



Slumming

Kristen D. Randle

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Everybody has two eyes and a nose and a mouth. What makes some people beautiful and some people not?

Nikki never imagined that this offhand thought would change the course of her senior year forever. But when she poses the question to her best friends, Alicia and Sam, Alicia is suddenly inspired, and the three unexpectedly find themselves launching a "human experiment." It seems like the perfect way to make a difference in their last few weeks of high school: they will each pick a student who needs a little improving and take that person to the prom.

Harmless, right?

When Nikki, Alicia, and Sam quickly become entrenched in their projects, each has to face difficult realizations about the people they have chosen -- and themselves. Before long their own close friendship feels fragile. Will they make it to graduation without hurting one another -- or anybody else?

Acclaimed author Kristen D. Randle has woven an intriguing, insightful, and suspenseful story about three friends who set out to transform others, with unforeseen consequences.

Slumming Details

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From Reader Review Slumming for online ebook

Skylar Harris says

What kept me reading this book was the weird story line and the suspense; I really didn't know what the book was about so that's another reason why I kept reading. My favorite line of the book that I like was in the beginning when Nikki was describing how she felt about going to France and how French faces don't look like American faces. "Not a physical difference, so much as a philosophical one". I was not able to predict the ending of the book because I didn't get to make that far just yet. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes a good, kind of confusing book; it's somewhat of a mystery book or maybe just a suspense builder. The part that really captivated my attention was when Sam was yelled at by his father cause he didn't take out the trash and he was furious with his dad but didn't know why, and the next day of school Alicia had asked him if everything was ok cause they were awkwardly quite all afternoon but he had seemed everything was fine. Sam had to have been my favorite character because he was always confused and needed help with something and I think it's funny. I really don't have a least favorite character; they are just a bunch of high school students. If this book was to become a movie I would probably have to use the actors and actresses; Will Farrell, Jack Black, Tom Cruz, Natalie Portman, Samuel L. Jackson, Jim Cary, and Tom Hanks. The author probably wrote this book to express the life of a high school student or to maybe show off the drama that goes on in life threw a high school student, life can really be rough on you but life still moves on.

Ailsa Bentley says

This book had a great message: don't judge a book by its cover. Ironic, right? In this book three seniors decide to start a "human experiment" and get to know people they usually wouldn't because of their appearance and rank on the social food chain. This part strikes me as weird because I don't see that this would happen in real life, but it might and I could be wrong. When they get deeper and deeper into their little project, their original friendships start to fall apart. This book is about coping with friends in high school, but it's also about growing up and realizing what is right, what is wrong, and what needs to be done when there is a grey area. I like this book, and it was a page turner. I wouldn't say it was one of the best books I've ever read, but it's up there with some really good ones. The idea and story line was really good, and the creativeness of telling the story from 3 different points of view really held it together. The creative writing and imagery could have been better, but that's pretty much my only critique. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and will recommend it to my friends.

Sandra Strange says

Alicia, Nikki and Sam, really good friends, decide on a challenge--find someone at the edge of their Utah high school culture, make friends, and inveigle them to take them (or go with them) to the Prom. Each story brings that teen in contact with people he/she has prejudged. The novel deals with prejudice, cliques and social groups in high school, and with dealing with evil. Caution: Sam must deal with the sexual exploitation of the girl he has chosen by her stepfather, handled very carefully and tastefully (in fact, you could be puzzled about what the girl was suffering). Positive, with good plot and important themes.

Sarah says

Unfortunately, the review I wrote, deleted. So here we go again.

Sam- I felt like the feelings that Sam went through were very real. Poor Tia, what she had gone through broke my heart. In a way, I'm glad that she was still angry and not "fixed" by the end of the book. She really went through something horrible and terrible.

Nikki- I felt bad for Nikki that she "lost" her friends and cared enough to bring them back. She probably got the most "normal" experience with the project.

Alicia- I felt bad for Alicia that her mom left and then going for the bad guy.

When I picked up this book it had pulled me in by the Pygmalion idea but this book was about more heavy subjects. (Which wasn't necessarily bad; just different.)

