



Movie Shoes

Noel Streatfeild

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Life is tough for the Winter family in London, with little money and Dad out of work. Luckily Aunt Cora comes to the rescue with an invitation to live in California. From that moment on, talented Rachel and Tim dream of stardom in America. The family couldn't be more surprised when a movie producer picks plain peevish Jane for the lead part of Mary in *The Secret Garden*. No one's ever noticed Jane before. Could this be the chance of a lifetime?

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Movie Shoes Details

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Katy Noyes says

This is one of those books that you need to read as a child to experience what the author intends.

I am sure I'd have loved it if I'd read it at 10. A family in need of money given the chance to travel to Los Angeles, away from rationing and towards adventures in dancing, radio and Hollywood. It's wish-fulfilment at its peak.

Eldest child Rachel wants to be a dancer, and meets Posy Fossil from previous book Ballet Shoes (to the delight of readers I would guess). Youngest Tim is talented on the piano and finds his own niche in their new home. It is middle child Jane, envious of her siblings' abilities and opportunities who is given the biggest chance of all...

The story goes in the way you'd expect it, with just a few curveballs (the reason for Mr Winter's inability to work seems quite shocking, the relationship between Jane and Maurice not ending as you'd think). It's quite formulaic, plot wise, but enjoyable for a reader, as you yearn for certain things to happen, and lo and behold...

As an adult, The Painted Garden is sweet, cloyingly so at times, the children actually pretty annoying. As a parent I'd be talking to my child if they spoke in the way the girls sometimes do. The entitlement they seem to feel that they deserve certain things really don't sit well with me.

The awful stereotyping of Italian and 'coloured' accents also was though I suppose of its time, something I'd alter if I read it to my child. And I would also have to discuss the probably-inappropriate present of a cigarette case to an eight-year-old too! I know it would have not been unusual then.

Overall, a great children's classic read and a trip down Of-Its-Time Lane for an adult reader.

Kirstin says

Better known as Movie Shoes, this story follows the three Winter children from their London home to the shores of Santa Monica in order for their father to recuperate from a nervous breakdown in the warm climate of his sister's home. Like in Ballet Shoes (a favorite of mine as a girl), the youngest and the eldest children hold the recognizable talent and looks in the family and the middle child is prickly and difficult.

The story opens with Tim, Jane, and Rachel eavesdropping on the doctor's conversation with their mother, trying desperately to learn if their father will ever recover from the shock of accidentally killing a child who runs in front of his car. The doctor's advice of sending him to a sunny climate for the winter holds little hope, but a letter is sent to the children's aunt, who has lived in California for many years. A positive response from her — inviting the whole family to visit — and a surprise inheritance for their mother's friend and the children's nanny to fund the trip set the stage for an international adventure.

First there's travel — on trains and an ocean liner; then there are the cultural differences. And then when they reach California, they find their aunt is unbearable, prone to taking to bed with nerves and sick

headaches, and unwilling to share much beyond room and board (which the adults agree is still terribly generous of her). Plus, she seems to stand in the way — intentionally or otherwise — of what each child wants most out of the California trip: for Rachel, a chance to meet with the famed Posy Fossil and to take dance lessons; for Jane, a friendly dog to hang out with; and for Tim, a piano upon which to practice.

Luckily, what the children seem to learn in America is that generally its inhabitants are friendly and inclined to help you out. Posy tracks Rachel down, gets her an audition, and takes her under her wing; Aunt Cora's cook, Bella, helps Tim track down a piano upon which to practice and generally counsels him to keep a positive outlook on things; and Jane encounters a sympathetic dog owner who also happens to be a director about to film *The Secret Garden*, but whose star suddenly became unavailable. The family's six months in the U.S. offers up wild adventures — but will these be enough in the end to keep them on this side of the Atlantic?

[A couple notes:

* One, I bought my copy second-hand, and all but the first page of Chapter 16 is missing.

* Two, I believe I own this book back at my folks' as *Movie Shoes* but was lured into buying it again because of the title difference. (For what it's worth, *Movie Shoes* is the later, American title.) It was totally the mention of the return of the Fossil sisters that grabbed me and made me buy it.

* Three, in looking into the title question, I have learned that this is a revised and abridged version of the book. I had been surprised by how casually they worked food parcels into the story. Had I not read/watched *84, Charing Cross Road*, I certainly wouldn't have realized how long food shortages and rationing went on in England and recognized the reference. Apparently some of the other things they cut referred to similar bits of British post-World War II restrictions.

Although the book wasn't nearly as good as I remember it being, nor as good as *Ballet Shoes* remains, it was still an enjoyable read. I'd recommend it to those who can enjoy a Pollyanna-type ending to their stories.

Boweavil says

Another one of the great "Shoes" books. Noel Streatfeild used some of the knowledge from her own life to look at things most children's writers (excepting the greatest ones, the folk and fairy tale creators) don't: work, money, and envy. I read this one several times sixty years ago and remember it in detail. The great ones leave indelible memories.

