



## The Language of Dying

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A woman sits beside her father's bedside as the night ticks away the final hours of his life. As she watches over her father, she relives the past week and the events that brought the family together . . . and she recalls all the weeks before that served to pull it apart.

There has never been anything normal about the lives raised in this house. It seems to her that sometimes her family is so colorful that the brightness hurts, and as they all join together in this time of impending loss she examines how they came to be the way they are and how it came to just be her, the drifter, that her father came home to die with.

But, the middle of five children, the woman has her own secrets . . . particularly the draw that pulled her back to the house when her own life looked set to crumble. And sitting through her lonely vigil, she remembers the thing she saw out in the fields all those years ago . . . the thing that they found her screaming for outside in the mud. As she peers through the familiar glass, she can't help but hope and wonder if it will come again.

Because it's one of those nights, isn't it Dad? A special terrible night. A full night. And that's always when it comes. If it comes at all.

## **The Language of Dying Details**

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Author : Sarah Pinborough

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## From Reader Review The Language of Dying for online ebook

### **karen says**

this is kind of like a grownup version of A Monster Calls. it's not a perfect readalike, but it features the same kind of magical realism spin on the experience of death and the grieving process, complete with a supernatural manifestation of that process - all rage and pain and hoof-stomping power.

however, the magic in this is not central to the story - it is an occasional grace note in an otherwise unflinchingly realistic depiction of a woman's experience caring for her beloved father as cancer devours him piece by piece.

there's nothing gentle or sugar-coated here; this isn't about the nobility of facing death after a life well-lived, or clinging to life and family with grit and determination, fighting disease with willpower and love. it's more medical journal than hallmark card - unsparing in its descriptions of the deterioration of the body and mental state of the terminally ill, through the eyes of a loving daughter who isn't ready to let go of her father; uncertain of what her world will become once he is gone. in this tiny book, we are taken through the memories of her life and her father's place in it, in sickness and in health, and how his passing will likely sever all ties between five siblings already scattered by their life choices.

it's only 130 pages, the narrator isn't even given a name, and it ends on a symbolic and highly ambiguous note, but it doesn't lose any of its potency for being so streamlined and open to interpretation, because the parts that matter, the parts that resonate and speak to the thing that binds us all - our mortality - are very well-explored, indeed, whether death comes for us suddenly, or as a horrible slow decline. (see who by fire or The Gashlycrumb Tinies for some of the variety of ways we can be felled)

many thanks to kristin KC for her generous contribution to my appreciation of all things sad, even though, alas - no weeping from me.

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wow. i don't even know what to make of this one yet. need to let the emotional sediment settle.

i'll be back.

come to my blog!

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### **Kristin (KC) - Traveling Sister says**

#### **\*5 stars\***

For its beautiful prose, unflinching honesty, and ability to carry us straight to the unnerving perimeters of death to witness the unraveling—I believe this book deserves no less than 5 stars.

*The Language of Dying* is a quick read, but there is so much conveyed in so few words, and not a speck of it is written in vain. It candidly explores the depths of mortality, narrowing in on a sick man's final days of life as his dignity deteriorates even more quickly than his body.

This glimpse is forceful, and doesn't pretend that death is simple or graceful or anything less than a red-eyed monster of the night who strips you of your sanity and blurs that fragile line between reality and imagination.

It is pain—in its purest form.

This story is told through the perspective of a distraught woman watching her father lie helpless in his bed of death as cancer slowly and unmercifully claims his life. But we don't feel his pain, we feel hers; she who is left to linger.

Although he is the one gasping for air as he coughs up his cancer, and **he** is the one wasting away from his inability to eat or drink because the end is aggressively washing over him, it is *her* death we are made to feel.

We don't learn her name, just her agony.

Through her eyes, we see the death of her father, but it is the quiet death of her spirit that we are bound to consume. Because how does watching a loved one die not kill pieces of you in the process?

With her mother long gone and her siblings estranged and scattered, her father is the last bit of glue loosely holding their dysfunctional family together. One by one, they gather to his side in reluctance, but the glue is dried up and peeling away, and they know their already battered bond will soon die along with him.

