

The Adventures of Allie McDuff

Susie Melendez

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An exceptionally well-developed character, Allie is on a never-ending quest for understanding that tests her strength, faith, and courage.

Thirty-year-old Allie McDuff knows what she wants ... kind of. An elementary school teacher in a small town in Ohio, Allie loves her job, her best friend, Callie, and a stiff drink at the end of the day—or in the middle of it. Though the passionate and likable protagonist of *The Adventures of Allie McDuff*, by Susie Melendez, is far from having it all figured out, she gets through whatever life throws at her with her friends and family, her cheeky sense of humor, and a drink (or two) in her hand.

Allie's strength, faith, and courage are tested through continuous trials and tribulations. Her adventures include a malicious scandal that threatens to ruin Allie's career forever, relationship woes with her seemingly perfect boyfriend, and supporting Callie through the most difficult decision she's ever had to make. Allie realizes that true strength is sticking to her morals and values, understanding herself, and supporting her loved ones in the face of everyday adversity.

Through the first-person narration, Allie comes across as a living, breathing person and the author's description of her competing values are realistic. "There must be some passionate, alcoholic, crazed Irish barmaid ... within me, waiting to raise her beer mug whenever I thought about becoming a typical, diaper-bag-toting, maniacal, minivan mama."

Allie's ideal night involves good food, good people, and, of course, good drinks, but she also is a dedicated educator and above all strives to be understanding, caring, and forgiving. Her growth throughout the novel into a stronger, more assured person, and her fun-loving, wry sense of humor make her feel like a good friend more than a character.

The book is about Allie's never-ending quest for understanding; in a memorable moment of clarity about her life, she says, "I had loved deeply, had been devastatingly angry, had encountered loss, had achieved intellectual victories, had embraced heartbreaking change, and had encouraged others to make a difference. ... People mattered. ... I mattered." Moments like this make the novel heartwarming and wise. Occasionally, Allie will relate her fascinating personal philosophy on education, which adds another enriching layer to the narrative.

Though Allie is a well-developed character, the rest of the cast isn't quite as relatable, mostly because there is very little dialogue. In one scene, Allie summarizes how "Callie talked about Lance's family ... and she couldn't stop 'gushing' about Lance until we were all laughing at how much she was blushing. She ... said that she never thought she would ever feel this happy and content." This could be illustrated more concisely by Callie's own actions and dialogue to hint at how she feels, and could make Callie more three-dimensional.

Melendez's humorous and well-rounded novel will captivate fans of stories of imperfect people, heartwarming and inspirational fiction, and character-driven fiction.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (September 9, 2014)

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