

★ **The Memory of Animals****Claire Fuller**

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A woman once undone by empathy now finds that it could be her salvation in Claire Fuller's stunning postapocalyptic novel *The Memory of Animals*.

In her childhood, Neffy split her time between her father's Greek island and her mother's United Kingdom haunts. She met an octopus while snorkeling in the Aegean Sea; it sparked her love of cephalopods and led her to pursue a degree in marine biology. But aquariums are not safe spaces for those who identify too much with restricted beings.

When a pandemic strikes, bringing with it chaos, it finds Neffy with a debt to pay. Multiple, if you ask her. Desperate and in mourning, she signs on for a vaccine trial with a high promised payout.

Neffy's luck is short: society blinks out just after she takes the virus in. The hospital staff disappears. Neffy languishes for days. When she wakes, it's to the realization that only a few fellow volunteers remain around her, and their desperation has grown. With their food running out and no news of the world beyond the hospital doors, they hatch a plan for their survival, with possibly immune Neffy tapped to lead their way.

Eerie in its coverage of empty streets and flashes of violence, the novel moves through the immediate challenges in the aftermath of a disaster, though also pausing to let Neffy entertain memories of before: of words she wished she'd said to those she loved; of salt water summers and the comfort of family. Still, though the hospital's power and water remain on—for now—the sense of urgency is real. Neffy is forced to consider how her world will continue, and who she wants to continue it with.

Sobering and evocative, *The Memory of Animals* is a novel about who we choose to be when the lights go out.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2023)

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