



Half a Man

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Michael hates it when Grandpa comes to stay. Days before the visit, his nightmares start and his parents start to nag him about how to behave. He must not upset his grandfather by leaving toys scattered about or having the television on too loudly. Above all, he must not stare at him. For Grandpa was badly injured in the war ? his face is now disfigured, his fingers missing ? but no one talks about what happened. His mother cannot bear to look at this taciturn, gruff old man. But Michael is genuinely fascinated and can?t help but stare. Soon Michael is old enough to spend time with Grandpa at his home on the isles of Scilly. He still stares at him but, in time, Michael?s fascination gives way to companionship. Then, years later Grandpa tells his story.

Most of the story is in flashback as Grandpa recounts his wartime experience and its legacy. His injuries have shaped his life, filling it with anger and pain, loss and emptiness. They have also shaped the behaviour of his loved ones. Now, in his final years, he turns to Michael ? the only person to have looked him in the eye and seen beyond the scars ? to help him redeem his life.

Deeply moving, the story delves painfully into the consequences of war, gaining much by touching upon the way in which people respond, often inadequately, to the wounded. It unfolds at a steady rhythm, its language rich and harmonious, its portrayal of war unflinching, the role of the merchant navy acknowledged. Originally published within a collection of stories on war, edited by the author, the story is reproduced here within a small format, exquisitely illustrated. The pictures are flat and stylised, with unsettling perspectives and a palette reduced to the blue-greens of the sea and orange-yellows of flames and sunset. Exuding a sense of detachment, they are the perfect counterbalance to the text, allowing the words to carry the story?s powerful emotional charge.

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