



Montpelier Tomorrow

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Mid-life mom, Colleen Gallagher would do anything to protect her children from harm. When her daughter's husband falls ill with ALS, Colleen rolls up her sleeves and moves in, juggling the multiple roles of grandma, cook, and caregiver, only to discover that even her superhuman efforts can't fix what's wrong.

"An affecting, deeply honest novel; at the same time, a lacerating indictment of our modern health care system." --*Kirkus Reviews*

"A heartrending story of love, loss and the endurance of the human spirit." --*Literary Fiction Book Review*

"Characters are vivid, relatable, and all too imperfectly human." --Jewell Parker Rhodes

"Each time I have reread this novel, I have felt rewarded by the connection it offers to the central character, Colleen. I can think of no single page in which her voice is not an irreplaceable gift to the reader." --Kevin McIlvoy

"An engrossing account of the impossible choices faced by caregivers..." --Kathryn Shonk

Montpelier Tomorrow Details

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From Reader Review Montpelier Tomorrow for online ebook

Gregory Williams says

While videos of celebrities pouring ice water on their heads has raised awareness of ALS in a mostly abstract way, Marylee MacDonald's poignant novel does what good fiction does best. It takes the abstract and makes it specific. Through vivid prose filled with tense moments as well as gentle humor, she takes the reader on an honest, unflinching journey with Colleen Gallagher, as she bears the burden of caregiver for her ailing son-in-law. But even after Tony is diagnosed with a rapidly advancing form of ALS, life's other stresses don't disappear, they are magnified. Backs go out, babies are born, and home repairs need to be made, including a much needed repair of her relationship with daughter Sandy. How Colleen keeps the family from drowning as Tony gradually sinks will keep you turning the pages. And by the time you reach the surprising conclusion, you'll have an awareness of ALS more chilling than a bucket of ice and an appreciation of the complexities of a mother's love, which will linger in your heart.

Diane says

A family dealing with the devastating diagnosis of ALS is the subject of Marylee MacDonald's intense novel Montpelier Tomorrow. Colleen Gallagher is a suburban Chicago kindergarten teacher and mother of three adult children. She raised her young children on her own when her husband died in a car accident years ago, and spent the last few years caring for her Alzheimer's-afflicted mother who recently died.

When her daughter's husband is diagnosed with a fast-moving form of ALS, Lou Gerhig's disease, Colleen rushes to her daughter's family in Washington DC to help care for Sandy, (who just gave birth to baby boy Ben) three-year-old Josh and son-in-law Tony.

Sandy and Colleen's relationship is not the perfect mother-daughter one. I found Sandy's need for order and control and the rude way she expresses that need to her mother unsettling. Sandy constantly berates her mother and even throws Tony's parents out of her home for a minor offense.

Tony deteriorates quickly and Colleen comes to stay with the family and help during her summer vacation. Sandy has to work as a lawyer to support her family now that Tony is housebound, so Colleen not only cares for the children, but she reluctantly becomes Tony's caregiver as well.

The characters in Montpelier Tomorrow are different from other books of this type in that they are not the let's-everyone-pitch-in-and-make-it-better people. Sandy is resentful of her husband's illness, Tony is self-centered and self-pitying, and Colleen just wants to return to her own life back in Chicago. Tony's parents' idea of helping is to let Colleen do the actual, difficult physical care of their son while they pop in from time to time.

MacDonald provides a realistic look at the tough day-to-day living as a caregiver to an adult with ALS. She pulls no punches at the frustrations, the anger and the punishing physical toll it takes on Colleen, who steps up when no one else will.

Colleen and Sandy's relationship is a tough one to read about, but eventually we discover what is behind Sandy's resentment. It reinforces that parents don't always know what their children are thinking as they

grow up, and the same is true of children about their parents. We tend to ascribe motivations to each other because we don't really understand each other.

There is a sad twist at the end of the story that comes on suddenly and changes everything. I admit to not seeing this one coming and it felt like a punch to the gut. *Montpelier Tomorrow* is a tough read, and MacDonald does a terrific job putting you in the shoes of this family in crisis. You may not like all of them but you will feel their pain. Colleen is a wonderfully complex, unforgettable character, and I for one would love to see more of her story.

Ashley says

This is a very touching and emotional story. It is about a woman named Colleen Gallagher. She has a daughter whose husband gets sick with ALS. So she hops on a train and comes to the rescue to try and help her daughter and grand-kids out while their dad is sick. She tries her best to help out with everything around the house between being a grandma, a cook, and a caregiver but even she can't fix what is really wrong. The struggles that this family has to go through with the disease is very sad and makes you grateful for your health. This is a very heartwarming story and I would highly recommend reading it!

