



Razzle

Ellen Wittlinger

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Razzle Penney, an oddball teen who works at the town dump, befriends Ken Baker when he and his parents first move to Cape Cod. Ken is drawn to Razzle's eccentricities, and she inspires the best photographs he has taken. However, she also introduces him to her nemesis, Harley, a boy-crazy beauty who gets what she wants and she wants Ken. As Ken's friendship with Razzle and his relationship with Harley both stumble, Razzle's mother comes back to town, with a revelation about Razzle's past that devastates her. Razzle wants to turn to Ken but finds that he, too has hurt her, and she may never be able to forgive him.

As she did in her award-winning novel, *Hard Love*, **Ellen Wittlinger** shows that while love and friendship are critical, neither is easy to sustain.

Razzle Details

Date : Published March 1st 2003 by Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers (first published September 1st 2001)

ISBN : 9780689856006

Author : Ellen Wittlinger

Format : Paperback 247 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Teen, Coming Of Age

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From Reader Review Razzle for online ebook

Mike says

I've talked before about how Blind Faith was the turning point in Wittlinger's career when she started writing good books. I haven't written everything she's ever released, so my judgement is limited, but for the most part, I haven't liked a single thing she's written before Blind Faith. It's not surprising, then, that this book, released in 2001, failed to capture my attention. I'll give it this: it's at least not as bad as Gracie's Girl, in that its message isn't so simplistic and one-sided. But this is still a very broken book. The Wittlinger book this is most similar to is Sandpiper, in that this book has too many characters and plot threads that don't get properly resolved. But whereas Sandpiper at least tried to make these characters and plot threads interesting, in this book, most of the side characters are caricatures, and most of the plot threads had very little potential to work in the first place. This book was doomed from conception, and Wittlinger's execution doesn't do it any favors.

Even in simply trying to summarize this book's premise, I run into one of the problems with this book. It focuses on Kenyon moving into a new town and meeting an eccentric girl named Razzle and a promiscuous girl named Harley (because nobody in this book is allowed to have normal names). He gets into a love triangle between the two girls. And... that's about it as far as the main plot goes. There are tons of subplots - a story involving Razzle's mom, Razzle's friendship with Kenyon's plumber, the increasing dissatisfaction Razzle's parents have with their new hometown - but nothing substantial enough to be called the main premise of the book. I guess that I could say this book is about the photography show that Kenyon enters at the end of the book, because that's what the climax consists of. But while there's some buildup to that event, it doesn't really shape the course of the book all that much. The plot threads are too unfocused for anything to really shape the course of the book. I said that this book was similar to Sandpiper, but at least there, I knew what the main plot was supposed to be. Here, I'm genuinely puzzled.

This might not have been such a problem if the characters were more interesting. And, to Wittlinger's credit, I at least sort of liked Kenyon as a protagonist. It did feel a little like his life began at the beginning of this novel, but he had a well-developed personality. But the other characters... not so much. Razzle, as a character, hasn't aged well. In a world where John Green is the biggest author in YA, it's difficult to read any sort of manic pixie dream girl without cringing. And Razzle is one of the most awkwardly-written manic pixie dream girls I've ever seen. Alaska and Margo were probably written with the distinct goal of having a quirky, fun character, but at least Green wasn't so obvious about it. Wittlinger's attempts to make Razzle quirky - from having her collect old junk from dump yards having her call Kenyon a "P.W.I." (person without imagination) - reek of desperation. Wittlinger's goal here was for us to see more of the humanity in Razzle as the book went on, similarly to Paper Towns. (At least, I think that was her goal - it's hard to tell, because the dramatic structure is so incoherent). But she never felt like a real person to me, so it makes her arc difficult to get invested in. Moreover, much like Paper Towns, this book would've worked much better if the manic pixie dream girl had narrated it. We spend a lot of time with Razzle's family in this book, to the point where large chunks of the book feel more like Razzle's story than Kenyon's. Razzle also has a much more distinct character arc than Kenyon - although I do appreciate the ending to Kenyon's story in some ways, it's a little frustrating that he doesn't seem to learn or grow as much as Razzle did. And it might've pulled this book out of a somewhat cliched groove if we could have seen the perspective of someone familiar with the town meeting the newcomer, rather than the reverse.

