



**BOOK REVIEW OF SIMONE ELKELES'
PERFECT CHEMISTRY
A FINAL PROJECT**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
S-1 Degree in English Department
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by her without taking any results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in references.

Semarang, December 4th 2015

Nararyani Pramuditha

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

So verily, with the hardship, there is relief. Verily, with the hardship, there is relief.

(Surah Inshirah verses 94:5-6)

She believe she could, so she did.

(Anonymous)

A winner is a dreamer who never gives up.

(Nelson Mandela)

*This final project is dedicated to my beloved family and
To everyone who helped me to accomplish this paper
Thank you for supporting me.*

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The writer realizes that this project is still far from being perfect. She, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this final project better.

Finally, the writer expects that this project will be useful to the reader who wishes to know the review of the novel Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry*.

Semarang, 4th December 2015

Nararyani Pramuditha

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Book Review of Simone Elkeles's *Perfect Chemistry*

1. Introduction

As teenagers begin to assert their independence and find their own identity, they are facing behavioral, emotional, or learning issues in their lives. Teenagers go through some hard times and it can be difficult at times. Each of them has a life story. Teenagers' life is surrounded by some issues, such as bad grades, reputation, drugs, popularity and family problem. It is confusing and very stressful. Teenagers' hardship makes them more critical and have a desire of having a good life in the future. On the journey to achieve their goals, teenagers definitely get various kinds of obstacles which could come from the loved one, for example, from their parents. Sometimes, parents want their children to be what they want instead of what their children actually want. Hence, these teenagers can not fully be themselves and be what they actually want.

As teenagers, there are a lot of things happen in the process of becoming an adult. They live in the world to try getting the best future. Their goals are to continue living and to survive. Some of them can get it, but the rest cannot. To get what is the best for their future, they will do anything. Sometimes, they put themselves in a dangerous situation because they make wrong decision. They lose control, but in the end they just want to make their loved one proud. However, these issues make them into the person who has desire to have a bright future and to be themselves in anything that they do.

Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry* is a novel that simultaneously addresses a number of complex teen issues. It was first published in 2009 and became a New York

Times Best Sellers in 2009. *Perfect Chemistry* tells a story about the real life hardship for teenagers as they try to find their place in the world. Through the ups and downs, the main characters of the book fight to reach their dream. They try to step forward and get their dreams in their own way. This novel is interesting to review because it has good messages dealing with respecting others, having faith in oneself, and working hard to reach one's dreams. The writer, Simone Elkeles, wrote the novel with an interesting plot, a good storyline, enchanting characters, and themes of love, drama, and motivation. The story becomes more interesting as it is told from two different point of views of the main characters. *Perfect Chemistry* takes the reader to really feel both main characters in the novel which has two different worlds. The purpose of this book review is to convey an explanation about the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

2. Summary of Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry*

There are two main characters: Brittany Ellis and Alex Fuentes in this novel. Both of them have different life but are pursuing the same dream to have a bright future.

Brittany Ellis is an American girl who was born in a wealthy family. Everyone thinks Brittany has a perfect life, but in reality she is not like what everyone thinks. Since Brittany's mother is a superficial woman who always wants her to look perfect in front of everyone, people start to call her as 'Miss Perfect'. It inhibits Brittany to achieve what she really wants for her future. However, in all sorts of bad things that happens in her life, she still believes and tries to be herself in order to get what she wants for her own future.

The other character is Alex Fuentes. He comes from a poor family. Alex's father was shot during a drug deal when Alex was only six years old. Alex joins the gang in order to protect his family because of his father's absence. From his background as a gang member, Alex is struggling to have a bright future. He makes efforts to get into a university so that he can make his mother proud. Living a hard life makes him look like a bad guy but actually, he has a good heart within.

