

Rabbit, Rabbit, Rabbit

Valerie Dunsmore

FriesenPress (Nov 13, 2020)

Softcover (178pp)

978-1-5255-6533-5

Tragedies compete with triumphs in the spellbinding fantasy novel, Rabbit, Rabbit, Rabbit.

Valerie Dunsmore's magical, lyrical novel *Rabbit, Rabbit, Rabbit* is about the secrets that bind families together and break them apart.

Ten-year-old Lily lives in a cabin in the Nakusp forest with her older sister, Rose, their mother, Lizzie, and her Aunt Ruth. As long as Lily is surrounded by "untamed forests," her life is complete. But Lily undergoes a tumultuous upheaval when her estranged father, Henry, returns and moves the family to the suburb of Delta.

At the same time, Lily notices a shadow hovering around her mother, who seems to be experiencing debilitating sadness. With Henry either gambling at the race track or mistreating Lizzie, Lily's hatred for him burgeons, becoming a source of comfort and power. Then Lily stumbles upon a black, dusty book that contains spells. When she wishes Henry away and he fails to return home, Lily is ecstatic. Feeling empowered, she persuades her mother to visit Aunt Ruth.

Back in familiar territory, Lily tinkers with the spell, hoping to expel Henry from their lives for good. But the secret that fuels Lizzie's sadness and Henry's anger impedes. As Lily gets closer to the truth about Henry's past, her mother's sadness intensifies, and Lily begins to question whether hate is a power worth wielding after all.

Poetic prose and rich characterizations result in a magical, sometimes ominous, story. The setting is lush and lyrical, brought to life with mentions of red-tailed hawks, starlings, and ravens; of moss growing in clumps; and of giant cedars that form a "tapestry of branches and blue sky." Aunt Ruth's cabin is a magical hideaway where she burns sage and bakes rhubarb pies and rosemary cookies, while Delta is said to hang off of Vancouver "like a wart;" it smothers Lily with its "rows of vinyl-sided two-story houses and chain-link fence." Later, Lily visits a different forest "where even the mountains cry."

Such masterful descriptions extend to the cast: Rose has "shoulders like sparrow wings and eyes the color of a robin's egg," while Lizzie is ethereal and embodies magical qualities. In one scene, Lizzie gathers mist in her hand; in another, Lily notes the "faint shimmer to her skin," and the dark mist that hovers close to her mother's body and breathes "with a life of its own." Once the sun sinks and ghosts rise, a foreboding backdrop has been well established for the dramatic scenes that linger in the memory.

Tragedies compete with triumphs in the spellbinding paranormal novel, *Rabbit, Rabbit, Rabbit*.

BIANCA BOWERS (October 13, 2020)

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