



The Caterpillar and the Butterfly

Laura A. Fisher

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Fisher's novel offers a powerful look at the harsh realities faced by far too many young people.

What would move a smart, talented, pretty fifteen-year old girl to attempt suicide? In *The Caterpillar and the Butterfly*, author Laura A. Fisher gets into the mind and heart of a teen for whom life is unbearable until she sees her own strength and beauty reflected in the eyes of another.

Lindsey Anne-Marie Lewis dreads school. Every day she is singled out for bullying, until her self-esteem is at zero, despite the fact that she has a lot to be proud of. Boys abuse her mentally, emotionally, and physically, and the girls who might have befriended her are not much better. At home, she feels unloved and unwanted by her alcoholic mother and stepfather, who make it clear that she is worthless in their eyes.

Though a talented violinist, she is not allowed to have an instrument of her own. Her boyfriend uses her for sex, and controls her by telling her the words she most wants to hear: that she is loved. But these words turn out to be a lie, as he cheats on her with one of her tormentors. Her life turns even more nightmarish when her stepfather repeatedly rapes her, leading to unthinkable consequences. Alone and afraid, she no longer wants to live.

Beginning the story with Lindsey's carefully thought-out suicide attempt, Fisher reveals a deep understanding of the girl's state of mind and of the fears that keep her locked in a desperate situation—one that has led her to lose her voice, her belief in herself, and her hope for the future.

Through words, dialogue, and body language, Fisher reveals a great deal of information about the two main characters, Lindsey and Jesse, portraying them as sympathetic and likable; she balances this with just enough information about the secondary characters to make them either appealing or appropriately despicable. One character, Jesse's father, is more ambiguous; at times he is kind and caring, yet he can quickly and easily become harsh and unyielding. Jesse's mother, in compensation, is almost too sweet. Scenes of school bullies in action and those that show what Lindsey's dysfunctional home life is like are both realistic and very disturbing. The pacing is brisk and the tension builds with very little letup to the climax, then winds down into a satisfying resolution.

Overall, the story is believable, moving, and engaging, and Fisher handles the topics of teen suicide, bullying, and sexual abuse with sensitivity and insight. Unfortunately, the numerous errors in grammar, syntax, word use, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling detract from this timely book's quality. The layout and design are easy on the eye, and the author has included a section containing hotlines for those in danger, are seeking help in emergencies, or who may be contemplating suicide. She has also included a helpful list of discussion questions for book clubs and study groups.

Laura A. Fisher's *The Caterpillar and the Butterfly* should be read by anyone involved with teens, and by teens themselves. It offers a powerful look at the harsh realities faced by far too many young people, and it strongly affirms that despite what today may look like, there is hope for a better, brighter future.

KRISTINE MORRIS (October 6, 2016)

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