



All Alone

Russ Thompson

Bookstock Press (May 28, 2021)

Softcover \$6.99 (120pp)

978-1-73731-572-8

In the sympathetic novel All Alone, a tenth grader persists through multiple tough challenges.

In Russ Thompson's direct, accessible novel *All Alone*, a vulnerable teenager contends with loneliness, as well as persistent school and family troubles.

Elgin is a teenager who faces a bevy of challenges. His mother abuses alcohol, and his father is addicted to gambling. He deals with poor grades, poverty, and his own lack of physical strength. Each day feels more grim than the last, leaving Elgin feeling defeated and lost.

The story opens with Elgin waiting on the stoop for his father to pick him up. He's avoiding his mother, who is drunk again. But just as Elgin gets into his father's car, his mother storms down and starts a fight with her ex over missing child support money. Elgin's father claims that he doesn't have the money yet: his sports-betting hasn't paid off. Their argument ends in violence.

The story is most about Elgin confronting his feelings of inferiority. Thus, the confrontation between his parents is set within its larger context: at school, word problems sound like a foreign language to Elgin; he envies his classmates' grasps of subjects he finds difficult. And the physical fitness tests that Elgin faces during gym make him feel like everyone else is stronger than he is, too. His parents are so consumed by their own problems that they fail to see these truths. Absent their support, it's Elgin's teachers who end up stepping in to offer him advice. But the adults' recommendations will require discipline and rigor, and Elgin isn't sure he's equipped to take them on.

Elgin narrates, covering his insecurities and deeper thoughts. He's an endearing and vulnerable lead. Reflective of his tough experiences, the prose is lean, sharing only the details that are necessary to set the novel's scenes and push its plot forward. This streamlined narration makes the story both consumable and quick. The language is just as direct and consistent, helping to make the serious topics that Elgin faces more resonant for general audiences.

Despite the many trials that befall Elgin, the novel remains hopeful in tone throughout. It models realistic responses to hard situations. Elgin confronts his problems at an incremental pace, vowing to take it one step at a time. This measured approach helps him to form a clear identity at school and at home—and to improve in a way that is logical. Though the problems he faces are without easy solutions, thoughtful responses to them are suggested.

In the sympathetic novel *All Alone*, a tenth grader contends with multiple challenges, hoping to become the person whom he wants to be.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (April 26, 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.