There's much sadness lurking in these pages, a sadness mixed heavily with fear. Because, as morbid as it sounds, we will all eventually take these characters places at some point, as the dying and the one sitting helplessly by. And as cruel as it will seem, the life around us will still go on. But after pain comes healing, even if we have to chase after it, hunting it down in the middle of the night just to feel a bit of its warmth.

Although this book is not meant to be a consolation, one can draw comfort in their relation to these words; to these feelings; to the shortcomings of these characters. Above all else, this book is *real*. It showcases our weakness when faced with death, and life in general. It represents our selfishness and our guilt, and it awkwardly hugs us and tells us that it is okay to *not* be okay. It is normal to feel so abnormal...to lose it, sometimes.

I didn't really want to let this story in, but I really didn't have a choice. I read this in a constant "choked up" state—needing to stop here and there to catch some air because it is *that* consuming. It is beautiful in its honesty, and it is beautiful through even its ugliest descriptions. The writing is eloquent and impactful, and just so clever that my eyes were not allowed to glide, but forced to linger and devour and even reread.

Yes, I would recommend this a thousand times over—to those who think they're strong enough to handle the cold reality of death in their fiction, to those who think they're far too weak to try, and to those who need to feel a little less alone in their grief.

(But especially to you, Karen-- because you're on the fence and you need to climb over and NOT pass this one up!;)

**Although this book in its entirety is worthy of a highlight, here are some excerpts that really stood out:**

"There is a language to the dying. It creeps like a shadow alongside the passing years and the taste of it hides in the corners of our mouths. It finds us whether we are sick or healthy. It is a

secret hushed thing that lives in the whisper of the nurses' skirts as they rustle up ad down our stairs..."

"My eyes adjust to the dark and I make patterns out of the shadows and shapes of the plastered ceiling. I think it's human nature, isn't it? To look for patterns or meaning in things."

"...its red eyes glow angrily and through the glass I can see hot steam charge from its flared nostrils as it paws the ground. I think perhaps it is blacker than the night, its mane shining as it is tossed this way and that. I am not sure whether it is beautiful or ugly, but I know that it's wonderful."

"You look so sick. You've given up. You haven't drunk anything. I think this should surely be enough to make death take over. I am wrong of course. You have so much more dying to do yet. You have to become so much less before you go."

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\*Huge thanks to publisher for providing Arc via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review\*

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### **Esil says**

5 stars for emotional potency. I expect this book will resonate tremendously with anyone who has sat throughout the last days with a dying parent, partner or close friend. It certainly brought me right back to my father's side, while he was in palliative care a few years ago as he was dying of pancreatic cancer. The inner thoughts, the quiet communication, the tumultuous emotions, the odd roads your memory takes you down, the shared anger, frustration, love and even humour with other relatives and friends, the selfish sense of being the only one able to decode gestures and looks, and in the end watching one breath, and then another breath, wondering whether there will more breaths, hoping there will and hoping there won't. Yup, this may hit some people at a very personal level. The end of this short narrative and the tinge of magic realism may be a bit hard to take for some. But, to me, this was sparse, emotional and beautifully done. Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy. And thanks to a few GR friends for bringing this book to my attention.

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### **Debbie says**

#### **5 BIG STARS!**

This one totally knocked my socks off. What a secret gem and one of my favorites this year! This is the story of a daughter tending to her dying father, told in first person. The voice pulled me right in to the secret chamber of wise thoughts and heavy emotions, and it never let me out. There is a subtleness to the emotion, a quietness, and it made its way into my soul. I wanted to bottle up the language and set it on my shelf as a tonic when I'm feeling down.

Wow, this book is making me want to be all serious and poetic. It's just that I was in love with it and when you're in love, you start talking all weird and dreamy.

