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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

My Boy Blink

Nev White
Xlibris UK (Nov 15, 2012)
Softcover $10.58 (68pp)
978-1-4797-4984-3

My Boy Blink, by Nev White, starts out promisingly enough: A young boy and his father come upon a baby in the woods. With the parents dead at the scene, father and son rescue the newborn, who ends up going by the nickname Blink because one of his rescuers yells “blinking heck” upon his discovery.

Blink’s given name is Henry, and the bulk of the book details his life and the narrator’s relationship with the boy. The identity of the narrator is in question, however, because of the author’s confusing writing style. The story is mostly told through dialogue, leaving the reader to infer the characters’ actions based on their speech. This stylistic choice would work if readers could only decipher who was chatting with whom. The audience never knows the parties in the conversations because one character will speak one sentence within the quotation marks, only to realize in the following sentence that another character is speaking in response to the first. It’s hard enough to distinguish characters when their names and defining traits aren’t mentioned until well into the book, and still harder to tell these nameless people apart when they speak within the same quotation marks.

The only character to leave a mark on the audience is Henry, and his story is as choppy as the text. It is never adequately explained why Henry must live in neglectful foster homes, instead of with a man he calls Granddad, who loves and is loved by the boy. The author jumps around in Henry’s life too much, sometimes skipping over months or years between paragraphs. Secondary characters are sketched out with so little detail that readers find it hard to remember the significance of these people when they appear again. The author alludes to Henry being otherworldly, a trait that remains inadequately fleshed out until Henry has a bizarre mystical encounter with an entity called the “green man,” a meeting that seems completely out of place in a book that is otherwise realistic. And a significant portion of the book is devoted to the intricacies of one cricket game. Readers know from previous pages that Henry excels at the sport, but the focus on one match is at odds with the rest of the book.

Knowing the narrator’s identity, and more focus on Henry’s rapport with Granddad would have made the plot easier to follow.

JILL ALLEN (February 12, 2013)

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