FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

The Sign for Drowning
Rachel Stolzman
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When she was a child, Anna stood at the water's edge beside her mother, both of them helplessly frozen as they watched an ocean wave capsize the boat carrying Anna's younger sister, Megan. In that singular, life-changing instant, Anna envisioned Megan fighting off "monsoon rains with every turn of her neck. Earthquakes broke fault lines with each kick of her leg. Every thrashing of her arms brought forest fires somewhere. Opening her mouth caused volcanoes to erupt. In this way, she left us."

With crystalline purity, Stolzman's appreciation of Anna's cataclysmic loss evinces an unassailable beauty and unimpeachable reverence for the *other* tragedy that was taking place. For three woman were lost on the beach that day, says Anna, "the careless, confidant girl I was disappeared in the water as surely as Megan did. And my mother had not surfaced for air even once."

As Anna's mother emotionally and physically abandons her living child to inhabit a world where time is endlessly replayed like the videotape of the fatal accident, Stolzman provides Anna with a means of coping whose logic is inspired. To communicate with the sister who had gone "beyond even silent words," Anna learns sign language, entering an unnatural community that would come to feel more comfortable than the hearing world, where her parents' "absent caresses, despondent nonresponses, all imposed unbearable silences."

But silence can be made bearable, as Anna learns in her career as a teacher of deaf children, and experiencing parental love can happen if one so chooses. At her school, Anna meets Adrea, a five-year-old orphan whom she eventually adopts. The attraction is instantaneous, if not predictable: here is Megan made flesh. Loving Adrea with a fierceness that is primal in its intensity, Anna examines her ability to surmount her own childhood loss of love, and to forge an elemental bond that defies convention or expectation. "Before Adrea," she says, "I had easier answers. Before Adrea, I had fewer answers, fewer questions. I had less."

By offering her heroine's hesitant optimism through such disarmingly honest confessions, Stolzman exhibits an authentic emotional and narrative integrity, an impressive feat

for a debut novelist. An award-winning author and poet, Stolzman brings this lyrical sensibility to an elegiac tale of a family's heart-stopping tragedy and hard-won redemption, in which a tarnished silence can once again be made to shine through the resonate power of love.

Carol Haggas