



# Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You

*Joyce Carol Oates*

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## **Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You** Joyce Carol Oates

*Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You* is renowned author Joyce Carol Oates's newest novel for teens. Laurie Halse Anderson, bestselling author of *Wintergirls* and *Speak*, said that "the painful honesty of this book will crack open your heart."

Senior year, their last year together, Merissa and Nadia need their best friend Tink more than they ever did before. They have secrets they can share with no one but her, toxic secrets that threaten to unravel their friendship—and themselves. Tink had a secret, too, a big one, but no one knows what it was. And now she's gone. . . .

In a starred review, *Kirkus Reviews* described Joyce Carol Oates as "a master at portraying the inner lives of teens." In *Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You*, she's created a powerful portrayal of a friendship strong enough to transcend death.

## **Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You Details**

Date : Published August 21st 2012 by HarperTeen (first published January 1st 2012)

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Author : Joyce Carol Oates

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## From Reader Review Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You for online ebook

### Darkfallen says

Okay so I am really disappointed. Maybe it's because I was so SUPER excited to read this, that the let down is hitting even harder, but whatever it is I'm so upset to say that I couldn't finish this book.

There is a number of things wrong with this. First of all the writing it, for the most part, a jumbled mess. It's a series of run on sentences separated by even longer parenthesis. I mean by the time you get to the end of the sentence you've already forgot where you were when it started. All the sentences being broken up by dashes and parenthesis just makes the flow off and you almost stumble over reading it.

Then there is the everything that is going on in here. You are constantly jumping from one thing, to another, to the next, and OMG *What Is Going On?!?!?* You have Merissa and her friends are all in high school. Dealing with all the pressures that go along with that, and the fact that their friend, Tink, killed herself. Merissa is under even more pressure because she is known as *The Perfect One* and therefore she has no room for failure. And while I should feel sorry for her, or just feel for her period, I can't. Mostly because of the heartless way she talks about her friends, and the way she handles her life. For instance she refers to her friend, Nadia, as being *soft, flabby, and fat* throughout the book, and then you find out that poor Nadia only weighs a measly 119 pounds. Then Merissa starts cutting on herself because it's more thrilling than having an eating disorder? REALLY?!

Overall I am just flabbergasted at how this book turned out. I really thought this was going to be one of those reads that changed your life and broke your heart, but I was terribly mistaken.

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### Hannah says

I really hate my terrible memory. I thought Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You sounded like something I'd like, but the name Joyce Carol Oates sounded familiar, and I didn't know why. If I'd thought about it more, instead of going with the "Ooh. Want. Buy." instinct, I would have remembered that I'd read *Big Mouth & Ugly Girl* by this author and that I didn't like it. I probably wouldn't have read Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You knowing that, and that would have been a good thing, because I had more of the same issues with Two or Three Things that I'd had with *Big Mough & Ugly Girl*.

Joyce Carol Oates's style just doesn't work for me. Somehow, I found the writing both immature and confusing. The sentences feel overdramatic and just really, really weird. I can't even explain it, so I'll give an example - this is how the book starts (page 3):

"Merissa! Congratulations!"

Hannah's excitement was genuine. Hannah's happiness for Merissa was genuine. Merissa could see. Merissa had been afraid - just a little, putting herself in Hannah's place - (for Hannah Heller's grades were inevitably just slightly lower than Merissa Charmichael's, not to mention the fact that Merissa was associate yearbook editor, Drama Club president, and cocaptain of the girls' intramural field hockey team as well; and Hannah had applied to virtually all the same colleges and Merissa) - that Hannah would be hurt, and envious, and even resentful, for it is not nearly so easy to be happy for your closest friend's good news as it is to (secretly) rejoice in your closest friend's bad news.

I don't usually like using quotes in reviews, but that shows it better than I could explain. The writing is like that the entire time. If you don't have a problem with that style, it might be a good read for you, but for me, the writing was just frustrating.

Asides from the writing, the story and the characters didn't work for me, either. To be honest, I didn't really see the point of it all. I hate saying that, because I'm not someone who thinks that literature always has to have a "point," that it always has to teach you something. But I just mean that for me personally, I didn't see the point, because the story didn't really go anywhere. It sort of circled around Tink's suicide, but not really. Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You is about three of Tink's friends, after Tink's suicide. It's split into three parts, with each of the girls telling their story individually, and none of the three really worked for me.

