



Forever, or a Long, Long Time

Caela Carter

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From rising new talent Caela Carter, author of *My Life with the Liars*, comes an achingly beautiful and endearing story about two foster children who want desperately to believe that they've found their forever home. Perfect for fans of Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me*, Leslie Connor's *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*, and Sarah Pennypacker's *Pax*.

Flora and her brother, Julian, don't believe they were born. They've lived in so many foster homes, they can't remember where they came from. And even now that they've been adopted, Flora still struggles to believe in forever. So along with their new mother, Flora and Julian begin a journey to go back and discover their past—for only then can they really begin to build their future.

Forever, or a Long, Long Time Details


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From Reader Review Forever, or a Long, Long Time for online ebook

Emily Pool says

This book broke my heart and then pieced it back together in such a beautiful way. What an gorgeous story of fostering and adoption. Cried cried cried.

Dyan says

[I got this book through Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.](#)

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"It's when the best things are happening that it's hardest to believe in Forever."

Forever, or a Long, Long Time is a middle grade book about two siblings finding their forever home after being in the foster system for a long time.

Flora & Julian are siblings. They have been adopted by Emily and her husband a while ago, but they are still struggling with the everyday reality of trusting that this is their forever home. We follow their story from Flora's point of view as we see how she struggles in school sometimes. Eventually, they end up tracing back their pasts to understand more about what happened to them and how they got here.

The writing style of the book is very engaging, yet simple enough. We follow Flora's point of view throughout the story. Every other chapter or so, there is a sub-chapter thrown in there which is 'a theory of how they [she and her brother] came into the world'. As we learn pretty early on, because the siblings don't know who their birth parents are, they don't believe they have been born like all other people and animals they know, so they constantly make up theories about where they could've come from.

We are introduced to different characters throughout the story. Most important are Flora & Julian, of course. Her adoptive mom's name is Emily and there is an adoptive Dad in the picture, as well as his biological daughter Elena. We are also introduced to other characters, like Flora's teacher and later in the story we meet more people as they trace back their pasts.

The relationships are well written, especially the deeper relationships with their adoptive mom really take shape throughout the story. We see them develop a deeper understanding about what family means and what family means to them and that things aren't always that simple, especially when you've been through much. We see all of them make mistakes but also pull through in the end and learn how to do things the right way around. In this way it is a very realistic story, that really portrays that it's okay to make mistakes, as long as you make up for them in the end as well. It's all very real and very human, without being too much for the intended audience, and that is, in my humble opinion, a masterfully crafted balance.

The plot, of course, has to remain a mystery to you, because spoilers! Just know that Flora & Julian are having a bit of trouble adjusting. They are still afraid that Emily will not be their forever mom, even though

she promised, and they might have to move again one day. Some things come up and after consulting their counselor, they decide that it is very important for Flora's and Julian's well-being that they learn more about their past, so they have a better sense of who they are and where they came from. This is the journey they take on together with Emily and this is where they learn a lot.

A very deliberate choice is the choice of language in this book. We experience the story through Flora's thoughts, and in her mind, she calls Emily 'Person', not 'Mom'. This seems distant as you notice it at first, but it soon takes on a kind of neutral role when she explains to us why: "I call her my mom when I'm talking to her or anyone else, but in my head I call her my person because there have been too too many mommies and they all have different faces that blend together in my brain until they're one ugly face that doesn't make sense and some of them were nice but others weren't very nice and they're all gone now anyway and Person says she's here forever."

What was great about this book is that it mixes in a lot of important things really effortlessly. Flora & Julian are mixed race and this isn't talked about as a heavy thing. It's just talked about for a while; what color is someone's skin, what color are their eyes? And how about mom's? etc. The next time this is talked about it is done in a very light and funny way as well: "[we] slather on the sunblock that Person [Emily] always makes us wear even though she's the only one who gets sunburned." - You have to be paying attention to see this as a topic of race, because it can be easily dismissed as just not being so prone to sunburn.

Another great thing is that we meet a set of previous foster parents who add to the diversity spectrum as well. This, in the book, is killing two birds with one stone. The foster parents talked about were a couple that consisted of two women. (Points for diversity) When asked why they gave Flora and Julian up, we implicitly learn that, though never stated that way, they felt like they were discriminated against by the foster system because of them being two women. Flora reacts: "My eyes go big. That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Having two moms was part of what made this home work so well."

Overall, this book packed it all: what begins as a moderately light middle grade story quickly develops into a children's book handling deeper themes as well: foster care, what that does to a child in terms of mental health, family and dealing with changes in life are all topics that are dealt with and extensively talked about. Some diversity is packed in there as well; not so much that it screams in your face, but just enough to teach kids that there are different kinds of normal; there are different kinds of people, different kinds of families. To teach them that everybody has got their own problems and everybody makes mistakes sometimes, but you can make it up again as well.

