

Jen's Comments

Summary: This is about a 12-year-old boy, kind of a loner, who is in denial about his loneliness, who spends a summer with his mother and older, teenaged sister on a communal farm in Maine. The story is about his growth as he figures out who he is and what he wants. The mother is simultaneously forced to face some difficult truths about herself.

For a great example of a scene where a mom breaks the news "we're leaving for a while" to a child read Cassandra Clare's City Bones. The scene starts on page 24. It is YA but it's a good example of showing a kid's reaction to bad news.

Chapter 1: You Have Only Yourself to Blame

My mom has gone crazy. Things can go along one way for your whole life. Then one day, everything changes. One day, she's all, "Put the iPod down and show some respect when your father is talking to you," and the next day she ~~thinks~~ ^{says} my dad, "Should be pushed off a cliff." She has, "no idea what the hell she's supposed to do now," and hopes that I, "Don't grow up to be anything like him," ~~even~~ ^{even} though I probably will because based on the way I'm acting lately I'm just as "emotionally disconnected" as he is.

No - I'm not, "super in touch with my feelings" or anything. Eleanor, my sister, is always ^{saying} telling me, "You're super out of touch with your feelings, James," and "Why don't you ever cry or get mad, James? It's like you're not even human." ~~James~~ ^I I'm as human as she is. No, I don't talk on the phone with my friends about my "innermost thoughts" every minute of the day. I haven't been crying in my room every night so everyone will hear me.

I get that my mother is a wreck. "A train wreck," my aunt Judith called her last Sunday when my mother announced, while we were all having brunch to celebrate my cousin Trent's high school graduation, that she was taking me and Eleanor to live on "a communal" farm in

Backstory

Is this his opinion of himself?

older

Why is she crying?

Break the sentence up.

Show the scene when his mom tells them & show us his immediate reaction. Start your story there instead of with the backstory.

9
EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: UPRISING BY BETSY MELODIA

Maine for the summer. "It's organic, of course," she said. "We're going to help with the animals and the farm stand and we'll get plenty of healthy, farm-sourced food. And we get to stay in a little cottage on the property, rent-free. They make goat cheese."

Show us James' reaction - Not Aunt Judith's

"That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," said Aunt Judith. "When have you ever been on a farm, Nancy? You've never even had a garden! You've never even had a potted plant! Did you say they have goats? Do you know what a goat smells like?"

Eleanor said, "There's no way I'm going. Not a chance."

"Your nails will get dirty, Nancy," said Aunt Judith. "They'll break right off. Have you thought about the fact that you don't like dirt? What do you think farms are made of?"

funny!

Mom looked at me instead of at Aunt Judith. "Guess what?" she said. "They have chickens, so we can eat ^{fresh} real eggs every day. And goat's milk - it's very low in fat."

Aunt Judith snorted.

"I mean, why not?" my mother said. "Why not just throw it all out and start over? What better place to do that than on a farm. Right, James?"

What is James thinking?

"Yeah, right," said Eleanor.

- I thought they were out for brunch?

My mother looked up at the ceiling fan over the kitchen table. Maybe she was pretending that the ceiling fan was really a big, puffy white cloud in a blue sky, which may be "an image or a place that puts her mind at ease," according to the book on the back of the toilet called, Tuning Out the Noise of Everyday Life.

"I'll bet it's really peaceful," said Mom.

"Really," said Eleanor. Give Eleanor a stronger reaction than this.

Use those quoted expressions more sparingly!

Yesterday, I didn't even know that you could get milk out of a goat.

Are Trent, Judith, and David important to the story? If not cut them out + have reactions only from James and Eleanor. You are introducing too many characters too early.

EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: UPRISING BY BETSY MELODIA

"You're crazy Nancy," Aunt Judith said. She was pointing her finger at my mother from across the table. "You read about something in a magazine and you think it's the answer to all your problems. That's not real life. You have no idea what you're doing. I told you not to make big decisions right now. Remember the knitting store? 500 pounds of yarn and nowhere to put it? That's real life Nancy. That really happened."

"Nancy, think for a minute," said Uncle David. "Does this make sense? For you and for the kids? What will you do for money? How will you pay for things, like food, and all those books and magazines you read?"

