



Unbecoming

Written by Jenny Downham
David Fickling £14.99
ISBN: 978-1910200643

This incredibly moving, heartbreaking and stunningly written novel explores the lives of three women, Katie, her mum and her grandmother. Katie is seventeen and in love with someone she shouldn't be – another girl. Mary, her grandmother, comes to stay after a mysterious absence of many years. She is suffering from Alzheimer's, and her world is slowly fading from view. Katie looks after her, and they form a very close bond. Mary, almost unwillingly teaches Katie to challenge the world around her, and together they begin to break the rules. Family secrets are slowly revealed and we witness the turmoil this brings through a series of narratives from both Katie's and Mary's points of view. The story weaves together the slowly unravelling events of the past and forces her to confront her present and her future. This is a truly wonderful book which everyone should read. Jenny Downham has created a masterpiece of narrative perspective as we witness the events through the eyes of teenager Katie, and through the Alzheimer's blurred memory of Mary. Mary's illness is treated with such compassion, understanding and emotion.

Allister Jordan

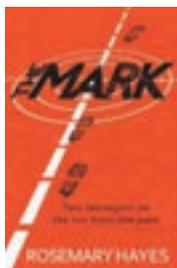
The Mark

Written by Rosemary Harris
Troika £6.99
ISBN: 978-1909991187

Jack and Rachel are both on the run from Adam, Rachel's ex-boyfriend and gang-leader. But, escaping from Adam will also enable them to escape from their past lives, which, though unconnected, have obviously left each scarred. It's a real worry whether Rachel will realistically succeed in recovering from addiction, refocus from self-harming and redirect her life's path.

Jack, often in excruciating pain, is driven to protect Rachel by an inexorable force which is sometimes at odds with his personal will. And what is Jack's true identity? From the first page the reader is immediately ensnared into chasing both Jack's and Rachel's stories. But, more than anything, the reader is encouraged not to judge and not to give up hope. Totally and utterly gripping.

Gill Roberts



Finding Audrey



Written by Sophie Kinsella
Doubleday £12.99
ISBN: 978-0857534583

Audrey wears dark glasses and doesn't go out of the house. The mere mention of a stranger entering her home strikes fear, resulting in a panic attack, brought on due to her Social Anxiety Disorder. Horrific bullying happened to her at school and, as more of the story emerges, it is clear that this is why her disorder has

developed. One of the coping strategies suggested by her psychiatrist is to make a video diary and another is to take that first step out of the house to the local coffee house, which seems impossible to Audrey. That is, until she meets her brother's friend, Linus. From that moment on Audrey's life changes and, although she still struggles with everyday tasks, things start to improve. Audrey's mental health problems are treated realistically and any teenager who is suffering themselves will find hope in Audrey's story. Her character evolves steadily and, although not a smooth journey, her recovery is apparent. This is Sophie Kinsella's first YA title, but, hopefully, not her last.

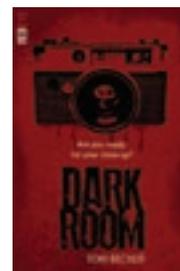
Nicole Jordan

Dark Room

Written by Tom Becker
Stripes £6.99
ISBN: 978-1847154576

Darla and her dad are looking for a fresh start and end up in affluent Saffron Hills. All the teenagers at school are image-obsessed, and beautiful, so Darla's feels really out of place. She starts having gruesome visions and begins to realise they are a glimpse into the future and, moreover, concern her classmates. The book begins with a prologue which sets the scene for this horror story. It is quite a brutal start, then the pace slows only to quicken again at the end. The story is written from Darla's perspective, but switches to another character prior to the downfall. This story is really exciting, scary and very visual. Even the cover has a warning "Not for younger readers" which is a sure way of encouraging young people to read it.

Ingrid Fox



Love and Other Perishable Items

Written by Laura Buzo
Allen & Unwin £6.99
ISBN: 978-1760112424



A love story with an age gap is tricky territory for a YA audience. How does the author develop the characters and the relationship in a satisfying manner without endorsing the age difference? Laura Buzo has answered this question by creating interesting, intelligent characters in Amelia and Chris. Both working at Woolworths, Amelia is only fifteen-years-old and still at high school, while Chris, in his early twenties, is in his final year of a degree in Sociology. The story is told predominantly from

Amelia's point of view and we see their friendship grow as banter gives way to in-depth discussions about literature, social difference and feminism. Somewhere along the way, Amelia develops an all encompassing crush on Chris even though he is unobtainable. The usual raft of teenage issues, frustrations at home, tensions with her best friend and fitting in at parties, are described in a way which fits Amelia's smart, yet unconfident, personality. The story is resolved in a way which both satisfies the desire for a happy ending and sees Amelia looking forward to a future full of possibility.

Annalise Taylor