



Solitaire

Alice Oseman

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In case you're wondering, this is not a love story.

My name is Tori Spring. I like to sleep and I like to blog. Last year – before all that stuff with Charlie and before I had to face the harsh realities of A-Levels and university applications and the fact that one day I really will have to start talking to people – I had friends. Things were very different, I guess, but that's all over now.

Now there's Solitaire. And Michael Holden.

I don't know what Solitaire are trying to do, and I don't care about Michael Holden.

I really don't.

This incredible debut novel by outstanding young author Alice Oseman is perfect for fans of John Green, Rainbow Rowell and all unflinchingly honest writers.

Solitaire Details

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Author : Alice Oseman

Format : Paperback 392 pages

Genre : Contemporary, Young Adult, Romance, Mystery

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From Reader Review Solitaire for online ebook

Maddie (Heart Full Of Books) says

Beautifully realistic and relatable. Alice Oseman is an author to watch.

April (Aprilius Maximus) says

TW: self-harm, suicidal thoughts, eating disorder triggers.

I had a lot of problems with this book, but since I am currently on holidays, I will go into more depth at a later date!

Emily May says

I found the writing awkward and stilted. Couldn't finish.

Kiki says

I started writing books when I was thirteen.

They were terrible. Man, they were bad. I also wrote fanfic, which I think was actually a better use of my time - I learned so much from writing fanfic. And I think the reason why my fanfic was better than my original ninety-page "novels" was because, at thirteen, a person simply does not have the **range** to write with enough nuance, restraint, or sociological knowledge.

The biggest thing I've learned since I started writing books almost ten years ago (oh my god, now you can guess how old I am! Japes) is that the most important thing, barring anything else, is an understanding of human psychology. I don't mean that a person has to trawl through four years of a psychology degree and read medical journals from Harvard; that's not the sort of psychology I'm talking about. What I mean is that a person has to have taken a certain number of steps, and met a certain amount of people, and been involved in many different social scenarios, to properly understand how to write actual people.

This probably seems like a really simple concept: *Kiki, don't talk shit, obviously a person has to meet people in order to understand how they work.* Yes, but think about that. I want to preface the next paragraph with a disclaimer: I don't mean to offend any teenage writers out there. Or, for that matter, any teenagers. Teenagers are the heirs to our planet and I write for them. I write FOR THEM. Teenagers are complex and brave and being a teenager is incredibly hard, and it only gets harder from thereon out, because after the teens does not come a plateau. After the teens comes the fucking twenties, man, and getting through that shit is like walking through an endless snowstorm that you're inappropriately dressed for. If I stood in front of a panel and had my twenties graded, I'd probably hit a borderline C-.

But I have to say this, because I was a teenage writer: teenagers, more often than not, don't have the range to write books. Especially books about weighty topics such as mental health and suicide and love and hope and redemption. "Love" is the worst one, because too many people treat it too simply, like narratives on immortality. Love and immortality are subjects that human minds have not even begun to scratch the surface of. Love in particular is a topic that still bewilders us completely, and when we pretend to understand it, that's when we all fall down. (This sounds really cheesy and also very sarcastic, but guys, I'm being serious. For once.)

There are some exceptions, of course, but they belong to the most exceptional teenagers, like Malala Yousafzai. But the average teenager is not equipped to deal with these sorts of topics, and they shouldn't be expected to. In the small window of time that it takes to transition from being a teenager to being an adult, a person's view of the world, and of psychology, changes drastically. Teenagers look towards themselves for insight into human behaviour, because of course they do. Someone who is still forming, both socially and biologically, is of course looking inwards and not outwards. **But looking outwards is vital** because that's how a better understanding of humans works. It's how you create a narrative that isn't filled with people who are exactly the same as you.

Given the hard work that goes into writing a book, I admire teenager authors who are willing to tackle it. I did, and it was exhausting. But *write what you know* is, contrary to many think pieces that refute it, extremely important, and it also relies on knowing outside of your small circle. And the opportunity to step outside of that circle is a very difficult thing for the average teenager to access.

I can't say a lot about this book that hasn't already been said. The maturity level of the writing, plot, and character development leaves a fuckload to be desired. It's a book that doesn't really know what it is, doesn't know how to pace itself, and doesn't know what it's trying to say. I doesn't know the nuances of mental illness, of how not to use characters as plot devices, of how to legitimize statements like, "I feel like I might be the only person with a consciousness, like a video-game protagonist, and the rest are computer-generated extras who have only a few select few actions, such as 'initiate meaningless conversation' and 'hug'". This is either a very tongue-in-cheek reference to teenage hubris, which I doubt, since this book takes itself laughably seriously, or an actual observation from someone who has absolutely no awareness of anything that is happening around them. This attitude, holier-than-thou, is never countered. There is a small sentence at the end in which the protagonist states "each person is a whole person" but how is this something that needs to be realized? And this follows a problematic half-plot in which a Manic Pixie Dream Boy saves the protagonist from her completely unfounded pessimistic view of the world.

Unfounded, because Tori is not suffering from a mental illness. The symptoms simply are not there. You can disagree with me if you want, but I'm going to need some concrete proof for this, of which there is none. Tori is dealing with feelings of low self esteem, but these are circumstantial issues, natural in teenagers going through a transition phase; I don't see a fucking shred of evidence to suggest that there's anything clinically wrong with this girl. She's a narcissist, yes, and extremely selfish, but these aren't illnesses.