Janice Richardson says

Artistry with words. That is how I view literary writers and this author is a master. This beautifully written story of a mother, her adult children, their lives intertwined through life events beyond their control, is a work of art.

The mother, a widow and a teacher, is caught between a rock and hard place when her son-in-law becomes ill. Balancing her job, her needs and the increasingly overwhelming role of caregiver, she struggles to find a balance. Faced with difficult choices, she makes the best decision she can.

This book is well worth taking the time to savour, learn from, and appreciate.

Reeka (BoundbyWords) says

As seen on my blog:

I seem to have hit a trend with my reading as of late—does 2 count as a trend? A trend that has found me reading important books, with less than stellar narratives. *Montpelier Tomorrow* is an important book, in regards to the light it sheds on a disease that is all too rapidly claiming lives. *Montpelier Tomorrow* was informative in its explanation of the disease, and of the stresses placed not only on the bearer, but on the loved ones surrounding the affected. But the fat, muscle, and skin intertwined with the very important core of this novel, was a storyline that was choppy, and stilted, and indescribably frustrating to read.

Marylee MacDonald went for that gut punch, for that seriously hard-to-ignore cast of characters that (almost)

made you feel lucky to have that aunt that comments on your slight weight gain every Christmas. The people existing in this novel were horrendous. They were rude, and selfish, and heartless, and overall lacked basic human courtesy. Colleen Gallagher's daughter Sandy has arrived home, her daughter's husband Tony, literally, falls out of the passenger side and curls up in a ball. Colleen tries rushing to his aid, while exclaiming, quite calmly, "Tony, are you all right?"....

That's it!? Were we to assume that Colleen was already aware of Tony's tragic news? I was so confused.

We soon find out that Tony has been diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), and is about to become even more insufferable than he already is naturally. And Colleen, to become pushover of the century.

That was the tone of this entire novel, it was one non-reaction after another. It was insult, after dropped topic, after assumption, after another. I felt like I was reading this book while submerged underwater, it made my head SO foggy. I'll be the first to admit that the subject matter of this novel is enough to propel it onto the "books you should be aware of" list, but the writing style made me cringe-the nails on chalkboard kind of cringe. Granted, readers eventually become privy to the reason why (a couple) of the characters are so hostile, but it wasn't enough for me by then. The entire 3/4 of the book set me up for exhaustion, I just wasn't having it by the end. I felt very little other than anger towards every single voice in *Montpelier Tomorrow*, even little Josh. Yes, MacDonald wrote a book that everyone should pick up, but I can't guarantee that you'll love it for it's literary finesse.

Recommended for Fans of: The movie: *The Theory of Everything*, Contemporary, fiction with characters that have a physical disability.

Valery says

Montpelier Tomorrow by Marylee MacDonald is a gripping and emotional book. This is the story of Colleen Gallagher who is off to visit her daughter Sandy, pending the imminent birth of Colleen's second grandchild. What started off as a focused visit with helping the new mom cope, turns into much more, when Colleen's son-in-law is diagnosed with ALS, turning the world on it's head. An emotionally wrought story that shows the demands and harsh realities that come with fighting and then submitting to, an overwhelming disease. MacDonald has done an excellent job of exposing the complexities that evolve when someone is sick, not just for the ill person, but for the caregivers. The relationship between Colleen and her daughter Sandy is also tenuous and complicated, with not so subtle tension. This only adds to the fracturing of a fragile family. There are a few bright spots however, the learning of compassion, and the gifts of fortitude and forgiveness. Dealing with a terminal illness is never easy; MacDonald captures this challenge quite well in this mesmerizing novel that will stay with the reader long after it is finished.

William Rose says

Read this late last year, and it was certainly one of the best books I read in 2014. Emotionally tough, wonderfully written. I didn't know much about ALS before reading the book (like others, a bulk of my exposure to ALS was the ice bucket challenge), so for this reason alone, I think this is an important book.

Judith Starkston says

In this sensitive novel, MacDonald plumbs the emotional depths of human relationships under extreme tensions and stresses. She portrays a young family when the father is diagnosed with ALS just as his second son is born. The novel is told from the point of view of the wife's mother. Grandma arrives to help with the birth of her second grandson only to discover a death sentence has been handed out to the father. Grandma is not without her baggage and challenges in her relationship with her daughter. Nothing here will be easy. ALS transforms some people's personalities into extreme self-centeredness just as their bodies are freezing up and making them dependent on others. The young wife is a lawyer and she has to keep working this demanding job to pay the bills as well as take care of two kids and a helpless husband. You begin to see why this is a compelling tale of family dynamics under major trials.

