

The Shadow Within

Lynette Tait

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The Shadow Within works toward issues of diversity and mental illness through its story of one woman seeking emotional awareness and strength.

Lynette Tait's novel *The Shadow Within* is an inviting story of self-exploration through trials and loss that brims with suspense, bereavement, and love.

Lynda lives a zealous and successful life. She has a husband, Daniel, and a child. She's also enjoying the accomplishment of running a very successful multinational food company. That is, until unexpected circumstances leave her financially ruined and alone.

After a series of catastrophic life events, Lynda embarks on a physical and spiritual journey deep into the mountains of Africa in search of meaning.

Elements of Lynda's journey hint at spellbinding and thought-provoking changes, but they are not adequately explored because, in time with her journey, Lynda is pulled into a mystery when someone close to her is murdered.

Lynda becomes tormented as she tries to figure out the killer's motivations. During her time in the mountains, she comes to understand the intent behind the horrific act and assists in the resolution of the case.

Still, the addition of this element is jarring, and the management of the two disparate threads hinders the book's cohesiveness. Chapters bounce between time periods, locations, and characters without clear direction, with developments that are jolting, congested, and raw.

Characters are underdeveloped. They have interesting backstories but are erratically handled, and connection to them becomes difficult. Characters' stream-of-consciousness thoughts are included, but are an awkward addition.

Dialogue is capricious, clipped, and dry, with conversations that seem scripted rather than natural. Daniel and Lynda do not speak any differently to their colleagues than they do to their family members, and relationships remain unclear as a result.

Even Lynda is a largely unknowable and dimensionless figure. The narrative explains her experiences literally, but they come without understanding or emotion. She often mentions her battles with mental illness, but she does so mechanically; there is not a fleshed-out confrontation between Lynda and her demons, and her life with bipolar disorder remains mysterious despite her pronouncements.

The text is direct and its characterizations are blunt. Lynda's journey through mental illness to self-enlightenment is hard to relate to; it is unclear whether she arrives at meaning.

The story meanders through paragraphs that don't contribute to the plot, and whole segments of the book feel

inconsequential to its overarching themes. Within this lengthy work, the story far outstretches itself.

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HANNAH WILLIAMS (January 16, 2018)

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