Here's the thing: circumstantial mental health issues arise from outside factors and are not chronic. They don't last forever. They can be very upsetting, and shouldn't be belittled, but call them what they are. Treat them how they need to be treated. Do not monopolise resources that are there to treat people who are dealing with mental illnesses that affect every facet of their lives, that prevent them from living their lives, that affect their ability to function - clinical mental illnesses are often lifelong and caused by internal chemical imbalances or other physical factors that cannot be cured. Think on this: how does the "trendiness" of mental health issues, and the number of people erroneously self diagnosing, delegitimise the struggle of people who have chronic mental illnesses - and circumstantial ones too - that prevent them from functioning?

Circumstantial mental health problems are serious and people suffering with them need care, help, and understanding. But those dealing with them do not need to scream over the voices of people who are forced to accept that their clinical chronic mental illnesses are going to be a lifelong struggle.

And these people who feel a little bit nervous on the first day of university, or don't like going to the doctor, and act as if these reactions are so abnormal and mean they have a mental illness, and self diagnose... Idk. I don't have time for that. I don't have time for people who are so sheltered and out of tune with what's going on around them that they think feeling a bit sad on one rainy afternoon means they have chronic clinical depression. They think that it's somehow abnormal to feel overwhelmed when you're a teenager and making decisions that'll impact the rest of your life.

I know people who've done this. People who've gone to the doctor to get medication for mental illnesses that they openly admit they don't have. People who get that medication because it's "trendy" to stand in the queue for an appointment at the doctor when you've got no business there, pushing back patients who actually need to get medical attention. Just so that they can join in discussions on Twitter that they have no business being a part of.

The situation with me, personally, is complex and a daily struggle and I honestly don't have the fucking strength to talk about my own mental health. Besides, it's private. But what I will say is that it personally angers me, very deeply, to see people abusing services and making mental health a "trend", spreading total misinformation. It alienates people who are genuinely ill and need serious help. People on the outside see the absurd circus in which unqualified minors get sad because sometimes being a bit sad is part of life, and then decide they have depression, and jump around waving their arms in front of people who actually have experience and have something of value to add to the conversation. Of course, those same minors will grow up and forget about that and go live normal bland lives. But the people they shouted over, the people they silenced, will still be struggling.

I digress. But do you understand what I mean with this?

(This is why the insertion of suicide at the end of this book, during the ridiculous climax, felt so jarring and out of place. One, because it didn't gel with anything we already knew about Tori, and two, because it was handled so pathetically. It was so unbearably blasé. One second we're teetering on the edge of a rooftop, the next, we're sharing a joke about it, and Tori tells us it was accidental. Are you kidding me with this?)

The issue with parents in his book is never dealt with, either, though I was waiting for it to happen; I might have given it another star if it had been in any way expanded upon. In one scene, Tori screams at her mother for not ironing a skirt for her, and when her mother refuses, because she is working from home, Tori concludes that her mother doesn't care about her and nobody cares. This is a girl who is sixteen years old and has two functioning arms that can iron her own fucking school skirt.

It's this sort of entitled, pathetic, self-absorbed behaviour from the protagonist that makes her impossible to sympathize with. I used to go out with a guy who said, "I sometimes wonder if I'm the only living one and everyone else is a programmed robot" and I was so profoundly hurt by this statement that I cut him completely out of my life. Drastic, maybe, but this sort of self absorbed, socially blinkered outlook is not charming or relatable. It's the exact opposite. It's overwhelmingly immature, like this book.

This book just does not know what it's talking about. It's contradictory; nobody twigs that Ben Hope is dealing with internalized homophobia and people need to be helped through that. Nobody joins the dots

between Becky desperately wanting to be popular, and how we've all felt that way at some point, therefore not cutting off her relationship with Ben following an incident that she doesn't fully understand. Tori hates her mother for absolutely no reason whatsoever, totally dehumanising her, choosing to be willfully ignorant of the fact that her being able to come home and do nothing, have a constant supply of the food and drink that she wants, and go to a grammar school, is due to her parents working and caring about her wellbeing. Smaller children can't be expected to understand this, but Tori is sixteen years old, and considers herself an authority on everything. She is not expected to get a job, or do anything she doesn't want to do, or be independent in any conceivable way. When she's on her way to a party, her mother drives her there and asks her if she wants some money, and apparently this makes her the worst most uncaring mother who has ever existed.

This book is overwhelmingly white ("their race was never mentioned" is not an excuse; being black or brown is a part of a person's identity, not just their skin colour, and if you write your character with the cultural markers of a white person, then you have to accept that they're a white person) and these characters are overwhelmingly privileged, and the amount of discourse around these issues in YA today means that it's not good enough to simply argue, 'I didn't know'. You did know. We have come far enough that this total blindness towards privilege is not acceptable anymore. This book tried at diversity with its gay characters, but it has no idea how to even scratch the surface of issues like internalized homophobia, and both of its out gay characters were convenient plot devices there to fuel the protagonist's angst. The mental illness of one of these gay characters was also sensationalised beyond belief.

This book failed for me, in pretty much every way. It was melodramatic, socially blinkered, absurdly self-serious and self-important. The constant references to media and pop-culture were absolutely agonizing, and left the book feeling intolerably dated. I'm definitely not the intended audience, but I don't think that as a teenager this would have been the sort of thing I'd have identified with in any way. I do applaud the author for succeeding at such a young age, but that comes with a price tag.

Lea (drumsofautumn) says

[suicide/suicidal thoughts, self-harm and eating disorders (hide spoiler)]

Miriam says

Just finished my first book for this week's Read-A-Thon with the Goodreads Inspired Read-A-Thon -group :)

3.5 stars!

I already read Alice Oseman's Radio Silence and really enjoyed it, so I decided to give her debut a try as well. I must admit that I liked Radio Silence more, but I take this as an evidence that she clearly has developed as an author.

