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Kyoko Mori

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"Lyrical...A beautifully written book about a bitterly painful coming of age."

THE KIRKUS REVIEWS

Yuki Okuda knows her mother would be proud of her grades and her achievements in sports if she were alive. But she committed suicide. And Yuki has to learn how to live with a father who doesn't seem to love her and a stepmother who treats her badly. Most important, she has to learn how to live with herself: a twelve-year-old Japanese girl growing up alone, trying to make sense of a tragedy that makes no sense at all....

Shizuko's Daughter Details

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From Reader Review *Shizuko's Daughter* for online ebook

Esther says

Shizuko's Daughter is compelling because it explores the world of a young Japanese girl who has to deal with the numbness, emptiness, loneliness, and abandonment as a result of her mother's suicide, and the anger and hatred she feels towards her "new" family and new life without her mother. Yuki, the protagonist, feels that her mother didn't love Yuki and thought that she was a reason not to live, so she killed herself. But Yuki doesn't know that Shizuko has always loved her, and killed herself because of her love for her, despite this being complicated in some people's eyes. Yuki's father, Hideki, remarries to his mistress, Hana, who makes Yuki's life a living nightmare. Hana and Yuki are cold and distant, with a bitter relationship. Hana tries to obliterate all traces of Shizuko's existence, but Yuki desperately clings onto the only remainders she has of her mother. Yuki reminisces a lot about the times she and her mother shared, and what she could've done to prevent her mother's eventual suicide. But she blames herself for everything, and starts withdrawing away from the world. After much turmoil and conflict between the Hana and Yuki, Yuki leaves for college and never returns, befriending a boy who falls for her. Ever since her mother's death, she feels love, attention, and appreciation that Hideki and Hana deprived her of, and she's able to move on with her mother's death.

Maryam says

A sad, gorgeously written, and captivating story full of beautiful colors and portraits.

Kaion says

"In spite of this, please believe that I love you... You will no doubt get over this and be a brilliant woman. Don't let me stop or delay you."

In the aftermath of her mother's suicide, twelve year old Yuki can't believe this. Not through packing away all the favorite blues and greens of her mother's closet before the funeral. Not through her father's suspiciously prompt remarriage to his secretary. And in the years that follow, even as she appears as the accomplished track star and class president to her peers and as the silent contrarian to her vindictive stepmother and emotionally-absent father—she struggles with the pain of trying to understand.

Shizuko's Daughter was and is still one of my go-to coming-of-age novels. In short chapters offering windows into Yuki's growth (mostly through Yuki's eyes, but also from the perspectives of her father, stepmother, and loving grandmother), it unfolds a rich emotional journey I find I can keep going back to. Yuki is a very remarkably strong and resilient young woman, and refreshingly frank even as the world around her tries to make her resigned.

The novel has been described as semi-autobiographical: unsurprisingly it shows its strengths as such in how the characters react in such vivid cultural specificity of 20th century Japan while confronting universal human pains and joys. More surprisingly, it avoids the pitfalls as such in its balance- for example, even as Mori condemns Yuki's stepmother actions, she shows an almost sympathetic fairness in the dissection of how such a bitter person comes to be.

I love Kyoko Mori's use of language throughout. Her straightforward prose becomes almost poetic in how it uses descriptions of nature to unfold the complex internal experiences of the characters. At the convergence of memory, intention, and belief, there really underlies the oneness in our physical and emotional experience.

To live well, we make peace with transience and rise amongst the cruelties. And so it is fitting the most experienced character, Yuki's grandmother closes out the novel with sublime bittersweet hopefulness—*"She laughed and cried copious tears, until her chest and shoulders ached from joy."* Rating: 5 stars (Reread 2/12/2010)

Corinne Morier says

Cue spoiler-free review!

Yuki is only twelve when her mother commits suicide. Her father almost immediately remarries, to a woman in his office named Hanae. Yuki knows that her father was having an affair with Hanae before her mother's death, but keeps her mouth shut, instead deciding to honor her mother's memory by going on and living her life, as she had promised her mother years ago.

The novel is a collection of snippets from Yuki's life, from the time she's twelve and discovers her mother on the kitchen floor to the time she's nineteen. We see Hanae trying to erase Shizuko's memory in any way possible, Yuki fighting to stay in contact with her mother's relatives even against Hanae's direct orders, and her father's inability to say no to his new wife, even to the point that it causes pain for Yuki. Such a tearjerking novel, about the deep bond between a mother and her daughter, that is never broken despite death and a father and stepmother's attempts to pretend as if Shizuko never existed.

I first picked up this novel when I was in high school, but I remember not really being very interested in it at the time. I decided to give it another chance and oh, my, gosh, I'm so glad I did. Yuki is such a real, empathetic character that she feels as if she could be one of my students (at least in the beginning of the novel while she's still in grade school lol, cause I teach elementary school) and I want to just give her a big old hug and tell her everything's going to be okay. This novel gives us a good taste of the real Japan, of the Japanese tendency to talk in circles rather than be blunt, making Yuki's straightforward attitude even more refreshing. All terms and locations are defined in the glossary in the back, but enough context is given in the moment that there's no need to stop reading to look something up.

