



## Half the World in Winter

*Maggie Joel*

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A captivating drama of family secrets and tragedies.

It is London, 1880, and Lucas Jarmyn struggles to make sense of the death of his beloved youngest daughter; his wife, Aurora, seeks solace in rigid social routines; and eighteen-year-old Dinah looks for fulfilment in unusual places. Only the housekeeper, the estimable Mrs Logan, seems able to carry on.

A train accident in a provincial town on the railway Lucas owns claims the life of nine-year-old Alice Brinklow and, amid the public outcry, Alice's father, Thomas, journeys to London demanding justice. As he arrives in the Capital on a frozen January morning his fate, and that of the entire Jarmyn family, will hinge on such strange things as an ill-fated visit to a spiritualist, an errant chicken bone and a single vote cast at a board room meeting.

Written with charm, humour and rich period detail, Maggie Joel has created an intriguing novel of a Victorian family adrift in their rapidly changing world.

## Half the World in Winter Details

Date : Published October 1st 2014 by Allen & Unwin

ISBN : 9781743310908

Author : Maggie Joel

Format : Paperback 432 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Half the World in Winter for online ebook

### Trav says

I received this book as a Goodreads Giveaway.

Half the World in Winter was not at all what I was expecting, however I thoroughly enjoyed it nonetheless. The book predominantly focused on Lucas Jarmyn, a railway owner, and his family in the months following a horrific disaster through which he lost his youngest daughter. Throughout the story the daily life and individual struggles of each family member and their small staff is explored in realistic detail. The secondary character of Thomas Brinklow, who similarly lost his daughter in an accident on Jarmyn's railway, adds a sense of intrigue and urgency to the plot, as he seeks revenge on those responsible for his daughter's untimely death.

I immensely enjoyed reading Half the World in Winter and found the perspective given on that era in history particularly fascinating.

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### Dale Harcombe says

I settled happily into this story of Victorian England. The novel starts with a train accident which kills three people, one of them a child. Her father, Thomas, wants justice. Lucas Jarmyn, owner of the railway, also knows the feeling of loss and grief in his own life and circumstances.

Basically this is a book about families and how each person deals with grief in a different way. Yes, the pace is leisurely but to me it was in keeping with the times in which the book is set. It is obvious a lot of research went into it. Some of the information about customs of the times and in particular mourning and grief stationary and clothes was so interesting.

One of the quotes I liked was, 'It seemed that, though you could have the same parents, live almost the same number of years in the same house with the same people, it was no guarantee you would grow into the same type of person.' Anyone who has ever been part of a family should be able to relate to this.

I did think the blurb on the back gave a wrong view of this book. The visit to the spiritualist that is mentioned is not that big a deal in the novel. I was enjoying the book until it got towards the end. Then I thought it tended towards melodrama and a couple of deaths occurred that really seemed unnecessary to the story. So although I mostly enjoyed it, what I thought might initially be four stars ended up at three and a half.

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### Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

\* 3.5 stars

1880's London, Maggie Joel transports the reader to the Victorian era in this exploration of family relationships and grief. Half the World in Winter opens with a tragic death on a railway line of a nine year old girl, Alice Brinklaw and follows her Father's cycle of grief, anger and eventually redemption. Lucas Jarmyn has inherited the railway from his Father that Alice Brinklaw has had her tragic accident. The two men do not realise at first but are linked by the grief they hold for their two daughters, who have both died in

sudden circumstances. Lucas Jarmyn and his family are struggling to come to terms with the death of their beloved 10 year old Sofia, who suffered from an agonizing death from a house fire accident in their home. As Thomas Brinklaw makes the journey to confront the Jarmyn family following his daughter's death, the tragedy of human fate and secrets are revealed under the backdrop of the rapidly changing industrial revolution era.

A little slow to get into, I found this book to be an enjoyable read once it got going. In particular, the painful unraveling of the events of young Sofia Jarymn's death and the time following her death made for compelling reading. I appreciated the meticulous research Maggie Joel, the author has put into providing a snapshot of Victorian grief and social etiquette, it was fascinating. The family and household relationships were touched with sentiment and a good balance of humour, especially from the household staff. Overall, a moving portrayal of grief from a Victorian perspective, that will appeal to those who enjoy reading historical novels rich in period detail.

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### **Loren says**

I received this book through the First Reads Program and would like to thank Goodreads, Allen & Unwin and any others involved in providing me with my copy of this novel.

