

Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie by Jordan Sonnenblick

Steven has always been a normal guy. I mean, sure, he's pretty good at playing the drums, but other than that, he's just an awkward kid without a girlfriend and with a super annoying and super cute younger brother, Jeffrey. But when Jeffrey suddenly gets diagnosed with cancer, Steven's world gets turned on its head, and it's up to Steven to keep it all together. But what eighth grader can deal with a caveman dad, a worried mom, a sick brother, drums, girls, and dangerous pie?

Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie lands solidly on my must-read list for every teenager. Steven's snarky and sarcastic wit keeps the book fast-paced, hilarious, and relatable. Like any middle-schooler, he hates homework, is annoyed by noisy teachers, and has that one girl he can't help but drool over, even in the midst of a life-altering crisis. And the way the story is told makes things deep yet lighthearted, strong yet vulnerable, and despairing until Steven learns to be hopeful. It is a story of conquering fear-- not because the fear disappears, but because no one has to fight fear alone.

This book is going to be B-PG just for some moments where Steven gets a little too drooly over the females in his life. Take heart, though, ladies, because those same females are some of the strongest, smartest girls you'll read about in YA fiction.