



Joseph's Cradle

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This gentle, charming book, set in South Africa, is a lovely evocation of life in a small village and the importance of traditions. There is a large, old tree in the middle of the village, much loved by the inhabitants. The children climb it, the elders gather under it, and it is the centre of life. One day, the boy Joseph climbs it and feels he has reached the sky. But when he is an adult and married, a storm comes along and blows the tree down. The villagers are dismayed, but luckily, Joseph has planted seeds from the tree and produces a young sapling to replace it. He also takes a part of the trunk from the fallen tree and makes a beautiful cradle out of it for his and his wife's first born, Sisi. When the baby grows out of it, the cradle is passed from person to person in the village, and all the new babies' names are carved into the side. Sisi grows up and has children of her own, and they all use the cradle, but when her children are grown and are expecting their own babies, a terrible thing happens. A fire sweeps through part of the village, and Joseph's house is burned. Where is the cradle? Has it survived the fire? The story is based on a real one, one that happened in Australia, and makes a lovely story in this setting too. The illustrations are delicate and detailed, with tiny glimpses of the insides of the thatched homes and depictions of animals and people. There's much to talk about here, and the vivid picture of a culture so different from our own is a treat in itself.

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