What impresses me most about her books is clearly her writing style. I think she manages to capture a teenager's thoughts very well and writes them down in a way that flows and makes it easy as a reader to get absorbed by the story. This kind of saved this book for me, because there was just not enough plot for my taste. It was fascinating to witness Tori's way of seeing life, but there never was real tension. I found it rather

easy to deduce the mystery around Solitaire, so the ending didn't really keep me on the edge of my seat. Normally I like character-driven stories and can easily forgive unperfect stories, but most of the characters remained kind of shallow. They were full of flaws in a way that made them totally predictable.

In addition, the characters in this book had a really negative opinion towards school and education in general. I already noticed this in Radio Silence and it keeps nagging me. It's obvious that the average teenager doesn't enjoy going to school a lot, because it is stressful and you have to work a lot etc. I don't know if it is a cultural thing, but this one-sided view was hard to tolerate for me. We often tend to forget how grateful we should be for being given access to education. School is not perfect of course, neither is university, but the attitude promoted in this book is exaggerated in my opinion.

To summarize it, this is a solid read for all contemporary-lovers.

I had a few i

Alice Oseman says

Well I thought this book was absolutely excellent.

Jojo (The Reading Bee) says

THIS REVIEW IS NOT FOR ANYONE WHO IS A FAN OF THE BOOK. I DON'T LIKE THE BOOK AND IF YOU LIKED IT, I EXPECT YOU WILL HATE THIS REVIEW, SO PLEASE DO NOT READ IT. I AM SO SICK OF GETTING HATE MESSAGES SO PLEASE JUST DO NOT READ IT IF YOU LIKED THE BOOK, FOR YOUR SAKE AND MINE.

I FINISHED IT!!

I ACTUALLY FINISHED THIS CRAP. FOUR DAYS WASTED JUST LIKE THAT.

Before I get into the review, I should mention that there was no trigger warning mentioned and that's not okay!!

SO TRIGGER WARNING: SELF HARM AND STUPIDITY.

This was me the entire book:

From the very first chapter I knew that this book is pretentious as fuck, but I wish it had stopped there. No, you have an insufferable protagonist, stupid kids, bad representation of mental illness and teenagers (to a point) and GUESS WHAT?! THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN BY A TEENAGER. This is actually the #1 reason I picked this book up, because I was intrigued by the 19 year old writer, whose book was described as "Modern Catcher in the Rye" and "Brutally honest" representation about life. But, what have we actually got here?! I'll tell you, we have a judgmental self-absorbed condescending asshole as a protagonist, her friends are normal according to her. But the protagonist, Tori, is obviously not normal because she's dealing with a mental illness that is not once mentioned directly. She doesn't feel normal like the rest of the people, she

knows that she cannot be happy BECAUSE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, APPARENTLY AND SHE NEVER ACTUALLY TRIED TO BE!! She's judgmental as hell but critics apparently see her as "honest", but there's a fucking thin line between being honest and judgmental. You're not being honest when you think that everyone around you is shallow for liking boys, clothes and normal shit. You're not honest when you keep commenting on everyone's actions for no apparent reason except that you're sad and want everyone around you to be sad when you don't have to. YOU'RE BEING JUDGMENTAL! Not only that, but she actually doesn't know why her best friend is her best friend!!! She is not even sure they are friends, she zone her out while she is talking, she feels like they are different because her friend is no longer a virgin like her, and she had a fight with her best friend and told her not act like they're in a "lesbian drama". Your brother is gay and you say that?! Contradictory character, amazing really! At one point, she actually says this *"In the end, though, being beautiful doesn't do much for you as a person apart from raise your ego and give you an increased sense of vanity"* and she makes of fun of an anorexic girl for reading the hunger games...

Most of the book she is talking about how she forgets things, she can't remember certain days or events. This is how the author portrays mental illness, she mentions it vaguely but at the same time it has a huge role in the novel. It's like she's saying air exists, but doesn't mention how or why, but at least we know that! I really HATE Tori, I think Oseman doesn't realize the difference between a real character and hateful character. Tori's character is a one you are supposed to hate, because she's "honest and real". But, in fact she's none of these things, she's a complete figment of imagination that doesn't exist. Because there's no real person who wouldn't be able to fake a smile, and that those who fake smiles are those who are most damaged, which is what Tori supposed to be. Tori is a character that's supposed to be hated, but character like Amy Dunne is a hated character because she's a psychopath, but she's at least brilliant and that's why some people love her.

Another thing is that Tori keeps repeating that "The world doesn't revolve around her" but GUESS WHAT?!! IT FUCKING DOES!!!

Shocking, right?! Yeah, I didn't think so either.

This mystery in the novel that is supposed to be at least exciting is so fucking predictable and incredibly lame as well as fucking idiotic. I figured out who is behind this whole Solitaire pranks shit before I reached 100 pages! And Solitaire is a secret group that calls for justice and freedom, but they're actually fucked up because they're a bunch of morons who started this whole thing for a silly reason! They made stupid pranks such as blasting a song on the school's speakers THAT NO ONE CAN TURN IT OFF!!! There's a button you could have pressed and it stops!!!!

Their biggest prank was going to be burning down the school, which is every student's dream (yup! that's mentioned like that), and it's so childish! The way it was executed is so childish, this is not how you represent teenagers for God's sake! Oh yeah! And this whole Solitaire thing was ALL FOR HER, BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS ABOUT THIS TORTURED SOUL WHO TREATS EVERYONE LIKE SHIT BUT THEY STILL LOVE HER, SO FUCKING REALISTIC. BUT, GIRLS TALKING ABOUT BOYS, CLOTHES AND PARTIES IS NOT, RIGHT?! "Brutally honest" my ass!

