



Shivah: A Novel from Memory

Lisa Solod

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In Lisa Solod's novel *Shivah*, family relationships are turned upside down after an abusive matriarch is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Leah's mother was an unpredictable presence in her life. She only cared for her children when it suited her, and she ignored and insulted them the rest of the time. When their mother starts acting strange, Leah puts it down to years of alcohol abuse, combined with bipolar disorder and the usual parental neglect. She believes that she has her mother figured out. But an Alzheimer's diagnosis forces Leah to reevaluate their relationship.

The prose is warm, flowing, and textured, mixing prose with poetry, quotes, and journal entries. Written as a detailed character study, it explores the realities of living with a difficult parent. Leah faces deep philosophical conundrums when reality crashes through the stories she's told herself about her life—and about her mother's life.

During shiva—the seven-day period of Jewish mourning that follows the death of a close family member—each day is designated its own focus to help with the mourning process. Inspired by this custom, the novel is divided into seven chapters, one for each day. It is steeped in Jewish spirituality, numerology, and theology, and it turns the commandment of honoring your parents inside out. Returning to the same situations, but from different perspectives each time, Leah struggles with questions of how to honor a parent who never honored her children; how to mourn the cognitive loss of a parent who never showed her true self; and how to hold someone accountable when that person has no memory of their actions.

Shivah is an introspective novel in which a daughter trades her angry resentment for compassion and love after her mother is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (July / August 2022)

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