What a beautiful, heartwrenching story. The reason this doesn't get five stars is because it was Yuki's story, and while we did spend some time with her maternal grandmother in a few chapters, the epilogue was from her grandmother's point of view and didn't even mention Yuki, which was rather disappointing.

This book has no explicit content, but I don't think it would be very appropriate for children, as the subject matter is rather mature and a child might get bored of this book or it might go over their head. However, I would recommend this book to a teenager or an adult looking for a well-written character-driven story that is impossible to put down once you've started.

Alisha says

This is the story of Yuki, a young girl from Kobe, Japan. I picked it up at the library based on title and then took it home because the author is not American born. I am purposefully seeking out books by people of color.

This book was surprising. Written in 1993 it touches some themes that I was not expecting. I think I really fell for the book for Yuki and Hanae fight. I found myself writing down the names of flowers as I read this book to look up later. She describes color vibrantly and shows Yuki's grit through a neglected adolescence without praising her for it. No one does. There is something in that which feels very real and universal.

I was surprised this was a youth fiction book.

Kirsten says

A YA novel about Yuki, a Japanese girl whose mother commits suicide when Yuki is twelve. The author does an excellent job of conveying Yuki's sense of difference from other children, as well as her confusion about what to feel towards her mother. I did feel frustrated in that Yuki's stepmother, Hanae, is pretty much unrelentingly meanspirited, and Yuki's father isn't much better. I suppose, however, that while in the third person, the novel is told predominantly from Yuki's point of view, so Hanae is likely to come across as a fairly unsympathetic character, anyway.

Firefly_1824 says

While I've read others' opinions that said this wasn't very interesting (it's not very active), I do find it very Japanese, in that most of the story takes place in the character's heads. There is a lot of thinking inside with much less action outside. In this respect it is a very introspective novel, and deals with many deep issues.

Susan says

Shizuko and her daughter Yuki are artists, and this book is written so it helps readers see what the artist's eye sees: wherever Yuki looks, whatever is going on in her life, she sees colors, and the colors have meaning. This is part of what makes this story much more complex than "mother dies, kid suffers with remote father and hateful step-mother, kid gets old enough and moves out" though that pretty much sums up the plot line. What makes the book worth reading, though, is how Yuki processes everything that happens to her, how she interacts with the people in her life, and how she matures over the 7 years the story takes.

The fact that the story takes place in Japan provides a nice background setting, but not much more. It could've taken place anywhere.

Chazzi says

I'm marking this a "really liked it" as I think it will stay with me for quite a while. I had to put it down a few times as the subject matter got a bit heavy.

Yuki Okuda is a bright, artistic and athletic 12 year old girl. Her mother, Shizuko, spend much time together drawing, painting, reading, enjoying the beauty of Nature and music. Yuki's father spends most of his time away from home working or otherwise busy. This world comes to an abrupt end when Yuki comes home from piano lessons to find her mother dead on the kitchen floor. Shizuko has committed suicide and left Yuki a note about it.

From this point on, the book tells of Yuki's dealing with this shattering of her life. She withdraws and becomes blunt to the point of rudeness with people. Her father continues to be distant and adds to it by taking a new wife only a year after Shizuko's death. The relationship between the new wife and Yuki never gets off the ground. Added to that is Yuki is no longer allowed to spend time with her maternal grandparents, because it would be awkward with the new wife.

Yuki finds it hard to understand why her mother would leave her like she did. The stigma of suicide, a stepmother who can only criticize Yuki and who promptly disposes of anything related to Yuki's mother by storing it in the attic or throwing it away, the lack of contact with the only grandparents and aunts and uncles she has known is a lot for a child to work through.

The chapters were written at various times, so each is like a short story yet they tie together well. Starting at twelve years old and working on through college age, the book give an interesting look at Japanese culture and behaviour in this type of situation. A culture who is centered on not behaving in any that would give scandal or gossip for people to talk about, and the secrets that are concealed behind that façade.

Though it is a young adult book, it can easily be read by adults, both groups getting a goodread from it.

Staciesakuma says

The genre of this book is Intergenerational readers and fiction. I chose this book because I read another book by Kyoko Mori (One Bird) and loved it. I wanted to see what her other book was about.

Plot:

This book is told in the third person point of view and the story starts in the mind of Shizuko Okuda. She is dreaming about the celebration going on in Kobe, Japan after the war has ended. She is confused because all of the children that are running around are not the ones that she played with before the war; they were her daughter, Yuki's (protagonist), friends. Then, all of Shizuko's surroundings fade and change into a park where she sees her daughter playing in the cherry blossom petals. Shizuko wakes up from her nap and has her mind made up. She writes two notes; one to her husband and one to Yuki. When Yuki comes home from her piano lesson, she finds her mother on the ground and the house filled with gas. Yuki is twelve years old and is too young to be going through something this tragic. Yuki is a bright young girl that is the smartest girl in her grade; she is the fastest runner at her school and is a fantastic artist. All of these traits contribute to Yuki's future successes.