You know what else I've noticed?! It's that the main character is somehow almost exactly like the author. I've been following Oseman's blog way before I read the book, her blog is (Chronicintrovert), Tori's (Chronic-Pessimist). But that's not it, her thoughts about "manic pixie dream girl" about John Green's novels is basically the same comment Tori made in the book. And isn't ironic that the author is not a fan of JG and Goodreads recommend this book for fans of JG! Haha...

One more thing, it's said that "this is not a love story" BUT GUESS WHAT?!! YOU GOT IT, THE BEST

CHARACTER IN THIS WHOLE FUCKING AWFUL BOOK FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE MOST SELFISH ASSHOLE CHARACTER IN THE BOOK! SHOCKING, RIGHT?!!! *Screams*

This book is basically *The Breakfast Club*, but unfortunately it's more than two hours long and much more idiotic, not that *The Breakfast Club* was the epitome of intelligence! It's basically a novel with clustered tumblr posts, ramblings, and sentences that look nice but make no sense (That's a compliment-ish). I'll just put this book next to another useless book, you got it : An abundance of Katherines, look at that Oseman and Green again! I would never ever recommend this book to anyone, a waste of money, time and brain cells.

Rebecca says

Read this review and more on my blog

In a nutshell: *Solitaire* is the newest addition to my favourites list. It was such an engaging read with well-developed and realistic characters.

Solitaire first came to my attention - like a lot of readers - via Tumblr. I was scrolling on my dashboard when I saw a post about someone who was only just older than I was and her debut novel. From the beginning, I was really interested in this story and I admired the author so much. It was this, a pretty cover, and great reviews that inspired me to check it out. The main reason, though, was my best friend. She is a huge fan of *Solitaire* and Alice Oseman, and I really hoped that I would be able to love this book and I did!

One of my favourite things about *Solitaire* was its tone. I've rarely read books that have captured teen life as effectively as this one does. It's such a raw, realistic look into school and life, which handles powerful themes and social/emotional issues. Honestly, YA contemporary is not my favourite genre and I often feel a detachment from these novels, but I didn't feel that with *Solitaire*. It felt real and it was so nice to know that the author gets it: life, school, friends, family, being a teenager, and whatever else.

Tori Spring is an introvert, a blogger, and a pessimist. Tori's voice was such a significant element of the book and I could relate to her quite a bit. I appreciated her growth throughout the book and her relationship with other characters, especially Michael (Tori's friend) and Charlie (Tori's brother). I was particularly fond of those two as characters, but all of them seemed to leap off the pages and stand out in their own way. The fact that there was no romance was so refreshing and another reason why I loved this book so much.

I was actually surprised by *Solitaire*'s role in the book. It was mostly a character-driven novel and *Solitaire* itself was almost in the background, which I wasn't expecting. It was intriguing, but I did like that the focus was more on the characters and how they reacted to the pranks.

Another thing I loved in *Solitaire* was its references. Just little mentions of things like Tumblr, Harry Potter and Waterstones were great. I'm originally from England so specific references relating to English things were nice to read. References in books are one of those things that in retrospect are so small, but I really appreciate them if they're done right.

Solitaire was an engaging read that I struggled to put down and I loved its writing style. It was the kind of debut that stands out to me and I'm looking forward to reading more of Alice Oseman's books in the future! I'd recommend *Solitaire* to pretty much anyone but especially fans of YA realistic fiction.

Kai says

“But books—they’re different. When you watch a film, you’re sort of an outsider looking in. With a book—you’re right there. You are inside. You are the main character.”

4.5/5 stars

I first heard about *Solitaire* on Tumblr. I've been following Alice Oseman ever since and I desperately wanted to read her novel. So when I finally, finally! found it at the library I think I maybe made some loud joyful sound and hugged it...yeah.

I loved *Solitaire* from the beginning. I couldn't wait to read about all the characters I had already heard of and I instantly fell in love with Nick&Charlie.

Solitaire is, in general, an extremely relatable YA novel. It deals with all the stuff our generation deals with, especially anxiety, depression and lgbt+ topics. It makes me very happy to see all this put into words and represented in this wonderful story.

Although I disliked a few characters - I did not really understand why the main character even put up with them - and did expect something else from the ending, I just have to give 5 stars. I believe this is a book you either love or hate, understand or don't. And I love and understand.

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Lily ?? says

⇒ 3 1/2 stars

? **You can find my review here on my blog!** ?

me: [hands out one- and two-star ratings to books everyone loves]

also me: [finally likes a book ... its top reviews are mostly one and two star ratings]

*

“My name is Victoria Spring. I think you should know that I make up a lot of stuff in my head and then get sad about it. I like to sleep and I like to blog. I am going to die someday.” (I am Victoria, Victoria is me.)

? **buddy read** with a golden soul

Natalie (Never trust a duck) says

Thank you Andye from <http://www.readingteen.net/> for your Review my Books program!

I quite honestly really really really enjoyed this book. Honestly. Solitaire was a major win.

Get it? XD

When the synopsis says it is "unflinchingly honest", it speaks the truth. Alice Oseman wrote a brilliant contemporary. Though I wouldn't expect anything else from a fellow 90s child. ;)

This book is hard to explain. I went into it knowing merely what it has printed on the cover, "This is the story of...Tori. Michael. Becky. Lucas. Charlie. And the year that changed everything." Not much to go on really. But it takes place in Britain and has British boys and British diction so, happy times for us Americans.

