



## Tell Me Something Real

*Calla Devlin*

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## **Tell Me Something Real** Calla Devlin

Three sisters struggle with the bonds that hold their family together as they face a darkness settling over their lives in this masterfully written debut novel.

There are three beautiful blond Babcock sisters: gorgeous and foul-mouthed Adrienne, observant and shy Vanessa, and the youngest and best-loved, Marie. Their mother is ill with leukemia and the girls spend a lot of time with her at a Mexican clinic across the border from their San Diego home so she can receive alternative treatments.

Vanessa is the middle child, a talented pianist who is trying to hold her family together despite the painful loss that they all know is inevitable. As she and her sisters navigate first loves and college dreams, they are completely unaware that an illness far more insidious than cancer poisons their home. Their world is about to shatter under the weight of an incomprehensible betrayal...

## **Tell Me Something Real Details**

Date : Published August 30th 2016 by S&S/Atheneum

ISBN :

Author : Calla Devlin

Format : 304 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Romance, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review Tell Me Something Real for online ebook

### Lolly K Dandeneau says

"I feel like a scavenger, a young raccoon, rummaging for scraps of motherly affection."

The three Babcock sisters are coping with their mother's illness in different ways. For the vibrant beautiful outspoken Adrienne, pious, sweet little Marie and quietly shy Vanessa everything they thought they knew about their long suffering mother's disease is going to wither and fall away when she decides to help a fellow cancer patient Caleb. When Caleb and his mother move in, it is a welcome change from the responsibilities that once consumed the girls. Finally, each can focus on just being young, Caleb and his mother are like sunshine on the darkest of days! Vanessa is in the throes of first love, but her mother's illness may darken the future she is hungry for. Their father is absent, busy with so many hours at work- depending on the girls to accompany their mother to a Mexican clinic for her controversial treatment. Sometimes it's convenient not to see what is happening before your very eyes, and sometimes it takes an outsider to expose the fractures in your family.

When I first started reading, I thought "oh it's going to be so sad, mother dying of cancer, children's heart breaking slowly" but what happens shocked me, only to make me realize it was a shadow from the beginning- there to be seen if you just paid attention. We are all fools, aren't we, in our own unique ways? It's hard not to talk about what happens, because it will give the entire story away- but there is so much I wish I could reveal and rattle on about. The girls are suffering, that never changes, their hearts are bursting with pain but not in the way you imagined.

Book clubs will have a heck of a time discussing this one. I truly enjoyed it, I think the love story wasn't the point but it was an anchor for Vanessa, who so desperately needed one. I wasn't reviewing this, just kept hearing people loved it and thought ' why not?' I was angry and sad with everything that happened. Felt outraged alongside the girls and admit, I was surprised. Not your usual story!

Out now

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### Nadine says

Tell Me Something Real is a story about coping. Coping as an individual and coping within the family. The book is told from Vanessa's perspective, the middle child to a mother dying of leukemia forced to manage responsibilities she shouldn't have to manage at her age.

At the beginning of the book, I thought it was going to be a knock off of The Fault in our Star by John Green. Both stories have similar elements: cancer, overly mature young adults, and a budding romance. However, Tell Me Something Real turned out to be a very different story (explaining this further would result in my spoiling the book).

What I liked most about this book is the focus on coping methods. Every person has different coping methods and this is highlighted thoroughly through each of the sisters. The youngest sister, Marie, becomes

fixated on religious saints, Vanessa drowns herself in her musical abilities, and the eldest, Adrienne, begins drawing. They each try to figure out their position in the world and how to deal with what's happened to them through their relationships with each other and their various talents. It was refreshing to read about healthy coping methods for a change.

Another interesting aspect of this book is the topic of parents' ability to care for their children and what happens when they fail. When I speak about failing, I don't mean losing custody of the children, but of failing to protect them emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Their father fails in many ways throughout the book and we watch as each of the girls deal with his failures in different ways. It's a devastating moment to realize parents aren't infallible and even harder to cope with. *Tell Me Something Real* offers different perspectives of dealing with this failure despite it only being told from one character's perspective.

Overall, *Tell Me Something Real* is a beautifully heart wrenching story about coping, grief, failure, and moving forward. It begins similarly to *The Fault in our Stars*, but turns into something much different that you won't be disappointed to have read.

\*\*I received this book in exchange for an honest review.

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All I'll say for now is that this book was much more than I thought it would be. If, after reading the synopsis, you feel like this book is going to be a typical coping with loss story, you are thoroughly mistaken. I will post my full review closer to the release date, August 30, 2016.

