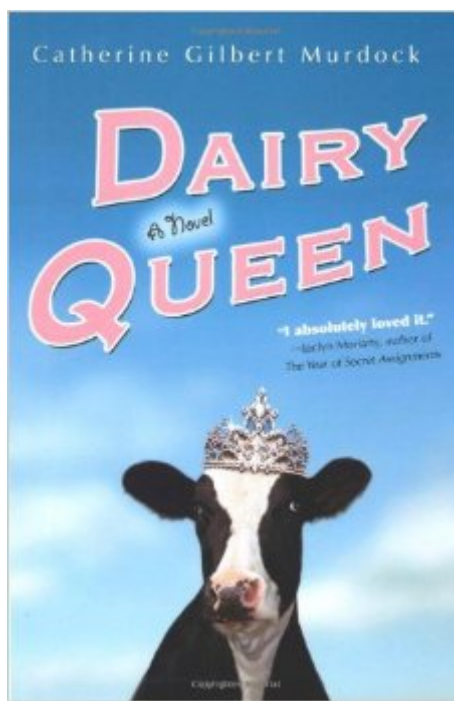


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Dairy Queen



Synopsis

When you don't talk, there's a lot of stuff that ends up not getting said. Harsh words indeed, from Brian Nelson of all people. But, D. J. can't help admitting, maybe he's right. When you don't talk, there's a lot of stuff that ends up not getting said. Stuff like why her best friend, Amber, isn't so friendly anymore. Or why her little brother, Curtis, never opens his mouth. Why her mom has two jobs and a big secret. Why her college-football-star brothers won't even call home. Why her dad would go ballistic if she tried out for the high school football team herself. And why Brian is so, so out of her league. When you don't talk, there's a lot of stuff that ends up not getting said. Welcome to the summer that fifteen-year-old D. J. Schwenk of Red Bend, Wisconsin, learns to talk, and ends up having an awful lot of stuff to say.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

D.J. Schwenk is the third child, and only daughter, of a small-town Wisconsin dairy farmer. The summer she turns sixteen finds her shouldering much of the load of the farm, because her two older brothers are off at football camp, and her father has an injured hip. She doesn't complain much, and struggles to meet the expectations of her demanding father, but inside, she's not happy. She's doing poorly in school, because of the farm work, and had to quit the basketball team, where she was a star. She has a best friend, Amber, but things aren't perfect between them either. And she worries about her younger brother, Curtis, who hardly ever talks. A family friend, the football coach of the rival high school, sends one of his star players to help out on the Schwenk's farm. Brian Nelson has

a great arm, but has been spoiled by his father, and doesn't have much discipline or team spirit. Before she quite knows what's happening, D.J. agrees to train Brian, to help him get ready for the fall season. They have to keep this a secret, because the towns are such strong rivals, and Brian ends up helping out on the farm quite a bit as camouflage for what they're really doing. After a prickly start, Brian and D.J. learn to talk to one another openly, and both grow as a result. The story is told in D.J.'s first-person voice, which is necessary, because she's so quiet that we could never get to know her in third person. But inside her head, D.J. has a lot to say, and a thoughtful, sometimes sarcastic, voice. Here are a few examples: "If there ever was a TV show called People Who Are Crazy and Need to Have Their Heads Examined, I'd be the very first guest. They'd put me on one of those couches and a guy with a beard and funny accent would ask me questions, and the audience would ooh and aah as they realized this girl was crazy. What else would explain what I had just done?" (Chapter 8) "I kept eating, my head down. Mom kept talking, but I didn't say anything else because that's what we Schwenk's do. If there's a problem or something, instead of solving it or anything, we just stop talking. Just like cows." (Chapter 9) "Amber was pretty good at making fun of people, but Brian -- well, he did make fun of other people, like me not being able to talk or his mom and sunblock, but it wasn't mean. It was just fun. If I had to make a list of the very best qualities someone could have, that would be right at the top. Being nice-fun instead of mean-fun." (Chapter 12) D.J. does think a lot about football, and about cows, but for the most part she uses them as metaphors to think about larger questions. For instance, she draws analogies between people's rote actions and the day to day existence of cows, wanting to not be like a cow (someone who doesn't make choices) herself. She made me think about my own life, and times when I go through the motion on a day-to-day basis vs. displaying initiative. Dairy Queen is a romance, in a sense, as we explore the growing friendship between the awkward farm girl and the spoiled quarterback. But that aspect of it never comes close to dominating the real story, which is about the coming of age of a girl in difficult circumstances, trying to find her own voice. I identified with D.J., despite our very different backgrounds and interests. More importantly, I cared about her, and wanted her to be ok. When I finished the book, all I could think about was getting on to the sequel, so I could spend more time with her. I loved Dairy Queen, and I highly recommend it for upper middle school and high school readers. It's quite clean, except for some references to underage drinking. While I think that boys could enjoy it, given all of the football and training references, the female protagonist might keep them away. But I hope that the football aspects of the story won't keep non-athletic girls away. Because once you give her a chance, D.J. has a lot to offer. This book review was originally published on my blog, Jen Robinson's Book Page, on June 3, 2007.

