



BROWNING-SHELP, Tanis

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Critical: Book 3 in the Maryn O'Brien Series

Dog-Eared Books, 2018. 241p. Gr. 5-10. 978-1-7753525-0-1. Pbk. \$12.99

Tanis Browning-Shelp continues her Canadian series featuring Maryn O'Brien, a teenage elite athlete, with the talent and drive to become an Olympian. She is inspired by her teacher to create "Maryn O'Brien's Critical Path to the Olympics", a rigorous training and nutritional program. But she is knocked off her path by her mother's diagnosis with breast cancer. It is her mother's wish to keep the knowledge to as few people as possible, so Maryn chooses only to tell her best friend Janey, and not her boyfriend Liam. As her mother's treatment progresses, Maryn has to take time away from her training to drive her mother to appointments, and to help more with the housework. While waiting in the hospital for her mother, Maryn meets an older gentleman who was an English teacher and a lacrosse coach. He inspires her to look more closely at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a teachable moment: she learns "*he was so wrapped up in his desire to become king that he was oblivious to everything, and everyone, else*". (p. 199) Eventually Maryn comes to the realization that her family and friends and quality of life are more important right now than her bike racing. She also realizes that if she chose not to include Liam in her closest secret, they aren't meant to be together right now.

This book once again has enough mountain biking plot line and lingo to engage the enthusiast, but that story is overtaken by the family drama. As Maryn is maturing, so too are her challenges and decisions. Fans of this series will appreciate this growth and conclusion.

Thematic Links: Elite Athletes; Mountain Biking; Cancer; Family Relations; Friendship

Patricia Jerney