

The Grace of Crows

Tracy Shawn

Cherokee McGhee (Oct 1, 2013)

Softcover \$14.95 (215pp)

978-1-937556-04-4

The Grace of Crows is a painful but valuable story about how a struggling woman learns the importance of forgiving and helping others.

For some, anxiety can become absorbing despite all of the therapies and remedies around us. So it is for Saylor in *The Grace of Crows*, Tracy Shawn's sentimental yet compelling look at social anxiety and family life.

Saylor is mother of two teenagers and wife to a disengaged husband. Her life revolves around the fear that something bad will happen to someone she loves, that she will say what comes to mind without meaning to, that her daughter is too thin and her son too compulsive. Therapists have not been able to help her, and it seems there is little hope for her recovery.

Then, by chance, Saylor learns that one of her childhood friends is homeless, living under a pier in the beach town where she grew up. She reaches out, despite those around her believing that she is being irrational. What this will mean for Saylor is a chance to reach back in time and discover hard truths about herself and her upbringing. Even more poignant is that Saylor, through her obsessive need to find and help her friend, will realize that she needed to be found and helped as well.

Saylor's life appears to be full of harsh and cruel people. At first reading, it could be easy to become critical of the book for hammering away with characters who are almost unbelievably rude. But this is Saylor's story, and to see things as she does through panic and worry pulls other characters out of proportion, to a purpose. Saylor is sensitive to things the way people without anxieties cannot understand.

There are a few too many "ah-ha" moments that click into place in planned and dramatic ways for Saylor, distracting from the more artful connection of the mood to the protagonist. Still, there are unpredictable twists and turns throughout, and an ending that balances hope with the knowledge that these characters all still have long roads ahead of them.

The Grace of Crows is a painful but valuable story about how a struggling woman learns the importance of forgiving and helping others and, more importantly, letting them do the same for her.

SARA BUDZIK (Winter 2014)

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