I never felt like I really got to know any of the characters, and that's a big part of why I didn't end up liking this book. They each have their problems, and there's some pretty messed-up stuff going on, but I don't feel like we got to go deep enough to explore those issues in any meaningful way. The way it is, they're just kind of... there. I don't feel like any of the characters are fully developed, and there was none of the character growth or resolving of issues that I'd hoped for.

I also struggled with seeing how these three stories tied in with each other; other than Tink, I didn't see a connection. And everything about Tink is just sort of weird. Tink, like, visits them in their dreams, or her ghost visits them, and she gives the girls advice. I didn't get what all of that was about, and since it's never addressed what's really going on with Tink, it felt kind of pointless to me.

Somehow, I just felt removed from the story throughout. I've been having a hard time getting into books lately, so it might have to do with my reading slump, but I think it was at least partly the book's fault. The weird writing style, the lack of character development, and the plot that didn't go anywhere made it really hard for me to enjoy this book. I guess Joyce Carol Oates just isn't for me.

Reviewed at <http://www.paperbacktreasures.blogspot...>

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## **Buchdokter says**

Merissa scheint die von allen bewunderte erfolgreiche Modellschülerin zu sein. Am Ende des vorletzten Schuljahres erhält sie schon eine Studienplatz-Zusage für eine amerikanische Elite-Universität, sie schreibt stets Bestnoten, führt das Hockeyteam und bekommt natürlich im Schultheaterstück die begehrte weibliche Hauptrolle. Doch bei einem Blick hinter die begeisterten Fassaden sieht die Sache ganz anders aus. In der Schule und auch zuhause wagt Merissa es nicht, anderen den Rücken zuzudrehen, weil sie stets damit rechnet, dass dann etwas Gemeines über sie gesprochen wird. Als lustvoll, weil verboten, empfindet Merissa das heimliche Ritzen. Ihre Narben trägt sie wie ein verstecktes Tattoo. Der elitäre Vater-Tochter-Bund bröckelt, der die weniger intellektuelle Mutter ausschloss und aus der Zeit stammt, als Merissa noch klein und niedlich war. Die Siebzehnjährige fühlt sich als fast Erwachsene vom Vater nicht mehr beachtet. Mädchen dürfen nicht wachsen und nicht erwachsen werden, so die unterschwellige Botschaft. Merissas gesamte Lebensplanung ist der Bewerbung um den Studienplatz untergeordnet. Sie spielt nicht Hockey, weil sie es will, sondern weil es für die Bewerbung taktisch sinnvoll ist, auch Theater, Musik und ihr soziales Engagement werden taktisch klug eingesetzt. Merissa, Nadia und Tink waren einmal eine eingeschworene Dreierclique. Doch seit Tink die Freundinnen durch ihren Selbstmord verlassen hat, haben die Zurückgebliebenen umso stärker mit ihrem Gefühl der Wertlosigkeit zu kämpfen. Tink fand es nicht nötig, anderen zu gefallen und nahm dadurch die Rolle eines Anti-Paradiesvogels ein. Nadia findet sich im

Vergleich zu ihrer jugendlich-kapriziösen Stiefmutter zu dick und gerät an der Schule ungeschickt in einen Strudel aus Sexting (Mobbing mit sexuellen Inhalten) und üblem Tratsch. Beiden Mädchen ist die tote Tink immer noch so nahe, dass man beim Lesen sogar an Tinks Tod zweifeln könnte. Tinks Tod wirkt auf die Mädchen so bedrohlich, dass Merissa das Wort nur mit einem Stern zensiert zu denken und zu schreiben wagt.

Joyce Carol Oates hat mich schon auf den ersten Seiten ihres neuen Jugendromans damit gefesselt, dass sie die Häme hinter der Fassade von Glück und Erfolg nur beobachtet. Die Fäden verknüpfen und die Vorgänge analysieren müssen ihre Leser ganz allein. Ihr Buch gehört zu den besten Jugendbüchern, die ich in diesem Jahr gelesen habe. Es verursacht dieses bestimmte Kribbeln, mit dem sich ein klassischer, völlig zeitloser Text ankündigt, über den man auch noch in vielen Jahren ebenso kontrovers diskutieren kann wie heute. Die Persönlichkeit Merissas hat mich im ersten Drittel des Buches mit Abstand am stärksten gefesselt, wenn auch die Zusammenhänge erst mit der Charakterisierung der Dreier-Clique deutlich werden. Merissas Lebensumstände karikieren den amerikanischen Traum vom Aufstieg aus eigener Kraft, halten überehrgeizigen Eltern den Spiegel vor und entlarven nicht zuletzt die Häme, die die Beziehung zwischen den Jugendlichen vergiftet. Ein starkes Buch.

