



The Picts & the Martyrs (Swallows & Amazons)

Arthur Ransome

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Jibbooms and bobstays! Those two Blackett sisters are back at it again, and Nancy is right there in the thick of it. Their mother (doubtless suffering from exhaustion) has gone off sailing in the North Sea with Captain Flint on a rest cure, but she has allowed her two daughters to stay a fortnight at Beckfoot on the lakeshore with their trusty cook. She's also permitted their two old friends, Dick and Dorothea Callum, to come up for a visit. But when their redoubtable Great Aunt (aka G. A.) hears of their abandonment, she's horrified and off on the next train. The Amazons are dismayed; not only will their solo holiday be ruined but now they'll have to hide their two guests in the woods in an abandoned shepherd's cottage (where they'll be forced to live off the land like savages, ergo "The Picts") while they'll be required to dress up in white pinafores, practice the pianoforte, and recite reams of parlor poetry aloud (ergo "The Martyrs"). Not much stretch here; no one dares trifle with the G.A.

As usual with Ransome, the fun is gentle, the action nonstop, and the instructions on everything from tickling trout to setting anchors are precise and informed. Even the formidable maiden aunt proves to have virtues, not the least of which is her ability to say she's sorry.

This is the eleventh title in a beloved series that have endeared themselves to three generations of readers, books as credible today as when Ransome penned them on the shores of his beloved Lake District in the 1930s.

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