Refreshing and wholesome, Catherine Gilbert Murdock's DAIRY QUEEN stands like a tall glass of cold milk in a crowded YA soda cooler. Examples that set it apart: the setting is Wisconsin; the protagonist (D.J. Schwenk) is a 15-year-old tomboy who wants to play on the boys' football team; and D.J. falls in love with the quarterback of her hometown's archrival (of all people). The first-person point of view provides an intimate, even folksy bit of country charm. Murdock keeps it clean, too, choosing to make this much more than a farm girl-meets-privileged boy tale by highlighting the strange family dynamics of the Schwenks. Like many of us, this family has its secrets. For example, sons Bill and Win, who have left the nest (OK, farm), are not talking to the dad; the youngest boy, Curtis, is not much talking to ANYone; and nobody seems to know how to talk the words "I'm sorry" to each other. D.J.'s curmudgeonly dad can no longer run the dairy due to physical limitations and her mom is subbing as the principal at a local school. That leaves D.J. and Curtis to milk the cows and run the farm. When archrival Hawley's coach (a good friend of D.J.'s dad) sends quarterback Brian Nelson to the farm to work, D.J. falls udderly in love and takes on the improbable (and some readers might complain, unbelievable) role of Brian's personal trainer. The Brian-D.J. relationship takes front seat, but D.J.'s place in her family is equally compelling. Then there's her best friend Amber. More secrets. (And you thought life was all cheeseheads and sausages in Wisconsin. Who knew?) Reluctant readers will probably balk at reading this book (or perhaps only "skim" it, if you'll pardon some dairy bad word play), but readers with an appreciation for characterization and not just plot should enjoy it. And while it is more a girl's book, DAIRY QUEEN has just enough football to intrigue, perhaps, a guy who likes to read as well. Or maybe not. Four stars for novelty and psychological drama. And pass the cookies.

Dairy Queen by Catherine Murdock tells the story of a girl named D.J. who has to pick up the slack on her family's farm when her father's hip injury prevent him from doing the bulk of the work. Her two older brothers, now away at college, were big hometown football stars. She helped them train for football while she trained for track and basketball. During the summer, she has to help train Brian, the quarterback for the rival high school's football team, as a favor to the coach, a longtime friend of her father's. D.J. does so reluctantly at first, only to strike up a friendship with him -- and realize how much she herself enjoys the game. So much so that she decides to go out for the team when the school year starts back up again. Though this book has been strongly received by sports fans, please note that there's more to this story than just football. It is also about family. It is about growing up on a farm, about growing up in a small town, and simply about growing up. Though

D.J.'s family members don't talk or emote very much, they are everpresent: the farm and her father are always on her mind, and she misses her brothers in fits and starts. D.J. is also going through a rough patch with her long-time best friend, Amber, and almost doesn't believe it herself when the two girls argue and drift apart. She's got a lot on her plate, and if she doesn't balance it correctly, she may have to drop something and disappoint her family and herself. Catherine Murdock's debut novel won over readers. It was followed up a sequel entitled The Off-Season. D.J.'s fans should also check out the corny-but-cute made-for-television movie Quarterback Princess starring Helen Hunt.

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