a book about family relations and the problems of being a doll--you can't go out in public because of your button eyes or blue skin; you can't eat or drink. I didn't like the way the family members treated each other. They really didn't seem to love each other, and the teenage girl was allowed to be a real brat. But it's a cute little story.

Eddie Watkins says

I recently recommended this book to a friend, a very sensitive friend, a Gilbert & Sullivan listening light poetry reading friend who does not want to deal with anything that makes him squeamish (one of his favorite words, which compels me to carefully poke his sensitive spots during our conversations to see exactly what

he considers "squeamish"). He's always asking what I'm reading, and I say "I'm reading _____ and it's great but it'll make you squeamish. DO NOT GO NEAR IT." I don't even bring up Dennis Cooper with him...

I admit to getting some light kicks from poking his sensitive spots, but I also pride myself on diagnosing my friends' reading deficiencies and prescribing just the right book for what ails them. So a few months ago I suggested he read *The Mennymns*, which is the first of five YA books chronicling the lives of a family of animate rag dolls. I had no doubts it would rock his sensitive skiff and fulfill all his non-squeamish needs. And it did! though he couldn't believe he was reading and actually caring about a family of rag dolls.

Me? I've read all five books in the series twice. I read it the second time after buying a house because I wanted to read it in our new dwelling so that my reading experience would infiltrate the house's atmosphere. Yes, that's a weird notion, but I can't be the only one here who knows what I'm talking about...

The premise? Three generations of rag dolls have lived for forty years in a house owned by a distant landlord. During those forty years they have had no direct contact with the outer world (though one doll has worked for years as a graveyard shift security guard), living in what was essentially domestic bliss; though, as it turns out, some of the younger dolls would beg to differ. But those forty years are not directly covered in the books, rather we meet them in media res as book one opens with the receipt of a letter from the heir of the recently deceased landlord saying that he is traveling to England to see them. This makes them all aflutter and the plot proceeds from there - through five books of vicissitudes and familial problems; through seeming death and reanimation; through sacrificial bonfires (squeamish!); through live rag dolls having to pretend they're inanimate rag dolls; and finally through the purchase of a new house that restores their previous domestic order and social invisibility, and presumably 40+ more years of homely bliss (with inevitable interior dramas).

All five books are fantastic. They are droll and wise and slightly satirical and even delve into metaphysical issues and fundamental notions of what it means to exist, all with the lightest of touches.

Kaille says

I still remember this book, and I haven't owned a copy in almost a decade.

The idea of dolls being alive should be childish and silly, but in reality, it's quite a haunting, dark story. The Mennymns are incredibly human in their worries and lives and conflicts, and I really came to empathize with them. Each family member is distinct and memorable, and I often found myself torn between what I wanted to happen.

Past the second sequel, the series isn't quite as well done, but I still think this is an EXCELLENT series and would recommend it to anyone 10+ who has an appetite for a 'different' kind of story.

Tabea Vanessa says

Such a precious read!! All the memories.... big love!!

Jennifer Laronier says

Who, or what, the Mennyms are is best summed up by a few lines from Chapter Three;

“They were not human you see — at least not in the normal sense of the word. They were not made of flesh and blood. They were just a whole, lovely family of life-sized rag dolls.”

When Kate Penshaw died 40 years ago, the ten dolls she created came to life. Miss Quigly and nine Mennyms were each “born” with their own histories and personalities. Collectively they’re able to tend to all the household needs, but they’re careful not to draw attention to their unusual existence. To appear human, they “pretend” various activities, including sitting down to dinner together though they needn’t ever eat.

Sir Magnus, aka Grandpa Mennym, is quite proper with a respected past. He writes articles, some about his heroics in the military, for academic publications. He manages all his business via post and is able to remain unseen. His wife Tulip takes care of the household finances. Their son Joshua works as a night watchman at a local factory. He disguises himself well and only ever converses with one person, to whom he just appears shy. Joshua’s wife Vinetta makes clothing to be sold in local shops. Orders are placed over the phone and Appleby, one of the couple’s five children, makes the deliveries.

Appleby is fifteen and the exact picture of a difficult teenager. She’s insolent and audacious. She’s also the only one who can pass for human in the outside world, making her fearlessness all the more dangerous. Soobie is the oldest child at sixteen and is very practical. He is the only one who won’t partake in the family’s “pretends.” He’s also made from blue yarn. The twins, Poopie and Wimpie, are around five or six, and are typically imaginative children. Though Googles is a baby and mostly just sleeps, when she is awake she’s quite happy and playful.

Miss Quigly, the poor thing, lives in the hall closet and comes to “visit” every couple of weeks. The Mennyms, with the exception of Soobie, pretend not to notice when she sneaks out of the closet, goes out the side door, around to the front of the house and rings the bell. After visiting with the family for a few hours, Miss Quigley departs through the front door, sneaks back into the house and then into her closet until the next visit.

