



NIKKI BARTHELMESS

YA AUTHOR

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NIKKI BARTHELMESS



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Nikki Barthelmess is an author of young adult books, including *The Quiet You Carry* (out now), *Quiet No More* (Flux, fall 2020), and *Everything Within and in Between* (HarperChildren's, fall 2021). Nikki entered foster care in Nevada at twelve and spent the next six years living in six different towns. During this time, Nikki found solace in books, her journal, and the teachers who encouraged her as a writer. A graduate of the University of Nevada, Nikki lives in Santa Barbara with her husband, daughter, and pride-and-joy Corgi pup.

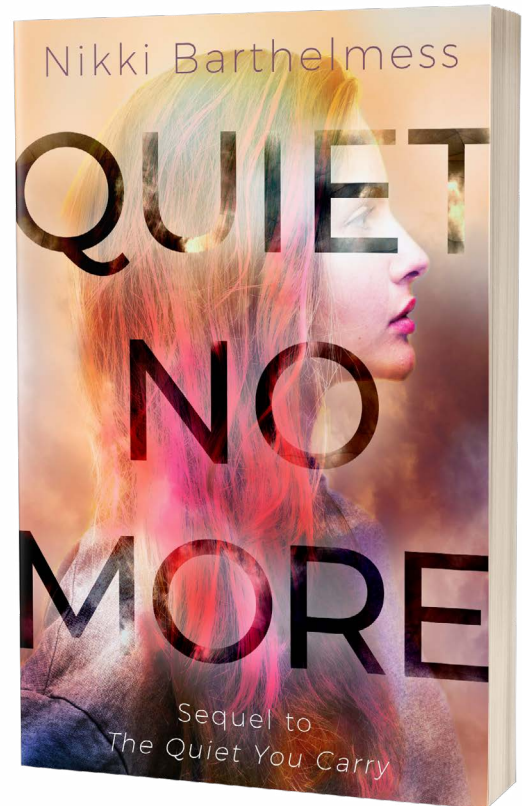
Nikki is represented by Elizabeth Harding and Sarah Gerton at Curtis Brown, Ltd.

BOOK SUMMARY

Quiet No More

After surviving sexual assault by her father and six months in foster care, college freshman Victoria Parker is trying to move on with her life. She's focusing on the positives—attending college, living on her own, repairing old relationships and making new ones, and getting involved with an abuse survivors activist group on campus. But everything's thrown into disarray when a strange woman shows up, claiming to be Victoria's aunt and asking Victoria to lie about what happened to her.

With her father's sentencing in a few months, Victoria's nervous about having to share the truth of what happened with a judge. She's not even sure if she has the strength to go through with it. But when her fellow club members begin pressuring her to speak out, Victoria has to decide how to share her story while remaining true to herself.



October 13, 2020

Author: Nikki Barthelmess
Category: Young Adult Fiction
Print ISBN: 9781635830637
Publisher: Flux/North Star Editions
([Download Book Images](#))

ADVANCED PRAISE & REVIEWS

"A sensitive and satisfying story of surviving sexual abuse."

– Kirkus Reviews

"Barthelmess shows us that there is no one right way to be a survivor, that there can be healthy love after trauma, and that sometimes you need to let go in order to move forward."

– Laura Sibson, author of *The Art of Breaking Things*

"Poignant and important, Barthelmess delivers a powerful story of resilience and inspiration while exploring the complexities of relationships following trauma."

– L.D. Crichton, author of *All Our Broken Pieces*

QUIET NO MORE

The wind blows a piece of my fiery hair into my face. I spit it out as I head toward the grassy area in front of Truckee Meadows Community College. The sun glitters over the still-snow-dotted Sierra Nevada Mountains off in the distance. Sure, it's not the quad at UNR, where Jess and I used to plan on hanging out in between classes. But it'll do. I pull my legs out in front of me, sitting on the grass. Stare at the kids walking around. Some are sitting under a tree nearby, laughing together like they've been friends for years. Maybe they have been. My phone buzzes in my pocket—Kale texting back—and I smile as I reply with several heart faced emojis. I sigh at the now familiar pang in my gut. I miss him. Sitting outside texting Kale for the few minutes between class and the SASAH meeting has become a Tuesday ritual for me.

I found the group on the school's website when I was looking for clubs to join. A way to get involved. Maybe meet some new people. The old Victoria, who I was last year when I was trying to hide from everything that happened with Dad, would have never joined a club, any club, especially not one that focuses on preventing sexual assault.

I breathe deeply. That's not the only reason why I joined the club. Sure, I wanted to make friends, but there's more to it than that. I want to help others from becoming victims—no, *survivors*—of the kind of abuse I went through. I want to do something positive to make what happened to me mean something. To show myself that what Dad did didn't break me.

