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Pretty Face

Betsy Sieber

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Reviewer: Betsy Sieber
Reading Level: Young adult
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;
Subject: Italy--Juvenile fiction; Self-acceptance--Juvenile Fiction; Overweight persons--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

This book begins in sunny California, where we encounter our protagonist dealing with a common stress in young female teenage life: her weight. Her mom is always on her case about it, and as much as she wants to eat healthier, and try to lose weight, eventually something always happens that causes her to binge. Then her mother suggests that they send her to Italy for the summer, in order to relax, and hopefully have a healthy change of scene. Although not thrilled to leave her best friend, and her crush, she relents and decides to go. In Italy she encounters a lifestyle completely foreign to her native roots of Hollywood California. No one counts calories, the family she stays with sits down to eat dinner together. They focus on enjoying the moment, the experience, instead of trying to have as much fun as possible and look cool doing it. Likewise she doesn’t have to worry about her appearance because she is away from her peer group. She finds herself slipping into this new “no-worries” lifestyle easily and with pleasure. She is able to relax, stop worrying about her weight and really enjoy her new surroundings. She also falls in love with a boy as she begins to believe that maybe there are more important things than weight and how you look--like self esteem and self-acceptance. Due to all of the walking and biking she does while she is there, she begins to lose weight and believe in herself a little more. Of course, on her return to the United States, that is the first thing her mother comments on as they embrace.

This is a helpful novel to anyone who has ever struggled with their size, especially teenage girls during high school. The protagonist goes under a significant change while she is away, which allows her to accept herself more fully, as well as deal with her stressful family better, when she returns. Her family dynamic seems accurate, with believable characters, an uncommunicative father, and a little brother who is only interested in video games or putting other people down. It is apparent that the mother loves her daughter, however she focuses too much on her daughter’s weight, assuming that having the proper weight is the only way her daughter can be truly happy, instead of teaching her daughter to love herself first, her body second. The one serious qualm with this book is that she loses her virginity to her boyfriend in Italy. She does make sure they have protection, which may redeem her in some eyes, however by including that experience the book could further the falsehood that in order for a girl to feel truly desirable she has to have sex. However, sans that incident the book is an accurate portrayal of a young woman dealing with her body, and the attitudes of people around her in relation to it, and her quest for self-acceptance in an appearance-oriented world.

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