



## The Devil's Mixtape

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In 1999, Ella was one of three students who arrived at her Denver school with a cache of weapons and a plan to use them. Years later, she sifts through accounts of other violent young women, writing letters to a little sister who had to grow up in the aftermath of that day.

In 1952, Sally was a runaway, hitch-hiking around Australia with a strange, secretive girl named Amy. Each outcasts in their own way, the pair navigate a landscape scarred by old memories and tragedies, searching for a place that will feel like safety and home.

And in 2011, Charlotte was a music journalist on tour with a band, listening to their stories of loss and hope. Though they are in very different times and places, the three are linked by a web of legacies and second chances.

Demons, fallen soldiers, hunters, rock & roll stars, and high-school heartbreaks are all thrown together. The result could never be anything but the Devil's mixtape.

## **The Devil's Mixtape Details**

Date : Published December 15th 2011 by Omnium Gatherum (first published December 14th 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Mary Borsellino

Format : Kindle Edition 275 pages

Genre : Horror, Young Adult, Fiction, Lgbt, Music, Fantasy

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## From Reader Review The Devil's Mixtape for online ebook

### jimmy says

This is a book that I wish, I wish with all my heart had been around when I was a teenager. But even now, I get so much out of.

The Devil's Mixtape explores voices in fiction that rarely get heard, young women and men who are marginalised, or ignored. It tells the story of outcasts and rebels, breaks your heart, but also makes you laugh when you cry.

The characters are fully, richly realised, each with a distinctive voice, and you understand their motivations and ideas, even when they aren't something you yourself might believe in.

The plot is lush, and thick, and masterfully woven, Mary Borsellino is a prime example of an author who shows, and doesn't tell. I never felt like I was being led by a simple go from point a to point b story, I was thrown headfirst into the messy, beautiful, painful world that the character's inhabit.

The story features a truly interesting and unique re-working of Judeo-Christian mythology of the afterlife, specifically Hell, and that's confronting, and a great and challenging read.

It's also an honest and raw experience of mental illness, as many of the characters have a mental illness. And none are demonised for them, or made into villains by it. They aren't cautionary tales, or stereotypes, they are real people, with real struggles, and that is so refreshing to see.

I would recommend this book to any and all teenagers, and to people older, who wish to experience something that is challenging, lyrical, and relevant. No matter your age, you will take away something from this book, whether it be a sweet sadness for the child you were, or a stronger understanding of the person you are.

I honestly cannot recommend it high enough.

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### Daria says

What this book is for me is Green Fried Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe meets the rock band AU of my dreams (of the fandom of *my heart*) -- and sprinkled with the transcendental beauty and intensity that lurks around the edges of Neverwhere, or American Gods.

The stories told in this novel are so personal, so vividly real, so *there* that before you know it you sort of think they were sent directly to you, meant for your eyes, written to speak to you personally. The unfolding of secrets, hurts, loves is so well done -- gently nudging here, spoken calmly, matter-of-factly, there -- it only enhances the feeling of dialogue, always dialogue and communication, as if a young kid looked you once in the eye and deemed you worthy of stepping over the threshold into that private universe of freedom, loneliness, and sharp, ungodlike clemency. And music, of course music; show me a kid with their headphones in, and I'll show you a person with a paradise -- not the kind to be granted, but the kind everyone deserves, the safe haven, a place of love.

The most precious thing is, of course, that the reader is allowed to witness the metamorphosis of the protagonists, the mythology each operates in, and the reality that surrounds them -- this book is a true crossroads.

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### **Beckah says**

>:) Yes I am adding an as-yet-unpublished book by this author to my list of read books; this is because I want to flaunt it in everyone's face! Mwaha! I mean, er, because it was really, really good.

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### **Aimee Nichols says**

One of the best books I've read in a while. I love narratives that switch between different characters, and *The Devil's Mixtape* does this really, really well. All the point-of-view characters have strong voices, and my favourite character tended to change depending on whose voice I was reading at the time.

I also enjoyed the disparate narrative threads, and reading through to see how Borsellino was going to tie them all together.

*The Devil's Mixtape* is a great read, and I particularly recommend it for people who, like me, grew up in the nineties - there are a lot of pop-cultural references that you'll enjoy if this describes you, and if this doesn't describe you, then don't be put off. It's a clever, atmospheric and thoroughly absorbing book.