Kate says

The only Streatfeild I didn't like. Could not warm up to the children in this story at all.

Beth says

This was probably my least favorite Shoes book growing up, because Jane is a difficult character to read about. This is a Streatfeild novel, so the story starts with quite a set of coincidences: her father is ill and the doctor says he must get out of England for the winter; his sister lives in Santa Monica; Jane is wandering

around Santa Monica when she finds a lost dog, whose owner is a movie producer looking for a Mary for his *The Secret Garden*. Jane gets the part because she's British and emphatic.

Jane's a hard character. Her sister is a talented dancer and her brother is a talented pianist. She's the middle, untalented child - and the plainest one, too. Streatfeild has characters like that, but they usually aren't given a story. Here, Jane is, and it's both compelling and disturbing.

I'm not going to take away from the fact that Jane is very difficult, because she is - and very realistically so - but her parents' behavior is shocking. Which was a new discovery for me, on this reread. Bee is embarrassed of her, and John is entertained by her, and neither try to parent at all. Mrs. Doe, who's in the book for three pages, a) is a better listener and b) gives excellent, practical advice which c) demonstrates more understanding of Jane than her parents ever show. And then there's Dr. Smith and even Jane's Mr. Browne, who both relate to Jane through her dog - again more than Bee and John do.

Movie Shoes ends up being a story - likely inadvertently - of an enchanted California interlude. Of a child who's the odd one out, and who makes her own luck through sheer force of will, and who's going back to her odd-man-out life in England, where her best friend is her dog. Outside the confines of this book, the story is pretty miserable.

Debbie says

In this story, the Winter family moves from England to the US for six months so that the father can recover from an accident in the nice southern California weather. Coming from war-ravaged London where food is still rationed even though the war (WWII) has been over for a couple of years, the Winters bask in the sunshine and the unlimited fruit and butter.

The eldest child, Rachel, is a ballet dancer (at Madame Fidolia's school, of course), and the youngest, Tim, is a talented pianist. Jane, the ornery middle child, has never shone at anything and is even the plainest of the three. When she gets the chance to play Mary in a movie of "*The Secret Garden*," she hopes that she will be the important Winter for once. But because the famous Posy Fossil arranges ballet lessons for Rachel and Tim finds a way to earn money playing the piano, Jane doesn't become quite the star of her family that she had hoped.

[Author:Noel Streatfeild] has a keen perception of children (or at least it seems so to me, as I do not). She captures vividly their ambitions, their irritations, their varied relations with their families. Even if no one else understands the difficult Jane, Streatfeild does, and she makes her more likable.

But of course she is known most for her focus on the performing arts. My first introduction to ballet was probably *Ballet Shoes*. And everything I know about "*The Blue Bird*" is definitely from that book. In addition to dance and theatre, Streatfeild incorporates literature into her books. *Movie Shoes* is all about *The Secret Garden*. Jane has read the book several times before being cast as Mary, and I agree with her ideas about Mary's character. It's great when the director tells her something he wants her to do, and she protests (futilely), "But Mary wouldn't do that!"

How much I enjoy the Shoe books! Because only three (*Ballet Shoes*, *Dancing Shoes* and *Theatre Shoes*) are in print in the US, I've had to collect the others from used book sales and a trip to Scotland. *Movie Shoes* was a happy find at a book sale a couple of months ago.

Sue says

A typical Streatfeild family feature in this book: a gifted ballet dancer, a talented musician, and an irritable un-artistic middle child. The family have the chance to spend the winter with a relative in California, and the middle child gets a chance to shine. Family dynamics push this book forward; a lovely gentle read with humour and moving moments.

Most of the story takes place in California, with some mildly amusing scenes as they try to adjust to American culture and language, and discover that children are expected to earn pocket money rather than being given it by parents.

One of the things I particularly like about this book is a side story about two of the sisters from Streatfield's classic 'Ballet Shoes'. I also enjoyed the children's gradual changes in outlook and motivation, and the way they come to love their new environment and the people around them. There are caricatures amongst the minor characters, but I don't see that as a problem.

I very much enjoyed re-reading this, and would recommend it to anyone who likes children's fiction of this kind.

Susann says

During the summer I was eight, I chose this for the plane ride to my grandparents'. And even though we went to the library at least twice a week, I read it over and over again. Not only does Streatfeild give the perfect shout-out to *The Secret Garden*, she brings back the Fossils! I still get excited when Rachel has lunch with Posy and Pauline.

Aunt Cora is one of my favorite Streatfeild characters. She's so selfish and whiny, and her type doesn't really appear in any of the other Shoes books.

I didn't know "Good King Wenceslas" when I was eight, so it was only later that I appreciated the "California, Here I Come" scene.