Victoria Spring, Tori as she likes to be referred to, doesn't try. Nor does anyone else for that matter. Everyone just doesn't *care*, according to Tori, and so she doesn't either. That is, until Solitaire infiltrates her school and Michael Holden infiltrates her busy schedule of wallowing in self pity and pessimistic thoughts. But I like Tori. She may be a bit of a Debbie Downer and push everyone away with her "Don't try" attitude, but she grew on me. Because she started to try. Mostly thanks to her new-found maybe gay maybe straight friend, Michael Holden.

Michael Holden's characterization is the work of a genius. He is. Just. So. *FUN*. A freaking fantastic boy.

"He's a very ordinary-looking, not ugly but not hot, miscellaneous boy. His most noticeable feature is a pair of large thick-frames square glasses, the sort similar to those 3D cinema glasses that twelve-year-olds pop the lenses out of and wear because they think it makes them look "rad." God, I hate it when people wear glasses like that. He's tall and has a side part. In one hand he holds a mug; in the other, a piece of paper and his school planner."

So basically he's perfect.

This book was a mystery. Solitaire is this anonymous blog that starts arranging pranks around the school. All of them seem to relate to Tori for some reason. But why? THAT'S THE QUESTION. So yes, it requires you to put on your sleuthing cap.

It's not just a mystery though, it's about realizing you don't have to do everything alone. It's okay to open yourself up. It's just an overall brilliant book, so give it a go.

I'll give you one more look into why Michael is perfect.

"They locked you in this room," he says, "and you still don't care. Why not consider it this way: They're the evil criminal organization and you're Sherlock Holmes. I'll be John Watson. But we've got to be the Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman Sherlock and Watson, because the BBC Sherlock is infinitely greater than all other adaptations."

I stare at him.

"It's the only adaptation that gets the bromance right."

"You're a fangirl," I whisper, with mock horror."

He understands us.

Happy Reading!!!

All quotes were taken from an ARC

Lauren ? (YABookers) says

"There comes a point, though, when you can't keep looking after other people anymore. You have to start looking after yourself."

Solitaire is a refreshing and brutally honest realistic fiction written by a teenager (Alice Oseman is only nineteen) for teenagers so it's totally and utterly relatable.

You know what I loved the most about *Solitaire*? Tori. Whilst she's cynical, sarcastic and rather mentally troubled, she's *real* and it's great to read and see her develop and I loved every second of it. I also loved Michael Holden and his ~~bumpy~~ touching relationship with Tori and how, at the end, it was all about acceptance.

The *Solitaire* aspect of the story invited mystery and suspense, and although I guessed early on who was behind it, the reveal is still rather spontaneous.

For a debut novel, *Solitaire* was fantastic and I'm looking forward to reading more from Alice Oseman in the future.

I would highly recommend to fans of contemporary realistic fiction, and fans of authors such as John Green.

A lot of thanks to Alice for sending me a free (signed & annotated throughout - this made my reading experience so much better. I won in an instagram giveaway) copy to read!

kat says

OKAY HERE'S THE DEAL: I filmed my review with half of my forehead cut out of the frame and it's not really that bad, but it was my second time filming due to "technical difficulties" (aka my own inability to get

my camera to work) SO, we are doing this here and now and then calling it a day. Please enjoy my quick, messy review notes typed for your leisure.

So, before I get into anything specific I want to say that while I had a lot of pretty major problems with *Solitaire*, having already read *Radio Silence* I think that I can confidently say that Alice Oseman has improved greatly in her storytelling (specifically characters and plot which is HUGE). And while it's awesome/amazing/cool to celebrate and praise authors who roll out of the gates with their debut hitting the NYT Bestseller list etc. etc. I think that it's equally important to recognize when an author fixes or improves upon their past works.

Alright, now on with it...

tw: depression, eating disorders

CHARACTERS:

Becky, Lucas, Michael, Charlie, and Nick. Side characters that were completely brushed over and under developed throughout the whole story.

I want more of Nick and Charlie together (backstory, relationship dynamic, just general cuteness). They seem to have a really solid relationship which was great, but now I want MORE PLS. Yes, I know there is a novella, and I plan to obtain it at some point, but that doesn't erase the fact that I felt like they deserved a lot more page time.

I would have loved to hear more FROM Becky rather than ABOUT her. She is painted as a complete airhead and a terrible friend by Tori, but based on her actions at the end of the story, I think Tori's narrative did her dirty and she should have been given some more credit.

Michael's character was, unfortunately, a mess. We hear nothing about his home life or his family. Not to mention, certain characters make it seem like Michael is "crazy" (even citing a specific event that causes people to be wary of him...and yet, I have NO IDEA what the heck happened because, oh yeah, no one actually explains it.

Lastly, Lucas. Let me just say that Lucas being *Solitaire* was totally obvious to me and his motive didn't make any sense? Only my opinion, but do you honestly think that someone caring for a childhood friend would ultimately end in them deciding it is an acceptable "prank" (um...crime.) to burn down a school? Yeah, right.

Now for Tori Spring. I may sound a bit hypocritical here, but her judgment was EXHAUSTING. She cares about next to nothing, and having to read through her eyes for a few hundred pages was awful. Let me make an assumption: Alice Oseman began (and finished?) writing this when she was 17. Now, this isn't to say that teens can't be great writers, but I really think that whatever angst or emotion 17 y/o Alice Oseman was feeling overpowered Tori's character and was never leveled out. It's normal for authors to allow themselves or their emotions to influence their characters, but unfortunately by the end of the story I was completely over Tori and had resorted to skimming.

PLOT:

Where was it? The story follows a girl who is stuck reacting to the world around her, pissed that she's so stagnant, and then results in her ultimately doing nothing about it. (other than burn down a building?) That's

pretty much it honestly.

