



Clementine and Rudy

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Editor's Choice:

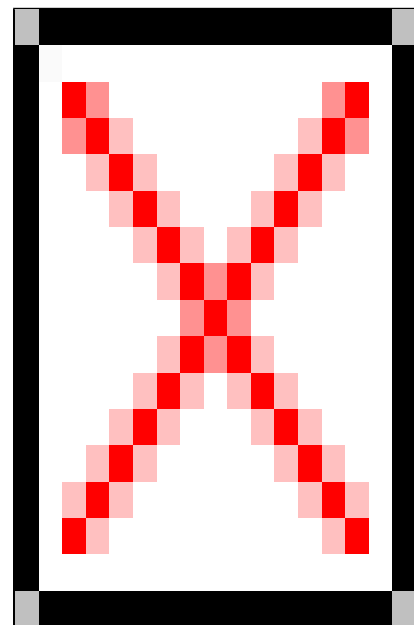
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Media type:

Book

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On the surface, they could hardly seem more different; but as the narrative strips away that surface, Rudy and Clementine realise they have much in common. Their alternating chapters are driven by Rudy's passion to create images and Clem's exploration of poetry. Along the way, the two fifteen-year olds come to define themselves and trust each other, despite the difficulties both face at home.

For Rudy, home is in a block of council flats above Brighton. Her Mum works long, late hours in a casino on the seafront. She's got a new man ? Rudy thinks of him as ?Idiot Dave?; Mum no longer finds the time she and Rudy used to share. Rudy's ambition, which she keeps secret from her Mum, is to create mixed-media street art. As the novel opens, she is about to post her first-ever piece on an alleyway wall in the dark hours of the morning.

Clementine lives in fashionable Hove, attends a private school, enjoys dance classes at a studio owned by a former member of the Royal Ballet. Her home is immaculate, cleaned obsessively by her mother, forbidden to pursue her professional career by Vincent, Clem's repulsive and controlling stepfather, a has-been Radio DJ. Clementine is

devastated to fail an audition for a dance show ? but her disappointment is offset by a chance sighting of Rudy?s street art. Words spark in her mind, and soon she?s posting a poem on Instagram in response to the artwork.

Social media brings the two together along with Rudy?s best friend Tyler, happily working out his apprenticeship at the welcoming veggie cafe, Kale and Hearty. Face to face, the girls are wary of each other. Different homes, clothes, schools ? and there are differences of ethnicity; Rudy?s family is black, Clem?s white. What is there to share? But once they decide to collaborate, with Rudy stencilling Clementine?s verse onto her painting, that caution dissolves. Words and images fuse to reflect heartfelt beliefs ? the need to learn from setbacks, to be resilient, to keep climbing towards your dreams; and, looking beyond themselves, they create a piece to add fresh voices to the shout against plastics choking the oceans. They talk, and talk; about everything from their creative processes to dealing with the crass middle-aged men invading their homes. In fact, there?s so much to talk about that the pace of the novel can seem as unhurried as a real-time conversation, though the use of the storytelling present tense makes for engaging immediacy. There?s humour too ? embedded in credible adolescent chat rather than the contrived banter of some YA fiction.

Both have much to learn ? not least about those intrusive blokes. One really is a sexist stereotype, but Idiot Dave doesn?t live down to his name at all. The girls? excited idealism may risk a reader?s scepticism as their pathways to artistic expression seem relatively rapid, with obstacles fairly easily surmounted, supported by perceptive friends ? who even include a teacher.

Perhaps to bring things closer to the realities of the wider world, Curham introduces a late episode which sees the two girls staying with Clementine?s Dad, who now lives in Berlin. Here, they visit the section of the Wall preserved for murals and Libeskind?s Jewish Museum. Racism and persecution, the death camps and the longing for freedom, serve to set the girls? personal stories back in Brighton in a larger context for them, and for readers too. Their growth as artists, which Curham has made readily accessible for a YA reader, becomes more complex. As visitors leave the Museum, they are invited to record a reaction. Rudy draws an image of the two of them joined in ?a double-faced head?; Clementine adds the words, ?Unity in Diversity?.

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