I personally think this is a great way to introduce your kid to the myriad of different people and lifecycles that they might encounter throughout their own lives, while still enjoying a moving story about 'just a girl and her brother'.

I gave Forever, or a Long, Long Time 4 out of 5 stars and I sincerely hope your children will love it as much as I did.

Mayla says

Two "only's" Flora and her brother are foster kids who bounce around families all the time. But when they're ready to learn about their past their "forever" mother doesn't know if she's ready.

I absolutely fell in love with the characters in this book. I could hardly put it down for a hot minute.

steph says

[(I loved Person getting angry and upset at the case worker and their first foster mom. The system

Amy says

OOOF, this was a hard one. There were a few times when reading it that I had to put it down so I could try to emotionally process what was happening and then I had to realize that the characters (11 and 9) were also dealing with these things, and that these issues happen EVERY DAY in real life, and then I would pick it up and keep going. Because I had to find out what happened to Flora. And I desperately wanted to know her story and how it would end.

Flora and Julian were adopted two years ago by Emily, but as kids who lived through the foster care system and suffered unknown traumas, they still have a hard time believing Emily when she says they are together forever. And now Emily is pregnant, so there will be even more changes. As Flora and Julian struggle to understand what it means to be a family and where they come from, they are taken on a journey to learn about their past.

This coming of age story deals with the realities of trauma for children. This was gritty while also being endearing. You want to laugh at times while you are crying. You can see the adults in this novel and you can hear the children's inner thoughts. Highly recommend.

DaNae says

Meaty content, but this book often felt like it was about the content.

This is just one more in a line of 2017 books where I feel I'm being educated about an issue. There is a lot to like here, and Flora and Julian's story is compelling, but in the end it kind of felt like a course in detachment disorder 101.

Juliaruth says

I'm not really sure I have the right words for this book. There's no way for me personally to sum up what I think beyond this. It's about a girl learning to be part of a family, to be with people. It's about trauma, family, childhood, love. It's an incredible book.

Leonard Kim says

Newbery peanut gallery, we need to talk about this one. I feel like lots of books have tried something like this over the years, but they are all basically The Great Gilly Hopkins but not as good. This one isn't Gilly

and, incredibly, it might be almost as good.

Lindi (Do You Dog-ear?) says

"There are more letters and more words. They're building up inside me but they refuse to leave my body. They jam on top of each other like a million-car pileup on the freeway until my face is hot and my throat is sore and I know that when I finally do cry it won't be tears falling out of my eyes but letters."

When we went to the library our goal had been to find *Artemis Fowl*, but someone else had already checked it out. Lucky us! *Forever, or a Long, Long Time* was a really interesting story that explored the difficulties foster children face, and the lasting effects of being in the system.

Flora had trouble expressing her thoughts and feelings with words. She's capable of talking, but would sometimes float away from a conversation. I enjoyed reading about how she perceived herself, because she is incredibly smart. She would often mention "lung filters" and how her words would get stuck behind them, but occasionally would spill out if they weren't working. She was able to think so clearly, yet she struggled to communicate with everyone except Julian (who hides food in his closet because he's afraid he'll go hungry again).

It was heartbreaking when Flora misunderstood a situation and thought she was to blame. She was always worried that their new mom would stop loving them if she wasn't good enough. Flora and Julian were constantly waiting to be moved again, so there were a lot of ups and downs that went with that. Sometimes they threw tantrums and did awful things, and other times they were trying to be perfect so their new parents wouldn't send them away. I hated that they felt like they were to blame for their circumstances, and that they struggled to believe their mom when she promised them they would be with her forever.

It was even worse when the family started researching Flora and Julian's past. Their paperwork had been lost and never recovered, so their adoptive mother knew very little about their previous homes. They took a trip and tried to backtrack through all the places they'd lived, and some of the things they discovered were shocking and left me feeling angry and frustrated. *They're children.*

Forever, or a Long, Long Time was a wonderful story about learning to trust again and believing in a future where *forever* means something. I think the author did a great job of highlighting some of the issues foster children are facing today, and discussing some of the conditions they are forced to live in. These children have done nothing wrong and deserve to be loved and appreciated for who they are. It's sad how many of them end up somewhere worse than where they started. Flora and Julian were lucky, but a lot of children in foster care never find new families.

I loved the random theories throughout the book. Flora and Julian didn't believe that they had been born, so they made up different theories about where they came from. An example would be, "We come from the chaos, my brother and me. We were born out of the screams of other kids. We're made of their tears. We grew from their temper tantrums. We will never escape the chaos because it's what brought us to life in the first place."

I really did enjoy this one, and I like that the author told the story from Flora's perspective. It was unique and very eye-opening.

Originally posted at Do You Dog-ear? on July 27, 2018.

