

A Book Review

Title: *Xanthe And The Ruby Crown*

Author: Jashbinder Bilan

Plot

Xanthe And The Ruby Crown is a story about a Year 6 girl called Xanthe, who spends the summer holidays staying with her grandmother in a tower block in Nottingham. Whilst exploring the building one day, Xanthe discovers a door on the ground floor leading to a cramped, seemingly unused area, which she decides would make a fantastic spot for a den. Xanthe's grandmother is showing signs of dementia, which means she's starting to lose her memory, and as the story goes on, Xanthe tries to help her remember her childhood in Uganda. With the help of her friend Romeo, Xanthe starts to convert her den into a memory museum for her grandmother, using Ugandan artefacts she finds mysteriously buried under the tower block as well as other treasures from her grandmother's past that she finds in her flat.

Characters

The main character, Xanthe, is a kind, sweet and very realistic young girl, who cares deeply for her family and wants to do her best to help her grandmother keep hold of her precious memories and also unlock some of the forgotten memories of her past in Uganda – though as the story unfolds, we start to realise just why her grandmother has wanted to forget her time there... Romeo is a great friend to Xanthe although they only get to see each other in the school holiday. However, you get a real sense that they have no secrets from each other and have a really close bond. Even so, this friendship is tested when Romeo introduces Xanthe to his school friend Pria, who Xanthe immediately feels is coming between her and Romeo. As the story goes on, though, Xanthe realises that Priya has a talent that can really help with the memory museum.

Your opinion

This isn't the sort of book I would normally read, but I found myself unable to tear myself away from the story and I finished it off in an afternoon! I really liked the characters of the three main children, and found the history element of it fascinating as well. As the story went on, you learn more about Xanthe's grandmother's past, and the unfair way that Asian people were treated in Uganda back then, which is a period in history I hadn't known anything about before – really interesting, but sad too! There is also a bit of a mystical element to the story too in the form of a mysterious cat that turns up in Xanthe's grandmother's flat from time to time and leads Xanthe to objects related to her grandmother's childhood – in fact, they give Xanthe visions of the past! I didn't mind this part of the story, but I might have preferred if the plot had stayed realistic all the way through.

Recommend

One of the reasons I picked up the book is because I'm a bit of a cat lover myself, so fellow feline fanatics might also like the book for the same reason! I would also recommend this book to readers who enjoy stories that are mostly set in real-life settings but don't mind a touch of the fantastical. The Ugandan element might also interest people interested in learning about the history of a completely different part of the world too. There's also some really lovely descriptions in the book too, especially of the sky and how it changes throughout the day, so if you enjoy picturing vivid, beautiful scenes in your head as you read, this could be for you. As I said at the start of the review, *Xanthe And The Lost Crown* isn't the type of book I would normally read but I ended up really quite enjoying it, so I'd say that if you think you might like the sound of it, give it a shot!