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### **Alice says**

Beware, this book is not what you're expecting, this is not just a YA novel regarding cancer coping. A lot more happens and not one of you will see it coming. Not gonna say anymore to avoid spoiling it.

The idea behind this book has sooo much potential, could have easily reached a higher rating which it sadly didn't because of the instant-love and unlikely proceedings.

I really liked the characters though, the sisters are really fun and I love their interactions. This book reminded me an awful lot of TFIOS right at the beginning but the love story here is nowhere close to being compared to that of Gus and Hazel.

Nonetheless it was an easy and enjoyable read and I know loads of you YA lovers will go crazy for it when it comes out.

(Although I still have to say it could have been developed way better with just a little more depth and variety of events)

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### **Kelly says**

[ the use of time periods where technology allows things to go ~unexplained~ for so long (hide spoiler)]

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## **Yodamom says**

Emotional Hell Ride.

That sums up this read for me. I was dragged down one road sobbing and heart broken only to be slammed into the wall of extreme anger, disbelief and then sorrow. I devoured this torturous read in one day. I couldn't leave the story at any point, it left me dangling off a cliff through the whole book. I read this yesterday, today I feel hungover and tired. The daily pain of these characters lives was draining. Then to find out.... I tell you it was so twisted. I wanted to throw my book off a bridge and watch it sink to the bottom of the sea.

Did I like it ? No, and yes. I don't care to suffer in realistic pain and suffering in my entertainment choice, books. I read to escape reality. This was realistic and it tore me into little soaked bits of don't want to go there, but it was so good. I loved, hated it. I'm glad it was recommended to me by a reviewer friend or I never would have touched it.

Emotional Rollercoaster E Ticket Turbo Ride

Don't read reviews with spoilers. You need to experience this shock to get the most out of the author's work.

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## **Brenda Ayala says**

Tell Me Something Real is a good book, but ultimately forgettable. I never felt particularly affectionate toward any of our character, especially Caleb. I (as usual) did not fall for the instalove between Caleb and Vanessa, and even less so when I realized that Caleb was supposed to be Vanessa's rock in the typhoon of her life.

I liked the twist and normally would have been gushing about it in my review, but it felt too detached. I didn't feel like Vanessa was actually experiencing what was supposed to be so traumatic, like it was always once removed from her and the rest of her family. THIS BIG THING is revealed and then it's only referred to in conversation, never actively experienced. It made it weird and not seem real.

Adrienne was annoying, too. Volatile and strong-willed I understand, but she would get irrationally angry over stupid things. It made it hard for me to root for her or to feel any sympathy, which makes me a giant jerk but whatever.

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## **C.G. Drews says**

**So this book totally surprised me.** In a really really good way! I went in expecting a contemporary about (A) a pianist, (B) epic sisterly bonds, and (C) a parent dying of cancer. So yes, it was all those things + fantastic plot twists that had me reeling! **It was so good. aLL THE GOOD.**

**My favourite thing about this is: SISTERRRRS.** I love books about sisters. I have 4 of them and they're all annoying so I like to read about epic fictional sister who spontaneously go out for ice cream. (No one spontaneously took me out for ice cream in my youth. #damagedchildhood) We have **Adrienne** who is like a swearing-firecracker and I LOVED HER. And then, the narrator is **Vanessa** who's the pianist and the soft/kind one. This, unfortunately, gives her the tendency to be quite bland too because she's always pegged as the "good" one. But I still liked her! I really felt for the pain she went through with her mum's illness. Then there's the 9yo little sister, **Marie** who is obsessed with Catholic saints. She was pretty cute. The sibling dynamics kind of reminded me of The Rest of Us Just Live Here. ANYWAY. They fought! They

disagreed! They weren't perfect! <-- **and that's exactly what made them perfect**

A++ FOR SISTER STORY (!!!) I WISH I COULD FIND MORE LIKE THIS

**Also, it's historical fiction.** It's set in 1976. And it has SUCH a summery vibe. The writing is almost kind of slow, in a way, but detailed in all the right places. It's so vivid I actually *felt* the weather and the city and AHHH. **The writing is just glorious.** I'm totally sucked in.

**Piano? We gotcha piano.** Although, like, music IS a big deal, but it's not the focus. Which was fine because often I find books about music can be hard if the music isn't described really well. Like, where is my bonus playlist to go along with this while I read??? WHERE IS THE MOVIE SO I MAY HEAR WHILE I SEE?? Ahem. (Also it's all Classical Piano, so WIN WIN.)