Elizabeth Kennedy says

I gained insight into the life of kids brought up in foster care but I felt too aware while reading that this book was meant to teach me something.

Gabrielle Schwabauer says

Everything about this book was superb. I am not usually impressed by books about adoption, foster care, and trauma, but boy did this story surpass my expectations.

Ms. Yingling says

ARC from Young Adult Books Central

Flora and Julian have found a forever home after years in the foster care system, but neither is entirely sure that their mother will keep them forever. Flora refers to her as "Person" in her mind, and is worried about everything, to the extent where she often has trouble communicating. Julian hoards food in his room. Neither child believes that they were born like other children-- they believe that they never had a mother because they can't remember one and no one else has been able to tell them about her. After this belief causes problems at school, and they find out that their mother and father are going to have a baby, the family takes off to investigate the different foster homes where they lived and get answers to many questions. Their father has another daughter, Elena, who visits every other weekend, and this is sometimes a troublesome family dynamic, since Flora doesn't understand how hard Elena's parents' divorce was on her, and Elena doesn't understand how difficult and traumatic Flora's early life was.

There are a few books about children who are or have been in foster care-- Hunt's *One for the Murphys*, Davis' *Peas and Carrots*, Grime's *Road to Paris*, Castleman's *Sarah Lost and Found*, Dowell's *Where I'd Like To Be*, Booth's *Kinda Like Brothers* and Wolfson's *What I Call Life* for a beginning. I think it's good to have a variety of different books on this topic, since no two children will have the same experience in foster care, and readers who are in classes with children in the care system may be curious about what it would be like.

The disturbing part about this book is that Flora and Julian are clearly children who have fallen through the cracks. They spend more time in an emergency setting than they should have, they are not allowed to be adopted by two mothers, and their *Lifebooks* are lost after one of their placements wants to take Julian but not Flora. While their mother is depicted as caring and helpful, many of the people in their lives have not been.

This was a sad but intriguing read, and the sort of book that my seventh grade girls find appealing in February. Reading about people who have more problems than they do is a developmental stage, and both makes children feel better about their own lives and hopefully makes them more empathetic people as well.

Hand this to fans of Entrada Kelly's *The Land of the Forgotten Girls* or Vaught's *Footer Davis is Probably*

Crazy.

Alison says

This book is spectacularly beautiful and insightful. I feel like my heart has been shredded and then carefully, lovingly pieced back together. Best middle grade I've read in a really long time!

Destinee Sutton says

A moving book about the inner life of Flora, a girl who grew up in multiple homes through the foster care system. She is permanently adopted, along with her younger brother, at the age of nine. Flora and her brother Julian don't believe they were ever born. They think they never had a biological family. Now Flora is eleven years old and trying really hard to trust her new mom and believe that she and Julian will be with her forever. But she is held back by her ignorance of her own origins.

The subject matter is important and the writing is mostly very good, but I struggled with the length. There were a lot of unnecessary paragraphs. I'm generally a patient reader, but I skimmed big chunks of this that didn't seem relevant to the plot. I was eager to find out about Flora and Julian's past. The meandering pace left me frustrated.

I was ambivalent about the italicized interstitial "Theory #" pieces. Yes, they were lovely pieces of writing. But they weren't in Flora's voice. They were lyrical, poetic. They were in the first person plural, speaking for both Flora and Julian. I think they might have worked better in third person because it felt like the author's own voice taking over Flora's.

I also never understood why no one had access to Flora and Julian's birth certificates. I understand why they didn't have originals, but copies of birth certificates can be obtained from government records. It seemed like an obvious way to prove to Flora that she was born and to find the names of her birth parents. I kept waiting for someone to go there and no one did. Frustrating. Was there some mention of this that I missed?

The best part of this book, I think, is that it explores an experience that is sadly common but not represented well in children's literature. The book is certainly critical of the foster care system, but didn't feel overly didactic (though it did tread close when they got to Jeannie the meanie). I think young readers will sympathize with Flora (even when she punches someone) and Julian (even when he's hiding food in his closet). Definitely a worthwhile read.

Crayola B. says

Some books are the right book at the right time.

And sometimes, even when you think a book is a window into a different life, it ends up being more of a mirror.

This one was both. So even though it kind of stomped on my soul a little bit (okay, a lot), I forgive it,

because it's a story about trauma and change and trust, but it's a realistically hopeful one. Things don't magically get better. But people get better at dealing with things, and some problems hurt less when you face them.

I loved this book. It's beautifully written and accessible and understandable. It translates a strange, confusing foster system and the struggles of healing from emotional trauma into words that form a compelling story with characters who are, for both better and worse, completely human and real.

This isn't exactly an easy read, but it was the right read for me, today, as I'm struggling with changing things in my own life. But that's not what most people care about.

Will this still be a good book a year from now, when my life is different yet again?

I very much believe so.
