



The Colour of Shadows

Books Reviewed:

[The Colour of Shadows](#) [1]

Issue:

[236](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

BfK Rating:

3

?It was seven days of revelations, realisations and unexpected events that spun me round, shook me up and spewed me out,? seventeen year old Saffron tells us. She shares the narrative of this maelstrom of emotions and incidents with Tom, her friend of many years. Saffron has much to learn and Shrimpton has much to teach through what at times becomes a modern morality tale. The author?s ?Acknowledgements? pages imply hands-on research into issues many of us know little about, though they are readily visible on our streets.

Saffron?s home is affluent middle-class. Dad?s a chartered surveyor and she and her two younger brothers have enjoyed every material comfort. However, ten or so years ago, Mum ?walked to the shop to get some milk, and had never come back?. Dad told them Mum wasn?t well, that the police had found her, she was too ill to be visited; and, eventually, that she?d died. Step-mother Melanie arrived and a baby had soon followed. Saffron resents both of them. Now, Saffron has stumbled upon an old brief-case in the attic; its contents show that Dad?s been lying all along. Somewhere, Mum?s alive and well. Saffron packs a bag, rages at her father over the phone, and runs away.

She hopes her old friend Tom can give her a bed for the night ? they?d met as kids in the park and their friendship has grown through the years, though Tom?s never invited her home to his council flat. No, he says, she can?t stay ? no reason given, though we realise he has secrets of his own. From there, Saffron?s story unwinds rapidly into sleeping rough, getting to know several homeless people, surviving grooming by a phoney charity worker. Tom never ceases to look out for her and, despite her furious rejections, her Dad and all her family (including bitch-witch Melanie) continue to beg her to come home. Some readers may empathise with Saffron?s sense of betrayal and think her courageous in facing her difficulties; others may think her petulant and self-absorbed. Even the ever-patient Tom points out that she?s never asked him anything about his life. Tom, incidentally, is something of a paragon: sensitive, articulate, loyal, funny, and so handy that he?s already refitting an old narrow boat in which he?ll one day sail away to explore the world. He?s also an old romantic - he won?t tell Saffron how he feels about her because he couldn?t offer her anything to match the home she?s used to. In turn, Saffron adores him but she doesn?t dare risk saying so for fear he?ll walk away.

In Saffron?s week of revelations, she mostly learns about her own shortcomings through encounters with homeless people. Beneath the stench of booze and grime, Crazy Maggie, the town?s wild woman, turns out to have a ?posh? background and to be a trained musician. William?s life (and financial support) fell to bits when his parents were killed in a car on the M25 when they were driving him back for a new term at uni. A couple of veterans suffering from PTSD are camped out under a road bridge. Middle-aged Ronnie lost his job and his home but is determined to climb back on

the ladder. You'd guess that these characters ? and their accounts of how they drift through their days ? have grown directly from Shrimpton's researches. Her concern that readers should see people, not stereotypes, is very evident.

So often with YA fiction, adult reviewers must surely wish they could listen to teenage readers talking together about a book. Comments on reading sites on the Internet range from ?Loved it, especially Tom? to ?She?s a spoiled brat?. It?s certainly a novel to provoke strong reactions, perhaps in a school book group; which, no doubt, is what author and publisher would very much hope.

Source URL (retrieved on Sep '19): <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/236/childrens-books/reviews/the-colour-of-shadows>

Links:

[1] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-colour-of-shadows>

[2] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/236>

[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>