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# Frozen Billy

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Issue:

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Reviewer:

[Anne Faundez](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

From the very first sentence, Fine propels the reader headlong into a riveting tale with sinister undertones. Set in Victorian times, it centres on the world of popular entertainment, the music hall. Carrie is filled with foreboding at the sight of her ventriloquist Uncle Len's dummy. Its gaping mouth, staring eyes and lifeless legs hold sway over her life and, more importantly, over her brother's. Uncle Len is running the household while Carrie and Will's mother is temporarily away. Their father, already absent, has migrated to Australia where the family hopes eventually to join him. Uncle Len's fondness for drink is rapidly turning him into a mediocre and penniless ventriloquist, full of platitudes and jokes that leave the audience unmoved. To reverse the situation, and bring in some money, Carrie and Will come up with an original scheme by which Will becomes part of Uncle Len's act as Billy's double. Honing to perfection the dummy's wooden gestures and constant patter, he soon turns the show into a top-billing performance. But Uncle Len pockets Will's wages, spending all their earnings on drink. Will now resentful, obliterates himself, turning into a persona that chillingly acts and speaks like a dummy. Finally, Carrie takes it upon herself to find a solution to her brother's unhappiness -- and a way out of their predicament. The story, told from Carrie's point of view, is set out in the form of ten notebooks. The first-person narrative describes the events and Will's decline and, in so doing, reveals her as a source of strength -- articulate, intelligent and, for all her self-deprecation, thoroughly capable. It is her voice, strong and resolute, that prepares the reader for a happy outcome to what could so easily tip into nightmare. The book touches on many themes -- popular theatre, ventriloquism, alcoholism, poverty, dependency and the disintegration of the self -- effortlessly weaving these threads into an optimistic story that recognises the courage of the young to overcome huge obstacles.

Running Order:

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