Brittany and Alex dislike each other at the beginning of the story. Alex thinks that Brittany is 'Miss Perfect', a spoiled girl who has everything and a perfect life. While Brittany thinks that Alex is a 'Bad Boy', a gang member who likes to consume drugs and get drunk. Once, they become Chemistry partner in chemistry class. Alex's friends keep telling him about how good looking Brittany is and that he should date her. His friends bet that he cannot get Brittany into his bed in two months. Alex begins to flirt with Brittany, so that he will not lose his precious motorcycle in the bet. Starting at this point, they start to know each other well. Later, bad assumptions that they thought about each other are turned into the opposite. Brittany's imperfections makes Alex becomes madly in love with her. The same thing happens to Brittany. After knowing that Alex is actually a good guy who has a good heart, Brittany falls in love with Alex. Brittany tells Alex that she is in love with him, but she wants to hide their relationship from her friends and family to protect both of them from judgement. However, Brittany immediately feels that she does not really care with what her friends think about Alex.

Alex and Brittany are beginning to fall in love deeper to each other and dream of a life together, but Alex finds himself drawn more closely into the gang. Suddenly, one of the gang leaders wants Alex to do a drug deal, but Alex hesitates. On the night of the

deal, Brittany comes to Alex's place to keep him from the deal until his friend Paco can take his place. However, after knowing that Paco actually wants to take his place to the drug drop, Alex follows Paco immediately. Paco is dead and Alex is confronted by Hector, his father's killer and his fellow gang members. Hector shoots Alex, but Hector is killed when the police arrives.

After that day, Alex walks away from Brittany because he thinks that his life is too dangerous for Brittany. However, Alex soon realizes that he cannot live without Brittany. Since then, Alex quits the gang and lives with the consequences. Fortunately, Alex gets accepted to the same school that Brittany has chosen to attend, the University of Colorado and five months later, he finally meets her. Here, Alex promises to never leave Brittany again and asks her to marry him when their study is done.

3. Review of Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry*

Perfect Chemistry is an interesting book to read. There are some interesting points that comprise the strengths and the weaknesses of this novel which will be explained in the following discussion.

3.1. The Strengths of Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry*

The strengths of the novel *Perfect Chemistry* include the characters, setting, theme and point of view. They are described as in the following discussion.

3.1.2. Character

The first strength is the character and the characterization. It is stated in the article "Elements of Fiction: Character" that, character is an important element of fiction. Without a central character, there is no story. The goal of the fiction writer is to create characters that are likeable and memorable. Brittany Ellis and Alex Fuentes are created as main characters. The heart and soul that Elkeles infuses her main characters with, that makes them real which in turn, makes the reader care. In addition, the author describes the character well, showing that she understands the teenagers matters deeply.

Brittany Ellis is described as an American girl. She is portrayed as the "Golden Girl," the girl every girls wants to be. Brittany Ellis is a rich girl who seems to have it all. She is rich, popular, and trying to keep up the act of perfection. Brittany is really care of what other people think of her because her mother always tells her to be perfect and reminds her of how she should dress and become. Therefore, she acts perfectly in her school and neighbours. However, after she falls in love with Alex Fuentes and realize what is she really wants for her life, she stopped following her mother's dream. "I love you both, but I don't want to always be 'the best I can be.' I just want to be me. I want to be free to make my own decisions and learn from my mistakes without freaking out, feeling guilty, or worrying that I'm not living up to your expectations." (Elkeles, 2009:323) In the quotation, the reader know what Brittany actually wants. She wants to be free and acts like herself without being perfect as her mother wants her to be. The readers can learn from Brittany Ellis that people have to be themselves and be proud of it. Let people see the real, imperfect, flawed, beautiful and magical person we are. Take control of our lives and the choices that are best for us.

Alex Fuentes is described as a poor Mexican boy, living in the southside Chicago. He struggled to adapt in that neighborhood so that he lets himself be regarded as the bad boy of the school. Everyone is afraid of him and no one wants to mess with him. This is because he is a gang member, but the fact is, Alex is a good guy with a good heart within, especially his attitude towards Brittany. He touches Brittany as if she were made of glass, cause he is madly in love with her. In the book, Brittany once said positive things about Alex, "He is smart. He has eyes so expressive they give a hint to more than what he portrays. He's dedicated to his friends, family, and even his motorcycle. He touched me as if I were made of glass. He kissed me as if he'd savor it for the rest of his life." (Elkeles, 2009:201) When Alex talked with Brittany, he became a very good guy. From Alex Fuentes's character, the reader get a lesson that not all Mexican have a bad attitude. Although Alex is a gang member, still he has a good heart within especially to the people he cared.