Because I won't let it.

A laugh trills behind me, a girl catching a frisbee before one of her friends wraps their arms around her and takes her down. I swallow. This year isn't going to be like last year. Pushing people away, keeping secrets, it only hurt me.

And my stepsister, Sarah.

There are other Sarahs out there, other people who have been hurt, who will get hurt. That's why I go to the meetings, even if it's hard being in a room full of people who constantly talk about assault and how to prevent it. Ripping the Band-Aid off every time I hear the word victim or survivor or perpetrator. But I keep going.

Sarah and I generally avoid talking about my dad since he plead guilty to battery with the intent to commit sexual assault on a minor, on both of us, his daughter and

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stepdaughter. He beat his wife, too, and Tiffany ended up pressing charges. But we don't ever hear her talk about it. The DA's office gave him the plea deal for a lesser charge (intent, rather than admitting to having sexually assaulting Sarah and me), since they didn't want to drag out the case and we didn't have any proof anyway. He says, she says, kind of thing. This way, he'll for sure get jail time. Five years to life with the possibility of parole. He could have gone free if it had gone to trial.

Still, five years to life is a big range. Sentencing doesn't happen for a couple of months and that's when Sarah and I will have our chance to give victim impact statements, in front of the judge, to see if what we say will affect sentencing.

I pull out my notebook and look at what I have so far.

Victim Impact Statement, it reads.

My dad hurt me, and now he's in jail. I'm glad he's there so he can't hurt my stepsister anymore, but

I never finished the sentence. I can't bear to write what I was thinking when I wrote it. To finish the thought, *but I don't want to hurt him.*

I resist the urge to crumple the piece of paper. I won't go back to where I was last year, trying to protect my father. All it did was cause pain, and not just to myself, but to Sarah, too.

I try to force the thought from my mind. The date of the hearing hasn't been set yet. It could be months away. I have time.

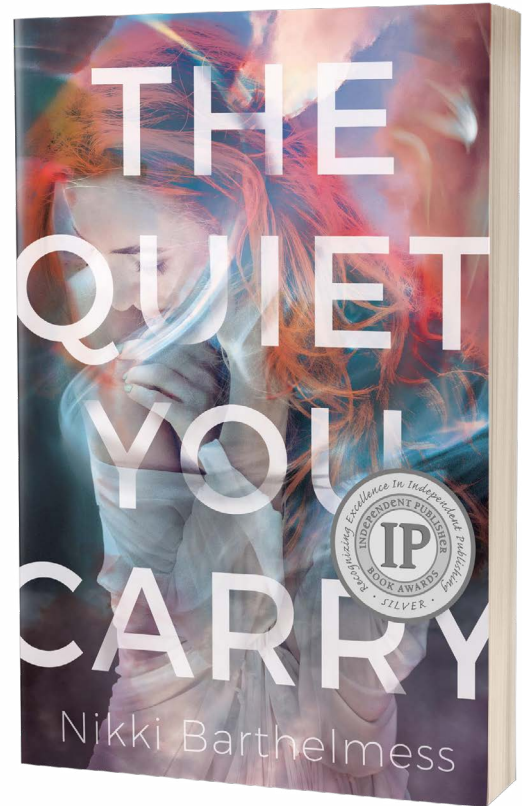
BOOK SUMMARY

The Quiet You Carry

Victoria Parker knew her dad's behavior toward her was a little unusual, but she convinced herself everything was fine—until she found herself locked out of the house at 3:00 a.m., surrounded by flashing police lights.

Now, dumped into a crowded, chaotic foster home, Victoria has to tiptoe around her domineering foster mother, get through senior year at a new school, and somehow salvage her college dreams... all while keeping her past hidden.

But some secrets won't stay buried—especially when unwanted memories make Victoria freeze up at random moments and nightmares disrupt her sleep. Even worse, she can't stop worrying about her stepsister Sarah, left behind with her father. All she wants is to move forward, but how do you focus on the future when the past won't leave you alone?



March 5, 2019

2020 IPPY Silver Medalist

Author: Nikki Barthelmess

Category: Young Adult Fiction

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(Download Book Images)

REVIEWS

“A positive addition to the sparse YA literature on foster care. This hard-to-put-down novel takes on grim topics unflinchingly but also gives readers hope that honesty and kindness will prevail.”

– Kirkus Reviews

“A thought-provoking story about abuse and the importance of speaking out.”

– Foreword Reviews

THE QUIET YOU CARRY

Before

Dad's door slams. He locks it, too, by the sound of it. He shuts himself in his room with his wife—leaving me in the dark hallway with this woman, this stranger. Her shape blurs before me, and I reach out to the nearby wall to steady myself.

