



## The Rest of Her Life

*Laura Moriarty*

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## **The Rest of Her Life** Laura Moriarty

In *The Rest of Her Life*, Laura Moriarty delivers a luminous, compassionate, and provocative look at how mothers and daughters with the best intentions can be blind to the harm they do to one another. Leigh is the mother of high-achieving, popular high school senior Kara. Their relationship is already strained for reasons Leigh does not fully understand when, in a moment of carelessness, Kara makes a mistake that ends in tragedy -- the effects of which not only divide Leigh's family, but polarize the entire community. We see the story from Leigh's perspective, as she grapples with the hard reality of what her daughter has done and the devastating consequences her actions have on the family of another teenage girl in town, all while struggling to protect Kara in the face of rising public outcry.

Like the best works of Jane Hamilton, Jodi Picoult, and Alice Sebold, Laura Moriarty's *The Rest of Her Life* is a novel of complex moral dilemma, filled with nuanced characters and a page-turning plot that makes readers ask themselves, "What would I do"

## **The Rest of Her Life Details**

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Author : Laura Moriarty

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## From Reader Review The Rest of Her Life for online ebook

### Rhonda Rae Baker says

Was going to give this a three because of the ending but after thinking about it the novel deserves a four because it is so well written and insightful. I was involved from the beginning and found myself agreeing with the characters on so many details. My heart was wrenched with what happened as I've been to places very similar. A very beautiful story, one that you'll remember for a long time. As mother's we try our very best to protect the children and give them what we never had...but we really can't protect them from choices in the world and what we think they need may be not what they want...it is extremely difficult being a parent. No child is alike...I will read more of this author...she knows how to portray the hearts of real people...thanks Laura!

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### Sheryl Sorrentino says

From practically the opening page, this story was intense, emotional and gripping. *The Rest of Her Life* shows us how, from one minute to the next, one error in judgment—a teeny, tiny moment of inattention—can profoundly alter so many lives forever. I found both the plot and characters to be intelligent, moving and utterly convincing.

Distracted by a stray dog, eighteen-year-old Kara Churchill accidentally hits and kills a pedestrian in a crosswalk while driving her parents' Suburban SUV. The victim, Bethany Cleese, is a fellow neighborhood teen being raised by a single mom. One beloved young life is irretrievably lost, but many, many others are deeply affected. Although Kara's punishment will likely be light (a reckless driving charge), Kara is hell-bent on punishing herself to the max. She withdraws, stops eating, and sinks into a deep depression while her father tries to do "damage control." Gary Churchill orders the family not to talk to anyone—not even their closest friends, mother-daughter duo Eva (the town gossip) and Kara's best friend, Willow. Gary's all about lawyers, insurance, and making sure Kara avoids jail and starts college in the fall on schedule as if nothing happened.

Kara's mom, Leigh (from whose point of view this story is told) processes the tragedy quite differently. She becomes obsessed with Bethany's mother, Diane, and grows increasingly desperate to finagle Diane's forgiveness even as the dents in her own relationship with Kara become all-the-more evident under the weight of her family's sudden misfortune. To Leigh, Kara's carelessness offers proof to the entire small town of Danby, Kansas that she has failed as a mother. She is reminded of something Jackie Kennedy once said: "If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do matters very much." Damning herself, Leigh concludes that "despite her best intentions, apparently, she'd somehow bungled raising her daughter. Now that Kara had bungled too, it was true—nothing else seemed to matter."

Although on the surface, *The Rest of Her Life* is about a fatal accident, Leigh's realization about her maternal inadequacy is what gives this story its beating heart. As the narrative progresses, we slowly learn why Leigh has had such a difficult time with motherhood: She was abandoned by her own mother as a 16-year-old, left to live in a trailer with her hapless if kind-hearted older sister (herself a young single mom), and basically had to grope her way through life in order to become a teacher and form a stable family as an adult.

