



Dead to You

Books Reviewed:

[Dead to You](#) [1]

Issue:

[200](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Rebecca Butler](#) [3]

Not on Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Ethan Manuel De Wilde is aged 16. He was abducted from his home at the age of 7. After nine years he has returned. McMann's story revolves around a first person narrative of his and his family's struggle to adjust to his return, and the issues that arise for all of them.

Ethan must establish a modus vivendi with his father and mother, as well as his younger brother Blake and a sister, Gracie, whom Ethan sees as the child intended to replace him when he disappeared.

Of course when Ethan reappears his family constantly want to know how much he remembers of his former life. Does he remember the house, the games, the books? Does he for instance remember that he loved playing snakes and ladders? On all these points Ethan disappoints his family and himself. His memories are scant.

Blake is placed in an invidious position. Over the years of Ethan's absence Blake has become accustomed to the role of the only son. Now he suddenly finds himself demoted in the family pecking order. His irritation is increased because Ethan recollects so little of their past lives.

The family are naturally curious about Ethan's life during the seven year gap. He explains that he was living for a time in Oklahoma with a woman named Ellen whom he took to be his mother. Ellen could not be said to be a competent mother. She worked as an 'escort' and often left Ethan alone. Eventually he was moved to a residential home in Omaha. Unhappy in the institution, Ethan absconded and found his way to St Louis where he lived homeless for a year. He tracked down his family through a website and rejoined them at their Arizona home.

Despite the shortcomings of his supposed mother Ellen, after he returns to his home Ethan feels more kinship with her than with the real-life mother he has rediscovered. For Ethan the most comforting aspect of his return is the relationship he establishes with Gracie. Because she has no knowledge of a life before he was abducted, she has no expectations of Ethan, no criterion by which to judge him inadequate. The relationship between Ethan and Gracie is the most appealing feature of this novel. The questions still hanging in the air as the book enters its final phase are how far Ethan can rebuild the relationships he has lost, and how will he set about doing so.

I have classified **Dead to You** as suited to readers aged over 14. On the whole this is an appropriate classification. In

places however the language of the book is too profane for children of any age. The copy this reviewer received was an uncorrected proof text. A particularly indefensible word occurs on page 87. The publisher would do well to remove it from the final text.

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[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/dead-to-you>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/200>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/rebecca-butler>