Andrew Hall says

Randle's writing style is clear and engaging, her characters fully rounded, and her works have a rock-solid moral center. I fully intend to foist these books on my kids when they become teenagers, and intend to quickly get my hands on at least her two novels from the 1990s.

From the works I have read, and the reviews of the others, I see Randle's plots have a clear, perhaps overly repetitive pattern. A troubled or damaged outsider older teenager is befriended a more conventional, vaguely Mormon teen, who is somewhat naïve, but possesses an inner strength fostered by his or her strong family background. The pair are of the opposite sex, so there is romantic tension. The Mormon teenager hopes to help or improve the insider, gets more than he or she bargained for, and may even be seriously hurt, but still generally was right to make an effort.

On the Side of the Angels was Randle's last book for the Mormon market, shares many themes with *Slumming*, but *Slumming* is smaller in scope, but is better for it. Keeping the basic theme of a connection between troubled teens and Mormon teens, she creates much more believable arcs of change for the characters, and removes almost all traces of both romanticizing the troubled teens and over-valorizing the Mormon teens.

Slumming starts with three teenage friends, the only Mormons in the school, discussing what makes some of their schoolmates outsiders. They decide, with differing levels of excitement, to launch a "human experiment". Each will pick an outsider (of the opposite sex), spend a few weeks trying to improve them, ending with a date to the prom. The flighty and bubbly Nikki picks a computer nerd, the dreamy Alicia picks a handsome delinquent, and the serious athlete Sam picks a fiery sullen, spiky-haired loner (think an angrier version of Joan's Jewish friend on *Joan of Arcadia*, if you have seen the show).

Incrementally the reader finds out that although all three Mormon teens are active, believing members, they do not come from ideal backgrounds. Alicia appears to be heading towards an emotional breakdown over her mother's recent abandonment of the family. Sam's father left when he was child, although his mother has remarried and his step-father is a good man. Even Nikki fears that her generally stable family relies too much

on yelling as a major form of communication.

Randle bounces the POV back and forth between the three, which works well, creating a nice balance in tone between the personalities. I do not want to give too much away. Suffice it to say that all three discover much more going on under the outside appearance of the “outsiders” than they guessed, and they realize how shallow their initial idea of reforming another person was. In one case, Nikki realizes her target is perfectly happy as he is, and she is the one who has things to learn from him. Sam, on the other hand, is nearly overwhelmed by the horrendous evil he discovers in his target person’s home, heroically intervenes, although at tremendous personal cost.

Although the Mormons’ attempts at “conversion” are presented in a completely secular manner, I think Randle is trying to say something about the blithe way in which some Mormons butt into other people’s lives in the name of religious conversion. Not to say that Randle is supporting a hands-off policy, clearly she cares deeply about the importance of those with something to offer, particularly Mormons, to reach out to those in need. Rather, she seems to be saying that one does not meddle lightly in the life of another—outreach is a serious business.

I am glad Randle openly presents her characters as Mormons, the first time she has done so in a nationally-published novel. It is not a big part of the narrative on the surface, but the values and culture of Mormonism underlies the trio’s thoughts and actions. Sam, for example, tells about praying before he makes a decision. Suffering from the pain he sees in his friend’s life, he feels guilty that he lives in such a happy home. His mother comforts him with these words:

“‘This life of yours didn’t come free, remember. It’s the result of generations of choices and work and teaching. My folks got it from their folks and then passed it on to me. I made some unwise choices,’ she goes on, looking away. ‘I was lucky—I got you kids, and I got a second chance. Since then, I’ve respected the gifts—the work ethic, the values, the faith, the self-discipline—they handed on to me. And the gratitude. You know what would really be bad? If you were ashamed of this gift so many people passed on to you—ashamed instead of grateful and determined.’

‘But,’ I tell her, holding my stomach, ‘I don’t deserve it.’

She laughs. ‘Who does?’ she asks. Then she gets serious. ‘Spend your life making everything you touch more beautiful and peaceful and healthy for other people. That’s how you end up deserving it. The trick here is to tell the difference between what you can fix, and what you can’t. Or shouldn’t.’”