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## **Kyria Collins says**

WHAT in the actual heck? I mean, like, what the \*car horn\*?? When it comes down to novels, particularly ones geared towards my age group, that deal with serious real-life issues such as depression, alienation, cutting, suicide, eating disorders and what not, I tend to gravitate towards those since I take those issues very seriously, so naturally I was drawn to this book once I saw all of these things be mentioned in the plot summary, especially regarding the situation of people who have lost a friend to suicide and the apparent direction of the story showing how all of three of the main characters' lives are changed and affected by this. And I had pretty high hopes for this book, and reading about Joyce Carol Oates' long-standing reputation as a critically acclaimed legend in the world of literature on the back of the book sleeve added to those hopes!...which is why I, with the lackluster result of the final product, felt as greatly gyped and deeply let down as I did. The poor, lazy and vague development of the plot and characters, unrealistic and shabby depiction of serious situations--ranging from a forbidden student-teacher relationship (inappropriate!), anorexia, poor body image, harassment and teasing due to past sexually unsavory behavior, emotionally neglectful and verbally/emotionally abusive parents (all of which are in the life of one character!), using cutting as a way to cope with the pressure to be perfect, losing a friend to suicide--absence of any emotional connection to the characters and their plights, the jumpy and unorganized writing style, which seemed to patterned in the format of a teen's diary or notebook of some sorts but came across as a forced and contrived attempt on Miss Oates' part to sound cool, raw, edgy, down-to-earth and relatable to teen/young adult readers kinda landed with a whimper instead of a bang. Speaking of which, the way some of characters spoke didn't even sound like teens--yes, yes, there are plenty of them that are mature and intelligent enough to carry themselves as such, but even then it's not to the degree of how pretentiously and unrealistically they're depicted! Also bothersome was the way the issues of suicide, self-cutting and eating were depicted: when Merissa began cutting, Nadia began starving herself and their friend Tink killed herself, there was no genuine emotion, urgency or realism in terms of showing the true ugly side to all three of these destructive actions as well as hitting the nail on the head with the emotional/mental/psychological state, feelings, mindset, psyche and behavioral traits of someone with a dark compulsive addiction; they were treated very passively, like minor trends or random things that just "happened" from day to day but weren't such big deals--not overtly, but subtly--which is an absolutely HORRIBLE message to send not just to teens and

