



## Stained

*Cheryl Rainfield*

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## Stained Cheryl Rainfield

An intensely powerful account of a teen, bullied for her port-wine stain, who must summon her personal strength to survive abduction and horrific abuse at the hands of a deranged killer.

Sixteen-year-old Sarah Meadows longs for "normal." Born with a port wine stain covering half her face, all her life she's been plagued by stares, giggles, bullying, and disgust. But when she's abducted on the way home from school, Sarah is forced to uncover the courage she never knew she had, become a hero rather than a victim, and learn to look beyond her face to find the beauty and strength she has inside. It's that-or succumb to a killer.

## Stained Details

Date : Published October 1st 2013 by HMH Books for Young Readers (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9780547942087

Author : Cheryl Rainfield

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Thriller, Realistic Fiction

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## From Reader Review Stained for online ebook

### Lorca Damon says

Cheryl Rainfield has done it again. As one of the powerhouse young adult authors who championed the #YASaves hashtag on Twitter, a cause that was taken up by authors and readers alike who felt that powerful teen literature had helped them survive high school and shaped them into the adults they are today, Rainfield often writes about the characters and topics that teen readers hunger for but that the adults in their lives want to pretend aren't real.

In this latest work from Rainfield, who has openly shared that her childhood of physical and sexual abuse is a strong motivation for what prompts her to write for young adults, teen Sarah Meadows has lived with taunting, staring, and bullying for a birth mark that covers half of her face. But when she is kidnapped one day on the way home from school, she has to look inside herself and find the courageous person who hides inside her, or risk further torture and death.

As with all of Rainfield's books, what drives the story isn't so much the very real circumstances that far too many teens today find themselves in, but the very real characters she creates on the page. All of us can identify with the main and supporting characters in her stories because she knows teenagers and their struggles like virtually no other writer today.

In an interesting aside, Rainfield's most recent title was basically sent back to the drawing board by book retailers who felt the original cover was too intense for their shelves. Stained has been redesigned, but still contains the same thrilling plot structures and real-life characters that have made Rainfield such a force in young adult literature.

Stained (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) will be available on October 1st from book retailers everywhere.

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### Roxanne Kade says

This is a very dark and harrowing story of one girl's strength and will to survive.

Sarah is a brave, sweet girl who is forced to face a cruel and unwelcoming world, day in and day out. She wants nothing more than to be normal; to be one of the Beautiful People, but the devastating turn her life takes will show her that behind the beauty can lie a monster.

My heart was in my throat for most of this story. I can only imagine how terrifying it must be, not knowing if you will live to see another day; if your captor will tire of you, and if he does how will your life end. Sarah's battle was only made that much worse by the fact that she was blind to the world throughout her ordeal. The horror she lived through at the hands of her abductor was heart-wrenching and it took all her willpower, as well as mine, to keep it together.

Where Sarah may have seemed desperate and on the brink on crumbling, she was actually being smart, knowing how and when to please her captor, knowing that if she angered him in anyway he'd punish her; but the truth is that everything he did to her was punishment, even if his sick, twisted mind thought otherwise. Sarah showed true courage and fierce determination. When she could have easily fallen, broken by the

torment she was put through, she rose above the darkness and fought for her life.

This book was one of hope, inspiration, and self-acceptance, as Sarah dug deeper than ever before, to find the beauty and courage in her soul. Her triumphs had me cheering, and I'm glad that even in the darkness she was able to find a little ray of light. One that taught her to love herself, and to hold close the people who truly mattered.

I recommend this story to everyone. It will make you think twice about whining about the small things in life, and you'll learn to appreciate everything you have. It is also a reminder that when you feel lost, broken or hopeless, don't give up, dig deep, because we all have a little Sarah in us, we just have to believe in ourselves, and believe that we're worth it.

