



First, You Swallow the Moon

Kipp Wessel

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Winner of the General Fiction category and Finalist for the 2016 BookLife Prize in Fiction!

A modern novel of heartbreak and wilderness

Luminous, offbeat, and moving, *First, You Swallow the Moon* is a vibrant novel about love, loss and the sometimes manically impaired road to redemption. This is a novel about the counterpart to attachment - the sometimes impossible act of letting go.

Plan A: Survive heartbreak

Plan B: Turn self into bear

At twenty-four years old, all Jack Hesley knows with certainty is he's head over heels in love. But his life (and love) veers from center when his brother's car careens across an icy Wisconsin interstate and into a stand of pine. Stunned by loss, Jack retreats into isolation - a depression so stubborn the only living thing forceful enough to cross its threshold arrives in the shape of wild bears. He dreams them. He becomes obsessed by them. And he alters his forward path, risking limb and love, to follow real bears, grizzlies, into the thick woods of western Montana to untangle their impossible message - to become one of them.

A love story about love unraveled, *First, You Swallow the Moon* takes us from the edge of a frozen Minnesota lake into the forested river basins of Montana. But its geography has more to do with the wilderness within - the heart's centrifugal gravity of attachment. It follows one man's attempt to survive loss and transform the chambers of the human heart.

First, You Swallow the Moon Details

Date : Published March 17th 2016 by Radialgrain

ISBN : 9780990924807

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Format : Hardcover 234 pages

Genre : Fiction

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From Reader Review First, You Swallow the Moon for online ebook

Wendy says

"First, You Swallow The Moon" an imaginatively touching story that begins when Jack Hensley shattered by the loss of his brother in a tragic accident flees his anguish, escaping to the isolation of a cube-shaped storage unit on his parent's lake property. His depression thriving in this natural setting Jack begins dreaming of bears, becoming so obsessed that he travels to Missoula Montana to volunteer for a bear research program. But as he journey's into the Scapegoat Wilderness his heart in limbo, his need to follow the bears a protection against feelings of loss and pain, he suffers another devastating heartbreak; one that leaves him defeated and wanting to numb his anguish by hibernating like a bear.

Set at the edge of a frozen Minnesota Lake to the vast wilderness near Missoula Montana the plot revolves around the emptiness of a man who finds solace in following bears, discovering their secrets, hoping to lower his heart rate and hibernate from his heartache and feeling of utter defeat. In a beautifully crafted story that's descriptive and moving, Jack Hensley takes a fascinating journey both humorous and tragic as he struggles not only with his brother's death but the abandonment of the young woman he deeply loves. Into themes that focus on the pain of loss, redemption and letting go Kipp Wessel weaves a rich background that also looks at appreciation of wildlife too often abused and our natural environment.

Twenty-four year old Jack Hensley grief-stricken after the loss of his larger-than-life, energetic but impetuous brother Ben becomes disenchanted with life, unmotivated and depressed, finding solace in his passion for bears. Although smitten by the warmth, mystery and luminosity of Clare Daupin who he met when she was seventeen, lack of communication and his frozen heart scare away the quiet, caring, smart post-graduate. Loving Jack and patient for years she abandons him to follow her own dreams. The tender-hearted, observant Sumi running from her own problems tries to glue back the pieces of Jack's heart, confronting him with her observations and sage advice, only with uncertainty and doubt to leave him again wandering in the wilderness. It is these personalities that infuse this story with heartwarming intensity and drama, making it a must-read.

I liked "First, You Swallow The Moon" which I won through Goodreads Giveaways although I thought Jack wallowed too much in his pessimism and anguish, needing more help than what Clare, Sumi or even Professor Jeff Kristoff could offer. But then this is only a story, a glimpse at a man's struggle to survive the heartbreak of a death and lost love, but one that could leave anyone vulnerable to the danger of an obsession.

Margaret says

I loved "First, You Swallow the Moon"! The setting drew me in first, as I live in the Twin Cities and have visited Missoula, Montana and the Lincoln National Forest nearly every year for the last two decades. Kipp is a poet with his words and makes these places come alive in a beautiful way. However, the meat of the story is about grief and the unusual way the main character deals with his losses. Let's just say, "grizzlies are key". I highly recommend diving into this book. You won't be sorry. You may be surprised!

