



The One Memory of Flora Banks

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~~Not a choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Look at this through Flora's eyes. You're seventeen. You have no memory of what happened a couple of hours ago, a week, a month, a year ago. You do remember your mum and dad, your best friend Paige ? you even remember starting primary school together. You remember quite a lot up to the age of eleven when, as your mum often tells you, surgeons removed a tumour from your brain. Part of your memory, along with your ability to make new memories, went too.

Now, you've somehow made your way to somewhere called Svalbard, looking for a boy called Drake, who used to be Paige's boyfriend. You're looking for him because you definitely, quite definitely, remember kissing him on a beach somewhere and that memory has stuck in a way no other memory has ever stuck since your operation. You are in love with him and you are sure of that. You are also sure he feels the same way about you ? you have a sheaf of emails from him to prove it. He's supposed to be in Svalbard, but you can't find him. It's freezing here and it never goes dark which means you can't be sure whether it's night or day or whether you've been to bed at the right time. People seem friendly but even when you've spent time with someone you don't recognise them when you meet again. Your only link with your parents is via your phone, but you daren't tell them where you are since they'll come and fetch you and anyway they're in Paris with your half brother, Jacob, who is very ill. You have some memory of him and you think he loves you.

Flora suffers from anterograde amnesia, for which there is no cure. She has made her way (surprisingly easily, we might think) to Svalbard from her home in Penzance. Once there, her feelings range from a new-found confidence based on her memory of that kiss to feeling utterly lost, at the mercy of anyone who might wish her harm. Her personal landscape is not unlike the featureless and threatening Arctic itself. After she finds Drake (no spoilers here), the plot confronts her with even greater challenges.

At times, especially during Flora's search for Drake in Svalbard, the narrative reads slowly. She can only edge forwards, sometimes losing her way and having to retrace her steps. She must depend upon reading and re-reading facts and rules she records in post-it notes and messages to herself inscribed on her arms. Flora takes the unreliability of the narrator to new territory; it's possible that some readers, obliged to share her hesitant perspective, may become impatient or detached. Readers may also wonder whether it's feasible that she could control such a protracted story when she has little concentration and only a flicker of memories to draw upon. Many more readers, I think, will be so

absorbed by Flora's situation that they will accept the repetitions and circularities as necessary and even fascinating as she searches for meaning among the confusion. Through plotting which leads to delayed and disturbing revelations in the closing pages and her compassionate exploration of Flora's condition, Emily Barr draws us into a moving mental and emotional struggle.

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