



Sofa Surfer

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Malcolm Duffy has set out to write a book that highlights the issue of teenage homelessness, and occasionally his novel reads more like campaigning literature than fiction, with at least one major episode contrived to demonstrate what it might feel like to spend a night on the streets if you're not prepared for it. However, this is an issue that needs raising and it's possible that young people might learn much from a story as well told as this. Tyler, the central character, is not homeless himself but has been uprooted from London to live in Ilkley in Yorkshire when his dad changes jobs.

Friendless in his new home, he strikes up an acquaintanceship with Spider, a Geordie girl, who has just been thrown off the sofa at her cousin's house. At first, Tyler does not realise that Spider is sleeping rough but, once he does, he goes to some lengths to help her, including allowing her to live at his house, without his parents' knowledge, when he and the family are on holiday. If that sounds a bit far-fetched, it is nevertheless understandable in view of Duffy's drawing of Tyler's situation and character: lonely, temporarily alienated from his family, really well-meaning and more than a little hapless, particularly in thinking through the possible repercussions of his actions. Duffy embeds him in recognisable relationships, with his parents, with Michele, a possessive girl from school who has picked him for a holiday romance, and, most of all, with Spider, where his attempts to help are appreciated and resented in equal measure. Duffy tells his story with winning humour and readers will be genuinely pleased, as I was, that both Tyler and Spider are in a better place at the end of the story.

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