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# Outside

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Like Rapunzel, Ele is a captive in a tower, or rather imagining herself as a fairy tale princess helps her survive the unimaginable horror of her life. Ele has been imprisoned in a windowless room ? six strides long ? for most of her young life. Food drops from the ceiling, ?sun bars? flick on and then off, and disinfectant ?rains? down at regular intervals. She shares the space with the ?Others?, three friends who may or may not be real, and knocks messages out to ?Jack?, a prisoner in another part of the tower.

Of course there?s a ?Him? behind this, Ele describes him to us one physical attribute at a time ? the sound of his footsteps, his thick fingers, scratchy lips. It makes him less human, more monstrous. Her descriptions of his actions towards her are more chilling for the details Ele leaves out, but she is clear when she describes how he murdered her brother. Through of all this, dreams of escaping to the ?Outside? sustain her, and she finally makes it, fleeing into a wild Scottish landscape naked and knowing nothing of the world other than what she has gleaned from her book of fairy stories.

She finds refuge with a boy called Willow and his father, who she fears at first is a giant. The tone changes for this section of the book and is less intense, more sentimental ? putting some strain on credulity ? but Ele?s voice, always clear, direct and engaging, keeps readers with her. We know of course that Ele will have to go back to face Him and to save her friends, and the climax is almost unbearably tense.

Comparisons with Emma Donoghue?s **Room** are inevitable, but **Outside** feels fiercely original. It?s not easy to write a character in the situation described and keep them cheerful, optimistic, credible, but Jukes manages it. This is well-written, sensitive on issues such as sexual abuse, and, whether in her tower or the outside world, Ele?s voice and vision of the world will keep readers intrigued.

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