

The Next to Last Mistake

Amalie Jahn

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Amalie Jahn's *The Next to Last Mistake* is an insightful story about love and friendship.

Tess Goodwin is happy with her life as a farm girl in Iowa. She is content with her cows, her chess club, and most importantly, her best friend, Zander. But her happy life is turned upside down when her veteran father reenlists and moves the family to North Carolina.

The discussions of complex social issues in the story are both beautiful and remarkable. Tess is sure she will not fit in, but another student, Leonetta, is assigned to help Tess adjust at her new high school. Leonetta becomes the first of three amazing new friends.

In North Carolina, Tess is exposed to issues surrounding race for the first time, and her new friendships are based as much on supporting each other as they are on all that the girls have in common. Tess comes to realize that acknowledging and exploring our differences can be a wonderful way to learn and grow; the lesson is incorporated naturally.

Lessons on growing up and accepting change are just as seamless and profound. Tess's fears about moving and fitting in are sympathetic. Despite her difficulties, she learns a great deal and discovers that her new life may have more to offer than she realized. Her family and her new friends are patient and supportive as she navigates the unfamiliar landscape. Her longing for Zander never fades, but their distance helps her to define and understand their friendship on a new level. She comes to recognize the importance of allowing this relationship to mature.

The Next to Last Mistake is a poignant and sweet story of love, loss, discovery, and the enduring bonds of friendship.

CATHERINE THURESON (March/April 2019)

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