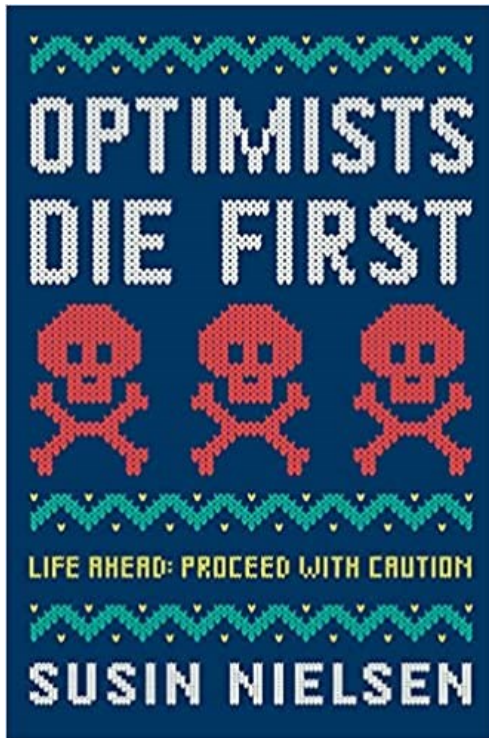


OPTIMISTS DIE FIRST



Young Adult

By Susin Nielsen

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Book Summary:

Two teenagers become romantically involved while involved in a group of troubled teens.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities; nudity; profanity; derogatory term; references to alcoholism and alcohol and illegal drug use by minors; reference to suicide; alternate sexualities; and controversial religious commentary.

3 / 5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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17	When I was done, I was grateful that the mirror was fogged up so I didn't have to see my tall, scrawny bod naked. "You have supermodel height without supermodel looks," a boy named Carl had explained matter-of-factly to me in sixth grade, when I'd had my first of many growth spurts and loomed over the other kids. "Well, except for your boobs. They're supermodel boobs. Itsy-bitsy."
19	What if her parents were into weird sex?
34	Alonzo is beautiful, with dark skin and a slender but muscular frame. He wore hot-pink pants and a formfitting T-shirt that read SLUT.
35	Koula's an alcoholic and a druggie. ... "I've been sober for a month," she said now, holding up her AA chip as she took a seat. "Third time lucky?" said Alonzo, because this was the third time since September that Koula had shown us her one-month chip. The last two times she'd gone on a bender to celebrate. Koula scowled. "Shut up, you fag." "Eat me, you skank."
52	A lone poster—CRAFTERS MAKE BETTER LOVERS—given to me by the Girl Formerly Known as My Best Friend on my thirteenth birthday, was peeling off the wall.
69	Koula wore a tight tank top with MY EYES ARE UP HERE emblazoned in gold across her boobs and an arrow pointing up. This was paired with dangerously low-rise jeans. Every time she bent over (which was a full three times before she finally settled into her seat) she showed off an upper-ass tattoo that read BEATIFUL TRADGEDY.
71	"I pissed off so many people when I was drunk or high. Now none of them will talk to me."
72	He'd cut out a black-and-white photo of a man carrying a rainbow flag. Over the image he had pasted letters that formed words. EVIL. ABBERATION. FAGGOT. "Those are some of the kinder words my dad used when I came out," he said. "I'm trying hard to be proud of who I am. But sometimes..." He stopped. "Sometimes this inner voice still says my dad is right. That I am an affront to God."
74	"His mom drowned two summers ago," said Alonzo. "It's not really clear whether it was an accident, or..." "Suicide," Koula said.
76	I had become very good at structuring my days around seldom having to use public toilets, which were like ground zero for germs, perverts, and unattended backpacks.
86	Then I felt his hand touch mine. Sometimes the body has a response that the mind has zero control over. My mind didn't want my body to feel like jelly all of a sudden. I didn't want to have this overwhelming desire to lean into him, to feel his arms around me again. Still. He was touching my hand. Was he sending a signal?
102	Koula dropped her hand and put her face inches from mine. "Don't call me a psycho bitch, bitch!" I recoiled from the smell. She reeked of booze. Betty smelled it, too. "Koula, you've been drinking."
110	Ivan started talking directly to the tombstone. "We miss you, Mom. Dad's doing okay. He drinks a lot of beer. And vodka."

