

EVAN *and the* SKYGOATS



Story by VANESSA VASSAR • Art by OPHELIA CORNET

EVAN AND THE SKYGOATS

Written by Vanessa Vassar

Illustrated by Ophelia Cornet

After his sister passes away, three-year-old Evan struggles to understand his own feelings and the sadness that envelops his family. Beautifully imagined and illustrated, Evan's magical journey offers a compelling message about the power of the natural world to heal, to reassure, and to affirm our lasting connections to the ones we love. A wonderful, insightful and heart-warming story to comfort children of all ages. Based on her own personal experience healing from the loss of her daughter, the author also shares a list of Love Thoughts, useful advice for those grieving and for the family and friends helping them.

VANESSA VASSAR grew up in California and received degrees in communication arts and English. She traveled extensively with her work and lived in New York and Berlin before settling in New Mexico. Her love of storytelling has been the basis of her professional work in journalism, film, music, and photography. Vanessa was inspired to write *Evan and the Skygoats* after the passing of her daughter, Sky Velvet. In the free fall of grief, Vanessa found her first glimmer of hope visiting a local goat farm. She fell in love with the gentle and playful nature of the goats and eventually brought three baby goats home. Vanessa lives with her family in Albuquerque. For more information please visit VanessaVassar.com.



OPHELIA CORNET was born in Belgium to a family of artists and designers. Her life in the Belgian countryside was juxtaposed with annual visits to New York City, where influential artists were among her family friends. Ophelia went on to study painting and photography, and her current work includes oil paintings, tile murals, and sculpture. She has been the Lead Art Instructor at the Albuquerque Museum for nineteen years. Ophelia lives with her family in an old adobe house in New Mexico and enjoys traveling to the South of France, Guatemala, and Mexico. Ophelia loved and admired Sky. For more information please visit OpheliaCornet.com.



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Juvenile Fiction • Ages 3 and up

To request a review copy please
call 505-216-6155 or send an email
to: andy@leafstormpress.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Albuquerque - Bookworks

October 20th at 1 pm

Taos - OpCit Books Taos

November 2nd at 2 pm

Santa Fe - OpCit Books Santa Fe

December 7th at 2 pm



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PRAISE FOR EVAN AND THE SKYGOATS

“After three-year-old Evan’s sister Sky dies, he and his family struggle to cope. As he tenderly navigates his grief, often by seeking her spirit in the sky, a visitor arrives. She brings with her a freshness of spirit and a novel idea: what the family needs is to adopt baby goats. . . . the transition into a work of surreal folklore, via a dreamlike, goat-attended journey to the sky, vivifies the story. Cornet’s appealing mixed-media artwork depicts the ethereal, star-speckled journey as Evan and his goat companions navigate the heavens in search of his sister. Final pages include guided “love thoughts” for both those grieving and those offering their support. A lovely offering for readers seeking additional grief resources.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

“*Evan and the Skygoats* is a beacon of light and a gateway for opportunities to explore, educate, and discuss the topic of grief and loss.”

—**DR. TED WIARD, LPCC, CGC**, Author and Founder of Golden Willow Retreat

“In a landscape of children’s literature that mostly shies away from this difficult subject, *Evan and the Skygoats* takes readers on a journey toward acceptance of tragedy. What a welcome addition!”

—**KATIE STONE**, Producer of The Children’s Hour Radio Show

“This wise, frank book will bring unexpected smiles of solace to the grieving—while tapping into the magical and fundamentally mysterious wellsprings that flow toward healing.”

—**HAMPTON SIDES**, Bestselling Author of *On Desperate Ground*, *In the Kingdom of Ice*, *Blood and Thunder*, and other works of narrative history

“Wow! *Evan and the Skygoats* is a magnificently moving and luminously illustrated, stellar story book that has earned its own significant place among the constellations of radiant and enduring literature in the big picture, under the sheltering Sky!”

—**JENNIFR GOODMAN**, Film Director, *The Tao of Steve*

“A book touchingly told and beautifully illustrated where the wonders of nature are used to illuminate and alleviate a family’s great grief.”

—**SHEILA KOHLER**, Author of *Love Child*, *Dreaming for Freud*, and *Becoming Jane Eyre*

“A luminous book. . . . Magnificent artwork and references to the unique culture, land, and light of New Mexico enhance this masterpiece.”

—**MIRABAI STARR**, Author of *Caravan of No Despair* and *Wild Mercy*

“A magnificent and poignant story brought to life with magical illustrations. From the first page to the last, this book took my breath away. It’s sure to equally mesmerize kids and adults.”

