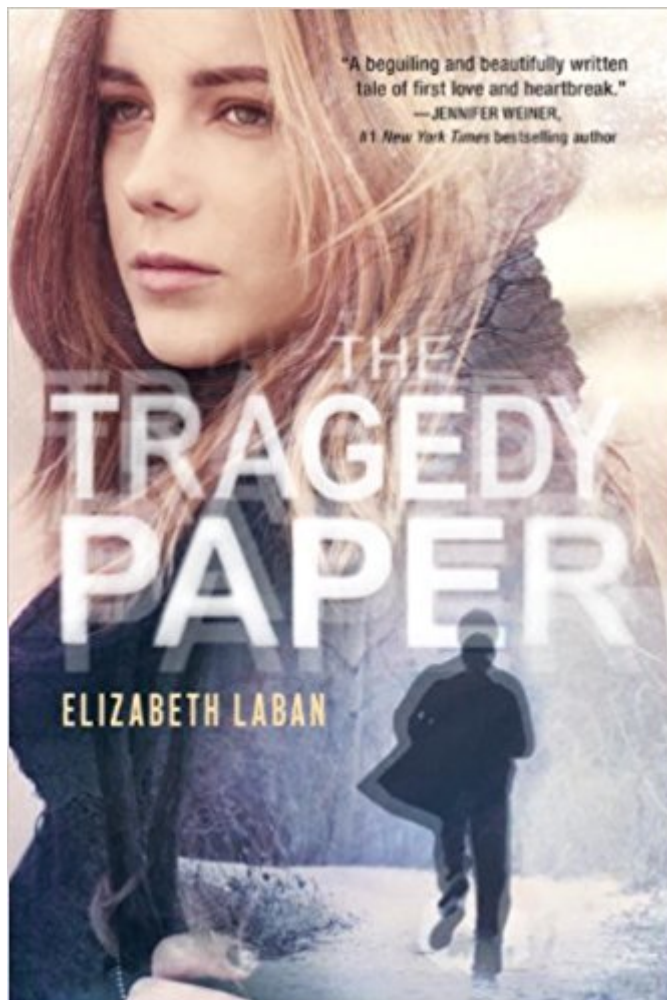


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The Tragedy Paper



Synopsis

Perfect for fans of *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Looking for Alaska*, Jennifer Weiner, #1 New York Times bestselling author, calls *The Tragedy Paper* “a beguiling and beautifully written tale of first love and heartbreak.” It follows the story of Tim Macbeth, a seventeen-year-old albino and a recent transfer to the prestigious Irving School, where the motto is “Enter here to be and find a friend. A friend is the last thing Tim expects or wants—he just hopes to get through his senior year unnoticed. Yet, despite his efforts to blend into the background, he finds himself falling for the quintessential girl, Vanessa Sheller, girlfriend of Irving’s most popular boy. To Tim’s surprise, Vanessa is into him, too, but she can kiss her social status goodbye if anyone ever finds out. Tim and Vanessa begin a clandestine romance, but looming over them is the Tragedy Paper, Irving’s version of a senior year thesis, assigned by the school’s least forgiving teacher. Jumping between viewpoints of the love-struck Tim and Duncan, a current senior about to uncover the truth of Tim and Vanessa, *The Tragedy Paper* is a compelling tale of forbidden love and the lengths people will go to keep their secrets.

Book Information

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Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Special Needs

#1203 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Friendship

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Q&A with Jennifer Weiner & Elizabeth LaBan This isn't your average Q&A. New York Times bestselling author Jennifer Weiner interviews Young Adult author Elizabeth LaBan—who also happens to be her very good friend! Read on to learn about LaBan's favorite books, darkest fears, and of course, her January debut, *The Tragedy Paper*.

Q. Jennifer Weiner: I know you went to a school that's a lot like the one in the book. How did your own experiences in high school inform the story?

A. Elizabeth LaBan: Quite a bit. I went to a school called Hackley in Tarrytown, New York, for my junior and senior years of high school. It was very different from the schools I had gone to until that point, and it took a little getting used to. By the time I was a senior, probably even sooner than that, I loved it and really felt like a part of the community. But I had no idea how much it stuck in my head until the story of *The Tragedy Paper* started to unfold. First of all, the jumping off point for the setting was always Hackley. The Irving School is slightly different (there is no tiny round window above the quad at Hackley the way there is in Tim's and Duncan's dorm room, for example), but as I created that fictional world, Hackley was at its base. Even more than that, though, the whole idea of the actual tragedy paper assignment—which I wrote as a senior—was truly stuck in my head all this time. It came tumbling out when I wrote the book.

Q. Jennifer Weiner: First novels can tend toward the autobiographical, but this story is told from the point of view of two boys. How hard was it to write from a male point of view?

