



## Deep Down Popular: A Wish Novel

By Phoebe Stone

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6th-grader Jessie Lou is deeply, madly, passionately in love with Conrad Parker Smith. Too bad she's a tomboy with only one on-again, off-again friend, and hair so short you can't spit on it. Too bad he's the most popular boy in their small-town school.

But then Conrad hurts his leg and suddenly can't keep up with his old pursuits anymore. Jessie Lou and Conrad start spending a lot more time together, but she can't help wonder -- is she just a substitute friend? And will Conrad forget her when his leg brace comes off and he's king of the school once again?

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## Deep Down Popular: A Wish Novel By Phoebe Stone Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Sixth-grader Jesse Lou is consumed by thoughts of Conrad Smith, but in the small Virginia town where they live, Conrad is popular, while tomboy Jesse Lou has only “maybe-when-I-feel-like-it” friends. Then Conrad starts wearing a leg brace, which translates into loss of his popularity and gives Jesse Lou an opening. Soon she, Conrad, and quirky fourth-grader Quentin form a triumvirate and become involved in an outlandish plot to save Bailey Hardware from big-box store competition. Meanwhile, refreshingly honest Jesse Lou hopes that Conrad keeps limping. This is an ode to love in many forms. Jessie Lou has loved Conrad since second grade, and she learns someone has been in love with her, as well. There is also a sweet relationship between Jessie Lou and her grandfather, who knows how to turn a southern phrase, and between Granddaddy and his daughter, Jessie Lou’s mama. Jessie Lou tells her tale with the strong, rough-edged purity of a young poet, which she is; equally strong are the story’s underpinnings, longing and laughter, and a willingness to believe in something despite the facts, which tangibly manifests itself in a field of flowers that were never supposed to bloom. Grades 5-7. --Ilene Cooper

## Review

DEEP DOWN POPULAR by Phoebe Stone is a beautifully written and evocative novel about the world and soul of Jessie Lou Ferguson, a sixth grade tomboy. Anyone who has felt the loneliness and despair of standing out in all the wrong ways as an emerging adolescent will empathize with Jessie Lou and take her to their hearts. The author's first entries into the field of intermediate fiction, ALL THE BLUE MOONS AT THE WALLACE HOTEL and SONATA #1 FOR RILEY RED were critically acclaimed coming-of-age stories. Casting an even wider net over that terrain, DEEP DOWN POPULAR showcases Stone's ability to create a cast of vivid characters and layered themes: the ache and inner conflicts of first love, family relationships, the impact of change and the inner workings of a multi-generational family. Jessie Lou's colorful speech and keen observations keeps the narrative crackling with energy and insight: "I'm sitting back here steaming and stewing cause that girl is about as reliable as a rubber raft with a hole it it floating backwards down the Cabanash River." And, what is it, exactly, that keeps Jessie Lou so exasperated? For one, there's her sister, Melinda, the family princess who can do no wrong. Then, there's Conrad Parker Smith, the once deep down popular classmate who begins paying attention to Jessie Lou. Is it because he now has a leg brace and is no longer as popular? And, will he still like her if he gets better and regains his popularity? The changing local economy also comes into play when a big box mall, complete with an enormous do-it-yourself department, threatens to close the local hardware store owned by her grandfather's best friend. Every member of this colorful cast of characters has a back story that contributes to the richness and texture of the narrative. When her otherwise perfect sister, Melinda, loses the beauty contest, Jessie Lou shows how superficial sibling rivalry is and how deep her own love runs: "I don't know anymore what I think. I think the moon turned purple and fell out of the sky...I think the stars dropped from the universe and are

clattering all over the roof above us sounding like rain...Everybody is smiling and acting normal, but nothing is normal." W. H.

- > Auden could not have pronounced a personal sorrow with any more feeling.
- > DEEP DOWN POPULAR happens to be presented to the world for ages 9 to
- > 12 and has a 6th grade protagonist, but I believe it has a far wider
- > audience because it addresses grand themes with great compassion,
- > sparkling wit and superlative writing. Even though I have to admit I
- > was tearing up a little by the last page I never wanted this wonderful story to end. --Review by Burgess Needle

#### About the Author

Phoebe Stone is the beloved and acclaimed author of several novels for middle grade, including *The Romeo and Juliet Code*, which was hailed by the *Boston Globe* as "quite simply the best novel for young readers . . . since *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*." She received four starred reviews for *The Boy on Cinnamon Street*, and another star for her novel *Deep Down Popular*. *Booklist* awarded a starred review to *Romeo Blue*, the follow-up to *The Romeo and Juliet Code*, calling it "compelling, and with plenty of heart and soul." Phoebe and her husband live in Middlebury, Vermont.

#### Users Review

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