



Full Disclosure

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[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Not on the Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Camryn Garrett was only 13 when she was invited to work as a reporter for **TIME for Kids** (a supplement to **TIME Magazine**); she has also written for **MTV** and **The Huffington Post**. To have sold this debut novel before her 18th birthday is some achievement.

Garrett's language is alive with honesty and energy, reflecting the viewpoint and empathy of someone writing from within the age group of her major characters and her readership. Her narrator, Simone Garcia-Hampton, is in her Junior (penultimate) year of High School. The quickfire, witty conversations between Simone and her friends, Claudia and Lydia, range easily from masturbation and vibrators to the relative merits of differently flavoured condoms; in fact, Claudia knows how to make your own dental dam out of a condom, should you happen to need one. They are equally at ease chatting about being bi, being gay or being straight. Some areas are more difficult for Simone, however. She is HIV Positive from birth and at her last school, she shared this with her closest friend who betrayed her trust, setting irrational fear and hatred blazing among students and parents. In the end, she quit. She's been settling in since September at a local school, not far from San Francisco. She longs to spread the Science ? about viral loads, about the U=U rule (Undetectable = Untransmittable) and the efficacy of current medication; but understandably, she remains silent, keeping her diagnosis to herself. The only place she can talk, with increasing freedom, is in a therapy group at the hospital with peers who also have HIV.

Recently, she's found Miles, a black guy on the stage crew of the school musical which she is student-directing. He's disconcertingly nice to be around. He's also a prominent athlete - an outstandingly good Lacrosse player. That's unusual ? Men's Lacrosse, even at High School, is largely a white sport. Here, I should abandon the reviewer's conventional pretence of self-effacement; I may well be the only British reviewer of Young Adult fiction who played Men's Lacrosse for over 20 years, including touring the USA and later coached the game in a US High School as an exchange teacher. An opportunity to mention this is unlikely to recur.

The musical is **Rent**, which began a 12 year run on Broadway in 1996. It's loosely based on **La Boheme**, but now most of the characters are affected by AIDS, in the fatal era before effective meds. Simone dreams of a career directing musicals. The teacher in charge here is interested chiefly in enhancing her own professional reputation; her direction is mechanistic, focussing on outward appearances (?Remember people are looking at you?). The whole thing lacks

passion. Simone's earnest detailed 'notes' are resisted by actors used to starring in previous productions. But then, on an impulse, Simone enables a couple of singers to draw on their own feelings and experience in a key song ? and the show takes fire.

The novel is crowded with animated conversations in the hallways, school clubs or on the way home; it's one of those school stories where classes and actual *work* don't significantly interrupt Relationships. Boys are not much explored in the story, except for the engaging Miles ? they are inevitably seen from the outside by Simone and her friends. Adults, even Simone's two caring, listening Dads (one a black teacher, one a Latino medical doctor), sometimes don't tune in to her wavelength. Eventually, someone discovers Simone's secret and terrifies her through notes threatening to go public, left in her locker and on her phone. Finally, she is exposed as being HIV Positive on social media, releasing a powerful and moving denouement. Garrett's control of a complex plot of almost 300 pages is remarkable.

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