



## Being Billy

*Phil Earle*

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## **Being Billy** Phil Earle

*Being Billy* is the award-winning first novel by Phil Earle.

**\*\*\**Heroic*, Phil Earle's hugely anticipated third novel is out on 24 April 2013\*\*\***

### **Faces flashed before my eyes.**

And for every face there was a time that they had let me down.

Each punch that landed was revenge, my chance to tell them I hadn't forgotten what they did.

Eight years in a care home makes Billy Finn a professional lifer. And Billy's angry - with the system, the social workers, and the mother that gave him away.

As far as Billy's concerned, he's on his own. His little brother and sister keep him going, though they can't keep him out of trouble.

But he isn't being difficult on purpose. Billy's just being Billy. He can't be anything else.

### **Can he?**

'Phil Earle writes starkly but sensitively about damaged children in this brilliant page-turning novel. It moved me to tears' - Jacqueline Wilson

'*Being Billy* was a total page-turner - authentic and gritty. Billy's voice doesn't falter . . . spiky, brave and compassionate' - Jenny Downham, author of *Before I Die*

'Moving and powerful, I loved it' - Sophie McKenzie

Phil Earle was born, raised and schooled in Hull. His first job was as a care worker in a children's home, an experience that influenced the ideas behind *Being Billy*. He then trained as a drama therapist and worked in a therapeutic community in south London, caring for traumatized and abused adolescents.

After a couple of years in the care sector, Phil chose the more sedate lifestyle of a bookseller, and now works in children's publishing. Phil lives in south-east London with his wife and children, but Hull will always be home.

## **Being Billy Details**

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## From Reader Review Being Billy for online ebook

### Nicola says

Being Billy was *so* much better than I expected it to be! I found the description to be only vaguely intriguing and certainly nothing original at all. I didn't expect it to be so engaging and unique! I thought Billy was an excellently developed character and had no problems empathizing with him and his whole situation. While Billy is certainly not perfect, he's still a good person who has just been through a lot. I loved his relationship with his little siblings and I loved that he wasn't afraid to admit that he was wrong sometimes. Billy certainly grew as a character throughout the whole book and I was very satisfied with the ending. It wasn't *amazing* but it was well written, interesting and kept my attention until the very last page.

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### Alice Dillon says

I don't remember where or when I acquired my copy of Being Billy. It was one of those books I picked up on a whim from my overflowing second bookcase (I have three), seemingly magically deposited there. Presumably I've had it for so long I had forgotten all about it. I have quite a few books like that and, being practical, I thought I should either read it now or give it away because I was never going to get around to it. It's a short book and so, even though the blurb gives no indication of what its pages hold, I decided to give it a go. Thank goodness I did because it was a wonderfully moving and profound piece of work, primarily focusing on the development of its main character.

Billy is a 'lifer', a child who is in care for the long haul with little to no prospects of being fostered, adopted or taken back home. He is by no stretch of the imagination an easy kid to take care of. He vandalises property, shoplifts alcohol, lashes out violently at his carers and other kids, refuses to do school work and is generally just constantly rude and angry. Doesn't sound the easiest character to like either, right? But this changes when we are first shown how he acts around his twin siblings, who are young enough not to remember a time before they were in care. Billy does everything for them (getting their breakfast, sitting outside the bathroom as they bathe, reading them their bedtime stories, waiting in their doorway for them to fall asleep), barely letting the carers do anything.

From the start Billy operates under the assumption that no one really cares about him - or any of the other kids for that matter - and lashes out constantly at the 'scummers', the care workers at his home. The book focuses on Billy over a period of several months as he makes a real friend for seemingly the first time (with, gratifyingly, no romantic tension whatsoever), deals with the terrifying prospect of losing the twins, processes past trauma and slowly learns to control his anger. Mostly this is achieved through his changing relationship with carer Ronnie, as Billy begins to trust that he does really care. It's true that I'm an easy crier, but I don't think that devalues the tears I shed at this and at Billy's growth in general.

There's little plot to be seen, but I often find that that's for the best with a book focused as much on character as this one is. Don't worry, though, the denouement is satisfying in its closure, bringing together plot points from throughout in one climactic evening which mostly serves to showcase how much our protagonist has changed. He is still a deeply troubled young man, but the way he deals with his emotions and his attitude towards others have transformed him into someone you can't help but love.

