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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ JUVENILE FICTION

From Beyond to Here: Merendael's Gift and Other Stories

Andrew Marr
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In his collection of stories, *From Beyond to Here*, Benedictine monk Andrew Marr reveals how paranormal experiences bring about positive outcomes for children who encounter a ghost or an alien being.

Among the six stories included in the collection is the main tale entitled “Merendael’s Gift.” Here, an alien named Merendael desperately tries to connect with eleven-year-old Eddie Peterson. He rejects Merendael because the cool kids think that Eddie is talking to himself and make fun of him. When Merendael connects with some of the other less popular children, who admit to the truth that they can sense and see the alien, Eddie rethinks his behavior *and* the true meaning of friendship.

The protagonists of “Swiss Chalet” are Meg and Paul, whose parents head to Copenhagen for a year. The children are left in the care of a mean-spirited aunt and uncle in a large mansion in Chicago. The siblings have only their piano instructor to help them understand why a young boy’s ghost haunts the mansion. In “Haunted in Time,” eleven-year-old Murray Hawkins finds that he is being haunted by himself. The ghostly version of Murray is, however, far more proactive at stepping in to save children from bullies, and is also more charitable and likeable than the real Murray.

Marr does achieve his goal of showing how the ghostly encounters bring about changes in the children. His characters are sympathetic in that they either come from broken homes or have at least one neglectful parent, and they are easily likeable for usually being well-behaved children.

In most of the stories, Marr introduces the idea of an interaction with ghosts and unearthly beings without being too frightening. However, in “The Dark Window,” the imagery of violence between the ghosts of Tommy and his foster mother, Miss Margaret, followed by the dialogue between Tommy and Jeremy, the boy he is haunting, is a little surprising in its sudden intensity. Jeremy asks Tommy: “Did Miss Margaret kill you?” and “Did she throttle you?” Tommy answers that she “banged my head against the wall. Hard. Lots of times. She couldn’t stop.”

Though the stories have intriguing starts, Marr’s tendency to tell rather than show burdens the pace and effectiveness of the plots. For example, when Jeremy describes his time at a Pittsburgh Penguins hockey game, he states, “The excitement in the air from the crowd washed over me. Watching the players skate around before the opening faceoff built up the excitement.” A few awkward and redundant transitions along with shifts in point of view also interrupt the flow of the stories. These are surprising errors in a collection that is otherwise grammatically clean.

From Beyond to Here: Merendael’s Gift and Other Stories lures older children and young teenagers into the accounts of life-changing paranormal encounters.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (October 25, 2012)

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