This story is centred around the Jarmyn family, who have recently lost their youngest member, Sophia, due to a tragic 'domestic accident'. Maggie Joel portrays the family relationships well and details how each of the family members handles the grieving process differently. Meanwhile, a man named Thomas Brinklow is also grieving over the loss of his daughter Alice, who was killed in an accident on the Jarmyn's railway line.

I feel as though the strengths of this book were its historical accuracy (and detail) and its characters. Maggie developed the characters well and intertwined their stories so that there was cohesion throughout the book. I was a little bit disappointed with the ending, however, and felt as though there were some loose ends that should have been tied. Overall though, it was an enjoyable read and I am interested in trying more of Maggie Joel's novels.

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### **Michael says**

Set in Victorian England, the story follows the Jarmyn family who are grappling with tragedy. Firstly the youngest daughter Sofia dies in a horrific accident and then the father, Lucas, is rocked by the news of a fatal train accident involving his own railway company. Just when it seemed things could not get any worse the terrible news comes through of the death of Cousin, Roger, during combat in South Africa. Daughter Dinah is devastated as she had intended to marry him on his return.

These incidents have taken it's toll on the family and staff with Lucas and his wife Aurora growing apart as they try to come to terms with there daughters death. Dinah has her own struggles as she tries to find meaning in the routine of being a socialite and the charitable work she once enjoyed but now finds meaningless. Even the household staff seem incapable of keeping things together accept housekeeper Mrs Logan who has had her dashes with loss and it's inevitable outcomes.

Mr Jarmyn also finds himself a target of Thomas Brinklow, who lost his only daughter Alice in the terrible

train accident and is furious to find the company has not paid for the funeral. With his marriage on the rocks and facing financial ruin Thomas goes to London seeking answers and revenge.

Thoroughly researched, *Half the World in Winter* gives a fascinating portrayal of late nineteenth century England, in particular with the traditions of mourning with colours. Regrettably this story had two areas that for me let it down. Firstly the pacing for the most part was to slow for my liking and secondly the amount of times I seen quotes repeated was to put it mildly annoying. Despite these discrepancies the story was absorbing and one that I still found enjoyable.

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### **Sam Still Reading says**

I always look forward to novels written by Maggie Joel. She combines elegant prose with an element of history I know little about to create a story that is fascinating with a touch of Gothic qualities. For *Half the World in Winter* (don't worry, you'll discover the meaning of the title by the middle of the book), she goes back in history further than before to London, 1880. The setting is still London and the topic is grief. This is an era before antibiotics, skin grafts and trauma medicine became routine and the untimely deaths of two young girls haunt two families, leading them to breaking point.

The main family we follow is the Jarmyns. Sofia died a prolonged, agonising death after her clothes caught on fire. Since then, her father has banned fires in the house (not a comfortable thing in the cold of December when electricity was in its infancy). Lucas is also increasingly concerned about the role his wife Aurora played in the accident but he can't bring himself to ask her. Aurora is still grieving but her husband is unreachable. In the midst of this, their daughter Dinah has a secret of her own, one that will become more painful to carry as the Boer War begins. Then there's the housekeeper, Mrs Logan, who appeared in shady circumstances (or so Aurora believes) and the maids who have quit after seeing a ghost in the drawing room.

Running parallel is the grief of Thomas Brinklow, who lost his daughter Alice in a train crash. The connection? Mr Jarmyn owns the railway they were travelling on, which is no stranger to accidents. Was the company negligent or was it driver error? As Thomas's wife deserts him, he travels to London, destitute and mad with grief to seek an audience with Mr Jarmyn.

Once again, the history in this novel is fascinating. I enjoyed learning more about the Victorian mourning rituals (especially the colours of the dresses and note cards as well as the thickness of the coloured border as a marker of the depth of grief). The trips the Jarmyn women took to Dearly Departed, an emporium for all things grief related was morbidly enthralling. I also liked how trains, a relatively new invention, were treated with suspicion and fear – can you imagine that these days (we don't even feel that way about the latest mass travel machine, aeroplanes)? The setting is expertly done; I felt the London fog and despair as I heard the streets rattle with carriages and carts. Maggie Joel's books evoke emotion without fail.

