



Out of Heart

Books Reviewed:

[Out of Heart](#) [1]

Issue:

[224](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This is an ambitious novel which begins and ends with poems by William Blake, *Little Boy Lost* and *Little Boy Found*, and moves restlessly around the meanings that we give to the heart. Adam's grandfather has just died, and his father left the family some time ago. Adam lives with his mum, his younger sister, Farah, who speaks only in sign language, and his grandmother. We meet him as a rather withdrawn, self-contained young man, drawing and playing with words, his favourite occupations, in a small attic room of his house, and thinking of Icarus. When he goes to help the other men of the family to wash his Dadda's body before burial, he learns that his grandfather's heart has been used as an organ donation. Not long after, a tall, pale man in ill-fitting charity shop clothes arrives at the Shahs' door, and announces, 'I have a heart in my chest that belongs to you. To your family. To Mr. Abdul-Aziz Shah.' And so William Tide becomes a part of the Shah family, much to the consternation of the neighbours. In what follows, somehow stemming from his grandfather's deathbed gift, we see Adam and the other members of his family gradually emerging from the shadow of the hurt, grief and shame which we learn has been inflicted by his absent abusive father.

There is a great deal to admire in this novel, not least its ambition, and some memorable writing. I found the body washing and Adam's dream of being the surgeon carrying out the heart transplant particularly powerful. However, I was left with a feeling of an even better novel struggling to emerge. There is perhaps too much happening, too many good ideas; so that we don't stay long enough in one place to explore the situation or the characters' response to it. This is particularly noticeable in regard to William's acceptance into the family, which is a brilliant notion and has the potential for a lot more exploration.

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[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/out-of-heart>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/224>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>