MENTAL HEALTH:

the rep was...not great.

Tori describes herself multiple times in a few various ways as "pessimist. mood killer. unbearably awkward. and probably paranoid. deluded. nasty. borderline insane. manically depressed. psychopath." (pg. 290) She was the one who discovered her brother after he attempted suicide, and she walks around for the entire novel displaying signs of depression. yet, no one ever seems to think that she may need some kind of help. Parents, friends, teachers all remain oblivious for the entire novel. The only person who seems to notice and makes Tori feel okay is Michael. Unfortunately, this plays into the harmful trope that a guy has the power to save a girl and make everything alright. This is obviously not true (sorry, guys) and especially a red flag when the issue being "fixed" has to do with mental health.

As for Charlie, his eating disorder was also never handled properly. It's revealed that he attempted to kill himself and as a result went to the hospital (where I assume he had doctors/therapists) BUT now he's out, and there is no mention of him having a doctor or any type of support system. On top of that, Nick seems to be the main caretaker of Charlie. This is alarming seeing as they are teenage boys who are in a relationship. First of all, where tf are your parents? Secondly, does this not add an unhealthy element to their relationship? There is a scene in which Charlie and Nick get into a fight during mealtime and Nick leaves Charlie. When Tori finds out what's happened, she yells at Nick as if it is his burden to shoulder to look after Charlie and ensure that he's eating. I'm honestly confused about how Charlie's mental health was handled and a little bit enraged.

Okay, that was it. I know it was kind of messy, but hopefully it does the trick in place of my video. Now I can finally put this behind me and go back to obsessing over Radio Silence in peace thank the gods..okay byeeeeeeee

Ashley says

Nose Graze — Book reviews & blogging tips

I stopped reading this book at 27%.

Let's talk about Solitaire

In the book, Solitaire is some kind of blog/prankster group. We learn pretty quickly that their blog URL is <http://solitaire.co.uk>. My first thought (which continued to bug me throughout the book) was: "*There's no way this domain name would be available.*" I'm pretty sure every non-obscure dictionary word is taken at this point (at least with the original and most common TLDs, like .com, .net, .co.uk). And solitaire.co.uk was in fact registered about five years ago.

I know this is a STUPID ASS thing to be annoyed about, but I couldn't get it to stop nagging me. That kind of stuff bugs me... #nerd.

But beyond that, Solitaire (the group) didn't excite me. I know I only read to 27%, which isn't that far, but they just seemed like a stupid group who thought highly of themselves. And to make things even worse, some of the "hacking" things they did just seemed too far-fetched. Solitaire has basically "hacked" the whole school. They do all these pranks by messing with the speakers, TVs, and computers. At one point in the book, they somehow lock Tori inside a room, take control of a computer, open up Microsoft Word, type a message, and manage to disable keyboard/mouse inputs (so Tori bashing the keyboard doesn't do anything). This was all done remotely.

I thought this seemed VERY unlikely. Sure, it might be possible to hack in and remote desktop into a computer if you knew the exact one and were familiar with the system, but the circumstances just seemed too far-fetched. Especially when Tori tried bashing on the keyboard and got no response. So I decided to consult Coding God on this matter. I told him about the circumstances and mentioned it's a **school** (that's important). He says:

[The hackers] would need to find an exploit [the system] is vulnerable to, even though it's not likely running any services. Most schools are running firewall/antivirus and aren't listening for incoming connections. It would be very difficult/improbable. Basically, if it was up to date on patches as well then no way. Unless those kids have zero day exploits that most experts are dying to find. :P

Coding God: software engineer with a degree in computer science

I know this is a fiction book and it doesn't have to be accurate. But when I read a contemporary book, I don't like having improbably or even fantasy-like elements in there. I guess it's just hard for me because I am a tech nerd and I like the hacking I read in books to sound reasonable, or at least have the steps/actions explained. Fair enough that maybe they're explained later on and I just didn't get that far... but in the moment it did annoy me and made the book less enjoyable.

Oh, then, at 24% a character got on the computer and **opened up Internet Explorer**. I mean, seriously? Internet Explorer? Kill me now. And if there are any readers out there who do use IE, please switch to Chrome or Firefox immediately. (I'm not kidding. IE sucks and is commonly known to be the worst browser out there. Do yourself a favour and switch.)

Tori is one bitter bitch

This main character (Tori) was one of the most unlikeable characters I've read in a long time. She was bitter, bitchy, and pessimistic. It's like she didn't know how to smile or laugh, but she was an expert on being judgemental and looking down on people.

"Everyone else sucks! I'm the only real person in the world!"

I think this might have been the most frustrating part of *Solitaire* for me. Tori is bitter. She's pessimistic and judgemental. She doesn't seem to like people at all. She walks around with this "I'm better than you because I don't conform" attitude. I felt like she looked down on EVERYONE and it was exhausting.

The large majority of teenagers who attend Higgs are soulless, conformist idiots. I have successfully integrated myself into a small group of girls who I consider to be "good people,"

but sometimes I still feel that I might be the only person with a consciousness, like a video game protagonist, and everyone else are computer-generated extras who have only a select few actions, such as "initiate meaningless conversation" and "hug."

She even kind of admits how bitter, pessimistic, and boring she is when she says this at one point:

"Can you imagine me being excited about anything?"

"My mom is so annoying so I'm going to be a bitch to her"

Tori had such a weird relationship with her mom. I don't know if there was a bad history there or what, but she was kind of a bitch to her. I didn't think it was 'cool' or necessary. It just made her look even more annoying and bitchy.

"Tori," says Mum, "Oliver should have been in bed an hour ago."

