Growing up in a world of wealth and pastel-tinted entitlement, fifteen-year-old Carly has always relied on the constancy—and authenticity—of her sister, Anna. But when fourteen-year-old Anna turns plastic-perfect-pretty over the course of a single summer, everything starts to change. And there are boys involved, complicating things as boys always do. With warmth, insight, and an unparalleled gift for finding humor even in stormy situations, beloved author Lauren Myracle dives into the tumultuous waters of sisterhood and shows that even very different sisters can learn to help each other stay afloat.

My Personal Review:
After spending the summer working a labor-intensive job in Tennessee with the Student Conservation Association, fifteen-year-old Carly comes back to her home in Atlanta with a new perspective on life, her priorities, and the future. Her work outdoors strengthened her body and her mind, and gave her a new appreciation for the world outside of her wealthy town and her prestigious Christian prep school.

Carly and her younger sister Anna have always been thick as thieves. They are only one grade apart. Carly's looking forward to the new school year because Anna will be joining her on the high school campus. Anna clearly looks up to Carly, and Carly looks out for Anna. Carly even waited to take P.E. so that she could be in the same gym class as her baby sister.

But when Carly returns from her summer away, she finds that her sister has grown up, not in height or emotional or mental maturity so much as in curves. Even though she's barely a freshman, Anna suddenly looks like the older sister. On the very first day of school, Anna gets hit on by a number of boys, one of whom pulls a stunt which accidentally gets her in trouble with the headmaster - and Carly's the one who gets her out of it. She wonders what will happen on the day that she can't bail Anna out . . . and she worries that soon, Anna will outgrow her.
Carly is a great narrator. She has strength of conviction and a good moral compass. Myracle’s trademark tell-it-like-it-is writing serves her well. Carly doesn’t stand for it when people are rude to her or her sister, and she knows how to handle things when adults are condescending or try to pull the wool over her eyes. Myracle infuses her story with realism, especially when Carly considers and confronts some of the unfair stereotypes in her school and community. Carly knows she lives a privileged life, but unlike the equally rich characters in so many books these days, it makes her uncomfortable. What makes Anna uncomfortable is her changing body, but instead of dressing provocatively and slathering on makeup or going in the opposite direction and covering up in layers, she just keeps wearing her usual clothes, which are pretty mainstream—modest. Though their parents are well-off, neither Carly nor Anna are materialistic. While Carly puts on jeans and tie-dyed shirts, her mother is always impeccably dressed in brand-name clothing. When given the opportunity to go on a shopping spree, the girls leave their mother in Neiman’s, drooling over Armani, to get some jeans and corny screen-print tops in Urban Outfitters, and Carly gets Anna to put some things back rather than overspend. Carly would rather listen to Cat Stevens than Top 40 radio, and she finds herself rather smitten by the new guitar-playing boy in school.

Each character has a clear voice and personality. Cole, Carly’s crush, plays it cool—and he obviously knows that he’s cool. Carly’s buddy Roger, who moved to America from Holland the year before, is considerate and well-mannered. Carly’s preppy friend Peyton is chatty and opinionated. Their classmate Vonzelle keeps her chin up, even when others look down on her because she’s a scholarship student. Carly is bold and bossy while Anna is tentative and sensitive.

When confronted with something difficult, the siblings remind each other to “paddle harder” to get through it or get over it altogether. This sisterly in-joke is based on something their father said to Anna when she was four years old and scared to swim on her own without her duck-shaped float. Their father, the proud owner of both a BMW and a Jaguar, berates the girls on a regular basis. While he is never physically abusive, and though he is nowhere near as horrible as Terra’s father in North of Beautiful, a fantastic book about self-acceptance by Justina Chen Headley, his put-downs really pain his daughters, especially Anna. Meanwhile, their mother makes pointed remarks about Anna’s food intake and figure. When Carly calls her mother on her commentary, readers will cheer. In fact, readers will cheer at many points in this story, but I don’t want to give too much away.

The book is split into three sections, with each given a portion of the title: first comes Peace, then Love, and finally, Baby Ducks. Each chapter is also given a title indicative of the events which occur in those pages. These breaks in chapters and sections are not all distracting nor
interruptive; the story flows right along from the first page to the last, and readers will keep turning those pages to find out what happens next.

The bond between the sisters is strong, so even when the current pulls them apart, they drift back together again. They sound and act like real sisters. They don't always get along, and they say things to each other that they regret later, if not immediately. Carly knows it's good to be yourself, rather than go along with what everyone else is doing, and Anna learns that, too, in her own way. Yes, it can be hard to swim against the current, but it's so worth it - so speak up, stand out, and, if you make a mistake or mess up, try again.

Myracle has written a variety of novels for kids, tweens, and teens. If you've read and enjoyed her books about a girl named Winnie (Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen) but are now a little older, then you will like Peace, Love & Baby Ducks, which is also a little older and a little bolder.

After you've read Carly's story, you'll most likely hope that Myracle writes a book from Anna's perspective. In the meantime, you should definitely pick up The Year My Sister Got Lucky by Aimee Friedman, in which a family's move from city to country changes the dynamic between two sisters. While Peace, Love & Baby Ducks is narrated by the older sister, The Year My Sister Got Lucky is told from the point of view of the younger sister, and both deal with young women reconsidering their lifestyles and priorities. Thus, the two books compliment each other quite well. Also check out The Key to the Golden Firebird by Maureen Johnson, in which three sisters deal with the death of their father in very different ways.

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