



How to Breathe Underwater

By Julie Orringer



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A *New York Times* notable book and winner of The Northern California Book Award for Best Short Fiction, these nine brave, wise, and spellbinding stories make up this debut. In "When She is Old and I Am Famous" a young woman confronts the inscrutable power of her cousin's beauty. In "Note to Sixth-Grade Self" a band of popular girls exert their social power over an awkward outcast. In "Isabel Fish" fourteen-year-old Maddy learns to scuba dive in order to mend her family after a terrible accident. Alive with the victories, humiliations, and tragedies of youth, **How to Breathe Underwater** illuminates this powerful territory with striking grace and intelligence.

"These stories are without exception clear-eyed, compassionate and deeply moving.... Even her most bitter characters have a gift, the sharp wit of envy. This, Orringer's first book, is breathtakingly good, truly felt and beautifully delivered."—The Guardian

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The stories in *How to Breathe Underwater*, Julie Orringer's debut collection, swim with tragedies both commonplace and horrific. A fall from a treehouse, an ailing mother, a near-drowning, a premature baby, a gun--each is the source of a young woman's coming-of-age, which we witness through Orringer's lovely, driving prose. The author possesses an uncanny ability to capture scenes and complex emotions in quick strokes. In "Pilgrims," young Ella is taken to a hippie household for Thanksgiving, where her mother joins several other cancer patients in search of natural remedies: "Some of them wore knitted hats like her mother, their skin dull-gray, their eyes purple-shaded underneath. To Ella it seemed they could be relatives of her mother's, shameful cousins recently discovered." Shame is as omnipresent as water in this collection, sadly appropriate for stories about girls becoming women. Orringer possesses an acute understanding of the many rules of girlhood, in particular the uniquely childish importance of "not telling" (for fear of becoming a traitor, and consequently, an outcast). But though her subjects may take us to the murky depths--submerging us in the cruelties girls and siblings commit against each other--Orringer's nimble writing and subtle humor allow us to breathe. --*Brangien Davis*

From Publishers Weekly

Trapped in awkward, painful situations, the young protagonists of Orringer's debut collection discover surprising reserves of wisdom in themselves. Their trials are familiar if harsh--the illness and death of parents and friends, social ostracism--but Orringer's swift, intricate evocation of individual worlds gives depth and integrity to her nine stories, set everywhere from Florence to New Orleans to Disney World. The collection's title comes from "The Isabel Fish," in which 14-year-old Maddy is learning how to scuba dive after surviving a car accident in which her older brother's girlfriend drowned. Maddy is sure her brother hates her, and when he kills the fish she is raising for a science fair project, she can hardly blame him. It is only when they go diving together that she realizes he feels as guilty as she does. In "Note to Sixth-Grade Self"--written in a telegraphic second person--the narrator details her torments at the hands of a popular girl who speaks with a stutter. The cruelty of children is also dissected in "Stations of the Cross," in which Jewish Lila Solomon attends her friend's first Communion in the Deep South, and finds herself reluctantly playing a part in an enactment of the Crucifixion. In "When She Is Old and I Am Famous," fat Mira must cope with the arrival of her supermodel cousin: "Aida. That is her terrible name. Ai-ee-duh: two cries of pain and one of stupidity." By the end of the story, Aida has won over Mira, who finally empathizes with her bids for attention. No matter how wronged they have been, Orringer's characters are open to reconciliation and even willing to save their tormentors. It is this promise of grace--and Orringer's smooth, assured storytelling--that distinguishes the collection.

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From [Booklist](#)

How apt it is that water is Orringer's ruling element and reigning metaphor, because her short stories are exceptionally translucent, deep, and fluid. Her young characters--primarily girls whose mothers are gravely ill with cancer, depressed in the wake of divorce, missing, or dead--are drawn to ponds, pools, and hot tubs where immersion in water is cleansing, even holy, but also deadly. In Orringer's sensuous yet edgy fictional universe, disease, accidents, rivalry, and ostracism are rampant; therefore, smart and determined girls and young women must devise their own covert strategies for survival. In one eerie tale, the young daughters of a cancer sufferer spend Thanksgiving in a similarly stricken household where the parents practice healing meditation while the children turn violent. In the Salingeresque "The Isabel Fish," a sister and brother struggle to reconcile in the aftermath of a drowning. Elsewhere summer's heady eroticism seduces Hasidic

teens. Radiant in their explicit sensory descriptions, penetrating in their eviscerating discernment of both the cruelty and the resiliency of children, and exquisitely attuned to the overwhelming tide of emerging sexuality, Orringer's unnerving and fiercely beautiful stories delve to the very core of life's mysteries. *Donna Seaman*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Eastman:

This book untitled *How to Breathe Underwater* to be one of several books in which best seller in this year, that is because when you read this guide you can get a lot of benefit in it. You will easily to buy that book in the book store or you can order it by way of online. The publisher of the book sells the e-book too. It makes you more easily to read this book, since you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to your account to past this guide from your list.

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Michael Kendig:

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