**I think the romance was probably the weakest part, but still SO CUTE.** Okay. That sounds contradictory (pfft, do not accuse me of mortal weakness, fiend) but lemme explain. The romance was (A) very fast, like they were kissing pretty soon after meeting, but yet (B) they were sooo cute together that I DIDN'T EVEN MIND. **Vanessa meets Caleb at the cancer clinic where her mum is getting treated.** Caleb is in remission from cancer so he's like a walking corpse. But he's sweet! And stubborn! And he wants life to be *real*. (HELLO I SEE THE TITLE.) I just totally shipped them. But **the story definitely doesn't centre around the romance.** So if you're after a less-romantic-y book? DING DING. THIS IS YOUR STOP. COME READ THIS ONE.

Ah, so, ehem, there is something to note though: **it does deal a bit with mental illness as well as physical illness...and it does not treat them equally.** So I get it: this is the 1970s. I mean, even now in 2016 people will acknowledge a broken leg but they won't make allowances for, say, depression. So mental illness has a lot of stigmas. SO I'M NOT SAYING THIS IS A NEGATIVE. I'm just *saying* it's there. Plus it was so sad when (view spoiler) That is so sad.

#### **Small Random Negatives:**

- sometimes I felt the writing skipped over the emotion...
- or perhaps I am a heinous vulcan
- like I said, romance = rushy rush
- it reminded me of my childhood where no one spontaneously gave me ice cream
- I'M JUST JOKING FOR THE LAST ONE OMG OKAY THERE ARE BARELY ANY NEGATIVES (!!)

**Honestly: get thee out there and read this book.** IT IS MARVELLOUS. I'm still reeling at the plot twists which were so well established and SO well executed! I love sisterly books, and musical books, so this combined like TWO awesome things and did it so well. The summer vibe was lazily delicious. Perfect for me huddling under 62 quilts and cursing winter. AND I LOVED THE CHARACTERS. They were all complex and relatable and mildly adorable and *tragic*. This is totally **not your average cancer story** and it has given me like 4 emotions.

SO MUCH GOOD. ALL THIS GOOD.

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#### **Lola says**

If you think that *Tell Me Something Real* is just another “cancer” book, think again. And then think some

more.

I wasn't planning on reading this one anytime soon. I mean, look at that cover. It's not exactly appealing. It makes the story look relatively boring and maybe extremely descriptive and slow-paced.

But I told myself I had to give it a try, as it was sent to me by the publisher.

And boy was I impressed.

It's such a *powerful* story. The theme of family is extremely important and heartfelt. A family struggles as the mother suffers from cancer...

But it's more than that. So much more. Sadly, telling you anything else about it will spoil the huge revelation, which took me by such surprise...

There is no way to read this book without shedding at least four tears. Calla Devlin's writing is lyrical and, unlike I predicted, this is not slow at all and definitely not overly descriptive.

When will I learn not to judge a book by its cover? Possibly never.

I was always a fan of books featuring sisters. I never had one (I have a brother) so, even today, I wonder what it feels like to have one. I love the dynamics sisters create in a story, and the ones in this specific book are quite special.

The sisters' reactions to their mother are very different from one another's, which made them so interesting to analyse and try to understand.

Calla Devlin breathed life into them, because there was not a single moment where I doubted the authenticity of their emotions or characterization itself.

I truly, truly loved reading this book. The only, only thing I would have changed, although it does contribute to the story in a good way, is the romance. Only because it's quite salient but not exactly swoon-worthy.

Everything else, though, amazed me. Music is another theme that makes the story. I did not care much for it, for I consider music to be something worth listening to but not exactly reading about. However, the emotions it unleashed in Vanessa were beautiful.

*Tell Me Something Real* is a must-read for fans of family-themed stories.

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### **Andrea says**

Many of my GR friends raved about this one.

.....Ugh. I was bored. Abandon ship??

But my GR friends REALLY liked it. Stay on ship!

.....YES! It turned around, picked up & smacked me in the face. (In a good way). My GR friends never let me down. ❤?

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### **Larry H says**

The beautiful, blonde Babcock sisters—brash, confident, artistic Adrienne; sensitive, musical Vanessa; and the youngest, devoutly religious Marie—are growing up in San Diego in 1976. The Babcocks struggle with the same problems many families do—their father works too much and gets bullied by his boss, Vanessa doesn't practice the piano as much as she should, and Adrienne spends a little too much time mouthing off.

