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Just Jealous

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A bleak tale, set in a bleak town on the wind-whipped Norfolk coast, beginning ? and ending ? with a dead body in the town park on New Year?s morning. The watching Elise feels invisible, physically and spiritually. She is so drained, so stained by a guilt she will never lose, that she has no substance.

So much for the naïve days of YA fiction when it was axiomatic that young readers were owed an optimistic ending. **Just Jealous** begins badly ? that corpse, Elise?s soldier brother Andy imprisoned after a drunken brawl, the pervading dreariness of winter ? and mostly things get worse. For Elise, though, life will be different; surely her friendship with her neighbour, mixed-race Carl, will grow into something more. But challenges to the course of true love are more like the machinations of **Othello** than the benign misunderstandings of Comedy; ?O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green ey?d monster? stands as this book?s epigraph. Elise herself drifts into the Iago role, even playing upon Carl?s colour, as she attempts to sour his friendship with American student Sandy, newly-arrived in the sixth-form at the local comp. The plot shifts from the tiffs and turns of a teen romance to something altogether darker when Elise discovers a gun in brother Andy?s bedroom.

This came as something of a shock. Style and plot to that point had seemed well-crafted but conventional, down to the well-worn device where, early on, the heroine stared at herself in the mirror and ?saw there a serious-looking girl whose head was very still, whose?? and so on. Once that gun is in play, the narrative becomes compelling as the consequences of Elise?s foolish scheming become fatally inevitable. The characters? inadequacies, their emotional poverty, their clichéd impulses, the small horizons of their lives, all invite readers? pity, and also their sympathy. Newspaper reports of youthful tragedies may sometimes leave us wondering whether the victims have watched too many soaps, as though tired Art has shaped real lives. This novel believably works that notion out through its sombre events.

Running Order:

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