young adults, but anybody, and GOD FORBID that anyone who's suicidal, anorexic, depressed, self-harming and such reads this and absorbs the toxic messages from the story! Plus, neither one of the girls telling any of their families and friends about their issues and getting the help they desperately need--on Nadia's part, she was being teased by the boys on the football team just because she...er, um...went down on a completely different boy (jerks) and was being neglected by her father and stepmother, who were also jerks to her, so I understand that (even though it wasn't wise of her to start a relationship with one of her teachers, a big no no), but Merissa came from a decent family and had decent parents who loved and cared about her in spite of them being divorced and her father dating someone else, so there's no excuse on her part--bothered me as well. But that's not it: on the part of Tink, there wasn't anything particularly likeable, relatable, memorable or sympathetic about her. Parts of the dialogue that discussed Tink, including flashbacks of her first showing up to school, her interactions with Nadia and Merissa, etc., just fell flat on its face and failed to evoke anything in me to feel sad or care about their friendship or Tink, who, via flashbacks, just came across as rude, childish, vapid, cross and a bit obnoxious, even her death didn't make me feel sad. Oh, and she appears as a ghost that popped up every now and then during the book and at the very end of the book, which REALLY made it cheesy and melodramatic. Not to mention that it unwittingly reinforces the dangerous false myth that, in teens' minds, they'll come back as a ghost who will watch over everyone and everything and come and go anytime they choose after they kill themselves, which is complete BULLGUNK! That said, I didn't like nor feel anything for Merissa; she too was unlikeable, especially in the way she talked about Nadia, though it's also the author's fault in the shabby and contradictory way in depicting Nadia and her mental/emotional state in her anorexia, describing her as round, flabby, puffy and a bit chubby then revealing that the poor girl is only 119 pounds! Somebody please tell me HOW in the world is that fat or chubby in any way, and how OFFENSIVE this is to any female readers who really are going through an ED and low body image/self-image?! It's one thing to realistically write in the mindset of someone with an ED and poor body image and evoke some urgency, emotion and realism, it's another thing to dangerously reinforce toxic and detrimental mentalities that will only push more and more people to follow suit at the expense of their own health. Worst of all, Merissa and everybody else describe her as flabby, chubby and round, and not only is Merissa cold and judgmental in joining in on the vendetta against Nadia, in one of the chapters she admits to resorting to cutting because she thinks it's "more thrilling" than having an eating disorder! Do you have ANY IDEA what that says?! 1. Merissa might as well have said to/about Nadia, "You're starving yourself? That's so lame, and you're lame too, but I cut myself--cutting is cooler than that, and that makes me cooler too!" 2. Like I said earlier, it passively treats two very dark and seriously destructive compulsions as trends or mundane hobbies that are no big deal and are just things "to do" but in this case it takes it to another level by treating them like parts of a popularity contest to use as judgment against others who are suffering, and it's absolutely NOT OKAY to even infer such messages. Overall, SHAME on Joyce Carol Oates for sending such horrible messages in romanticizing, normalizing and perpetuating such negative and toxic behaviors and the stereotypes/stigmas that attach themselves to them--the poor writing, plot, structure and what not are the least of our problems. And I thought that "Twilight" and "Beautiful Disaster" were terrible books that I thankfully never read! Vote: 0/10!

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### **Katie says**

This was an amazing book. Perfect for Jr High aged students because it deals with bullying, suicide, cutting, and friendship. This book for the most part was an easy read and also easy to understand. This book is told in parts and shows the different impacts that each of these things can have on teens. There is some strong language in this book. One of the main characters in the book is actually a spirit, because she killed herself, so when you are reading you you have to understand that she isn't alive. The other two main characters are alive and the spirit helps them grow up and face the problems they are dealt in life. Very moving book, I

loved it!

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## Christine says

### Did Not Finish

I received an ARC copy through a book blogger exchange program: ARCCycling.

Unfortunately, I just wasn't able to finish this. Or really ever get into it, for that matter. I'm sure this book is right up someone's alley but sadly, just not mine. I'm not going to write a review because, well, I didn't finish it. I do want to mention why it didn't work for me, however. Needless to say, the things that weren't for me might be things you love about novels. So here we go:

1. The writing was so confusing. The sentences lasted forever and had lots of parentheses--these things, whatever they are called--commas, etc. Having those sometimes, and where appropriate, is fine. It seemed like almost every other sentence had them, though. It was a bit excessive and like I said, I was confused as to what we were actually talking about by the end of the sentence. To demonstrate this, here's a quote from the ARC:

Like a scene in Tink's TV soap opera *Gramercy Park*--(Tink had played a DVD of an episode for her girlfriends once, from a long-ago time when, in the story line of the saga, Tink had played a little girl of nine and her mother, Veronica, had played a neurotic rich man's wife, unrelated to Tink--the girls had laughed at the hokey melodrama, underscored by mood music, such sad, silly women whose lives were a tangle of disappointed marriages and love affairs)--except this was Merissa's *real life*.

See what I mean? One very convoluted sentence and I didn't know what we were talking about by the end. Not all of the sentences are this extreme, but some just as confusing as this.

2. I couldn't relate to the characters. Now before I get into this, they are *very* realistic characters. The things that Merissa dealt with could and does happen in real life. I don't know much about Nadia's character. I didn't make it to her part of the story. But Merissa's character had quite a few personal problems and why I can understand she would be driven to do these things, it's how she talked about other people that frustrated me. Again, here's an example to further demonstrate my point:

"How Nadia could bear to look at herself in the mirror, Merissa couldn't imagine. Nadia's features were pretty--especially her warm brown eyes--but her face was round as a plate and she had, if you looked at her sideways, an actual *belly*."