Here's how the book opens:

**“There is a language to dying. It creeps like a shadow alongside the passing years and the taste of it hides in the corners of our mouths. It finds us whether we are sick or healthy. It is a secret hushed thing that lives in the whisper of the nurses’ skirts as they rustle up and down our stairs. They’ve taught me to face the language one syllable at a time, slowing creating an unwilling meaning.”**

Another favorite:

**“Sometimes there are just too many words filling up space and not enough emptiness left for thinking. I keep a little emptiness inside for when I need it.”**

I identified with this last quote bigtime. I've just returned from a tour of Scotland, which included non-stop history lessons. I'm not into history (tell me about live people, not dead ones, please). Many times I screamed in my head—as I've done in the past, many times—“Stop it! Please! I can't hear myself think!” I missed being able to be inside my head without constant interruption of facts facts facts. I did get pretty good at tuning out the history lessons, so I guess I kept a little emptiness inside when I needed it.

This book isn't big on plot; it's big on psychological insight. Even without a fast plot, it's a fast read (except when you stop to savor, which I did frequently). It's not a long book, so that's another reason you can zip through it.

There is some insightful sibling interaction, as the siblings come for one last visit to their dying dad. I identified with the narrator in some ways—she is the middle of 5 children, so am I. She's the daydreamer of the group, so am I. Of course this made me even more glued to the page.

There is a little magical realism, which I think is supposed to have more importance than I am giving it. Magical realism usually doesn't work for me, but I have a trick now. Like with *The Enchanted* (an all-time favorite book I read in 2015), in this book I interpret the magical realism as something inside the head of the narrator—as imagination. The trick worked with both books, yay yay yay! The term “magical realism” no longer sends me running the other way.

I have a big problem with how Goodreads categorizes this book. It lists in this order, “Fantasy, Fiction, Horror, Contemporary, Magical Realism, Novella.” This is all wrong, in my humble opinion. “Contemporary Fiction” should lead the list, “Magical Realism” should be next, and the list should end with “Novella” (for those who just HAVE to know that it's a short book). But “Fantasy”? No. And “Horror” is just plain wrong! There's not any horror—I do not read horror, period. If I had looked at the categories before picking the book up, I probably would not have read it. The author's bio shows that she writes fantasy and horror, so I think that's how this book got wrongly categorized.

I will say that despite its lusciousness, it's a gloomy book, and I guess I'd have trouble recommending it to the world because of that. Some people just don't like to read something depressing. For me, “upbeat” is not a requirement—if a book is brilliant (and not gory), it's perfect, regardless of the tone. The depressing part of the story is in the last quarter, when the narrator is describing the intricate and personal and physical horrors of dying. I used to be able to read about the process of dying without twitching so uncomfortably, but now that I'm older, I think it's closer and scarier, and it left me feeling unsettled, to say the least. Still, I'm in awe of this writer's skill, and the book had a big impact on me. I will be checking out Pinborough's other work, I guarantee you.

5 stars, no questions asked.

Thanks to NetGalley for the advance copy.

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### **Melissa says**

**Don't let the length fool you, this quick snapshot of a story packs one heck of an emotional punch.**

With a somber and reflective tone, the author explores the painful reality of death and those we leave behind.

This meaningful story centers around five siblings returning home to face the haunting memories of their childhood and one another; in the midst of their father's death. He's slowly withering away and it's incredibly sad and humbling to watch. Naturally, it made me contemplate how precious life truly is and just how excruciating it would be for anyone in this situation. And while this might sound morbid, I had to ask myself - would it be better to go suddenly and save those you love from this painful waiting game of sorts?

There are plenty of cracks and divisions among the siblings; how could there not be? Life has dragged each of them in different directions and chunks of time have passed. The harsh reality is, it's taken a death to bring them all together.

Told through the eyes of the middle child, a nearly 40-year-old woman, whose prone to drifting off in her own mind, the story is almost poetic in a way. For me, it reiterated how important it is to let go of the past and make more of an effort. That despite the years, the distance or the words that have gone unspoken, the familial connection will always remain.

*"Even when by rights it has no place left to be, love is hard to kill. Like life. And sometimes, like life, it takes you completely by surprise."*

I have to mention the ending. There's a part of me that's almost embarrassed to admit this, but seriously, I didn't get it. Was a part of it only a figment of her imagination? I'm confused. . .

