



Twenty Questions for Gloria

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Fifteen year-old Gloria meets Uman, a mysterious and determinedly different new boy at school. Very soon the two run away together with no real plans except for continuing with the delight they take in their own company. But money starts to run out and, like King Lear, they find they are not weatherproof when sleeping rough and it starts to rain. The whole escapade lasts for fifteen days, and this fine novel starts with Gloria being questioned by a police officer about the whole affair after the event. Gloria's distraught mother is also in attendance. But of Uman, there is now no sign.

Creating convincingly original and arresting characters in any story is never easy. If, as here, what they say seems at times facetious and immature readers may wonder what the other characters involved actually see in them. But Martyn Bedford knows what he is doing. Although some readers may tire of Uman's gnomic sayings, he does succeed in bringing out a liveliness of response in Gloria that was not there before. This is a big improvement on the adolescent sulk she starts out with, mocking or blanking out her parents and despairing over the 'Same old, same old' in her otherwise comfortable life. But Oman brings her something new, including quotations from Jack Kerouac, making her immature infatuation with him totally convincing. It is only when she starts stealing to sustain their new, unreal life-style that she realises it is game over. But she still finds it impossible to give up the first great love of her life, who himself has no such scruples.

Gloria comes over as not just selfish but also confused and more than a little depressed. Her relationship with her nice but easily distracted parents is not as good as it should be, for which fault lies on both sides. The experience of falling in love for the first time is sensitively described, and the way the couple's great adventure eventually turns into a sad ordeal is subtly done. Supporting characters, from the police woman whose taped interview with Gloria starts this novel off to her teachers at school, are all rounded human beings, never caricatures. Gloria herself ends not just older but also wiser. So too might any of her readers who may themselves have sometimes half contemplated if only in fantasy doing something like this themselves. This whole story is emotionally perceptive and impeccably written. It deserves to be read.

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/twenty-questions-for-gloria>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/216>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/nicholas-tucker>