Just a year after her mother's death, Yuki's father, Hideki, decides to remarry to a woman from his work named Hanae (antagonist). Over the years, Yuki is still troubled by her mother's death and does not like her father's new bride. She is constantly reminded of her mother when she has flashbacks but manages to make new friends and conquer many obstacles despite her constant downheartedness. Later in the book, Yuki confronts her stepmother and tells her that she is just pretending to be the perfect piece to complete this family. This gets Hanae very angry and she smashes Shizuko's tea set that was considered a prized possession to Yuki. As the story continues, Yuki must face some difficult obstacles that are clouding up her path to her future.

Conflict:

Man vs. Man or Man vs. Self

Yuki faces two main forms of conflict. She faces her new stepmother who absolutely despises her and Yuki also faces a battle within herself. Yuki must suffer through all of the hardships that Hanae puts her through at home. She also has to overcome all of the sadness and feelings of loneliness caused by the death of her mother.

Theme:

Love is lost easily and not gained back quickly but love will always find its way back into an open heart. Yuki loses a very important figure in her life; her mother. When her father remarries, she does not like his new bride and refuses to accept her love. When Yuki is at her grandmother's house, she realizes that not everyone in the world is out to hurt her, and that if she allows people's love into her heart, then she will ultimately become a stronger person.

Writing Style:

Kyoko Mori has a very unique style of writing that is strong, passionate, meaningful and detailed. She uses rather complex sayings and phrases but they are easy to understand. "I think now that it's worth it all the same, loving someone. It may not turn out right, but I want to love someone in spite of it. In a way, it means more because the odds are against us" (142). This shows how meaningful her words are but they are easily comprehensible.

Critique:

I loved this book, but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone who isn't interested in the cultural type of books. It really helped that I could, on some levels, relate to Yuki and that I could understand some of the simple Japanese words used throughout the story. But if someone is just interested in a good book, I would say to definitely read it.

Savannah Beckstrom says

I've read this book back in high school and I remember how beautifully written it was, I would defiantly love to read it over again if given the chance!

Quirkyreader says

This is a story that deals with a family tragedy. Spoiler Alert.... The tragedy is the suicide of one of the characters. And the rest of the book deals with the fall out of the characters actions.

This book can be helpful to those who have also gone through one of these fall outs. Events like this need plenty of time for healing. So please be respectful to others who are going through this. But mostly if you know of so one who is in dire straights don't be quiet. Let others know.

Nancy says

Shizuko's Daughter

Kyoko Mori

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How many times in life have you been hurt? What do you do about it? Twelve years old Yuki is so young and she is facing many difficult problems. "You're so good; you're only twelve and so brave! Your mom would be so proud." Everyone around Yuki says those sentences to her and she is tired of hearing this every time. She wanted more than a couple of sentences; she wanted love from her family. The problem is will she get it? As a young teenager, she faces many challenges like losing her mom and more. You will think that she will break down but will that happen? How well can Yuki handle the truth? As you know the truth hurts. Yuki had moved many times, now she finally settled in Kobe. One afternoon she comes home on a pleasant day to enjoy her new neighborhood but instead she finds out her mom is died. Yuki walks in to her cozy house feeling and sees her mom lying on the floor unconscious. Yuki thought about why her mom had killed herself. She is in a state of confusion and woe. After this tragedy, nothing seemed right to her. Yuki moved in with her with her occupied father who doesn't seem to care about her. Also her father's new married wife, Hanae always bring trouble for her. This world seems unfair with out her mom by her side. She is so young and she is in misery. Should she just join her mom?

I like this book because Yuki who is younger than me has to go through this hard world all by herself. I like the motivation of her mom memories that pushes her into becoming a women and enjoying this world even through most her joy is taken away. The only thing I dislike about his book is that the author puts all the misery on one person, oh the poor girl but this also makes it more interesting. It makes it interesting because it makes you want to find out what happens and how a young person can handle things.

Yuki faces many challenges that can't be changed because it is fate but she still tries to do it. I know this is silly for her to do but she is brave. I bet you can't take all the misery Yuki had to take. I would recommend this book to anyone but I especially recommend this book to people who think their life is miserable. I recommend it to those people because they think their life is miserable but they don't look at other's lives and realize that other suffer more. No one has the worst life because life isn't over yet; find a way to enjoy it. There are good things that can happen. You just have to try.

Emily says

I was gearing up for our Japan trip and realized most of the Japanese books I've read are by Murakami, who is not my favorite. Cue: a library holds stack of Japanese women.

Mori provides a compelling, semi-autobiographical glimpse into the inner life of a 12-year-old Japanese girl in the aftermath of her mother's suicide. I read this as a companion to some of Mori's more straightforward autobiographical work, which provides a lot more background for the limitations Japanese culture and marriage traditions place on women, particularly in the context of marriage.

The book excelled at its exploration of grief, and how the protagonist, Yuki, worked to construct her memory of her mother through the artifacts--art, tea sets, fine embroidery on clothes--she left behind. It was somewhat lacking in providing depth or motivation to any of the book's tertiary characters, though.

Amber Taylor says

Beautiful and sad YA novel.
