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When I Cast Your Shadow by Sarah Porter

Author Biography

Sarah Porter is a young adult literature writer from Brooklyn most known for her book *Vassa in the Night*. Porter received her M.F.A. in creative writing from City College. In her free time, she leads creative writing workshops. *When I Cast Your Shadow* is Porter's seventh published novel. Porter finds inspiration for her writing in stories of the fantastic preferring it to realism.

Summary

When I Cast Your Shadow follows twins Ruby and Everett after the death of their older brother Dashiell. Ruby begins the story recounting a dream she had where in trying to bring Dashiell back from the dead he drowns her. This particular dream rattles Ruby to the point of suicide, which is stopped by Everett. Later in the night Ruby wakes up Everett and seems to be speaking to him as Dashiell. Following this confrontation with Ruby in the middle of the night Everett begins to have suspicions that Ruby's dreams of Dashiell are more than simple grief. Everett continues to converse with Dashiell through a totally unaware Ruby. Promising his suspected brother to give up his own autonomy to spare his sister the grief she feels. What follows is a surreal narrative about grief and family.

Significant Quotes

“Certainly. Even worse than the pathetic tragedy that was Dashiell's life, Ruby, is the tragedy of how you and Everett romanticize him. Even *dead* your brother is still a menace to

you, because as long as you cherish these deluded views of him, there's always the risk you'll succumb to his influence" (24).

To me, this is the crux of the narrative. Both Ruby and Everett romanticize their older brother Dashiell leaving them to trust his judgement more than they should. Despite passing away from his own actions Dashiell remains ingrained in the twins' lives. Everett and Ruby hold onto memories of their brother and who he could have been. Ruby in particular is fixated on the idea that Dashiell was getting better and thus was not at fault for the pain he caused their family. The twins' connections to Dashiell leave them open to possession from him as they are willing, at times unconsciously, into letting him in.

"I picture Dashiell the way I heard they found him, naked in his girlfriend's bed in the East Village with his head hanging over the edge and the needle still in his arm. Eyes wide and gray in the silvery morning light. I try to feel the truth behind the image: did someone else's hand slide in that syringe and press down the plunger? It seems unthinkable that Dash did it to himself, and the idea that it was murder shines like a bright bauble, like a secret trying to be revealed. No one will ever believe that, though. Not unless I can prove it" (56).

This quote demonstrates the strength of which Ruby's conviction of her brother's innocence is. Ruby has grown up manipulated by Dashiell. She believes him to be a good person no matter the circumstances. Even faced with the literal outcome of Dashiell's overdose she refuses to believe he could do any wrong. Therefore, her subplot to find out what "really happened" to Dashiell begins. This relationship and viewpoint stop her from seeing the reality of Dash's actions.

"Dashiell always got everything he wanted, and what do you know? He still does. Even now that he's rotting in the ground and I've flung shovelfuls of dirt on his damned ass he goes on

smugly sitting in my sister's brain, winking at me, knowing I won't tell Ruby anything-because after yesterday I know she's way too close to cracking already" (78-79).

Here the focus is on how toxic Dashiell is and how despite his family doing away with him he has huge effect on them in death. This becomes a metaphorical and literal interpretations of guilt, mourning, and abuse. All of the characters involved in Dash's life are aware that he is manipulative and always gets his way. Despite being fully aware of how he uses them all the characters still find themselves effected by his actions.

Resources on Craft and Book Category

Porter's novels tend to focus on fantastical themes that do not focus on realism. This is reflected in her fascination with the paranormal and her characters often being slightly unreliable and unaware of the true events happening around them.

When I Cast Your Shadow is a young adult novel specifically tackling death and loss. However, the story itself reads like a thriller interested in how death and loss push characters into uncomfortable situations.

Text Complexity

The text in the novel is fairly easy to read and understand. The text becomes difficult not to the complexity of the words used, but instead the confusing and disorientating manner, in which Porter tells the story.

Why Should this Book Be Read?

When I Cast Your Shadow should be read due to its unique look at family, grief, and abuse. Unlike other narratives Porter's characters are all arguably flawed. No character in *When I Cast Your Shadow* is perfect. Many of the characters are also naïve and come to often strange

conclusions. Often narratives are kind to those in mourning and the dead. Porter instead chooses to reflect on harm that the dead can still cause and the effects they have on the living.