



# **A Laughing Matter of Pain**

*Cynthia Hilston*

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Harry Rechthart always knew how to laugh, but laughter can hide a lot of pain that's drowned by the bottle and good times. He grew up the joker in the early 1900s in Cleveland, Ohio, but as he enters adulthood, conflict splits him. His once close relationship with his brother, Erik, breaks as they come into their own and Erik goes off to college. No longer under Erik's shadow, Harry feels he might finally shine and make others see him as someone to be proud of. Harry finds an unlikely comrade who understands how he feels—his younger sister, Hannah. Once free of high school, Harry and Hannah double date sister and brother, Kat and Will Jones, attending wild, extravagant parties during the years of Prohibition. Harry thinks he's won at life—he's found love in Kat, in a good time, and in the bottle. But all the light goes out fast when Harry's alcoholism leads to disastrous consequences for him and Kat.

Harry thinks the joke's on him now that he's sunk lower than ever. He's in jail. He's pushed away his family. He's a broken man, but in the darkest depths of a prison cell, there is hope. Can Harry rebuild his life and learn that true laughter comes from knowing true joy, or will he bury himself once and for all in this laughing matter of pain?

## **A Laughing Matter of Pain Details**

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## From Reader Review *A Laughing Matter of Pain* for online ebook

### Katie B says

I jumped at the opportunity to read this one because I really enjoyed the author's previous novels. This book features Harry, who is the brother of the main character in *Hannah's Rainbow: Every Color Beautiful*. So while I already knew a little about Harry's life from the other book, this goes into more detail and has his perspective on key moments in his life.

Growing up in the early 1900s in Ohio, Harry comes from a big family. When his older brother Erik leaves for college, Harry feels like he finally has the chance to make something of himself now out of his brother's shadow. He develops a closer relationship to his sister Hannah, and as a young adult, Harry ends up dating Kat, the sister of Hannah's boyfriend. But too much partying is going to catch up with him, and change his life forever.

I did like the book as it was nice to go back to familiar characters but unfortunately this didn't come close to matching the emotional reading experience I had with *Hannah's Rainbow*. I just didn't feel like the character of Harry was fully developed. I thought certain things were glossed over or didn't go into detail until much later in the story. Basically I felt like the book could use some polishing up to make it better. I wanted to feel for Harry the same way I did for Hannah when reading her story.

While this book could be read as a standalone novel, I highly recommend reading *Hannah's Rainbow* first as that's the stronger book of the two.

I won a free ebook in a giveaway but was under no obligation to post a review. All views expressed are my honest opinion.

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### Alexia Patrick LLC says

A story of a man's battle with himself, sets the pages of the struggle with the balance of family vs. self-confliction. Add in the mess of secrets and all you have left to make the days easier, is a dry sense of humor, which made me love and root for Harry all the more. A perfect blend of love, life, and the struggles that come with family.

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### Kathleen Joyce says

Again, this exceptional writer digs deep into the human condition to give us another poignant story. This book is available on Amazon.

In *A Laughing Matter of Pain*, Ms. Hilston takes you on a roller coaster ride that starts in the days of prohibition and bathtub gin to chronicle the life of Harry Rechthart. This is a story of one man's battle with alcoholism and his struggle to triumph. Like so many men, Harry grew up in the shadow of his older brother.

He loved him, envied him, but desperately needed to stand out on his own. Where his brother, Eric, was solid and did the right thing, Harry was reckless—always the clown. Life was not to be taken seriously. He laughed through his pain. He adored his sisters, but broke their hearts and those of his entire family. He moved into the fast lane of drinking and partying until disappointment in love and disastrous event struck him down as low as a man can go. You will root for Harry, but he will frustrate you, sadden you, and you will be livid with him at times. When he meets Dawson, a man who lifts him up and welcomes him into his family, you applaud. With a sigh of relief, you cheer Harry on as happiness and acceptance finally flow into his life. But the demons of his past still haunt him and when tragedy strikes again, depressing him, he finds his way to the bottom of a whiskey bottle for what he realizes is only temporary relief.