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## Emi says

To be honest, I really thought I would enjoy this book a lot more than this. (As usual, I ramble a lot about characterization, pacing and story execution, so there'll be sort-of spoilers. I just enjoy discussing character and plot development a lot.)

The story of Being Billy should be something right up my alley, with the angry kid in the care home and his issues and fumbling his way through life and all. It's generally my type of story and everything. However, very early in the book, only a few pages in, I ran into my first issue.

I didn't like Billy. I really didn't like him. I'm not sure if it's his characterization as an arrogant and angry teenager, but I could not sympathise with him for most, if not all, of the book. While I understand that children of his background have every right to be angry and attention-seeking in their own ways, but even with this understanding, I didn't find enough redeeming features for me to sympathise with him. Not caring about the protagonist was a big disaster signal for me only a few chapters in. I believe part of the reason is the way his first-person perspective is written. I reckon the biggest weakness of the first-person view is that the description of everything the narrator does becomes magnified, focusing all on his choices and how he made them, and how cocky and sure he is of what he does, over-explanation, over-defensiveness of his actions etc. So the safer option would've been to go for the third-person, where distance seems to make it easier to relate to the characters. I understand the need for first person- to understand Billy and his anger, particularly later on the book- but I regret to say I never did like Billy and that really affected my enjoyment of the book.

The thing is, in order to make an unlikeable character likeable, you simply need to show the reader something or someone they love passionately. With Being Billy, we have the twins as a way to show Billy's good side. But the twins are so obviously there for that purpose- Lizzie and Louie are basic cardboard cut-outs of the typical needy siblings, seen commonly in other books where children band together against abusive parents- their interactions with Billy and their clinginess to him are so typical and obvious. There are moments where their characterization is done fairly well, such as the description of their drawings, but overall, the twins are very bland and flat characters used only to play their required roles.

I wish I could say something positive about Daisy, as she is a pivotal character in Billy's growth. However, she was not as interesting as Billy made her out to be. At times, she had odd quirks and traits, but her personality and back story seem unsatisfying at most. I did like the way she was introduced in the story, her kick ass nature and her coldness and fierceness to Billy. I wish that spark had lasted longer and that it was evident in their later interactions, which were boring and didn't portray the closeness they supposedly had. It would have been nice to see casual or deeper conversations play out between the both of them, to see scenes of their friendship. Instead, we are just told by Billy that throughout the months they sit on the bench together, they text each other, etc etc. We are given like one scene where they go out drinking together, but that too lacks any substantial development between the two. Thus, Billy's anger and hurt at her apparent betrayal later on doesn't make much sense to me, as the two didn't seem anywhere near as close as they were supposed to be. It would've been nicer to have seen a raw friendship, to see a relationship develop throughout the book, rather than simply being told it happened.

I did like that there was no romance. It was important that Billy and Daisy could understand each other without anything extra, and it's always nice to see genuine, strong boy-girl friendships. (It's just a shame it wasn't really portrayed as that genuine or strong.)

Ronnie was one of the more interesting and better fleshed-out characters of the book. He really stood out, with the way his speech and actions were described. I'm happy to say that I genuinely liked him, although it was incredibly predictable from the beginning that he would turn out to be a good guy.

I did really like the tragic backstory of Billy with Jan and Grant. It was just believable and tragic enough to see how the incident could've heavily isolated and impacted Billy. I liked that he would sneak back into his old room to sleep peacefully, I thought that was cute and a good way to display Billy's longing for a home.

Most of the book didn't seem to be about anything. I presumed Billy was supposed to be growing or making some changes, but it wasn't really evident, he just seemed to meander along and nothing happened really. I believe his relationships were supposedly improving with Ronnie and Daisy, and thus he was improving, although there was the constant foreboding of losing the twins to his mother. It would've been nice if the upward ride was more upward, like it was more evident that Billy was really making an effort to change and improve in order to keep the twins (because he really didn't seem to try that hard at all, especially with school and it really contradicts what his aims are actually supposed to be). I believe if there was more evident improvement then the downward crash at the end would have a lot more impact- more sudden, more unexpected and much more devastating- as it would be in real life.

