



My Cousin's Keeper

Written by Simon French

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I knew, though, that I wasn't about to start looking after Bon. And I sure wasn't going to be his friend. (p.51)

Kieran's life is going great as he becomes more popular and hangs out with the soccer team. While not the leader, he is still one of the gang. When his weird cousin Bon returns to town, Kieran worries that his popularity will be jeopardized if his new friends know that he and Bon are related. Bon is a free spirit with a long braid and a great imagination. Rather than play sports, Bon writes adventure stories with characters such as "Kieran the

Brave" and "Bon the Crusader," that spring from Kieran's medieval set of action figures, one of which Bon "borrowed" two years earlier before his mother took him out of town. Bon's stealing of Kieran's knight and horse figures was bad enough, but now Kieran is shocked to find out that Bon has come to live with his family.

In addition, Bon's newest friend is the new girl that Kieran secretly likes. He wishes that Julia would pay as much attention to him as she does to Bon. The soccer boys bully Bon for being different, and Julia stands up to them. She eventually learns that Kieran is Bon's cousin, and as she comes to know Kieran better, she confronts him about not standing up for his own family. As the soccer boys become more hurtful, Kieran has to decide about standing up for his cousin or ignoring the bullying and letting Bon suffer.

This middle school narrative makes a great companion to books such as Jerry Spinelli's *Loser* (2003), *Stargirl* (2002), or *Crash* (2004), as well as *Where I Belong* (Mary Downing Hahn, 2014), all of which deal with bullying. Additionally, this would make a great addition to any text set that addresses internal conflict and doing what is right, which could include books such as *Little White Lies* (Katie Dale, 2014) and *Whirligig* (Paul Fleischman, 2010). A story that will create great discussions about wrestling with your conscience, determining what is popular or normal, and how those who need help the most are frequently silenced by the more powerful, *My Cousin's Keeper* has the potential to engage young readers in building their own sense of worth as well as the worth of those around them. Well written and deeply felt, this is a wonderful novel.

Simon French lives in Australia where he works as a teacher. He grew up in Sydney, published his first book while still in high school, and has won numerous awards for his books in Australia. He is also the author of *Change the Locks* (2012) and *Cannily Cannily*

(2012). *My Cousin's Keeper* was originally published in Australia under the title, *Other Brother* (2012). More information about French and his work can be found at goodreads (https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/45415.Simon_French).

This book was named a 2015 Outstanding International Book (<http://www.slj.com/2015/02/collection-development/usbby-presents-its-annual-outstanding-international-books-list/>) by USBBY.

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