



***A Room Made of Leaves* - Kate Grenville**

Normally I'd start my review by summarising the plot of the novel. However, *A Room Made of Leaves* is no ordinary novel and therefore asks for a different approach. I found this book captivating from the beginning right up until the ending. Then, I happened upon the Author's note. "Wait, what?" was my thought.

Author Kate Grenville starts the book by stating these are the memoirs written by Elizabeth Macarthur at the end of the 18th century and recently found concealed on Elizabeth Farm. The only thing Grenville did was transcribe and edit. Well, alright, bring it on.

A Room Made of Leaves tells Elizabeth's story: how she grew up at her grandfather's farm after her mother abandoned her and later as a ward at the parsonage with her good friend Bridie, how she fell for Mr. John Macarthur's (fake) charm, got pregnant and was forced to marry him and how she followed him to the penal colony in New South Wales. It is a book full of beautiful descriptions of the surroundings Elizabeth finds herself in, of the people she meets and the way she finds her path through her sometimes tragic life.

Grenville describes a part of history that I personally do not know much about. It's an enthralling and believable story. Why wouldn't you believe it? The author stated herself that she merely transcribed and edited it...

But then there is the Author's note. Grenville writes: "No, there was no box of secrets found in the roof of Elizabeth Farm. I didn't transcribe and edit what you've just read. I wrote it." That is where I said "wait, what?" Then what did I just read? I thought this book's purpose was to shed light on what really happened when the English established their penal colony. The reader is led to believe at the beginning of the book that the story is a true historical account. However, it turns out that the author is using narrative license. How can you present an accurate account by inventing a story? I just can't get my head wrapped around that.

My perception of the book's premise of a true historical account was turned upside down. If these aren't Elizabeth's memoirs, then I did not just read a biography, I read a work of fiction instead. Once I had that in my mind, I could start to appreciate the book. Does it matter if it is true or not? It's a gripping and interesting story about a strong woman being forced to live on the other side of the world just because she made one mistake.

I enjoyed the passages that describe the native people of Australia. Short as they were, the passages gave a nice view of their existence and the trouble the English caused them. I would have liked them to have a bigger role in this book.

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