



INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Somebody's Someone

By Linda Oatman High

Genre: Middle Grade Fiction

Reviewed by Samantha Hui

A compassionate novel exploring the lifeforce of a child's love

Love can be beautiful and nourishing. But love can also be messy, frustrating, and painful. *Somebody's Someone* is a real & tenderhearted story about loving someone in the throes of self-destruction.

“I have no answers...just love. Love and hope and a sisterly bond that makes me want to find her no matter what.”

Many wish their lives were like an action movie. For those with mental illnesses and self-destructive behaviors, every day can be one—but in place of glory, there are real life consequences. Linda Oatman High's *Somebody's Someone* teaches young readers a compassionate perspective on those suffering from addiction and mental illness. Though self-destructive behaviors can negatively impact those closest to us, where there is love, there is hope.

“Aunt Marion and I are the Accidental Experts on Missing Mothers. Reluctant Experts.”

Ruby Louise Bean lives in a pinkish house with her Aunt Marion and (sometimes) her mother. At just twelve years old, precocious Ruby has to deal with issues no one else her age has to. Ruby's mother Ruthie suffers from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia; the paranoia and adrenaline-seeking behaviors often draw her away from Ruby and into dangerous situations. When Ruthie runs away again fueled by a government conspiracy, Ruby knows the drill and helps Aunt Marion post “Missing” posters around town.

“And here we are, my aunt and me: thumbtacking our whole world up on a board of holey cork, in between things like a refrigerator for sale and free kittens.”

Ruby’s summer vacation becomes a chase to find her mom before anyone else can. As Aunt Marion and Ruby search for clues as to Ruthie’s whereabouts, they are joined by two homeless people and a dog. Daisy is an eccentric hippy who always finds the positive in any situation. Benny is a paranoid conspiracy theorist, and his dog Nixon is as sweet as can be. The motley crew set off to D.C. and NYC in search of a woman who doesn’t want to be found. Though the prospects look grim, the group is proof that goodness and worth are found in the little things and each other.

“Sometimes a dog is all you need. I’ve always wished I could have one at home, but Aunt Marion says that our life is ‘too chaotic for an animal.’ I always wonder if it’s too chaotic for a dog, how can we humans stand it?”

The story is told from Ruby’s perspective. She does poorly in school and avoids making friends because her time and energy are spent worrying about her mother. Readers will sympathize with and admire Ruby for her emotional strength and headstrong attitude toward finding her mother. She is forced to make decisions that no child should have to make. From Ruby’s perspective, we can see her self doubt and confusion as she navigates a truly adult situation. Yayira Dzamesi’s beautiful, soft illustrations scattered throughout the novel also paint Ruby and her crew as sympathetic characters. The images convey a certain vulnerability and add emotional depth to the already masterful storytelling.

“What Aunt Marion doesn’t understand: When a kid is trying super-hard in one area of her life (my Mama), it’s hard to extend any effort into another area of life (school).”

The book also does an excellent job of not vilifying those struggling with mental illness. People make mistakes, even life-changing mistakes. They are called criminal or bad, but we are taught in this story that even those who are considered good could be pushed to do questionable things when they feel at a loss.

Somebody’s Someone carefully addresses dark and complex topics through a compassionate, community-driven lens. This book is great for both young readers and grown ups, teaching us the multidimensionality of people and how we should do better by each other.