Oliver doesn't seem to hear her. I glance up from the race.

"That's not really my job," I say.

"I like to snap at people for no reason"

This character Lucas gets introduced and he and Tori used to be best friends. So he starts talking about how much she's changed since he last knew her, and she decides to be all snappy and bitchy to him, just because. In fact, she seems pretty snappy to him throughout the whole book (that I read). But poor Lucas was never anything but nice.

"You're so different," he says [...]. "You're more serious."

[...] "I'm, well, I am probably the least funny person since Margaret Thatcher."

"No, but you were always dreaming up all these imaginary games. Like our Pokémon battles. Or the secret base you made out of the cornered-off section of the playground."

"Would you like to have a Pokémon battle?" I fold my arms. "Or am I too unimaginative for that?"

"No." He's digging himself into a hole, and it's actually quite funny to watch. "I—oh, I don't know."

"Sometimes I do stupid, pointless things for no reason"

At one point, Tori gets recruited to be part of kind of a campus lookout type programme. Solitaire is pranking the school and they want students to patrol the school and be on the lookout for them (break-ins, suspicious behaviour, etc.). So the leader gives Tori her number just in case she sees anything while on her

watch and...

"Here's my number."

I nod at her and go to walk off.

"Er, Tori?"

"Yeah?"

"You look a bit—" She doesn't finish her sentence.

It's 7:00 a.m. She can piss off.

I walk away, throwing the piece of paper in a bin as I pass it.

So she throws away the number immediately. Then when she DOES see something, she doesn't have the number to call the girl. Then she decides not to tell her anyway. Yeah, stupid.

"I hate books because they're boring"

I think this was the final straw for me Tori-wise. She admits that she hates books.

Coming out as a book hater to my dad is comparable to coming out as gay to homophobic parents.

It was at that point that I realized: I love books! Why should I waste my time reading about a bitter bitch who hates them?

Please, make it end!

I spent like three days just getting to the 27% mark. Tori was incredibly unlikeable and there was nothing in the plot or other characters that hooked me in. I had no desire to keep reading and every desire to start *Take Me On* by Katie McGarry. So long, *Solitaire*.

Ally says

Nope.

I have a feeling I may just be way too worldly for this book. I mean, I'm old now. It's been a while since I was a teenager. But I guess my main beef with *Solitaire* is that, okay, sure its important for YA books to be relatable for the teenage audience it's aimed at, but that doesn't mean that it's okay for books to perpetuate harmful behaviours and attitudes and call it "brutally honest".

I know Alice Oseman was only what, seventeen when she wrote this. And, honestly? That's great. However... (and this is a potentially offensive however, so soz in advance) I don't always think being a writer

and being a teenager go together. Throw rocks at me if you like, but it's my opinion. I feel like, if you have a story to share, whatever age, that's truly awesome. But I feel like a story like *Solitaire* really needs some distance, some years and some perspective before it's put to paper. I'm not explaining this very well because I really don't want to offend all the teen writers out there, but writing benefits from life experience.

Like, take a look at Tori. She's apparently got a mental health problem which, from my experience, both personal and professional, is a difficult one to call. I heard recently that mental health problems amongst teenagers is at an all time high. One newspaper article went so far as to call it an epidemic. But when you examine what's going on, it's a lot more hazy than that. We've got anxiety, which so many people say they have. The vast majority of people I've spoken to who say they have an anxiety disorder also say they are self-diagnosed. Look, guys, *stop* self-diagnosing. If you genuinely feel like you have a problem, *go to your doctor*. Or another professional who is qualified in assessment. You cannot self-diagnose because, in all honesty, it makes the problem worse. You either end up sitting on the issue and not getting the help you need, or you have diagnosed yourself incorrectly and labelled yourself either wrongly, or unnecessarily.

A fuck ton of the anxiety that people feel is normal. It's *normal* to feel anxious in certain settings, at certain times of your life, in specific situations. *Everyone* gets anxious. It becomes a disorder that requires treatment when it prevents you from living your life. It's also normal to feel depressed sometimes. *No-one* has a steady mood, or a positive mood *all* the time. It's perfectly okay to feel off some days, or to feel down about things. Especially when you're a teenager. There's so much change that takes place during your teens years and it's a tough time. You're growing and changing like, every day and it can be scary and overwhelming. I'm in no way trivialising anyone's experiences or feelings, but it's perfectly sane and normal to be anxious or depressed during this time. Again, it becomes a problem that requires treatment when you can't function daily because of it.

Also what's important is that there is a *massive* difference between circumstantial and clinical mental health problems. Circumstantial means that like, you're down about life because everything is changing, or you feel like you're growing apart from people, or you're scared or overwhelmed about your future because you have so many decisions to make. Clinical is like, everything is great but you still feel like shit. Does that make sense? If you have a circumstantial problem, there's a ton you can do about it without labelling yourself with a mental health problem. Practise some self-care, go for a walk outside and get some fresh air, talk to someone about what's going on to make you feel this way (and be honest), take a look at your diet and sleeping pattern. It's not a good idea to leap to the conclusion that just because you're having a tough time, means you have a mental health problem. Trust me, you don't want that label. It follows you for a long time and can make the situation so much worse. I'm not saying that anyone who feels crap doesn't have a problem. Just that there are different "treatments" for different issues, and it's super important to get to the actual bottom of the situation rather than labelling yourself with anxiety or depression and calling it a day.

That's the issue I have with books like this. They don't encourage a positive outlook on mental health. They make it seem like it's okay to behave in a perpetually negative cycle. Tori is so unlikeable, it's unreal. She's rude, she's spoiled, she's selfish, she's judgemental. But yeah, because she's supposed to be suffering this undiagnosed and unspecified mental health problem, it's all fine!

