



## The Wonder of Us

*Kim Culbertson*

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*Riya and Abby are: Best friends. Complete opposites. Living on different continents. Currently mad at each other. About to travel around Europe.*

Riya moved to Berlin, Germany, with her family for junior year, while Abby stayed behind in their small California town. They thought it would be easy to keep up their friendship—it's only a year and they've been best friends since preschool. But instead, they ended up fighting and not being there for the other. So Riya proposes an epic adventure to fix their friendship. Two weeks, six countries, unimaginable fun. But two small catches:

They haven't talked in weeks.

They've both been keeping secrets.

Can Riya and Abby find their way back to each other among lush countrysides and dazzling cities, or does growing up mean growing apart?

## The Wonder of Us Details

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Author : Kim Culbertson

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## From Reader Review The Wonder of Us for online ebook

### JenLovesBooks says

I knew I had to pick up The Wonder of Us when I read the synopsis and found it was about two best friend going on an epic adventure, while trying to reconnect. This is a story that resonates with many as high school, college, and different parts of our life ends. What could be better than finding a way back to that friendship by taking a road trip through Europe.

There's Abby who has been left behind in California, while Riya has been away with her family in Germany for the past year. Both of them have gone through their own turmoils and secrets they've carried since leaving each other in bad terms. Then one day Riya offers Abby a chance to be taken away from all of that, for both of them to travel through Europe for two weeks, and things move along from there.

"Yes! That other thing in your hand right now is a ticket to Florence, Italy--for you!!! Surprise! My nani is sending us on an incredible multi-city trip this summer. She's giving me my eighteenth birthday trip four months early. Two and half weeks of European fun!"

The story goes back and forth between Abby and Riya giving the reader both sides of their journey, well along with Neel (Riya's cousin) who is their chaperone during their time in Europe, and it's a nice take on things to be able to see their changes and growth with each other since being a part for close to a year. And, it's fun getting to view the different places in this novel through the well written words used to describe it all.

"The Boboli Gardens spread out around me, and I can't help but feel like I've just stepped back in time into the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It's hard not to."

"After another hour of passing through storybook villages with patchwork fields and sheets of striking blue lakes, we near the urban center of Zurich. It doesn't look like the cities I'm used to. More like Santa's village. The buildings seem made of gingerbread. Flags, mostly Swiss, flutter along the ordered streets. Leafy trees shade people sitting at outdoor cafes on the wide sidewalks. Pots of geraniums bloom in containers and smartly dressed men and women chat on their phones."

This was just as much about the scenery as it is about the friendship between Abby and Riya and it made me love The Wonder of Us even more. Just as their getting to see new places and make new memories, they are also getting to know the new them, how they've changed from who they used to be, into someone that their friendship may not be able to grow from.

If that wasn't much of a strain on their relationship already, Neel definitely doesn't make it any easier. When I thought, here's a character that is going to make me as annoyed as it's making Riya, I see the better side of him through Abby. There are other characters throughout this novel also that add a nice touch to everything, even if they are only in a few pages. I just couldn't get enough of this book and it might also be how honest it all is, and how beautifully the sights were portrayed. This is definitely one of my faves of this year.

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### Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Stacey on [www.whisperingstories.com](http://www.whisperingstories.com)

Teenagers Abby and Riya had been best friends since they were little children. They were never apart until the day Riya moved from her hometown in Yuba Ridge, California to Berlin, Germany with her family. Whilst Riya was getting to know her new hometown and school, Abby's life was falling apart as her mum left her dad for another man.

With the two so far away from one another they tried to talk on the phone or Facetime as much as possible, but with resentment creeping in from both of them, their friendship started dwindling. Not wanting to lose her best friend, Riya has a brilliant idea and soon afterward Abby receives airline tickets in the post.

Riya has invited Abby for a two week all expenses paid tour of six European countries, there is only one catch, Riya cousin Neel is escorting them and he's a bit of a stickler for the rules. There's also the matter that Riya might have an ulterior motive for this trip too!

The Wonder of Us is a cute YA book that features interesting characters and vibrant cities. Throughout the book, the best friends visit Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Scotland, Iceland, and England. Abby is a history buff and loves everything from the past, especially The Seven Wonders of the World, so Riya tries to make the trip as interesting for her as possible, showing her new wonders that can be found in each city.

The main aim of the trip though is to try and become close again and repair the damage that has been caused between them, however, the girls seem reluctant to actually speak about what has happened and try to brush it under the rug, which over time causes more friction between them.

I really enjoyed the plot, visiting the numerous countries and learning so much about each of them. I do have a little problem with how much time we got to spend in each city. For example, we head to Florence, Italy for the first 'Wonder' and this takes up 66 pages. When we visit London, England this only covers 31 pages and lacks the detail that the earlier countries did. For each country we visited the number of pages dedicated to that country reduced. I would of love to of seen a nearly equal amount to each.