The last few chapters and as I said, the downward crash was written very well. It was exciting to read Billy exploding and crashing the room, as well as the sudden return of Shaun. As I mentioned before, it would have had been a much bigger impact if there had been more of an upward ride before the sudden downward crash. However, although these last scenes were written really well, the pages afterwards seemed to be really really rushed. In a few sentences, we're told that it's already been five days (Did Billy really just mope around all that time? Why not have some character reflection or something?) and it literally reads like everything's quickly being cleaned up and swept aside. (The charges were dropped by like the next day??) The immediate denouement from the climax honestly feels a bit half-assed and very rushed. However, I did like the final conversation between Billy and Ronnie. It was a very suitable way to end, as I feel like they are the two main characters and everything was built around their relationship.

Overall, *Being Billy* is just too predictable and the characters and story progression were undercooked. But it has a lot of heart in what it's trying to say and Phil Earle's honest efforts should be commended.

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### **Stephanie (Stepping out of the Page) says**

*Being Billy* was a very realistic book. It is clear from the beginning that Phil Earle has previously worked in care - the authenticity of Billy and the relationships he has with others is incredible. Though I didn't find Billy completely endearing, I found him to be a very interesting character and I could see where he was coming from in a lot of his thoughts and I could admire the fact that he knew he wasn't perfect and had made mistakes. I adored Billy's relationship with his siblings as it showed a more sensitive, paternal side of him. His relationship with Ron also made for a very strong feature in the story. I didn't see the twist coming which made for a really big shock - it was certainly effective and emotive. I can't say that this book completely grabbed my attention, it didn't have me desperate to read on, but it all felt very true to life which is the real quality of this book.

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## Jo says

Woosh.

This book was fantastic. I think my heart is still pounding from those last couple of chapters.

I don't mind admitting that the majority of my knowledge of children in care is from reading Tracey Beaker by Jacqueline Wilson. And I know that might sound odd because Ms Wilson doesn't *really* write young adult books, but if you've ever read a Jacqueline Wilson you will know that she is not one to shy away from the truth or darker aspects of life because they're uncomfortable to read. Tracey Beaker is my second favourite of Ms Wilson's books (First one, if you're interested, is The Lottie Project) because it's so realistic and isn't afraid to delve into the nitty-gritty of what it's like for a child in care.

And Being Billy? It was like Tracey Beaker... *amplified*.

There were two scenes in particular (the bowling alley and the house at the end, if you've read this) that I'm sure will stick with me for a long time. They were *so* powerful and it was often difficult to read it because they felt so raw. But it never felt gratuitous. As the events unfolded I could always tell that Mr Earle knew what he was talking about. I knew that he wasn't just thinking "Right, OK, I'm writing a book about a SERIOUS SUBJECT and it has to be horrendously sad and my readers have to be in floods of tears". He was telling Billy's story as it was, with no extra trimmings.

So did I cry? I hear you ask.

Maybe.

And when I say maybe I really mean yes. Multiple times.

Anyway enough about me, let's talk about Billy. He was such a colourful character even if he wasn't always likeable. But sometimes they're the best ones, aren't they? There were so many times I wanted to reach into the pages and throttle him. Was he frustrated, angry, unreasonable? Our Billy was all of the above. But I still loved him.

He had an extremely British self-deprecating and dry humour that was hilarious but also ridiculously sad. No fourteen year old should have the material to master a self-deprecating sense of humour. But unfortunately Billy does. I don't want to go into the specifics because of spoilers, but when the events of his past are finally revealed it isn't surprising that he is the way he is. He's disillusioned with life. He doesn't trust people when they say they want to help. He feels that he has been given up on by every single 'responsible' adult that was supposed to be taking care of him. And he has anger that he can't control without being restrained by The Colonel.

I'm 99% sure that Mr Earle didn't have an agenda in mind when he wrote this book but regardless, he has written an extremely affective book that wasn't only compelling but also incredibly harrowing.

My favourite relationships in young adult books are between siblings. Wait... I'm not talking about in a creepy and illegal Forbidden way, but I mean the connections *between* siblings. I always think that, when done right, a relationship between siblings can be more powerful than a love interest and it makes me sad that siblings hardly get a look in in fiction. Luckily, Mr Earle knows how to do it right. Billy's relationship with Lizzie and Louie was one of the most touching aspects of this book and every time the three of them were together I just wanted to gather them into my arms and cuddle them and pray that everything was going to be OK for them.

Also, make muffins made in orange skins. Because they sound DELICIOUS if you ignore the slight possibility of getting salmonella. I would like that recipe.

For... um... research. Blogging research...

And also snaffling them.