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### **Brianna C says**

*4.5 out of 5 stars*

*received via Edelweiss and HMH Books For Young Readers in exchange for an honest review*

**"Behind me, I hear another burst of giggles. I know it's about me and Nick. Purple stain and doughboy. They don't care that he's kind, smart, and good natured, and sort of cute in a soft, chubby way, with messy, sandy hair that's always falling into his eyes and a quick smile. All they see is his weight and his social awkwardness, just like they only see my face and how alone I am."**

Wow. I've been feeling like I've been in a bit of a book slump lately and this definitely fixed it. Not to say I've been reading bad books, just the books I've read recently haven't completely grasped my attention. This did. I was hooked right away and I could definitely feel the suspense as I was reading. As the first book I've read by Cheryl Rainfield, I honestly cannot wait to read more of her work

**"Every day is another day missing from my life that I'll never get back. Every day is another day further away from my family, from the police, from anyone who might be able to find me. It's getting harder and harder to hope that someone will."**

Sarah has a port wine stain on her face. As a result she's used to getting strange looks and being bullied. As a result she tries to hide it and not stand out. Throughout most of the story she is ashamed of herself and dislikes her face. Despite this, she is fairly strong; especially when sticking up for another person being bullied. Even with standing up for others, she still feels ashamed that she lets her port wine stain bring her down. When she gets abducted, she finally starts to realize just how strong she can be. Being a girl, it's so easy to say "I know I shouldn't let it get to me" but in reality, it's going to-regardless. It was refreshing seeing a character overcome this and realize that she could be her own type of superhero.

**"I wish Sarah could see how beautiful she is. And I wish she could see me for who I am. Because I'm right here, loving her. But she never seems to notice."**

Nick. Nick is my favorite ever. He is so sweet and caring and important to this story. I didn't know this would be told in alternating POV's when I first picked it up. I'm happy it was though. It made it easier to see the change of time than just Sarah's. It also provided a way to show Brian in a different light than what Sarah sees. It was also nice seeing just how dedicated Nick is. Despite Sarah pushing him away, he stood by her

side and never abandoned her like some of her other friends did.

**I feel so dirty, like his smell is clinging to me still, sweat and cologne and sex. Like he's stained me deeper than my birthmark ever could. Stained my soul, stained everything that makes me who I am."**

The bad guy, Brian, is truly *bad*. He is a real piece of work. I find it very impressive that Cheryl Rainfield can write such a creepy, insane character. I do wish there was more about him, more about his past and reasons for why he does what he does. I feel like he could have been so much more scary if there was more about things he's done in the past. Regardless, there was still a lot of suspense that kept me intrigued.

Overall this was an awesome book. While some parts were a tad predictable, I could barely put it down. The only other thing that somewhat bothered me was how drawn out things were. If there was more about Brian then it wouldn't have been so obvious, but oh well. I would still strongly recommend this to anyone looking for something suspenseful, especially with Halloween right around the corner!

*\*Quotes taken from an uncorrected proof so they may not match the finished copy.\**

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This review and more on my blog Listful Booking.

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### **Laura says**

Where do I even begin with *Stained*? First, I'd like to say how I hands down loved this book. I read it in less than a day. The story was completely gripping and it plays on the emotions the way *Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. If you loved that book, you'll most likely love this one. I do have a few warnings for anyone thinking about picking up this book. While I applaud Rainfield's use of showing Sarah overcoming her victim mentality to save herself and the ones she loves, I caution readers because of the content she chooses to share about Sarah's abduction. I do believe all of these were important to her story but when I think about my nieces and if I'd want them reading something this traumatic. Even when I was in high school, I think this book would have been hard for me to read because of its content.

Full Review Here: <http://www.literarylunespublications....>

And Here: <http://ashleylaurasmith.wordpress.com...>

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### **Reeda Booke says**

An emotional YA novel dealing with the abduction of a 13 year old girl, Sarah, who gets bullied at school because of a port wine stain on her face and how her ordeal makes her accept herself for who she is. The author deals well with the pain the girl feels because of her birth defect and the strength she finds within herself despite her confinement. I also fell in love with Nick, the "nerd" who secretly loves Sarah, and his tenacity for not wanting to give up on her. Recommended.

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## Cheryl says

Perhaps I am stronger than I think. - Thomas Merton

"Stained" is an excellent book, telling the painful story of Sarah Meadows. Sarah is 17 years old and has grown up with a large port wine birthmark on her face. She's had to call on her inner strength to put up with the rude comments, stares, and bullies all her life. But now she's been kidnapped and really must call on that strength to make it through this horrendous experience alive and sane.

The story is told in the alternating first person voices of Sarah and of Nick, a friend who wants to be more than a friend and doesn't give up the search for the missing Sarah. These alternating voices work well so that the reader finds out Sarah's feelings during her imprisonment and abuse. With Nick telling his side, the reader finds out what is going on on the home front with Sarah's parents, friends and of course, Nick.

