



Theatrical

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off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

The adjective 'passionate' has been criminally overused but in the context of this book, no other word will do to describe the protagonist Hope's feelings about the theatre. She has been working backstage at The Square Globe, a small local community theatre and then she is selected for an interview at her beloved Earl's to work as an intern with the technical crew, which, if it goes well, will provide her with the reference she needs to get into college to study stage management. When she is given the job she feels disbelief, delight and a determination to keep it secret from her mother, the world-famous award-winning costume designer, Miriam Parker. Her determination springs from her heartfelt wish to make her own mark on theatre life and not rely on her mother's name to get her work.

Harcourt's own knowledge and involvement in theatre shines through on every page. She manages to give the reader an intimate picture of the work of the backstage team, pack it full of often complex technical detail and yet avoid being dull or professorial. Her talent for creating memorable characters comes to the fore, here-the reader wants to know what the people they have come to know and like do to make a production successful.

Tension is skilfully created through both characters and situations. Hope must respond to the whims of the star of the production, Tommy Knight and this often involves last-minute forays to retrieve a vital prop or, at the other end of the spectrum, some expensive dry cleaning. Tommy's brother Rick is the show's director and the two often clash another source of credible tension. Perhaps Harcourt's most impressive use of this narrative tool is her ability to convey the theatrical miracle of actors becoming the character they play, then shedding that fictitious skin at the end of a rehearsal or performance.

There is, perhaps inevitably, a romance threaded through this story. Hope finds herself deeply attracted to Luke, a student at drama college who is playing a part in the show-and the attraction is mutual. Yet, even here, Harcourt has a sure touch and the developing relationship never descends into comic-book fantasy but instead gives her a vehicle through which she can delve more deeply into the two characters to show how their lives and personalities have been shaped.

I have to resort to the old cliché-I couldn't put this book down-because it is absolutely true. At 300+ pages it is a long read but an absorbing and richly rewarding one.

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