—**LAURIE B. ARNOLD**, Author of *Hello There, We’ve Been Waiting for You!*

“Imagination, adventure, and inner emotion come through in the text and the drawings. I love the references to the New Mexican landscape, seasons, and sky.”

—**JOSIE M. LOPEZ**, Director of Curation, Albuquerque Museum

“Very beautiful and moving. . . .”

—**MARY LANCE**, Filmmaker, *Blue Alchemy: Stories of Indigo*, *Agnes Martin: With My Back to the World*, and *Diego Rivera: I Paint What I See*

“A truly wonderful book. Fine writing, beautiful illustrations, and a great contribution and comfort for so many folks.”

—**BENSON DAITZ, MD**

“The art in the book is phenomenal. A welcome addition to resources for counselors, *Evan and the Skygoats* is a lovely expression of the passage of time and the blanketing of emotions, at times suffocating or comforting, that follow the death of a family member. It provides a quiet, gentle place for grieving parents to emotionally rest when day-to-day tasks become overwhelming. Perhaps most importantly it offers grieving parents a glimmer of hope. Vanessa was very brave to extend a heartfelt embrace to parents.”

—**CONNIE GRIFFIN**, Children’s Book Buyer and Bookseller, Bookworks Albuquerque

“Often, children who lose a sibling wake up one day in a dramatically different and confusing world. As their caregivers are also grieving, the turmoil can feel all-encompassing. Vanessa Vassar’s depiction of the bewildering yet still beautiful world of a grieving child will speak truth to families in the midst of grief, as well as friends and community members who love those experiencing loss and don’t know what to do or say. Ms. Vassar’s “Love Thoughts” provide practical guidance and teach an age-old lesson that all members of grieving families must learn to find balance and thrive again: the only constant is change. Parents, schools and play groups should meet brave Evan and his Skygoats.”

—**JADE RICHARDSON BOCK**, Co-Author of *Parenting Through Grief*

“The book is beautiful! And the illustrations are gorgeous. And more importantly, the boys LOVED it (I read it to them for their bedtime story last night).”

—**KAREN O’REILLY**, Author and Resettlement Expert at UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency

“The book is beautiful. Vanessa Vassar’s words and Ophelia Cornet’s art really complement each other. I was moved at many points, starting with the comment that Evan’s hugs made everything better—even the weeping trees. The culmination of the story in dream travel to the stars hits on an archetype, and I have felt grateful to my own dreams as a world where I meet up with—and can touch and even smell—loved ones that I’ve lost. And thank you for being explicit in listing acts of love that can be helpful to yourself or to a loved one grieving.”

—**CALINE CONE, MD**, Family Medicine

“So beautiful, and necessarily thoughtful. This book is charming and important for the sleepy journey it draws you into, and priceless for the words of advice at the end.”

—**ANNA DARRAH**, Film Producer/Director

“This story is wonderful! Thank you for writing this. The book will be a blessing for many families! I cried by the time I finished it!”

—**NANCY COONRIDGE**, Owner, Coonridge Goat Farm



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A conversation with Vanessa Vassar, author of *Evan and the Skygoats*

What was your inspiration for *Evan and the Skygoats*?

When I sat down to write *Evan and the Skygoats*, the moment was a spontaneous one encouraged by a visiting friend's early morning offer to play with my 2-year-old son while I wrote. The tale poured out of me all at once. I was definitely inspired by my own story of healing when I adopted three goats after my sweet daughter passed away at the young age of 13. But, more than anything, I think I wanted to convey the possibility of joy emerging even while one is experiencing profound grief. And I wanted to send a message of hope—especially to the youngest of grievers.

How did you work together with Ophelia Cornet, the illustrator? What was the process?

Ophelia's oldest daughter and my daughter were close friends at the time of my daughter's passing so that Ophelia lived this story from the perspective of a mother helping her teenage daughter move through intense loss and grief. When Ophelia read *Evan and the Skygoats*, I told her that I often felt like a floating figure in a Chagall painting. She used this as a point of departure for her own style, and you can see her homage to Chagall's work in her illustration of Poppy holding Evan in his arms and Mommy by the hand as she floats just above the earth. Another of Ophelia's illustrations where the mom is crying and holding her own pool of tears—even as she admires colorful flowers—perfectly illuminates not only this moment in the story but also how I often feel in my real life. As Ophelia's colorful illustrations brought my characters to life, they began to influence my story and we made many edits as well as story additions together. Our editor, consultants, publicists and especially our publisher were all involved in these creative processes, each offering advice and exhibiting patience beyond words.