Fast paced with super character development, I found myself rushing through to find out the ending.

Slight spoiler warning:

My only negative is the age group this book is targeted to. The imprint is "Harcourt Children's Books" and the Advanced Reading Copy I have says the targeted audience is 14 years old and up. Just be **WARNED**: This book not only contains some rough language, more troubling is the sexual abuse including repeated rapes that are a major part of this book. Also, child abduction, emotional and physical abuse and a serial killer fill the pages of this story. This book has intense, emotional, heart wrenching scenes in it. Just make sure you or your child are prepared.

NOTE: I received a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

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## Tez says

*TRIGGER WARNINGS: Bullying, abduction, rape, murder.*

Unpopular opinion time!

There seems to be an unspoken rule that if something has a positive message, you can't disagree with how it's presented. Actually, that rule is spoken after someone dares to criticise the message's vehicle.

**There's a lot of messages I like, but dislike how they're presented.** Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" song may be upbeat and positive, but Madonna's "Express Yourself" is way better. (*They're two different songs, Tezzy; you can't compare them!* Listen to the music, and tell me they don't sound similar. Don't lie.) It's not even the best song on the *Born This Way* album. ("Government Hooker" is, followed by "Scheiße".)

And if you dare say you don't like the TV show *Glee*, people call you anti-gay, anti-arts, and a hater. I stopped watching after the first season when it stopped pretending to have a plot (teen pregnancy). It instead became just karaoke, with storylines written around the songs, instead of writing the stories first and then finding appropriate music.

And now there's Stained. Sarah Meadows judges people as much as they judge her, but the difference is she

doesn't vocalise her opinions. She thinks of her best friend as "plump", and doesn't want to hook up with Nick because she doesn't deem him good-looking enough. And if she thinks of her friends like this, she does worse of others.

*"You know you can trust me."* As soon as someone says that, you know they can't be trusted. We can tell from the book's message that Sarah will survive, and we know who does it from the quote, so there's no mystery or suspense. Thus the interest factor goes down.

Nick is so freaking rude towards the police, keeps accusing them of not doing their jobs, and not trying hard enough to find Sarah... UP YOURS, NICK! You have no idea what police go through, how many different cases they have, and how they are all top-priority cases. NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT YOU! Have some respect.

*"Doesn't seem right, bad things happening to good people, does it? If it had to happen to anyone, it shoulda been one of those mean bitches, like Madison."* What the hell does that mean? Do some people, more than others, deserve to be abducted, raped, and maybe murdered? I've heard victims of crime say they wouldn't wish what happened to them upon their worst enemy. But this book totally does!

### **I AM NOT AMUSED.**

So in this story, all good-looking people are evil and all not-so-good-looking people are good? It's a subversion of the classic fairy tale trope, but it's still "us versus them" mentality. Prejudicial, too.

The novel's heavy-handed message is to be your own hero, to save yourself. But it's repeated so many times that I fear the hidden meaning: That if you can't free yourself from literal imprisonment, that if you can't dissociate during rape, that if you can't prevent yourself from being murdered...YOU SIMPLY AREN'T TRYING HARD ENOUGH?!

I'm so offended I can't even respond to that.

So yes, a supposedly positive message with a poor delivery. Subtlety is a writer's best tool: Allow readers to come to their own conclusion rather than shoving it down their throats. They'll appreciate it more, and it won't leave such a bad taste.

This is such a disappointment in comparison to the author's other work. Cheryl Rainfield's *début*, Scars, is brilliant, and I highly recommend it. It's not just "an issues novel" - it's also a mystery, and that "whodunnit" aspect makes Scars a prime choice for binge-reading.

But **Stained... I agree with your message, but I disagree with how you present it.** Morals are supposed to be something that the lead character, and readers, learn at the very end of the novel. NOT hammered at them all the way through it. **Even if I like what you have to say (and I do), I DON'T LIKE WHEN PEOPLE PREACH AT ME.** Themes are supposed to be subtle, a discussion starter so readers can decide for ourselves what we think a book means.

What a let-down, for such a fabulous premise. This should've been a tense psychological thriller. But it isn't.

P.S. I know the author didn't intend to offend. And if the novel was more subtle, I wouldn't have even thought about hidden meanings. But writing and story-crafting are very difficult to master.