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## **Ellen Trautner says**

### **Favorite**

This is the third novel by the author and I've enjoyed them all, but I think this one might be my favorite! It takes place in the same universe as her previous books, so you will recognize some of the same characters, which is fun. This is the story of Harry (brother of Hannah from the first book) and it deals with how people cope with pain of all sorts, both in healthy and unhealthy ways. It's written in the first person present, which can be very hit or miss for me, but in this case it was a hit as it drew me into the story and even though I should've been sleeping, I just kept reading!

Harry is a very likeable protagonist. Even though he has major flaws, those just make you root for him. I especially liked the very honest portrayal of alcoholism and how it affects so many people. I thought it was very brave of the author to not shy away from such a heavy subject. Ultimately this is a story about healing from pain, not just coping with it, and it's very hopeful.

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## **Cynthia says**

I enjoyed this book and rooting for the characters.

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## **Ellie Midwood says**

After reading “Lorna vs Laura” and “Hannah’s Rainbow,” I quickly became Cynthia Hilston’s fan. She is a true master of spinning family sagas which are destined to be classics of literary fiction. Masterfully bringing history to life with her fascinating characters, Ms. Hilston creates a perfect blend of fact and fiction, adding such crucial historical points as the prohibition era, WW2, and the jazz age into her novels. In “A Laughing Matter of Pain,” we get to meet Harry - a protagonist, who is as problematic as they get. A middle child who always considered himself second best to his big brother Erik, Harry chooses to laugh off all of his troubles as a teenager, and later - to drink them away, immersed into a chimeric life of illegal alcohol, dubious relationship, and bad choices made in the prestigious Millionaires’ Row. One of such choices ends up in tragedy, which will haunt Harry for the rest of his life. Now, it’s up to him to rebuild it anew or drink it away like he used to.

I absolutely love reading about problematic characters like Harry. They’re so much more interesting than

typical, clean-cut heroes because they feel real, they act real, they make their mistakes like all of us, they fall down and get up again, and I love getting through their struggles with them. Harry is incredibly complex and Ms. Hilston did a marvelous job at both character study and psychological characterization of this lost young man. Secondary characters, such as Mr. Dawson, also left a mark on my heart, and I couldn't help but get emotional in quite a few places where their kindness shone through desperation.

If you love historical fiction and family sagas, you need to read Cynthia Hilston's books. It's a true literary treat for everyone, who appreciates high-quality literature. Five huge stars!

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### **Marissa says**

Goodreads Kindle Copy Win

This is a story of a guy growing up who felt overshadowed by his brother as he turned to alcohol. This will lead him to a road to prison. He will have to find his way back and in doing so find who he really is and not what he has become. An enlighten read.

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### **Nancy Beach says**

Ms. Hilston's newest book does not disappoint. It is a spin-off of Hannah's Rainbow on the life of Hannah's brother Harry. I found myself drawn into the story, rooting for Harry--crying with Harry. The book is written in first person, which I liked. I think it helped me see Harry as an unique person.

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### **Cheryl M-M says**

This is a story about how alcoholism can destroy lives. Not just the the life of the alcoholic, but also that of their loved ones and the people around them. It is also the story of the hard walk of sobriety.

What Harry likes to do throughout the story is lay the blame at different doors. His older brother is too perfect and successful, and Harry can't live up to it. His eldest sister is too busy being an adult, his younger sister is too busy being a child. The only sibling he connects and has a bond with is Hannah, and in the end he rejects her too for caring and loving him. His parents expect him to be responsible, keep his life together and grow up. I mean, come on that's just too much pressure for one man, right.

Now that may seem like a harsh comment, but the truth is that even the smallest source of pressure, stress or anxiety can be a trigger for a person with addiction problems.

It's really interesting to note how his addiction sneaks up on him, in fact he isn't even aware that he has a problem until he ends up behind bars. His sister Hannah knows, but she enables and helps him to hide it from the rest of the family. In the end his realisation comes after a lot of soul-searching in prison, and yet he still lacks a certain acknowledgement of culpability.

