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Paradise End

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

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Paradise End starts in Household Hell. 14-year-old tap-dancing prima donna Carly is at loggerheads with her Barbie-minded little sister with whom she shares her bedroom. This contrived contretemps, however, provides the catalyst for the rest of the narrative. To calm herself down, the headstrong teenager bolts from her house and finds herself outside Paradise End, a stately home which abuts their housing estate hovel. There she meets Tia, the delicate daughter of jet-setting parents, who is symbolically penned in behind the massive iron gates of the ironically-named eponymous pile. The rest of the story charts the burgeoning friendship between the seemingly ill-matched pair. Money does not buy happiness, of course. Despite her fantastic wealth, Tia is a porcelain princess, a fragile beauty, scarred through neglect: her father is absent in Argentina; her metaphorically 'absent' mother is a self-centred socialite. And so, although initially bedazzled by the luxurious lifestyle of her beautiful friend, Carly increasingly comes to cherish the 'spit 'n' sawdust' sanity of her own humble home. Given that the book's central theme is the gap between appearance and reality - between material wealth and spiritual worth - it is ironic, perhaps, that the Carly-voiced narrative sounds, at times, fake. How many teenagers really refer to their silly sister as a 'spiteful little cat'? Or a next-door neighbour as 'an old misery'? That said, the Diana-like drama of the ending is fittingly appropriate: like *her* story, this paradoxical Paradise ends in pain.

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