There are layers to this subtle story. People do not act as you thought they might. Philosophic insights into that odd creature, humanity, flow naturally from crisp, involving dialogue and painful character choices. Imagery provides a sophisticated underlay of the action.

Whether you are facing the tragedy of ALS somewhere in your life or not, this novel will provide a rich, nuanced read.

Rose says

I received this book in exchange for an honest review.

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the story and the main character, Colleen. The subject matter, a person dying of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) is not normally something I would have been excited about reading. However, the author created a plucky character in Colleen, a middle-aged widow with three grown children. When she arrives at her daughter's house in Baltimore for an extended visit, she learns her son-in-law has just been diagnosed with ALS.

The plot follows Colleen in her journey as she increasingly assumes the role of primary caregiver for Tony (the son-in-law).

The author handles the emotional phases--anger, guilt, denial--from an interesting perspective. Colleen is practical but caring. Her method of helping to deal with a terrible situation is often met with resistance and outright hostility, even from her daughter, Sandy.

Sandy, Tony and Tony's parents all come off as selfish and unlikeable which was unexpected. I was glad the story wasn't sappy or overly sentimental. It was only towards the very end that I even got teary eyed.

Colleen's voice is what kept the story interesting. I also learned much about the disease and some of the issues surrounding the choices different people make on whether to try to extend their lives or let the disease take its course quickly.

Recommend this book for anyone who likes a real life story about imperfect people dealing with the injustice that life often delivers.

Trinity says

Wow, how much heartache can one family handle? Apparently, a lot, as long as you have each other to get you through. Heartwrenching and absolutely wonderful!

Etta Worthington says

Painful to read but impossible to put down

I read once that it is loss that defines us. Much like the negative space that a sculptor crafts that give definition to a block of stone, loss gives us texture, form and substance. It is that sense of loss, past, present and future that runs through every page of Montpelier Tomorrow.

And it is loss that separates Colleen Gallagher from her grown daughter Sandy; that keeps Colleen from the kind of relationship she craves with her only daughter.

And it is the impending loss of her husband to ALS that pushes Sandy to her mother, the only person she knows will come through for her, while Sandy tries to navigate mothering her two young children, a career, and a dying husband.

Colleen, almost by default, becomes primary caregiver, understanding on a very deep level the loss Sandy is facing, which she herself had faced as a young mother with the sudden death of her husband. So Colleen slips into the tattered tapestry of their lives, putting her life half a continent away on hold.

She's there to change diapers of an infant and wipe the butt of a mostly incapacitated but demanding man. Attempts to provide emotional support to her daughter are rebuffed, so Colleen is left to spell out her love with mundane daily tasks and house repairs.

This book isn't a comfortable book to read. The cruelty of ALS scrapes at the fiber of the extended family. But the depth and complexity of emotions that a caretaker experiences leap out from the pages. There are no saints in this book. But underneath all the darkness runs a strong and terrible current of love.

This book is a compelling look into the mother's heart. Love isn't pretty in Montpelier Tomorrow. But it is there, wrapping all the losses into a compelling story. A must read for mothers. For caregivers of any sort.

Jan English Leary says

In this brave, beautifully written novel, Montpelier Tomorrow, Marylee MacDonald shows a family pushed to the limit due to illness. Colleen Gallagher's son-in-law has been diagnosed with ALS, and her daughter is pregnant. Gallagher, herself widowed when she was a young mother, struggles to help her daughter escape the same fate, as she steps up to fill the roles of mother, grandmother, cook, carpenter, caregiver.

MacDonald's characters are loving, yet flawed, wise, yet capable of bad behavior. There are no false notes in

this novel. I admire its honesty and its heart.

Neil Mccabe says

Marylee MacDonald's novel, *Montpelier Tomorrow*, gets off to a fast start and propels the reader to the end. The settings and characters seem real, pulling the reader into the room with them as they grapple with heart-wrenching and complex issues. The novel isn't always easy reading – it brought tears to my eyes more than once – but it is rewarding because of its gritty honesty and wisdom in dealing with those issues and because of the gems of brilliant writing MacDonald sprinkles liberally in the reader's path.

The protagonist, Colleen Gallagher, has a life and career as a kindergarten teacher in the Chicago area. She plans to spend part of her summer vacation at her daughter Sandy's home in Washington D.C. helping with the arrival of Sandy's second child. But Colleen quickly sees that the house, and the life within it, are deteriorating, and she discovers the crucial fact that had not been previously shared with her: her son-in-law, Tony, has a devastating degenerative condition, ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), that will have tsunami ripple effects on his family and friends.