That's a question my dad would have asked. "Where are all these goddamned magazines coming from?" he would always say when he went through the mail after work. My mother subscribes to a lot of magazines that "reflect her varied interests," and help her "learn more about potential entrepreneurial endeavors," like interior design, horseback riding, gourmet cooking, and King Charles cavalier spaniels, which is the kind of dog that we have. Our King Charles spaniel is named King Charles, which my dad always said was, "the stupidest possible name you could have chosen for the dog."

My mother looked at Uncle David. "David, I really, truly think that this farm thing will be just what we need. I think it may be the answer."

Eleanor said, "The answer to what?"

Even though everyone was against her, I didn't feel sorry for Mom. She has "only herself to blame." That's what my father says. He says, "What else are we supposed to think, Nancy? If you never finish what you start?" That's what he tells me whenever I bring home a "mediocre" report card that doesn't "reflect my true potential" or whenever he and my mom get a call from

He's added skill in the
Past tense? why use
Present tense?

be careful with MG

these are very
distracting.

EPISODE 10: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: UPRISING BY BETSY MELODIA

the school telling them it's time for another meeting to talk about my inability to make authentic connections with my peers.

- finally something about James

There's too much of James quoting other characters.

My dad says you can't change who you are just because you want to. You can't change all the things you've done, that you keep doing, over and over, just like that. It takes real commitment. My dad says he's good at two things – work and golf - and he's put in the time and the sweat equity to prove it. He plays three hours of golf after work every day, Monday through Friday, rain or shine. "If you ever want to be in control of your life," he says, "you need to play golf. Golf is all about control."

dad had an affair with

Even though that's rich – coming from someone who lost control over a thirty-three-year-old golf coach with fat ankles, I think he's right. When you cry and carry on like a hormonal teenager, than no one will even care what you're upset about.

Eleanor told me, not that I asked, that Mom was just as upset about the fat ankles as the affair, because, Eleanor said, "Mom thought all Dad cared about was how good she looks. So it's like, everything she thought was a lie."

I think Aunt Judith is right about the farm. It's just going to be another yarn store. And then everyone will say, "You have only yourself to blame."

If this is for a middle grade audience then this should be James' story. The way it's currently written it is his mother's story. I like the mother's quirkiness and I can see why it's a problem for the family. This is great material for tension + conflict. Show us how her whims impact James and how he feels about it. Is this why he's a loner? The family interaction is important but it's 90% family, 10% James right now. Should be flipped. 90% James. His point of view, his reactions, how this impacts him. Right now he's only a narrator, not a character a MG audience will keep reading about.

Chapter 2: No Turning Back

What I want to know is, how did my mother get somebody to believe that she could work on a farm? Even if it does turn out to be more like a summer camp for people who want to pretend they're farmers, which is how my dad described it when he found out where we were going. (Are the parents still together after the affair?)

My mother found a bunch of South Korean students to rent our house for the summer. Our house has only three bedrooms, and there are seven South Koreans, but my mother says that they're used to a more communal way of living than we are. When my father found out he said, "There goes my investment." (Is Dad going to farm? If not, where will he live?)

this is funny 😊

The day we left for the farm my mother had to track Eleanor down at her friend Grace's house. She was worried because the drive from Raleigh to Stonington was about 24 hours and she had only budgeted for one night on the road. When Eleanor got home, Mom said, "You're as bad as King Charles." Ever since we started packing up our stuff, King Charles has been spending all of his time next door at the neighbor's house, lying on the back deck with their dog, Sandy.

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It's good that they are already on their way to the farm on page 5. Getting to the action early is important.

Summary: This is about a 12-year-old boy, kind of a loner, who is in denial about his loneliness, who spends a summer with his mother and older, teenaged sister on a communal farm in Maine. The story is about his growth as he figures out who he is and what he wants. The mother is simultaneously forced to face some difficult truths about herself.

Chapter 1: You Have Only Yourself to Blame

My mom has gone crazy. Things can go along one way for your whole life, ^{conjunction} Then one day, everything changes. One day, she's all, "put the iPod down and show some respect when your father is talking to you," and the next day she thinks my dad "should be pushed off a cliff." She has, "no idea what the hell she's supposed to do now," and hopes that I "don't grow up to be anything like him," even though I probably will because based on the way I'm acting lately I'm just as "emotionally disconnected" as he is.