During his time in prison he meets an inmate who offers him a lifeline when he gets out, so it isn't his own family he turns to after years of imprisonment – it's a stranger.

The author shows the reality of his addiction, which isn't always triggered by dramatic events by the way. An alcoholic always wants to drink, it is always the inner voice whispering into your ear, regardless of where you are or what you are doing. The question is whether you can learn to control the urge or not, an internal and eternal urge. I think that is something many people struggle to understand though, that addiction never leaves you and there is always the possibility of falling off the wagon. Kudos to those who manage sobriety, especially when they are confronted with their addiction of choice on a regular basis.

It's a tale of struggle and determination to come back from a devastating mistake and addiction. It is a story of what family is to some of us, and that it sometimes isn't defined just by blood. Hilston wants her readers to see that with support there is a possibility of redemption and a new life.

\*Read via Kindle Unlimited and received a copy courtesy of the author\*

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## **Melanie Young says**

A smile – a joke – laughter – these are all capable of hiding pain. Years of being a jokester can fool everyone. Often the people who seem the happiest are the ones who have the most pain. Harry Rechthart is always a clown, cracking jokes more often than not. Growing up, though he is caught in his shadow and never quite measures up, he is close to his brother, Erik – that is until Erik leaves for college and begins his own life. Now he finds a close relationship with his sister, Hannah. Harry and Hannah even begin to double date brother and sister, Kat and Will.

Harry feels like his life is great, he's drinking too much, falling in love, and really enjoying life. He is living on the edge, as reckless as a man can be. Tragedy strikes, and not just once. He eventually finds himself in prison and hopeless. Now how can he bury his pain? How can he create a good life for himself out of the disaster he put himself in?

A Laughing Matter of Pain is my first experience reading Cynthia Hilston's work, and I have to say that I enjoy her style immensely. The family dynamics are exceptionally tangible. I enjoy historical fiction, and Ms. Hilston proficiently plants you in the prohibition era in this story. She creates well rounded characters that are easy to relate to. The interaction between the characters is real and Ms. Hilston makes you feel like you know them.

I can't say that I really liked Harry at first; he made a lot of bad choices, and made me upset many times, but I was always rooting for him. By the time this story reached its peak, Harry grew on my and he felt like family. I highly recommend this book.

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## **Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says**

See more of my book reviews on my blog, [Literary Flits](#)

I was attracted to this quirkily titled novel by its unusual cover image. The story is set mainly across the first four decades of the 20th century and is essentially a coming-of-age tale narrated engagingly in the first person by Harry Rechthart. I didn't actually like Harry very much although I did appreciate reading this story. As a young man he has a massive chip on his shoulder caused by his elder brother's apparent success.

Harry spends a lot of the book telling us as readers, and most of the other characters, how hard he is trying to be a good person, but repeatedly seeing him choose to whine and drink instead of heeding his own claims did get quite infuriating! He is fond of blaming others for his own mistakes too.

A Laughing Matter Of Pain moves as a fast pace though Harry's life with occasional jumps of several years meaning significant events happen offpage as often as on. Hilston focuses on conversations between her characters so I felt I got to know most of the people fairly well although not in great depth. I would have liked a lot more in the way of historical detail as well. I didn't feel as though I got a strong sense of Prohibition-era America which was a shame as this is such an interesting period. For readers who prefer lighter issues driven fiction, A Laughing Matter Of Pain would be a good choice. The narrative doesn't get too dark, but does generally feel real.

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### **Rachelle says**

After reading Hannah's Rainbow soon after it came out, I was quickly drawn into the fabulous world that Cynthia Hilston created. So when I found out that one of the characters I loved the most from that book was going to get his own story, I jumped at the chance to read it.

Harry Rechthart isn't exactly your typical main character. He screws up—a lot. He comes from a loving family but constantly lives in his brother's shadow, turning the worst of life's matters into a joke to get by. When the pressure of his family and adulthood become too much, he turns to alcohol and makes one of the gravest mistakes of his life. He shuts himself off from the world and pushes away family, even his sister Hannah, who's the only sibling he still feels closely connected to. He'd rather condemn himself than do the hard work it will take to turn everything around.

