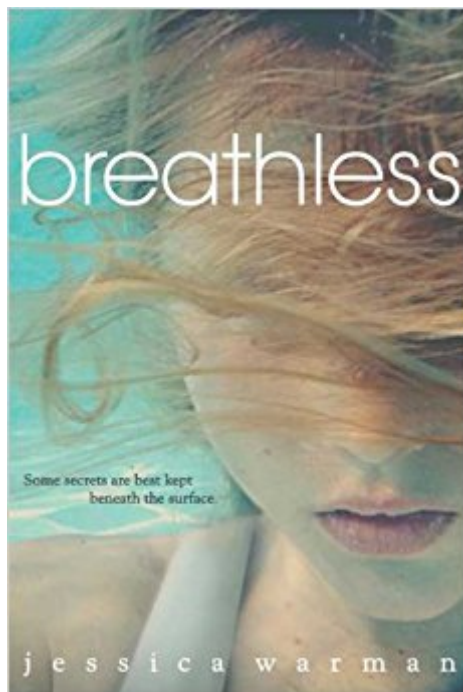


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# Breathless



## Synopsis

When Katie Kitrell is shipped off to boarding school, it doesn't take her long to become part of the It Crowd. She's smart, she's cute, and she's a swimming prodigy who has a first-class ticket to any Ivy League school of her choice. But what her new friends, roommate, and boyfriend don't know is that Katie is swimming away from the secrets of her past, and from the schizophrenic older brother, Will, who won't let her go. As Katie's star rises, Will descends deeper into insanity. And when he does the unthinkable, it's all Katie can do to keep her head above water. Largely based on the author's own experiences, *Breathless* is a stunning debut that explores illness and health, love and lust, friends and enemies, and the moneyed world of prep school with a deft, expert hand.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Starred Review” Says 15-year-old Katie, "The only thing I really love is swimming. Sometimes I feel like I don't really exist outside of the water." When her parents send her to boarding school after her schizophrenic brother, Will, attempts suicide, Katie loves the escape that Woodsdale offers from her family: institutionalized and increasingly violent Will; her emotionally distant dad; and her alcoholic mom. She also loves the intensity of the school's swim team, with its motto that "practice isn't over until someone pukes," and she begins a tender relationship with a gorgeous fellow swimmer, Drew, a devout Christian who, unlike most of their classmates, is still a virgin. After a misunderstanding leads to a lie, Katie tells her new friends that Will is dead. Only Katie's roommate, Mazzie, knows the truth, and that shared secret begins the deep friendship at the core of this heartbreaking debut. Stretched over three years, the episodic novel, narrated in Katie's

raw voice, meanders occasionally in its focus. But Warman's achingly realistic scenes and characters transcend cliché, and with rare, refreshing honesty and flashes of wry humor, she writes about the intimacy of boarding school, the anguish of family illness, finding a sense of self in sports and in life, and the small, mysterious, imperfect moments that add up to love in all its forms.

• Booklist, starred review • "Starred Review" Though there's plenty of weight in the plot, this isn't a book about events so much as human dynamics, and characterization is vivid and exquisite. Katie is achingly real, and her relationship with her ferocious, guarded, and superbly faithful roommate, Mizzie, is one of the most tender and intimate platonic friendships in YA lit. Since readers make the journey with Katie, they'll sympathize with her choices and failures, and they'll be glad to see, in the closing epilogue from ten years on, that she learns to find her own stability while remaining connected to Will. Along the way to that hard-fought end, they'll find the boarding-school experience enviable, the family situation poignant, and Katie a protagonist they'll understand, support, and forgive.

• The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, starred review • "Starred Review" Katie, 15, is most herself when she is in the water, swimming faster and better all the time. Things were so much simpler when the Kitrells were poor—her family seemed closer. Now that they are financially comfortable, their relationships have deteriorated. Katie's parents become more and more wrapped up in one another, and Katie feels excluded. She is still close to her older brother, Will, who is schizophrenic, and when his behavior becomes more erratic and extreme, she becomes concerned and frightened. Their father, now successful in his psychiatric practice, seems unable to maintain any warm relationships with his children, and sends Katie away to boarding school. There she is accepted by the most popular girls and attracts the attention of gorgeous Drew, captain of the swim team. Katie is also intrigued by her strangely withdrawn roommate and works on building her trust. Eventually, too much drinking, smoking, and worrying about her family take their toll on her swimming performance. When her brother's illness spirals out of control again, Katie faces serious personal losses and challenges that have no simple solutions. Warman treats Will's schizophrenia with stark honesty as seen through his sister's eyes. Similar to Jessica Lee Anderson's *Border Crossing* (Milkweed, 2009), this novel provides an important look at an extremely difficult illness and its effects on a family.