Finally, having Razzle narrate would've justified the characterization of Harley. Because dear god, badly as Razzle was developed, Harley's characterization is so much more inexcusable. Harley is a promiscuous

character - she dates lots of boys, and quickly leaves them, with the implication that she's mostly in it for the sex. Not coincidentally, she's also one of the most one-sided villains that I've ever come across. She spends most of the book seducing Kenyon, and generally being vapid. She has very little personality apart from this - her only role in the story is to be a foil to Razzle, and to be a cheap source of conflict (because Razzle hates her and has a crush on Kenyon). Almost every scene with her is unbearable, because her characterization is so broad and obvious. She's so vapid and blatantly only interested in Kenyon for sex that I wondered why Kenyon didn't just leave her on the spot. I didn't buy at all that he was as genuinely into her as Wittlinger wanted me to believe - I don't see how anyone could be into someone so single-minded and petty. It's a subtle form of slut-shaming, but it's there nonetheless - the promiscuous character is a vapid villain, and serves as a foil to the quirky and intelligent good guy. I almost feel like Wittlinger wrote Sandpiper - a book about a promiscuous character dealing with slut-shaming - entirely to make up for how badly she messed up Harley's characterization in this book.

Finally, I should mention that the prose is much sloppier than Wittlinger's writing generally is. Even in her worst books, she usually at least crafts competent prose. But there are some serious editing issues with this book. There are a lot of blatantly wrong word choices and awkward turns of phrase, and while it's not exactly constant, they pop up enough to be distracting. The editing on this book doesn't seem to be nearly as tight as it is in most of Wittlinger's books. This isn't a huge problem, but it does detract from Kenyon's voice and the overall cohesion of the novel.

On the whole, this book just feels confused about what it's trying to accomplish. Wittlinger doesn't know what story she wants to tell, so she shoves a bunch of them in one book, hoping one will stick. I did like Kenyon as a character, and the ending was well-written and surprising. But it's not enough to save this book. This isn't Wittlinger's worst novel, but it is definitely one of her weaker efforts. If you're interested in Wittlinger, I highly recommend Parrotfish or Blind Faith above this one. If you want contemporary books with a similar mood, We Were Liars has a similar atmosphere, and is far more cohesive and well-written. You can probably skip out on this one, unless you're a die-hard Wittlinger fan.

This review can also be found on my blog.

Talia Castro says

well i liked this book :) it was pretty interesting (...this book is about a boy named Kenyon Baker . He's not happy about moving to Cape Cod halfway through high school, but his parents have decided to retire there to run a summer cottage colony. At least they'll let him have his own darkroom, provided he helps prepare the colony for guests. The early hours and hard work compound Ken's unhappiness, but just when he thinks he'll never make it through the summer, he meets Razzle Penney. Razzle isn't afraid to act differently from everyone else, and she then becomes Ken's friend and his muse, as he takes a series of inspiring photos of her. However, Razzle also introduces Ken to beautiful, aggressive Harley, causing a rift in their friendship. He goes for Harley juz becuz he wouldnt have been notice by someone that gorgeous back over in boston. Just when it seems things can't get more complicated, Razzle's mother breezes into town, and Razzle learns more about her past including who her father was. Just when he starts to like living in Cape Cod, his parents decide to move to vermont.

Salsabrian says

Kenyon Baker and his parents move to Cape Cod where they've purchased several cottage units and are refurbishing them to rent to tourists. One of the first people Ken meets is Razzle, an eccentric offbeat girl who works at the dump. They become friends and he finds her an intriguing subject to photograph. But his head gets turned by the sexy, manipulative Harley, who was friends with Razzle when they were little but a feud split them apart and continues to simmer. Ken also befriends Frank, the gay plumber working on the cottages and who knows the tragic secret of Razzle's father.