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### **Narrelle says**

Mary Borsellino wrote the five-book *The Wolf House* vampire series, which I love. It's full of horror, cruelty, compassion, love, art and rock music. *The Devil's Mixtape* is her newest book, and it has all the power, passion, razorblade insights and sometimes shock value of her vampire novel, condensed into a single volume. Mary Borsellino does not choose safe, easy subjects - or protagonists - but she grabs everything in two fists and propels you to places you never saw coming. The other writer who most recently made me feel like this was Suzanne Collins in *The Hunger Games* trilogy

*The Devil's Mixtape* has three interwoven stories, all about fierce women who do not even pretend to play nice. The very first chapter throws you right into the deep end with letters from a girl named Ella Vrenna. Ella once led a shooting spree at an American high school, and died at the end of it. She's in Hell, writing letters to her little sister, now a grown woman and a rock star.

The second thread of stories follows Sally, a part aboriginal teenager, travelling across Australia with Amy, who isn't really a girl. The third thread is told in excerpts from a book, in which rock journalist Charlotte interviews the band HUSH on the road. The members of the band are all linked, in some way, to the Ella, Sally and Amy.

Those are the bare bones of it, but the layers of storytelling and theme are so rich, deep and varied that I can't begin to cover them all. But I'm going to give it a shot.

There's a lot in here about identity. Ella is no longer her whole self but reduced to 'ellavrenna', her full name always spoken in a breath, made a monster by a monstrous act and losing the rest of who she was in the

process. Even in the way she signs her letters, Ella is always confined, but always changing.

Identity features in lots of other ways too. The sainted Stacey, one of the school shooting victims, the other side of Ella's coin, is also remembered more as an icon than as a person.

People you know by one name in one thread are actually going by different names in other parts of the story. Where some people are building an image or identity for themselves with careful iconography, others, like Cherry from HUSH, are using Twitter to break down the icon, communicate with the fans and become more real than the rock idol. Sometimes having more than one name is a way of showing that there is more than one truth about who you are. Even Charlotte turns out to have a secret identity.

The Devil's Mixtape is full of families and siblings torn apart by sickness, violence and death; and full of people forging new families for themselves in the aftermath. The characters are frayed, sometimes broken. They are all terribly flawed and tragically human - even (or especially) the monsters.

God and the Devil are mentioned a lot in this book. Hell, too, since that is where Ella resides, along with a lot of other people who haven't done things half so evil as she has. But I don't see God here really as a religious God. This god seems a personification of a conformist society, intolerant of difference: if you're queer and won't pretend not to be; if you're a girl and won't be sweet and pliable; if you fail to conform (and if you're angry that everyone wants you to) then this God will send you to hell.

A key element of this notion is the story of the wolf and the dog, told in the early parts of the book, ending with the moral "It is better to be hungry and tired and free than to be fat and sleek and at a master's mercy". God will put a collar on you, so perhaps it is better to be damned but free. But being damned is not the same as being without compassion or love. The book is full of people who choose damnation selflessly, protecting others.

The Devil's Mixtape is about refusing to conform by hiding who you are; but also about trying to find a place to belong, where you can be accepted as your whole self. It's passionate, defiant and fierce. It's also full of stories, parables and fables about wolves and fierce women and love. It's full of people who are strong and vocal. They're not always nice, but they are always, like the wolf, free.

Themes aside, the writing itself is superb. It switches from voice to voice cleanly. Ella's letters to Tash differ in tone and style from Sally's present-tense narrative, which contrasts with Amy's past-tense narration even though they share a timeline. Charlotte's use of reporting alongside verbatim interviews with the band give another tone again. This technique keeps the large cast of characters airborne and distinct and provides texture and momentum.

Then there are the turns of phrase, the unexpected observations and the sudden insights that make Mary one of my favourite writers. On this second read-through (I read one of the later drafts a few months ago) I kept finding more interlinking themes, phrases and ideas that weave the three threads together. It's an intricate, tightly woven story that is as rewarding in rereads as the first gripping time.

The Devil's Mixtape is part horror story, part declaration of love for non-conformists, especially those who embrace being outside the norm. It's passionate, smart, powerful and at times incredibly beautiful.