Another moral of the story is that when faced with a friend with a big problem, one should not try to deal with it by themselves, even if the friend demands secrecy. After some hesitation, Sam turns to his parents and a school councilor for help, while Alicia does not, and suffers. Nikki reminds Sam about the right way to rescuing someone who has fallen through the ice—to make sure you are on solid ground yourself first, otherwise you could be pulled through the ice yourself.

This was a great book. It had all the emotional punch of *On The Side of the Angels*, while being more believable. Randle also has a remarkable skill at portraying very tough topics without bathing the reader in mire. She shows us the pain of bad choices without spelling out the details, and the ugliness of vulgarity without actually printing the vulgarisms. It is not easy to do these things without coming off prudish, and Randle does it well.

Victor Medina says

Am not done with the book yet but, ill tell you a bit about what am reading...The book is call Sluming, its about three teens, with good life's popular, just normal people, but before they gradute they one to help someone...meaning they want to choose a person thats haveing trouble with anything, and help them, change them. They wanna do something good before they gradute, so what they do, they each choose one person, once they choose they cant change...and the thing about this book/ or characters, is that they think that they got it all figure out, but when they chose the person, and work with them they figure out that is not always what see in the person from the outside is whats in the inside...and they figured out, that this way more hard then it should...the partner that they chose need way more help, and try to explain that theres better world out there.

Gayle says

4.5 stars. I didn't get the title of this book until I'd finished it and had to go look up the definition of "slumming". It tells the story of 3 LDS teens who decide to do a "human experiment" and each befriend someone they think needs some kind of "rescuing". What happens is not what any of them expected and they learn a lot about themselves in the process. Lots of thought-provoking issues are brought up, including some not-so-pleasant ones (i.e. abuse). I liked that even though the teens were LDS, they were by no means from "perfect" families and it wasn't an overwhelming aspect of the book (but it was important to the teens' characters).

Lila says

Genre: YA, Abuse

This story is told from the perspectives of three different high school students who share the same religion and want to expand their perspectives and make new friends. They each choose someone and begin to get to know them, however then didn't know what they bargained for. One is the classic friendly bubbly girl who becomes friends with the "nerd" of the class and learns much about her own jaded perspectives. Another falls for the bad boy and is almost raped because of it. The third is the popular athletic high school quarterback who learns about the life of the punk girl at school, and learns of her horrible family life and child-abusing father. They each face decisions about their lives, and grapple with the idea of "perfect" families. I thoroughly enjoyed this book though it deals with some really tough emotional issues.

Jorge Valladares says

The book I chose to read was slumming by Kristen D. Randle. It was a great book that I couldn't put down. I would recommend this book to young-adults becausae they will be able to relate to it like I was able to. My favorite character in the book was sam because I can relate to him and I thought that he was the most dynamic character in the book. My least favorite character was nikkis person because he wasn't open to anything. He was rude to her and made it really difficult for her in the beginning. I think that the author wrote the book to see if she could write from a teenagers point of view. It also could be that she did

something similar in high school and wanted to write about it. The beginning of the book captivated my attention. It grabbed me and didn't let go. I started reading and I didn't want to stop because I was so curious to find out what was going to happen. If the book was made into a movie I wouldn't know who to put in. I guess the guy from Harry Potter to play Sam, and I can't think of anybody to play the girls. The emotions I felt were frustration, happy, sad, sympathetic and a couple more I'm not remembering. My favorite line from the book is "everybody has two eyes and a nose and a mouth. What makes some people beautiful and some people not?"

Madison says

This is my favorite book now. Hands down. I read the majority of the book in one day. Today. The writing was incredible. The characters were so real. Sam was probably my favorite though. I got the goosebumps when he was Tia and I felt like throwing up right along with him. The story was so overwhelming at times, that I cried. But I couldn't put it down. I loved the characters, I'm still just overwhelmed by it all, though. I recommend this to everyone, whether they be Mormon or not. And can I say, Samuel is the kind of guy I for sure want to end up with! Wonderful book. Won't be forgetting it soon.

Sasha says

But that's the game, isn't it? Who you turn out to be in the end.

Even if everybody in the world had exactly the same face, there would be no two people exactly alike. Some would achieve beauty; some would be ugly; some faces would end up seeming gentle, some cruel. All depending on the person looking out through the face.