But what sets the Babcocks apart is sadness. Their mother has leukemia, and her decline is taking its toll on their family. The girls spend much of their time with their mother at a small clinic across the border in Mexico, where she frequently receives a controversial alternative treatment that doctors in the U.S. aren't allowed to prescribe. While the girls enjoy their time at the clinic, and have found themselves woven into the fabric of its daily life, they hate to see their mother suffering, and even though they know her time is short, they can't picture life without her.

At the clinic they meet Barb, a woman who has befriended their mother while her teenage son, Caleb, receives the same alternative treatment their mother does. Barb and Caleb move into the Babcocks' house, and it isn't long before she has taken control of the unruly, disoriented household, bringing organization and emotional steadiness into the chaos. Caleb awakens feelings in Vanessa she never imagined feeling, and all she wants is to be with him, and worries about his health despite being in remission.

"I learned from Mom that each word is a risk. It takes a certain amount of courage to converse, especially when one of the primary topics of conversation is terminal illness."

As their mother enters what everyone believes will be her last days, their lives are turned upside down. Everything they had depended upon they begin to question, and they wonder what kind of answers they want, and what they will mean for their future. Vanessa, in particular, is torn between her love for her family and her desire to leave home to study at a prestigious music conservatory, but she is unsure she can leave everyone, including Caleb, to pursue the one thing which brings her joy.

I'm being deliberately vague because I don't want to give away one plot twist that Calla Devlin so deftly slips into this book. Knowing it might not affect your enjoyment of the story, but it was nice to be surprised. ***Tell Me Something Real*** is an emotionally compelling story of a family in crisis, missing their emotional rudder yet unsure if they'll ever regain their momentum. At the same time, it's a story of the jumble of emotions that accompanies first love, and how we hope the things and the people we care for most can help complete us.

As you might imagine from a book about a family dealing with terminal illness, at times the book veers dangerously close to melodrama, but for the most part Devlin keeps a steady hand on her story. She's a terrific writer and even if you don't get to know all of the characters as well as you get to know Vanessa, who is the heart (and voice) of the book, you can see the immense thought she has put in to all aspects of her story. This is a moving and affecting read, and although it is classified as YA fiction (not that that is a bad thing), it definitely didn't feel that way.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

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## **Maria (Big City Bookworm) says**

*This ARC was provided by Simon and Schuster Canada in exchange for an honest review.*

Tell Me Something Real by Calla Devlin is one of those books that would have completely flown right by my radar if I hadn't been offered the opportunity to read and review it through Simon and Schuster Canada. I had never heard of this novel previously, but the synopsis totally had me intrigued and I just knew that I had to read it.

### **STORY LINE/CONCEPT**

Tell Me Something Real tells the story of three sisters who are struggling to take care of their mother who is living with leukaemia. The girls and their mother travel back and forth between California and Mexico, where there is an experimental drug known as Laetrile that treats cancer, but isn't legal in the United States. Their father is a workaholic, with a terrible boss, which makes it difficult to be there with his wife and daughters. Tell Me Something Real explores the relationship between each of these family members as they deal with their lives. Of course, there are many hidden secrets, and an ultimate betrayal, that will change this family forever.

### **WORLD/SETTING**

Tell Me Something Real takes place in the 1970's, not too long after the Vietnam war has ended. As stated earlier, the girls and their mother travel back and forth between their cozy home in California to a clinic in Mexico. There is a new drug on the scene known as Laetrile that is said to treat those who have cancer, but it isn't scientifically proven to be true, making it illegal in the United States. I did a little bit of research as I was reading just to familiarize myself a little about Laetrile and I learned that it is a modified form of amygdalin, a poisonous cyanogenic glycoside that can be found in many plants. It can be potentially toxic or lethal when taken by mouth, due to cyanide poisoning. After reading all about that, I thought I knew where this book might be going, but I was completely wrong. There are twists and turns throughout this book that hit me in the face as if I ran straight into a brick wall. I didn't see any of them coming and that was one aspect of this book that I thought was fantastic!

