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The Light Jar

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Lisa Thompson's poignant and touching new novel tells stories within stories to gradually reveal its truths both to the reader and its central character, eleven-year old Nate.

The opening paragraphs take us through a tunnel to emerge into what could almost be a fairy tale world: Nate and his mum have driven away from their home in the middle of the night to take refuge in a tumbledown cottage that they visited once years ago on holiday. Nate is not sure why his mother has taken them away like this, but from very early we're aware of her new partner Gary as a threatening, dangerous presence in the background. The next day Nate's mum drives out into the snow to buy food leaving Nate to tend the fire, and she doesn't return. In the days that follow two children keep Nate company, one is his old imaginary friend, Sam, the other a girl called Kitty who comes from the big house on the estate, and doesn't seem to be quite of the real world either. It's through his conversations with the two of them that the reader learns about the misery of Nate's home life with Gary, a manipulative bully who has, quite literally, taken the light out of the family's life. Helping Kitty to untangle the clues to an old treasure hunt enables Nate to get back his sense of self-worth, and then to find his mum too.

There are echoes of classic children's stories in the snowy setting of woods and estate garden and also in Nate's ghostly/other-worldly companions and both cleverly temper the bleakness of the domestic abuse storyline, though we are left in no doubt as to the horrible impact of Gary's coercive behaviour.

Thompson's ambitious, original and thoroughly absorbing book tells a big story with a light touch.

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