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One for Sorrow

Karen Abbott

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Book Review

One for Sorrow

Author

Mary Downing Hahn

Illustrator

N/A

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Excellent

Level

Young Adult

Pages

304

Year

2017

Publisher

Clarion Books

ISBN

9780062443410

Annie Brown has moved to a new house and a new school. It is 1918 and Annie has been taught to be polite, but Elsie, a brash and unpopular girl at school, tries to force her to be her only friend. Annie feels uncomfortable but isn't quite sure how to handle the situation. Annie soon makes friends with other girls, Rosie in particular. When flu strikes the town Rosie thinks that it will be fun to read obituaries and visit the grieving families to enjoy the sweets at each wake. Still timid, Annie finds herself going from home to home, until they come to Elsie's wake. Her guilt puts an end to this unsavory pastime but Rosie has another great idea: Why not go sledding in the graveyard? It has the best hill. After a few runs, Annie ends up smashing her head into Elsie's tombstone. She receives a serious concussion and begins to see Elsie everywhere. Elsie gets her into increasing trouble until one day she ends up in a convalescent home. An elderly woman helps Annie befriend Elsie and to find peace for both of them.

This is definitely a ghost story, but it also deals with bullies and bullying. Annie doesn't want to hurt Elsie's feelings but feels bullied by her. When the tide turns and she has new friends, she joins in bullying Elsie. There is an excruciating scene of torture the day before Elsie becomes ill that readers on both sides of the drama will relate to. Annie's mixed feelings are consistent with school girls of every generation who have found themselves caught between group dynamics, personal tastes, and wanting to do the right thing. This triangle provides three great reference points to open a discussion on bullying. Then the ghost story with Elsie haunting Annie keeps both reader and Annie bouncing between sympathy and disgust. The moral that Annie learns in the end of befriendng the unfriendable and breaking free of guilt and shame could use a slight boost, and then this book would be outstanding.

*Contains mild violence.