As for plot, I found it initially slow as the characters and their stations were revealed but it grew on me as I continued to read and the characters began to reveal their secrets. It was very cleverly plotted and entwined – I found just as I was wondering what one character's secret or link to another was, it was described. The revelations at the end of the story tied everything together well, but not as I'd expected (which is a good thing; I like a good twist in my story). While not upbeat, the story shines with authenticity on how people thought, felt and acted during this time period. Light relief was provided by the cook (who will not cook pigeon under any circumstance, indeed the family need to fool her into thinking she's cooking 'Prussian fowl') and Hermione, the new maid who turns out to be a good actress in a crisis.

An enthralling insight into grief and the rituals of the Victorians, Half the World in Winter delivers a sombre yet authentic story. It's the closest you'll get to a time machine to access the Victorian period.

Thank you to Allen and Unwin for the ARC of this book.

<http://samstillreading.wordpress.com>

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### **Shannon Blake says**

Firstly I would like to thank Goodreads, Allen and Unwin and the author for making it possible for me to win a copy of this novel. It was an honour to be among the first to read it.

The basic idea revolves around the Jarmyn family in Victorian London, after the death of the youngest child, Sofia in a fire. This event shakes the family as they each withdraw into their own method of coping and often blame each other and themselves for the tragedy.

The story was quite good, very enjoyable, however I felt that (I will do this in such a way so as not to give spoilers) the event on page 379. was a little clumsy and without much point. But overall a good read from Maggie Joel!

I did pick up on two typos which you may wish to edit before the book is officially published.

pg. 313. 'set on removing g him to an asylum' (a lone standing 'g')

pg. 387. 'without here seemed... inconceivable' ('here' is believed to have been a typo of 'her')

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### **Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says**

A story of tragedy, grief, and redemption, Half The World in Winter centers around Lucas Jarmyn and his family who are mourning the grisly death of nine year old Sofia. As the household struggles with the loss of their beloved daughter and sister they turn away from each other, and their home, in which Lucas forbids a fire to be set, grows ever colder.

Hundreds of miles away a train accident claims the life of a young girl. Her grief stricken father, Thomas Brinkley, demands justice from the head of the railway, Lucas Jarmyn, and when it is not immediately forthcoming, seeks revenge on the man and his family.

Half the World in Winter is an exploration of the dynamics of a family in mourning, and the impact of death and grief in a period where tragedy was common. The Jarmyn family are not only struck by the death of Sofia, they lose a nephew to the Boer War, a cook to a chicken bone, a discarded maid to vice, and are burdened by the deaths of those souls killed on the railway.

*"Inside 19 Cadogan Mews time had ceased. It no longer existed, it had no meaning. A silence had fallen that no one felt willing to break. Footsteps were muffled, and commands, if they were given at all, were given in muted whispers in the hallways and corridors. doors were kept closed and before entering hands hesitated on doorknobs and deep breaths were taken. An excuse not to enter at all was often found."*

Set in England during the 1880's, the period detail is rich and meticulous, from the minutiae of the Jarmyn's household to the physical and social context of Victorian England. I was surprisingly interested by the workings of the Victorian railway system, and intrigued by the elaborate rituals of mourning - for middle class Britons there were strict rules to be followed after a death, determining, for example, the type and colour of fabric worn, to the depth of the border on notepaper.

*"Half an inch for the first three months of mourning certainly. After that the border decreases to one-third of an inch. At six months it decreases to a quarter of an inch, then in increments of a tenth of an inch over the succeeding six months depending on the nature of the loss and one's relationship with the deceased"*

I did struggle with the sombre and often bleak timbre of the narrative and the measured pace of the novel quickened only marginally near the end. The writing however is stylish and descriptive, and the portrayal of the period is vivid.

Half The World in Winter is a genteel historical drama, but it was a little too slow and solemn for me to really enjoy

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### **B the BookAddict says**

Sorely in need of some judicious editing, especially 'commas'! While the historical content was interesting, for me, the story was slow and too fragmented to be seriously considered a *good* read. A very poor 2★

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### **Fiona Higgins says**

This book parachutes readers back into Victorian England and keeps them there from start to finish. The painstaking research that informs this book is admirable, and the details fascinating – for example, the 'grief stationery' and other customary mores of mourning. The book's relevance is not limited to the era in which it is set – it is a compelling insight into family relationships. Highly recommended.

