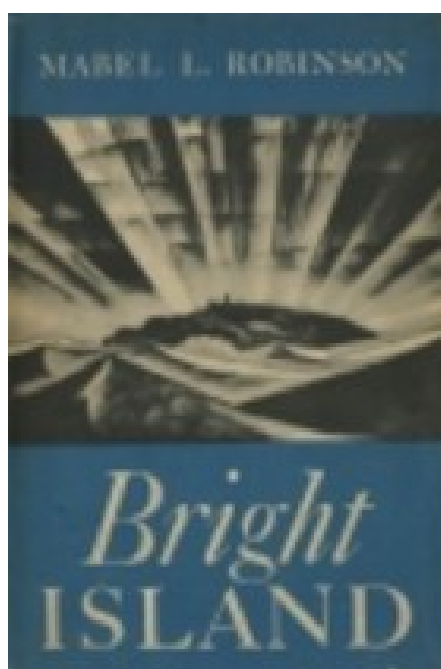




Bright Island

Mabel Louise Robinson , Lynd Ward (Illustrations)

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Born and raised on Bright Island off the Maine coast, Thankful Curtis is more like her sea captain grandfather than any of her older brothers are. Nothing suits her better than sailing and helping her father with the farm. But when her dreaded sisters-in-law suggest that Thankful get some proper schooling on the mainland, the wind is knocked from her sails.

Thankful finds the uncharted waters of school difficult to navigate: there's a rocky reception from her rich roommate, Selina; the breezy behavior of the charming Robert; and stormy Mr. Fletcher, the handsome Latin teacher whose caustic tongue masks a tender heart. And while Thankful works hard to make the best of her new life, Bright Island continues to flash in her thoughts, like the sparkle of the sun on the water.

Mabel Robinson's delightful coming-of-age story won a Newbery Honor in 1938 and garnered extraordinary praise from critics and readers alike. *The New York Times* raved, "One would be hard put to it to find a better contemporary novel than this," and now this evocative tale can be welcomed by a new generation of readers.

Bright Island Details

Date : Published March 28th 1965 by Random House Children's Books (first published 1937)

ISBN : 9780394909868

Author : Mabel Louise Robinson , Lynd Ward (Illustrations)

Format : Hardcover 268 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Realistic Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review Bright Island for online ebook

Jill says

Didn't have high hopes for this 1938 Newbery Honor about a remote island off the coast of Maine even after I was a few chapters deep. Maritime-themed books seldom hold my interest. And on top of that, it seems the earlier I get on the honor roll the less enjoyable the book. But I was wrong. The tomboy-ish main character, Thankful, is likeable. It is a coming of age Cinderella story of a girl who goes from being home-schooled to an elite, well-to-do boarding school where she is at first ridiculed for her simple, unfashionable clothing. But the other characters misjudge her—turns out the simpleton islander is more advanced academically than her peers. Good for her. I find it so interesting with the rise in popularity of homeschooling to look back in time to a book written in the 1930s, to consider the author's viewpoint and experience.

"The weeks seemed to her like waves at sea, each one like the other, rolling up and flattening out, leaving no record behind."

After a difficult first day at the boarding school: "Her first deep sleep broken, that path of escape was closed. She must lie in this airless black space with only the realization of how inevitably it must go on—and on—and on. Its very limitless expanse dazed her imagination into sleep again. The first day was over."

"Her anxious absorption at the beginning had set her apart, and now she found herself still outside watching all these young people who had no awareness of her. She had thought she could find out how not to be a shadow, but now she was not sure that a shadow could ever become substance."

"Thankful was conscious then of sound. The air, the earth, the sea, were filled with it, like herself, and as unaware of it as she was. A great tuning fork, it set them all to singing together."

Claire says

Loved this simple but luminous 1938 Newbery Honor book. A few favorite quotes:

"This was the most peaceful spot that she had found. The tide flowed back over bare and thirsty spaces. She felt refreshed in the vigor of her own thoughts."

"[Her mother] opened Thankful's door softly, and with competent hands covered her until only the cloudy head buried in the pillows was visible. Then she left her in the quiet room with the sound of Jed's motor going across the water, fainter and fainter. It was Mary Curtis's belief that a lass must do her growing alone."

"When Thankful woke the next morning she felt as if she had been out in a storm which had left her battered but had washed her clean."

Steve Ward says

This is a well written book that was quite enjoyable to read. The author's descriptive writing is the strength of this book along with her excellent character development. I'd recommend this book to any reader over 8

years old.

Erin says

I loved the beauty and feel of this book. It reminded me of the way it feels to read stories like *The Penderwicks*, *The Boxcar Children*, *The Happy Hollisters*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Little Women*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Anne of Green Gables* and such. Written over 75 years ago it still has a timeless feel to it especially as a coming of age story. The descriptions of the island and the sea were so beautiful that you imagined them to be 2 more characters in the story.