Reading this sentence REALLY made me mad. Sure, I know high school girls can be extremely judgmental, but still. Merissa says things of this nature multiple times thereafter. She was self absorbed and rude as a snake...behind people's backs. I also didn't like how she called her father "Daddy" every time she thought

about him. I stopped calling my dad "Daddy" when I was 10. Maybe some high school seniors still call their father "Daddy?" I don't know. I only do when I'm being silly and trying to persuade mine to give me something ;) But other than that? It sounds a bit childish. That's just me, though.

3. I hated reading, in detail, how Merissa cut herself and why she chose the spots she did. It made me cringe and I found myself skipping over these parts, as often as they were talked about. I mention again: these things that she does to herself happen all too often in today's society. I felt bad for Merissa because nobody should feel compelled to deal with stress and anxiety in this way. I appreciate that Ms. Oates wanted to bring awareness to this ever prevalent phenomena. People do need to be more aware of this and I applaud her for being brave to tackle the issue. I just didn't like reading about snipping of veins and skin. \*cringe\*

4. Lastly, the plot tended to jump all over the place. I'm sure you noticed it in the quote I presented with point #1. One minute Merissa is in her room talking about texting a friend and the next she's rambling on about falling down the school stairs a year ago and all the attention she got from it. Characters were introduced that didn't really have a point (up until the point at which I stopped) and just added to a long list of things that I felt I probably should remember. The flashbacks didn't seem to serve a purpose or help further the plot, either. I was very confused about where we were, why Merissa was now talking about this subject, and if it actually had anything to do with what she'd been thinking about in the previous paragraph. There also didn't appear to be an actual plot going on.

I only made it to page 57. Maybe the writing got a little better. Maybe Merissa calmed down a bit. Maybe some fantastic plot developed. I just don't know. I've been trying to read this book for over a month and sometimes, you just have to accept that a book may not be for you.

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## **sparklyunikorn says**

**1.5 stars** - YA Realistic

After I finished it, I regretted I bought this book and it was friggin' expensive (RM 34.90) for a story that I don't even understand and characters I can't connect. I'm highly disappointed, alright. I liked the subject matters (suicide, insecurities etc) but the writing style, it isn't my cuppa tea. It is not recommended but if you insist, read on your own peril.

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## **Deitre says**

Joyce Carol Oates is an author that I've seen frequently when I've browsed the shelves of a school library. She is a New York Selling Best author especially in the area of young adult literature. Unfortunately, I haven't had the experience of reading one of her novels. This was a first. I read this book in a day, truly committed to the lives of Merissa, Tink and Nadia. The novel is arranged into three distinct parts. Each part featuring one girl. In this novel we are presented with aspects of teenage life, that unfortunately is occurring in some of today's schools. It was slightly depressing knowing that one of the girls has already done the inevitable. Her actions ultimately effect the choices that the other girls make within their life and high school experience.

I'm very torn about the amount of details that I provide for this review. However know, that this novel deals



with the following issues: bullying, sexting, suicide, inappropriate relationships etc. This would surely be a novel that I would suggest would be more suitable for the upper high school female student. I appreciate the fact that the author is capturing the issues that teenagers face today. However, I found that the beginning of the novel was slightly written at a slow pace making it hard for the reader to grasp what was truly going in the story. Once you get through Part 1, Part 2 and 3 flow a whole lot smoother in your mind when reading. In conclusion, I could see this book as a choice for a young adult female book club pick where discussions of events is facilitated by an adult.

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### **Lisa Cook says**

I love Joyce Carol Oates, but I'm not a big fan of YA, so take that for what you will. This book was good, but it was definitely stuck in its genre. Oates is a master of narration, but this book was manic. This was ridiculously melodramatic and aimed at easily impressionable tween/teen girls. The book was very literary in its merit, but the plot was so overly wrought for its sentimentality and attempts to connect with its target audience.

The book is told from multiple perspectives in the aftermath of a teen suicide, leaving her friends to make sense of life after the fact. This novel was entertaining, but so over the top. One girl has a secret. But her friend has a secret, too? But their other friend has committed suicide and she had secrets of her own. Ooooh... After a while it got kind of ridiculous. The novel starts off with Merissa, dubbed "The Perfect One" for her constant anxiety to perform under pressure, be the best, get the best grades, get into the best school and prove she is worthy of Daddy's love since he doesn't love her mother anymore and instead now loves some other woman he has moved in with and now wants a divorce. Oh, and did I mention she's also a cutter? Geez... I just couldn't get over the fact her name was spelled Merissa. Then there's a brief interlude that deals with the infamous Tink, who came into this circle of friends, then left via barbiturates and a bottle of wine as quickly as she came. Then the last part deals with Nadia who is a whopping 119 pounds but wishes she was 98 so of course she's slightly anorexic, who's in love with her teacher and also dealing with daddy issues of a different nature. But don't you fret, it all turns out hunky-dory in the end anyway.

