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Whisper to Me

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Set in New Jersey, this sometimes harrowing story provides a sympathetic and informed description of what it is like to hear voices in your head inaudible to everyone else. But its narrator, 17-year-old Cassie, also has to cope with a possessive and permanently angry father, a first love of whom he strongly disapproves and the disappearance and possible murder of a new best friend. What follows is artfully constructed and involving, though Cassie's advice to herself to ease up occasionally on her habitual mental self-flagellation could well have been taken more often.

Socially isolated and driven to endless reading, Cassie recognises some of the darker elements in the Greek myths she loves in her own story. She struggles to stay sane while her voices keep telling her she is a worthless guilty party in the tragedy of her mother's violent death some years before. Thankfully she soon receives psychiatric support when it most needed - would she have been as well-served in this country? But while one doctor merely prescribes pills, the second helps her understand and then, as much as she can, take on and stand up to what her voices are saying. The same situation was unforgettably described in Joanne Greenberg's semi-autobiographical novel **I Never Promised You a Rose Garden**, published in 1964 but still in print.

Nick Lake is also a good writer. While this long book could have been cut in places it often contains pages consisting of just one or two words as Cassie debates briefly with herself in her characteristically self-deprecating way. Her despair is balanced by a remarkably understanding and forgiving boyfriend who stays by her when others may have had enough. But they would have been wrong; Cassie is a clever and original person, worth sticking with. Her author serves her well; like her, he too has much to offer both here and in his previous three novels.

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