TheCosyDragon says

This review has been crossposted from my blog at The Cosy Dragon . Please head there for more in-depth reviews by me, which appear on a timely schedule.

Ken has been forced to move to a random place in Cape Cod – a holiday place that his parents have imagined doing up in their retirement. Summer promises to be boring and distasteful – except that a girl he meets at the junk yard promises to be interesting and photogenic. As summer progresses, Ken falls for the more deadly Harley and makes a complete mess of things.

I confess again, that I listened to this novel, then debriefed with my partner, then took 2 months to write a review! So my ideas are quite old by this point. She's apparently going to start recording me when I rage about novels.

Photography is the linking theme in this novel. But if you want a good novel that has photography in it for teenagers I'd personally suggest

This novel really highlights how teenage boys think. As nice as Ken is, when he's faced with a sexy girl vs a nutter, he goes for the sexy one, much to the disgust of the reader. I can't blame him actually.

Razzle is very odd. Yet the eventual revelation by her mother, while it shakes her, doesn't surprise the reader. In fact, it left me feeling somewhat cheated. As a climax for the novel, it was weak and insignificant.

While the blurb suggests that Razzle might forgive Ken, I think she'd be better off not doing it! The ending pages of the book are flakey and uncertain – I'm sure this is supposed to be a metaphor for something important, or perhaps just an open discussion on friendship and love.

I gave this 3 stars straight after I had read it. I'm not going to be retracting that score, although I'd consider revising it down. It was saved only by its reader, who did a bloody good job of trying to make something of nothing.

Liz Chapman says

Endearing characters, and charming Cape Cod summery-ness. This is an excellent book to read in the summer. Identity is at the heart of this novel, and I found myself identifying in equal parts with both Kenyon, the story's good-boy, average narrator, and Razzle, the quirky and independent girl who's so weird that most

people don't know what to make of her. I loved the message of being true to oneself, and of seeing the value in things (and people) that others may dismiss. (There's also some great side-commentary about how damaging it is to use sex as power. But it is secondary.)

Rossana Snee says

Excellently written book about a young photographer whose parents move to Cape Cod after buying some beach property. There he meets Razzle, a girl whose "weirdness" brings Kenyon to life. Conflict ensues when Razzle's arch enemy, Harley, shows an interest in Kenyon. But not for the reasons one might think, I enjoyed this book and would definitely recommend it.

Abbie says

3 and 1/2 stars, really.

This book was an odd mix of things. On the one hand, bits and pieces felt like a children's book. I had trouble seeing Razzle as a teenager. But on the other hand, there was sex and cursing. So I really don't know what to make of it.

Frank was my favorite character, easily, and the ending was my favorite part. I liked that it was open-ended, not too happy. I enjoyed despising Kenyon's mother.

Hillari says

What a "back to your roots" kinda book. There was nothing in this text to write home about - no real climactic moments; just little blips, no fantastical vocabulary/word choice; just practical dialogue, and no Hollywood glamour; just real-living. Regardless, it was such a likable book with genuine, relatable characters that steal your heart. This read felt fulfilling and earthy - authentic almost. Once in a while you need a book like this and for me, this fit the bill.

Margarita says

Pretty interesting book:) this book is like no other story before. Eccentric characters with an amazing setting.

Love Ellen Whitlinger is amazing! Love her stories!

Kenyon is the typical nerd boy. He loves photography more than anything and has the oldest parents alive. And when he's parents decide to move to Cape Cod for their retirement, he has no choice but to leave the only place he's ever known, Boston, and embark on a journey yet to come.

Meet Razzle Penny, the strangest girl you'll ever meet with many secrets that unravel when she meets Ken and forms a friendship that will last a life time.