The different characteristics of Brittany Ellis and Alex Fuentes make this story more interesting. Especially both of the characters have the same portion as central character. *Perfect Chemistry* bring a great deal of teenagers to both characters. Elkeles creates the two characters so complex by combining good and a bad personality with their emotion and motivation.

3.1.3. Setting

The second strength of the book is the setting. Setting is the time, place, and situation in which a story takes place. The setting of this novel is explained clearly

especially in the setting of place. In this novel, the setting is in the outskirts of Chicago. This novel tells the reader about the lives of people who live in north side and south side Chicago in the 21st century. The people from the south side and north side grew up in different areas, and whichever side they live in, that what their social standard is. It is written in the article "Chicago's North Side-South Side Rivalry Is Part of Its Charm" that, north side and south side since a long time ago split the place. The north side of Chicago has a high number of whites, area of well educated people, it is safer and have a higher median income compared to the south side. The south side has always been associated with blue collar workers, lower income, large black population, high crime rate, murders. Most of the south side kids are in gangs or at least act like they are. In the south side, many Mexicans living in that area. People who live in the south side with people who live in the north side are not mutual friends.

Perfect Chemistry tells the difference between people in north side and the people in south side to the reader perfectly well. In the book tells that both of the main characters are from different area. Brittany Ellis *lives on the north side of the outskirts of Chicago Illinois* and Alex Fuentes is a Mexican *living on the south side in the outskirts of Chicago Illinois*. They do not like each other. In the book, Brittany states, "The kids on the north side don't really mix with kids from the south side. It's not that we think we're better than them, we're just different. We live in big houses on Lake Michigan and they live next to the train tracks" (Elkeles, 2009:14) But the biggest aspects that sets apart the north and the south is that the north side is all Caucasians and the south is all Mexicans.

The interesting part is also because the author, Simone Elkeles, is born and live in Chicago. She describes the setting very clear so that the reader can understand the life of

the south side and north side Chicago very well. The reader would not get it if they are not grown up in some of these places. However, by reading *Perfect Chemistry*, the reader can be familiar with the place.

3.1.1. Theme

The next strength of the book is its theme. Theme is one of the main points in the book. Theme is the central idea or meaning of the story. There are three kinds of theme in this book. The first is 'do not judge a person by his/her appearance'. Being judged by appearance is frequently experienced by teenagers. It has been previously discussed that teenagers' life is surrounded by some issues such as reputation and popularity. Therefore, teenagers prefer acting as someone else to being themselves in order to get good reputation in their society. *Perfect Chemistry* shows that it happens among American teenagers. This book shows a story which represent real life: how young people in America try to get a good reputation by not being themselves. In the story, the main characters are seen differently from what actually are. They tend to hide their true selves because of the fear of being judged or criticized by others. In the beginning of the story, Alex believes that Brittany is a rich girl with a perfect life, but in reality, Brittany is not any of those things. She is just like any normal teenage girl with an absent father, a mother that always wants her to look perfect and a sister who has a disability. She tries to be perfect, all in an attempt to be what her beloved sister can never be. Brittany is afraid to show herself to people because she does not want to destroy her perfect image and dissappoint her mother as can be seen from what Brittany says below:

Everyone knows I'm perfect. My life is perfect. My clothes are perfect. Even my family is perfect. And although it's a complete lie, I've worked my butt off to keep up the appearance that I have it all. The truth, if it were to come out, would destroy my entire picture-perfect image. (Elkeles, 2009:2)

Likewise, in the beginning, Brittany believes that Alex is a bad boy who is a member of the gang and dangerous. However, in reality, Alex is just a kind hearted boy who wants a bright future and love his family so much. Alex explains who he is to Brittany in the following quotation.

"I thought I could save the world ... or at least save my family. I'll never be in a gang, I told myself when I was old enough to join one. I'll protect mi familia with my two hands. On the south side of Fairfield, you're either in a gang or against them. I had dreams of a future then; deluded dreams that I could stay away from gangs and still protect my family. But those dreams died along with my future the night my father was shot twenty feet from my six-year-old face" (Elkeles, 2009:107)

Alex actually wants to have a bright future rather than living as a gangster. He joins the gang just to protect his family. Through what happens to Brittany and Alex, *Perfect Chemistry* gives some messages to the readers. First, do not ever judge anyone because we do not know their story and what is really going on. Second, how people judge us it is not important. The important thing is how we can be ourselves and do our best.

