



Severed Heads, Broken Hearts

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

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Regular readers of my reviews may already know of my admiration for Lois Keith's book **A Different Life**, which charts the journey of a once healthy teenage girl to the acceptance of her new status as a disabled person. Schneider's book charts a similar journey. In her case the traveller is Ezra Faulkner, once the sports star of his Californian high school year, now (as a result of a motor accident) walking unsteadily with a cane.

Now that sports are beyond him, Ezra finds himself posted to the school debating society, a humiliating secondment to the ranks of the nerds and sports no-hopers. (In short, the team to which your reviewer once proudly belonged.) In this unpromising context he meets Cassidy Thorpe, recently arrived from another school. In that school she was acknowledged as a debating star. No one can quite understand why she found it necessary to transfer.

Ezra and Cassidy now set out on a shared quest. Who are they? What do they have in common? Can they help each other become reconciled with their new lives?

Schneider sets out to chart the feelings of these two adolescents in alarmingly challenging situations. She comes very close to achieving a complete success. But she encounters two obstacles. The first is that the complexities of the plot are manifold: it is easy for a reader to lose the track. The plot developments might have been more visibly signposted as they are for example in *Morpurgo*.

The other problem concerns how Ezra's impairment is described and accounted for, the societal context in which he must find himself anew. To read Lois Keith's book is to find utterly convincing accounts of the context in which her protagonist finds herself - her friends and family, the NHS, social services. Schneider's account of Ezra's context is very nearly convincing but not quite - but a worthy read none the less. **RB**

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