

## Into the Deep End

**Leesa Freeman**

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*With its complex characters and emotionally charged mood, Into the Deep End communicates the hardship of existence within the human spirit.*

A young man recently made paraplegic works at a summer camp for special needs youngsters and faces his own hardships. *Into the Deep End*, Leesa Freeman's new dramatic novel, deals with pain, both physical and emotional, and how people must face their afflictions head on.

Former swimming champion Luke Stevenson is angry. Recently made a paraplegic thanks to a drunk driver, he's always lashing out. He smokes a lot despite his therapists telling him he shouldn't, curses out his friends and colleagues, and is haunted by his sister, Bethany, who died in the same accident. When Luke goes to Camp Caballero as a counselor for children with back deformities like spina bifida, he's forced to confront his own rage while trying to make amends with his past.

Luke's temperament is what drives *Into the Deep End*. He's almost hateful to his peers before and after he arrives at the summer camp. He has no problem sarcastically declaring to others that he's "an incomplete Thoracic II injury," referring to the area of his spine that was damaged, and calls the camp founders "do-gooders," seeing them as uninterested in him, but out to do charity to keep their own halos shiny. Yet, he pleasantly tells the young campers about his injury when they ask and even responds humorously to inquiries about his sex life.

Freeman doesn't do a lot to sanitize or romanticize the characters. Luke curses freely, but his peers are quick to verbally combat his negativity. *Into the Deep End*'s main strength is that it is pleasantly devoid of the sentiment one might expect from a story of emotionally or physically damaged characters.

If any complaint could be made, it's an absence of experimentation in the characters themselves. There are elements of cliché, such as Luke finding renewed confidence by learning to drive the custom-built camp bus, and by slowly becoming less hostile to women.

Overall, *Into the Deep End* has power and good prose.

JAMES BURT (Summer 2015)

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