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By George Ella Lyon

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After sixteen-year-old Jules has her baby, Zoe, it doesn't matter anymore that her mother thinks she's a drama queen, or that her father left them years ago, or even that Zoe's father is gone, too. She and her baby make a family now; she doesn't need anyone else in the world except Zoe. Though it's tough being a new mom, balancing Zoe's needs with working at the Toyota factory and thinking about how to finish school, Jules is sure she'll figure it out. Still, she wonders, why can't anyone be happy for her and Zoe? And why does her mom refuse to believe that Zoe's real?

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Editorial Review

Review

“...readers will gain an important new perspective on why some teens welcome the idea of pregnancy.”
?BCCB

“...an intriguing window into the life of a damaged teen.” ?Kirkus

“... readers will be intrigued by this unique story.” ?Booklist

“Lyon brings in the real issues that can and do cause so much heartbreak around teen pregnancies: disappearing boyfriends, conflicts with parents, the shortage of affordable child care, and getting a high school diploma as the girl struggles with her delusions and refuses to accept the truth.” ?School Library Journal

About the Author

George Ella Lyon is an award-winning poet and author. She has written more than 35 books for young readers, including the Schneider Family Book Award picture book *The Pirate of Kindergarten* and the young adult novel *Sonny's House of Spies*, as well as numerous books for adults. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

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I SWEAR I WON'T WORK IN THAT FACTORY one day longer. It is killing my legs, my ears, my back. Tending the line that puts door handles on minivans, that's what I do: sweeping to make sure nothing's underfoot for workers and taking production numbers from the foreman to the supervisor. The machines count, of course, but they want a human count, too. All day I hear the zing and whump of the machines, feel the vibration that aches my bones. Halfway through the afternoon I tell myself, You're never coming back. You don't have to. Nobody can make you.

Then I get off my shift, walk the long hall to the day care, and as soon as I feel the warm weight of that baby in my arms, I know I'll go back. I've only had this job a few weeks. I'll get used to it. I have to. How would I pay for her diapers otherwise? How would I afford her doctor? How would I pay our rent?

Why am I working in that factory day after day anyway? Why did I leave high school, my best friend Reba, and Mom's little apartment to take this job and move to an apartment at Toyota?

Zoe is the answer. Zoe is the answer to everything.

* * *

Of course, I used to think the answer was Damon. Damon of the curly brown hair and the smoky dark eyes, Damon who was so moody and funny, humming and winking at you one minute, gone off inside himself to some dark place the next.

I still think I loved Damon: the way he walked down the hall at Stuart Ellis High like he was about to step out on a stage where fans were waiting, the way he loved music so much he didn't have time for English and history but spent exams drawing guitar fingerings which he turned in instead of answers, the way he wrapped

me in his strong arms and sang to me after.

Sex was okay but it didn't give me what I thought it would, didn't bring me any closer to understanding Damon—or even to feeling close to him. That's pretty funny, isn't it? Here this guy is inside your body and still you don't feel you're with him. It was in the singing afterward that I felt close. Close and held. I would have given a lot for that. I did give.

And after I missed my period, when I told Damon about Zoe, he said he would marry me, just like that. His dad was a truck driver, never around, and my dad had skipped out years ago. Damon said he'd be damned if he'd let his kid grow up that way.

I couldn't believe this. I thought he'd offer to go with me to the doctor, maybe contribute to the cost of an abortion. So when he said he wanted to marry me and have the baby, I envisioned a whole new life. We would be a family—Mama, Daddy, baby! I laughed and cried. We were huddled on the wall of the skateboard park near the school. I'd been so sad and scared, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I wasn't alone. Damon put his strong arms around me—I remember his navy blue sweatshirt smelled like cigarettes and fabric softener—and I rested against him, a little bird safe in the nest. Till the nest flew away. Damon told his mom that night and she yanked him out of school the next day and sent him away. Just like that. He didn't even tell me in person. He called me from the Greyhound bus station the next afternoon.

“Hey, Jules—”

“Are you sick? Why weren't you in school?”

“I'm sorry,” he said. “I told my mom and she threw a fit. She's sending me to Tennessee to work construction for my Uncle Rick.”

“She's what? What about school?”

“She said I'm about to flunk out anyway, which is true. But the thing is, Jules, working construction is really bad for my hands.”

“Your hands?” I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

“Yeah. Guys get fingers smashed and tendons torn all the time. It could ruin my guitar playing.”

“Damon,” I heard my voice getting higher. I was pacing the small box of our kitchen and about to hyperventilate. “What about our *baby*, our *family* you were so sure about yesterday?”

“Grow up, Jules. Like Mom says, we can't have a baby. We're kids.”