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113	<p>As he straightened, I put my hands on his shoulders and kissed him. On the lips. He pulled back. “Sorry. I’m so sorry. I don’t know what made me—” He took hold of my wrist. He pulled me close. “Has anyone ever told you you have spectacular eyes?” he said. This time, he kissed me. ...But even so, I knew that this kiss felt right, and good. So good that when thoughts of saliva-transmitted illnesses like mononucleosis and oral herpes crept into my brain, I was able to push most of them out. I replaced them with these thoughts instead: Jacob is not “this side of” good-looking. He is spectacular.</p>
117	<p>Jacob’s parents had gone to the art gallery. He pulled me into the apartment and down the hall to his room, leaving the door ajar. We collapsed onto his bed. This time we did more than just kiss. I could not get enough of him. He slipped his real hand under my shirt and I slipped a hand under his. Then we heard the front door open, and his parents hollering out hello. I practically somersaulted off his bed.</p>
118	<p>I tried to read, but my mind kept wandering to Jacob, and the feel of his hands, the real and the bionic, on my body. My hand slipped under the covers, down to the waistband of my granny underpants. With my other hand, I turned off the light.</p>
129	<p>“If you ever need to talk about anything—” “Thanks. I’m good.” “For example, protection and birth control—” “Mom!” “I’m just saying, if it ever comes to that, you want to double up, condoms and the pill, no unwanted pregnancies, no STDs—”</p>
139	<p>She answered in English. “Relax, Bampas. They’re not druggies, they’re friends from art class. We’re here to shoot a video.”</p>
141	<p>My name is Koula. I am an addict. I’ve been clean four weeks, five days, and thirteen hours. Not that I’m counting. I started using three years ago. Whatever pills I found in the medicine cabinet. It snowballed from there. I wish I could tell you the reason. There was no creepy uncle. No abusive parents. Nobody died. The truth is, I liked it. ...But I want to say I’m sorry.</p>

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	<p>Sorry for the lousy things I did when I was high. Sorry for the lousy things I did to get high.</p>
145	<p>I started to reel off a list of aviation disasters, but then Jacob shut me up by putting his lips on mine. We kissed all the way down the hall to his bedroom. He left the door open a crack. "What about your parents?" "I'll hear them if they come in. And they won't be back for hours." Things heated up, fast. His window literally got steamy. We'd fooled around a lot, but we always kept our clothes on. Until now. I unbuttoned his shirt and tugged it off. He carefully pulled my bleach-art T-shirt over my head. Soon our jeans were on the floor. I had a moment of panic when I realized I was wearing my old granny underwear. When I'd put it on I'd had no idea that this was where the day would take me. But Jacob gazed at scrawny me in my saggy underpants, my functional beige bra, and hand-knit toe socks, and said, "You're beautiful." I wanted to weep. I gazed back at him in his black boxer briefs and the shark socks I'd recently knit for him, which made it look like the sharks were eating his feet. His skin was so pale, it was almost translucent. "So are you." ...We crawled under the bedcovers and faced each other, naked except for our socks and undies. Our noses touched. ...We started kissing again. I slid off his underwear. He slid off mine. "Are we doing what I think we're doing?" he asked. "I'd like to give it a try." "Have you ever...?" "Pssh, what do you think? Of course not. You?" "No." "We have to be safe." "Definitely. No teen pregnancies on our watch." I was thinking of much more than that. But I didn't want to spoil the mood by telling Jacob everything I'd read about pubic lice, crabs, genital warts, venereal disease, HIV, syphilis, and more. "I have condoms," he said. "My uncle gave me a box of them for Hanukkah, mostly to bug my parents. He called it a preemptive strike." He leapt out of bed, naked except for the shark socks, and got the box of condoms from his desk drawer. Then he crawled back under the covers and pulled out one of the packets. "I've never put one on before." "Me neither. But I've stuffed a lot of sock monkeys." He winced. "That does not inspire confidence." "I also saw a demo once in health class, with a cucumber." "Better." "Let's make it a team effort." I took the packet out of his hand and tore it open. In a movie, this is where the script would read: Fade to black.</p>

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148	I told my mom a few days later. Well, I didn't tell her, exactly. I wrote her a note. Dad was working late and we were eating dinner in front of the TV again. Re: Our earlier conversation, the note read. I think I need to see our family doctor and go on the pill.
154	"What do you feel guilty for?" asked Koula. "Loving mime?" "No, bitchy-poo. Being gay." Koula groaned. "Oh, get over it." "It's not that easy. My whole life I've been told it's a sin. It's hard to shake that stuff." "I feel guilty, too," I said. "It may not be rational, but it doesn't mean you don't feel it anyway."
178	He stared up at the ceiling. Then he looked me in the eye. "I was the drunk driver. I'm the one who killed Gord."
180	They were invited to a party after the game. Jacob and Frankie had just wanted to head home. But Gord wanted to go, and it was his car. So they agreed to go for an hour. There were kegs at the party. Jacob had a few drinks. He didn't think anything of it. Gord was their designated driver. But Gord got loaded. He could barely stand up. Frankie was pretty drunk, too. The three of them decided that Jacob would drive.
198	Easy for all of you to talk about forgiveness, I wanted to shout. You didn't have sex with him. You didn't have sex with a boy who forgot to tell you he'd killed someone, and who treated you as a pity project.

Profanity	Count
Ass	3
Bitch	9
Dick	2
Fag/Faggot	2
Goddamn	2
Piss	1
Shit	4