It's not fine.

I don't want people to be worried about me. There's nothing to worry about. I don't want people to try and understand why I'm the way I am, because I should be the first person to understand that.

And I don't understand yet. I don't want people to interfere. I don't want people in my head, picking out this and that, permanently picking up the broken pieces of me.

Oh what a shame that people give a fuck. Because of course no-one understands Tori. No-one else in the entire universe has ever been a teenager before. See, what bugs me with this is that if Tori *did* speak up she would discover that there *are* other people who have been through tough times who could support her and help her find ways to cope with how she's feeling. To create a character who insists on isolating herself and feeling so fucking sorry for herself throughout the whole book, right up until almost the last page, is not encouraging anyone who's reading it, and maybe feels the same way, to choose the right path. Maybe Tori's struggle *is* relatable, but that's not enough. The book lacks value because it doesn't offer any other way of looking at the world that might genuinely benefit readers. I think maybe this is what I was getting at about the whole teen authors thing. Sure, you might be able to write an awesome contemporary novel that other teens can connect with, but you need to also be about to write the characters in that novel out of the hole you've created for them. Otherwise we wind up with self-absorbed, narcissistic, unhealthy bullshit like *Solitaire*.

There's so much crap in this book: the dumb, hard-to-believe mystery about the secret society, the way that feminism, the LGBTQ community and diversity is badly represented, the way that parental figures are portrayed, the horrible, stilted dialogue, the *constant* pop culture references that age the book the instant it hits shelves, the lacklustre story arc, the pale characterisation, the confusing finale.

If you wanna read *good* contemporary, this ain't it. I do not recommend. Over and out.

? jamieson ? says

I think this is one of those books you either love or hate the reviews seem very polarising - I'm not sure exactly where I sit yet. I know I did enjoy it overall, mostly because of the writing style. I love Alice Oseman's writing, it flows so well you just get so caught up in it and I think she writes teenagers incredibly well.

I didn't love this anywhere near as close as I loved Radio Silence, but also this is Alice's debut, and I think it's nice to see how much she's grown and improved.

I know I loved Nick and Charlie, but I already loved them before this book thanks to Heartstopper so I don't know if it counts as a positive to be accredited to this book. I also think Tori was an interesting narrator - maybe she's not *likeable*, but I don't think every 16 year old is. I don't think every character needs to be, either. I think teenagers definitely can be jaded and cynical and pessimistic, and I think it's something you kinda grow out of. I think I can relate to Tori at age 16, I hope I'm not as much like that anymore. But I enjoyed the perspective, even if it wasn't likeable, it was honest and authentically teen.

I think overall, I'm not sure if I feel like I love how the issues were dealt with, and I don't know if I get this book.

So I'm not gonna rate this yet? I kinda want to take a day or so to think about it overall. All I know for sure is I definitely don't feel the immediate connection to this book I felt to Radio Silence

Romie says

Just because someone smiles doesn't mean that they're happy.

This isn't a book about happy people. I don't even think this book was made for happy people, they would dislike it, say everything inside this book is utter bullshit. But it isn't. It's the absolute truth.

This book broke me, I think I'm reading it at the exact right moment in my life. 16-year-old me wouldn't have liked it all that much, she would have sympathised with the characters, but she wouldn't have understood them like 21-year-old me did.

This is the story of sad & introvert Tori Spring. Nothing about being sad or introvert is wrong. That's just the way she is. And yet people judge her for being like this. This say she doesn't try enough to make friends, or to care about anything, and maybe it's true, it probably is, but they're not her. They don't understand what's going on inside her head. They don't know how much she actually cares about her brother Charlie, the best person in the entire world, or how the things that happened to him broke her because he's her little brother and nothing bad should happen to him. They don't know that she's sad 95% of the time but can do nothing about it because this isn't just her deciding to be sad, this is her experiencing her life. Tori Spring was born in a world in which you should smile all the time and answer 'I'm fine' to every 'How are you?' Tori Spring was born into an extrovert and fake happy world, but why should she bend to the world's will and be like that as well? This isn't her.

One day she meets angry boy Michael Holden. Angry at the world for expecting him to be someone he's not. Angry at people for thinking him weird and not worthy of their attention and respect when he's just being himself. Angry all the time. But hiding it. Hiding it because people would judge him even more, they would make him feel even more lonely than he is now. Michael Holden is the softest boy you will ever meet. He's angry but that doesn't he isn't trying to make Tori happy, really happy, not fake. He's not trying to save her, she doesn't need to be saved, she needs to see she's not alone in this world, that people like her exist. Michael Holden doesn't want to save her, and he doesn't need to be saved either. They just both need someone to help them. And their this person for each other.

Ultimately this is a book about family and friendship. The family dynamic between the Spring siblings is one of the best I've read about. They're a bunch of precious human beings who deserve for good things to happen to them. They're trying to make their way through this world the best way they can, sometimes they fail, but they got each other to help them get up when they fall.

This book isn't perfect, but it was perfectly real, and I needed it.

There comes a point, though, when you can't keep looking after other people any more. You have to start looking after yourself.

Anna (Enchanted by YA) says

1.5 STARS

To go into a book with no expectations and then come out disappointed is an impressive feat. But not a good one.

The writing may have been relateable but the protagonist was not. By the end of the book I honest to god couldn't stand her and it made what could have been an interesting book with powerful messages, painful to read.

Jackie says

i,, honestly don't know what to think of this book?? it was so much different from what i thought it would be but i still mostly enjoyed it.

i'll have to think about it a bit more and give it a rating later!!