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## **Tonya Moore says**

I like a book that really makes me think, so a book with a title such as The Devil's Mix Tape isn't something that I could pass up on reading, not in a million years. Depending on your personal tastes, the subject matter might be a bit harder to swallow than that of your run-of-the-mill contemporary book. True, it may prove to be challenging for readers who prefer a more linear sort of story but I think the scattered style of storytelling makes The Devil's Mix Tape feel like a puzzle you just have to solve.

The language of The Devil's Mix Tape is vivid and visceral. Mary Borsellino takes a long, hard look at human nature and what she brings to us are questions that have already been brought about by social dichotomies and lore. Reality isn't pretty. Most of us have witnessed and experienced enough cruelty to understand that. Mary Borsellino gives voice to some of the most notorious women in recent history, strong voices of the damaged and twisted. They are voices that do not ask to be forgiven or pitied. We often choose to regard real events concerning violent people--women in particular, as incomprehensible. God forbid that we'd delve into their inner workings and acknowledge why these things actually happened. What The Devil's Mix Tape reminds us is that closing our eyes to the daily disasters unfolding right in front of us does not make us immune to them.

None of us are as good or innocent as we'd like to think we are and none of us are as evil as we fear we are. What does it mean when a terrible choice is the only one we could have made? What is it that makes people splinter, how does it happen and what happens afterward? Who is to be blamed for the misfortunes that befall a person? If there are saints and demons walking the earth, who are they and what were they before?

The Devil's Mix Tape by Mary Borsellino is Samsara expressed more profoundly than I would have expected of any contemporary book. Read and judge for yourself--or judge not.

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## **M says**

I really wanted to like this book.

An Australian author, writing female characters and using an Australian setting? Indigenous, trans and queer characters? Music references? Sounds great.

Unfortunately, too much time is spent on some of the interweaving storylines (especially if you count the information about young female killers as a storyline) and not enough on others; ultimately, this book tries to do a lot of really interesting things but doesn't have enough time to make them as interesting as they deserve to be. Some of the rare or marginalised character types were dealt with so briefly that they felt tokenistic, and I felt uncomfortable about how the Aboriginal characters (major and incidental) and their mythologies were handled.

However, the main issue that I had with the book is likely the very thing that makes it appeal so strongly to some other reviewers: the writing style is one that I associate strongly with the fanfiction community, in not only its works but its general discourse. Not having been involved in the community, and with most of my experiences of said style involving some very poor writing, this really makes the writing miss the mark for me.

It's also fair to say that while the multiple POV characters have the potential to add depth and texture to the work, they lack unique voices. Even the excerpts from (fictional) music journalism come across as simply more of the author's own voice, and characters talk to each other and themselves in the same way across the various time periods that the book covers.

Two stars rather than one, because there were some nice ideas here and I think a more mature version, perhaps in series form rather than a single book, would be very impressive.

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### **Nora aka Diva says**

A powerfully moving story that touches your soul or what's left of it. You get to know the characters and are able to understand them on several levels. The connection between the characters shows albeit a fictional view of how the tapestry of life weaves all our life threads into one grand patterned design. Very well written.

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### **Bunny says**

Another *The Girl Who Was on Fire* essayist.

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### **Edward Erdelac says**

Devil's Mixtape is a lyrical, at times mesmerizing reflection on gender, identity, and the complex sources (and far reaching results) of teenaged violence. I won't try to summarize the plot as it really involves the interwoven stories of three separate groups of characters (including what at first appear to be minor, sideline characters), but at its core is the wonderfully realized voice of a teenaged school shooter (now in hell) writing letters to her now adult rockstar sister. I admit that I did find one of the storylines, that of a pair of girls traveling across Australia a bit less compelling than the others, and was a little confused as to how they fit in until the end, but the author brought the various threads together successfully. This is a brilliant, darkly poetic work that spans decades, interspersed with some insightful observations and stirring turns of phrase. Like poetry, it may be inscrutable to some, but for the most part I found it a very compelling read. Mary Borsellino is a voice to be reckoned with.

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### **Suz says**

ARC for review from Sally.

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### **Hal Bodner says**

THE DEVIL'S MIXTAPE is not the sort of book you read once and stow away on a shelf. It's far too multi-layered for that. Borsellino's writing works on several levels at the same time. With a story told from the

alternating views of roughly half a dozen characters, the book explores variegated topics from gun control to the positive and negative effects of the internet to pop culture's influence on youth to how creative and artistic processes work. Yet, as serious as those themes are, **THE DEVIL'S MIXTAPE** is never preachy or pedantic.

The plot, or the "story" if you will is far from linear. It spans roughly fifty years, two continents and involves twenty or more people, all of whom have nick names or alternative names and who, in the end, are connected in some way. Moreover, like the "cobweb" which refers to the novel's mass murder plot, each storyline is also a single supporting strand of the novel's figurative "web" as a whole.

It's practically impossible to mine all the riches from this book on a first pass. You'll definitely want to read it, put it aside for a few months, and read it again. Not to do so would be to cheat yourself of some of the richness and subtext. Borsellino also explores themes that require thought--and it's difficult to stop and think about what she's saying in the broader sense while you're also eager to see what happens next!

While this book is clearly one of the best I've read this year, it's not without its problems. As captivating as the various story lines are, it's sometimes difficult to separate who's who and what's what. This is obviously a mechanism that Borsellino intentionally crafted. However, there are times when confusion sets in. Worse, it is emphatically NOT the kind of book you want to read on a Kindle; there's too much page turning back and forth trying to figure out which character may have gone by a different name in an earlier chapter. Contrary to what you might expect, that's not an irritating process as it would be if written by a lesser author, but rather it is part of the fun of the book. Nevertheless, it's easier to do by flipping physical pages than by tapping a screen!

Clearly, Borsellino excels at crafting plot and in exploring theme. Her character work, however, is a little weak which often account for the "which one is this?" thoughts that often go through the reader's mind. There's also a bravery (for lack of a better word) to her writing in that she eschews exposition and simply presents the reader with the fantastic elements of her fictional world without explanation. While one can admire the boldness of the technique, there are times when a little more exposition would be useful and would help the reader connect more closely to the plot lines on the first pass.

In the end, I recommend this book highly. However, be warned it is NOT an easy read and should be embarked upon when you have the leisure to pay close attention to what Borsellino is trying to do and what she is trying to say. You'll be well rewarded for the effort.

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### **Laura Martinelli says**

I should point out that I blame Tumblr for leading me to this. I had seen a post promoting this book, thought it sounded interesting and bought a copy for my ereader. (And then it turned out that the wrong synopsis was posted, but I thought "Eh, we'll still give it a shot.") And then, in the middle of this, I got to the scene with Ben's rant about "If teenage girls like a thing, it's automatically derided," and I went "Wait a second, I've read this before! It's that Tumblr post!"

So there's that.

This is an incredibly hard book to sum up in a few paragraphs. Not that it was confusing or hard to follow, but feels like the kind of book that's just so good you can't describe it behind "Just trust me on this one." It's

probably not going to work for everyone, but when it does work, oh my God does it work. Borsellino's writing is this hypnotically haunting piece of work with so many layers and twists to the story, that even though I was muttering "The *fuck* did I just read," I meant that in a good way.

There's four different narratives in this, intertwining and bleeding through each other, and I genuinely did not know what the truth was going to be until I got to the very end. Like, I honestly thought up until the mid-point that Ella was writing her letters in jail, but she's seeing it as her own personalized hell. The whole story of Amy and Sally traveling across Australia and trying to figure out what they were looking for took such a hard left turn, that I was sitting going "Wait, **what?** What the *fuck*?" And this is all background for a series of articles on a band called Hush, whose members are intrinsically linked to Ella and Sally and Amy.