"I'm with Child Protective Services," the woman tells me. "It's going to be okay, Victoria, but you have to come with me."

I stare at the back of my dad's closed bedroom door and wipe my tear-soaked face. "I don't understand," I plead. "I didn't do anything. I didn't—"

"Shh." The woman reaches out to put a hand on my shoulder but drops it when I flinch. Dad touched my shoulder. Just minutes before, Dad touched my shoulder and my hair. He came close, too close, and I froze.

My stepsister Sarah is asleep in her bedroom at the end of the dim hallway, completely unaware of everything happening outside her door.

The woman clears her throat. "My name is Fran." She wears a puffy black jacket and jeans. Her gray hair is tied back in a loose bun, and strands slip onto her face. She doesn't look tired, even though it's so late. I glance into the kitchen and see the microwave clock reading 3:08 a.m.

"I didn't do anything," I say again.

"I understand that's what you told the police officer, but your father is telling a different story. I want to hear your side. You can tell us what happened, what's been happening. And you can press charges—"

"Press charges?" I interrupt. "No. Nothing happened. I already told him that." I wave maniacally toward the police officer sitting on our couch, who's probably writing notes about his conversations with me and my dad. "I'm not going to press charges, because whatever you think happened, didn't. My dad and I had a misunderstanding." I let out a breath and close my eyes. I have to think clearly. I have to make sense of this.

It happened so fast, after Dad left the room, and I closed and locked the door. Tiffany banged on the door moments later, saying my father was ready to talk to me. Instead, when I opened the door, Dad pushed Tiffany aside, grabbed me by the arm and

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dragged me outside. No jacket, no shoes. Locked me out in the cold. A few minutes later, blue-and-red police lights shone through the dark residential street.

Sitting on the curb, shivering, I watched as the police officer got out of his squad car and sat next to me.

“Hello, my name is Officer McDonnell. I’m with the Reno P.D.” He reached a hand out to shake and I grasped it, wiping tears off my face with my other hand. “Are you hurt?”

I shook my head no.

The man’s voice was deep and he spoke slowly as he asked me more questions. I could focus on his voice, but not the words he was saying.

I shook my head. Told him my dad and I had a misunderstanding.

“Did he touch you? Did your father try to make you do anything you didn’t want to?”

“No, no, no. Nothing happened!” I was yelling. I didn’t mean to, but beyond the officer, the door creaked open to reveal Dad and Tiffany. Dad gave her a meaningful look, like the fact that I was yelling proved this was my fault.

Officer McDonnell stood, seemingly sizing my dad up. He told him it was pretty cold outside, being December, for me to be locked out there. And late, too. He ushered me in, past Dad and Tiffany, and told me to stay in my bedroom. I waited until the sound of his footsteps became softer before cracking my door open to peer outside. Officer McDonnell was in the living room, pulling a small notepad from his pocket. Dad, dressed now with his hair combed, stood by the couch. He started talking quietly, calmly. I couldn’t make out his words. He didn’t seem as angry as before. Maybe he would talk to me. Maybe he would look at me.

Maybe he would stop whatever was happening.

Stop everything.

But instead another stranger stormed through the front door—this woman with messy gray hair and deep lines on her face, brandishing a Child Protective Services badge for the officer to see. Fran. At the sight of her, Officer McDonnell motioned for Dad to give them some space. Dad scowled and obeyed, waiting in the kitchen as

THE QUIET YOU CARRY

Fran and the officer spoke in hushed voices in the dining room. I blew on my hands, still numb from outside, as I strained to hear what was going on.

Eventually, after seemingly having made some kind of decision, Officer McDonnell met Dad in the kitchen. I watched them whisper before Dad stormed to his bedroom, not bothering to look at me as he went.

Officer McDonnell shook his head in Dad's direction in disgust, hanging back by the door, seemingly keeping an eye on all of us.

I sat in silence, watching Fran write in a notebook. Time stretched on as my world fell apart around me.

Now, a few moments or a century later, the lights are still on in Dad's bedroom, but I can't hear him and Tiffany talking.

"I need you to gather your things." Fran says, her no-nonsense tone yanking me back to the present. "Nothing valuable, nothing that could be stolen. Just enough clothes to get you by for a week."

"What do you mean I can't bring anything valuable? Where are we going?"

My breathing quickens, faster and faster. I suck in all the air I can, and it's not enough. I stop suddenly. Close my eyes. I can't breathe. I can't think. I can't anything. "I'm sorry—what if I just say I'm sorry?"

