

The People We Choose

Katelyn Detweiler

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Family, friendship, and love convene in *The People We Choose*, Katelyn Detweiler's sensitive novel about a teenager's revelatory summer.

Not long before she turns eighteen, Calliope starts dating Max, her new artistic neighbor; their relationship leaves her less time for her childhood best friends. At the same time, Calliope must decide whether or not to contact Mama and Mimmy's IVF sperm donor. Having never known her father, she is curious and anxious. When the sperm donor turns out to be Max's dad, the shocking coincidence leads to painful reckonings with what biological and nontraditional families mean.

The moral taboo of Calliope and Max being half-siblings is navigated via mature, emotional calibrations, such that their anguish is tempered by Calliope's practical upbringing. Her two mothers' beliefs that handling problems is better than avoidance, and her friends' understanding, guide the teenagers toward a peaceful resolution. Max's family, which suffered from its own griefs, leading to their abrupt move from Philadelphia to Green Woods, has to do its own healing as each member copes with the news.

The subtler facets of tending to one's roots reinforce the book's themes, including the gradual renovation of Max's house; background passions, including a friend's cello composition that's played in response to unrequited feelings; and the confrontation of tough memories. Throughout, Calliope is an appealing narrator whose generous, forthright nature invites others to reframe their outlooks, too.

Wise about irrevocable facts, *The People We Choose* is a modern novel in which love expands to encompass once-strangers and friendships that are close because of honesty.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2021)

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