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Sprout

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Since **Catcher in the Rye** over 50 years ago, American writers for young people have been offering new incarnations of the self reflective Holden Caulfield to suit each new generation. Daniel is one of the latest crazy mixed-up kids with a talent for ironic commentary on the world and his place in it. It's difficult to see how he could be more mixed-up. His mother has died of cancer and he's been transplanted by his alcoholic dad from Long Island to backwoods Kansas, where he decides to embrace his outsider status by dyeing his hair green and adopting the name Sprout. And we have only just begun. Sprout is gay and his first sexual relationship, consummated in the janitor's cupboard, is with a bullying jock. His second is with a boy who suffers from the memory of his brother's suicide and who is regularly beaten up by his bible bashing father. There is some eccentric stuff, too, which is almost definitely symbolic. Sprout and his dad live in a trailer completely enclosed by vines, and outside they have a collection of large uprooted dead tree stumps. If I am making this sound awful, it isn't entirely. Peck writes with humour, insight and empathy and successfully conveys the impression of lives lived on the edge of desperation and of a suppressed tension that, at any moment, may explode with horrific consequences. There are some good one-liners too. But it was all just too much for me. I frequently felt lost and trapped in a dense thicket of situations and words waiting for a clear narrative path to emerge. It seems to me that Sprout and his author love words far too much for the good of their story.

Running Order:

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