I want to say it was a happy ending, but it wasn't. Normally I hate happy endings because, to me, there is nothing worse than an overly saccharine ending that would never happen in real life. But I wanted there to be a happy ending with this book because I wanted to know that Billy was definitely going to OK. I wanted to know that all his flaws and insecurities would be eliminated by a glorious ending where all the characters get together and sing or do an interpretative dance or something. But no. I got a realistic ending and it's one that's *almost* hopeful. I have faith in Billy. Not sure how much that means for I am just a lowly book reviewer but I believe he'll be OK when he gets to the end of his story. This book is just the first chapter in his story, though. That's what I reckon, anyway.

He's a tough nut, our Billy is, and he's a fighter.

Before I wrap this review up, I just want to say how much I want to go on and on about how much I loved Daisy and how much of a fantastic character she is... but I've just discovered that Mr Earle has given her her own book. So I'll just wait, because there is 100% chance that I will be reading Saving Daisy within the next few weeks.

Read this book.

Go on.

Have I ever steered you wrong?

\*flutters eyelashes\*

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This review and lots of other exciting things can be found on my blog, Wear the Old Coat.

### **Cora ? Tea Party Princess says**

#### **5 Words: Harsh, startling, thought provoking, different.**

I haven't read a book like this for a long while. And it was so refreshing.

Being Billy is stark and harsh and thought-provoking. It makes you stop and think and look at things from a different perspective.

This book is UKYA at its best. It's real, it's gritty and it hits you hard.

At first I thought I wasn't going to sympathise with Billy. He's a bit of a shit. But as I read I discovered that he's a good kid, really. He just hasn't had the best of lives. I understood why he made the decisions he did, even if at first they seemed abhorrent to me. As different as Billy is, as much as he is pretty much the opposite of me, I found that I could identify and empathise with him.

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This is a great read. Read it even if only to challenge your own perceptions of the bad kids.

### **Sarah says**

**Being Billy** is a book that I've been meaning to read for a long time now, it's come highly recommended by most of my favourite UKYA bloggers and now that I've finally read it I can completely understand why they all rave about it. It's incredibly impressive to think that this was **Phil Earle's** debut novel and I'm excited that I already have copies of his next three books because I can't wait to dive into them.

Billy is an angry young man, something that isn't really surprising considering everything he's been through, he has spent eight years living in care and he feels that nobody really cares about him. The staff may act like they care but they're getting paid to look after him and he's sure they all forget about him the moment they're no longer on the clock. The only constants in Billy's life are his younger siblings, Lizzie and Louie, and Billy would do anything to make sure they are safe and cared for. He's pretty much given up on himself but he wants the best for them so when social services threaten to separate them unless he starts to behave himself he knows he's going to have to try and do something about his temper.

This story absolutely broke my heart, Billy is such an incredibly realistic character (you can really tell that the author has experience as a Care Worker) and his story really makes you think. It's painful to think of the thousands of children who are in Billy's position, children who haven't had the best start in life and who have been rejected or abused by the people who are supposed to love them the most. It's no wonder that some of these kids fight back to get attention or just don't know how to deal with their anger in a healthy way. Billy has no outlet for his feelings so his temper can be explosive but it was incredibly easy to sympathise with him.

What I loved most was seeing how Billy changes from a young man with the world on his shoulder who thinks that everyone is out to get him. It isn't easy but eventually he starts to understand that people do care about him and that they want what is best not just for him but also for Lizzie and Louie too. I also loved seeing his friendship with Daisy develop and I'm excited that we're going to learn more about her in **Saving Daisy**. I think the thing I probably enjoyed the most was Billy's interactions with the carer Ronnie. Ronnie was a hard taskmaster who didn't let Billy get away with anything but he took the time to build a bond between them. It was obvious how much Ronnie cared about the whole family and even though it took Billy a long time to realise that seeing the change in Billy when he finally did was incredibly rewarding. I have the utmost admiration for carers, it must be one of the most emotionally draining and difficult jobs out there but at times it must be one of the most rewarding ones too.

**Being Billy** is an incredible story, one that will break your heart one minute but have you laughing out loud the next. It will make you appreciate everything you've got and it might even make you think twice about the actions of some of the kids you used to go to school with. One thing it will definitely do is stay with you. I found myself thinking about Billy many times after I finished the book because he just feels so real to me, he is a young boy you could meet in pretty much any town in England and he wormed his way into my heart and made himself at home there. I can't recommend **Being Billy** highly enough and I can't wait to read more from **Phil Earle**.

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### **Iselin says**

My. heart.

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## **Kirsty says**

I really enjoyed this moving and poignant tale about Billy an angry young man who has spent a lifetime living in care.

I liked this book because I thought it gave real insight into what life is like for children like Billy and highlights an issue that many people do not give a second thought to. It showed how simply the effect of being in care can affect every aspects of a child's life even affecting their future aspirations and achievements.

I found Billy as character really fascinating. He had this really tough front which he had built up from years of being in care and thinking no one wanted him but underneath it all he was really kind and loving towards his younger siblings and was deeply affected by all the rejection he had been through despite appearing to shrug it off. Being inside Billy's head throughout the entire book was an interesting choice of narration as it meant the story was quite unpredictable and subject to the differing moods Billy was in.

I loved the relationship Billy built up with Daisy another young girl who he recognised to be the same as him. I also liked seeing how Billy was with Ronnie his key worker and seeing how that changed over the course of the novel.

The final outcome of the story was really moving and very sad. The twists were unexpected and engaging. All in all a fantastic book which highlighted for me the issues surrounding children in the care system. An emotional rollercoaster of a ride and definitely one I would recommend.

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## **Michelle says**

### **Rating: 4.5 Stars**

Although I am a fan of contemporary novels and recently read another novel set in the UK with a male protagonist (review here), *Being Billy* still managed to take me by surprise. I was expecting it to be confronting and gritty, it seems to be something the Brits excel at, but I was not expecting it to make me so angry or have a protagonist I didn't particularly like.

I know that sounds harsh, but in my opinion, Billy wasn't meant to be instantly likeable or endearing. No, he was angry and he showed it and that's always confronting to read. I felt deeply sorry for Billy and I could never begin to imagine what it must have been like to have been through what he had. However, he also made me angry when it came to his relationship with his main carer Ronnie. I could see Ronnie was trying to help and Billy's constant anger toward him annoyed me, but ultimately I could understand why he found it so hard to trust anyone. In saying that, I did eventually come to care deeply for Billy. He was so incredibly loving towards his brother and sister, and so brave and mature when it came to realising he had to let them go. By the end of the novel, I was cheering him on, hoping he could make everything right.

In terms of the pacing of this novel, it was spot on. It was relatively fast-paced and very compelling, yet portrayed the more 'mundane' aspects of life in the home and at school. And those last few chapters...WOW. I'm still trying to get my head around it all. I was torn between desperately hoping for a magical happy ending and knowing that I wouldn't be happy unless the conclusion was realistic, however

heartbreaking. Well, Earle certainly delivered a realistic ending, but there was a dash of hope in there.

*Being Billy* was a wonderful read and one that really did take me by surprise. It was raw, heartbreaking, confronting...everything I've come to expect from those marvellous British writers. Although I didn't instantly take to Billy, he won me over in the end and made this a book I won't forget in a hurry.

*This review and many more can be found at Maree's Musings.*

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## **Sammee (I Want to Read That) says**

4.5 Stars

This really is such a great book! I apologise in advance for my (rather) gushing review but I really did love it.

The story follows Billy, a boy who has been in care for the past 8 years, a 'lifer' as he calls it. He's angry with everyone - the only meaning in his life are his younger brother and sister. Then one night he runs into a girl called Daisy and they develop a friendship. As he starts to open up to her he begins to learn that people do care...and that he cares too...

Phil Earle's writing in this is spot on and the voice he gives to Billy is remarkably authentic. Not only did I absolutely adore his character but his story made me reconsider all the things I take for granted - having a home, having parents who have always been there for me, knowing that I am loved by them - there are just so many things that just are that I haven't really thought it might not be the case for everybody. No, that's not completely true. I think I know that's the case but by making Billy so real, it makes it heartbreaking to realise that there are many, many kids out there just like him.

So I admit I cried A LOT reading this but please believe me when I say there is humour present too. I loved how Billy is constantly trying to wind Ronnie up! But Billy's story really struck a cord with me. I can't even begin to understand what it must be like - to essentially be rejected not once but twice, and all before you are 15 years old. To be told: yes you are wanted and then no, sorry you are not. Back to care you go. It made me really sad (and angry) but I also began to understand why this might happen. How do you go from living in care - where everything is decided for you, with a bunch of other kids and people who look after you on shifts and then go home to their 'real' family - to being part of a family where suddenly you are supposed to fit in and make all these choices, to really believe that someone cares? I wondered if that's why Billy calls himself a lifer? Because he knows he will never have anything else?