*\*Thank you to Quercus/Jo Fletcher Books and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Sue says**

Very powerful view of a family coping, or not, with the actuality of the father's impending death, told through the middle daughter's perspective. The emotions are raw and the physical details are real. The family dynamics complex but also well explained. The ending...Well I was holding my breath.

This is not an easy book to read; how could it be. But it is, in its own way, somehow satisfying emotionally. Definitely recommended.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

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### **Elyse Walters says**

I hated this book - and now I can't sleep. Why the hell did I read it????? That's my biggest question ---why the hell did I read THIS book? I didn't 'need' it.....nor did I take away anything new that I didn't already know.

I wasn't uplifted - it wasn't enjoyable - Yet... I read the whole damn thing!

I did appreciate and respect Sarah Pinborough's opening .....

"There is a language to dying. It creeps like a shadow alongside the passing years and the taste of it hides in the corners of our mouths. It finds us whether we are sick or healthy. It is a secret hushed thing that lives in a whisper of the nurses' skirts as they rustle up and down our stairs. They've taught me to face the language one syllable at a time, slowly creating an unwilling meaning."

Cheyne-Stoking

Terminal agitation

The agitations are ending. The Cheyne-Stoking is beginning. ( when a person is dying they move into this next cycle- their last living cycle- before death)

Honestly---though, I felt sick reading this book. I would have been better off having skipped this--- and I rarely say that about anything I read.

This book did NOT give me comfort. I honestly didn't really need to re-visit my own past memories.... of watching A SLOW DEATH OF A LOVED ONE.

DEATH IS NOT A BEAUTIFUL PROCESS - ITS HARD!!! .....

BUT .... hey.....This book gave many readers 'something' - so they win: they benefit!

It was simply - a book I wish I had never read! BEEN THERE - DONE THAT - HAVE READ SIMILAR BEFORE - HAVE LIVED IT BEFORE - AND WILL AGAIN!

Yes, Sara Pinborough described what it feels like to wish the dying person - would either come back or leave completely....as the in-between is no good for anyone.....

Yes, Sara describes what it feels like to be closed off from the the world -seldom leaving the house. Lots of tea and more chocolate biscuits than a person would ever normally eat.

But....the characters were weak. REALLY REALLY WEAK!!!!

There are two twins in this story. One paranoid schizophrenic and the other a junkie... but that's ALL we know about them. All we learn is, "our family has so much color that brightness is damaging". WHAT? That tells me NOTHING! - so I'm left with this image of these twins and their challenges with no history -and on with the show. Tea anyone? I'm not sure WHY this lyrical language is beautiful if it doesn't communicate.

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I'll get off my 'whatever'..... something about this book - and me reading it - ( the combination) pissed me off! I still can't sleep - I'll reach for a more enjoyable book!

## **Chelsea Humphrey says**

This will be a teeny tiny review for a teeny tiny book, but just know it deserves no less than 5 stars in my book. This would be a fantastic gateway book for those looking to enter the magical realism realm without going hardcore right away. Books with cancer patients always get me, since my mom was diagnosed with

stage 4 breast cancer back in 2008. Hallelujah she has been in full remission since then (!!!), but it still always makes me weepy reading about other's stories, real or not. This particular one is set around a very sick man and his family's interactions during the last hours of his life.

Clearly the plot is slim and not even the main focus of the book, so let's just leave it alone and move along. This story was beautiful, tragic, heavy, and poetic all at once; I picked this up on a Sunday evening and read it's entirety in one sitting, though you could easily take your time and soak up every detail if you chose to. I was particularly moved by the final segments where we walk through the process of dying. Even though I'm still young and hopefully not near my time to go, there was something very scary and disturbing about experiencing these final moments with this sick man and his family. I had to pause at moments to just take in what I was reading and the heavy finality it brought to the story. Needless to say, if you are looking for a book that will sweep you out of your life for a brief moment, one that is gorgeously haunting and will stick with you, this is it.

