



Whistling in the Dark

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

From the first sentence the reader is transported to a suburb of Liverpool in 1940 to meet Joan, and her family, older sister Audrey, brother Brian, and younger sister Judy who live with their widowed mother. Their father died in a fire on board a merchant navy ship before the war and their mother has begun a relationship with Captain Ronnie Harper Jones whose presence grates on the children. A new girl comes to Joan's class at the local girls' grammar school, Ania who is a refugee from Poland. Joan's friend Doreen protects Ania from the bully in the class and they become friends. At the same time a deserter appears to be in the local area and there are rumours of a black market flourishing. Ania's uncle is the deserter and when Joan's mother finds out she invites Ania to meet with him at her home but the pair are discovered by Captain Harper Jones. After an accident between a lorry and two boys the black market element of the plot also comes to a surprising conclusion.

Shirley Hughes has given a snapshot of life during 1940, with every little detail adding to the picture. This is the work of an accomplished author who has moved to writing stories as well as the picture books and illustrations for which she is so well known and loved. In her foreword Shirley Hughes states that this is based on her own war time childhood, but this is not a memoir rather a story to tell children what life during wartime was like. Many readers will be surprised I think that lots of families did not have air raid shelters but instead used the cupboard under the stairs, or even just stayed where they were. Rationing with its endless queues and the collecting of scrap metal by the young people are just part of the life which is so well described. Small drawings by Shirley Hughes decorate the beginning of every chapter and add to the pleasure of a very good story. There are many good stories about the Second World War but this is a stellar contribution and highlights the work of the Merchant Navy which does not often appear in this genre. A real gem and a treat to read!

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