The book is told from dual points of view by both of the girls. Now I'm not normally one for dual or multiple narratives but for this book to work it really needed it. The chapters are told from alternating POV so you always know which girl you are spending time with.

Whilst the girls were typical teenagers and sometimes fun, sometimes moody, I really enjoyed getting to know Neel. He is one eccentric young man who is wise beyond his years, yet still, a teenager inside, even if he doesn't like to show it often.

The book was great fun to read and shows you the importance of friendship and that just because someone is thousands of miles away it doesn't lessen their feelings for their friends. It also shows the reader that sometimes you need to learn to stand on your own two feet and face the world.

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### **Alexa says**

I really enjoyed this book! I'm a sucker for friendship stories, especially when they center around evolving friendships, and I think Culbertson did a good job with this one. There's also the added bonus of being set in some fun European cities to sweeten the deal!

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### **Kimberly B says**

3.5 Stars. I read this for my Teachers as Readers book club. A really nice take on a friendship. At times the girls seemed their age (17), and at other times their conversations and dialogue seemed between two much older girls. Overall it was a nice story about how friendship changes and evolves.

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### **Lynn says**

This book takes a look into the friendship of two girls that are in different places. They've gotten into a big fight and their friendship hangs in the balance. The miles between them as well as their diverging paths in life only add to the trouble of working it out. Both girls have very different personalities but have been best friend for years.

What I liked. This story is primarily about friendship. It seems that too often YA ignores the importance of friendships so I'm glad this book takes a deep look at it. There was a lot character development as well. I also liked the road trip/adventure sort of feel. I liked that the author went deep enough with the characters that the girl who would seem superficial if you only look at her surface is actually shown to have plenty of depth too.

Neutral- There were a lot of historical and factual tidbits that will bore some and intrigue other readers. I also found that the journey through the places was so fast that it was hard to really absorb it. With that said, I imagine that's how it would feel if you really did go through these places that fast.

I was also neutral overall about Neel. He was super condescending at first with controlling tendencies so I was put off by him. Sure, as we get to know him he is more sympathetic but I still was never very attached to him. Plus, the whole storyline with him and Abby was very open ended and almost added for the sake of having some kind of romantic tension in the story. Honestly, it wasn't needed and I would have preferred it without. I'm not sure how I feel about the nearly complete open ending.

Which leads me to things that weren't my thing. As I just mentioned, the very small romantic subplot could have been left out. The girls got a little dramatic and the way they'd both take shots at each other when they got into a fight doesn't show a healthy conflict resolution style. You'd have thought they would have learned from their first big fight. The doors getting stuck on Abby's schtick was kind of strange.

Overall, this was a good book about friendships and the directions they take. It dives in and looks at many things. Due to my being older, I think some of what missed is based on my age versus the target age of the novel. That's okay because I think it works for the intended age group.

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### **Maddy W. says**

This book was great! It was touching and really touched on friendship and gave really good hidden lessons on friendship relationships. Although this book was long, you fell in love with Abby, Riya and all the side characters too. It also has a lot of history if you love that too! :)

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### **Christina (Reading Extensively) says**

Abby has had a difficult year in the wake of her parents' divorce. Her dad fell apart and the burden of taking care of him and the house fell to her. It's also been tough because her best friend Riya moved to Germany and they got into a major fight. Now she is in Europe on a trip with Riya (paid for by Riya's wealthy grandmother) where they hopefully will mend their broken relationship. When Abby first sees Riya again she realizes how much Riya has changed. She dresses like a sophisticated European and Riya is also keeping a big secret from Abby that could destroy their friendship for good.

Riya comes across as flighty and irresponsible and a little spoiled at times. She does care a lot about Abby and wants to be a good friend but she definitely has some growing up to do. I think Abby is more mature in a way because of what she's been through with her family. Riya seems like a younger, boy crazy idealistic dreamer in comparison. Of course Abby also likes their small town and doesn't want things to change while Riya is growing away from that and wants to see and experience the world. For Abby, their small hometown represents stability and for Riya she feels it is holding her back. She doesn't want to have the same exact life that everyone else is living. I think this is something teens can easily relate to as they prepare to graduate and possibly leave home for college or career. It is a time when friendships change and people sometimes do grow apart because they want different things.

Abby and Riya are not alone on their trip as they are chaperoned by Riya's older cousin Neel who is in college. Neel is British and can be a stick in the mud in Riya's view but he and Abby get along really well (cue the romantic sparks). Abby is really into history and the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, something she and Neel have in common. As someone who has loved history since I was a kid, I liked how Abby kind of geeked out on it. I love reading books about travel (especially set in Europe) so that appealed to me about this book and I enjoyed reading about the different places they visited.

