



I Am Not Esther

By Fleur Beale

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Imagine that your mother tells you that she is going away. She is leaving you with relatives whom you have never heard of-and they are members of a strict religious cult. Your name is changed to a biblical one, Esther, and you are forced to follow the severe set of social standards set by the cult. You don't know where your mother is, and you are beginning to lose your own identity.

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I Am Not Esther By Fleur Beale Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sort of a *Handmaid's Tale* for the junior high set, New Zealander Beal's engrossing novel peers into the restricted world of the Children of the Faith, a rigidly traditional (and fictional) Christian sect. Resourceful Kirby has never known any family aside from her impractical mother, Ellen. When Ellen abruptly makes plans to fulfill her lifelong dream of working with refugees in Africa, she sends Kirby to her long-estranged brother, the strict and pious Caleb, and his wife and children. Renamed Esther ("The women of our faith all have biblical names. As do the men," explains soberly clad Aunt Naomi), Kirby chafes at the restrictions forced on her by her newfound kin: they dictate her style of dress and hair, forbid slang and even contractions, and resolutely discourage any ambitions aside from an early marriage and plenty of children. Angry and confused though she is, Kirby becomes attached to her newfound cousins, in particular the vulnerable five-year-old Maggie (Magdalene) and teenage Daniel, who is himself struggling to reconcile his interest in becoming a doctor with the community's mores. Though several plot twists seem to exist mostly to serve the novel's decidedly anti-fundamentalist stance (only dissenter Kirby, for example, has the courage to defy her uncle and get her ailing pregnant aunt the help she needs), this tale still has more than enough power to chill. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7-10-Kirby, 14, comes home from school to find her usually good-natured "dizzy flake" of a mom crying. The mystery deepens when her mother announces her intention to leave New Zealand almost immediately to work as a nurse in Africa, and ships the teen off to live with an uncle she's never met. Caleb and his family are members of a sect called the Fellowship of the Children of the Faith, and their house has no mirrors, no TV, no radio, no newspapers, and virtually nothing to read but the Bible. Her uncle renames her "Esther" and though she is by turns feisty and irreverent, she quickly learns that everyone suffers when she breaks the rules because discipline consists mostly of grueling prayer sessions that all family members are required to attend. Beginning to find her place among the six siblings, Kirby cannot understand why no one will talk about another sister, Miriam, who died just four weeks earlier. She enjoys increasingly unguarded conversations with her cousin Daniel, who secretly wishes to continue his education and become a doctor, but is horrified by the rigidity and brutality of this male-dominated fundamentalist society. The author builds tension well, introducing layers of conflict, revealing elements of the plot realistically and plausibly. The climax shocks and the resolution feels right. While understanding the comfort and peace that some believers feel, in the end it is clear to Kirby that such strict beliefs limit people, dictating too much of what can't be done instead of allowing personal initiative and creativity to flourish.

Joel Shoemaker, Southeast Junior High School, Iowa City, IA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 7-10. When her quirky mother takes off, 14-year-old Kirby is left with her uncle's family, whom she has never met. An elder in a strict religious cult, Uncle Caleb changes her name to Esther, dictates old-fashioned clothing and language, and conducts lengthy family prayer sessions for her salvation. Rebellious Kirby constantly makes him angry, but she learns that being an integral part of a family is very satisfying, even when it includes hard work and few tangible rewards. In fact, when she is given the opportunity to escape, she finds it difficult to leave. New Zealand author Beale paints a universal picture of the mind-altering, abusive nature of cults. Openly defiant Kirby almost assumes the persona of obedient, subservient "Esther" just as the "great experiment" had planned. Yet with the support of a sympathetic school guidance counselor

and a kind older "brother," she does find the strength to halt that dangerous slide. Although the story is too quickly and tidily wrapped up, it is an uncomfortable picture of the seductive nature of cults from a young person's perspective. *Frances Bradburn*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jesus Gilbert:

Book is to be different for each grade. Book for children till adult are different content. As we know that book is very important for all of us. The book I Am Not Esther was making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The guide I Am Not Esther is not only giving you considerably more new information but also being your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your publication. Try to make relationship while using book I Am Not Esther. You never truly feel lose out for everything when you read some books.

Muriel Colvard:

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Valarie Chamberlin:

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