



The House of One Hundred Clocks

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

In Edwardian Cambridge, Helena, her beloved pet parrot Orbit and her father, recently bereaved after the loss of Helena's mother, begin a new life in the home of the enigmatic Mr Westcott. They have been charged with looking after the many clocks which crowd Westcott's townhouse and with which he appears obsessed.

Helena is not enthusiastic about this venture and even less so when she discovers the harsh nature of the contract her father has signed. If any of the clocks stop during her father's stewardship, they will forfeit all their possessions. This Helena discovers was the fate of the previous incumbent.

There are many questions to which Helena seeks answers, including the reason the contract her father had to sign was so harsh, what has happened to the belongings of the previous timekeeper, why drawings of flying machines keep appearing on the walls and who the mysterious child called 'boy' often seated silently in the corner of a room really is. The need to solve the mysteries in this strange household is intertwined with the compelling urgency to prevent the clocks from stopping. Helena dreads this happening as it will lead to the loss of Orbit, her remaining link to the mother she has lost.

As this absorbing well-crafted narrative unfolds, we discover the grief and fear of further loss which fuels Mr Westcott's irrational superstitions and the motivation and resentment of his sister, Katherine. Witnessing these revelations leads to greater understanding between Helena and her own father as she begins to come to terms with her mother's death and learns to look forward to a new life.

In addition to the sensitive exploration of grief, depression and obsession, historical themes are threaded throughout the story: the beginning of female emancipation and rights to education, early attempts at flight and the plight of the poor with the ever present spectre of the workhouse.

A compelling and very well-crafted story, highly recommended.

Links:

[1] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-house-of-one-hundred-clocks>

[2] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/241>

[3] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/sue-mcgonigle>