



Forged by Fire

By Sharon M. Draper

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When Gerald was a child he was fascinated by fire. But fire is dangerous and powerful, and tragedy strikes. His substance-addicted mother is taken from him. Then he loses the loving generosity of a favorite aunt. A brutal stepfather with a flaming temper and an evil secret makes his life miserable. The one bright light in Gerald's life is his little half sister, Angel, whom he struggles to protect from her father, Jordan Sparks, who abuses her, and from their mother, whose irresponsible behavior forces Gerald to work hard to keep the family together.

As a teenager, Gerald finds success as a member of the Hazelwood Tigers basketball team, while Angel develops her talents as a dancer. Trouble still haunts them, however, and Gerald learns, painfully, that young friends can die and old enemies must be faced. In the end he must stand up to his stepfather alone in a blazing confrontation.

Sharon M. Draper has interwoven characters and events from her previous novel, *Tears of a Tiger*, in this unflinchingly realistic portrayal of poverty and child abuse. It is an inspiring story of a young man who rises above the tragic circumstances of his life by drawing on the love and strength of family and friends.

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Forged by Fire By Sharon M. Draper Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Sharon Draper has indeed forged a fiery name for herself in the field of young adult literature--that of a courageous writer, willing to tackle tough, real-life problems while developing honorable, streetwise role models for troubled teens. Her previous novel, *Tears of the Tiger*, garnered much acclaim and became the first recipient of the Coretta Scott King Genesis Award. In this second novel, Draper weaves in characters from *Tears*--most significantly Gerald Nickleby, a young basketball player who discovers his innate strength and determination while protecting his stepsister's safety and his mother's honor.

Unfortunately, Draper's strengths (her desire to delve into tough social issues, such as child abuse, drug addiction, incest, bulimia, and domestic violence) become this book's weakness as the story line teeters on implausible. For example, in less than 20 pages Gerald faces the following: the death of a close friend (a passenger in a car that was driven by a drunk teammate); the discovery of his drunk, evil stepfather trying to sexually assault his younger stepsister; a brutal attack by his stepfather; and a raging apartment fire that threatens to kill them all. Nonetheless, Draper creates believable and important heroes for teenage boys--those who are forged from adversity, only to burn more brightly and courageous. (Ages 12 and older) --*Gail Hudson*

From Publishers Weekly

This prequel to Draper's *Tears of a Tiger* is a stark portrayal of a young man struggling to protect his little sister from a drug-addicted mother and an abusive father. Ages 10-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7-10. Gerald, a battered and neglected African-American child, is severely burned in a fire at the age of three, having been left home alone by his single mother, Monique. Upon leaving the hospital he goes to live with his warm and caring Aunt Queen. When he is nine, his mother reenters his life for the first time since the accident. Monique introduces him to Angel, his four-year-old half-sister, and Jordan Sparks, Angel's surly father. When Aunt Queen dies suddenly of a heart attack, Gerald is returned to his mother and takes on the role of loving protector of his little sister. He soon learns that Sparks, who mentally and physically abuses all of the family, is sexually abusing Angel. Gerald and Angel's testimony helps send Sparks to prison, but upon his release six years later, he returns to the family, with the blessing of Monique, whose own life is checkered with bouts of substance abuse. A terse confrontation erupts into a fiery climax when Sparks again attempts to molest Angel. The riveting first chapter was originally published as a short story in Ebony magazine under the title "One Small Touch." While the rest of the book does not sustain the mood and pace of the initial chapter, *Forged by Fire* is a grim look at an inner-city home where abuse and addiction are a way of life and the children are the victims. There's no all's-well ending, but readers will have hope for Gerald and Angel, who have survived a number of gut-wrenching ordeals by relying on their constant love and caring for one another. ?Tom S. Hurlburt, La Crosse Public Library, WI

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Maria Bruns:

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