Another theme in *Perfect Chemistry* is very interesting for the reader, especially those who have a dream to achieve and are trying hard to get it. The second theme is 'teenage dream'. The book pictures the teenage dream in so many different ways. It is represented in each character who is working hard to achieve his/her dreams. Brittany is a rich girl from the north side. She has to stand up to her popular status and she always tries to be perfect and impresses everybody. For her mother, she has to be a daughter that does not make mistake. She does this to achieve what she thinks is her dream, but in reality, it is her mother's dream. Brittany lies not only to herself but to others as well. As the story

goes on, Brittany Ellis starts to realize that living a perfect life is not actually as perfect as it seems. In the end of the book she states, "I can't play the perfect daughter anymore. I'm not perfect." (Elkeles, 2009:322) Through this, she shows how much she is willing to change, and how her teenage dream is starting to change.

At the beginning of the book, Brittany wants to do what her mother wants, that is making everybody to like her. However, in the end, after meeting and falling in love with Alex Fuentes, she realizes that she does not want to live in a confusing reality. Instead, she stands up against her parents and friends. She believes in her relationship with Alex, even when he is a separate race and from a different side of town. At this point, her teenage dream is to have a strong relationship with Alex, to go to college, and to make a difference in the world. Through this theme, Brittany's character give some lessons to the reader not to give up when facing problem. Brittany has so many problems but she still believes in what she thinks is right and has the courage to chase after her dreams.

The other character in the book is Alex Fuentes who is from the south side and a member of a gang 'Latino Blood'. However, through the book, Alex maintains his teenage dream by making his mother proud: being the first son in his family to go to college and making Brittany Ellis fall in love with him. In the book, Alex once said to Brittany, "You were the one girl who made me risk everything for a future worth havin'." (Elkeles, 2009:354) Alex finally quits the gang and is able to live a normal life again, allowing him to chase after his dreams. All of his dreams end up being achieved because he finally goes to college and gets married to Brittany. It makes his mother and the rest of

his family very proud of him. In this theme, Alex's character give a message to the reader that no matter what race or region a person lives in, everybody has dreams.

In this book, each main characters has a dream. The way Brittany Ellis and Alex Fuentes struggles to get their dreams in *Perfect Chemistry* stories can motivate the readers. Alex Fuentes at the beginning feels like he does not have a good future because he is a gangster and a lot of people think bad about him, but it turns out he can achieve his dream which is quitting of the gang and getting into a university, then marrying Brittany Ellis. Furthermore, Brittany Ellis at the beginning of the story is not being herself because she does not want to be perceived badly by others. She always does what her parents want, not her own desire. However, she is finally able to go to college as she wants to, not as her parents want. She can also live independently. Both characters have the courage and desire to pursue their dream so that they can be what they are dreaming and continue to live happier than ever. Through that story, the novel will motivate the readers to achieve their dreams in the future. People should be brave and confident in themselves to achieve their own dreams.

Another theme in this book is 'diversity'. This theme makes the reader more interested and love to read the book since both characters come from different backgrounds yet they are in love with each other. *Perfect Chemistry* has two different characters and backgrounds, which indirectly wants the reader to know that love happens to anyone without looking their background. This theme also gives a lesson that people do not have to change their personalities in order to be together. This is about embracing who really is and by doing that, he/she have to change stance about life. Through this

theme, *Perfect Chemistry* gives the impression to the reader that this book is a good love story with a hopeful message.

3.1.4. Point Of View

Another strength in this book is the point of view. Point of view is the angle of considering things, which shows the opinion, or feelings of the individuals involved in a situation. Point of view is the way the author allows you to "see" and "hear" what is going on. Skillful authors can fix their readers attention on exact the detail, opinion, or emotion the author wants to emphasize by manipulating the point of view of the story. How the author wrote the story is also the strength of the book. By reading *Perfect Chemistry*, it feels like the reader is the only one who is on their side. The narration switches between Brittany and Alex, both characters narrate their own story and each chapter alternates the first point of view between them by using present tense narrative. It takes reader to be both of the two main characters in the book. Furthermore, the different viewpoints of each of the characters really gives the reader a really great understanding of the character and allows the reader to see the depth of them instead of just seeing them as words on page.

