

★ **Shortcuts****Amy Bearce**

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Parker Mills has a secret that she knows is both a gift and a burden: she is a psychic empath who senses the emotions of those around her. One of the few children born to parents who used a mysterious fertility treatment that has since been swept under the rug, Parker, along with her three best friends—also born with psychic abilities caused by the treatment—navigates middle school dramas in Amy Bearce's novel *Shortcuts*.

These “shortcuts” are actions Parker takes to ensure that those around her are happy so that she doesn't have to feel their pain, longing, embarrassment, or anger. She's known as a matchmaker in her school, helping kids with crushes on each other to connect. When a seriously depressed new student, Mia, arrives at school, Parker is overwhelmed by the power of her emotions and knows that she is in over her head. Grief and self-denial are emotions she has had little experience with. After her clairvoyant friend Avery shares her vision of a disaster at the upcoming school dance, Parker desperately works a series of “shortcuts” to make sure the horrible event doesn't happen.

Told over the course of a few weeks and led by deeply feeling characters, *Shortcuts* is captivating. Parker's gift validates the variety of emotions that young teens feel. Her own feelings, which she often suppresses to avoid confronting her personal issues, shape the story as she learns the true value of empathy.

The story moves at a fast clip, with numerous subplots expertly knit together. Each strand builds on the complexity of the tale until its explosive, intense culmination. *Shortcuts* is a memorable speculative novel that begs for a sequel.

AIMEE JODOIN (May/June 2019)

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