



Firestarter

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Not on Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

This is the kind of book teachers and librarians came to love or loathe, according to their prejudices, in series such as ?Topliners? in the 1970s. Keith is an ordinary 16-year-old with ordinary parents living in ordinary suburbia until ? literally over the garden fence ? Reece drops into his world. Reece is different. He?s just what you don?t want in the boy-next-door, especially when you are earning some honest cash looking after your little sister for a week while Mum?s away on a social work course and Dad?s out all hours at work. For one thing, he?s plastered with bizarre make-up; and for another, he?s an arsonist. He?s clearly damaged and he won?t leave Keith and his sister alone. As time goes by, Keith sees that Reece has never had a chance. No-one took an interest in him, he?s never known a family?s love. In fact, he?s known domestic tragedy.

Catherine Forde employs an engaging teenage argot in Keith?s narration and in the dialogue, though allusions to a ?Betty Boop nightie? or phrases like ?cute as get-out? seemed surprising. Mum and Dad?s protectiveness of little Annie blinds them to the complexities of Reece?s side of the picture (and you might wonder about the effectiveness of Mum?s training in social work at this point). Keith, however, is wiser than his parents. He knows there is some good in Reece, that things are almost always grey and rarely black-and-white.

Although this text is sometimes a little short on incident and long on dialogue, it reads easily. It may well draw in tentative readers ? there are fewer than 200 words to the page. The message is liberal and the narrative voice lively and often funny. The novel reaches an exciting finale ? and it refuses an over-easy solution to Reece?s difficulties. GF

Running Order:

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