



# The Year the Swallows Came Early

*Kathryn Fitzmaurice*

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## **The Year the Swallows Came Early** Kathryn Fitzmaurice

Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson loves cooking and plans to go to culinary school just as soon as she's old enough. But even Groovy's thoughtfully—planned menus won't fix the things that start to go wrong the year she turns eleven—suddenly, her father is in jail, her best friend's long-absent mother reappears, and the swallows that make their annual migration to her hometown arrive surprisingly early. As Groovy begins to expect the unexpected, she learns about the importance of forgiveness, understands the complex stories of the people around her, and realizes that even an earthquake can't get in the way of a family that needs to come together.

Kathryn Fitzmaurice's lovely debut novel is distinctively Californian in its flavor. Her rich characters and strong sense of place feel both familiar and fresh at first meeting—and worth revisiting, again and again.

## **The Year the Swallows Came Early Details**

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Author : Kathryn Fitzmaurice

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## **From Reader Review The Year the Swallows Came Early for online ebook**

### **Pam Torres says**

I also found her chapter beginnings and endings masterfully executed with quick action right at the start and unsolved questions at the end. Endings are hard, sometimes they linger on too long or stop too abruptly, hers was perfectly timed with the right amount of tension. I especially liked the message of non-judgmental acceptance for others. A keenly difficult concept to convey, yet through her characters and action, the idea lights gently on your shoulder like a warm blanket. See my full review at [soimfifty.blogspot.com](http://soimfifty.blogspot.com) and enter to win a signed copy of the book.

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### **Jeannie says**

This folksy book is enjoyable. Any book that declares hope for children in less than ideal family situations is great, especially when it has strong characters with dreams that they are working towards even at young ages.

Some of the writing drove me crazy (but then that's a short drive).

Books which try for a "folksy" feel often have a hard time with time periods, and this one in particular does. I understand that authors may want the timeless approach, but really can you have, for one example, GPSs and green glass soda bottles in the same time frame?

Some plot twists seemed a bit far-fetched and forced, but it was a quick read with a good message. (Well, except the part about the government vs illegal aliens, but that's a whole different topic of discussion!) I won't recommend purchasing, but worth a library check-out.

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### **Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says**

It's nice to give a book a higher rating than I expected. At first, I thought "Oh, no, another young people's downer!! Divorce, betrayal, abandonment...ugh." When I picked this book up I was hoping for a cosy little family story I could snuggle down into--this definitely isn't that. Somehow, though, I kept reading, and I'm glad I did. The characters all grow and change, and even though some of that might seem a little idealistic, there is a hopeful ending that comes after the main character is at last honest with herself and those around her. I also liked the fact that the Christians in the book are believable human beings, not head cases or fake-smilers. They just are who they are.

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### **Barb Middleton says**

As a sixth grader I remember cooking all sorts of desserts. My best friend and I would make krinkles or cakes and pies from scratch. I didn't realize she was my yellow brick road to cookdom until I started cooking on my own. My brick road crumbled once I went solo. That's why I get a kick out of authors who have

protagonists who love to cook and are good at it like sixth grader Eleanor. She's so good that she starts selling her food at a local restaurant to save up for chef school. But cooking isn't just a passion for Eleanor, it also calms her inside, something she needs desperately as she watches her dad get carted off to jail. Her mom won't tell her what is going on and she turns to cooking to settle down. As the situation unfolds, she's spitting mad at her dad's actions. She turns to her friend, Frankie, whose problems are similar to hers and the two find words of wisdom from the homeless man, Tom.

This story has some inconsistencies in the characters and plot but for the most part has a nice message about forgiving others and learning to have empathy. Frankie has the same emotional arc as Eleanor in a subplot but both are dealing with different situations. Eleanor's family deals with addiction and Frankie deals with abandonment issues. Eleanor's mother doesn't talk to her when the author wants to advance the plot. This is supposed to add tension but it drags out the action and makes the plot forced. There was one part where I guessed what the dad had done so early it was a boring build-up to the big "ah-ha" moment. Unfortunately I've had two relatives steal money a grandparent left to them so it was a predictable plot element for me. I doubt students will catch it.

Eleanor's mom is presented as flaky and caring. The fluctuations of being a responsible and irresponsible parent made for a convincing dysfunctional family, but also a contradictory character. The mom rushing off to give herself a deep conditioning treatment when she doesn't want to talk to Eleanor or keeping her up until midnight is irresponsible, but other times she makes an effort to talk to Eleanor and shows she cares. I didn't find her particularly bright with her superstitious mumbo-jumbo and I didn't think she was respectful to Eleanor (hiding her dad's letters) and to the father when he comes back from jail (she won't cut his hair even though she is a stylist). I thought the parents would get a divorce because of the mom's attitude but she is still going through her emotional arc of forgiveness. I didn't find her all that likable or consistent and the harshness of putting her husband in jail versus having an intervention made me think they were getting a divorce.

