



## ★ **Extraordinary Birds**

**Sandy Stark-McGinnis**

Bloomsbury (Apr 30, 2019)

Hardcover \$16.99 (224pp)

978-1-5476-0100-4

In *Extraordinary Birds*, a troubled young foster girl who is obsessed with birds and the possibility that she may one day fly comes to terms with her past and learns what it means to find a place to call home.

Eleven-year-old December Lee Morgan has bounced from foster home to foster home these past few years, with her various foster parents unable to handle her strange fixations and behaviors. She eats mostly seeds, for instance, and often climbs trees and jumps from them in preparation for unfurling the wings that she knows lie beneath the skin of the brutal scar on her back. When she moves in with taxidermist and animal sanctuary worker Eleanor, she begins to find a reason to make a perch.

Acutely emotional, *Extraordinary Birds* conveys how December's fragility and strength work together to help her realize that she is just as human as everyone else—and that this is a positive thing. Sadness in Eleanor's past, the bullying that December's new friend Cheryllynn suffers, and a hawk that Eleanor entrusts her to train are the external forces that influence December's coming of age. Her journey is one of self-acceptance and making peace with the fact that the past is not always indicative of the future.

With writing that delves intensely into December's mind, the book shares bits and pieces from December's "Bird Girl," a journal in which she writes an alternate history for herself. That and the poignant dialogue—with so much unspoken but still movingly felt—build a heartrending image of December's inner world. Though her external world is small, her viewpoint is complex and beautifully rendered through simple yet descriptive language.

This heartbreaking but ultimately redemptive middle grade novel shows the beauty of accepting one's true self and finding a place to belong.

AIMEE JODOIN (May/June 2019)

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