ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Head Above Water
S.L. Rottman
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Skye Johnson and her brother, Sunny, are teenage characters that deserve more than one book. She's sixteen and a half, a good student and swimmer trying to make the state championships. She has confidential girlfriends, a healthy, but somewhat naïve, interest in boys and a divorced mother working two jobs. What makes her relationships and choices different than most characters in stories is that she is responsible for her endearing older brother, Sunny, eighteen, who has Down's syndrome. Skye fixes dinner for Sunny, helps him with his homework, gets him to school and keeps him with her while she practices swimming.

Although she loves her brother, Skye becomes upset when Sunny is determined to learn to swim and wants her to teach him. It is one more intrusion in her life. Understandably, she would like some time for herself, especially when one of the most popular seniors, Mike, wants Skye to date him. Mike urges Skye to skip swim practices and pressures her for sexual intimacy. Skye is flattered, but uneasy about being devious and his advances.

The relationship becomes alarming when Mike attempts to rape her and then spreads lies about her. Skye learns that Mike is among a group of boys that has pushed Sunny around. When Mike calls Sunny a "retard," Skye calls her former boyfriend a jerk. "I was furious. I hated that word. [Sunny] needs a little extra time to do things but he's not a retard. He's just a person who needs help sometimes. I know Sunny annoys me, but he's part of my family. He's my brother. I'm supposed to complain about him. I can insult him because I know him; no one else has that right. And besides, half the time he really isn't as bad as I say he is anyway."

Skye learns to accept consequences for her behavior and to reaffirm family, integrity and self. Sunny's achievements are also remarkable as he strives to be like his sister and demonstrates his love. Both manage to keep their head above water.

Rottman, a high school English teacher and swim coach has created believable characters and realistic teenage social situations

Linda Salisbury