Dad is presented as caring and loving at the start, not irresponsible, but he steals money from his daughter. We learn how irresponsible and not too smart he is as the story progresses too. He isn't really presented as a gambler well enough to justify the harsh actions. I also had questions such as can a person be put in jail for spending their child's trust fund? If he's the guardian doesn't that mean he can get at the money? Isn't it legal since his signature is on the deposit box access slip? I wanted more explanation as to why the mom chose this course of action and legally how much he had to steal to be put in jail and how long he'd be in jail. He had just gotten a job and couldn't they have come up with a solution where he sets aside money for Eleanor? He seems reasonable. More importantly, if he has a gambling habit he needs intervention not jail-time. In this story the jail-time supposedly turns him around, but in the real world that isn't going to happen with someone who has a serious gambling problem. And giving the trailer to a homeless guy, Tom? I think this is supposed to show he's kind, but it didn't make sense to me in the plot. I struggled with this part of the plot being authentic.

Marisol didn't come alive for me and I didn't find Frankie's habit of chewing Tums endearing. Many people love this book, but it didn't strike a chord with me. While the themes of friendship and forgiveness amidst a family crisis are worthwhile, I found the execution, "meh." This book did remind me of Polly Horvath's books with characters who love to cook. I would recommend her novels to students who liked this book. I also thought of the book, "Turtle in Paradise," that develops an interesting mother who is unable to take care of herself. This book's mom is not that extreme. I also thought of "Three Times Lucky," because the plot revolves around a restaurant where the characters come and go, but there is no similarity in plot or character development. This is one book you'll have to judge yourself. I know it is one that won't stay with me.

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## Andrea says

Writing is full of lush sensory depictions. Overall plot is unique and engaging (an eleven year old who loves to cook, another one who is an artist!), though not all believable. I liked that Groovy's special talent is cooking and that she has true passion and hope to fulfill her dreams. Same with Marisol and her art. We need hope that our creative lives can be expressed in this world and both of these characters offer that. I just could not believe a mother would have a father arrested for gambling...and a pretty nice father at that. The girls are much stronger characters than the boys. [Is that generally true in real life, too?:] Another one of those books where the kids are more adult than the adults and the most of the adults are unbelievably flakey. Also didn't fit that mother was redeemed by church at the end.

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## Holli says

### SPOILERS

I like this book, but as a survivor of decades of abuse I completely disagree with the ending. I also thought it was a little preachy and the advice given was heavy handed. This is not good for victims as forgiveness is often used to keep a victim in his\her place to receive more abuse. I don't believe the father actually changed or would have if this happened in real life. It is so easy for criminals to ignore a mandate to pay the victim. I know this as I never received one penny of restitution for a wrongful death case.

People often think that forgiveness means reconciliation and won't leave u alone until u do so. Those same people can't handle 1\5 of the abuse I endured. Also, acknowledging that a person is the way "they are" is ACCEPTANCE not forgiveness. U can forgive someone and walk away from them forever. In fact, a person would be downright stupid to go back to the people who failed them hoping for a new result. Obviously this writer has no experience or knowledge of how many times a parent can say they r sorry and then return to their behavior.

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## Eva Mitnick says

It's bad enough that Eleanor Robinson (called "Groovy" by her father and all her friends) has to watch her dad being arrested, but then she learns that her mom is the one who turned him in – for stealing Groovy's \$25,000 inheritance from her grandmother and losing it betting on the wrong horse.

Not only does Groovy's dream of going to culinary school some day start to look unlikely, but she's angry at her feckless father, whom she also can't help missing. Her best friend Frankie is having problems, too – his mom suddenly shows up two years after leaving on what was supposed to be a two-week trip, and Frankie can't bring himself to forgive her.

Just a few characters in Groovy's small California town are highlighted – her beauty-stylist mom, Frankie's stepbrother (and guardian) Luis who runs the Swallow Shop and Ferry, a mysterious street person named Mr. Tom, and a classmate named Marisol, whose ambition matches Groovy's own. The characterization was the least effective part of the book for me – although all characters certainly felt realistic in both action and speech, no one came alive for me or felt particularly fleshed out or intriguing. Well, except that I wouldn't

mind Luis as a son-in-law. Mr. Tom, with his wise and insightful (though out of left field, as befits a mysterious street person) comments, feels a bit forced, but his physical description is vivid.