### **CHARACTERS**

Tell Me Something Real is told from the perspective of Vanessa, the middle child of the three Babcock sisters. Adrienne being the oldest and Marie the youngest. Of the three, Vanessa is the most shy and timid. Adrienne is very in-your-face and confrontational. Marie is still the innocent baby of the group. Tell Me Something Real does a fantastic job in showcasing the family dynamic and relationship between the three sisters and how they all cope with their ill mother. While in Mexico, the girls meet a teenaged boy, named Caleb, who is also travelling from America in order to receive Laetrile treatments. The Babcock family eventually take in Caleb and his mother so that their trips back and forth are quicker and easier. As the story is told from Vanessa's perspective, we learn more about her and her ambitions. We learn that she is a very talented pianist who had plans to apply to prestigious conservatories before her mother became sick. Tell Me

Something Real does a great job in exploring the moral dilemma that Vanessa must deal with. Does she stay behind and help her sisters in caring for their mother, or does she continue with her dreams of becoming a professional pianist? Once a terrible secret is revealed, it becomes even harder for Vanessa to make this decision.

## **WRITING STYLE**

The story is told from the single perspective of Vanessa. As much as I love stories that are told from multiple perspectives, I think that the single perspective worked really well here. I felt at times that there was too much going on within Tell Me Something Real. There was the family dynamic, a mother dealing with cancer, a teen dealing with the decision to pursue her career in music, a teen experiencing her first love, and of course, there was that huge twist that completely turned this book upside down. While I loved this story, I think there were parts that maybe could have been left out. As much as I enjoyed learning about Vanessa and her passion for music, there was just so much going on that I'm not sure if it really added anything substantial to the story itself. Tell Me Something Real could have been just a strong by dealing with just the family and its experience with cancer and the twist that changed everything. Other than that, Tell Me Something Real was fast paced and exciting and I had a hard time putting it down.

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Overall, Tell Me Something Real was such a pleasant surprise for me. As I mentioned, I had never heard of it prior to being asked to read and review it. I'm so glad that I was because it ended up being quite the wonderful, shocking and touching read!

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### **Initial post reading thoughts:**

This one tripped me out. There were twists and there were turns. I saw none of them coming.

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### **Trang Tran (Bookidote) says**

[image error]

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### **Dominique says**

Really fantastic look at grief and loss from the perspective of three daughters dealing with their mother's illness.

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### **Elyse Walters says**

"It was like I had to pretend that I wasn't sick to make them feel okay".

"Sometimes we have to wait, especially when things are difficult and a lot is happening at once". This is why

I needed time to tell you about....."

A STRONG 5 STARS!!!!

The entire novel is great....

.....complex surprising 'substantial' storyline. It's not a story with an explosive beginning...yet the our minds start spinning and forming opinions right away about the characters. As soon as you think you know the basic 'theme' of this novel...the rug is pulled out from under you.

This is a bold, enigmatic, thought-provoking novel. It's brilliantly crafted ...designed to make you think. My husband happened to have some of my favorite schmaltzy easy rock top 100 hits - music playing in the background while I was deep into this novel...( wild horses wouldn't pull me away)... but between the music and a couple of sections I was reading....my face was sopping wet from tears. I was trying 'not' to cry ... 'not' to feel....It kinda hurt.

However, that's me...I'm guessing most people won't cry at all. I was extremely sensitive about a couple scenes -- which I rather not say in a public review.

other than truthfully ... with all my heart... I'm glad I read this book!!! Nobody can take a readers deep personal intimate experience away. This book touched me on many levels.

I mostly recommend this to my close female friends: adults and mature teens....( a few men too)...In fact...I'm very impressed of the type of male characters in this book.... especially with Caleb, a young adult male teen.

Thank You. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, and Calla Devlin ( terrific debut)

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### **Book Riot Community says**

This story is so incredibly specific that it completely sucked me in. From the details about the characters to the time to the setting everything felt real and captivating. The story follows the three blond, beautiful Babcock sisters through a San Diego summer in 1976. Their mother is dying of leukemia and travels, with them, to Mexico often to receive an experimental treatment. I thought I'd fall in love with the story because of the sister relationship (definitely my genre kryptonite!), but instead the lyrical writing and tightly controlled plot twists became my favorite. There is also a very swoon-worthy romance. I'm not sure if you can call a book set in 1976 historical fiction, but I'm loving the trend in YA to tell stories in the more recent past.

—Alison Doherty

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from The Best Books We Read In October 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/10/31/riot-r...>

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At first you think this is a novel about three beautiful sisters helping their sick mother as she is treated for cancer, narrated by the middle sister. BUT THEN IT TURNS INTO SOMETHING ELSE. Explaining it would give it away, so let me just say: READ IT, READ IT, READ IT! This book is another example, like A.S. King novels, where I feel books shouldn't be labeled as 'young adult' but 'books for humans' instead.

PS – Don't forget tissues.

Backlist bump: The Weird Sisters by Eleanor Brown

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