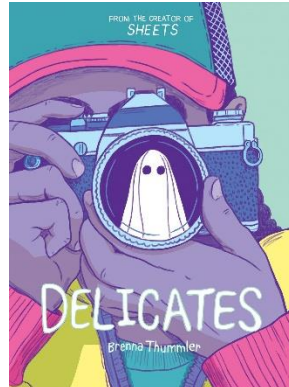




Delicates

[Young Adults]

Delicates by Brenna Thummler



Eliza Duncan is a direct and diligent, no-nonsense kid with a passion for photography and a focus on ghosts. She's enhanced her chances by studying not only composition but exposure and film development. We find her alone in the school's dark room.

"Ghosts and I have that in common: we come alive in the dark. Jimmy Pickle said it's because I blend in so well with the dark.

"That's called racism.

"Jimmy Prickle also called me a weirdo and said I'm wasting precious film. I wanted to tell him that he is a waste of precious space on Earth, but I didn't.

"That's called making good choices."

Eliza Duncan allows herself the smallest of smiles.

"I do that sometimes."



Deliciously witty, astutely **observed** and *astoundingly* complex, this comes with layers of self-awareness, self-examination yet blind spots and moments of betrayal from even the kindest of corners. I'm going to teach this in schools as the best book on bullying.

In SHEETS Marjorie Glatt found her family laundromat infested with white-sheeted ghosts: with its schedule of washes, tumble-dries and ironing, they thought it the perfect health spa. She adopted one as her new best friend: Wendell, a boy who'd drowned young. But now she too has been adopted – by her school's most popular students who rule the roost by putting everyone else down. Marjorie, once a victim of this, spends the majority of the time feeling awkward about her newfound immunity for she fails to speak up for others, particularly when they start picking on Eliza who's determined that there are ghosts, that she'll snap one on celluloid, and soon has her sights set on Wendell.



Brief break: is this not the most perfect cover? What a narrative drive!

“This is the best time for ghosts, I think.” Eliza taps her camera. “See here? This is Lorraine. Like Lorraine Warren. Anyway, I’m working on a whole ghost collection. You know, for my portfolio.”

“Oh, uh. Wow.”

“So, you were talking to yourself?” Marjorie was talking to Wendell.

“I guess so.”

“That’s weird.”

“Yeah, well, tell that to Lorraine.”



Thanks to Thummler both her protagonists’ dialogue and interior monologues come with a dry delivery dropped into the panels with such phenomenally well judged timing that the entire narrative appears effortless. It isn’t, obviously: it’s the result of a craft almost incomparably well honed. Eliza’s dad Mr Duncan’s the funniest. He’s one of their school teachers doubling as poolside supervisor where the smart set has spent all day – not in the pool but by its side, munching fries.

“My wife told me to spend the summer break saving lives. The “Superman” position was filled, so here I am.... All right, I’ll catch your hooligans next week. Enjoy the concrete.”

As to the scene when Mr Duncan asks if Eliza will be okay in her bedroom by herself, his inhale (“I’m not going to be by myself”) then exhale (“I’m going to the darkroom”) is exquisite paternal relief. Their expressions throughout replicate the deadpan delivery with subtly nuanced shifts while Eliza’s face and especially eyes, glasses halfway down her nose, are a *tour de force* of composed pensiveness. And once again Thummler owns her unique pastel palette which pulls off the neat trick of being warm.

Anyway back to the conflicts of interest, and I promise you that they are multiple, intricate and ever-escalating, but let’s conclude at the start with Marjorie Glatt dubious about her unexpected popularity.

“Hearing that they my “friends” feels... wrong? I guess that’s expected then your former nemesis now refers to you as “Marjorie May” and bought you matching chokers.

“Maybe she’s trying to strangle me.”

DELICATES is my book of 2021. Only once you’ve read it, will you understand why.