I enjoy trying and failing to picture myself as a modern-day Peaseblossom.

Deborah says

I like the Winter family (even truculent Jane), and I love reading about their adventurous journey to Hollywood (they travel across America in a *train*! I am so jealous). It's one of NS's best stories, *and* we get to meet Sylvia, Nana, Pauline and Posy again, and hear about what Petrova is up to. My Puffin edition is also illustrated by Shirley Hughes, just line drawings of course, but beautifully done.

The descriptions of film-making are fascinating - but so are the descriptions of America, and family life on both sides of the Atlantic - it's a very absorbing book! The characterisation is, as usual, spot on, and NS captures exactly what siblings say to each other, how they feel and what they do.

As an adult reader, I am slightly miffed that nobody called Peaseblossom moved in to make *my* life easier after I had my first baby. But I still enjoy the story. Wall to wall sunshine from the moment they arrive, for a start. What's not to like?

Lucy Beban says

The painted garden is a heartwarming book and was recommended to me by my mother. It can occasionally be dry and boring but is normally engaging. It explores the theme of self discovery. It is about the Winter family, mainly the middle child, crabby Jane, and their adventures during their trip to America.

Katie says

This felt like a slightly different Streatfeild book. Of course, it's also (I think) the first one I've read for the first time as an adult. But, mostly, it's that it's about the untalented sibling. And, unlike characters like Petrova, she is not happy being untalented. Which I thought was very realistic! She's written with sympathy, but the narrative still make it clear the poor girl isn't that talented, despite the movie role!

Anyway, it just felt a little less . . . fun, I guess. But you get to see adult Fossils!!! And I liked Rachel. She has a quiet kind of journey. (I like Tim, too, but I guess he felt less distinct. I guess Streatfeild's boys have never stuck out to me much.)

But I am sad the book ended (view spoiler)

Emma Rose Ribbons says

Wonderful read, and very unexpected too. I'd forgotten just how great her other books are and I'm so glad I gave this a chance. The writing is sweet and warm and the children's adventures are full of wonder. The Christmas scenes in particular really moved me, and the beginning of the book, about the family's first steps in America, is hilarious. I enjoyed this very very much and I can't wait to read and reread more of her work.

Jasmine says

Reading the British version, The Painted Garden, which has some significant differences from Movie Shoes.

So the major things cut out, from what I could see, were more detail about America and some key stuff about Bella the black servant and the Antonios. The dialogue for them was VERY stereotyped, and there were a few things about Aunt Cora not wanting the Antonios around her that I don't remember from Movie Shoes.

It's funny to me that I love Jane so much in this book, since Rachel is the ballerina and I always like the ballerinas. But then I find Rachel insufferable, and Jane a grumpy delight.

Katherine Scott says

I actually read my mother's original copy of *The Painted Garden*, published in England in 1949, and I read it to my 11 yr old daughter. We both enjoyed it very much. The edition we read does contain stereotyped dialog for different characters, which some modern readers may object to. But I thought it did a good job of describing how this post-war English family reacted to the abundance and affluence of southern California. I also appreciate how many of the characters are less than perfect. Streatfeild shows kids being kids, having meltdowns and jealousies, and coping with feeling left out. None of these emotions are romanticized but neither are they vilified. She shows normal people coping with normal emotions. I think my daughter related and hopefully learned something. I enjoyed passing this book on to the next generation.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

The very worst Streatfield I have ever read. None of the characters is remotely sympathetic, and I didn't feel at all empathetic with any of the three self-involved children. Tim was obnoxious, Rachel oblivious and Jane flat-down unpleasant. Their parents just kind of hang around waving their hands admiringly and saying, "Well honey if that's what you want to do, go for it." The Americans are cardboard (did Streatfield ever visit America?) with stupid made-up sounding names like "Sneltzworth" --and seriously, "Bee Bee Studios"? Streatfield certainly wasn't trying very hard. I found it very hard to believe that even in 1949 an American child actress in Hollywood would go around *curtseying* to guests at her own party! Shaking hands yes, being polite certainly --but not curtseying. But then Streatfield has a "thing" about curtseying in her "dancing stories."

Posy Fossil makes a reprise performance from an earlier book --as I thought, going to Czechoslovakia in 1938 didn't work out, though we are never told how she and her dancing master made it to the US before WW2. But even she and her entourage are background. I trudged to the end, willing it to be over, just to see if Streatfield could redeem this thing. She couldn't. The ending was tacked-on, just to sweep the family back to England loaded down with presents and satisfying *éclat*, having got what they wanted --money and a free vacation, I guess. The final scene with the train had me rolling my eyes.

If you haven't read any of Streatfield's "Shoe" books --don't start here! If I had, it would have put me off her for life. Maybe that's why the author worked in so much about "The Secret Garden" --maybe she knew it wasn't very good, so she tried to ride on a better book's coattail.
