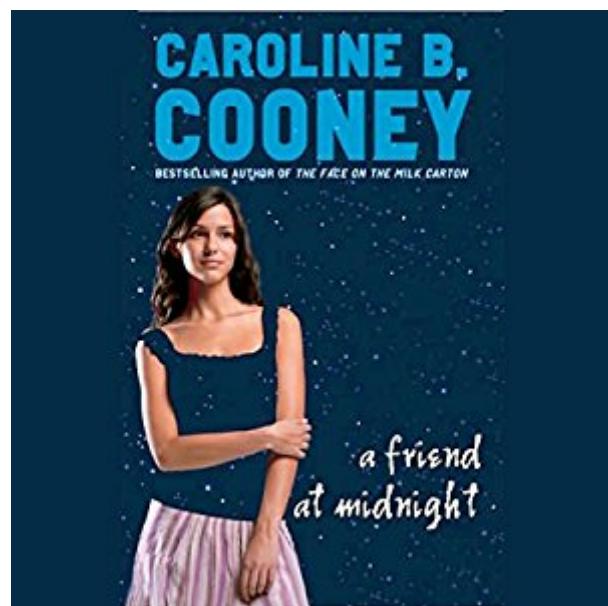


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A Friend At Midnight



Synopsis

Lily has settled into life in Connecticut after her parent's divorce but it's been harder on her eight-year-old brother Michael. After their mother remarries, her brother chooses to go live with his father in Washington, D.C., until the day he calls home from the Baltimore-Washington Airport where his father has abandoned him. Lily is home babysitting her baby stepbrother when she answers the phone. She has no idea the extent to which her faith in God will be tested. There is no choice for Lily. She will rescue Michael, but will she be able to rescue herself from the bitterness and anger she feels?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Caroline Cooney diversifies her writing portfolio with an inspirational fiction novel for teens. I am unaware of any former ventures on the part of Cooney in writing this type of fiction. If any of my readers know of any such works, please leave them in the comments. When the novel begins, eight-year old Michael is being told to get out of a car by an unidentified voice. He is being dropped off at the La Guardia airport without breakfast, money, luggage, or a plane ticket. We are then told the unidentified voice belongs to Michael's father. Michael has grown up living with his mother, stepfather, and brothers and sisters. When he decides to go live with his estranged father, the whole family is worried about him, especially his older sister, 15-year old Lily. Lily receives the call from Michael, who is trapped in the airport, without any means of helping himself. She doesn't know what to do. Her mother and stepfather have left to take her older sister, Reb, to college. Lily is alone with Nathaniel, her toddler stepbrother. Finally, Lily, who is not old enough to drive yet, decides to fly

herself and Nathaniel to Michael and fly them all back. The beginning part of the book is suspenseful as we watch Michael trying to survive 4 hours in an airport by himself. He is hungry, tired, and hurt, but he can't risk telling the police the truth or his Dad might get in trouble. When the trio gets back home, Michael makes Lily promise not to tell anyone what really happened. Lily promises, and so begins the rest of the story. Lily is a smoking furnace. She is mad at her father but cannot say why. She has no outlet for her anger and so her anger festers inside and escalates to dangerous proportions. At one point, she almost hits another boy her age with a chair. The majority of the book is about how Lily tries to cope with this deep secret. The family who has no idea what happened, can't understand why Lily is so upset. Shouldn't she be happy her brother is home? The different members of her family all feel let down by her: Boring, predictable Kells (her stepfather) doesn't believe for a second the lame story she tells, Lily's mom is just happy Michael picked her over the Dad, Nathaniel is hurt that no one believes he went on a plane, and Reb, worst of all, blames Lily for turning Michael against Dad. Lily is the center of this solar system of lies and it tears at her all through the book. This is a frustrating book to read. It has one of those characters in it that is just blinded by love. Michael loves his Dad without reason, despite what has happened. In turn, his accusations turn to himself and how he let his Father down. It is Michael and Lily who pay the price of their father's sins. Lily feels let down by everyone, including God. How can God expect her to honor her Father? Is she expected to forgive him for the terrible wrong he has inflicted on her brother? There are no easy answers in this book. It has a spiritual message but similar to the Melody Carlson books, there is little preachiness to be found. Lily's distrust and anger to her real father turns to the same for her heavenly Father. This book is about forgiveness and the price of telling a lie to protect someone else.

Have you ever read *The Face on the Milk Carton*? The book *A Friend at Midnight* was written by the same author, Caroline B. Cooney. This fiction novel is 183 pages long. It was published by Delacorte Press in 2006. The main characters are Lily Rosetti and her brother Michael. Lily finds her faith in God tested as she struggles to rescue herself from all the anger and bitterness she feels towards her father. Lily's parents are divorced and when her mother remarries and has a baby she copes with it. Her little brother Michael feels differently about it though and decides he wants to live with his dad. His dad, however, doesn't like the idea of having a son when he sees the responsibility that comes with taking care of a child and abandons him at the airport. Lily comes and picks her brother up and never tells anyone about why her brother suddenly came back home. She has all these angry and bitter feelings towards her dad and when her older sister, Rebecca, decides to get

married and says she's going to invite him to the wedding she has to face what happened in the past and try to forgive her father. One good thing about this book is that it's never boring. You want to keep reading and see what happens. It starts right away with Michael being abandoned and I like books that start out with action. Another thing I enjoyed about the book is that the book is about her faith being tested and her relationship with God. I think what Caroline B. Cooney writes about is relevant to real life because a lot of girls go through tough times and have struggles and at times have their faith tested. I think that the book was really good and that it portrays the strength of a person in times of crisis and the resiliency of the human spirit. I would definitely recommend reading this book.

Fifteen-year-old Lily Rosetti has had many ups and downs in the past few years: her parents' divorce, her mother remarrying, and then the arrival of her little brother Nathaniel. While these events would be difficult for anyone to adjust to, Lily has learned to cope and has settled comfortably into a new routine with her blended family. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for her younger brother Michael, who feels left out and has to share a room with the noisy, messy Nathaniel. Then, much to his family's dismay, Michael decides he wants to go live with his father. Given his determination, Lily's family has no choice but to let the eight-year-old go. Two weeks later, Lily receives a phone call from Michael, who has been abandoned by his father and left at the Baltimore-Washington Airport with no means of returning home. Since she is taking care of Nathaniel while her family helps her older sister Rebecca move into her college dorm, Lily is forced to secretly buy a ticket and, along with Nathaniel, take a four-hour flight that will bring her to her frightened younger brother. Reluctantly, on Michael's insistence (and later to try to shield her brother from being a target of unfair scrutiny), Lily decides not to tell the rest of the family yet about the real reason for Michael's surprise return nor the events leading up to the abrupt abandonment. However, keeping such an important secret will not be easy, and Lily is thrown onto an emotional rollercoaster that will test her religious faith. *A FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT* presents Lily's and Michael's, and sometimes Nathaniel's, emotions quite well. However, there were a couple of things that bothered me about the story: the stepfather seems to show more genuine concern about Michael's return and his well-being than his mother and Rebecca do, and there is a significant time lapse in the story before there appears to be any type of real resolution to the family's crisis. I think if those two aspects had been explored further, the book would have been more compelling throughout rather than just in the beginning chapters. Nevertheless, *A FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT* is never boring and is worth checking out. It takes a somewhat realistic look at how the repercussions --- both good and

bad --- of a life-changing event (or in this case, multiple life-changing events) can affect a family. ---

Reviewed by Sarah Sawtelle (SdarksideG@aol.com)

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