Carole P. Roman says

Heartfelt and intense, *First, You Swallow the Moon* is unforgettable. Kipp Wessel weaves a tale about Jack, a young man who loses his brother in a tragic accident. His descent into grief is all consuming. He raw need to make everything stop, pulls him deep into a depression that causes him to lose everything he cares about in his world. Jack leaves humanity behind searching for a cave to hibernate, like the bears he is obsessed with, hoping the long numbing sleep will heal his bruised heart. This is a book about losing yourself then finding a way to put back the broken pieces knowing it will never be the same, and learning to accept it.

Tara Morrison says

Only one other time in almost 50 years of reading have I written to an author to tell them how much I loved their book...this was the 2nd time. It is beautifully, eloquently written. There are parts that are heart-wrenching and parts that make you laugh until you cry. It is a very unique subject mattering some ways, yet also a story that I think almost everyone can relate to. This book is a treasure, and is one that I know I will re-read every few years. I chose this for my book club to read and every single person on my book club LOVED it. We even invited the author to join us for a discussion, and he graciously agreed to do so. We had a fabulous discussion with him! Read this book!!!!

Kris Harrison says

I loved this novel. The story is fascinating on its own - a young man hoping to swap places with a wild bear as an antidote to the mess of his life and his romantic relationships. It weaves humor and tragedy - the grace and gracelessness of loss.

But what I really adored was the writing. This is a beautiful, artfully written lit fiction novel. It is imaginative, playful, and crisply rendered. It's a novel that artfully draws you deep into the woods and deep into a broken heart. Loved this.

Lori says

Read 8/5/16 - 8/10/16

4 Stars: Strongly Recommended to heartbreakers and those who have had their hearts broken.

Pages: 219

Publisher: Radialgrain

Released: March 2016

I don't know about you, but I hate... HATE... reading books that are going to jerk my emotions around and get me all worked up over shit I thought I had buried and put behind me. There is little worse than trying to

lose yourself in a book that is determined to work its paper thin words inside the tender scars of your own past heartbreaks. I read to escape, not to stew in a pot of my own snively self pity licking old wounds, you know?

Thank GOD this is not one of those books. Though, honestly, I had feared it would be, which is why I was so gosh-darn hesitant to pick it up back when Kipp Wessel first sent it my way back in February.

Don't get me wrong, there's heartbreak here, lots and lots of it, and that same depressing struggle of moving forward because time keeps trucking along even if you don't want to, and the more time that passes the more you find yourself holding on to the pain of being left by someone you love because you just can't bear to let it go, because without the pain there might be forgetting and you refuse to forget and so you just keep fucking holding on to that pain. And then you panic a little because time is just such a fucking bitch and it's dragging you farther and farther away from the moments that were good and happy and warm, the moments you wish you could cocoon yourself inside of, and you think about how one someone can't make any more memories and it kills you to know they are gone and you are not, and you think about how the other someone is making memories without you and that kills you too, and there is such a tremendous pressure on your heart when you think of those things and you are terrified it will break into a thousand pieces right there in your chest and so you start training your heart to slow down, to beat slower, to beat like a hibernating bear's, and when it learns to hibernate you find the numbing floatyness of it addicting. You become obsessed. You jump from the brink of depression into the arms of obsession. You obsess over training your whole self to hibernate. To shield yourself from the pain and to cocoon yourself in the memories and to hide from the right now. Because acknowledging the right now is to acknowledge that things have happened, are happening, will continue to happen, around you, with or without you, and moving on into the right now is simply not an option.

(deep breath.)

Ok, so that was less me and more Jack, the poor heartbroken dude who takes the unexpected death of his older brother really badly. So badly, that he slips into a state of semi-depression and teaches his heart to hibernate like a bear's. While smooshing around in his half bear funk, he decides to move to Montana to actually study bears because he's digging the whole hibernation thing and secretly wants to try to train his whole body to do it. He breaks the news to his girlfriend Clare and she takes it pretty well, transferring schools to go live out there with him and giving him time to "find himself" as he figures out how to cope with his grief. But Jack, man.... the dude is just so darn mokey and selfish and eventually Clare gets sick of it and says she needs a break. She's been so busy taking care of Jack that she now needs time to find herself. And you're thinking, no, no, nononono, Jack you gotta pull up man, she's leaving you, and you're like Clare, wait, wait, waitwaitwait, Jack is not gonna handle this well, just wait a minute before you go blowing his whole world to shit, but it's a book, and they can't hear you and you're like fuuuuuuuuckkk.

First, *You Swallow the Moon* is a crafty little debut. It's all heartbreak and obsession and not being able to see what's right in front of your own face because you're busy hanging on to the past and it's mokey and indulgent but in the absolutely sweetest sort of way.

It reads like art. It feels like home. It took me places I didn't expect it to. And you should let it take you there too.