I raise a hand, ready to bang on Dad's door. I can apologize. Yell through the door to tell him that I misunderstood. That he doesn't have to make me go. Couldn't we pretend it never happened? Couldn't we forget?

Fran shakes her head slightly, casts her eyes down for a moment.

I stumble back from the door.

Everything's a blur. I don't know what Dad told his wife. What he told the police. I don't know anything. Except Fran's saying I can't stay here.

INTERVIEW WITH NIKKI

What inspired you to write *The Quiet You Carry*?

I grew up in the Nevada foster care system, living in six different towns in the six years I was in foster care. I didn't know what foster care was, not really, until I entered the system, and it felt like no one else could possibly understand what I was going through. At times, people judged me, like it was my fault I was in foster care. Like I was a "bad kid." I felt so unwanted and, sometimes, even hopeless.

As I grew up and started volunteering and mentoring foster youth, I realized I wasn't alone. Many of us were used to people making wrong and often negative assumptions about foster kids, based on poor representation via the news, TV, movies, books, you name it. I wanted to write a story where a foster kid struggles, yes, but also one where she doesn't give up. One where she refuses to become that negative statistic us foster kids are so often being told we will become.

Is this book based on your actual experiences or of someone you know?

The Quiet You Carry isn't based on me. It's fiction. But it is partially inspired by circumstances I've experienced or have seen in the lives of others. I often tell people that Victoria, the protagonist of *The Quiet You Carry*, isn't me, but her emotions are real. Similarly, my book isn't meant to serve as a one-size-fits all narrative about what it's like to be in foster care. I hope to see many, many more books with foster kid protagonists because there are so many different experiences.

When did you become a writer and what or who inspired you?

I've always been a writer, even though I didn't know it at the time! I started writing my own (not-so-good) songs about being lonely when I was five years old, and I would sing them to my dogs. (I know that sounds really sad, but I'm smiling as I remember it because at least Lucky and Blade were an eager audience!).

I continued writing as a way to deal with my feelings. I wrote poetry (again, it wasn't great) when my mom was dying of cancer. I wrote in journals throughout my time in foster care. Writing out my feelings helped me cope.

I started writing seriously, if you could call it that, when I was 20 years old. I wrote a very bad attempt at a memoir, and I geared it toward a young adult audience, because YA is what I liked to read at the time (and still do!). After that, I got an idea for a YA science fiction/dystopian story, and I wrote my first novel. I eventually got a literary agent to represent me for that novel. Though it didn't end up selling to a publishing house, that was the start of my fiction-writing career. My next attempt at a novel was for *The Quiet You Carry*, and the rest is history!

INTERVIEW WITH NIKKI

What writing did you do before *The Quiet You Carry*?

Professionally speaking, since graduating with a degree in journalism, I've worked as a features reporter for a newspaper and as a freelance essay and magazine writer. I've written stories about so many different topics, from how to survive a bear attack to profiles on some really great authors and even a *Hunger Games* fandom article.

Have you always wanted to be a YA author?

Nope! I grew up wanting to be a lawyer, since I was always speaking up for myself in court while in foster care. But after I worked for a lawyer when I was in college, I quickly changed my mind! Ironically, my husband is a lawyer. Watching what he had to go through in law school, I know I made the right choice!

How would you describe your voice as an author?

I sometimes tell people that I'm the saddest happy person I know. Or the happiest sad person. I've suffered a lot in my life, through experiencing abuse and neglect, abandonment, and the untimely deaths of close family members. But I've mostly managed to stay hopeful. I've tried not to let the darkness consume me.

I write characters who also struggle with some pretty heavy stuff. But they don't give up. They live to fight another day. Just getting up out of bed, when everything around you is crumbling, is an act of great strength. It takes bravery. The stories I write sometimes lean dark, but there's always hope. So, to answer the question, my voice as an author is sad, but hopeful.

What have been some challenges you've overcome as an author?

Publishing is a tough business that has no guarantees, unless you count lots and lots of rejection! I'm a pretty sensitive person, and it's challenging for me not to view my self-worth with how I'm doing professionally (but I'm working on it!).

Announcing...

Everything Within and in Between

Coming from HarperChildren's in Fall 2021

Carolina Ortiz at HarperCollins has acquired *The Quiet You Carry* author Nikki Barthelmess's *Everything Within and in Between*, an #OwnVoices contemporary YA novel about the convergence of family, identity, and assimilation. In the novel, Ri Fernandez, a biracial Mexican-American teenager, fights to reclaim her Latinx heritage and her connection with her absent mother from her strict immigrant grandmother, who has kept her from both. Publication is set for fall 2021; Sarah Gerton at Curtis Brown did the deal for world English and world Spanish rights.

Add *Everything Within and in Between* on Goodreads!

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