Before I Die

Amazing, Exquisite, Heartbreaking

Tessa has just months to live. Fighting back against hospital visits, endless tests, drugs with excruciating side-effects, Tessa compiles a list. It’s her To Do Before I Die list. And number one is Sex. Released from the constraints of ‘normal’ life, Tessa tastes new experiences to make her feel alive while her failing body struggles to keep up. Tessa’s feelings, her relationships with her father and brother, her estranged mother, her best friend, and her new boyfriend, all are painfully crystallised in the precious weeks before Tessa’s time finally runs out.

My Personal Review:
This is a stunning, remarkable, breathtaking novel, one of the best things I’ve ever read. And part of the beauty of it is that you don’t just read it—you end up experiencing it in a powerful, visceral way. Years ago, I took a Literature for Young Adults course in college, and something the professor said never left me. He said if you read BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA and don’t end up crying, you don’t have a heart. The same can be said for this spectacular book. You’ll cry plenty (if you possess the aforementioned heart), and crying over potential or imagined loss is one of the profound ways we connect as human beings. Despite the inherent sadness of the important subject matter, there are pockets of hope woven throughout, often where you’d least expect them. And despite the fact that the subject of death and dying can so easily be made maudlin or sentimental or cliche (after all, its been done so much), Downham’s approach is consistently fresh and innovative and new. Thank you for giving us this book, Ms. Downham. You have enriched the world of letters in an immeasurable way.