

Lemon Drop Falls

Heather Clark

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In Heather Clark's compassionate novel *Lemon Drop Falls*, a girl is desperate to create a new normal in the aftermath of a family tragedy.

Twelve-year-old Morgan, a soccer player with two best friends, used to talk with her mother, a life coach and an avid planner, over lemon drop candies. Those conversations, even when they started out sour, ended up sweet. They discussed challenges like Morgan's struggles with her friends; Morgan talked about feeling pushed to date, and about being told that one of her best friends had a crush on her.

But then Morgan lost her mother to a pulmonary embolism. Now, she's figuring out how to care for her two younger siblings, keep up the house, cook, and hide her escalating anxiety from her grieving father. She worries that he will move their family to be closer to his own family for support. At the end of a long summer, their family camping trip tests her mettle, forcing her to figure out who she truly is.

As the story moves between the time before Morgan's mother's death and the period after it, the pre-teen's vulnerability comes into increasing relief. Morgan's conviction that she must single-handedly save her family and hide her own failing mental health is detailed in profound, authentic terms. The social mores of junior high round out the chaos. Each development in the story serves to make that burden, and the anxiety that accompanies it, even heavier. Still, the compelling secondary characters and Morgan's younger siblings are a source of comedic relief.

Poignant and harrowing, the novel *Lemon Drop Falls* is about a tough girl who deals with grief, anxiety, and family challenges across one powerful summer.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January / February 2022)

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