I was thinking about the characters in the story and wondering what life had in store for them and if there was a sequel. But then realizing that it was written in 1938, the next book most likely would've taken place during WWII and would've been difficult and sad with innocence lost. Rather than reading about that I decided it's best to leave them frozen in time in 1938 and enjoy the beauty of the story for what it is.

Peggy says

This is just the kind of old-fashioned book I love, very reminiscent of *A Girl of the Limberlost*. Thankful's understanding but no-nonsense mother also reminds me of Velvet's mother in *National Velvet*. And there are some boarding-school elements as well, another of my favorite themes. I can't believe I'd never heard of it before, but now it's been re-issued for its 75th anniversary.

Stephanie A. says

The descriptions of the island and island life are beautiful, reminding me of *Misty of Chincoteague*, but even after she resigns herself to life on the mainland, her boarding school and the small slightly-inland town are lovely in their own way as she learns to navigate this strange and noisy territory full of other teens, including such tropes as *A Dashing Boy* and a sophisticated and standoffish roommate. Even though she's out of her element, she never loses her natural determination and sense of self reliance. Thankful Curtis is just about the pluckiest young heroine I've ever met.

As a bonus, I fell all over myself when the book suddenly came at me with a surprise student/teacher element. Of course it's all very innocent in the way these should ideally be, and lets me just enjoy the fact that because it's 1937, everyone is like "it is totally normal and fine for a teacher to hang out with students on the weekend. What nice friendship. I certainly don't see any heart eyes latching onto her prowess with Latin and adoring her every move."

(view spoiler)

Mary Jo says

Definitely deserving of the Newbery Award! A charming story that holds interest until the last page.

Tracy says

Such a wonderful character. It reminds me of Anne of Green Gables, but without all the annoying prattle. This speaks beautifully of how place becomes part of you.

Julie Barrett says

Bright Island by Mabel L. Robinson

ISBN: 9780394809861

First thing that attracted me to this book was that it's about an island. Love islands as I spent many a year in my teens growing up on one local one.

Next thing is the state of Maine. We have traveled around the state and have spent many a week there just discovering new things.

Mary Curtis has 6, 4 living boys who were now all married and living on the mainland and the last child she had a daughter which she named, Thankful.

They were all coming to visit for the day to have a Sunday dinner.

The family has decided come September she will spend time over on the mainland going to regular schools.

Spend a few weeks with one relative and then onto

another. Thankful is not too keen as she likes her daily routine of jumping into the frigid ocean for a quick wake up swim, then onto breakfast, feeding the

animals and other chores before she heads out in her sailboat, The Gramp. she misses him so much and loves being so free to do, dress and as she likes on the island.

The mainland will be so different.

The charcoal type drawings throughout the book are interesting to visualize.

Another solution presents itself and that is what Thankful wants and is able to get.

Is this going to be the right choice for her?

Love not only the Latin language, I had picked up a book of my brother's once to study it. but also the knowledge of the winds and sailing. What a lesson!

Highlander traditions, song and dance and everything it stands for comes out in this book.

Not only the weather she knew about but the signs of fall, when certain berries were a certain color, I remember those.

Happy to hear the gift her gramps gave her in his will, priceless!

Wish there was a previous book when the grandfather was alive and teaching her everything.

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Paula says

I chose this book because once-upon-a-time it was a Newbery Honor book, but, meh.
"Bright Island" is a coming-of-age story about Thankful Curtis, a young girl who has grown up as basically an only child (her brothers are much older) on an island where no other families live. She has been home-schooled, and spent most of her time alone. She doesn't much care for other people, and has a difficult time fitting in when she goes to spend a year on the mainland to finish high school. The book takes place in the 1930's, an alternate universe where, after you've been pressured by well-meaning teachers to dance a solo highland fling - in full Scottish regalia - in front of all your peers at the high school dance, you become the "It" girl of the evening, instead of the pathetic loser that everyone avoids, as would have happened at the high school I attended. Also, no one bats an eye when the high school's dreamy Latin teacher develops a crush on Thankful and, during Easter break, asks her to marry him. And yes, he is still her teacher.
It was pretty obvious during the reading of this book that Mabel Louise Robinson was a woman who didn't like women much. There are four brothers, each of whom are named, and in fact the author goes into great detail about how each got their name. But of their wives, only two of them merit an actual name; they are usually mentioned, then dismissed, as a group: "the girls," Thankful's least favorite people on the planet. Quoted from the book - "The wives Thankful scarcely bothered to keep separate. They looked alike and talked alike and acted alike." When a group of women is together talking, they "chittered and chattered." But when it's a group of men: "Over the rice pudding the men warmed into digs at each other which brought gruff laughter. Thankful laughed too. She was used to a tableful of men."
I can see why this book was well-received when it was written, but to me it hasn't worn all that well.

