

Lily and Dunkin

Donna Gephart

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Lily and Dunkin follows two friends, Lily and Dunkin, coming to terms with parts of themselves they struggle with. Lily is transgender, but hasn't come up to her whole school. Her gender puts a strain on her relationship with her father, who wants to be there for her but cannot understand her situation. Dunkin suffers from bipolar disorder and has yet to cope with a loss in his family. Add just a dash of middle school drama, complete with school dances and juvenile bullying, and you'll get an incredibly touching story about growth and friendship.

The book perfectly captures middle school awkwardness. The characters all feel very real, even the bullies. None of the relationships formed feel forced. It's a very authentic story that'll draw the reader in very quickly. I loved seeing Lily and Dunkin's relationship grow stronger, especially when they weren't speaking. The two genuinely cared about each other, and the progression from platonic to romantic wasn't surprising at all. The romance crept up pretty slowly but surely. Lily's relationship with her parents also felt very real. Her parents always had the right intentions but could never truly understand what she was going through. There was no forced drama; it all felt like a natural progression of the story. The heavier topics were all handled in a very mature way that was easy to grasp.

Lily and Dunkin is perfect for younger audiences in middle school. Many of them are going through the same things the characters in the novel are, and reading about these struggles is a great way to feel accepted and not alone. It's also very educational for people who aren't dealing with these things, and definitely helps children become more empathetic. Older audiences, including young adults, might also enjoy this novel. Personally, I'd rather check this out from my library, but it would be a fantastic gift for anyone who can relate to the titular characters.

Recommended Titles:

Death by Toilet Paper by Donna Gephart

Wonder by R. J. Palacio

Fish Up a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt