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The Silent Stars Go By

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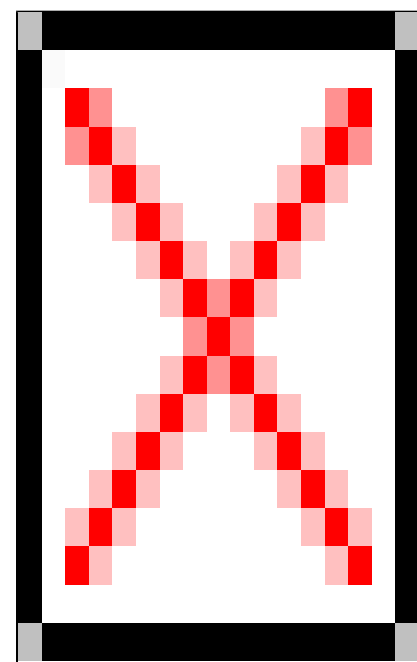
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4



Here is an author who makes writing look so easy it is as if each sentence is already perfectly formed even before it appears on the page. The story of young Margot, a 1918 vicar's daughter who conceives a baby out of wedlock, is totally involving, with many readers probably skipping to the end well before time to make sure everything works out. But such is Nicholls' skill any minor objections only swim to the surface after reaching the end of a novel so gripping that many will want to read it in one gulp.

For example, we know a lot about Margot because Sally Nicholls records her every thought and emotion to a degree that at times threatens repetition. But other characters do not receive the same attention. Margot's noble but dim former lover, thought to have been killed in the war and returning with no knowledge of his young son, too often talks in the Wodehouse 'silly ass' tradition. Her reverend father 'nodding over his Trollope' and her hard-working mother, who agrees to pass Margot's child off as her own, are both stereotypes. And while attitudes towards the under-paid servants

who keep the cold under-resourced vicarage going are authentically patronising it would have been nice if Doris and Edith had been given more of a voice themselves.

Nothing will alter the fact that Nicholls is a supremely competent writer. She makes everything seem effortless and assured, although her novel's conclusion rather ducks out of solving the very problems that Margot had spent so much time previously worrying about. But perhaps her next story could come up with something more confrontational and urgent for our own times while also allowing readers more spaces in the narrative in which to make up their own minds.

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