This story will make you laugh, cry and will take you on a ride you'll never forget.

Anne says

I am not sure how this book for teen-agers ended up in my elementary school juvenile fiction pile. However, I am glad it did. It is an engaging coming-of-age story about two misfits finding their place in the world and most of all finding themselves. Very heart-warming! Mature themes make it inappropriate for students younger than upper middle school aged students.

Stephen says

I chose this book after reading Ellen Wittlinger's *What's in a Name* and liking it. This one is better.

It's the story of Ken, a young man who's a bit of a loner. He prefers framing the world through the lens of his camera to participating in it, but that's shaken up when he meets an odd girl at the Truro dump named Razzle. Having been uprooted by his parents from a semi-invisible life in Boston, he's now lonely living on Cape Cod with only his two older parents as company and taskmasters.

Having just retired, his parents have decided to buy and renovate a cabin resort on the Cape and all three are sort of at ends adjusting to their new lives. Too young to drive yet, Ken feels cut off until Razzle gets involved and he starts meeting some of the interesting and colorful people that live on the Cape. While Razzle and her family and friends are fascinating, one friend in particular, the vixen Harley fascinates Ken the most.

Getting to know these characters and watching their relationships develop makes for an engaging story and you quickly find yourself caring about a few of these oddballs. Well seasoned with local color and well supplied with strange factoids, courtesy of the zany Razzle, this novel is a quick and enjoyable, light read. Perhaps, given the setting, it would make a perfect beach read.

Diana says

I had to read this in 8th grade for part of a reading program it was either this *Ties That Bind*, *Ties That Break* or *Fever 1793* and I had already read one and couldn't get the other because everyone wanted to read it. Don't actually remember what I thought about it, all I really remember was my teacher trying to convince me it was a good read because the guy on the cover was cute.

Anyway I ended up really liking it, according to my 8th grade review I thought "it had everything you could want in a book." (To be fair I wasn't much of a reader at the time.)

But from what I do remember I know it would be a book I would love to read again if I ever got the chance.

Heav says

I was a little hesitant at first about reading this book, because I noticed on the cover of my copy it says the title of the book is "Raziel" and then I looked it up and it is really Razzle. I just figured this book was going to be 1.) Awful or 2.) Make no sense. After I got over the title mix-ups I just decided to open it and read. I'm so glad I did, because this story was amazing and like no other book I've read. The plot was just so multi-colored. It had a lot of things going on, but they all flowed together. There was romance, photography, family, complications among everything else. My favorite part would probably be how Kenyon's love for photography was integrated into the story. I loved how you get to see a piece of what goes through an aspiring photographers mind and the effects it can have.

This book is definitely for everyone out there who feels like they aren't popular or in with the normal crowd. Someone who is a little weird and likes to act different for a change. This book really captures the real experiences that many of us go through on a daily basis.

Jaemi says

Meet Razzle Penney. I'm not sure it gets more unique than this girl, with her love of all things, mysterious roots, most unusual family, and blunt personality. She sure turned Kenyon Baker's life right around. More so than being uprooted to Truro Cape Cod did.

This book had a little of everything. Coming of age, mystery, suspense, teen angst, creativity, depth, new looks on life, family relationships, retirement....but no, I would not consider it a "kitchen sink" book. Sometimes I wanted to toss it at a wall, which would have been more useful than yelling at the characters, but to me that's just a sign that it was well written.

Though the book is cyclic, it sort of leaves you hanging at the end. On the one hand you're heading for closure, on the other, it seems possible that Kenyon and Razzle could show up again someday. I'm sure it would be more story worth telling.

At any rate, if you're up for something unusual, this is the girl for you.

Vicki says

Josh leaves friends, moves to Cape Cod w/his retired school teacher parents who are buying a resort to fix up. The first person his age that meets is Pazle, long-legged quirky & who works at the dump. Josh who is a photographer captures Razzles essence in his pictures. Great read bout teen angst, family life & true friends