*The Rest of Her Life* reveals just how difficult it is to parent a child when one has had defective (or no)

parenting herself. Understanding intellectually that her mom did the best she could given how *she* was raised did little to heal Leigh's festering emotional wounds. Even though Leigh could dance circles around her own self-absorbed, clueless mother, she has difficulty connecting with others—including her own family, and slowly comes to realize that, despite her best efforts to be a different sort of parent than her mom, her own daughter simply doesn't like her. At this crucial time when she most wants to comfort and connect with Kara, she is blocked at every turn. Stomach-clenching scenes are abundant throughout this novel, but the clumsy mother-daughter standoffs are perhaps the most heartbreakingly authentic; they certainly struck a nerve with me.

A well-rounded cast of nuanced secondary characters—including younger son Justin; sister Pam; Eva and her daughter, Willow; Cynthia Tork (the book-censoring mom of one of Leigh's students); and especially Bethany's mom, Diane—pepper this already compelling tale with thorny complexity as Leigh grapples with her day-to-day connections and commitments. After all, no matter the pain we might be suffering inside, life marches on all around us.

Though I am perhaps in the minority in finding Laura Moriarty's novel to be the rare gem that left me emotionally spellbound, in this reader's humble opinion, *The Rest of Her Life* is a truly extraordinary book deserving of five stars. I would give it six if I could.

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### **Karen Benson says**

I could not put this book down and finished it the same day I started it. It seems that opinions of this book are all over the place, but I for one found it to be quite intriguing and well-written.

Perhaps the description on the cover is a bit misleading since the story is actually about the mother, who has a very strained relationship with her teen daughter which is put to the test by the tragedy. She relives her sad and unfortunate childhood and relationship with her own mother and finds that what she wants for her own mother-daughter relationship is not to be.

This is how I came to know Leigh and relate to her personality. I can appreciate how she tried to be a complete opposite of her own mother. Some of us try to over compensate for the love we didn't get by trying too hard and being disappointed that we have failed when we feel rejected by those we reach out to, in a misunderstood way. It's what we know. We all dream of a Norman Rockwell life, don't we?

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### **Joy H. says**

Added 6/15/15 - I read to page 62 of this book but didn't read further because I found the story too depressing. The story concerns a daughter who fatally hit a pedestrian while driving. I don't enjoy reading about the terrible things which happen to people but I suppose that's the stuff of novels. The book seems to wallow in depressing situations. Here's a sample from page 61 & 62:

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"...Leigh had woken up with her pillow and sheets covered in her own vomit. Waking up to the smell of it had made her vomit again, and then it was in her hair, on her blanket but she was too weak to stand up and get away."

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I bailed out after that. I don't need to read that kind of writing. For me the story has a value of only one star. The book seemed to "wallow" in the depressing situations. It wasn't the theme of the story so much as the "wallowing". There's just too much concentration on descriptions of the sad happenings and their effects. It seems to be indulgence to an immoderate degree, over and over, just wallowing in sadness.

PS-I found some good use of words on page 45 of this book: "... a kind of heightened consciousness, a heightened sensitivity to truth."

To me the words refer to seeing or realizing the reality of a situation for the first time.

PPS-I originally chose this book because I had enjoyed reading Moriarty's The Chaperone. I didn't find that depressing.

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### **Lindsay Underwood says**

Solid meh on this one. Kept thinking something cool was gonna happen. Never did. Guess the point was that mothers and daughters are selfish? Whatevs.

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### **Liz B says**

The rating is a personal one. I suppose the book is a fine book, and at least moderately well-written. It's not really the book's fault that I hated the premise (everything that happens after the protagonist's teenage daughter accidentally runs over and kills another teenager), disliked the protagonist (whiny), and was pretty much uninterested in the back story. In fact, the main real critique I have of this novel--that is, a critique not based on personal taste and bias--is that it doesn't have enough story to really make it a novel. It felt like a short story that had been forced into being a novel, with back story grafted in to make it long enough. As a short story, I may even have liked it.