This novel was good. Oates has enough writing chops to make anything worthy of reading, but the melodrama just felt so forced to me I couldn't get over it. Another feat of Oates' talent, but this is not my genre of choice.

And also, I won this book from a Goodreads Giveaway! So yay!

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### **Drennan Spitzer says**

Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You by Joyce Carol Oates

In *Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You*, a somewhat unconventional Young Adult novel, Joyce Carol Oates explores the pressures and experiences of the senior year of high school for several friends. First, let me say that I am always amazed that Joyce Carol Oates manages to produce the volume of work that she does. I am in awe that one woman is so prolific and that so much of it is just so engaging and well written. But it strikes me in reading and thinking about *Two or Three Things I Forgot to Tell You* that Oates's genius

lies not in her ability to churn out words (although as a writer, I certainly envy her that) but in her understanding not just of human nature but of what motivates humans, especially women in American culture. We see this in her more famous, more serious, more literary works like *Blonde* and *We Were the Mulvaneys*, but here too Oates displays an understanding and sensitivity to the feelings and neuroses and traumas that plague women and young women in our culture, such as self-mutilation, suicidal ideation, body image issues, and eating disorders.

In what is clearly a Young Adult novel, Oates presents the high-pressure prep school world of friends Merissa, Nadia, and their recently deceased friend Tink Traumer. This is a world that lacks the glamor we have come to expect from series like *Gossip Girl* and instead shows the shadow side of the world of moneyed teen overachievers. This Young Adult novel lacks the sort of clearly delineated plot that some readers might prefer, focusing instead on several character-driven trajectories. Oates structure the novel by breaking it into three separate parts, each with a distinct point of view of one of three central characters: Merissa, Tink, and Nadia. By doing so, Oates invites us to focus on the girls and their emotional lives, rather than what happens to them externally. This then becomes a novel not about what happens but about how these girls respond and how they feel. This allows Oates the opportunity to explore in an authentic way the experience of being a teenage girl in contemporary culture.

Oates manages with thoughtfulness the very real emotional and psychological difficulties these girls face, self-mutilation or “cutting” being made to be particularly understandable. I think that for adults particularly it is easy to be dismissive of behaviors like self-mutilation and suicidal ideation, so prevalent really among young people. We tend to say to young women, “Just stop. Don’t do it. Don’t cut,” not always realizing that there’s a deep motivation behind the behavior and that the behavior fills some emotional void in the young woman. Oates’s treatment of the theme allows us to understand and even empathize with what might otherwise seem such an incomprehensible choice. And it’s precisely this kind of treatment of behaviors otherwise marginalize and labeled as neuroses and even pathological in our society that makes Oates remarkable. She takes that which we’d much rather dismiss because we want to ignore it and presents it in a way that it becomes not just understandable but something we can develop some compassion for, even if we continue to dislike the behavior.

As much as I like Oates’s work and am drawn particularly to her novels which tend to be somewhat tragic, I am tired of the focus on the plight of the middle- and upper-middle class female. Certainly, this is a demographic I relate to. I understand the neurotic, prone-to-depression, slightly-anxious woman just trying to make her way in an upper-middle class world that feels hostile and threatening at every turn. But where is the sensitivity to those who truly suffer, to those even in the United States who are disadvantaged and abused? While Merissa, Nadia, and even Tink face difficulties that are both uniquely their own and are sadly prevalent among teenage girls in our culture—neglect by parents and emotional and psychological distress—I would like some acknowledgement that ultimately their position of privilege allows them opportunity to overcome these difficulties that the truly disadvantaged in our culture may not have.

NOTE: This review originally posted in a longer form at the book review website *Luxury Reading*: <http://luxuryreading.com> and at my website <http://drennanspitzer.com>

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## **Christie Bane says**

And just like that, I love Joyce Carol Oates again. Man, this is exhausting! It's like the literary equivalent of that bad boy relationship. He's making you crazy, and you want to kill him. But then, oh my God, you have one of those nights with him and you know you will never leave him even though you know you're in for more bad times if you stay. That's me and Joyce Carol Oates.