While there is some romance the book really does focus on the friendship of Abby and Riya which I appreciated. The resolution of that part of the story felt realistic. I also liked how supportive Riya's parents and grandmother and Abby's dad are. It is nice to see positive portrayals of adults in teen fiction. I mostly enjoyed this novel, especially the travel aspect and the growth of the protagonists. It would be a great book to pack in your beach bag this summer.

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### **Jheelkamal Nayak says**

This book wasn't for me at all. Neither did I connect with the history geek Abby nor with Drama queen Riya. They both felt immature, selfish and boring to me.  
The story didn't do much for me either. Even the writing style was too predictable.  
I kept going and wishing that the story will pick up the slack as it goes. But it didn't happen at all.  
My rating : 2/5

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### **Hailey (HaileyinBookland) says**

This didn't really do anything for me. I didn't care for the characters, in fact I found it difficult to differentiate

between the two in the dual perspectives so that was an unnecessary element. It was just meh, disappointing overall.

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### **autumn says**

tl;dr: i thought most of this book was really charming and sweet! i don't read a lot of realistic fiction but i really liked this. if you like stories about travel and friendship, this is for you. 3.5 stars (for the unnecessary romance that i felt overcomplicated things)

i totally gaybaited myself with this since logically (based on the blurbs, the cover, the fact that i hadn't seen it on any lgbt lists etc) i knew the two main characters wouldn't end up together, but! the title is THE WONDER OF US! that's the most romantic thing i've ever heard in my entire life! how could they NOT end up together?? very easily, as it turns out. other gay highlights: riya calls abby her 'true love', says she 'lights up [her] life like nothing else', compares them to a couple that's been married for 20 years, and gets really jealous when abby flirts with her (riya's) cousin, neel. multiple times when abby kisses neel, the first thing she thinks about is riya (also how could she NOT be in love with riya when shes the most beautiful dynamic interesting fun amazing person who's ever lived?). personally i think the book would have been stronger without neel's character (even if riya and abby didn't end up together) since the trip was supposed to be about rebuilding their friendship. i just felt like it didn't make sense to have someone else with them the entire time, when he obviously only existed to be abby's love interest. (i did like neel as a character, just not for this book)

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### **Samantha says**

I love a good summery book to get you in the mood for summer and with the current heatwave we are having here in the U.K there was not a better time to read this.

Riya and Abby have been best friends forever, they lived in California and have attended school together, they pretty much have been inseparable, that is until Riya tells Abby she is leaving and her family are moving to Germany. This hits the girls hard and they seem to drift away, after a few months they have little contact with each other. Riya knows that they both behaved badly but wants to fix their friendship, after all, it was once as strong as anything. Riya sends Abby a plane ticket to meet her in Italy and said she is giving her a holiday of a lifetime around Europe, something that her nan has paid for. Abby touches down in Italy and decides that perhaps Riya is right, she decides to enjoy her time away, but things don't go to plan.

This is a story about friendship and growing up a long the way. I had a slight problem with the narration of the characters, at times it was hard to identify who was speaking at one point and I had to go back to check which character I was reading, it would have helped if the voices were slightly different to avoid confusion.

This is a cute book, with a travel theme of two girls who are trying to repair their friendship but also knowing that sometimes people change. It didn't blow me away but it passed the time nicely in the garden.

I would like to thank the publisher for sending this in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Kyley Kordick says**

I was surprised by this book. I thought it looked interesting, but after reading the first bit, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it. It actually turned out to be a very good book. It really made me want to travel after hearing about all of the things Abby and Riya got to see in Europe. It had a good ending as well. I like the message that it portrays about friendship.

Personally, I sided with Abby more during Abby and Riya's arguments. The two friends have quite a lot to discuss after being apart for a year. They get into a lot of fights with one another. I think I tended to side more with Abby simply because I'm more similar to her personality-wise than I am to Riya. I like how the author organized the book around the Seven Wonders of the World. I think the book had a really good ending and says a lot about how friendships truly can last.

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## **Kelly K says**

2.5 stars.

This was a pretty frustrating novel. The two girls were squabbling most of the time and I felt that Abby's reason for running off was absurd. You're friends will not be in close proximity to you for forever but that doesn't mean they aren't your friends. Yeah, Abby dealt with some shit and Riya could have done a better job at being a friend but damn girls life goes on. This was also another one of those books that has to cram a love plot in there. Just stop.

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## **Ellen says**

This was very cute! I finished it fast and liked the description of places they both visited.

I really liked the focus on complicated female friendships and growing up.

I thought sometimes the two characters were indistinguishable from each other which made it hard when it was a duo perspective book. It could also be a little repetitive: they went to a new place, they had a little argument, they flirted with boys. That happened almost every country they visited lol.

All in all this is a fab fun read, got me in the summer mood ?

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## **Tracy Erler says**

Thank you, thank you, thank you Kim Culbertson for writing a book about friendship. The Wonder of Us is a beautiful, honest story of two friends at the beginning of the end of high school and what life might look like after graduation.

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