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### **Krista says**

I thought the way the daughter's reactions to the accident evolved was thoughtful and real, but that was only a tiny part of the story. Despite what the book cover and premise in the blurb say, the story is actually about the mother; the main event just served as a catalyst for her to realize things about herself and her relationships with her family and friends. At first I didn't like her at all because of her petty feelings in momentous circumstances, but as her past unfolded, I started to understand and so did she. She didn't just have an epiphany and suddenly change the way she had been her whole adult life, though; the author showed small things she tried to do and how unnatural they felt, which I also thought was realistic. So the ending turned out satisfying but not all tied up in a bow.

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### **?Karen says**

There is a lot of sadness in this book and it comes out in so many different ways. Following a car accident

where her daughter hits and kills another teenage girl, the mom struggles with how she can deal with the after effects and how it is damaging her daughter's life. Because the mom's own mother did not know how to show love or affection properly, the mom's own attempts to do so often fall flat. There is a very poignant moment when she realizes she does act like her own mother, despite attempts specifically to not be like her. 3.5 stars.

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### **Anna (Bananas!) says**

I didn't expect to care about this book. It was a pleasant surprise. I did two rounds of reader reviews through Elle magazine several years ago and this was one of the picks. (Great way to get free books. I see why the blog reviewing is so popular.)

The heart of this book lies in the mother/daughter relationship. It delves into how mothers and daughters relate, especially how they screw with each others' heads and also how no one understands a woman like her mother can. This can be the most torturous and most beautiful love/hate relationship you'll ever have.

For that reason, the book struck a chord with me and I've never forgotten it.

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### **Dale Harcombe says**

This book starts with a tragic accident that affects Kara and her family. I think I expected the story would focus on Kara and how this event affected more. Instead the story is more about her mother Leigh and her inability to reach out and communicate with her daughter. Over the course of the novel we get flashbacks to Leigh's childhood and the relationship or lack thereof with her mother, which helps us understand Leigh. One quote that struck me in the novel was attributed to Jackie Kennedy. ' If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do matters very much.' Leigh's main aim in life is to be a good mother unlike her own mother was and yet Leigh fails to relate to her daughter, even before the accident. While it is easy to empathise with Leigh given her upbringing, I still found it hard to warm to her. But then, that perhaps is indicative of her life and her inability to relate to others. It's an interesting read but I think the cover and the blurb do it a disservice since in the end the story is more Leigh's story than Kara's. But it certainly raises some issues about responsibility, parenting and relationships.

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### **Libby says**

What we want for our children isn't always what they need. A mother/daughter story with a painful twist.

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### **Patty Schneider Swalley says**

I was really disappointed in this book. The author never develops the characters enough for you to make this story believable.

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### **AddyF says**

This was primarily a book about mother-daughter relationships, and the protagonist in this book was, basically, a secular me. Reading this book was sort of an exercise in getting to know myself better and how my own relationship with my mother affects how I relate to my daughter. This was an enjoyable read, and I thought the book was well written.

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### **Christina says**

I am tired of books that say one thing and deliver another. This was supposed to be the story of a mother dealing with an accident her daughter had in which she killed another teenager. Instead it was a flashback rich tale of Mom's woes thorough life and the accident took a backseat, so much so that the truth about what happened that day was NEVER given. Waste of time!

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### **Jaime Hardin says**

I love that this author doesn't feel the need to spoon feed her readers every detail. She gives her audience some credit and lets us put things together ourselves. This book was just perfect. The characters were so believable and the story progressed at just the right speed. My favorite character was Eva. Everyone needs a friend like her! I would definitely recommend this book.

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### **Lisa says**

Leigh Churchill has a nice life in a small Kansas town: A sweet husband, two good kids, a teaching job she loves. There's the usual teenage trouble with her daughter, Kara, but nothing serious. It all changes one day - on the first page of the book - when a distracted Kara runs a stop sign and ends up killing a girl.

In "The Rest of Her Life," Moriarty follows the family in the turmoil after the accident. She deftly captures the initial horror and the sadness, but also explores the wash of feelings that comes afterward: the frustration of never being able to apologize enough, the fear of leaving your house because the whole town is talking about you, and the confusion over what to do next. We feel for these people and know they are hurting just as much as the girl's mother, though in a different way.

