

The Swimmers

Chloe Lane

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An observational tragicomedy that follows five days of a holiday weekend, Chloe Lane's novel *The Swimmers* puts life's unsparing absurdities on full display as a family tries to execute an illegal, life-terminating request.

One year ago, twenty-six-year-old Erin's mother was diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease. Her mother's body shut down much faster than anybody expected. Until then, Erin and her mother were a perpetual, singular unit. Post-diagnosis, her mother returned to live with her siblings at the Moore family farm, Erin's childhood home. Thus Erin travels from Auckland to the suburbs to be ensconced in a house that has "the feel of being both too lived in and entirely free of human attention."

The novel's compressed timespan is tantalizing, both in terms of what is depicted and what's hinted at in passing or through omission. Erin's world is rearranged by what remains of the Moores: her mother's increasingly locked-in body, the new tenor between her mother and her Aunt Wynn, the limp but tender overtures of her Uncle Cliff, and the skittish, coltish energy of her younger cousin, Bethany.

Motivated and stymied by realizations about how much she doesn't know and will never know about herself, her mother, and the Moore family history, Erin lives in an arrested present that skitters between acceptance and denial. As Erin gets glimpses of insight into her relatives' lives, their sharp edges soften without dissolving into easy resolutions. The result is a narrative that transpires like "a drunken snog with...grief in the dark corner of the party."

Infused with a sympathetic dread, *The Swimmers* is a novel that traces the small panics, collaborative denial, and suburban antics that a family perfects in their attempts to keep their heads above dangerous emotional waters.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May / June 2022)

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