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The Great Godden

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Editor's Choice:

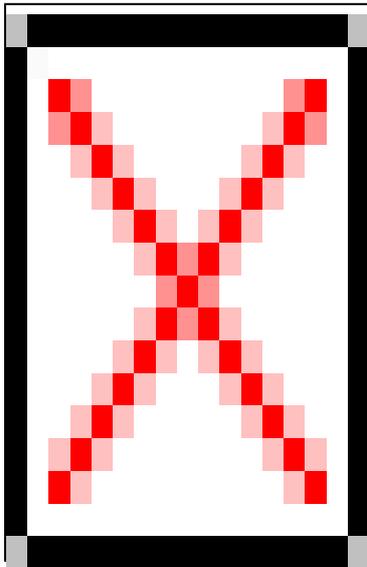
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5



A gift for apparently effortless prose usually betokens an author working long hours perfecting their craft. Meg Rosoff, whose latest novel further cements her place as a truly outstanding popular writer, is one such perfectionist. Already a multiple prize-winner, she has the confidence to write about whatever she pleases, regardless of whether the settings are currently fashionable. In this novel she focuses on the wealthy and amiably self-congratulatory Godden family. There is no nod towards any sort of diversity, because it would not have fitted into the plot. Instead, this story could have been written any time in the last fifty years, where teenagers and affectionate parents plus other adults experience a protracted summer break by the sea. Characters read plays by Edward Albee and set off to the beach to pick samphire for the family lunch, later to be fortified by glasses of an English Pinot Noir. Relationships are warm, with parental reprimands never amounting to much more than gentle advice on when to say ?whom? rather than ?who?.

Describing families who have it all can risk alienating readers in less happy circumstances, but this is not an issue here. Because it is soon evident that the Goddens are blindly heading towards emotional disaster, all recounted in terse first-person by one of the teenagers of the house, whose actual gender is never made clear. Readers are drawn into

relationships where sex divorced from feeling, however urgent it seemed at the time, ultimately proves destructive to all concerned. The villain is a handsome American teenager stud spending time in Britain ? a perfect part for any similarly endowed actor should this fine and engrossing story ever make it to the screen. Ostensibly a Young Adult novel, there is much here for adult readers too. Rumer Godden's **The Greengage Summer**, now over sixty years old, is still one of the best ever descriptions of adolescent first love and eventual betrayal during one hot summer. Rosoff could have been thinking of this when choosing the family name and title for this equally compelling novel.

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