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## **Kaitlin says**

Actual Rating: 4.5 Stars

Source: I received an e-arc of this book through Edelweiss in return for an honest review. Thank you to HMH Books for Young Readers for letting me read it!

(For this review, I decided to divide the things that stood out to me and put them under headlines describing the topic.)

This book was . . . incredible. Scary. Inspiring. It wasn't light, fluffy, or easy to read. It was packed with powerful messages of strength and inner beauty. It's a story worth every second of your time.

### **GREAT HERO**

I loved how Nick was just an average guy. I loved how Cheryl Rainfield made him overweight and unpopular because not a lot of authors do that. He didn't look like the typical "hero," but this book shows that any guy—regardless of whether he is overweight or muscular, a good drawer or a good athlete—can become a hero because it's the inside that counts, the compassion, loyalty, and the heart that he possesses.

### **SCARY READ**

Give me ghosts. Give me bloodthirsty vampires. Give me whatever other scary thing in a book, and more times than not, I won't say it's scary. Those things aren't real. Now, this book—this is the scary type. The things in this book are possible. They have happened. People get abducted, killed, raped, abused all the time. It's a very real topic, and although this book isn't a traditionally scary book, it contains much, much scarier things in it than fictional ghosts and paranormal creatures.

### **GREAT FOCUS ON STRENGTH**

One of the biggest points of this story is strength—the strength to keep living, to keep pushing, to keep thinking positive in adversity. Sarah definitely pushed through. She never truly let anyone get to her and she was always able to stand up and do what was right. She was always strong, even though she didn't use to think of herself that way. She was always beautiful, regardless of her port-wine stain. She's definitely an inspirational character and I think many people would love her resilience. It was one of the greatest things about the book.

### **OVERALL**

It reminded me of the thrillers or crime dramas I've seen on tv, especially towards the end. *Stained* was a really quick read that had my eyes burning with threatening tears for at least quarter of the book. It was definitely worth the read, and I highly recommend it to anyone who can handle books focused on and containing abuse.

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## **Claudia says**

I read this in July as an advance reading copy and couldn't review...NOW I can! Woohoo.

Cheryl Rainfield is one of the bravest people I know. She has faced some of the most harrowing events anyone could...as a defenseless child. She creates characters who find themselves in similar kinds of peril, and she uses her own horrors to bring reality to her books.

Stained...that's how Sarah feels. The port-wine stain that covers part of her face deeply affects the way she is seen by others and how she sees herself. She can be fierce in defense of others, but so very vulnerable when it comes to self defense. She knows she's being judged by her peers, but she can't help but do her own share of judging...Nick, who has such a crush on her but is nerdy and overweight, Charlene, who's desperate to be accepted.

All Sarah's hopes for a 'normal' life shatter in the first pages. Her dream of flawless skin explodes as she learns her father's business has been destroyed and the family has nothing...nothing but each other. Like so many other teens, that's JUST NOT ENOUGH. Her resentment blocks out her parents' words and she becomes even more bitter.

Then, she's abducted, held prisoner, starved, raped, attacked, tortured mentally and emotionally. Through it all, she learns how very strong she really is.

Nick narrates his own chapters as he bonds with Sarah's parents, fiercely pursuing leads, harassing the police for results. We see Nick grow too, gaining confidence and a faith in his own gifts.

Sarah never gives up, even after it's apparent her abductor plans to kill her.

I LOVE the line from the front of the book. It reflects Cheryl and it reflects Sarah: "Sometimes you have to be your own hero."

Cheryl saved herself those years ago, so she could create Sarah...who saved herself. As hard as her books are to read sometimes, as hard as it is to admit the reality in these books IS reality for some children, Cheryl uses all her courage to put these difficult stories out there, so kids who need this message will find their own courage: sometimes you have to be your own hero. Isn't that a message we want all young people to internalize?

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## **M J says**

<http://nogginquest.wordpress.com/2013...>

July 5th I tweeted, "Best welcome home greeting. ARC copy of Stained by @CherylRainfield I'm jumping up & down with joy. Putting all others away #summerreading", and I read with barely a pause. As I finished the book I did so holding my breath. There was no way I was going to be able to write a review.