3.2 The Weaknesses of Simone Elkeles' *Perfect Chemistry*

Perfect Chemistry also shows some weaknesses in its cover and language. They are described as in the following discussion.

3.2.1. Cover

The first weakness of this book is its cover. Book covers are so important. According to Wilson, the cover is not only a billboard for the book, but, in a sense, the first page of the story, because it is here that the book can communicate a little of the style and mood of the tale inside. A dark cover, with lots of shadow, can suggest a horror, while a bright white cover with clouds could suggest a motivational textbook. This is important because it speaks to the emotions of the reader, engaging them on a deeper level, and thus potentially not only securing a book sale, but setting the stage for whether or not they will like the book in the first place. The cover can scare away a customer or lure them in. (Taken from: <http://deanfwilson.com/tag/cover-art/> *Why Book Covers Are So Important*).

The cover of *Perfect Chemistry* is a picture of a blonde girl lying down while a boy is on top of the girl and looks like he wants to kiss the girl. The background color on the cover of the book is black, which makes it look like a mystery book. The models on the cover of the book also show the impression of erotic books.

Perfect Chemistry is a book for young teenager readers. The cover of the book should look fresh, such as uses animated images to portray the character in the book and adds the element of love in the book with the animated image of flowers. It would be more interesting to look and the reader could also get the meaning about the book that is about teen life, dream, love and happiness. The background color of the book, instead of using black color, could have been much better if it used brighter colors such as yellow,

light blue, white, soft pink or any other bright colors so that the book will not look like a mystery book but will look clearly like a teens romance book.

3.2.2. Language

Another weakness of this book is the language. Language is a way to communicate and to express human thoughts and feelings. Language is just only words in literature. The writers needs to choose the right words, to reveal his/her intentions because language can also manipulate things in life. In a literary work, a change of one word could change the entire meaning. In *Perfect Chemistry* there are many Mexican language/dialect appears especially from Alex and his family. Actually, the use of Mexican language helps the reader to become part of the story. However, it is hard to be understood by the readers. There are some Mexican language that will be easy for the reader to understand, such as “Mi familia”, “Nada”, “Si”, “Amigo” because probably the readers are already familiar with those words. Unfortunately, there are also some Mexican language which the reader may not be familiar with, when they are not Mexican. The words in the book which are not easy to understand by the readers are, for example “Ahora los declar. Marido y Mujer”, “No lo puedo creer, ganaste la apuesta!”, “Vete, cabron no molestes.”, “Es un carbon de mierda!”. Not all readers know Mexican language. The readers will be lost in translation, especially if there is no connection with English sentences. It will be easier if there is a translation of Mexican expression to English under the story, especially for the long ones. It will make it easier for the readers to understand the meaning. Thus, the reader can read comfortably.

4. Conclusion

Perfect Chemistry is a teen romance book. This book tells the story of two different teenagers trying to get their dream. The main character Brittany Ellis and Alex Fuentes are from different side of town yet they are in love with each other and have the same dream to achieve.

Perfect Chemistry by Simone Elkeles presents an interesting theme, character, setting and point of view. There are several themes in this. They are: 'do not judge a person by his/her appearance', 'teenage dream' and 'diversity'. These themes make the story interesting and in each themes give a good message to the readers. By being proud of oneself and having faith, one can enjoy living his/her life as teenager. Beside those themes, the character and the characterization also become the strengths of this book. The different characteristics of two main characters in this book make the readers not feel bored to read. Another strength in this book is the point of view. It takes the reader to be both of the two main character in the book. In addition, it is exciting that the readers get to read what both of the main character are thinking and feeling. However, there are some weaknesses found in the book. The book cover is not very interesting to look and the use of Mexican language that appears in the book is hard to be understood by the readers. If they are translated, it will be easier for the reader to understand.

