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# The Wrong Train

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

There are not that many collections of short horror stories for teenagers, despite the abiding appetite in the young audience for the disturbing and the grotesque. In the past, in some of its most accomplished writers, the ghost and horror story had an affinity with the short story form, giving just enough space to leave everyday reality, develop an anxious situation, ratchet up the tension and spring a disturbing ending. Yet perhaps it is a difficult trick to sustain over a collection. Here Jeremy De Quint does well, with eight stories presented in a portmanteau format in which a teenage boy is stranded on an unfamiliar deserted railway station at night with only a teasing sinister old man for company who insists on telling him tales that terrorise. Some of the tales use familiar horror devices: the house or car with a murderous past, the fluidity of dream and reality, and the danger of invoking the power of the unknown. But they are all freshly disturbing, based in everyday experiences like moving house, baby sitting, or break-time silly games. One of the most ingenious is about lights that unaccountably switch on during a power cut. Some stories grow out of or exploit the real vulnerabilities and anxieties of young people. In the story 'Dead Molly' the most dismaying feature of Richard's inability to escape from a recurring dream is the revelation that his mother doesn't love him as much as she does his absent brother; and, in 'Nanny's Little Candle', Cassie's failure to accept her new baby step-brother anticipates the replaying of a historical tragedy. Maybe not bedtime reading, the collection is inventive, with the right level of fright for the early teens and a good gender balance of protagonists.

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