Justin McLeod is the man without a face, since he was badly burned in a drunken car crash in which he killed a child. Charles is fourteen and miserable at home, determined to pass the boarding school entrance exam and get away. McLeod is an ex-teacher and Charles penetrates his physical and emotional isolation, forming a working partnership which turns to friendship and then to love. Isabelle Holland successfully depicts a fraught household, tense with sibling rivalry and she's equally adept at the much trickier task of exploring a homosexual relationship between Charles and McLeod. Charles' rejection of these emotional ties is also credible, but the book's ending, where he returns to repair the damage and finds McLeod has died a month earlier, has a manufactured and awkward feel.

This is a brave attempt at a contentious subject and should be made available for young people to read, explore and make of it what they will.