The easy tone and fluid writing make reading this book a breezy pleasure; the pace pulls readers along at an even clip. Earthquakes and the return of the San Juan Capistrano swallows, both slightly heavy-handed metaphors in the story, effectively evoke Groovy's seaside town. Groovy is a likable girl with a huge amount of energy and drive (something I always find awe-inspiring in any person, as I have to fight off the urge to drift lackadaisically through life) who narrates her story with simplicity, immediacy, and insight.

This is a pleasant read that will appeal to kids who enjoy realistic fiction about friends and family.

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### **Shelby says**

This is such a cute book! I really loved and enjoyed reading it. It was just perfect. I loved all the characters and the writing of it. It did take me a while to read it all. That was because I have been so busy reading my other books, but I finish reading it. I think you all should read it.

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### **Wisteria Leigh says**

Kathryn Fitzmaurice has captured all the flavors of a successful first novel in *The Year the Swallows Came Early*. The year the swallows came early is not the only anomaly that occurs during the year you follow Eleanor Groovy Robinson in this delightful debut novel by Kathryn Fitzmaurice. [return][return]Eleanor Groovy Robinson is an endearing character with a heart as big as sunshine. As the story begins, Groovy is disturbed when her daddy is picked up by Officer Miguel and taken away in the backseat of the police car. What is even more troubling to her, is discovering that her mother is the one who had him arrested. She faces a tough challenge of forgiveness when she learns why her daddy is in jail, and that now her dreams and future plans are in jeopardy. [return][return]Fitzmaurice offers a descriptive prose so precise you feel painted in her background as a voyeur to her story. Groovy's language and character is so genuine, kids will find her naturally appealing and easy to relate to. Groovy's dialogue is further enhanced by the author's use of simile, metaphor and a humorous wit wise beyond the character's age. [return][return]When you look for a great book to read, *The Year the Swallows Came Early* has everything you could want. It offers a picturesque setting on the Pacific coast, offbeat characters with memorable personalities, imagery that evokes an awakening of all senses and an interesting story that captures your attention.[return][return]I highly recommend this book for read aloud, read alone, literature circle or reader's workshop groups.

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### **Josiah says**

2009 was a notable year for debut juvenile novelists: Suzanne LaFleur, Kurtis Scaletta, Nan Marino, Ann Burg and Kate Feiffer are just a few among the exceptional authors who brought forth their initial novel over the course of the year. In my view Kathryn Fitzmaurice belongs right up near the top of that group.

*The Year the Swallows Came Early* is a rhythmically pleasing story, told with great simplicity and warm, well-detailed characters. Groovy Robinson is a girl who lives an interesting life in the culturally diverse

southern California area, and her friends and interests reflect the nature of that life very realistically. We come into the story just as Groovy's life hits a major rough patch, with her father inexplicably being led off to jail and her mother seeming to want to delay explaining to Groovy what happened for as long as possible. Groovy's friend, Frankie, has family drama of his own to deal with. His mother has returned home after a mysterious two-year absence, and he wants nothing to do with her. All is not as it seems in Frankie or Groovy's case, however, and as the story ambles along at its own remarkably comfortable pace we begin to see the full picture for what it truly is.

The real main issue confronting Groovy and Frankie is one of personal forgiveness. It's not about forgiving a person because they're necessarily deserving of absolution, or because one has a strong desire to have them in their lives again. It's more that forgiveness is a key, of sorts, to a door that could never open on its own, and without that key there are parts of one's life that can never be seen. Once you use the key and open that door unexpected and wonderful things can happen, either directly or indirectly, that would have never otherwise been triggered. Forgiveness, at the center of its essence, enriches people.

There are some really nice perceptive thoughts in *The Year the Swallows Came Early*. Groovy's narrative voice is calm and clear, but also expressive of honest emotion, and because of that I was totally comfortable being with her right from the book's beginning. I'll never forget the metaphor of the dandelion that Groovy's father stepped on, not realizing that it was under his foot, and how Groovy felt just like the dandelion, "stepped on" by her father because he didn't pay attention to what he was doing; then, when she later saw a dandelion seed floating through the air, she realized that even though the dandelion itself had been crushed, a piece of it still survived; the seeds had floated away and had the power to renew its life again, but in a place that would be less risky than before, with greater care taken. Groovy realized that people were like this too, and the connection is soul-stirring both for her and the reader.