^{Delete sent. 1} ~~No~~ I'm not, super in touch with my feelings or anything. Eleanor, my sister, is always telling me, "You're super out of touch with your feelings, James," and "Why don't you ever cry or get mad, James? It's like you're not even human." ~~I guess I'm as human as she is.~~ No, I don't talk on the phone with my friends about my "innermost thoughts" every minute of the day. I haven't been crying in my room every night so everyone will hear me. ^{Deleted}

^{Tighten choice 1.} I get that my mother is a wreck. "A train wreck," my aunt Judith called her last Sunday when my mother announced, while we were all having brunch to celebrate my cousin Trent's high-school graduation, that she was taking me and Eleanor to live on "a communal" farm in ^{How is Judith related?}

JULIE

EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

19

Maine for the summer. "It's organic, of course," she said. "We're going to help with the animals and the farm stand and we'll get plenty of healthy, farm-sourced food. And we get to stay in a little cottage on the property, rent-free. They make goat cheese."

incongruous

"That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," said Aunt Judith. "When have you ever been on a farm, Nancy? You've never even had a garden! You've never even had a potted plant! Did you say they have goats? Do you know what a goat smells like?"

Eleanor said, "There's no way I'm going. Not a chance."

"Your nails will get dirty, Nancy," said Aunt Judith. "They'll break right off. Have you thought about the fact that you don't like dirt? What do you think farms are made of?"

Mom looked at me instead of at Aunt Judith. "Guess what?" she said. "They have chickens so we can eat real eggs every day. And goat's milk – it's very low in fat."

Mention / goat's milk or goat cheese.

Aunt Judith snorted.

"I mean, why not?" my mother said. "Why not just throw it all out and start over? What better place to do that than on a farm. Right James?"

"Yeah, right," said Eleanor.

My mother ~~looked up at the ceiling fan over the kitchen table. Maybe she~~ was pretending that the ceiling fan was really a big, puffy white cloud in a blue sky, which may be "an image or a place that puts her mind at ease," according to the book on the back of the toilet called Tuning Out the Noise of Everyday Life.

underline

Tighter

"I'll bet it's really peaceful," said Mom.

"Really," said Eleanor.

Yesterday, I didn't even know that you could get milk out of a goat.

JULIE

EPISODE 19: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: UPRISING BY BETSY MELODIA

19

"You're crazy, Nancy," Aunt Judith said. She was pointing her finger at my mother from across the table. "You read about something in a magazine and you think it's the answer to all your problems. That's not real life. You have no idea what you're doing. I told you not to make big decisions right now. Remember the knitting store? 500 pounds of yarn and nowhere to put it? That's real life, Nancy. That really happened."

When?
What happens

"Nancy, think for a minute," said Uncle David. "Does this make sense? For you and for the kids? What will you do for money? How will you pay for things, like food, and all those books and magazines you read?"

~~That's a question my dad would have asked.~~ "Where are all these goddamned magazines coming from?" he would always say when he went through the mail after work. My mother subscribes to a lot of magazines that "reflect her varied interests," and help her "learn more about potential entrepreneurial endeavors," like interior design, horseback riding, gourmet cooking, and king Charles cavalier spaniels, ~~which is the kind of dog that we have.~~ Our King Charles spaniel is named King Charles, which my dad always said was, "the stupidest possible name you could have chosen for the dog."

Tig. Peter

My mother looked at Uncle David. "David, I really, truly think that this farm thing will be just what we need. I think it may be the answer."

redundant

Eleanor said, "The answer to what?"

Even though everyone was against her, I didn't feel sorry for Mom. She has "only herself to blame." That's what my father says. He says, "What else are we supposed to think, Nancy? If you never finish what you start?" That's what he tells me whenever I bring home a "mediocre" report card that doesn't "reflect my true potential," or whenever he and my mom get a call from

JULIE

EPISODE 8: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

19

the school telling them it's time for another meeting to talk about my "inability to make authentic connections with my peers."

My dad says you can't change who you are just because you want to. You can't change all the things you've done, that you keep doing, over and over, just like that. It takes real commitment. My dad says he's good at two things – work and golf - and he's put in the time and the "sweat equity" to prove it. He plays three hours of golf after work every day, Monday through Friday, rain or shine. "If you ever want to be in control of your life," he says, "you need to play golf. Golf is all about control."

