



Beswitched

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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When Flora Fox's grandmother falls and breaks her hip, a train of events is set in motion. Flora's mother and father set off for Italy to help sell Granny's house and bring her back to Britain, where a granny flat is being prepared for her. Meanwhile, for convenience, Flora is sent to a boarding school. This school, however, is far from the tyrannical institution of popular novels. The pupils have their own laptops, wear what they like and call the teachers by their first names.

Flora, however, is a spoiled princess. If anyone is to be locked away during this crisis, it should be Granny, not Flora. On the train heading reluctantly for school, Flora has a weird experience. She sees three phantom figures in a room. She feels as if she is being gently sucked up inside a vacuum cleaner and wakes up on the train, only to find that she has been transported into the life of another Flora who lived in 1935. And the school Flora reaches is the 1935 version of the school, where the pupils wear scratchy uniforms and are compelled to speak French and Latin.

The three phantom girls Flora saw on the train turn out to be three real-world pupils of the 1930s school, who as a joke attempted to summon someone from the remote future.

The consequences of time travel are spelt out. In a history lesson Flora inadvertently refers to her studies of 'the Second World War'. Everyone laughs. What a ridiculous idea, that hardly a generation after the First War, humanity would stumble into global conflict again. Flora's Latin teacher, Miss Harbottle, knows more about time travel than the reader initially thinks. Flora also uses her privileged knowledge to persuade a Jewish girl against returning to Austria. Flora learns as the story progresses that one of the girls she meets will play a significant role in her life, more than 70 years into the future.

This is in some sense a classic boarding school yarn, with a dominant teacher and with friends breaking up and making up. If there is a criticism to make of this book, certain of the boarding school episodes are a little too reminiscent of the clichéd world of Malory Towers. However, the introduction of the time travel motif gives Saunders the possibility of dealing with more fundamental questions of life and destiny, freedom and fate, memory and imagination. To raise these questions in the minds of young readers without preaching is an unusual accomplishment.

Running Order:

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