• School Library Journal, starred review

JESSICA WARMAN has an MA in creative writing. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Sundress Publications, *Stirring: A Literary Collection*, the *Stickman Review*, *Penguin Political*, and *Redivider*. *Breathless* is her first novel. She is 27 years old, a marathon runner, and a

mother of two girls.

Grade: B  
Champion swimmer Katie is sent to boarding school after her older brother's latest schizophrenic episode. For the first time she's popular and has a boyfriend, Drew, though she's closest to roommate Mazzie. Katie first person narration seemed authentic and I could read for hours at a time without a break. I like Jessica Warman's writing style. She mixes great dialogue, description and plot and *BREATHLESS* has great voice. Katie was perfectly imperfect, with a good heart but not always the best judgment. She's kind, most of the time, and honest some of the time. I loved her complicated relationship with her brother as his mental health deteriorates. I adored Mazzie, my favorite character, secretive, sardonic and loyal. The only character I truly loathed was Drew, a holy roller who thought Katie and Mazzie were going to hell for being agnostic and Buddhist respectively. He was subtly possessive and controlling, but that was never addressed. On the surface he treated Katie quite well. I kept hoping she'd kick him to the curb or he'd fall in love with another holy roller. The entire book alluded to Mazzie's mother dying under either traumatic or mysterious circumstances, and I didn't like the way that was resolved. Aside from that, the book had closure and an epilogue, though they were somewhat weak. An added bonus, there is some crossover of characters between *BREATHLESS* and Warman's *WHERE THE TRUTH LIES*, which takes place in another boarding school. Themes: boarding school, mental illness, friendship, dating, partying, swimming, family  
A fun read, but I doubt a memorable one.

This was an quite interesting book. A pretty good read. But I did wish there was more to this book somehow. It seemed a bit too simple for me. It's like there's this great topic, but it's always touch and go. This happens, she leaves the same day. it doesn't drag out or get into it much deeper. So much avoidance. A bit too much in my opinion. And where's her happy ending? I mean she sounds happy 10 years later, but I'm quite curious if she's actually the marrying kind of girl or not for sure. I would like to see a sequel to show how she ends up regarding her love life. I can imagine whoever she ends up with would be amazing to be able to turn her head and rock her world. Great book, but could've been better.

I'm conflicted about this book. It was well written and covered a tough subject very well. But I still feel let down by it. There wasn't anything necessarily wrong with it, it just wasn't right. The characters are well written and you can see the growth in most of them throughout the novel. They are realistic and I can see myself coming across people just like them in real life. I didn't really fall in

love with Drew, but that's more due to personal reasons than the writing of him. He was a great character to have in the sea of crazy teenage behavior. I think my main problems with this book are that it covers such a long time period and there is never really a major conflict and resolution in the novel. I always think a book should start as close to the end as possible, which is why I can typically forgive the "love at first sight" plots of young adult novels. However, this book covers 3 years of Katie's life, and during those years, yes, things happen, but there isn't one main event. I kept waiting for something to happen that would have me on the edge of my seat and nothing ever did. I wasn't blown away by the plot and it felt a little ho-hum for my tastes. Overall, this was a good book, but it just left something to be desired. It felt more like a story instead of a novel, in that things happened, but at the same time, nothing really happened. There was so much potential, and I feel like it just didn't quite reach the level it could have.

This book was a great read for me. I am very impressed at how well played the characters were. I was able to form the perfect picture in my head as I was reading it. It was like I was actually there in the book watching the story unfold. There was just enough of every element in the book. However, I'm not particularly crazy about the way the book ended, but it did end in a way that made sense for each character. As my title states, this is the perfect "rags to riches" story. This story shows that you can overcome where you came from--everyone has a choice to make it in life. They've just got to make the best of what they've got & find opportunities. That's just exactly what this character did--she wasn't thrilled about attending boarding school, but she looked at it from a different perspective. She made the best out of what she had & she was very successful in life. The main character didn't come from a perfect family--her brother held her back in many ways due to his mental problem. As you read the book, you can imagine how hard it was on the entire family; however, she didn't let it get her down or bother her. I recommend this book to mature adults (due to language & some disturbing actions).

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