The protagonist, Sarah Meadows, felt too personal. She felt too real, and honestly that scared me a little. So I sat on my copy of Stained and waited for the rawness of Sarah's experience to evaporate. I wanted to write an objective review. Unfortunately the struggles, fears, and eventual victory I felt along with Sarah as she

grew from an obsessively self-conscious teen to a confident young lady would not abate.

In *Stained* author Cheryl Rainfield uses a port-wine stain covering half of the face of a teenager to represent the feelings of inadequacy many of us experience. Not every person with what society considers a blemish hates that which was given at birth, but many people suffer from the perception of blemishes that only matter within their own mind's eye. Rainfield captures the feelings of the latter type perfectly.

Plus in true Rainfield style she validates the abused and gives them a flawed survivor in Sarah Meadows. She shows us that even if you're scared, or imperfect, or ready to give up you can still be your own hero. That validation of being a survivor and honoring all your flaws proved to be the scary aspect of the story to review.

Don't get me wrong, I'm thankful for every book Rainfield writes because she knows the heart of a survivor. Her stories provide the bibliotherapeutic opportunities that many authors cannot produce and many readers desperately need. However, this honest voice of courage through adversity can be frightening because it forces survivors and those fortunate enough not to have faced a similar situation to examine themselves. Am I strong enough to overcome abuse, bullying, self-hate, trust issues, etc? In *Sarah Meadows* we learn yes we can be that strong. We can be our own hero.

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### **Debbie Narh says**

I feel bad about review this book because of my mixed feelings towards it. The message it's trying to get across gets there, loud and clear. Yet, there are so many things that I just couldn't overlook since this is a novel telling a story that might be fictional, happens to people all over the world. Before getting to the things that disappointed me, I want to say that Cheryl Rainfield did make me uncomfortable and she did make me remember that my life could be worse no matter the situation that I'm in. I think that *Stained* will remind readers of how lucky they are and how to always, always, always trust their gut, no matter what.

*Stained* is a tough book to get into and didn't take much to lose my attention since it is so very stiff and bland. Especially the characters, although I admired Sarah's courage and determination, I still couldn't connect with her and feel the emotions that Rainfield was trying to get me to. Nick, like Sarah, feels extremely contrived and odd because all I got from him is that he loves Sarah, like, a lot and he's willing to do anything for her. That's about it. He's only there as an accessory to Sarah rather than an actual friend who helps her get through a harsh time.

But, I did find the writing style to be okay for the most part. It flows nicely even if it doesn't give off an intense feeling. Like I mentioned before, Sarah's determination and courage changed her and for the better. I love the main message this novel gives off (Inner beauty is much more important than outer) as well as the smaller, albeit just as important, messages of how cruel some people can be about certain things.

Overall, this is a novel that I think should be read for the message rather than the story. Without enjoying it much, I was left disappointed and a bit confused at how quickly it moved at the end. The ending isn't as realistic as I wished it to be nor did it have me at the edge of my seat and thrusting my fist in the air. However, I still recommend this book to everyone because it's a great reminder as to how easy it is for a person to disappear by someone they know and may even trust.

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## **Brandi Kosiner (Brandi Breathes Books) says**

It had a very powerful start, putting us in Sarah's shoes, showing how it feels to have such a prominent stain on her face. She is tormented and she feels like no one gives her the chance to see who she is besides someone that is not physically perfect.

I liked the dual perspective and getting to know Nick. He is nerdy and he is kind so I automatically was cheering for him even though he knew that she didn't see him like that. He saw past her face, and found her beautiful anyways. He thinks she is strong and they have a connection through comic books, he draws and she writes them.

There is a lot going on with Sarah, her dad has trouble at work and while she was going to get treatments for her face, that had to be put off because of the finances. I did like her mom, and I know as a teen that had to be annoying to be constantly told your parents think you are beautiful and that it is more than physical beauty to the world. But I am glad that she is present and saying these things.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the formatting. I am not sure, it is probably a product of being an ARC (advanced reader copy) but there were "I"s missing, and some of the lines were cut off.

But anyways, Cheryl Rainfield the author writes with such passion and so beautifully dark and gritty. The details of what Sarah went through weren't skimmed over, they were examined and it focused on her feelings too. I was amazed at how strong she was, how courageous and the will to survive. I also thought this story was all the more powerful because Cheryl writes from personal experience in abuse. That really touched me that she can relate with her main characters that way, that the feelings and emotions come from a very real place. And that she is able to share the stories, no matter what details are fiction and what comes from what she has experienced is a real gift. Not only to survivors of abuse or captivity that there is hope and that outlets exist for pain, but to those who haven't been through something like this to get a harrowing and realistic look at the mindset and experience of someone kidnapped, raped, and manipulated.