This is a book about finding family in the darkness of the world and finding that love in spite of the darkness. And that people who do terrible things sometimes do them out of loneliness or fear—they're not absolved from the things that they've done, but it doesn't mean they can't try to repent. Most of the heart of this comes from Ella, or at least it was for me. Here's the thing with Ella—her story is a very thinly veiled version of the Columbine shootings, here called Cobweb, to the point where there are specific details (like her school being in Colorado and that her friends would make custom *Doom* levels). I've mentioned that Columbine had probably a bigger effect on me than 9/11 did (not saying one event was worse than another, but there's a reason that I get so upset when I hear about mass shootings and how often that they've happen), so for me to say that I found myself sympathizing with Ella is huge. Especially because she is unrepentant for what she's done, and that feels like the shootings were the right thing to do. But what I liked about it is that Ella's not absolved for what she's done, she doesn't expect to be absolved, she knows why she's in Hell and that she can't take back what she's done. (view spoiler)

While Ella's story directly ties into Hush, the Sally and Amy backstory is a slow burn into revealing what roles they ultimately play in the end. I think this is the one part that really won't work for a lot of people, because it feels so disconnected from the rest of the book until we got to the reveal at the very end. But Sally and Amy's journey is much more hypnotic and drew me into the story more trying to figure out what their connection to the plot is. (view spoiler)

While the Hush sequences feel like the weakest part of the book, I actually enjoyed them the best out of the three major storylines. I really liked how Borsellino portrays the band through Charlotte's articles—we get just enough characterization of all the band members, and enough hints to their backstory and what their connections are to the other plotlines. And I also really liked that Borsellino captures the fandom of Hush and how the band reacts to it—I've said that YA books dealing with music sometimes don't really give a grasp on a fictional band's fandom and music, and I loved how Borsellino wrote about Hush. And she also makes them feel more realistic, and not just token characters—Jacqui's being trans is dealt with in a near-scandal, but she talks about it frankly and the world moves on. And even Cherry and Tash's connection to Cobweb is mentioned, but it's not lingered on until things become clearer in the text of Ella's letters.

This is an incredibly ambitious book, and I don't think there's a lot of writers out there who could pull it off as well as Borsellino has. Aside from a couple of things that kind of break the world of the book, this just pulled me in completely, and wouldn't let go until I got to the end. I highly recommend tracking this one down, and I'm very interested in reading more of her work.

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## **Elizabeth says**

Mary Borsellino's *The Devil's Mixtape* is the kind of book you will be physically unable to put down until you have read the last page and solved every mystery.

Told in a series of alternating points of view, this book masterfully takes a dozen different narratives from different times and weaves them together -- into a Cobweb, if you will -- and each story builds on the last so perfectly it stings with how brilliantly it's done. It's got a rich Australian voice, seamlessly blending history and geography and origin tales.

But most of all, *The Devil's Mixtape* is a story about ladies: badass ladies, mixed-race ladies, ladies with penises, ladies with guns, ladies who are literally the Devil, ladies who are saints, and ladies who are murderers. Each of them have a spark, an anger, an importance, and a VOICE that is so achingly familiar, and the stories they tell rarely wind up being just their own.

I cannot recommend this book enough for any lost, hurt kid of this generation.

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## **Emory says**

As human beings, we all share an innate curiosity, if not fear, of death. The theories abound as to what constitutes consciousness, and what happens to it after the cessation of the physical form. The ideas and mythologies are as varied as people themselves. In Mary Borsellino's "*The Devil's Mixtape*," traditional notions of the afterlife are twisted into something wholly original and pleasantly strange.

The main focus of the narrative is an event referred to as "Cobweb" and the lives that were affected by it. The reader is slowly brought up to speed through four perspectives: alternating between two nomadic girls, excerpts from a biography written about a band formed in the aftermath of "Cobweb," and missives from one of the key players in the event. What at first seems like several disjointed and unrelated narratives seamlessly melds into a single story of life, death, love, loss, regret, and absolution.

As mentioned above, the afterlife plays a key, if somewhat silent, role in the tale. The great game of God and the Devil is played out in all the subtlety one would expect from deities, winding gentle vines of influence throughout the narrative. The order of Heaven, Earth, and Hell through Borsellino's words draws all of the other elements together; the characters, places, events, everything.

To say much more about the story would rob the reader of an incredible novel. Opening the cover is like opening a blank nondescript jigsaw-puzzle box. You don't know what the full picture will be until it is finished. Each piece is integral to the overall whole, even if it is not at first obvious. Once one reaches the end, the experience is the same as standing back from the puzzle and admiring the completed work. You know it is not your creation, but at the same time you will feel privileged to bring it together in your mind through the story.

In short: a touching, creative, and skillfully rendered portrait of humanity. A simple review can not do justice to this book. Much like life itself, you must experience it for yourself.

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