



The Rabbit Girl

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[Robert Dunbar](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Three different places: three different times. Mary Arrigan's novel deals with a variety of settings and, occasionally with the help of some handy coincidences, succeeds in linking them into a story of some charm and originality. An opening chapter resurrects the Ireland of 1934, with five-year-old Tony seeing his mother die, the prelude to his subsequent emigration with his father to London. The arrival of war brings further dislodgement for the boy in the form of evacuation to a farm in the Lake District, where he is befriended by another London evacuee, Alice, staying on a neighbouring farm owned by the mysterious 'Mrs H'. London bombing raids seem far away from the two children's new surroundings which, while never particularly harsh, demand hard work and application, alleviated by Mrs H's kind concern. She, it turns out, is an artist of considerable distinction and it is one of her paintings, featuring a girl and a rabbit, which links the wartime dimension of Arrigan's story with 'England, the present day', to quote the title of her second chapter. In this setting, some seventy years on from the Lake District chapters, we encounter best friends Mallie and Jamila, both young teenagers: the former, in choosing a birthday present for her aspiring artist mother, happens to come across an old painting...The various worlds of Arrigan's novel are brought together with a fair balance of poignancy, sentimentality and humour, the last of these evident mainly in the 'present day' chatter between Mallie and Jamila. And, by way of an extra bonus, there is a closing revelation about the precise identity of Mrs H. Older readers, drawing on their knowledge of the Lake District, literary rabbits and artistic ladies, may possibly have had their suspicions sometime before all is made clear.

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