Really?
A bit excessive

Even though "that's rich – coming from someone who lost control over a thirty-three-year-old golf coach with fat ankles," I think he's right. When you "cry and carry on like a hormonal teenager," ^a then no one will even care what you're upset about.

Eleanor told me, not that I asked, that Mom was just as upset about the fat ankles as the affair, because, Eleanor said, "Mom thought all Dad cared about was how good she looks. So it's like, everything she thought was a lie."

I think Aunt Judith is right about the farm. It's just going to be another yarn store. And then everyone will say, "You have only yourself to blame."

Chapter 2: No Turning Back

What I want to know is ^{how} did my mother get somebody to believe that she could work on a farm? Even if it does turn out to be more like “a summer camp for people who want to pretend they’re farmers,” which is how my dad described it when he found out where we were going.

My mother found a bunch of South Korean students to rent our house for the summer. Our house has only three bedrooms, and there are seven South Koreans, but my mother says that they’re used to “a more communal way of living than we are.” When my father found out he said, “There goes my investment.”

The day we left for the farm my mother had to track Eleanor down at her friend Grace’s house. She was worried because the drive from Raleigh to Stonington was about 24 hours and she had “only budgeted for one night on the road.” When Eleanor got home, Mom said, “You’re as bad as King Charles.” Ever since we started packing up our stuff, King Charles has been spending all of his time next door at the neighbor’s house, lying on the back deck with their dog, Sandy.

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HAVE JAMES INTERACT / CONVERSE WITH MOM?
SO FAR, HE IS A SILENT OBSERVER.
WILL JAMES AND ELEANOR SEE DAD AT ALL
OVER THE SUMMER?
HOW DOES JAMES FEEL ABOUT MOVING TO THE FARM?

Ed

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Chapter 1: You Have Only Yourself to Blame

good first line!

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No – I'm not "super in touch with my feelings" or anything. Eleanor, my sister, is always telling me, "You're super out of touch with your feelings, James," and "Why don't you ever cry or get mad, James? It's like you're not even human." I guess I'm as human as she is. No, I don't talk on the phone with my friends about my "innermost thoughts" every minute of the day. I haven't been crying in my room every night so everyone will hear me.

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- why do the "said's" come before the names? be careful.
- lots of quotation marks. partly funny, partly clever, but may get old.
- funny. light but serious.

EPISODE 15: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

9
Maine for the summer. "It's organic, of course," she said. "We're going to help with the animals and the farm stand and we'll get plenty of healthy, farm-sourced food. And we get to stay in a little cottage on the property, rent-free. They make goat cheese."

"That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," said Aunt Judith. "When have you ever been on a farm, Nancy? You've never even had a garden! You've never even had a potted plant! Did you say they have goats? Do you know what a goat smells like?"

Eleanor said, "There's no way I'm going. Not a chance."

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Mom looked at me instead of at Aunt Judith. "Guess what?" she said. "They have chickens so we can eat real eggs every day. And goat's milk – it's very low in fat."

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My mother looked up at the ceiling fan over the kitchen table. Maybe she was pretending that the ceiling fan was really a big, puffy white cloud in a blue sky, which may be "an image or a place that puts her mind at ease," according to the book on the back of the toilet called Tuning Out the Noise of Everyday Life.

"I'll bet it's really peaceful," said Mom.

"Really," said Eleanor.

Yesterday, I didn't even know that you could get milk out of a goat.

15
EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

“You’re crazy Nancy,” Aunt Judith said. She was pointing her finger at my mother from across the table. “You read about something in a magazine and you think it’s the answer to all your problems. That’s not real life. You have no idea what you’re doing. I told you not to make big decisions right now. Remember the knitting store? 500 pounds of yarn and nowhere to put it? That’s real life Nancy. That really happened.”

“Nancy, think for a minute,” said Uncle David. “Does this make sense? For you and for the kids? What will you do for money? How will you pay for things, like food, and all those books and magazines you read?”

That’s a question my dad would have asked. “Where are all these goddamned magazines coming from?” he would always say when he went through the mail after work. My mother subscribes to a lot of magazines that “reflect her varied interests,” and help her “learn more about potential entrepreneurial endeavors,” like interior design, horseback riding, gourmet cooking, and King Charles cavalier spaniels, which is the kind of dog that we have. Our King Charles spaniel is named King Charles, which my dad always said was “the stupidest possible name you could have chosen for the dog.”

