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If You Find Me: A Novel



Synopsis

There are some things you can't leave behind . . . In *If You Find Me* by Emily Murdoch, a broken-down camper hidden deep in a national forest is the only home fifteen year-old Carey can remember. The trees keep guard over her threadbare existence, with the one bright spot being Carey's younger sister, Jenessa, who depends on Carey for her very survival. All they have is each other, as their mentally ill mother comes and goes with greater frequency. Until that one fateful day their mother has disappeared for good, and two strangers arrive. Suddenly, the girls are taken from the woods and thrust into a bright and perplexing new world of high school, clothes and boys. Now, Carey must face the truth of why her mother abducted her ten years ago, while haunted by a past that won't let her go . . . a dark past that hides many secrets, including the reason Jenessa hasn't spoken a word in over a year. Carey knows she must keep her sister close, and her secrets even closer, or risk watching her new life come crashing down.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

I received this book from the Goodreads First Reads Program in exchange for an honest review. *If You Find Me* by Emily Murdoch is a haunting read that will stay with you long after it's done. The novel stars Carey, a teenaged girl who has been living in an abandoned camper in the woods for

years with her younger sister, Jenessa, who she has taken care of, while her druggie mother has been in and out of town and eventually, missing, for the past two months. The two girls get discovered by social services and Carey's father, whom she hasn't seen for a decade, and what happens next is a revelation, both for her and her new adoptive family. I don't want to give away too much about the plot, because it is so wonderful to discover all of the intricacies as you read yourself. The characters are deftly drawn, beautifully written, and poignant. Carey, the protagonist, carries the piece, which is vitally important to the success of this novel. She is very likeable and sympathetic as a character. Her younger sister, Jenessa, is the perfect combination of sweet and loveable, and mystery, since we know there is a reason why she hasn't talked for years. The supportive cast of characters is also wonderful, including Carey's father, Melissa, their new stepmother, Delly, the jealous new stepsister, and Pixie, an odd, whimsical new friend for Carey. The prose is gorgeous, and the description spot on. The plot races along at a perfect pace, and I was gripped from start to finish. As you can tell, I was greatly impressed by this novel. If I had anything less than positive to say about this novel, it has to do with the boy in this piece-- his part seems a little too easy, too perfect. But that's about all I can say about it-- it obviously didn't change my opinion about the book. Overall, a compelling, heartbreaking, and beautifully written first novel-- Murdoch is an extremely talented writer, and I will be watching for her future work.

If You Find Me is one of the most beautifully written and heartbreaking novels I have ever read. It is one of those books you hate to put down and you hate to finish because it gets under your skin and stays in your head. For days. Carey, age fifteen, has been living in a broken down, cockroach-filled camper deep in the forest since her mother spirited her away from her abusive father ten years ago. Once a talented musician, her bipolar mother self-medicates with meth and will sell her body to get it. The result of her behavior leaves Carey with a little sister, Ness, who she has had to raise from birth, especially when the drug-addled mother will disappear for days, even weeks, at a time. Washing in the creek, eating what she can forage or shoot, wearing clothes that smells like cat pee, Carey and her sister have led a solitary life until the day two strangers find them. Carey's father and a social worker have been looking for them and have come to take the girls home. Remembering very little but what her mother has told her, Carey is angry and fearful of her father. But she goes with him only to rescue her little sister from their life of hunger, abuse, and neglect. Ness has not spoken for the past year. Alluding to some unspeakable events that occurred on what Carey calls "the white star night"; Ness has been selectively mute, whispering short sentences only to Carey. Her father brings them home to his loving wife and teenage stepdaughter, Delaney, where

the girls begin the strange and wondrous, sometimes terrifying, process of re-entering civilization. Or, in Ness' case, entering it. She has never known running water, electricity, TV, or Christmas. Neither has been to school, but with Carey's motherly diligence in the woods, both learned to read and write and actually test higher than their age level. As a teenager, the adjustment to the modern world is harder for Carey, especially when she starts high school. When she left the woods with her father, Carey brought more baggage than the few personal belongings she stuffed into a garbage bag. Carey brought secrets, painful and traumatic secrets. She knows what happened on "the white star night" and she knows why Ness does not speak anymore. But how can she tell the man she does not trust, and barely knows, what happened? Narrated by Carey, the story is told in present time and with flashbacks. Her wiser-than-her-years perspective is compelling and heartbreaking. While the reader would expect Carey to hate her mother and despise her former living conditions, she convincingly displays feelings of sorrow and homesickness for the only life she has known. Dealing with high school, boys, and the resentful Delaney, is torment in itself, but now Carey is torn as she watches her formerly clinging little sister blossom and become attached to their new family. However, the almost daily emotional upheavals are almost insignificant compared to the day she must finally tell her father what happened on "the white star night". It's a powerful experience watching this fiercely independent woman-child protect and raise her little sister, survive in the forest and navigate the intimidating civilized life. I highly recommend *If You Find Me* because the author has written a passionate story with memorable characters the reader will absolutely love. And I also highly recommend you bring your tissues because you will need them.

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