

Almost a Senior

Brenda Faye Collie

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Teacher and award-winning playwright Brenda Faye Collie introduces feisty high-school junior Loresha in *Almost A Senior*, the first volume of a planned trilogy. As the newly elected student-body president at fictional Major Horris High School in Harlem, sixteen-year-old Loresha is bright and determined, ready to make her mark on the world. Facing the challenges and temptations of adolescence, she sometimes gets it right, sometimes makes poor choices, but, ultimately, finds her way. Collie depicts Loresha admirably, creating an appealing character to whom teenagers will relate.

At home, Loresha is the responsible one, watching out for both her single mother, who works nights at a bar, and her older brother, who is on probation but working on both his GED and a new career path. Determined to forge a better life for her whole family, Loresha can be self-righteous and rather pushy, giving advice and feeling exasperated when her mother and brother do not seem to heed her “encouraging words.” Even so, theirs is a close, loving family. They take pride in one another’s accomplishments and support each other in times of need, something that Loresha eventually realizes is more important than anything else in her life.

At school, Loresha faces typical adolescent dilemmas and dramas, which are compounded by her position as a student leader. Peer pressure, friendship and betrayal, alcohol and drugs, and dating and sex all play key roles in her junior year, and Loresha is not immune to temptation or regret. Collie addresses numerous delicate issues, treating them both sensitively and realistically. She guides Loresha through some bad decisions, illustrating the costs and consequences of those decisions and the lessons learned from them. Readers will empathize with Loresha when she occasionally makes the wrong choice, and they’ll understand how she responds after the fact. When, following a series of particularly trying events, Loresha finds herself wondering “if *everybody who was anybody* was who I wanted to associate with,” she echoes the thoughts of many a high school student. Teenagers will be able to relate not only to what Loresha does but also to how she feels.

Almost A Senior is a heartening story, well written but marred by some flaws. The cover, for instance, features a lovely adolescent girl, but she does not resemble the toothpick-legged main character described in the story. And there are instances of awkward sentence structure: “The sound of the applause caused me to look up plus the strong hold Kelita had around my neck.” Most of the dialogue is apt and believable, although an occasional line like, “Let’s go to the next level in our relationship,” sounds out of character, especially coming from a teenage boy, and Loresha’s references to her student government presidency as “my administration” seem a bit over the top. *Almost A Senior* is an artfully crafted, relevant teen novel with a few flaws.

CHERYL M. HIBBARD (August 20, 2012)

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