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The Children of the King

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

There are two stories here. The main framing narrative is about two middle class children and their mum evacuated from Second World War London to live with an eccentric bachelor uncle and his staff in a northern country house, and, on the way, acquiring a working class evacuee from the local village hall billeting scrum. The other embedded story is the perennially fascinating tale of Richard III and the Princes in the Tower, related to the children in the evening by the uncle as a locally connected ghost story. Alert readers will quickly realise that the two shadowy boys in strange clothes lurking around the castle ruins in the nearby wood have a lot to do with this second story. Sonya Hartnett has a striking turn of phrase and an enviable grasp of social nuance, so there is a lot to enjoy and admire in her depiction of tense family relationships and, in particular, the friendship of somewhat spoilt, reckless and a little thoughtless, but essentially good natured, Cecily, and her working class protégé, self-contained, resourceful May, seen through Cecily's gradually opening eyes. However, the two narratives don't quite fit together, despite the overarching theme of the bravery of children in the face of the (male), adult lust for power, underlined in a powerful penultimate chapter in which Cecily's runaway brother, Jeremy, tells of his own trial of courage in the London Blitz. I am still not sure why the two princes ended up here rather than the Tower, when they were supposed to have died, and why their ghosts finally decided to leave.

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