But just as interesting as the story about the aftermath of the accident is the story of Leigh's childhood, woven throughout. Abandoned by her mother at 16 and relegated to sharing a trailer with her not-much-older sister and her boyfriend, Leigh did not know a stable home until married life. She turned her life around and vowed that her own children's life would not be like hers; the friction that occurs between her and her daughter is mainly due to their radically different upbringings.

Even though everything ends up as well as it could, it's not all OK. Kara is changed, forever, but it's a tribute to the strength of her parents that she chooses to pay her penance in a helpful and constructive way. The ending fits perfectly with who the characters are, unforced and completely real.

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### **Bonnie says**

The Rest of Her Life takes the reader into the life of a family whose lives are turned upside down in an instant. The book opens with Kara, a teenager who is about to graduate from high school and while driving makes a terrible mistake that changes the course of her life and those around her. This mistake also affects another teenager, Bethany and her family. I don't want to share all of the details of the story as it would give too much away.

The story is actually told through the eyes of Leigh, Kara's mother. Leigh was a complicated character but one that you got to know intimately as the story unfolds. I found the character development of this book outstanding. Leigh, grew up with her sister Pam and a narcissistic single mother who did her best which was truly not good enough for Leigh and Pam. As the story unfolds, we realize that as a mother, you may want what you "think" is best for your children and in reality you just may be repeating your own mothers mistakes. Leigh chose to go down a different path than her mother and made choices to go to college and married a respectable man, Gary who is a college professor. Leigh is a high school teacher and has a daughter, Kara and son, Justin who is twelve.

I found Leigh's character brutally honest and could relate to her as a mother and the depth of her honesty. She has isolated herself over the years and is not trusting of people and she has to confront all of her emotions when in one instant her daughters actions change the course of their lives completely. She must look at why her relationship with Kara is strained and why Kara instead turns to Gary, her father, for comfort instead of Leigh. Leigh must look at why her sister Pam is able to break through Kara's wall and even connect with Justin in a way that Leigh cannot. Justin is an awkward child and struggles socially and he is closer to Leigh who seems to understand him more than his father does.

This is a wonderful book about the complexities of motherhood, the relationships between mothers and daughter, mothers and sons and sisters. There is so much to this story that holds your attention as you read each page. I found the book enthralling and wanted to know what would happen next as we follow Leigh on this heartbreak but cathartic journey. I found myself often stopping and wondering...What would I do in this situation? This is the kind of book that makes you think and assess your own choices and actions and how women grow and change from our roles as daughters to mothers.

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### **Helena says**

Well-written and engaging. I found it hard to put down. But certainly a more introspective novel rather than action-filled.

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### **Valerie McEnroe says**

The plot in Laura Moriarty books has much to be desired. Very little actually happens. I consider her books to be more of a character study. The main character's thoughts are so intriguing to me that I'm caught up in what she's going to think next. Even though I can never identify with any of her characters, I feel like I know them. As with her other books, I could not put this one down. It is interesting how people either love or hate

this author.

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### **Emily says**

I really loved this book. I didn't find it at all 'jodi piccolt'-ish. Though I can see why people have linked the two. It didn't feel overtly sappy as JP books can. This was a really interesting point of view, and I found it refreshingly different. The jacket is a bit misleading though as it does state that it is a book about a young woman and the aftermath of her accidentally killing a teenager. The story is much better than that. The accident is a catalyst for a change in the mother/daughter relationship. It was told from the mother of the driver of the car that killed a teenager, not the driver of the car. I felt that was really interesting, and enjoyed it. I liked the mother and her background. As a mother I am constantly second guessing myself and trying to make sure that my daughter has a better childhood than I did, and that is a main focus of the strife between the mother and daughter in the book. I found it very relatable and would highly recommend this book. I gave it 4 out of 5 because I too felt very misled about the premise of the book, but ended up enjoying it much more than I think I would have.

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