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Mister Cleghorn's Seal

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This gentle story was inspired by a small stuffed seal in Judith Kerr's childhood home and the tale her father told about it. It's a short story, for younger readers rather than a picture book, and it's enhanced by charming pencil drawings, as strong as you would expect in character and humour, but whose slightly faded delicate quality creates an air of nostalgia. The tale of how the seal is found, its loving but somewhat awkward relationship with Mr Cleghorn, and its eventual fate (which is a lot happier than being stuffed in the living room) is also a tale of how shy Mr Cleghorn finds love and a new purpose in life after retiring from his corner shop. The world they inhabit is perhaps a little like the author's Berlin childhood of nearly a century ago: milk carts are horse-drawn; Mr Cleghorn has a spiky moustache, a bowler hat and a bow tie; and, while a zoo at Brighton is mentioned, Mr Cleghorn lives, continental style, in an apartment block with a vigilant janitor who won't have pets on the premises. Reflecting the polite restraint of a bygone era, we never learn the first names of the two central characters; to the end, while we are on more intimate terms with nearly everyone else, including Charlie the seal, they remain Mr Cleghorn and Miss Craig. It's a delightful story from an author whose touch remains as sure as ever. It's given a fine production by HarperCollins.

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