



Jem, a Fugitive from London

Delaney Green

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In this poignant coming-of-age story, the greatest challenge is learning to accept change itself.

Delaney Green's charming middle grade novel *Jem, a Fugitive from London* follows Jem as she navigates her tween years in 1750s Britain. Jem's struggle to acknowledge the magical light in herself is a poignant metaphor for self-acceptance that results in a moving journey of discovery.

Recently orphaned Jem is well into her apprenticeship with Dr. John Abernathy. Half as a social experiment devised by Dr. Abernathy and Ben Franklin, and half as a makeshift witness protection program to hide Jem from her thwarted kidnapper, Jem lives her life as a boy.

Her situation gives her unparalleled freedom intellectually and physically—but that freedom is threatened. Between Jem's uncontrollable "Second Sight", the looming specter of her kidnapper, and complications surrounding her biological family, she experiences great upheavals. Still, the greatest battle Jem faces is learning how to accept change itself.

Part of a series, this book deftly navigates the terrain between the prior book and its own story. Just enough detail is given about the previous novel to create intrigue and establish the stakes.

This book spans roughly two years of Jem's life, and the time frame seems just right. Jem's maturation and evolution as a character doesn't occur overnight. Her lessons are hard earned and largely a byproduct of growing up. Jem grapples with deep issues, too, such as the meaning of family, personal integrity, gender roles, independence, and social class.

One of the novel's many pleasures is its cast of characters. Jem is forthright, stubborn, gender-nonconforming, and warm. She approaches life with raw curiosity. Her earnestness is endearing and leads her into trouble as much as it delivers her from danger.

Surrounding her are a community of adults who love and care for her without the bonds of biology. Ranging from the medical doctor who has taken Jem as an apprentice to historical figures like Ben Franklin to a lady apothecary and her uncanny granny, Jem's immediate circle offers an imaginative journey into the past that is illuminated by real human drama.

These relationships show that love is often imperfect; despite being perfectly imperfect, characters keep working toward the goal of becoming a family.

Green's lyrical prose anchors the story, which is laced with mystery, danger, and realistic family drama. Its historical setting and use of natural magic closely align with the time period's understanding of medicine and science, adding additional richness to this fine work.

A coming-of-age novel that never panders or talks down to its audience, *Jem, a Fugitive from London* is compelling. By the novel's end, Jem is poised to radically change her life; it will be hard to wait for the next book.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (August 17, 2017)

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