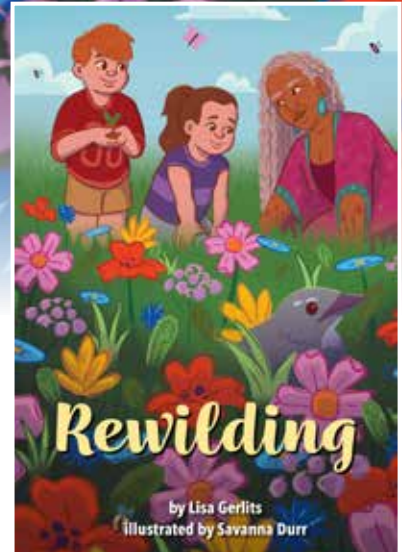


FALL 2025

Rewilding

by Lisa Gerlits
illustrated by Savanna Durr



Joy, an eleven-year-old often called “Bruiser” by her Dad, isn’t as tough as she appears. With her Dad gone and her Mom falling into depression, the responsibility of managing the household and caring for her younger brother Ian falls on her small shoulders. She struggles with the reality of wearing old clothes that no longer fit and constantly dealing with Ian’s hunger. Joy lives in fear that the school counselor might contact Child Protective Services due to their situation. One day, a baby bird falls from its nest, reminding Joy of her Dad’s warning, “You don’t know your own strength.” Desperate for help, Joy strikes a deal with their quirky neighbor Ezzie, known as the “Ark Lady.” Through this new relationship, Joy, Ian, and her friend embark on a journey to restore the garden. In the process, they discover the concept of “rewilding,” which brings unexpected beauty and healing. This experience leads Joy to question her father’s views, opening her eyes to new possibilities and strengths within herself.

Comps Include: *The Secret Language of Birds* by Lynne Kelly
How You Grow Wings by Rimma Onoseta



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lisa Gerlits is an award-winning author, muralist, and children’s art teacher. Her debut novel, *A MANY FEATHERED THING* (Capstone 2020), won the Oregon Spirit Book Award and was a Bank Street College of Education pick. She lives with her husband and three kids in Silverton, Oregon.

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"Ian Michael Holderman," Dad's voice thunders behind me.

Ian screams, climbs to the top step, and to my horror, tips sideways. The ladder stays where it is, but my brother falls through the ivy, through twiggy branches, and onto the ground with a thump.

He lays there, on his side, motionless. My breath is stuck. It won't go in or out. I'm holding the ladder in a death grip as Dad passes me and kneels next to Ian. I hear Mom and Simone running and calling behind me, but I can't move.

"Ian," says Dad. "Squirt."

And then it comes—Ian's scream. Long and loud



245

At her feet lies the flat moon of a drum. I knew it! I did hear a drumbeat.

Her gravelly voice cuts through the silence. "You're either an elephant or a nosy neighbor. No native animal makes that much noise." One eye springs open and zeroes in on me.

I freeze, suddenly sticky with sweat. My too-tight shirt feels even tighter. She drops her arms and turns both eyes on me now, but doesn't say anything, just studies me. I expect scolding or questioning at least. That's what most adults would do. After an awkward silence I decide that truth is best. "I guess I'm a nosy neighbor, then."

"Ha!" She picks up the drum and stick, strides

over to the back of the house where there's a leafy-roofed patio, and sets them on a mosaic table.

I stay put.

"Bet your parents complain about my yard. Weeds too high for them?"

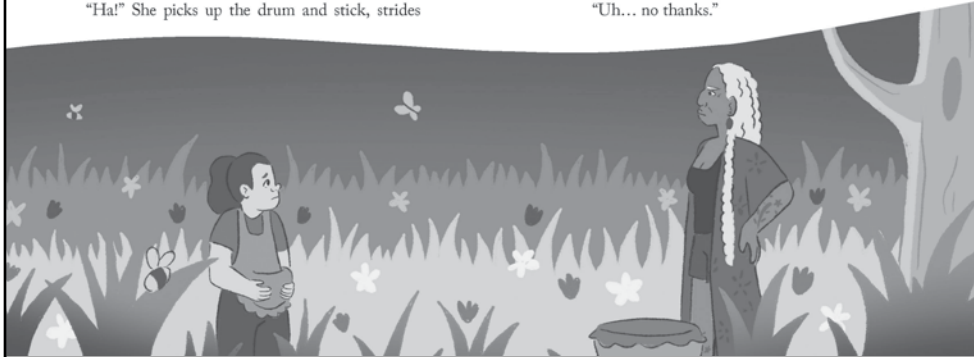
"No."

"Well, you tell them I get ten inches. The city says I get ten inches." She advances on me and waggles a finger in my face.

"Okay." I have no idea what she's talking about.

"I've been through it with the other neighbors. You can come out here with your ruler and measure if you want."

"Uh... no thanks."



"As bright and tender as a garden in Spring, *REWILDING* gently weaves a story that is both personal and global.

—**Cindy Baldwin, author of *Where the Watermelons Grow***

"To see young Joy handling the fallout of her parent's divorce is both heart wrenching and inspiring... all while revelling in a sense of childhood fun and wonder. I love its honesty, its sensitivity and most of all its very real path to peace and acceptance."

—**Kengo Kurimoto, award-winning author of *Wildful***

"A tween girl feels she must protect her household when her parents' split throws the family into disarray in Gerlit's middle grade novel.... This uplifting story tackles domestic troubles with consideration and a whole lot of heart."

—**Kirkus**

"A lovely story of friendship, healing, and finding your voice with characters you'll think about long after you finish the last chapter."

—**Heather Murphy Capps, author of *Indigo* and *Ida and The Rule of Three***

"A tender story about family, healing, and the power of rediscovering childhood...an honest conversation about family, love, and growing up."

—**Independent Book Review**