I loved taking Billy's journey with him. At the start he's angry with everyone - constantly lashing out and refusing to let anyone close. His lifeline is his brother and sister and you really see how different he is with them, how caring and vulnerable. The addition of Daisy in his life seems to change all that anger and their friendship seems to open him up and make a real difference. I also loved his relationship with Ronnie and how that changes and develops over the course of the novel. If I had to criticise, there was one aspect of the story that felt a little too coincidental for my liking, but at the same time it did get Billy to the place he needs to be. The pay-off made it worth it so to speak!

What I really enjoyed about this book, as well as everything I mentioned above, was how all the characters felt real. Ronnie, Daisy, Billy's brother and sister, his mother - I felt completely invested in all of them. I

think Phil Earle's experience working in a care home really added to this novel by giving us insight into not just Billy but also in the characters that surround him. A truly awesome debut and I'm really looking forward to reading more by this author.

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### **Rebecca says**

[For those of you who have read it, it was the part where the twins leave to go and live with Annie that set me off. (hide spoiler)]

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### **Helena says**

Billy is a complex character - living in a children's home - with his younger brother and sister, whom he obviously adores. He is full of angst and anger - very bitter, and tends to hit out at those around him at times. He did not have a happy home life, and finds it difficult to accept the fact that his mother wants his siblings back but not him.

Powerfully written and well worth the read

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### **Susan Mann says**

I was very lucky in winning a signed copy of this book from the wonderful book blog Wonderous Reads. I woke up at 5am this morning and read this book in one sitting could not put it down

I found it a very emotional book, it gave you an insight into the mind of a 15 year old boy in care. He is aggressive anti- establishment, school, care home etc. The only people he cares about is the twins his little brother and sister. His mother had given up her rights to him and allowed him to be put forward for adoption, it didn't work out and he was returned to the care home and reunited with the twins. Although in a care home he looks after them , puts them to bed , reads them stories prepares their breakfast etc. His alcoholic mother gets her act together and eventually gets the twins back and Billy always looking after their interest makes it easier for them to leave him, although it is the hardest thing he has to do.

Without spoiling the story , he does find that one of the care workers has always been looking out for him and as the story unfolds he realises not everything or everyone is as it seems to him.

Although there is a lot of aggression in Billy you understand what is behind it and how in his mind it is always justified. The author obviously has an insight into his subject matter through his previous employment. Although hard hitting I found it a very believable account.

I would recommend this to everyone, it's not my usual read but I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a powerful read.

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## **Carly says**

Wow – I honestly cannot believe *Being Billy* is a debut novel. The writing is first class and I was moved from beginning to end. I am officially in love with this book.

*Being Billy* touches on a subject I haven't read about much in YA literature – children in a care home. Earle writes with a stark honesty and it's quite clear he knows his subject matter inside out. Some of the little stories within *Being Billy*'s pages can only be real life anecdotes and they really help to bring the book alive. The one that springs to my mind now is the story of the hotel biscuits!

I read *Being Billy* in a single sitting on Christmas Eve while I was waiting for my working day to come to an end. Yes, I had finished my work for the day so was allowed to read, I wasn't pulling some incognito ninja page turning under the desk, rest assured. Embarrassingly enough I cried not once, not twice but **THRICE** while reading this book. Luckily none of my work pals noticed, or if they did they were kind enough not to ask why I was huddled behind my desk weeping.

For me the garage scene on Billy's birthday is the runaway show stealer of the book. Absolutely beautifully written and so emotionally charged, I dare any of you to make it through without a sniffle or two. For me this was the turning point that made *Being Billy* go from being a great book to one of my favourites. Yup, instant classic right here.

Billy is a complex but loveable character. Years of terrible treatment at the hands of his mother and alcoholic stepfather have forced him to keep his emotions hidden and his guard permanently up. He cares about nothing in life but his nine year old twin siblings, who are clearly his only reason for being. It was lovely to see the way Billy interacted with the twins as we saw a much softer side to his personality. His blossoming friendship with Daisy was great as well and I really warmed to her as a character – she reminded me a little of Caro from the Zelah Green books (which is a good thing).

Phil Earle is definitely one to watch, I'm so impressed that this is his first book and I cannot wait to see what he brings to the table next. So tomorrow morning I strongly suggest you rush off to your nearest bookshop now and spend some of that Christmas cash on *Being Billy* because it's an absolutely corker.

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