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Perfect

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In this story a boy has his new baby sister come home to him. The terms 'disability' and 'impairment' are never used. But there is something different about her. He enjoys watching the swifts which fly around their home. The best view of the darting birds is from his little sister's room.

He struggles to come to terms with his sister's difference. At one point he says 'I couldn't love my sister, no matter how hard I tried.' He prefers to pretend she doesn't exist and refuses to acknowledge her as his sister in public.

A swift falls from the sky. The boy cares for it and it flies away. Through the birds, he understands that his sister needs help. They begin reconciliation.

This book strikes a troubling note. The reader is invited to share the anguish and embarrassment of the sibling of a disabled child. All the reader's sympathy is lavished on him and his struggle to accept the unexpected and imperfect sibling. The question whether the disabled sibling can achieve a worthwhile self-conception is never even raised.

For a disabled reviewer, this book was a painful read. What added to the pain, the book is designed for young readers. Presented to readers aged 4 to 7, the book teaches that difference is scary, that it can only be met by developing extraordinary tolerance. Why does the book not encourage children to ask questions about difference?

The baby girl needs to have a 'perfect smile' only because her brother has not learned to love the imperfect.

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