

The Watching Lake

Elaine Forrestal

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The story

Bryn and his family have just moved to a new house by the lake. The area is beautiful, teeming with wildlife. But soon there are scars on the landscape where the houses are being built — bulldozers tear at the earth, the sound of machinery rends the air. Once again the Min Min stirs ... And this time, it has chosen Bryn.

About the author

Elaine Forrestal is an award-winning author of fiction titles for young readers. She has been writing stories and poems since she was in primary school. Born in Perth, Western Australia, Elaine grew up in small wheatbelt towns. After travelling the world and teaching for many years she now lives in Scarborough with her husband, Peter, and their beagle, Fling. She has two daughters.



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Before reading

1. Predict what the story might be about by looking at the front cover only.
2. Now look at the back cover. Does this confirm any of your suggestions? Which ones?
3. Read the blurb about the author in the back of the book.
4. Find the quote from 'The Min Min Light' by Joy McKean and Slim Dusty in the front of the book. The ballad tells a different story from the one Elaine Forrestal has written.

A lot of the songs Slim Dusty is famous for were co-written by his wife Joy McKean. Here is the whole song:

Have you ever heard the story of the Queensland Min Min Light,
Heard the old folks tell in whispers how it beckons thru' the night:
How your horse will rear in terror, and your dog will howl in fright,
For there's somethin' mighty eerie in that dancin' Min Min Light.

There's a couple living westward on a lonely station camp,
Each night they keep their vigil by the glimmer of a lamp;
They keep their watch together till they see it glowing bright,
And they sometimes rise and follow that misty Min Min Light.

Years ago they had a youngster, the laughter of their life,
Always he would ask them to see that pretty light;
One night when all were sleeping, the lad awoke and so,
Looking out the window he saw that Min Min glow.

It seemed that he could touch it and it moved off far ahead,
He ran and laughed behind it, and followed where it led;
Across the darkened ridges far into the night
The lad was lost forever to that cruel Min Min Light.

His resting place is hidden, his parents hope and pray
Some night that ghostly light may come and show to them the way;
But it quivers and it dances through the cold and lonely night
But forever keeps its secret, that cruel Min Min Light.

Now I've told to you the story of the Queensland Min Min Light,
How the old folks tell in whispers how it beckons thru' the night;
And your horse will rear in terror, and your dog will howl in fright,
And there's somethin' mighty eerie in that dancin' Min Min Light.

After reading

1. Write a story or poem of your own based on a ghostly experience.
2. Write a description of:
 - Welsh Morgan's house
 - Bryn and Chad's house
 - The Cubby House
3. Draw an aerial (bird's-eye-view) map of the lake showing all the houses, the stables, the horse yards and Welsh Morgan's vegetable garden and chook pen.
4. Why did the Min Min come out of the lake after staying hidden for so many years?
5. Discuss the positive and negative effects of the spread of our modern cities on:
 - our environment
 - our family life
 - our society as a whole

6. If you could trade places with any one of the characters from *The Watching Lake*, which one would it be? Why?

Extension Activities

1. Visit the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre or the last remaining market garden on Pearson Street, Woodlands, or the Equestrian Centre on Jon Sanders Drive, Osborne Park. (These are all situated around Herdsman Lake, on which the novel is set.)
2. Read *The Min-Min* by Mavis Thorpe Clark.

