

Holding Up the Universe

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Libby Strout, once known as America's Fattest Teen, finally decides to go back to school after years of being locked up in her room, eating and grieving the death of her mother. When she goes back to school, Libby is faced with many challenges, but trying to get people to see her for her and not her weight poses the biggest challenge of all. Despite trying to make new friends, Libby makes very few friends and is often bullied by others. Jack Masselin, on the other hand, is a popular guy who has a lot of friends. He too feels alone like Libby, despite having many friends; he gives into making poor choices to fit in, and even hides the fact that he has prosopagnosia, a neurological condition disallows the ability to recognize faces. One day, when Jack gives in to the pressure of being involved in a cruel game, Fat Girl Rodeo, both Libby and Jack end up in community service and a counseling group together. As they start to spend more time together, Libby and Jack start to feel safe talking about their personal struggles with each other. Their connection helps them feel less alone, and Libby and Jack's relationship form into something romantic. However, Jack calls the relationship off when he believes that he only likes Libby because she is easy to identify due to her weight. After cutting ties with her, Jack's prosopagnosia continues to cause problems for him and eventually becomes a problem he can no longer ignore. Libby also realizes that she has to face her problems of not feeling wanted as well and hands out flyers in a bikini that talks about everyone's self-worth. Libby realizes how much she has transformed from that girl who once did not love herself and ate to ignore all of her problems. At the end of the novel, Jack realizes that Libby's weight is not her identifier, but everything else about her that makes her special. After accepting their own flaws, Libby and Jack are finally able to confess their love for each other.

I really enjoyed reading this book as it brought to light many of the problems teens face today. Although teens may not be able to directly relate to the issues the characters in the novel are facing, this novel holds themes that are important for everyone to listen to. I thought the story of how the characters were able to face their imperfections was eye-opening and helped me realize that I need to face my insecurities and flaws head-on as well. The perspectives of Libby and Jack were so descriptively written that it helped me truly understand what each character was feeling.

There was not one part of the book I disliked. However, there is some provocative language used throughout the novel, so this book may not be appropriate to readers younger than 13. I believe this book would be a great gift to give to someone else. Overall, I really enjoyed reading this novel and strongly believe that other readers will love this book as well!

Recommended Titles:

Girl in Pieces by Kathleen Glasgow

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell

Tell Me Three Things by Julie Buxbaum