



The Secret Starling

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Editorial Choice:

New Talent

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Clara is alone. Her home a dilapidated mansion on the Yorkshire Moors, her life governed by the rules of her Uncle. Then her Uncle abandons her. For the first time Clara experiences freedom - and when Peter turns up on the doorstep, friendship. But why is Braithwaite Manor being sold? What are the secrets that are being kept from Clara? Who was her mother? With Peter and the children from the village Clara sets out to discover the truth.

The epithet 'old fashioned' is being applied more and more to new titles appearing, especially for this age range. What does it imply when it is at its best? A real sense of story, characters that have appeal, a plot that inspires belief and is rooted in a real domestic world but allows for that sprinkle of fantasy that everyone wants, a satisfying reading experience for confident readers - all of these should be part of the package. This debut novel certainly earns this description. Julia Eagle cleverly sets her narrative in the 1970s - a period that is sufficiently historical to allow her young protagonists plenty of freedom unfettered by modern gadgets such as the mobile phone or the internet but one that is near enough in time to feel contemporary. Her influences are clear - *The Secret Garden* is one, the novels of Noel Streatfeild another - and from these she takes that ability to create characters the reader can care about, lively children in a story that instantly makes one want to turn the page. Her style is as confident, full of a rich vocabulary and vivid descriptions that rely, not on extended paragraphs, but on the well-chosen adjective that brings the text to life. Dialogue moves the action along briskly adding colour and character, engaging the attention. This is a really satisfying book for young confident readers; certainly the villains are nasty and coincidence is a useful tool to ensure the happy ending but again the author shows great skill in persuading her audience to suspend any disbelief and enjoy her story. This is a writer to watch.

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