This is a book for teenagers, and even though I had nothing in common with these characters when I was a teenager, the message is everyone is insecure at that age no matter how much they look like they have it together on the outside. For me to feel like 16-year-old me had anything at all in common with Merissa or Nadia is ridiculous on its face, but yet I totally get them.

Although I thought the plot of this book was JUST SLIGHTLY rambling (totally thought it was about Merissa -- nope! it's about Nadia just as much), I didn't care because I enjoyed the rambling journey that much. I kept thinking all the way through, don't do it, girls! Don't do what Tink did, no matter how your life seems to be spiraling down or how humiliated you've been! I know they both thought about doing it, but then time passed and they didn't do it, just became stronger afterwards, which is what happens to the great majority of people in their situation.

And how do you explain why the Tinks DO do it? Don't ask me. I've been wondering that for a long time.

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### **Katie says**

It makes me sad to only give this three stars. I really love Joyce Carol Oates, because she deals with some really dark aspects of relationships. I didn't find the cutting narrative particularly realistic, but I could believe Nadia's story. I am also not really sure about the choice to have the story told from the perspective of those two characters. The book didn't feel as cohesive as I would have liked. Regardless it was still pretty good. I am not disappointed that I spent New Year's Eve and the first hour of 2013 getting to know the words of Joyce Carol Oates.

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### **Camilla says**

The first half of the book alone would have gotten two stars. It's melodramatic and extremely sentimental, but Merissa's story was the more realistic. Her's is the typical straight A, perfect blond that everyone loves but who is secretly unhappy. Blah blah. Despite her being somewhat unlikeable, I was actually moved by her story.

Nadia is SO FAT. She's--gasp--119 pounds at her heaviest and 5'4"! I know the point is for the reader to realize she isn't fat and pity her, but *everyone* in the book comments on how chubby she is, they're so used to private-school-in-New-Jersey girls, so it might give off the wrong impression, especially when the author comments on her chubby cheeks often. She also has an extremely unrealistic crush on her teacher that gets her into trouble later, and is labeled as a slut because she gave a guy a blowjob. Her whole storyline was just so incredibly unrealistic and melodramatic, though I suppose it might show younger girls reading (those who haven't been exposed to sexual issues) that slut shaming is hurtful and wrong.

These girls are connected and allegedly protected by their dead friend Tink, who is really a Manic Pixie

Dream Girl. She came to the private school full of preps as a sort of low key punk, shocking all the students. Tink had committed suicide, and visits her friends as a sort of half ghost. Sentimental much? Tink prevents the suicides of both friends. I prefer to think the friends thought of Tink and stopped themselves from killing themselves, but I don't think this is what the author intended. These girls go around talking aloud to dead Tink.

Overall, the book was exemplary of a teen novel, and just the reason I normally don't read them. It was insanely sentimental in trying to get its point across, unrealistic, melodramatic, and just packed with over exaggeration. I wouldn't recommend this to anyone who isn't in love with teen lit set in high school. Also, my copy says "Ages: 14 and up." I think that's a bit too old for this book; I'd say it would suit a twelve year old better.

\*\*I received an ARC copy of this book from the Goodreads First Reads program\*\*

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### **sally says**

Simply awful. Could not even finish it - especially after this:

"...at her heaviest, she'd weighed 119 pounds -- *horrible!* (Nadia was just five feet four inches tall.) By the start of the fall term she'd managed to get her weight down to 111, which was still high -- her goal was *ninety-eight...*" (p 201)

Nadia had been described as chubby, round, flabby, etc, and when I got to that description, I just lost it. I tried really hard to plow through, though. I assume that though it is the narrator speaking, the voice is tinged with the self-criticism of the character, and therefore unreliable. However, I could not finish what was already an extremely mediocre read.

small nit pick: I don't think there are ANY contemporary rich NJ teenagers who wear straight leg jeans and sweaters from The Gap.

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### **Lauren says**

Like everything she writes, Oates' new YA novel packs an emotional punch. She writes about a group of teen girls who all have problems of the Laurie Halse Anderson variety and, like those of the aforementioned author, the story feels fresh and important, never trite. An interesting and hopeful read for teens and their parents!

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