**\*I'd like to thank the publisher for providing my copy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest and fair review.**

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### **Debbie "DJ" says**

I have no words to describe how deeply touching this book is. We all come face to face with the death of a loved one at some point in our lives. I just love a book with amazing writing, and Sarah Pinborough is simply a master with words. She describes what it is like for the middle daughter, the one who has lived with her father, the tightness of their bond, what it is like now that he is slipping away. How siblings show up to help, some surprise while others disappoint. And will this bring them closer together or tear them apart. All of it felt so real to me, even the touches of magical realism were nothing less than brilliant. Beautiful and heartfelt, I won't forget this one!

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### **Cheri says**

“Time is surreal. I can hear that laugh as if it were yesterday and in the same instant I can see the years ahead in which I will never hear it again. I squeeze my eyes shut let the drifting take over.”

Death, its impact on the lives of the siblings, how it changes the way each person views the words and actions of their siblings. It impacts and changes relationships of the caregiver and the dying, as well as the relationships of the caregiver and the remaining family. Death's imminence changes everything, what you do, think, feel, hear and don't hear, where your focus is, until exhaustion claims your thoughts and they drift away.

Recollections of the narrator, family scenarios through the years, explanations through situations that show the chain of events leading to her brothers being viewed as less than reliable in the past, past resentments leading to sharply worded comments between siblings. All these things are bound to happen in that space between life and death while you're playing the Watchman. Everyone comes into that situation with a different agenda.

If you've experienced the death of a parent or loved one you'll recognize the internal conflicts, if you have

your own siblings to throw into the mix, then you will undoubtedly be doing some comparing and maybe some reliving of the struggles between family members, and the feelings that result.

This is a relatively brief story, but it is powerful.

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Many thanks to Quercus / Jo Fletcher Books, NetGalley and to author Sarah Pinborough for providing me with an advanced copy to read.

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### **Karen says**

A woman is taking care of her dying father. When his death is imminent, she calls in her four siblings who all arrive to pay their last respects. There is conflict and resentment as each copes with their dad's impending death. Clearly, they use different coping mechanisms that lead to misunderstandings and anger. This difficult time will change relationships but will it divide or bring them closer? I was hopeful for the latter. I lost my own father in May to a long-lasting horrible illness and one of my three siblings was his caregiver. This made for an even more emotional read as I made comparisons to my own experience. Bits hit close to home. This is a short but deeply moving story.

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### **Diane S ? says**

A novella about a man and his daughter, the daughter who has watched over him as lay dying. The man who raised his family of five after his wife and their mother left him. This daughter is the middle one, and as she watches and speaks to him we learn her backstory, the events in her life that made her return to this house. Although the three brothers and her older sister come home to say goodbye they all leave again and it is only her, the father and whatever is waiting for her.

A wonderfully written book, albeit grim about a family who has suffered its fair share of trials. A difficult subject to say the least and yet one we will all face at one times or another in our lives. The author uses magical realism to great effect and I was a bit surprised by the ending. A very different but good story.

ARC from Netgalley.

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### **Larry H says**

"It's been a long few months and, even though time has folded from the first diagnosis to now, my body and soul know that I have lived through every painful second of it. They sing it to me through aching limbs and a torn heart."

A woman's father is in the last few days of his life, as he is dying from cancer. She has cared for him through his illness, watching his body and his mind deteriorate. She wants his suffering to end, but fears what the end of that suffering will mean for her life.

Her siblings have all come to the house they grew up in, now her house, to pay their last respects. Their family has been fractured emotionally for years, with each of them having suffered traumas, some known and some hidden. But even coming together for one purpose, saying goodbye to their father, is fraught with disaster.

The woman herself has had her share of trauma and tragedy, which has left her angry, somewhat unstable, and knowing she may never have the chance to be happy ever again. But she has given everything she has to care for his father and make his last days as comfortable and secure as possible.

Ever since she was a child, she has had visions of a nameless presence, hulking, alone, and waiting for her. She only sees it at certain moments, and she knows that it will come again. But it is a reunion she fears and welcomes, because what will it mean for her if she finally connects with it?

