



The Butterfly Shell

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Maureen White's debut is the story of one year in the life of young teenager Marie. Told in a first person narrative and in a voice that is direct, honest and completely convincing, it's a description of grief, and an anatomy of a bullying. Raw and haunting as it is, it also manages to be a story of hope and of new beginnings

When Marie starts her new school, there's another girl there with the same name and by the end of the first day, one of her classmates Rachel has nicknamed her 'other Marie'. Marie shares her name with an older sister, who died at just a few weeks of age, and already suspects that in her parents' eyes she is indeed 'the other Marie'. When she finds a box of letters written by her mother to her dead baby, the hurt is almost physical.

Ringleader of the year's 'Super Six', Rachel is one of those girls with a loyal band of followers, and a readiness to hurt others. The nickname is the first of a series of deliberate cruelties she inflicts on Marie, whose time at school is marked by a bullying impossible to prove, but horribly effective. As her unhappiness increases, she suddenly starts to hear a baby crying at night. She finds a way to escape the pain and starts to cut herself.

A breaking point has to come and when it does it is both terrible for Marie, and also strangely a relief: she is involved in a serious accident and almost dies. It is while she is unconscious, separate from the physical world, that she experiences something rather like a miracle, and that brings new hope into her life.

This is a very impressive first novel, the writing is spare and effective, and the story will resonate with young readers.

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