“But we *are* having a baby, Damon. You can leave town but I'm still pregnant.”

“I know. And whose fault is that? Anyway, when I get paid I'll send you some money to help get rid of it.”

“*Rid of it?*”

“You know what I mean.”

“I do, but I can't believe you. Yesterday—”

“Yesterday I was a kid, pretending. Now I'm a man with a job that I've got to get out of fast. Got to make my way to Music City. At least at Uncle Rick's I'll be in Tennessee, that much closer...”

My throat was hurting like I wanted to cry and my heart was pounding like I wanted to scream, but I just said, “Is there a phone where I can call you?”

“I don't know where I'm staying yet,” Damon said. “Maybe with Uncle Rick, maybe with one of his friends. But I'll let you know. You'll see. I'll make it up to you. When I'm playing at the Bluebird Café in Nashville—”

Talk about fantasy, I thought. “But you won't be here,” I said. “I need you *here*.”

“Sorry, Jules. They're calling my bus.”

“I'm sixteen and pregnant,” I said. “And the daddy of my baby is skipping town.”

“Sounds like a country song,” Damon said.

I hung up.

* * *

I stood in Mom's kitchen, my finger threaded in the black loops of the phone cord. I felt as alone as if Damon had never happened. Cast out of the circle we'd made, that small hot space where I had tried to feel at home.

I took a deep breath. Think of a *good* thing, Jules, I told myself. There's got to be one. Oh, yeah. Your mother wasn't here when he called. That's it. Things could be worse. Lana Livingston McCauley could be standing in this room.

And she will be home from work before long, I realized. I'd better get hold of my life while it *is* my life. The first thing I do is look across the breakfast bar, through the living room and out the grimy window. We're on the second floor, but I know that beyond the parking lot, diagonally across Willow Street, is a laundromat.

Well, that'll be handy, I think. I can wash the baby clothes right across the street. Mom always says it takes too much time to wait on the machines in this building. There are only four and usually one is out of order. Plus they're in a dank dingy room. Gross.

I have to have this baby, Damon or no Damon. I can't be alone anymore. Of course I'm not feeling sick or cosmically sleepy yet. That comes later. I don't feel weird at all, unless you count being sure of something as weird, which I guess it kind of is for me. Before Zoe, I was always looking around to see how I was supposed to be, picking up signals from my parents first and later, after Dad left and Mom was too busy, looking to other kids for clues.

Sometimes I'd try to talk to Mom like my best friend, Reba, talks to her mother—try to sound casual, connected. Like one day when she got home late, I said, "Hey, Mom, there's a new Chinese place on Weber. Reba's mom says it's great. I could go pick some up and you wouldn't have to cook."

She ran her hand through her short hair, put out her lower lip, and blew air up till it lifted her bangs.

Exasperation. Then she said, "Jules, may I remind you that we are *not* the Karims? Your father is not a lawyer—he was a private pilot, for heaven sakes. And at this point I don't know what he is except gone. I don't have the luxury of staying home like Sara Karim, and we do *not* have money to throw around."

"I know, Mom. Sorry."

"It's not just our expenses, I've still got school loans to pay off."

"I know, I know." After Dad left, Mom had to go back to school. Her part-time office work wasn't enough, so she went to college and became a social worker at the same place she used to file and type.

When Damon and I first got together, I even tried to be like *him*, saying books bored me, ignoring homework, trying to buy into his dream. He'd make it big in music one day and we'd travel and see the world. I liked imagining this but I couldn't *be* Damon. I wanted stuff to think about, too. I wanted my own dream. That's how I am. Also, when it came down to it, I had to do well in school. For Mom.

Anyway, my days of trying to be like somebody else or blend in are over. Now that I'm pregnant, forget it. Every day that passes, I will be less blended in.

And it turns out that I have a voice inside me that knows her mind. Maybe she was always there but I never listened before. Maybe it was that one speck of boy juice that nested itself in the egg and changed me. I don't know. I just know when I quit looking to other people for directions, I found my own map.

* * *

It's late January. My baby won't come till the end of summer at the earliest, so I can finish my junior year. I'll keep my part-time job at Baskin-Robbins until I start to show, and then when the baby comes, I'll have to find a better job and finish school somehow.

Think, Jules, I tell myself. What do people with kids do? Kids with kids?

No, what can *I* do? Me, Juliet McCauley, always called Jules. Me, somebody's mother.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patrick Cartwright:

Book is to be different for every grade. Book for children till adult are different content. As we know that book is very important for us. The book Holding On to Zoe ended up being making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The publication Holding On to Zoe is not only giving you much more new information but also for being your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship with all the book Holding On to Zoe. You never sense lose out for everything when you read some books.

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Jill Williams:

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