Susie says

In the same vein as The Bent Twig, Up a Road Slowly, even Understood Betsy. Elisabeth Ogilvie comes to

mind too. Loved it.

Bethany Scofield says

This is just a beautiful book. It shunned the frivolous chattiness of shallowness and deeply plunged into the steady beauty of a life deeply felt and bravely lived. It's a romance in its very practical way which suited me perfectly. I can't stand romance books usually. There was so much good in this book. I have a new favorite.

QNPoohBear says

In 1937, Bright Island off the coast of Maine is uninhabited by anyone except the Curtis family. Thankful Curtis would have it no other way. With her older brothers grown and off the island, she can swim and sail to her heart's content. A tomboy, Thankful resists her sisters-in-law attempts to civilize her. Then, Thankful's parents decide she must attend school on the mainland. Thankful tries to rebel, insisting her place is on the island, but she learns it was her beloved grandfather's wish that she go. So off to school she goes, to Blair Academy where her roommate Selina is a rich snob, the boys are mysterious (especially the handsome Robert) and the classes are tough. Though she longs for home and the open sea, Thankful is determined to succeed to show everyone she can do it. On vacations, there's her beautiful island home she desires to share with her new classmates and her good friend Dave, always there despite his rapid promotion in the Coast Guard. Thankful experiences extreme joy and heartache before the year is done. Through it all, she remains true to herself and her island.

This Newbury Honor classic from 1938 is similar to the Anne of Green Gables series in that Thankful and Anne both love and long for their island homes while away at school. Sadly, this book lacks the charm and warmth of the Anne series. I was rooting for Thankful to stay true to herself and her island, but at the same time, I found her a bit too obsessed for my liking. She's stubborn, proud and resistant to change. If I were here, I wouldn't want to be suddenly told I had to go away to school either but I think I would long for higher education and a place off the island. Thankful is a bit prickly and difficult to like due to her single-mindedness. She doesn't develop any outside interests or anything to make her a well-rounded character. Her schoolmates are more interesting because they're not the stereotypical boarding school snobs. Her teachers too are more than stock characters. I quite like Orrin Fletcher and wanted to know more about him.

The plot is slow and episodic. A lot of events are summarized and told in passing which I didn't like. There's way too much technical description about sailing that I didn't understand or care for. Some of the story is repetitive, especially the adjectives describing Thankful.

The descriptions of the island are the real stand-outs and I could easily see it in my mind's eye. The island is the most developed and important character in the whole novel. The drawings are nice but are a bit difficult to really tell what they're supposed to be, at least in the paperback version. Overall, this isn't my favorite classic novel. It didn't leave me with any warm, fuzzy feelings or shouting huzzah or anything like that.

Amy Dance says

Enjoyed this book a lot, but it left a few loose ends (Fletcher) that weren't settled to my satisfaction. The story & language is timeless, rather than dated.

Tracey says

I wish I'd known this book when I belonged to the target age group. It feels like an unexpected amalgam of a *Heidi*, *Anne of the Island*, and *Swallows and Amazons*, with a little *Railway Children* thrown in for good measure - the isolated girl who is just fine with staying that way, who has to carve out a place for herself among townsfolk; the extraordinary girl going away from her beloved home to school, a completely foreign environment where she is seen as a hick but proves herself and wins good friends with a very good mind and an unaffected attitude; the completely unsupervised children messing about with boats – and a timely rescue or two. But it in no way owes anything to any of these stories: it is - despite what I just said - very much itself.

Bright Island - so called because it shines in the sun and acts as a beacon for boaters - is the home of the Curtis family, and always has been, as long as there have been Curtises. It is its own world off the coast of Maine, almost entirely self-contained. It used to be home to a large family: not too long ago Gramps, the patriarch, ruled over his son's family: Scottish wife, four strapping sons, and fey daughter. But as the book opens Gramps has died and the four sons have married and left the island, to their father's dismay, and only Thankful, the youngest, remains. She is more of a sailor than any of her brothers ever were, and scorns the decision all of them made to marry and take work off the island (as she scorns the silly mainland wives they've taken) - all Thankful wants is to continue as she's always lived, learning from her former-schoolteacher mother, working around the farm, and sailing every available minute.

When it is decreed that she must go to the mainland to go to school, she digs her heels in. Hard. She has no desire to meet new people, or to learn more than her learned mother can teach her, or to leave the island for any reason whatsoever; the idea of an undetermined time spent at a landlocked school - especially boarding with those sisters-in-law by turns ... It's a nightmare. But as it is decreed, so it must be done, and though she wins a battle or two, the war is a lost cause to her, and off she goes.