A. Elizabeth LaBan: First let me say—and you, of course, know this, but other people don't—this is not the first novel I've written, it is the first one that is being published. The first one I wrote—which you have read many times—is about someone who is married to a restaurant critic. That is about as autobiographical as it can get for me. So maybe I got a lot of that out of my system by the time I wrote this book, which is actually my fourth novel. I didn't really think that writing from the male point of view was hard. Of all the things I thought about constantly while I was writing *The Tragedy Paper*, the idea that I was writing from a male perspective wasn't one of them. When I was writing about Tim and Duncan, I rarely asked myself, what would a boy do in this situation? Instead, I found myself always thinking, what would a teenager say and do? The scenes where I focused most on that issue were when the boys were interacting with each other. From observing my teenage daughter and her friends, I noticed that there is a big difference between the way the girls deal with other girls and the way the boys deal with other boys. Even in the first scene of the book, when Duncan sees Tad for the first time that year, I knew they wouldn't hug the way girls would. I had to keep those details in mind throughout. While there are clearly great distinctions between boys and girls, they also share a lot of similarities in the way they handle the

challenges of adolescence. Young people—boys and girls—have many of the same concerns and obstacles, so when Tim and Duncan were each alone, those were the things I was paying the most attention to.

Q. Jennifer Weiner: What do you like to read? For people who fall in love with your book, what other books would you recommend? And what were your favorite books in high school?

A. Elizabeth LaBan: I read a lot. I've been to your events where people ask about getting into writing, and one of your tips is to keep reading. I totally agree with that. So what do I read? I've been reading a lot of young adult books lately. I can't get enough of John Green's books. I don't know what I would suggest for people who like my book. Some have compared it to *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Looking For Alaska*. I don't know if people will agree, but I was thrilled by those connections. I've always loved books about teenagers. In high school, I loved S.E. Hinton's books—particularly *The Outsiders* and *That Was Then This Is Now*. I had always fancied the idea of being a writer—really since I can remember—but reading those two books made me want to actually do it. I also read adult books. I love Scott Spencer, John Irving, Curtis Sittenfeld, and Jane Smiley. I discovered another author I love recently named Liane Moriarty. I loved her last two books—especially *What Alice Forgot*—and now I plan to go back and read her earlier books. And of course I read every book you write—the minute they come out—or even sooner when you offer me an advance copy.

Q. Jennifer Weiner: Could you give me your list of the 10 things you're worrying about right now? Bonus points if one of them is the brown recluse spider.

A. Elizabeth LaBan: Did your mother put you up to that question? I know she always gets a kick out of my long list of worries. I'll give you a sense of the 10 things I'll probably worry about over the next few weeks—though I don't mean the really big worries—like that the world will end or there will be a catastrophe. These are my everyday worries:

- 1) I worry that the tiny bit of raw chicken juice that got on my finger at the store will somehow give my whole family salmonella.
- 2) I worry that my son didn't eat the rather chunky soup I packed in his lunch today—and I don't mean chunky in a good way.
- 3) I worry that I won't make my mother's 82nd birthday festive enough (she is big on festive).
- 4) I worry that I'll forget how much I hate swimming in open water and I'll find myself between two shores with no place to touch down.
- 5) I worry that I'll get stuck in an elevator.
- 6) I worry that the smoke detector in a hotel room might not work—which makes me worry about all the smoke detectors in the whole hotel.
- 7) I worry that the hamburger my husband had for lunch wasn't properly cooked.
- 8) I worry that I will settle in to watch *Parenthood* (my

favorite show!) and a mouse will scurry across the floor and ruin my night. 9) I worry that writing all of these worries down will make them come true. 10) Also, did you say something about a brown recluse spider?! "The Tragedy Paper" Map --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review It's an Irving School tradition: each graduating senior chooses the incoming senior who will inherit his dorm room and leaves a treasure for the new occupant. Duncan hardly expects his treasure to be life changing. After all, it's just a stack of CDs narrated by Tim, the strange albino student who came to Irving for the first time last year. Yet as Duncan becomes more obsessed with each successive CD, he also becomes more determined to make the most of his senior year opportunities with fellow student Daisy and as the organizer of this year's senior game. Debut novelist LaBan takes us into private-school culture as well as the heads of two charming yet very different teenage boys and their parallel love stories. Eventually, LaBan's ever-building suspense reaches a harrowing climax. The private school aura heightens the book's fascination. Nonexistent parents; well-intentioned, likable faculty on the periphery; elaborate dorm rooms with overstuffed closets; and even the romantic, snow-covered campus all contribute to a setting that adds heft and intrigue. Finally, LaBan weaves a single underlying thread through both boys' narratives—the tragedy paper. A senior-year requirement possessing its own myths and legends and assigned by the very exacting, personable Mr. Simon, the paper must answer for both the Irving graduate and the reader the ultimate question: how do you define tragedy? Grades 7-12. --Frances Bradburn --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I guess I'm in the minority, because I think this was just okay. This is Laban's first published work. The story follows Duncan, now a senior at a prestigious prep school. Duncan's room used to belong to Tim, who has left him his story on CDs. Duncan knew of Tim, though they weren't friends. Tim, who was only at the school during his final semester of high school, was an outcast at the school, due to being an albino. Tim met and fell in love with Vanessa during his trip to start that last semester, only to find out that she's with the most popular jock in school. This book has been out for awhile, so I don't know that these are really spoilers, but just in case - SPOILER ALERT. I just couldn't see why being an albino made Tim an outcast. Kids are cruel and yes, they pick on those who are different. But this just felt so forced. It was more that Tim was so unhappy being an albino that he immediately assumed people would dislike him. Thus, he pushed them away before they