The Mennyms have lived in the same house since their creation. For forty years they’ve been paying rent to the inheritor of Kate’s estate through a management company. When they receive a letter from Albert Pond, the nephew of the man who owns their house, they fear discovery. Uncle Chesney has passed away; Albert is the Mennym’s new landlord and he wants to pay a visit to meet them. For obvious reasons, this cannot happen.

The family has other pressing issues to deal with. Joshua is laid off and must try to find another job in which he can remain concealed. Appleby is engaging in a secret pretend of her own and Soobie has found an unfinished doll tucked away in the attic. She’s another Mennym and his very own twin!

Waugh is a gifted storyteller and is able to draw readers into the lives of these unlikely protagonists. She’s created characters that are captivating and relatable, and the troubles they face are familiar and real, even if the Mennym’s are not.

Soobie's scared says

I've lost count of how many times I actually read this book, both in Italian and English. It's the first book I've bought second hand because I really wanted to know how it sounded in the original version. It's where I got my nick from.

This book was published in Italy in 1995. I was 11. And I fell head over heel in love with it and with Soobie of course. I love the idea of this life-size dolls who could talk and feel. But I wasn't that fond with the character of Appleby.

Anyway. Love it.

Annelie says

Sylvia Waugh's "The Mennymns" is a fantasy-based novel following the lives of the Mennymns, a family of rag dolls that have come to life. After spending many years of self induced solitude after their creator died, they receive a letter from a mysterious man named Albert Pond, stating that their old land lord has died, and that he will be visiting them around Christmas. The Mennymns are frantic. Will their secret leak out? Can the ignorant Albert Pond be persuaded into not coming? How will this impact their lives from here on out?

The Mennymns family contains nine members, all who are equally featured in this story. The first, and most lethargic, is Sir Magnus. He spends most of his time in bed, creating crossword puzzles for the newspaper as well as frequent articles. The second is Tulip, a talkative, energetic grandmother who deals with all the bills and knitting. The third is Magnus's son, Joshua. Joshua is practical, realistic, and down to earth. His wife, Vinetta, is the fourth. Vinetta loves all the domestic duties that being a mother brings, and also enjoys entertaining Mrs. Quigley, another rag doll created. Soobie is the fifth. Sad, doleful, and blunt, he hates the playing pretend his family enjoys doing, impassively pointing out guilty flaws of the family. Appleby, the sixth, is a teen constantly tasting the bitterness of adolescence. A master of pretend and a collector of stamps, she is Magnus's favorite, being smart, energetic, and, unfortunately, crafty. Poopey and Wimpey, the twins of the family, are the seventh and eighth. Constantly in a life of play, they enjoy childhood and all the mischief that it comes with. Googles, the baby of the family, spends all of her time in the crib, occasionally being picked up by Vinetta for a "diaper change".

And then, of course, is Ms. Quigley. While the Mennymns (besides Soobie) pretend that she lives in near by street, in reality she lives in the hallway cupboard. The Mennymns, while they invite her over a lot, agree that they can't handle her in but small doses, and that she'll never be on the family.

All in all, I think this book showcased betrayal, life, guilt, and misery beautifully. I recommend it to those who have some free time. This book is both captivating and magical, if you see it through.

Kathleen says

This is a great story about a family of "human-size sentient rag dolls" who live in an old house together. Unlike so many books for this age range (probably late elementary/early middle school), there's nothing "edgy" about this book, but, at the same time, the characters aren't milquetoast and the story is surprisingly sophisticated. I read it aloud to my 9-year-old son, and it was quite a hit.

Mara Vettters says

This book was really amazing. I loved all of the depth and levels that are hidden within the story. On one level this is a cute little adventure about a family of living dolls, but at the same time it has a lot to say about being human. I highly recommend this book to anyone, but come prepared to think!

Mary says

I'm not sure where this book has been all my childhood, but I'm glad it's here now. ;)

The Mennymns are Real-not-Real by design, and live their lives under the belief that they are less than human. But I'm not sure I've ever seen a more clear depiction of pure humanity. Props to you, Madam Waugh! The story is an instant classic; an instant essential part of my childhood memories (the ones I was born with... *wink*).

For a story that rarely leaves one house, there are surprisingly many plot layers, many character layers, many emotions and many philosophical symbols to ponder every time I reread. Any good book leaves us looking at our own self; trying to figure Me out.

Now the only question remaining is; why isn't this book out there (and common) like The Borrowers or other magical secret families? I'll have to buy the series because my library doesn't even have them. Poor me, cry me a river at having to buy another book. ;)

Sally says

Dude I LOVED this series! Recommended to me by Emma, I totally ate them all up. :D

blmagm says

A children's fantasy involving a three-generation family of rag dolls who have been created some forty years before. The characters are believable enough, unfortunately, they are just not very endearing or even likable. Instead they are self-centered and for the most part surly with one another. Of course I'm sure I would be snippy too if I had experienced adolescent hormones for that long and could only PRETEND to eat and drink! My favorite part: Soobie, the teen brother ventures out to find his runaway sister, wanders into a

church, and has a heartfelt conversation with God.