I also rooted for Sarah so much because she was smart. Even though desperate, she used her brain and did what she needed to in order to survive for the most part. She learned from her mistakes and her pride, and she was a mental fighter.

I love how she became her own hero and learned to see the beauty inside and out.

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Bottom Line: Powerful look of a courageous main character with a will to live.

## **Katy says**

**Book Info:** Genre:

Reading Level: Young Adult

Recommended for: Those who need to learn to be their own hero

Book Available: October 1, 2013 in Hardcover, Kindle, and Audiobook formats

Trigger Warnings: bullying, kidnapping, sexual assault, rape, attempted murder, reported murder

**My Thoughts:** "Sometimes you have to be your own hero." That is the lesson Cheryl Rainfield has said she tries to show in all her books. I'll admit to being a Cheryl Rainfield fan—I have liked all of her books I've read to date, and was very excited to find this one among my Vine offerings this month. I was also incredibly happy to note that my ARC has the original cover, the one deemed "too harsh" by some retailers, leading to a new cover being designed. That's fine, but I liked this original one, which really brings home the situation in which Sarah finds herself.

This is an incredibly difficult book to read, on multiple levels. First of all, the content is difficult, especially for anyone who has experienced any of the traumatic events reported in the book. Also, most of this book is thinking about things, talking about things, discussing things, and the internal dialogues of Sarah and Nick. There is not a lot of action, because the book is about the drastic changes that Sarah goes through as a result of her experiences. So people who prefer a more plot-driven book may have difficulties going through this. I, however, read the book straight through. There does tend to be some repetition, but that's to be expected in this sort of book.

Most of Cheryl Rainfield's books have at least one or two characters who are part of the QUILTBAG, which is also true in this book. None of them are main characters, but they are there, living their lives, and loving whom they please. I love this about her books. This one is also about learning to live for yourself, accept yourself for who you are, and not to spend so much time worrying about the opinions of people that have no control over your life, and I think that is a lesson well learned by younger readers.

Sensitive readers should take note of my trigger warnings, and be braced. While not necessarily as explicit as other books I've read, the events are nonetheless raw and difficult to read. However, it's a very moving book, and one I think a lot of people should take the time to read and think about. And definitely check out Cheryl Rainfield's other books as well, as she has some really great stories to tell. Recommended.

**Disclosure:** I received a paperback ARC from the Amazon Vine program in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own.

**Synopsis:** In this heart-wrenching and suspenseful teen thriller, sixteen-year-old Sarah Meadows longs for "normal." Born with a port-wine stain covering half her face, all her life she's been plagued by stares, giggles, bullying, and disgust. But when she's abducted on the way home from school, Sarah is forced to uncover the courage she never knew she had, become a hero rather than a victim, and learn to look beyond her face to find the beauty and strength she has inside. It's that—or succumb to a killer.

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### Suzanne says

The bullied are often chosen by their tormentors for something that marks them as different from the herd. Something screams prey to those who make themselves predators of their own species, and in Sarah's case it is a facial port-wine stain. Everyone, save three others who see their own share of mistreatment—two of them fat, one boy and one girl, and the other a lesbian—treats Sarah horribly. The very day that she was scheduled to do treatments to lighten her stain and a financial disaster befalls her father's business preventing what she hoped would be salvation, she is snatched from the clutches of bullies into a far worse fate: a friend of the family kidnaps her, blindfolds her, and rapes her. With only peanut butter, bananas, and water in limited amounts left with a pair of buckets and no way to really see where she is and how she might escape, Sarah spends day after day dreading the man's return trips filled with verbal abuse and rape.

