

The Ten-Cent Boy and the Brooklyn Dime

W. Delaney

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An underprivileged country boy and a Brooklyn diva meet in this canny examination of relationships.

“Brooklyn Dime” is slang for a girl who is a perfect ten, a knockout, as William Delaney reveals in the author’s note in his debut, *The Ten-Cent Boy and the Brooklyn Dime*. The title hints at the uneven match between the central pair in his YA novel: his hero grew up in poverty, bullied and abused; his heroine is a sophisticated, Hollywood-bound beauty. The course of their on-again, off-again relationship echoes classic loves stories.

The novel opens in 1991 with twelve-year-old Ken Martin, teased in school and beaten up by his single mother’s boyfriend. Thanks to a friendly school janitor and the local sheriff, who soon ends up dating his mother, Ken thrives academically and socially. A star lacrosse player and later a gifted environmental engineer despite his deprived background, Ken is quite a catch for Blanche Bianco, an aspiring singer and actress from Brooklyn. They meet at their upstate New York school at the age of fifteen, when she drops a textbook on his foot. The next decade poses many threats to their love, as Blanche pursues her Hollywood dream. Can their relationship survive?

Ken is an appealing main character, but from her first description onward, Blanche seems like a stereotypical bimbo: “Her genes had performed admirably and she had learned how to accentuate the result.” Her name literally means “White White” (in French and Italian, respectively), aligning her with fairy tale figure Snow White. In California, Blanche sleeps around and uses her body for money by starring in raunchy movies. “It does bother me that thirty million people have seen the dimple on your butt,” Ken objects. Compared to Ken, Blanche feels one-dimensional; this might detract from readers’ investment in their romance.

Delaney successfully imitates the Brooklyn accent and nineties teen-speak, throwing in some enjoyable one-liners, especially from Ken: of Blanche’s dancing, he says, “It looked like an octopus having a convulsion.” However, at times, the dialogue seems false, too obviously soliciting information. For example, “Are the sex and drug pressures from your friends back?” is not a question a teenager is likely to ask his girlfriend in conversation. Typos and punctuation errors occur at a rate of three or four per page.

When zeroing in on a particular time period, the novel works well as a canny examination of relationships. Yet, when it zooms ahead several years, as happens a few times, the interruption in pace requires rushed summary chapters. Chapters 6 and 45, for instance, are overviews that sometimes employ passive voice and do not give enough detail about the interim years.

By appropriating the classic themes of chastened female sexuality and delayed romantic gratification, Delaney makes subtle allusions to Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* and Jane Austen’s *Emma*. This solid teen novel should appeal to fans of John Green and Rainbow Rowell.

REBECCA FOSTER (October 20, 2014)

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