



The Icarus Show

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This is a story about bullying and friendship, so, in a sense, not that unusual. It also highlights the relationship between a young person and an older person in a nursing home, a feature of three books I have reviewed recently, and, on the basis of that small sample, may be reflecting a situation in many families in our increasingly ageing population. So far, and so typical; but what sets the story apart is firstly Christie's handling of a brilliant plot device: the anonymous announcement via letters to every member of a secondary school class that 'A boy is going to fly!'? Alex, our narrator, is a boy whose chosen path through school life is to be invisible and trust no one, and the letters both fascinate and disturb him. Why would anyone want to call attention to themselves like this and what could it mean? The gradual revelation of who is responsible for the letters, to what kind of show they might lead, and how Alex is drawn into the life of the new boy who has joined his class and moved in next door, makes for riveting reading, with a shocking denouement. The ending is rather compressed, with the introduction of an important character that we have not met before. And, for the first few chapters, I was unclear whether I was reading about a boy or a girl (Alexander or Alexandra?), there was such an absence of the usual enthusiasms or affiliations that make for conventional gender markers. But that is perhaps part of the second distinguishing feature of the novel. Novels about bullying often feature its direct victims or the bystanders who have to make a choice whether to intervene. Rarely do they show, as this novel does, the way in which a self-protecting strategy like Alex's can close down someone's personality, as fear makes him an observer rather than an actor in his own life.

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