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TITLE INFORMATION

ANGEL ROCK LEAP

Ellen Weisberg

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BOOK REVIEW

What at first appears to be an overblown high school drama proves to be an astute look at the painful connection between low self-esteem and bullying.

After her professors encourage her to quit her undergraduate degree in pharmaceutical science, 19-year-old Sarah returns to her hometown of Palenville, New York, where bad memories and old rivalries await her. While she is certainly not the first college student to have picked the wrong major, Sarah quickly succumbs to melancholy as she replaces her dream of curing the illnesses that took her parents with desperate fantasies of winning over the old classmates who once rejected her. The narrative is interspersed with flashbacks from school and Sarah's short stories and poems, which are unfortunately too similar to each other to firmly establish Sarah as the budding writer that she hopes to be now that her pharmaceutical career is over. But authors Weisberg (*Making Emmie Smile*, 2012, etc.) and Yoffe develop Sarah's obsession with the initially bland high school bully, Pamela, with great skill. Pamela, now a waitress, barely remembers Sarah's name when she takes her order at a diner, but Sarah persistently picks at the scab of their rivalry until the truth about Pamela and Sarah's ex-boyfriend Gary, as well as her long-lost childhood sweetheart, Doug, bleeds out. The French doors of Sarah's dilapidated apartment also create an unsettling, almost gothic, backdrop for emotional turmoil when a creepy man from Sarah's past turns up on her doorstep. Too pushy to take no for an answer, Sarah's stalker forces her to resolve her victim mentality and defend herself—until he reveals a secret that changes the way she sees him. While the other characters seem to have given up on life before their time, Sarah's best friend, Scott, balances their negativity with quirky observations and good cheer: "You can't live without passion. It might get cooled from time to time, but it's always there. Just waiting to be reheated. Waiting to be revived. Waiting to chase after dreams."

A unique voice emerges from an unlikely heroine in this quickly paced coming-of-age story.

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