

Tiger Skin Rug: A Magical Journey

Joan Haig

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In Joan Haig's urban fantasy for young readers, three children help a creature fulfill a promise made long ago.

Lal Patel is homesick for India. His father relocated their family to Scotland and installed them in an old house whose furnishings include a worn tiger skin rug that Lal finds creepy. His little brother, Dilip, is the first to understand and connect with the rug's magical powers. Through Dilip's ability to communicate with and harness those powers, the brothers and a neighbor embark on an enchanted quest to release the tiger's spirit from its imprisonment in the rug. In return for this favor, the tiger promises Lal that he will take him home to India.

There are moments when the novel's magic pulsates, as with its scenes in the Indian jungle, and in the relationship between the tiger and a street child who acts as a guide to Lal and his companions. But much of the novel is less ethereal—in part because the story is guided by grounded Lal, whose observations all and expresses disbelief, and whose sensibilities are less fantastical than his circumstances.

Lal interrupts his suspenseful storytelling with surprises and, even when the tiger fulfills his promises, proves to be resistant to feelings of enchantment. Instead, he learns, and shares, messages about conservation, especially about poaching, extinction, and forest conservation. The lesson that home is more of a concept than it is a place is strong.

Tiger Skin Rug is a story in which a myth intrudes upon a boy's reality, expanding his world and delivering him to a place of contentment and understanding.

RANDI HACKER (November / December 2021)

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