Finally, with many strengths and weaknesses, *Perfect Chemistry* is a recommended book to read by readers. This book has a good storyline. *Perfect Chemistry* gives people message that is to be themselves no matter what. This book can also motivate the readers to have dreams for a bright future and not be afraid to show weaknesses because nobody is perfect in this world.

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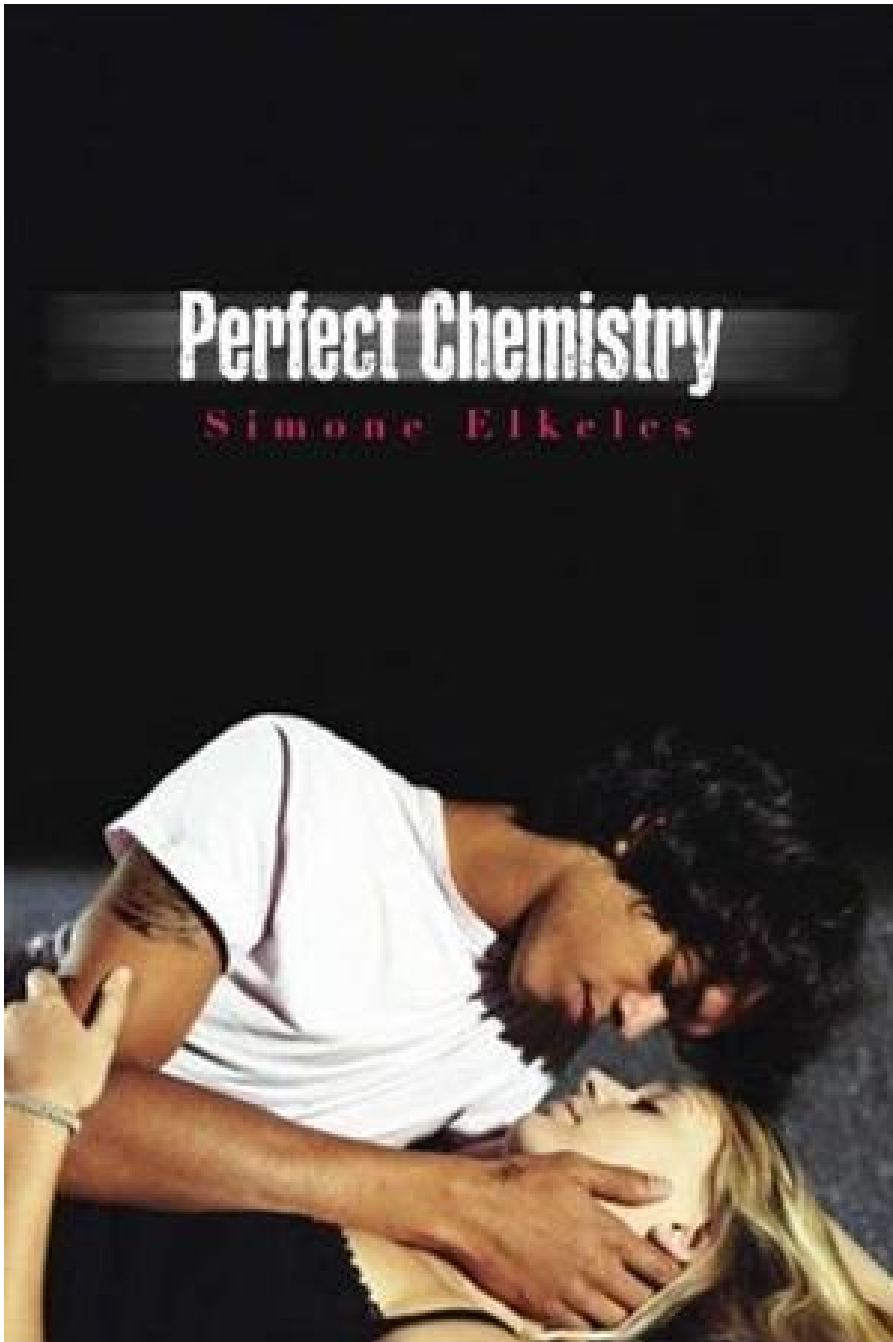
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Attachment 1

Cover



Attachment 2

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