



The Bookshop Girl

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

No mention of TV, no mobiles, no internet and nothing so vacuous as social media; no mention either of tedious stuff such as schools or having to attend one. This is the kind of setting readers used to find in long-ago children's books (no gritty realism) where you know the baddie when you see him because he's wearing a long grey coat, a long grey face, shabby shoes and he's called Mr Eliot Pink. Maybe he could have walked into these pages out of, say, Masfield's **Box of Delights**. My advance proof copy has only a couple of witty line drawings, but more illustrations from Ashley King are promised in the finished text. This is an attractive world - all the more impressive since its creator, Sylvia Bishop, graduated only recently from university, though this is already her second published novel. Her voice is both comic and conversational - just right for the independent young reader becoming accustomed to enjoying complete novels.

Things didn't begin well for Property Jones. When she was five, her parents took her into a second-hand bookshop and left without her. 10 year old Michael, who ran the shop with his altogether sensible mum Netty, found her and with characteristic logic put her in the lost-property cupboard; that is how she got her name. Six years later, she's very happy with Netty and Michael and all the stock; she loves the feel and smell of old books. Each evening, the three read copies of the same book - silently, but turning the pages at the same time, and - laughing and sighing at all the same parts?. But Property - was keeping a secret from them and it was a whopper?. No-one had ever taught her to read; so she has had to fake her reactions each evening, and now she's too ashamed to tell Michael and Netty.

Their White Hart Bookshop - it used to be a pub and the sign was too good to waste - is up against it financially. So it is fantastic news when, in a grand raffle, they win the Great Montgomery Book Emporium, the most exciting, most famous, most amazing bookshop in the United Kingdom, or anywhere else for that matter. Its owner, the eccentric, lemonade-swilling, cake-eating Albert H. Montgomery, has decided to retire - hence the raffle - but he stays to show them round his magical treasure-house. Suppose you want to look at books about Knights and Castles, or Desert Islands, or Woodland Tales or Space Adventures; you just pull the right lever and the relevant room creaks into place behind one of a dozen doors leading off a central hall. Michael's favourite is The Room of Dictionaries. Behind each door there's a kind of ferris wheel featuring a loop of different departments, each with appropriate decor (the Knights and Castles Room has stone walls covered in tapestries) and inventively displayed titles.

It's Paradise. Except, All Is Not What It Seems. Albert H. Montgomery has a secret too. He's been showing them round

the Emporium when suddenly he exclaims, "Goodness me, look at the time!" and leaves abruptly. The fact is, somewhat unwisely, he had agreed to buy the only extant handwritten manuscript of a Shakespeare play - for forty-three million pounds. Which he doesn't have. The seller (yes, the sinister, long grey coated Mr Pink) wants his cash. From the new owners. Now.

It wouldn't be giving too much away to reveal that everything turns out fine, but not without some wondrous adventures in that wondrous Emporium and beyond, told with pace, warmth and humour, much of it generated by Gunther Armageddon the Third, a Persian Blue kitten of ferocious disposition with a mind of his own. The family won him in the raffle, along with the Emporium, whether they liked it or not.

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