is intruding. As Anna dreads losing her 15-year-old genius brother to Harvard in the fall, Katy's profoundly developmentally disabled brother suddenly needs to be institutionalized. (On top of this inequity, Anna's parents are happily married; Katy's, bitterly divorced.) An additional story line involves a classmate whose father has recently died; he and Anna like each other. Given so many developments, it's not surprising that Anna's emotional responses seem a little blunted, even when Katy inexplicably turns on her. But the writing is simple and clear, and gently delivers the message that growing up is inextricably linked with change. As Anna concludes, "I just miss us, Katy and Anna, those girls who played and are gone now." Ages 8–12. *(Dec.)*

Skeleton Creek

Patrick Carman. Scholastic, $14.99 (192p)
ISBN 978-0-545-07566-4

In a much-anticipated "multi-platform" mystery, Carman (the Land of Elyon series) tells of two small-town teens who go looking for trouble in an abandoned dredge once used to find gold. Presented as the journal of 15-year-old Ryan, the book is produced on ruled paper and in a font resembling handwriting; Ryan unfolds the details of the recent accident that has left him laid up with a broken leg. Periodically, Ryan receives e-mails from Sarah, his fellow sleuth, who is still hunting down clues about ghostly sightings at the dredge, and, armed with a video camera, is posting her findings on a Web site. (Readers can access the site with the passwords in the book.) The premise is more intriguing than the execution. Clues come slowly and don't keep the reader guessing so much as perplexed: Sarah's brief clips are just as much hair-twirling musings as plot-thickeners. Readers should know in advance what the otherwise enticing package does not make clear: this is the first in a series, and anyone expecting that it will end on anything but a cliff-hanger will be disappointed. Ages 9–12. *(Jan.)*

Granny

Anthony Horowitz. Puffin, $6.99 paper (208p)
ISBN 978-0-14-240868-1

With the wickedly fun undertones of Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, Horowitz (*The Switch,* reviewed below) imagines that stooped, child-hating grannies are out to take over the world. To do it, they need Jordan Warden, aka Joe, a filthy rich 12-year-old who lives in London with his self-obsessed mother; his cold, can't-be-bothered father; and a quartet of odd but affectionate servants. Joe's Granny—a kleptomaniac with peculiar eating habits—sets out to kidnap him, and Joe ends up in a hotel full of old ladies assembled for the Golden Granny Awards (one prize is for longest time spent boarding a bus). They are also clamoring for his youthful enzymes. Of course, to get those enzymes, Joe has to die. Horowitz resorts to the lights-going-out-at-the-right-moment trick to get Joe out of his predicament, but even that old chestnut doesn't detract from the excitement. Although some parents may cringe at the blackness of the humor, kids who can shudder through the explosions will love the campy ending. Ages 8–12. *(Jan.)*

The Switch

Anthony Horowitz. Philomel, $16.99 (192p)
ISBN 978-0-399-25062-0

Maybe only a 10-year-old would find the zanily sinister world here plausible, but Horowitz (the Alex Rider adventures) writes about it with such zeal that older readers will get sucked in, too. Rich, spoiled Thomas Arnold David Spencer, or Tad, goes to bed one night on his goose feather pillow and Irish linen sheets wishing for one split second to be someone else. Thanks to some alignment of planets (or maybe just a weird carnival gypsy, it's never really clear), 13-year-old Tad gets his wish, and he wakes up in the body of Bob Snarby, the son of carnival workers, who has a penchant for sniffing glue. The ensuing chain of events has Tad, Bob and readers questioning whether anything is what it appears to be. Horowitz has fun describing both the squalor of Snarby's caravan and its hard-knock occupants as well as the upscale, anything-can-be-bought world of the Spencers. Spinning an action-packed story, Horowitz also slyly tosses in some pretty deep questions about life. Ages 10–up. *(Jan.)*

★ The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had

Kristin Levine. Putnam, $16.99 (272p) ISBN 978-0-399-25090-3

Tension builds just below the surface of this energetic, seamlessly narrated first novel set in small-town Alabama in 1917. Twelve-year-old Harry, aka Dit, has been looking forward to the arrival of the new postmaster from Boston, said to have a son Dit's age. The "son" turns out to be a girl, Emma, and to everyone's surprise, the family is what Dit calls "colored" and others call "Negras." Emma, bookish and proud, impresses Dit with her determination (he calls it stubbornness) when she decides to learn to throw a ball or climb, and when Emma's mother upbraids him, Dit begins to rethink what he's been taught about the South's sorrowful defeat in the War Between the States. Levine sets up a climactic tragedy that will challenge the community's sense of justice; although hair-raising *Mockingbird*–esque events are becoming common in YA novels about inequality in the segregated South, Levine handles the setting with grace and nuance. Without compromising the virtues and vices of her characters, she lets her readers have a happy-enough ending. Ages 10–up. *(Jan.)*

Wherever Nina Lies

Lynn Weingarten. Scholastic/Point, $16.99 (336p) ISBN 978-0-545-06631-0

Sixteen-year-old Ellie Wrigley is desperate to find her unconventional, beloved older sister, Nina, who disappeared two years ago, seemingly without a trace. When Ellie uncovers a clue in a local secondhand shop—a drawing that Ellie recognizes as Nina's work—she is determined to investigate, even without her family's support. Ellie's father left years earlier, and her mother is remarkably uninvolved: "Your sister's not missing," Ellie's mother has told her. "She's just not here." Without telling anyone where she is going, Ellie sets off on a cross-country chase with her new crush, Sean, who has also lost a sibling, and seems to be the only one who understands her. The cast of convenient characters also includes Ellie's gay boss at the coffee bar and her suspicious best friend. The story is largely unbelievable, however, debut author Weingarten's fast-paced, chatty style will keep readers tuned in. Ages 14–up. *(Feb.)* ■

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