

Binding 13 by Chloe Walsh

Reviewed by Charlotte

Binding 13 by Chloe Walsh is not just a high school romance, but a touching story about a girl who's broken and a boy who's determined to pick up the pieces of her heart and patch them back together. Shannon Lynch has never had it easy. Growing up in a toxic and abusive household and prone to being the target of bullying, she's always been cautious. When she arrives at Tommen College, one of the most prestigious private schools in Ireland mid-way through the school year, she's desperate for a fresh start and to shake off the demons that plague her. On her first day of school, she accidentally comes into contact with Johnny Kavanagh, rising rugby star and one of the most popular boys at Tommen. Trying to keep a low profile but failing to do so while creating a fragile alliance with the boy, Shannon yet again finds herself at the mercy of bullies. Johnny Kavanagh has only had one true love: rugby. Ever since the young age of six, Johnny has had a dream of playing professional rugby. And ever since the age of six, he's never let anything, let alone anyone, get in the way of his goals. But all of that changes when he meets Shannon Lynch. Ever since Johnny had laid eyes on the shy but gorgeous new girl, he hasn't been able to stop thinking about her. Placed on a pedestal so high while trying to play rugby with an injury that can permanently alter his career, Johnny has no time for distractions. But every time he simply looks at the girl with hidden bruises and midnight blue eyes, he finds himself wanting to find out more. As the two get closer and haunt each other's dreams, they wonder if their undeniable chemistry is all in their heads, or if fate brought them together for a reason. When I picked up Binding 13 and saw that it was 800 pages, the last thing I expected was to read the book in a span of four days. Binding 13 is the quintessential representation of a character driven story. You will find yourself rooting for these characters, experiencing their pain and trauma, and focusing on their relationships. It's also a dual perspective of Johnny's P.O.V. and Shannon's P.O.V., which made it more exciting to read as you find out about both the characters' different friends, family dynamics, and feelings. It's the first book of the Boys of Tommen series, and you best believe I will immediately be moving on to the next book as soon as I'm done writing this review. Shannon Lynch is perceived by others as sweet, quiet and shy but you'll find out she is actually tough, driven and strong. She has a penchant for freezing up when it's time to fight back but as the story goes on you see her gradually grow into standing up for herself. Learning about her trauma was painful but plays a key role in her story, explaining her countenance, how she perceives herself, and the some of the rash decisions she makes later in the book. Many people when reading how Shannon acted around Johnny have said they "cringed" and had to put the novel down because of how awkward she was, but it only made me want to keep reading on. I believe those scenes are the most important parts of the book because they showcase her character development the most. As Shannon interacts more with Johnny and comes to a conclusion that he would never hurt her, her perspective changes and she lets herself be vulnerable around him. This emphasizes how important Johnny is to her, and is the reason why we as readers understand why she likes him so much. Johnny Kavanagh is the standard. I especially enjoyed reading from his point of view in the book because his side of the story includes more of the lighter and happier moments of the book. Johnny is under a lot of stress and is very driven to reach his goals of being a rugby star, and it was humorous reading about how he was thrown completely off-kilter once he laid eyes on Shannon. He was so smitten with her it was adorable. I was also creating non-existent abs when reading the humorous banter between him and his best friend, Gerard (Gibsie) Gibson. The side characters like Gibsie add so much humor, love, and story into Binding 13. Lizzie Young and Claire Biggs are Shannon's best friends and add so much power and

light into her life. Meanwhile, Johnny's best mates Patrick Feely, Hughie Biggs, and Gibsie will have you giggling and kicking your feet whenever a word comes out of their mouths. Some parts of the book do touch on topics such as abuse, bullying, self-hatred, and anxiety, so I would advise reading the trigger warning ahead before proceeding. Overall, I would definitely recommend this book! Binding 13 was a powerful and effective way to start off the Boys of Tommen series because I have a feeling that I'm going to love the rest of the series just as much as this book! The themes of love, friendship, high school romance/teenagers, and drama were what made this book such an immersive experience, and the hype surrounding it is definitely worth it.