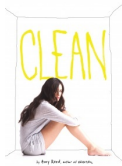


Rosie Nominations Clean and Bitter End



What I like about the Rosie nominations, is that there are books that cover a wide

variety of subjects and vary in feel from light to pretty dark. Two books on the list deal realistically with the tough topics of dating violence and drug addiction.

In *Bitter End*, Alex is a typical teenager. She struggles with family issues, works a job she mostly enjoys and hangs out with her two best friends Zach and Bethany. Things change when the new boy at school, Cole, begins to show interest. Things are rosy at the beginning, but then Cole's interest becomes increasingly demanding, jealous and violent.

The path from rosy to violent is the crux of this story and is often difficult to read. Early on in the relationship, they becoming very close very quickly and share their deepest secrets. Alex feels that Cole loves her and is able to initially overlook some of Cole's dark moods. The transition from overlooking the dark moods to blaming herself for them is gradual and terrifying. And even when the moods switch from being petty and sarcastic to physical violence Alex still is able to forgive Cole and the cycle continues.

Needless to say, this book is intense. And being told from her perspective magnifies this intensity because you see how she rationalizes her actions. Even though she makes some choices that are hard to identify with, Alex makes for a really great character. Teenage relationships are difficult no matter what! I would suggest this to a lot of readers as one extreme end of the relationship spectrum that unfortunately exists.

Another harsh but realistic book on the nomination list is *Clean* by Amy Reed. In this book we meet Olivia, Kelly, Christopher, Jason, and Eva - 5 really different teenagers who are all in the same group at an addiction recovery facility outside of Seattle. We hear short pieces from all five as part of their group writing assignment, but the bulk of the book is narrated by Kelly and Christopher. Everyone is recovering from different addictions including crystal meth, alcohol, cocaine and diet pills. And while their addictions are out in the open, they don't want to share their dark secrets. As they open up with their group leader and each other we learn to really care for these characters. I was worried that this would be just another warning or 'issue' book, but the unique narrative structure and all the characters make for something that was accessible - sad without being too contrived.

Posted by sbowman on July 30, 2013

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