Meanwhile, her parents and the sweet fat kid Nick, who always wanted to get something more going with Sarah than just their mutual love of comics and interest in writing and drawing their own, will absolutely not give up looking for her, even when weeks turn into months. Ultimately, it is Sarah who becomes her own savior in a hard fought battle against an almost caricatured villain with a horrifying past in taking girls and keeping them as long as possible before "freeing" them from the pain of their mundane lives. Neither Sarah nor Nick ever really become more than constructions of ink and paper for me. She not only suffers at the hands of others because they define and revile her for her facial disfigurement, but she seems to limit herself

to her stain for the most part, too. I suppose her ordeal helps to unseat her preconceptions, but the book was more about message and less about captivating storytelling. I do see many, many positive reviews; and on the basis of awareness of bullying and the power of the will to survive, my remarks could be more glowing. As it is, I think it best to recommend to reluctant readers who don't demand too much from their fiction, those who are looking for treatment of an issue and some sensationalism.

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## **G. MA says**

Cheryl Rainfield is an amazing human being. I love her to pieces. I have read SCARS, HUNTED, PARALLEL VISIONS, and now STAINED. All four books are incredibly well written, true-to-life and realistic teen fiction. But there's an air of realism that cuts through the pages, reaches out from the book as you hold it, and grips you like no other YA books I've read. Hands down, I am in awe of Cheryl's remarkable writing, and accessibility. And with STAINED, Cheryl has raised the bar once again.

I met Cheryl online and consider her a friend. But I can separate my friendship from my abilities to read and review a novel. I have felt so welcomed by Cheryl over the years, no matter when or how I check in with her. She always replies in a friendly and compassionate manner, and emotes smiles and hugs and feelings through social media with a tenacity most writers would not be able to keep up with. Not only is this accessibility true to connecting with Cheryl online, but it is equally true in the pages of her novels. STAINED grabbed me on page one and didn't let me go until the very last page. I was frustrated I couldn't carve out enough real life time to read cover to cover all at one sitting, as I had hoped to do. I struggled to put it down at times until I could pick it up again and read at a harrowing, high-stakes pace through chapter after chapter, and page after page.

Sarah and Nick are written in first person POV, in semi-alternating chapters. I say this as a caveat. Some books written in alternating chapters religiously alternate with odd and even chapter numbers. Cheryl alternates as the story unfolds, or as needed, to give the reader the most "there" persona to put you in the center of every moment as it happens. I found this to be very realistic in reading the book and it kept me wanting to know what happens next. Since this is a thriller of a novel, there's also a day or time stamp at the top to aid the reader in knowing how much time has elapsed since the last chapter. Rainfield uses this masterfully, keeping the reader on the edge of a knife blade.

While Nick and Sarah both become central to the story, I feel Sarah is truly the MC. Sarah's port wine stain on her cheek becomes the subject of her obsession with her own outward appearance, and also emboldens others to bully her. Sarah spends her time flipping through beauty magazines, and searching for her own beauty hidden behind her hair and her large facial blemish. But not everyone sees her this way. In fact, Nick sees beyond the surface and notices how Sarah protects others who are bullied, creates her comic book character, Diamond, who later becomes a persona she inhabits in real life, and the way she must decide to rescue herself from her captor.

Cheryl takes on the issues of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), kidnapping, bullying, rape, torture, brainwashing, and predators and how they groom their victims, in this novel. It's not easy to stomach many of the scenes, since they are written as unflinchingly as Sarah, who bravely resists everything her captor throws at her. It did not surprise me to learn that the captor was someone known, as is often the case in abuse and rape. With STAINED, Cheryl has become her strongest yet, in fleshing out characters who fight hard to overcome their attackers, and even humanizing her villain.

More books like this need to be written. This issues of CSA and rape are among the most avoided in our country. Most who have dealt with it, or know someone who has, prefer to sweep such topics and discussions under the carpet of conversation. This is wrong, and empowers predators to thrive in the dark shadows they inhabit, taking advantage of the downtrodden, the bullied, the social outcasts. One in six boys and one in four girls is sexually assaulted before they turn 18. These statistics are not only horrifying, but they're getting worse. Current data proves these numbers are moving in the wrong direction (one in five for boys, one in three for girls), and leaves 40 million survivors in the U.S. alone.

I applaud Cheryl Rainfield for standing up for these victims, these survivors, and their loved ones who need books like this one to identify themselves and to empower victims to become survivors and overcomers like Sarah. Not all families have the skills necessary to equip potential victims and help them avoid becoming abused. I believe STAINED could be effectively used as a therapeutic tool to help assault victims face and deal with their trauma history.

Apart from the issues addressed in STAINED, it is an amazing, fast-paced read. Gripping all the way to the last page. Wow! Highly recommended!!

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