The moon is huge. Bigger than my house. Bigger than this city. Huge and far away, floating in nothing. When you see it that way, the things that happen to little individual people don't seem so big.

But women are people who come dangerously packaged. Their outsides can make you crazy. So you always have to focus on the eyes.

His eyes are made of shadows; his smile scatters light. His hair falls over his eyes and is beautiful.

She's got to feel like tearing the whole world apart with her hands.

I'm afraid she'll someday just spontaneously combust, and that will be it. And who will be there for her when that happens?

They are eyes that cry for beauty and truth.

I harbor my hopes for him the way you'd cup your hand around a flame. I don't need anyone else's opinions about this. It is my own private leap of faith.

I don't know how I'm going to sleep. I don't know how I'm going to wake up.

If he wants something from me, he is too late. What little I have left is already taken.

It was about giving somebody a chance. About believing in him. It was about never breaking faith with hope.

He is the type who hides a heart wound behind a laugh but would kiss a woman on the palm before he left her.

You can't sleep when it's your soul that's nauseated. You can never sleep again.

I am going to carry this horror for the rest of my life.

The question in my mind right now is how does God, who loves us, watch all of these terrible things and not die? Not just die of the sorrow.

***This was before I recorded page numbers and I apologize for that.

Nolan says

This is a well written intense story about three LDS kids in a decidedly non-LDS world whose lives are changed as a result of an impulsive decision they make near the end of their senior year. Each LDS kid decides to take on a project--a person whom they will somehow change enough to take to the prom. Alisha chooses a loner rebel kid who smokes and philosophizes on the things of the world. Nicky picks a nerd and Sam goes for a goth girl whose mysterious style has always fascinated him from afar. What these kids learn is that people aren't easily changed and that they aren't immune from experiencing all kinds of changes as a result of their new friendships. Can the old friendships even survive this experiment? You won't know for sure until the end, and this author writes extremely well. This isn't LDS fiction; it's good fiction that includes LDS characters.

Samantha says

When three high school friends decide to "improve" some of their classmates, they quickly discover that they are changing as well. What begins as a sort of Pygmalion project, with Nikki, Sam, and Alicia "adopting" some of the dregs of their high school society to make them better and more friend-worthy, they get much more than they bargain for. The nerd Nikki decides to cultivate into the perfect prom date isn't actually as repulsive as she first thought. The tough girl Sam adopts has a reason to be so hostile and angry, and Sam may be the only person who can save her. Alicia? She crushes on a true bad boy. A boy who slips off into the woods each day for a smoke and has a police record. Through their experiences these three friends both lose and find themselves, learning that just because someone isn't like you doesn't mean they aren't a person of value with feelings, needs, and dreams of their own. A good book for students in grades 8 and up.

Rachel says

Three Mormon teenagers decide to each pick someone to help improve in their lives, and in the process learn a little about humility and the trials other people go through. I related to the teenagers deciding to do something ridiculous and a little arrogant--I did similar things at that age.

One of the characters ends up being a victim of sexual abuse, and the words "rape" or "sexual abuse" didn't occur at all. If I had read this book as a teenager, I would not have understood that the character was being sexually abused. But since the subject is mentioned so obliquely, it makes the book safe to recommend to other Mormon youth, and people who are familiar with abuse can pick up on the hints. Another character has a mother who has left her family. I like how the conflicts felt real. There were also more minor conflicts like changing friendships and responsibility for chores.

The ending did seem happy, so even though the book dealt with heavy topics, it wasn't a downer.

Brent Wilson says

Randle was recommended by an adult author I admired-

This book in particular. So I picked it up used from Amazon and was blown away. After 15 pages the book pulls you in and you can't let it alone.

I think what I loved about it was this sense of potential of what a person could be - their senior year of high school. And the chance to really change your life by certain choices and relationships. As an old geezer myself, it's great to be reminded of those times of real volatility, where who you are is not quite so fixed.

Randle is wise and humane and hopeful - just the kind of writer I like as an adult reader.

I haven't read Young Adult fiction much, and was so impressed with the dramatic pull of this book, the serious questions addressed, and the page-turner quality of her writing.

So now I'm looking for more work by Kristen Randle. My attitude toward YA fiction has changed!
