

When Kangaroos Jump Backwards - Life in Seventh Grade gets off to a rocky start, getting "wors(er) and wors(er)" for the confused, angry and hurt young heroine. (Middle Grade)

Excerpt
from

When Kangaroos Jump Backwards

The more I explain about why Caitlin isn't eating with us, the more I see Mom's disbelief staring back at me from her dark gray eyes. When I tell her I don't want any pizza for awhile, she opens her mouth, then feels my forehead again and heads for the hall. She leaves my door open.

"You'll call me if you need anything."

I nod, and she finally goes downstairs. In all honesty, I'm a little hurt. I blink back tears. I admit I expected my own mother to see through my lies. To get me to confess what a miserable day I had. Then comfort me. Reassure me the next day will be better.

Thinking about the next day makes my heart rev up and my stomach hurt. Brittani's smirky face flashes in front of me. How in the world can I go to school tomorrow? Everyone will be whispering behind my back, talking about how I attacked the most popular girl in Seventh Grade. No one's going to want to listen to my side.

"Darn you, Brittani," I mutter. "What'd I ever do to you?"

To keep from screaming, I put my headphones on, and the next thing I know Mom's standing in the doorway again. It's dark outside.

"Elizab--Liza?" Mom whispers, coming over to my bed.

I close my eyes and keep my breathing relaxed, but I can sense Mom standing over me, looking down at me. After a couple of minutes, she tiptoes back into the hall where she stands for what seems like an hour. I don't open my eyes until I hear her on the middle landing.

Surprise tightens my chest when I look at the clock radio. Nine fifteen. Ten fifteen in Colorado. I close my eyes again. I hope Daddy doesn't call. For sure he wouldn't want to hear about my first day in Seventh Grade.

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Why a book with a Seventh-Grade heroine?

Body image and peer acceptance become overriding concerns for girls this age. I wondered what would happen if a very bright girl came back from summer camp and found her best friend now belonged to the “in” group? What if something awful happened the first day of Seventh Grade? What if she got off on the wrong foot with the most popular girl in the class?

My heroine Caitlin wants her world to remain the same. Which, of course, can’t happen. Her divorced parents aren’t going to reconcile. Her father isn’t moving back to Silicon Valley from Colorado. Her best friend can’t “unpierce” her ears.

I wanted to show how easily a smart girl can do real damage to herself when she accepts she’s fat and ugly. When she believes if she stops eating, all her troubles will go away.

Anorexia and bulimia are medical problems that can ruin a girl’s life. I wanted to write a book that offers hope--of warding off the self-destruction and hopelessness before it’s too late. Could I write a book about a bleak subject and find a realistically happy ending?

If I can’t find a mainstream publisher for *Kangaroos*, I may look at alternative ways of publishing it. The novel is that important to me.

I hope you’ll contact me with your thoughts about the excerpt and the topic of eating disorders in particular.