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When the Sky Falls

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~~Editors Choice~~

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Set in the London Blitz this is a striking story which cannot fail to move anyone who reads it.

Joseph is sent to stay with Mrs F as a favour to his grandmother who can no longer cope with his unruly behaviour and the rage he feels that his mother abandoned him at a young age, and his father gone to war. His fury at the world does not endear him to anyone but he meets his match in Mrs F, a formidable lady who takes no prisoners and professes no love of children either. She sets Joseph to work the very next day and he is amazed to find that her job is running and trying to maintain a run-down zoo that has been in her family for generations. The only animals remaining that have not been re-homed are two hungry-looking wolves, a camel, two miniature ponies and a magnificent silverback gorilla, Adonis. Is it clear Mrs F loves this huge beast in particular and does her best to feed the animals with whatever meagre rations she can procure.

Joseph is at first afraid but gradually develops a strong bond with Adonis whose strength and sensitivity he respects; he has more in common with Adonis than he realises as both have lost loved ones. The zoo becomes Joseph's place of refuge. He also meets there Syd, a young girl Mrs F had taken under her wing as both her parents had recently died. Joseph gradually warms to her and she becomes an ally when he is mercilessly picked on by bullies at school and by the terrible headmaster who beats Joseph with his cane, because he can't read. It is obvious to the reader however that Joseph is probably dyslexic.

The story is unflinching in its detail and realism. The chaos of the falling bombs, and the intensity of the hurt and anger Joseph feels are palpable and the way Mrs F finally admits her own pain and sorrow and comes to love and mother Joseph is magnificent. The story has a similar emotional resonance to **Goodnight Mister Tom**. The bond between Joseph and Adonis and that between Mrs G and Joseph shows that redemption and humanity are possible even in dark times and that the power of love is unshakeable. This is an exceptional novel.

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