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Eleanor said, “The answer to what?”

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EPISODE ¹⁹ 8: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

the school telling them it's time for another meeting to talk about my "inability to make authentic connections with my peers." ✓

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Chapter 2: No Turning Back

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DUVE

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BRING FORWARD

At this point, we get a good introduction to Mom. She's a character from a sit-com with a kvetchy preadolescent son whining about her oddities. So far, the son is simply a verbal camera with little to add to the story other than critical snarky observations of his parents. The use of such sarcasm is effective in small doses. If this is a longer story, real conflict and not the oddities must take over to sustain any interest.

Too bad we didn't get to follow the antics at the farm. After all, what could go wrong?

The writing is good, but a bit overdone. I tried to show where there could be some tactical editing. It seems to this reader that you are having fun writing this.

Chapter 1: You Have Only Yourself to Blame

My mom has gone crazy. ~~Things can go along one way for your whole life. Then one day, everything changes.~~ *These sentences don't fit. Delete.* One day, she's all, "put the iPod down and show some respect when your father is talking to you," and the next day she thinks my dad "should be pushed off a cliff." She has, "no idea what the hell she's supposed to do now," and hopes that I "don't grow up to be anything like him," even though I probably will because(,) based on the way I'm acting lately(,) I'm just as "emotionally disconnected" as he is.

EPISODE 19: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

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I get that my mother is a wreck. "*A train wreck,*" my aunt Judith called her last Sunday when my mother announced, while we were all having brunch to celebrate my cousin Trent's high school graduation, that she was taking me and Eleanor to live on "a communal" farm in Maine for the summer. *(too long. Break up into more bite sized sentences)* "It's organic, of course," she said. "We're going to help with the animals and the farm stand and we'll get plenty of healthy, farm-sourced food. And we get to stay in a little cottage on the property, rent-free. They make goat cheese."

"That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," said Aunt Judith. "When have you ever been on a farm, Nancy? You've never even had a garden! You've never even had a potted plant! Did you say they have goats? Do you know what a goat smells like?"

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Aunt Judith snorted.

"I mean, why not?" my mother said. "Why not just throw it all out and start over? What better place to do that than on a farm. Right James?"

19
EPISODE 08: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

“Yeah, right,” said Eleanor.

My mother looked up at the ceiling fan over the kitchen table. *Maybe she was pretending that the ceiling fan was really a big, puffy white cloud in a blue sky, which may be “an image or a place that puts her mind at ease,” according to the book on the back of the toilet called, *Tuning Out the Noise of Everyday Life*. (too long.)*

“I’ll bet it’s really peaceful,” said Mom.

“Really,” said Eleanor. *“And educational.”*

Yesterday, I didn’t even know that you could get milk out of a goat.

“You’re crazy(,) Nancy,” Aunt Judith said. She was pointing her finger at my mother from across the table. “You read about something in a magazine and you think it’s the answer to all your problems. That’s not real life. You have no idea what you’re doing. I told you not to make big decisions right now. Remember the knitting store? ~~500~~ *Five hundred* pounds of yarn and nowhere to put it? That’s real life Nancy. That really happened.”

“Nancy, think for a minute,” said Uncle David. “Does this make sense? For you and for the kids? What will you do for money? How will you pay for things, like food, and all those books and magazines you read?”

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name you could have chosen for the dog.” (Way too long. Break up the long sentence into smaller sentences)

My mother looked at Uncle David. “David, I really, truly think that this farm thing will be just what we need. I think it may be the answer.”

Eleanor said, “The answer to what?”

Even though everyone was against her I didn’t feel sorry for Mom. She has “only herself to blame.” That’s what my father says. He says, “What else are we supposed to think(,) Nancy? If you never finish what you start?” That’s what he tells me whenever I bring home a “mediocre” report card that doesn’t “reflect my true potential,” or whenever he and my mom get a call from the school telling them it’s time for another meeting to talk about my “inability to make authentic connections with my peers.”

My dad says you can’t change who you are just because you want to. You can’t change all the things you’ve done, that you keep doing, over and over, just like that. It takes real commitment. My dad says he’s good at two things – work and golf - and he’s put in the time and the “sweat equity” to prove it. He plays three hours of golf after work every day, Monday through Friday, rain or shine. “If you ever want to be in control of your life,” he says, “you need to play golf. Golf is all about control.”

