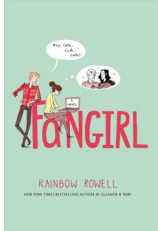


Fangirl

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Over Christmas after a Gruffy walk, gift-giving and catching a new flick, I picked up this YA book about a Nebraska college freshman obsessed with writing fan fiction. Now if you don't know what that is? I didn't until a patron explained it to me a couple of years ago--it's a new trend where people (mostly young) write new endings, beginnings, and middles, sequels and prequels for books they love in the style of the author.

"Fan Fiction is what literature might look like if it were reinvented from scratch after a nuclear apocalypse by a band of brilliant pop-culture junkies trapped in a sealed bunker," Lev Grossman said in *Time* magazine. Cath loves the Simon Snow series--magical fantasy--and the book includes many postings from the invented FanFixx.net where her tag-name is Magicath.

But when Cath enters college, life gets complicated. First of all, her twin Wren decides not to room with her. And Wren already abandoned fan fiction as too juvenile for a college student. Do you notice the wordplay in the twins' names? Their parents had expected one child whom they planned to call Catherine.

?There was a boy in her room.? That's how the book opens. On her first day of college, Cath thought she had brought her boxes to the right room but in the wrong building. Sure the dorm was coed, but the rooms couldn't possibly be.

The boy introduced himself as Levi and he turns out to be her new roommate's boyfriend or ex or something like that. Both Reagan and Cath are pretty anti-social. Reagan wanted her own room but the campus was too crowded. In fact, they don't say more than excuse me, do you mind the light, etc. for weeks. But eventually they do bond when Reagan finally convinces Cath to eat in the dining hall. Cath was too afraid to go on her own. They find a table facing the door and share snarky repartee about their fellow diners.

Cath takes a fiction writing class, and begins writing extra stories with Nick who eventually steals her work and submits it as his own. Meanwhile Professor Piper accuses Cath of plagiarizing when she turns in some fan fiction for an assignment. You can't steal someone else's plot, characters, etc., she warns Cath.

The boy Levi keeps coming around. Eventually Levi and Cath fall for each other, but it's complicated with his ex, Reagan, constantly observing their budding romance. Wren develops an alcohol problem. Also, their dad, an advertising writer, suffers a breakdown. And did I mention that their mother Laura, who abandoned the girls years ago, now wants to reenter their lives? The book, like a lot of contemporary young adult fiction, focuses on many social problems.

But the story of young love is very believable and the quirky jokes and the reading sessions between Cath and Levi (fan fiction of course) are presented well. Also, it's interesting to discover how two identical twins attending the same college establish separate lives and relationships.

It's a fun book, and even if you're not into the fan fiction element, it's a story worth reading.

Rowell's earlier book *Eleanor and Park* won the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* for excellence in Children's Literature.

Posted by Dory L. on December 26, 2013

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