



Pay Attention, Carter Jones

Books Reviewed:

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

There's humour and pathos in this skillfully structured story, and who could resist a book that uses cricket to convey its message of fair play, responsibility and resilience.

Carter Jones and his family ? mother and three younger sisters ? are in something of a state when, with Mary Poppins-like good timing and just the slightest sense of, if not magic, then something outside of the ordinary, the Butler arrives in their lives. Mr Bowles-Fitzpatrick was ?gentleman?s gentleman? to Carter?s grandfather and the old man has left an endowment in his will to support continuing service to the family. The Butler, as we know him pretty much throughout, brings the kind of order that is so satisfying in fiction, introducing Carter?s sisters to ballet and E Nesbit, ensuring their vomiting dachshund is regularly walked, and teaching Carter both how to drive his car (a purple Bentley) and, even more thrillingly, how to play cricket.

Cricket is the thread that holds the book together. Each chapter opens with a paragraph on the rules of play and the game provides the Butler with means to guide Carter on the best ways to live, from the importance of paying attention to the need to keep up the bails. The book reaches its climax in a cricket match played at Carter?s school while the football team wait on the sidelines to start their own game and the spectators huddle in the bitter wind of a New York State October.

Weather plays its part throughout. The Butler arrives in a rainstorm that reminds Carter of the tropical downpours of the Blue Mountains experienced on a camping trip with his soldier father who is otherwise one of the defining absences of the book. We learn gradually that Carter?s father will not be returning to his family, and that he wasn?t there either when they needed him most of all.

With all the elegance of cricket at its very best, Gary D. Schmidt has written a tender story of masculinity and companionship. Carter and the Butler may be separated by a common language but the older man understands exactly how the boy is feeling. Beautifully paced the book demonstrates to us all the importance of making good decisions, and of remembering who we are and who we love.

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