had a chance to reject him. I give props to Laban for not just making him fat or gay, which are the usual suspects when kids (and adults) bully, but I just can't buy the albino thing being a reason to mistreat someone. I also found NO redeeming qualities in Patrick at all, which made me dislike Vanessa for being with him. As for Duncan, he really wasn't necessary at all. Because I couldn't connect with the characters, I didn't care about what happened to them. Tim may have suffered the most but by the end I wanted to smack him and say, you were so intent on appearing "normal" you ruined your own sight - remind me why I'm supposed to feel sorry for you? It's okay. It's still better than Twilight. And just about anything James Patterson has written lately.

So much of the so-called young adult fiction world these days is occupied by multiple versions of dystopia, characters with some sort of special power, zombies, vampires, werewolves, angels, and warriors, it's easy to overlook some of the sensational work being done in more "traditional" fiction. I was utterly captivated by Elizabeth LaBar's *The Tragedy Paper*, and think it's demonstrative of the depth of this genre today. Tim Macbeth has always been an outsider. Being albino, he's always stood out in crowds for the wrong reasons, when all he really wants to do is hide in a corner and make himself invisible. When his mother and stepfather sell their Chicago house, Tim agrees to attend the prestigious Irving School in upstate New York for his last semester of high school. En route to school, he meets Vanessa Scheller, a vivacious, beautiful, sensitive girl his age--who happens to be a student at Irving as well. Vanessa is, of course, popular, and dating the most popular boy in school, but she seems interested in Tim, especially when there's no one else around. As Tim tries to fight his growing attraction to Vanessa and deal with confusing behavior from her boyfriend, Patrick, he, like all of his fellow seniors, is obsessed with *The Tragedy Paper*, Irving's version of a senior thesis, which is an assignment of great magnitude given by a quirky and demanding English teacher. Tim also deals with increasingly alarming physical problems, which he tries to ignore as he attempts to make sense of his relationship with Vanessa, finish his *Tragedy Paper*, and plan for his future. Everything comes to a head during a fabled and mysterious school activity known as "The Game." At the heart of this novel is Duncan, a senior who learns firsthand all that transpired in Tim and Vanessa's relationship, as he tries making sense of what occurred, while he tries to take control of his own life (and his own *Tragedy Paper*). The book switches viewpoints between Tim and Duncan. I thought this was a really well-written, compelling book. I had suspicions about the direction in which the plot would flow; sometimes I was right and sometimes I was wrong, but I wanted to keep reading. Even though I couldn't quite identify with the characters as it's been quite some time since high school (sigh) LaBar drew me fully into their stories. I wanted to know

what was going to happen to them, and more than that, I wanted to know what happened to the characters after the book was over, which for me is truly the mark of a book I love. This isn't a book in which high school students lament their lives or their star-crossed loves; this is a book that provokes emotions and may very well remind you of feelings you once had. But even if it doesn't provoke memories, it's still a book you should read.

The Tragedy Paper is a book that you read with a feeling of dread because you know something bad is going to happen and you just like the main characters too much to want to allow it to happen. Duncan begins his senior year at The Irving School, a private boarding high school, with the tradition of finding your room and the "gift" that the previous roomer has left for you. He knows from the start that the room he is going to get belonged to Tim, an albino boy who was a part of something bad that had happened the year before. Duncan was also involved in what happened the year before. We just don't know what that was, yet. When Duncan finds his "gift", a set of cds that Tim has left for him, explaining from the start just what happened, Duncan is profoundly changed. Tim meets Vanessa at the airport on his way to starting school. There is a connection between the two and a friendship starts. Vanessa seems to want to keep their relationship a secret especially from her boyfriend Patrick. But Patrick senses something and brings Tim in closer to his circle and involves him in planning the senior game, something they do every year at the school. What happens next is something I didn't see coming. There is also the tragedy paper the seniors have to write. Their English teacher Mr. Simon makes it the major part of their school year. Tragedy looms over everything in this book. You just expect it, even though you don't want to. It seems to be around every corner like it's going to jump out at you. But it is very subtle and hits you when you least expect it. It's written so well that I felt as if I was actually listening to Tim tell the story and I wanted to yell at him to stop because something bad was coming. I have my own idea in my head that things end up happily ever after for them because out of tragedy, something good does come about.

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