Even though “that’s rich – coming from someone who lost control over a thirty-three-year-old golf coach with fat ankles,” I think he’s right. When you “cry and carry on like a hormonal teenager,” than no one will even care what you’re upset about. (Confusing paragraph. Try to re-write.)

19
EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

Eleanor told me, not that I asked, that Mom was just as upset about the fat ankles as the affair, because, Eleanor said, “Mom thought all Dad cared about was how good she(*who?*) looks. So it’s like, everything she (*who?*) thought was a lie.”

I think Aunt Judith is right about the farm. It’s just going to be another yarn store. And then everyone will say, “You have only yourself to blame.”

Chapter 2: No Turning Back

What I want to know is, how did my mother get somebody to believe that she could work on a farm? Even if it does turn out to be more like “a summer camp for people who want to pretend they’re farmers,” which is how my dad described it when he found out where we were going.

My mother found a bunch of South Korean students to rent our house for the summer. Our house has only three bedrooms, and there are seven South Koreans, but my mother says that they’re used to “a more communal way of living than we are.” When my father found out he said, “There goes my investment.”

The day we left for the farm my mother had to track Eleanor down at her friend Grace’s house. She was worried because the drive from Raleigh to Stonington was about 24 hours and she had “only budgeted for one night on the road.” When Eleanor got home, Mom said, “You’re as bad as King Charles.” Ever since we started packing up our stuff, King Charles has been spending all of his time next door at the neighbor’s house, lying on the back deck with their dog, Sandy.

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Susan

19
EPISODE 18: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

Summary: *This is about a 12-year-old boy, kind of a loner, who is in denial about his loneliness, who spends a summer with his mother and older, teenaged sister on a communal farm in Maine. The story is about his growth as he figures out who he is and what he wants. The mother is simultaneously forced to face some difficult truths about herself.*

Chapter 1: You Have Only Yourself to Blame

My mom has gone crazy. Things can go along one way for your whole life. Then one day, everything changes. One day, she's all, "put the iPod down and show some respect when your father is talking to you," and the next day she thinks my dad "should be pushed off a cliff." She has, "no idea what the hell she's supposed to do now," and hopes that I "don't grow up to be anything like him," even though I probably will because based on the way I'm acting lately I'm just as "emotionally disconnected" as he is.

No – I'm not, "super in touch with my feelings" or anything. Eleanor, my sister, is always telling me, "You're super out of touch with your feelings, James," and "Why don't you ever cry or get mad, James? It's like you're not even human." I guess I'm as human as she is. No, I don't talk on the phone with my friends about my "innermost thoughts" every minute of the day. I haven't been crying in my room every night so everyone will hear me.

I get that my mother is a wreck. "A train wreck," my aunt Judith called her last Sunday when my mother announced, while we were all having brunch to celebrate my cousin Trent's high school graduation, that she was taking me and Eleanor to live on "a communal" farm in

good way to introduce his name

19
EPISODE 8: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

Maine for the summer. "It's organic, of course," she said. "We're going to help with the animals and the farm stand and we'll get plenty of healthy, farm-sourced food. And we get to stay in a little cottage on the property, rent-free. They make goat cheese."

"That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," said Aunt Judith. "When have you ever been on a farm, Nancy? You've never even had a garden! You've never even had a potted plant! Did you say they have goats? Do you know what a goat smells like?"

Eleanor said, "There's no way I'm going. Not a chance."

"Your nails will get dirty, Nancy," said Aunt Judith. "They'll break right off. Have you thought about the fact that you don't like dirt? What do you think farms are made of?"

Mom looked at me instead of at Aunt Judith. "Guess what?" she said. "They have chickens so we can eat real eggs every day. And goat's milk – it's very low in fat."

Aunt Judith snorted.

"I mean, why not?" my mother said. "Why not just throw it all out and start over? What better place to do that than on a farm. Right James?"

"Yeah, right," said Eleanor.

My mother looked up at the ceiling fan over the kitchen table. Maybe she was pretending that the ceiling fan was really a big, puffy white cloud in a blue sky, which may be "an image or a place that puts her mind at ease," according to the book on the back of the toilet called, *Tuning Out the Noise of Everyday Life*.⁴

"I'll bet it's really peaceful," said Mom.

