

★ **A Place to Hang the Moon****Kate Albus**

Margaret Ferguson Books (Feb 2, 2021)

Hardcover \$17.99 (320pp)

978-0-8234-4705-3

In Kate Albus's wonderful novel *A Place to Hang the Moon*, terrible times lead to gutsy solutions for three orphaned children who take a chance to find a new home.

William, Edmund, and Anna live with their atrocious grandmother in London. When their grandmother dies, the children are left with a pile of money, but nobody to look after them. Their family lawyer hatches a plot to send the children to the countryside; with luck, they will find a forever home and a new family to love.

The three siblings pack their bags with the usual clothes, shoes, and "one small family memento." Edmund quips, "No worries there... That'll save you some room." His words become a poignant reminder of how little their children have from their parents, beyond the manufactured memories that William shares with his siblings at bedtime.

The dramatic historical backdrop—World War II and the bombings of London—is blistering, characterized by suspicion toward anything German, and filled with danger. The children's life is hard: they are bullied as "filthy vakies," tangle with a frightening teacher, and face the grinding poverty of the war years. They bounce from house to house, never really finding the home they hoped for. But they remain affable. Their secret weapon is that they are all voracious readers: they find inspiration in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and enlightenment through reading the encyclopedia. They find solace in the town's little library, whose librarian is their perfect adult contact, even if German connection makes her a social outcast.

Both touching and genuine, the historical novel *A Place to Hang the Moon* speaks to the power of stories and families, both of which can be found in the most unexpected places.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2021)

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