Colleen would seem well-prepared to help in this difficult situation, having successfully carved out a life after her own husband was killed in an automobile accident, leaving her with two young children and pregnant with a third. She raised her children alone, went back to school to obtain her teaching credential, and worked full-time during the school years as a kindergarten teacher and summers remodeling houses to put aside enough money to send all three of her children to college. For the past few years she has been a caregiver for her aging parents. Now her mother has died, freeing her from the last of those responsibilities. Thus, Colleen has relevant experience and is available, but she soon learns that coping with the death of her young husband was quite different, in some ways easier, than caring for Sandy's dying husband.

Sandy is struggling with her duties as an attorney, wife and mother, trying to maintain some semblance of a normal life, but it is a juggling act becoming more difficult with each passing day. Colleen tries to rescue Sandy, efficiently checking items off her to-do lists, helping to run the household, cooking, cleaning, caring for the kids, painting the basement or unplugging a drain, all while filling the role as principal caregiver for Tony. Colleen extends her "vacation" until fall when she must return to her home and teaching job. Then she makes numerous trips throughout the year, flying to D.C. on weekends with suitcases full of frozen casseroles. She returns for the following summer, and stays into fall, taking an extended leave from her job. Colleen's days as a caretaker are grueling as she takes on more and more monotonous or physically demanding tasks, feeding Tony, helping him in the bathroom, bathing and dressing him. MacDonald made me feel the crushing weight on Colleen's shoulders and cheer for her as she soldiers on. She performs well, but it seems she can never do enough to please Sandy or Tony.

Though the story revolves around the competing needs of Tony, the dying man, and his family, friends and caretakers, at its heart is the question whether the broken relationship between Colleen and Sandy can be reconciled.

Sandy's household crackles with emotions and complicated interactions with family and friends regarding Tony's healthcare needs and emergencies, all piled on top of normal life. There is tension, keenly shown, between Sandy and Tony, between them and Colleen, and between them and Colleen and Tony's wealthy parents, who show up periodically and give financial support but otherwise do not pitch in even as Tony's needs escalate. The most surprising emotion is anger, powerfully shown with gestures, facial expressions and hard-hitting, realistic dialogue.

Reading this novel is like sitting down with a long-time friend, Colleen, and listening while she shares her frustrations, exhaustion, pain and wisdom. She is a strong, capable, and caring rescuer whom I cared about. She can be blunt, sarcastic, and funny. She has her limitations, sometimes speaking too quickly and saying the wrong thing or not speaking up when she should. But she is a reliable narrator who acknowledges her

failings, learns from her mistakes and honestly shares her wisdom. I wanted to hear everything she had to say.

MacDonald knows how to turn colorfully original phrases. Colleen hasn't merely felt sexual temptation, she has "...danced along the risky knife-blade of sex, never quite falling off and into bed." Her back doesn't simply hurt – it turns "...into a magnet that attracted the metal filings of pain." Charles isn't as obvious as an open book, he is "...as transparent as Josh's ant farm, a cutaway of his psyche visible to the naked eye." There are too many of these gems to repeat here.

I won't reveal other plot points. Readers will appreciate discovering them on their own.

I highly recommend this book to anyone wishing to take a serious look at the effects a debilitating degenerative disease can have, not only on the afflicted person, but on caregivers and other family members and friends as well.

Suanne says

A subtle, carefully crafted novel that captures the struggles of a family disrupted by Lou Gehrig's disease. Colleen, the mother, attempts to "save" her daughter by becoming caregiver to the son-in-law, Tony, as his disease progresses. Colleen is an admirable character for such self-sacrifice, yet MacDonald captures her moments of being less than likable when Tony's self-centered behavior infuriates her, when her daughter, Sandy, is less than appreciative, and Colleen's loss of a potential love many years ago. This book captures the heartache and the joys of being a caregiver in a long-term care situation.

Shannon Savory says

Montpelier Tomorrow by Marylee MacDonald is an emotional story about the effects of ASL on a person but also the family. The entire novel flows beautifully while incorporating humor, wisdom and insight while a mother (Colleen) helps her daughter navigate through the diagnosis of ASL given to her daughter's husband. Having dealt with a husband loss Colleen knows what it is like to raise a family on their own and wants to save and protect her daughter from as much of the struggle as she can. I think the most moving part of this novel was when Colleen was doing research on a respirator and talked to a family member that was helping their mother with the same diagnosis and was on a respirator. The section was very emotionally charged but also informative. This family had so much to deal with and I found myself agreeing different characters and yelling at others. There are no right and wrong answers in a situation like this and I think the novel captures the struggle that a family would go through. Marylee MacDonald did a beautiful job and I enjoyed reading this book immensely.