While I know unlikable characters aren't every person's cup of tea, I have a soft spot for them. And Harry is no exception to that. This story is full of raw emotion. It's realistic, making it an easy page-turner. Though the decisions Harry makes leave you feeling like you're watching a train wreck, you can't help but root for him, holding out hope that he'll change. There were moments where I wanted more details about the surroundings, but I still very much enjoyed this book. With undertones of depression, death, and some of the most difficult subjects any author can include, I applaud the author's respectful but honest approach to those matters. This book will take you on a journey from start to finish, leaving you breathless and appreciating life that much more.

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### **Eve says**

#### **Heartfelt**

This is a lifetime-spanning book about a boy growing up in the twentieth century, messing up, and trying to improve. I quite enjoyed the book, and I found it very heartfelt. There are some wonderful character arcs that occur, and the story doesn't always go exactly where you expect it to. It's a touching book about making it through the hardest of times.

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## Robyn says

Harry always felt like he was living in his brother, Erik's shadow. Erik was the good son, the responsible one whereas Harry was the reckless one, often getting into trouble.. In a way, it felt like Harry never grew up. Once his brother leaves for college, Harry begins to come out of his shell a bit, making friends in high school, but the friends he has are the wrong type of friends. They encourage Harry to drink and soon he becomes an alcoholic. But, when a tragedy occurs altering the course of Harry's life it feels as if nothing will ever be the same again. Will Harry be able to get his life back or is he destined for failure everywhere he turns?

The heart of Harry's story takes place mostly in the 1920's and 30's during the time of Prohibition. Told in first person narrative, I really got to experience and feel things through Harry's thoughts and actions. I was able to see things through his eyes and what was in his heart. Much like life, Harry's was messy and complicated. He is flawed and makes mistakes. Even Harry knows he is not perfect. After the night of the tragedy, Harry wishes he could do everything all over again. To be a better son, a better brother, to not be so reckless and to stop drinking. Harry is very much a complicated character with many layers to him. As you peel back the layers, you see Harry for what he is and the potential that he has if he doesn't screw it up.

While reading through Harry's story I found him to be such a relatable character especially growing up with two alcoholics in my family. It is a terrible disease. It is a struggle to stay sober, to not want just one drink or one sip of alcohol. It is an addiction that is so hard to kick and even if someone does kick the habit it is so easy to fall back into drinking again. It is a struggle for many many people. It is really sad to see someone go through this and I felt myself being able to sympathize with Harry with the struggles he went through in his sobriety. I cheered Harry on through his ups and downs hoping for him to realize the potential he has and in a way praying he can be the man he was destined to become.

The setting of this story really made me feel as if I was transported back in time to the 1920's and 30's. Cynthia Hilston really embraces that time period in both mannerism and speech. The historical accuracy during that time period felt so genuine and so real. Just the way some of the characters spoke reminded me of some of those old black and white movies my grandmother used to make me watch. It was such a different time back then. I can remember my grandmother using some of the same terminology as this was her time period as well. I am really glad this story takes place during this time period as I have always been fascinated with the early 20th century.

A Laughing Matter of Pain is a poignant and evocative story that will pull every emotion out of you. The story is raw and unfiltered. Hilston delves heavily into personal pain, alcoholism, family, and even redemption. It is highly emotional and riveting the deeper you get the more you feel connected to every part of the story.

A Laughing Matter of Pain is definitely one of those books that will stay with you for years to come. I have to say that Epilogue had me in tears and really made me cry. Here is another book that has moved to the top as one of my favorite books for 2018.

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## **Kathy Webb says**

I won this Kindle Edition book in a GoodReads giveaway - thank you to everyone involved!!  
This is a wonderful book - the author, Cynthia Hilston does an amazing and accurate job of describing life based on the time period in this book. Very enjoyable. I highly recommend!!!

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