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The Thirteenth Home of Noah Bradley

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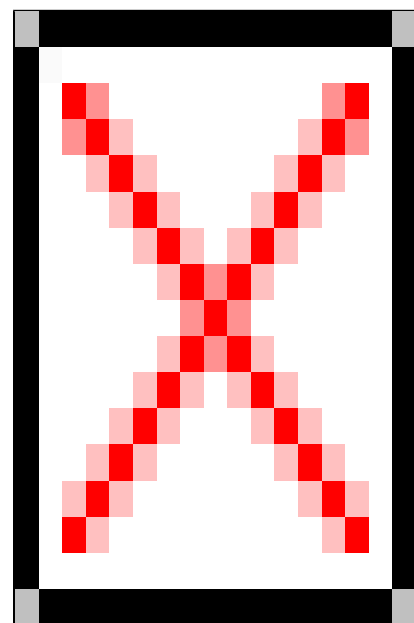
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Media type:

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'I was only twelve but I'd already lived in twelve different homes,' Noah tells us. That is, if you count a tent, a camper-van, a trailer, a houseboat and a range of other accommodations from Inverness to Cornwall. Unfortunately, those homes were prone to sudden collapse, being blown away in a gale and sundry other modes of demolition, with the family forced to relocate elsewhere. That meant Noah changing schools frequently and anyone knows the only way to survive a new school is to fit in. If that means hanging out with the Jocks, then do it, even if you're not much good at sport; or, if the place to be is the Drama Club, sign up for the School Play. Whatever it takes. Just don't get noticed.

That's the advice Noah tries to give his 8-year-old brother Billy, for whom life is particularly tough because he's had so much trouble coping with hearing difficulties. Being one of the in-crowd goes against Billy's grain. He's very bright in a lateral kind of way which doesn't help when it comes to fitting in. Billy's most at ease with Arnold, his ferret; they're inseparable. Noah feels a fierce responsibility to look out for Billy and their loving relationship is one of the mainsprings of this novel.

They both like their new home at 18, Verity Place. This time, they think things could be different. Noah also likes his school; he's made three good mates and even likes one of the teachers. Mum and Dad love the house too, though lately they've been arguing a lot and Noah knows why. It's *The Curse of the Bradleys*.

The novel starts with the story of the Curse – a four page Prologue telling, in the manner of a traditional tale, an old story of a family whose greed in developing their property, abusing the earlier generosity of others, had led to a magical curse being laid upon them. The family is condemned to be forever rootless, catastrophe falling upon any place they came to call home. The only solution to these recurring crises would depend upon the family uniting – but exactly what this means is not clear from the tale.

Down the ages, Bradley homes have been subject to disaster after disaster, prefaced each time by the arrival of the terrifying black birds of the north. That's why Mum and Dad are arguing – how best to face the Curse and give their boys a settled life. The elevated language of the ancient tale doesn't last. Amber Lee Dodd plunges readers into a swift-paced story, mingling everyday school life with wild magic encompassing towering tides, raging fires, wind, lightning and rampaging herds of wild animals on the one hand and malign elderly grown-ups on the other. Noah's Year 8 neighbour, Neena Kapoor, gets drawn into the action too; Noah's been horrible to her at school, but soon she becomes the best friend he's ever had. Both Noah and Billy learn what they need to learn. Despite the magical melodramatics, Dodd keeps her prose down-to-earth and comic in spirit. Regrettably, there are unusual numbers of proofing errors and some confusing factual inconsistencies. Even so, the plot is a straightforward read, since Dodd doesn't employ time shifts or switches of narrator as the story hurtles about the country. Young readers should enjoy the adventurous ride, which doesn't spare some graphic violence in disposing of the chief mischief-maker.

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