I certainly am pleased with the first official literary showing from Kathryn Fitzmaurice. *The Year the Swallows Came Early* is a book that shows excellent writing aptitude, and a lot of potential for future greatness from its author. I would give it two and a half stars.

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## **Sarah BT says**

Way back in September, I attended a conference given by the children's division of ALA. HarperCollins was nice enough to pass out a handful of Arc's to all us book hungry librarians and *The Year the Swallows Came Early* was one of them. I stuffed the books in my new "I Can Read" bag (also from the conference-gotta love free stuff!) and carried them home on the plane, only to not really look at the books for awhile. A couple of weeks ago I picked this one up to review for TeensReadToo.com and fell in love.

Reading *The Year The Swallows Came Early* was such a delightful treat! The chapters were short and moved quickly and was such an engaging read. Groovy is a strong and lovable character whose growth throughout the story felt real. I felt like I was learning and growing along with Groovy as things were uncovered around her. Author Kathryn Fitzmaurice's writing is like poetry and her story pulled me in. Even though there was a lot packed into the story, the pacing was perfect and each chapter added a wonderful new layer to Groovy's story.

Even though it's a tween book, I would recommend this one to all readers. I love when I'm surprised by a book and Kathryn Fitzmaurice is definitely an author to watch! This is a wonderful pick for readers looking for something unexpected.

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## Becky says

I love this book. I do. I love the narrator, Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson. I love that she loves to cook. That she is passionate about something and knows what she wants. That she has a way about her--a special way of seeing the world and making those connections that others might miss out on. Her "foodology" for example. I love her vulnerability too. How she has--or had--a simple and idealistic way of seeing the world, but this innocence, this naivety is challenged during the course of the book. Life becomes more complicated for Groovy, that's for sure. But though she may struggle with big issues: anger, disappointment, depression, bitterness--there is always something more for her to hold onto: hope, faith, love, and joy.

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## Jill Williamson says

In Kathryn Fitzmaurice's book *The Year the Swallows Came Early*, eleven-year-old Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson loves cooking. She's writing her own cookbook and plans to attend culinary arts school someday if she can afford it. Even her best friend Frankie's stepbrother, who owns a local store, gives her some secret family recipes to go in her special cookbook.

Things start going wrong when her daddy is arrested as they're walking through town. Since no one will tell Groovy why, she hurries to her momma's salon to find out. Momma is in no hurry to let Groovy in on the details, but when she finally does explain, the truth breaks Groovy's heart. Groovy's sorrow for her daddy evolves into anger and Groovy turns her back on everything that makes her life special: her friends, her family, and her cooking. Nothing matters anymore. But when life brings unexpected surprises, Groovy discovers that there is more to every story. Sure, sometimes people just mess up, but sometimes the situation is out of their control. Either way, Groovy needs to decide if forgiveness is worth the risk.

Having recently read *Because of Winn-Dixie*, this book felt quite similar. Both were in first person and about young girls, so I guess that's why. This book is a great deal longer, but easy to read and entertaining. It's a character-driven novel, as well. No edge-of-your-seat action adventure in this one. I liked Groovy and the way she saw the world. I liked how she thought her mama's obsession with horoscopes were just superstitions and didn't apply her mama's beliefs to her own.

I still don't know why her father was in jail. From what I can figure out, what he did was low and selfish, but completely within his rights as Groovy's father. I wish the author would have given me a little bit more there to help with the realism of Groovy's dad's sentencing, because it didn't make any sense to me.

My favorite part in the book is when Groovy shows her chocolate-covered strawberries to Marisol, a girl she thought was a bit snobby about her artistic talents. But since Marisol had shared about her love of drawing, Groovy took a chance to reveal a bit of her heart—her love of cooking—and in doing so, Groovy found a great friend. Sometimes friendship is a risk, but isn't it always a risk worth taking? And if that's true, isn't forgiveness a risk worth taking, as well?

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## **Estee Hull says**

This was a great book and an easy read. I picked it randomly off my bookshelf and was in for quite a surprise. This book is about a girl who's life gets turned upside down, and she finds her way through all that upside down-ness. This book was a great lesson in living your life when even the things that we can count on disappear. Great read for fifth graders up, I think even adults would even like this one.

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## **untitled says**

the characters are believable, the seaside setting is absolutely charming, and Eleanor's tenacity to make things right in the end wraps the story up very nicely. in short, the book is a slice-of-life depiction of the little struggles faced by people from all walks of life in a tiny coastal town. one of my favourites for sure.

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