

The changeling



THE CHANGELING by ROBIN JENKIN This is an interesting book with very strong characters for whom you develop strong feelings. It is the story of a school child Tom Curdie, living in the grim slums of Glasgow in the 1950's, and his teacher Charlie Forbes who genuinely wants to help Tom and improve his life, but,,,,,, is ignorant of the best way to go about this. Charlie decides to invite Tom on his annual family holiday, much to the disappointment of his wife and children, and to the doubt of Tom and his family, Forbes, thinks by offering Tom this holiday, he is providing him with strength to see him through his difficult life when he returns to the slums. Tragically, he does not anticipate the difficulties Tom would face when it is time to return to the slums after experiencing a different life with the Forbes. Tom is then, tragically, caught between the two lives, fitting into neither. Forbes is naive in wanting to help but he doesn't consider the possible harm that his help may cause. All of the characters are very rich and deep, providing the reader with much to consider. The character of Tom is a very memorable one.

One feels great sympathy for him, with his awful life in the slums in Glasgow, the neglect he suffers, and his apparent hopeless chances of forwarding himself or improving his situation. It is interesting though that the author creates a character that we, as the reader don't fully understand- in many regards you may expect Tom to be another Oliver Twist, who would instantly gain our sympathies and we would be wishing well, but?!. Tom creates a little uncertainty and slight suspicions in us regarding his motives and actions. One can admire this as it is probably more true to life. Many poverty stricken and desperate people would have no hope of any help or

sympathy so would be suspicious, as Tom is, when some is offered. Part of Tom is keen to accept, the help but the majority of him is determined to disappoint and hurt ??? the good Samaritan??™ before they disappoint and hurt him.

Jenkins has been very clever in portraying this in the character of Tom Curdie. His character is fully rounded with flaws and good qualities, not just a simple trusting person with a heart of gold waiting for someone to save him, and full of appreciation for any help offered. He has had to learn to survive on his own and to trust only himself, so cannot drop his guard or lose his suspicions of people immediately.

It is interesting to see Charlie Forbes??™ daughter??™s reaction to Tom, she is very suspicious of him and doubting of his motives from the beginning- perhaps this displays a more honest reaction that adults may feel, but would try to conceal, and Tom does seem an intriguing character- with his smiles, that seem to display some secret knowledge or understanding , or that he is secretly passing judgement on the speaker. Mr Forbes??™ motives are fascinating and very true to life. He is obviously a very caring man that wants to help Tom, yet he can??™t help but have personal motives for these generous deeds. It does him credit that he is able to identify these motives- many people wouldn??™t, and would paint themselves as entirely selfless.

He felt sorry for Tom and tried to help him. It is almost scary how damaging Forbes??™ actions are how naive he was. This book demonstrates that people and charity are a great deal more complicated than they appear- sometimes you can think that you are helping someone more unfortunate

than yourself, but actually, by not being able to experience their feelings and the way they have lived their life, and the thick skin they have had to develop in order to survive, you may actually be interfering and doing more harm than good. It can be very easy and tempting to simply think that by offering money or our time will automatically fix things in other people's lives, but it isn't.

Unfortunately it isn't as simple or straightforward as that. The Changeling gives a fascinating and accurate study of human nature and motives. Tom steals money from Mr Forbes' school desk - not because he has to, as he has already stolen from another teacher's office, so he has the money he needs. Because Mr Forbes has offered him kindness in inviting him on his family holiday, Tom believes that if he trusts Mr Forbes then the teacher will inevitably let him down, so, he wants to cause the hurt first before suffering hurt himself.

It is also thought provoking to consider how people change after their time with Tom—sadly they all appear to become even more crueler than they were. This puzzled me a little. Perhaps it was the fear that Tom was getting too close and settled to the family, and they wanted to drive him away to preserve their status quo, or maybe they are forced to consider themselves when they judge Tom and inevitably become aware of their own flaws, which they resent. But, all of them change from being fairly sympathetic to Tom, to hating him and driving him out. This book is very sad and bleak in that the end result isn't a happy ending with the poor happy and content, and life being fair. Yet, this is why the book is so strongly written and why it is one to

be highly regarded as it doesn't tie up everything nicely, but shows how real life actually is, with all its unfairness and unhappiness.