"Really," said Eleanor.

Yesterday, I didn't even know that you could get milk out of a goat.

✓ good

17
EPISODE 10: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

“You’re crazy Nancy,” Aunt Judith said. She was pointing her finger at my mother from across the table. “You read about something in a magazine and you think it’s the answer to all your problems. That’s not real life. You have no idea what you’re doing. I told you not to make big decisions right now. Remember the knitting store? 500 pounds of yarn and nowhere to put it? That’s real life Nancy. That really happened.”

“Nancy, think for a minute,” said Uncle David. “Does this make sense? For you and for the kids? What will you do for money? How will you pay for things, like food, and all those books and magazines you read?”

Commented [s1]: Where did he come from? Let us know earlier that he’s at the table.

That’s a question my dad would have asked. “Where are all these goddamned magazines coming from?” he would always say when he went through the mail after work. My mother subscribes to a lot of magazines that “reflect her varied interests,” and help her “learn more about potential entrepreneurial endeavors,” like interior design, horseback riding, gourmet cooking, and king Charles cavalier spaniels, which is the kind of dog that we have. Our King Charles spaniel is named King Charles, which my dad always said was, “the stupidest possible name you could have chosen for the dog.”

Commented [s2]: Would the adults have a conversation like this in front of the kids?

My mother looked at Uncle David. “David, I really, truly think that this farm thing will be just what we need. I think it may be the answer.”

Eleanor said, “The answer to what?”

Even though everyone was against her, I didn’t feel sorry for Mom. She has “only herself to blame.” That’s what my father says. He says, “What else are we supposed to think, Nancy? If you never finish what you start?” That’s what he tells me whenever I bring home a “mediocre” report card that doesn’t “reflect my true potential,” or whenever he and my mom get a call from

19
EPISODE 8: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

the school telling them it's time for another meeting to talk about my "inability to make authentic connections with my peers."

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Even though "that's rich – coming from someone who lost control over a thirty-three-year-old golf coach with fat ankles," I think he's right. When you "cry and carry on like a hormonal teenager," ~~than-then~~ no one will even care what you're upset about.

Eleanor told me, not that I asked, that Mom was just as upset about the fat ankles as the affair, because, Eleanor said, "Mom thought all Dad cared about was how good she looks. So it's like, everything she thought was a lie."

I think Aunt Judith is right about the farm. It's just going to be another yarn store. And then everyone will say, "You have only yourself to blame."

Commented [s3]: Who's saying this? I think it's the mother, but I'm not sure and I couldn't even guess until I read the rest of the page.

Commented [s4]: I don't really understand this.

Chapter 2: No Turning Back

What I want to know is, how did my mother get somebody to believe that she could work on a farm? Even if it does turn out to be more like “a summer camp for people who want to pretend they’re farmers,” which is how my dad described it when he found out where we were going.

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Overall, I think the basis for your story is a good one. There’s plenty of conflict (forcing the kids to leave their home, the divorce, etc.), and the story has a lot of potential.

There are a few things that I think could change.

Commented [s5]: I want to really understand the world that they live in now. A fancy home? The city? The county? Do they have a lot of money? What does their home look like? I want to see the contrast between that and the farm. Don’t just tell us—show us.

Commented [s6]: Is “her friend” Eleanor’s friend or the mother’s friend?

19
EPISODE 19: NOVEL EXCERPT - MIDDLE GRADE: *UPRISING* BY BETSY MELODIA

On the one hand, I like how the boy quotes what his parents are saying. Because there's so much of this, however, we (the readers) don't experience the voice of the boy. It sounds like an adult telling the story. Even when dialogue does take place, it's between the parents. So I have no idea as to what the main character is like at all, how he thinks, what he experiences, what he looks like. I want to hear the voice of the 12-year-old boy, and what he's saying and thinking and experiencing, and not through the voices of the adults.

Also, I can't explain why-hopefully someone else in the group can-but the tone of the story comes across to me as an adult novel, not middle grade, and if I didn't know it was about a 12-year-old boy, I would have thought it was a girl.

If you use the technique of quoting the adults sparingly, but tell the story mostly from the boy's point-of-view by interjecting his voice into conversations that he participates in, and allowing us to hear his thoughts rather than repeating what he hears going on around him, then you'll not only engage the reader, but you'll also turn this into a middle grade novel.