Sarah Pinborough's ***Behind Her Eyes*** (see my original review) was tremendously unforgettable because of its WTF ending, but also because of how her storytelling ability helped the book transcend an immensely implausible plot. But as strong as her writing was in that book, it really didn't prepare me for the sheer power and beauty of her writing in ***The Language of Dying***.

Stripped of any artifice, there is poetry and emotion that characterizes Pinborough's writing in this book. Anyone who has seen a loved one suffer from a terminal illness will probably recognize some of the feelings and situations the narrator experiences, the simultaneous desire and dread that the person's battle will end. But while there are certainly moments that may make you cry, this is not an emotionally manipulative book, but rather a tremendously contemplative one.

If the pain of loss is still fresh, reading this book may reopen those wounds. But this is an immensely beautiful book, one which demands to be read, one which will wow and dazzle on the power of its words and its emotions.

NetGalley and Quercus (US) provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

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### **Linda says**

I received a copy of The Language of Dying by Sarah Pinborough through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to NetGalley and to Sarah Pinborough for the opportunity.

Death is the Great Equalizer.

Death fails to note if it has arrived far before one's first breath was ever taken. It never keeps track of the breaths unnoticed until the last one comes too soon.

A house is in near darkness and there sits The One. The One is The Watcher who keeps vigilance with her back poised against Good Intentions. Eyes stare into nothingness and nothingness stares back. "But then love clings on, doesn't it?"

The woman leaves the room on tiptoe to answer the door. Penny, her older sister, embraces her. Penny avoids going up the stairs to encounter her invalid father whose days are overshadowed by the cancer that ravages within him. Soon the twin brothers arrive and yet another brother, Paul. Each of the late arrivals perches on a chair and chain smokes or snacks. Let no hand be idle. Let no mind teeter on the brink of what surely is to happen.

Conversations take place and yet words are not spoken. And life intrudes as it always does. And the roles that we assign to ourselves take precedence over everything. The excuses are made and the little band of brothers and sister take leave with promises to return. To settle matters....the matters that override the daunting present.

But The One remains. She waits with those same eyes. But this time she finds that elusive voice. The voice that can only unburden the soul in whispers. She tells her father of her past and pours her heavy regrets into a stone chalice as an offering. It is enough. It will always be enough.

Sarah Pinborough presents a flawed family and their interactions with one another in the darkness of their father's last days. It is truly an emotional read because you will see mirror images of yourself or perhaps even your own reality. The words will leave their mark on your conscience. "I kiss your head. I leave my love there forever."

But The One will meet her Stronger Self in the night. You'll see.....

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### **Pouting Always says**

A women reflects on her life as she waits for her father to die. He is in the last stages of lung cancer after a life of chain smoking and her older sister has come to help her in the last few days. She is the middle child, sandwiched between two older children and two younger, and has always felt closest to their father. His impending death though only highlights the dysfunction of the siblings relationship and forces her to reflect on their own struggles and self destruction.

Spoilers, maybe? I liked how the book was written, though it took a while for me to get into it. It felt pretty jarring and fragmented in the beginning but it is clearly intentional and does add to the whole tone of the book. I also enjoyed the really physical description of how the women was feeling, it really added to the whole detached feeling. The book did a pretty good job portraying mental illness in a way that I liked where it didn't feel exaggerated or done for the sake of shock if that makes sense. Like her brother's struggles with addiction and her other brothers constant overzealous exertions that end in him hiding away. Even the women's own domestic abuse and 'drifting' all felt like things that can happen to anyone and more real to me.

I really also liked the whole magic realism thing going on with the horse and death, that was pretty cool. Some of the writing was more poetic and it kind of bordered on getting to be too much for me, but I do get pretty emotional so I don't handle writing that is more emotional or sentimental as well. I felt it particular in the beginning but as with the fragmented writing I got some what eased into it as I kept going. Enjoyed the book overall and it wasn't very long so I finished it up in a sitting which is always a plus.

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