There are plenty of fish-out-of-water coming-of-age stories in which the ugly duckling either becomes a swan or proves s/he was never ugly to begin with, and ducklings are terrific. This fits in well amongst them, but stands strong – and bright - on its own.

Katie Fitzgerald says

This review also appears on my blog, [Read-at-Home Mom](#).

Thankful Curtis is the youngest of Mary Curtis's children and the only girl. Her six brothers have married and left the family home on Bright Island, but Thankful has no such desires. She wants to remain in the place she loves most, where she can hold tightly to memories of her beloved grandfather. Unfortunately, Thankful's family is concerned that she hasn't been properly educated about "what a girl is for," so they decide that she must attend school on the mainland. In the year that follows, Thankful learns the ways of the modern world, which has many more luxuries than her island home, and comes to a greater understanding of herself as a human being.

Bright Island was originally published in 1937, and it was a 1938 Newbery Honor book. It seems that it has been out of print for a while, but Random House has just published a 75th anniversary edition, which I read courtesy of NetGalley. Bright Island is a coming of age story of a type that no one seems to write anymore. Thankful's age is never identified, but based on her experiences at school, she must be a teenager, meaning this book would likely be classified as YA if it were published today. It certainly shares a lot in common with other young adult books. Thankful struggles with issues of family, identity, friendship, education, romance, and belonging. She must leave the safety of everything she knows and try to stay true to herself out in the real world. This is something every teen faces, either at the start of high school, or when he or she goes away to college.

The writing, despite being 75 years old, is very accessible. Robinson's lyrical prose is beautiful - especially to read aloud - but the reader doesn't get bogged down in her descriptions, as in other older books (The Yearling, for example.) Thankful and her mother are the strongest characters in the book, but even more minor characters, like Thankful's antagonistic roommate, are written sympathetically, so the reader understands their motivations and believes in them as real people. The most interesting parts of the plot actually hinge on the visits of these minor characters to Bright Island. These scenes heighten the tensions between Thankful's island life and the modern world on the mainland and show the reader interesting sides to Thankful's character as well as that of her roommate and of Robert, a popular boy from school.

I expected this book to be similar to Swallows and Amazons, but Bright Island is much more character-driven. There are some sailing scenes, and I was thankful that I had read Swallows and Amazons because that helped with the sailing terminology, but this is not a sailing book, or even an island book. The island is a strong presence because of its importance to Thankful, but Thankful herself is really the center of the plot. It is through her experiences that the reader comes to terms with the inevitable, which is that we will all someday grow up and venture out into the world.

The illustrations by Lynd Ward are a wonderful addition to the story. They look old-fashioned by today's standards, but they do a wonderful job of immersing the reader into the natural world Robinson conveys with her words. I think my favorite image of the entire book is the snowy illustration at the start of the chapter entitled "The Stranger Leaves Bright Island." I love the way Ward draws the sweep of the winter wind and each individual snowflake. I get cold just looking at the picture.

Bright Island should appeal to girls - and maybe boys, too - who like reading classic works of children's literature. I think it would make a wonderful read for a mother-daughter book club, as the mother-daughter relationship is one of the central themes. Some read-alikes might include The Little House on the Prairie series, In Summer Light by Zibby O'Neal, and The Moon By Night by Madeleine L'Engle.

Adam Housley says

I can see why this book is a Newberry award winner. Having just finished reading this book to my fourth grader tonight, I must confess that Robinson writing style has a choppy style too it. Not to say that her writing is not excellent and worthy of praise, but it was a challenge to read aloud. The story: it's good, not great, but I love the narrator's discovery of her love for home and her grandfather, not to mention her shunning modern society.

Allen says

Ssslllllloooooowwww. Like watching a 3 hour BBC show that an American network could manage in 45 minutes.

Michael Fitzgerald says

This is a magnificent book that is engaging and rewarding. While the situations are perhaps not commonplace today, the emotions are no less apropos. The story is somewhat typical, but is nevertheless interesting. It does not resolve in the expected way and yet is entirely satisfying. What I noticed, however, was that the book is written in a style that is strikingly different from that found in children's fiction of recent vintage. Too many of today's books seem dumbed down through the influence of video. Novels read as if they were merely screenplays; if something can be put into dialogue, it is. Since credible dialogue is basically simplistic, sophisticated structure and vocabulary are essentially absent from such books. Writing, however, is **different** from speaking - and it should be! In this book, the author is not afraid to use written language to express thoughts and emotions, even avoiding dialogue at times while still conveying what is being expressed in a conversational interaction. This book has substance and provides much to think about. It deserves to be widely read and discussed. Thankfully, it has recently been republished on its 75th anniversary.
