

★ **Starling Days****Rowan Hisayo Buchanan**

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Rowan Hisayo Buchanan's novel *Starling Days* is a gentle treatise on the anatomy of sadness, wherein the many manifestations of modern melancholy raise questions about what it truly means to be "okay."

Mina wants to silence the part of her that wants to die. Her husband, Oscar, is holding himself together with to-do lists and exercise routines. Hoping to cure Mina's depression by changing their scenery, the couple heads to London, where their private turmoils bleed together.

Shifting between Mina and Oscar, the novel unfolds their respective pains in an effortless way. Their internal struggles manifest in the poetry of their poignant actions: through Mina's days spent sleeping until noon and unshaven legs; through Oscar's strict diet and fastidious attention to a language learning application. The couple is lovable but not always likable: intense, interesting, and approachable, they are familiar in their flaws.

For all the pain that it contains, *Starling Days* doesn't read as a tragedy; instead, it is all about humanity and survival. It is no accident that Mina's stagnated monograph focuses on the women in Greek mythology who *don't* reach tragic ends. She is her own heroine, living an internal epic struggle, figuring out how to persist by waking up another day. As a result, the book is able to interrogate depression without portentousness or heaviness. It elucidates how pain enters relationships without the hovering specter of blame and speaks, in plain terms, about suicidal attempts and ideation, absent hesitant whispers and dramatic morbidity.

Lovingly written and lovely to read as its characters figure out how to survive, *Starling Days* is a cathartic work, its nuances and normality essential to discussions of mental health.

JESSIE HORNESS (March / April 2020)

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