

Balding, Clare

### **The racehorse who wouldn't gallop**

Charlie Bass lives on a shambolic farm with a chaotic family. They accidentally end up with a reluctant racehorse and set out to win the Derby and save their farm from ruin.

This is an easy-going, humorous read with a huge feel-good factor. Balding does manage to build a real feeling of tension by including the private worries of the characters about the crazy scheme, as well as the enthusiasm of optimistic Charlie. Charlie does a huge amount of research and planning to get her horse to the start line and learns how to engage the help of her annoying brothers, who rise to the occasion once she gives them an angle that they are interested in. It did give a little bit of insight into the world of racing and all the work that goes into preparing for a race and Balding's familiarity and fondness for that world comes across.

Fun, entertaining and easy to read, readers aged about 9 to 12 will enjoy this.

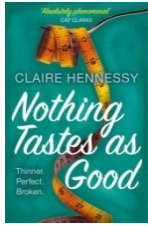


### **Dreaming the Bear**

Mimi Thebo

What an unexpected pleasure I found in this slim book! Darcey's voice is assured, likeable and hugely courageous. The bear is not personified but we are given her tragic memories so we sympathise and understand her behaviour. Darcey's out-of-body moments, a result of her illness, are not overdone but add a frisson of mystery. The story doesn't pull its punches: Darcey learns the hardest way that she has broken the rules. The moment when she shoots the injured bear is sensitively and gently portrayed. Impressively, the style is economic while keeping its lyricism and detail.

Suitable for 11 to 14 year old readers



Hennessy, Claire

### **Nothing tastes as good**

Narrated by Annabel who is deceased, she is given the task of helping a soul called Julia. Julia is an outwardly successful sixth-former at Annabel's most recent school. Gradually we learn about our narrator from her reactions to Julia. Through her horror at Julia's binge eating we discover that Annabel died of heart failure brought on by anorexia. Her younger sister is heading the same way.

Annabel's gradual journey from believing that she was powerful, to realisation, is a masterful piece of writing. At no time does it seem forced or unrealistic. The weaving of the two plotlines, the gradual development of the characters and the ongoing revelations kept me absolutely hooked.

Fiction that tackles a particular issue can be cumbersome but this is a remarkable read. The pace is maintained throughout – some chapters are simply bullet points-and there are some wonderful themes for discussion. I would like to think that the skilful writing gets an appreciative audience from all readers, not just girls.

Suitable for mature 15 year old readers and above.