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### **Brit McCarthy says**

*Thank you to the publisher who provided this book in exchange for an honest review. This did not influence my review in any way.*

It is 1880s London, and the Jarmyn family are coming out of deep mourning for the youngest member of their household, nine-year-old Sofia, after a terrible accident. Each member of the family is struggling – head of the family Lucas, his wife Aurora, eldest son Bill at Oxford, newly eighteen year old Dinah, younger sons Gus and Jack who were left out of it all – and it seems only their housekeeper Mrs. Logan is able to keep them all together. Six months later, another nine-year-old girl has died and it's on the railway that Lucas owns. Her father Thomas travels to London for explanation and justice and the future of the two families collides.

I have had a lot of trouble trying to write this review – it was one of those that I just couldn't work out where to start because by the time I got to the end I had mixed feelings. I was really enjoying it for the most part – while the story was moving slow, the history was fascinating and you can tell this book has been meticulously researched. It was just so interesting that I didn't mind the pace of the story development. Though the death of Sofia, and Alice too, were grisly and the detail of 'how to mourn correctly' was heavy and you can tell these people are full of grief and guilt, this book still managed to be infused with humour relief, particularly from the household staff who were fantastic characters.

I enjoyed the slow burn and the development of both the story of Thomas Brinklow and the Jarmyn family following the train accident, and the story surrounding Sofia's death and how this affected the other members of the household – particularly Dinah, who has turned eighteen and become a woman and no one has realised. All of this is happening in the midst of the Boer War, with the Jarmyns' cousin Roger off to serve the Queen and young Jack wishing he could do the same. These stories were all intricately woven and well executed but I was left unsatisfied with the ending. It made perfect sense but it still seemed to fall flat, I'm not really sure why. I was really enjoying the story but maybe the ending was too quiet, with not enough of a bang? But then the novel wasn't a bang of a novel, if that makes sense, so maybe a bang of an ending wouldn't have worked and I'd be just as unsatisfied? You can see why I'm a bit confused about how I feel!

I think I will settle on 3.5 stars, which is kind of safe. But the writing and the storytelling was brilliant and I did enjoy it and I do recommend it for that, I only wish I hadn't been so iffy about the ending!

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### **Writer's Edit says**

Half the World in Winter was a beautifully written novel. Ticking all the boxes for a good historical fiction. Maggie Joel's novels are becoming more popular for good reason and as such, this novel highly recommended to any avid reader who wishes to extend into historical fiction.

You can read more of our review here: <https://www.writersedit.com/book-revi...>

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### **Calzean says**

London 1880s, the lifestyle of the wealthy railway man Lucas Jarmyn and his family is described with well researched detail. Lucas is dealing with the recent death of his 9 year old daughter and a string of railway accidents that threaten the family business.

His family's life is seen to be pretty shallow as the need to follow the customs and traditions of the day restrict their choices. The world of Jarmyn is nicely compared with the father of a young girl killed in the most recent railway accident who loses his job, possibly his wife and his values as a result of the accident.

There is a Gothic element to the book, an anti-war message and a number of ah-ha moments as family secrets are revealed. This book reminded me of "Atonement".

I'll be reading more of Maggie Joel.

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### **Sharon says**

A story set in London in 1880, *Half the World in Winter* follows in particular two men who have each lost a daughter under tragic circumstances. Lucas Jarmyn has lost his daughter through an accident at home, while Thomas Brinklow has lost his daughter in a railway accident, the same railway company that is in fact owned by the Jarmyn family.

In the Jarmyn family home, Lucas' wife Aurora and eldest daughter Dinah are coping in their own ways with the loss. Meanwhile the household is kept running by the very capable Mrs Logan.

When I first started reading, *Half the World* felt a little flat but quickly warms up and I ended up thoroughly enjoying it. Along with the tragedy there is also a dose of humour spread throughout, especially when it comes to the kitchen staff.

I happen to have another of author Maggie Joel's books sitting on my bookshelf - I look forward to reading it.

Thank you very much to Allen & Unwin and TheReadingRoom for my copy, much appreciated :)

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### **Tom Davern says**

I received this book through Goodreads giveaways. Thanks Goodreads and Allen and Unwin for the opportunity to read this captivating book.

3.5 stars

This book wasn't what I expected, however, I still found reading it enjoyable. It was a great the way the author used the language of the Victorian era to bring the characters to life and the images of family life provided me an understanding of society and class in this period, especially in times of grief. Unfortunately, I often found myself distracted and loosing focus as I read it, but perhaps this is just because it is not my usual type of book.

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