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Bloom

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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In this story children start growing flowers and vegetables on their heads after some mysterious seeds are first found and then scattered. Their parents and teacher soon follow suit. And all because an old lady gardener, long dead, is now taking her revenge against a town where almost everything since she was alive has been concreted over. It falls to young Sorrel and her best friend Neena to finally make peace with this disturbed horticultural spirit, although they will still have flowers in their hair, quite literally, for the rest of their lives.

Written as if by Sorrel herself with determined sometimes almost relentless good humour, this first novel makes some cogent points about contemporary urban living at its most desolate. It also takes some welcome swipes at over-controlling secondary schools whose head teachers are in it mostly for their own ambition. But rebelling against the worst sort of autocratic educational regimes in real life can now in too many cases easily lead to a speedy exclusion. Being occasionally disruptive at school is more dangerous than it ever used to be and to that extent much less fun both for readers and the characters concerned when reflected in contemporary fiction. Both Sorrel and Neena are unjustly excluded at one point, with each facing serious repercussions as a result.

While the author has a good line in salty dialogue she occasionally drops her guard when it comes to cheesy characterisations. Much is made of the obtrusive black nose-hairs sported by the school's unpleasant headmaster Mr Grittysnit. This humour by uglification, as once so widely practised by Roald Dahl among others, has surely had its day and is better left, if at all, to contemporary 'celebrity' authors looking for cheap laughs. Sorrel's chief pupil adversary is condemned, among other things, for coming from a home possessing a butler, chauffeur and maids. Again, this sort of lazy targeting is best avoided by any writer intent on following their own line while not also reaching out to boring old stereotypes. Because hidden away in this novel there is also some genuine originality of vision and a fresh determination to make young readers think about their environment, and all credit for that.

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