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# A Door Near Here



## **Synopsis**

Without even noticing, 15-year-old Katherine has become the head of her household. She hasn't had time to notice. Her single mother, an out-of-work alcoholic, has been in bed for weeks, leaving Katherine and her three younger siblings to band together and fend for themselves. But it has gotten harder and harder to maintain any sort of stability. There's no time for housework, food and money are running out, and the kids' teachers are starting to get suspicious. Worst of all, Katherine's youngest sister, Alisa, seems to be losing her grip on reality; she is obsessed with finding a door to the imaginary land of Narnia. And the longer they all struggle to maintain their pretense of normality, the more they have to fear--and to lose.

## **Book Information**

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

Teens are always fascinated by the idea of running life on their own, free of parental interference. But what happens when reality sets in--when the laundry piles up, the sink overflows, you run out of money for food, and your little sister starts getting very sick? In *A Door Near Here*, winner of the annual Delacorte Prize for Best First Young Adult Novel, Heather Quarles shows readers that "no parents" is no fun. The mother of the four Donovan kids has taken to her bed and bottle, only stumbling out of her pigsty of a room occasionally in search of more vodka. Katherine, the eldest at 15, tries to keep her brother and sisters clean and fed and in classes, but things are slipping out of

her control--especially when 8-year-old Alisa decides to run away from school in search of the kingdom of Narnia. Katharine can't turn to their cold and selfish father for help, so the four siblings cling to their secrets--terrified that an adult, seeing beneath the appearances they are desperately trying to uphold, will alert Social Services. When a kindly teacher begins to ask questions, Katharine panics and lashes out with an accusation that could well destroy this concerned man--only to be met with an act of breathtaking forgiveness. Both teens and adults will find the poignant resolution of this compelling novel utterly engrossing. (Ages 12 and older) --Patty Campbell --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

PW's starred review said, "A candid narrative voice joins with skillful pacing" for this story of 15-year-old Katherine, who tries to conceal her alcoholic mother's incapacity from authorities to prevent the family from being split up. Ages 12-up. (Jan.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is an excellent book. It is meant for teenagers but can really be appreciated by adults of any age. It is particularly recommended for fans of the Narnia series. The emotions that the children feel as they struggle with the difficulties in their lives are perfectly described, and there are no purely good or bad characters. Just people doing the best they can. I can't recommend it highly enough.

**A Door Near Here** By Heather Quarles

Four kids live with their single mother near Washington, DC. When their mother loses her job, she succumbs to depression and alcoholism, and stays in her bed, living on alcohol for weeks. Fifteen-year-old Katherine tries to keep the family together, even when a nosy teacher is asking too many questions and their scant food supply and money are running out. The three older children agree not to tell anyone about the problems with their mother. Katherine is very worried about her younger sister, Alisa, and her imaginary world, where she searches for the door to Narnia. But at the same time, Katherine is lying to herself and others about her mother's condition. This is a tale of family secrets and family unity which shows what it could really be like inside the home of an alcoholic family. Kids are often forced to grow up before their time and handle tough decisions and obligations which should be the responsibility of their parents. I recommend *A Door Near Here* to teens, families of alcoholics, and educators. It can show teens that they are not alone, and that they really have a right to, 'just be kids'. Jill Vanderwood co-author: *Drugs Make You Un-Smarter*

Very good story for middle school boys and girls.

I read the 2000 release book *A Door Near Here* not long after my parents split up, which may have some slight impact on why it means so much to me. A truly compelling story, that has unfortunately been viewed in real life by many children. Fifteen-year-old Katherine is the oldest of four children. She is also "mother and father" to those three younger than her. With an absent father, who doesn't really care anyway, and a mother who is unable to drag herself out of her vodka bottle, let alone her bed, Katherine thinks it'll be a cinch to pick-up where her mother left off. All too quickly the fun and games of getting to do whatever they want takes a toll on the food supply and budget. Hiding the truth from everyone so that the family will remain together, also begins to wear on the children's shoulders. So much so that the youngest of them, Alisa, runs away from school in search of a better life for the whole family in Narnia. When a kindly teacher reaches out a helping hand, Katherine lashes out due to strain and puts everything she and the kids worked so hard for in serious jeopardy. Wow. Katherine was the strong, independent, stubborn girl that I looked up to when I was a child. I felt like she really knew what she wanted and what was best and would stop at nothing to ensure that everything was done to the best possible standard. She fascinated me. Her youngest sister, Alisa, embodied the childlike thought that one can simply slip into a fantasy world and make the real world disappear. Nothing too awful ever goes wrong in those worlds and if it does, the hero/heroine comes along to save the day. It only makes sense that that should also happen in real life. The tone of voice and plotline were so realistic I felt like I was listening to a friend recount a nightmare. It was so raw and accessible that I truly believe that any child, from youth to teen, can appreciate some aspect of this book. Even adults could discuss how each child exuded certain personality traits that helped and hurt the family's chance for survival. While obviously not the happiest read ever, the stark reality and frankness was refreshing. Everyone can learn something from this book and I think it ranks on my top list of books that everyone should at least glance at during some point in their lifetime. I reminds me of the 1991 movie "Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead" and the Cynthia Voigt book *Homecoming*. If this book sounds appealing to you, be sure to check out these other items as well.

Here is a story of what we would all like to hope is what every teenager's life is NOT like. Let us pray that teenagers (smoking ones, by the by) will not be forced to take control of their households due to neglect. In this frighteningly touching and emotional book, that's exactly what happens. You'll have read the story-line already. Katherine is forced to take over her family when her mother...

doesn't. Actually, that's not quite true. Several times in the book, Katherine has the inner argument regarding what to do in such a situation. In what is a very teenage-like frame of mind, she decides not to call social services. While some may find this pig-headedly stupid, it's not. It's simply a teen looking at things in the worst possible way. Katherine fears that if she told someone, social services would split her family up. There are two parts to this story. The first is the realistic, real-world one. The family is running out of money. Three teens and an elementary school kid are trying to live their lives as though nothing has changed, but with money, food, and resources running out (the book opens with bad plumbing, and has a part with no electricity), things are becoming considerably tougher to handle. Here you see the ties of family (which bind both way, when it comes to the mom) in their best and worst ways. The other aspect of this story is the fantastical one. Alisa, the youngest member of the family (and the only one born to a different, unknown father), is becoming obsessed with C.S. Lewis' land of Narnia and wants to go there. She believes this is the answer to her problems and to her family's problems. Regarding her mother's physical and mental state, the eight-year old writes in a letter that she wants Aslan (Narnia's king) to help her. Alisa's story is chilling and sad, because through Katherine's eyes we see how she seems to be falling apart. Katherine is of course concerned, and ultimately, Alisa's obsession leads to the climax, one that will leave you with tears in your eyes. While the religious aspect is one people love to bring up (same for the Narnia series, which is sort of the origin here), I found that it was neither too obvious nor too heavy. It was not insulting to either religious or non-religious people. This book is simply a piece of fiction. Let us remember that, though there is much with the religion teacher in the book. "A Door Near Here" is a great book. It's that simple. It's well-written, has the perfect amount of feeling and emotion, and is interesting. There's an air of mystery to it, but mostly the reader is just sucked in and can't stop reading. The characters are so vivid and real, it's almost like you know them. From the first line, you're hooked. Highly recommended to all teenagers. It's a wonderful book.

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