What are some of your favorite children's books and adult books?

Some of my favorite children's picture books are *Corduroy*, *Goodnight Moon*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Painted Dreams*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, *Mama, Do You Love Me?*, and all of the *Winnie the Pooh* books. Like most classics, there is something in each of these that makes me love reading them again and again. *Corduroy's* sweet search for his lost button, Max's fierce posturing at the wild things, Pooh knocking on his own door, and Mama loving her dear one until the "umiak flies into the darkness," while Sam-I-Am tirelessly works at getting the grumpy guy to try something new, and Ti Marie creates art with paint she scavenges from a garbage can—I love all of these characters. As for adult books, I have gravitated toward female writers from Jane Austen to my contemporaries like Barbara Kingsolver and Pam Houston. I like short stories very much, and right now I'm enjoying the Interviews and True Story Memoirs in *The SUN*. Every few years or so I reread classics like Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* or Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* just to see how I've changed my perception of these books since I first read them as a teenager.

Where did you grow up?

My parents moved with my sister and me from Texas to California when I was two years old. I grew up in a variety of cities, finally settling in San Francisco, six blocks from Ocean Beach and two blocks from Golden Gate Park. I was often lulled to sleep by the sound of a foghorn and woken by the screeching of an electric streetcar stopping directly in front of our house.

Who are some of your favorite artists?

I do love many of the fantastical paintings of Chagall with his floating figures, string instruments and—of course—magical goats. And I have enjoyed viewing many artists' works in museums, galleries and homes during my travels. In my own home I have a small painting from a winter visit to Russia, a mask from Africa, and pottery from New Mexico. But most of the art I collect is created by friends and highlights more personal stories.

Anything else to add?

I wrote the list of Love Thoughts at the back of *Evan and the Skygoats* for small children as well as for older youth and adults who might read aloud to a child and discover an idea that supports their own grieving process.



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A conversation with Ophelia Cornet, illustrator of *Evan and the Skygoats*

What was your inspiration for the book?

In the beginning, the book's author Vanessa and I talked about how we both loved the magical realism of Marc Chagall and the tenderness that many of his paintings evoke. These qualities in his work became a point of departure for my own style. Although the illustrations of *Evan and the Skygoats* evolved into something quite different, one can still see an homage to Chagall in the illustration of Evan's mother floating, inspired by his painting, *My Mother's Disappearance*.

Another inspiration for my illustrations was Vanessa's daughter Sky. Having known her personally, I wanted the artwork to be lovely, soft, and thoughtful, as she was.

How did you work together with Vanessa Vassar, the author? What was your process?

Over the years, Vanessa and her children had often attended the art classes that I facilitate at the Albuquerque Museum. She liked my artistic style and knew that I understood children well. A few years ago, she approached me about illustrating her story. Vanessa was very encouraging and we shared an organic process throughout with lots of feedback from each other.

My artistic background is in painting and I quickly realized that illustrating a storybook requires a whole different approach. Rather than creating images that are more ambiguous and open to interpretation, the goal of illustration is to support the text, to bring it to life and to be consistent throughout.

At first, I used watercolor, acrylic paint, and ink. Later on, I mixed the watercolors directly into white acrylic to create a more muted and chalky feel. In addition, I began lifting parts of the images away from the background to create a 3-D effect reminiscent of the old-fashioned European puppet shows of my childhood. Another style element that evolved with time was adding black ink lines to tie the images together and create a graphic quality.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Belgium, attended kindergarten and first grade in Austin, Texas, and then returned to Belgium where I lived until I was 16. My summer months were always spent in New York City.

What are some of your favorite children's books and adult books?

My favorite children's book in terms of story is *Heidi*. I adored this book as a child and still have my original copy. The vivid descriptions of the Swiss Alps, shepherds, and small villages sparked my imagination. I also related to Heidi's close relationship with her grandfather because I was raised by my grandparents in Belgium, and enjoyed a special connection to them.

In terms of favorite illustrations, I never tire of the *Martine* series. The charming books are famous in French-speaking countries. Only as an adult did I find out that the author/illustrator lived very privately in the next village over.

Favorite authors of adult books are Isabelle Allende and Laura Esquivel for their magical realism and strong female characters.

Who are some of your favorite artists?

Hokusai, Henri Matisse, Man Ray, Hilma Af Klint, Marlene Dumas, and Cecily Brown, to name a few.