



Saving Francesca

By Melina Marchetta

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Francesca is stuck at St. Sebastians, a boys' school that's pretends it's coed by giving the girls their own bathroom. Her only female companions are an ultra-feminist, a rumored slut, and an an impossibly dorky accordion player. The boys are no better, from Thomas who specializes in musical burping to Will, the perpetually frowning, smug moron that Francesca can't seem to stop thinking about.

Then there's Francesca's mother, who always thinks she knows what's best for Francesca—until she is suddenly stricken with acute depression, leaving Francesca lost, alone, and without an inkling who she really is. Simultaneously humorous, poignant, and impossible to put down, this is the story of a girl who must summon the strength to save her family, her social life and—hardest of all—herself.

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Saving Francesca By Melina Marchetta Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"This morning, my mother didn't get out of bed." So begins the saga of Francesca Spinelli, the hilarious and achingly real creation of Aussie author Melina Marchetta. Francesca used to think her biggest problem was transferring to St. Sebastian's--a school only recently turned coed: "What a dream come true, right? Seven hundred and fifty boys and thirty girls? But the reality is that it's either like living in a fish bowl or like you don't exist." But now there's this matter of her usually vibrant and annoyingly optimistic mother Mia refusing to get up in the morning. Her taciturn father doesn't have much to say on the subject, her beloved little brother Luca is anxiously looking to her for answers, and her so-called friends from her old neighborhood seem to have abandoned her. So, Francesca keeps it all inside--her frustration with school (there aren't enough girl's bathrooms and no girl's sports teams); her fear making new friends (with the few girls who do go to St. Sebastian's); and her overwhelming hatred of the smug Will Trombal, who despite being completely infuriating, is also incredibly cute. Keeping this to herself when all she wants to do is spill it to her mother is killing Francesca, but with Mia trying to make herself well again, Francesca will have to figure out how to save herself.

What makes *Saving Francesca* an exceptional standout in a vast field of mediocre teen chick lit is Frankie's painfully nuanced characterization. It has been ten years since high school teacher Marchetta's break out hit, *Looking for Alibrandi*, came out in her native Australia, and the care and precision she took in getting Francesca's voice just right is evident. As a result, there isn't a girl alive that wouldn't feel right at home in Francesca's skin. Her frank observations about boys, with their hygienically-challenged habits and their ineptitude in dealing with the opposite sex, are dead-on and riotously funny. Marchetta deftly balances Francesca's humor with a sympathetic depiction of Mia's struggle with clinical depression, creating a well-rounded novel that will prompt both laughter and tears. Fans can only hope that they won't have to wait another decade for Marchetta to gift them with another of honest and moving story. --*Jennifer Hubert*

From Publishers Weekly

Sixteen-year-old Francesca's compelling voice will carry readers along during a transitional year in her family and school life. The narrator's vivacious mother falls into a deep depression soon after the teen narrator starts "Year Eleven" at St. Sebastian's, a Sydney boys' school now accepting—but not particularly accommodating to—girls (a teacher refers to the class as "gentlemen"; Francesca describes being outnumbered 750 to 30, as "either living in a fish bowl or like you don't exist"). Slowly, she begins to put down roots at her school, bonding with the girls from St. Stella's (her former school) whom she had considered misfits, and with some unlikely guys. She even finds herself falling for Will, whom she originally called "a stick-in-the-mud moron with no personality." Francesca also lets out her own personality, which she had kept hidden at St. Stella's because of her conceited friends. Her mother's illness takes its toll, though. Marchetta (*Looking for Alibrandi*) beautifully depicts the pain experienced by Francesca's whole family (at a wedding without her mother, Francesca observes while dancing with both her father and brother that even "combined, we feel like an amputee"), and Francesca's anger towards her father starts to escalate ("You think you can fix everything by forgetting about it but you just make things worse," she tells him). Readers will applaud the realistic complexity in the relationships here, the genuine love between the characters, as well as Francesca's ultimate decision to save herself. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 9-12—In her second young adult novel, Australian author Melina Marchetta creates a compelling teen

girl character conflicted by her mother's deep clinical depression and her own adjustment to a new, previously all boys school. As in Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi* (Orchard, 1999), the themes and motifs here include the main character's status as being one generation removed from the immigrant Italian community. Francesca is not only a very believable 16-year-old, but the demands on her given her family's difficulties and her friends' attempts to deal with changes in their social milieu are ones that American teens will understand and empathize with readily. Marchetta sees the vanities of some adults as occasions for humor as well as distrust on the part of insightful teens. Rebecca Macauley's light accent is readily understandable, and she provides a variety of voices for Francesca, her beleaguered father, her little brother, and her female and male friends. There is enough romance here to make the story appealing to those interested more in such relationships than in the equally well-treated complexity of parent and teen relationships. Francesca grows through the story's development from a girl who knows only how to emulate others to one who is willing to admit that she has her own needs and ideas. The print version will be available in the U.S. this fall.—*Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Howard:

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Diane Sanchez:

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