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The inspired, insightful and intensely absorbing new novel from one of the most important literary writers working today

Her boyfriend said she was quirky but it was more than that. Some things were important in life. You had to fight for them. Helen was prepared for that. Only she wasn't as strong as people thought. She tried to be but didn't always succeed. Nobody does, not all the time.

Trust, love, friendship; the lives of others, relationships; parents, children, lovers; and death, and the rich, and poor; safety, security; home and homelessness. The ordinary stuff of life but extraordinary too when you think about it. As Helen did, each waking hour, as day follows dawn, till that strangest of moments on the way home from work this tall, skinny down-at-heel guy crossed the road in front of her taxi. Brian? Her long-lost brother? How could it be? But it was his shape, his way of moving, his very presence. Could it be? So begins this twenty-four hours in the life of this ordinary young woman, as ordinary, as unique, as each and every one of us.

Mo Said She Was Quirky Details

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Author : James Kelman

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From Reader Review Mo Said She Was Quirky for online ebook

Susan Ovans says

Susan decided she could not bear one more moment spent viewing the world through Helen's eyes, seeing only what Helen saw, smelling only what Helen smelled, feeling only what Helen felt, thinking only what... no, that's a lie. What Susan thought is that Helen wasn't worth more than 25 pages of her attention. So she trudged down the hill and returned this book to the public library shelf from whence it came.

Helen Dawson says

A very intense read that left me rather exhausted. My star rating would be 2.5 (dead on 50%) if such a thing were possible, as I think I am glad I read this book, but I kind of wish I hadn't... (Sorry this is the lousiest review ever.)

24 hours in the head if Helen both compelled and repelled me.

My tip, if you're not into it after the first few pages, put it down. It's not for you.

Sean Wilson says

James Kelman's *Mo Said She Was Quirky* reads like a working-class version of *Mrs Dalloway*. By the release of this novel, 2013, Kelman had completely mastered the art of third-person stream of consciousness narrative, this time from the perspective of a late-twenties Scottish mother and a day of her life in London. It's pretty dense and very much dialogue-free, realistically portraying the scattered thoughts of a woman just trying to get by in life. When it comes to the low-level anxieties of modern day-to-day existence, look no further than James Kelman.

Jo Bennie says

24 hours inside the mind of Helen, pretty much stream of consciousness. Helen is a croupier working nights at a London West End casino. She has a 6 year old daughter Sophie, is divorced from Sophie's father and lives with her boyfriend Mo in a tiny flat in south London.

On this day Helen is on her way home from her shift in a taxi when she is startled by the sight of a pair of homeless men walking in front of them. He seems to be Helen's brother Brian, lost to her years earlier when he walked out of their Glasgow home after a fight with their father. Unable to rest as she so desperately needs to do she is sat in the kitchen as Mo and Sophie wake, startling her from her reverie on old family photographs. As they begin their day Helen retreats to bed waking as Sophie's school day ends and Mo prepares to go to work as a waiter.

Kelman brilliantly evokes the fractured sense of a life of drugery, Helen is never rested enough or present enough to be a parent to Sophie and the shadow of her own past, unloved by her mother, abandoned by her beloved brother, negatively affects her judgement of Sophie's actions and innocence.

It is so noisy in Helen's head, things unspoken, sentences half spoken making the reader wonder and speculate. Helen worries incessantly and conversely talks herself into not acting on the things her instinct warns her are not right.

This was a book that returned to my mind over and over, the sad bleakness of Helen's life living the twilight world of a nightshift worker fighting to make ends meet, not a comfortable book but a brilliantly written one.

Heather says

Couldn't actually finish, just couldn't get into the writing style, it suffocated me!

Kasa Cotugno says

Helen is a casino worker in London on her way home in the early hours when an chance encounter with a homeless man sets off memories of the past. In this truly original novel, Kelman employs a form of stream of consciousness from Helen's point of view, placing the reader directly behind her eyes. How many disparate thoughts enter our head during the course of a day, and how are they interconnected? If we were to transcribe these thoughts, it would probably look like this book. From one subject to another triggered in ways we can only surmise. While I liked this book, it was slow and deliberate. But characters are well defined, and situations believable.

Joseph says

Mo said she was quirky, but I found her boring. Kelman's stream-of-consciousness narrative (weirdly written in the third person, for reasons well beyond my understanding) almost completely eschews plot, which doesn't have to be a bad thing. A compelling narrator doesn't necessarily have to have anything terribly interesting to narrate, if she has a sufficiently distinct voice or well-expressed viewpoints.

Helen has neither. Maybe that's the point; maybe she is meant to be a stand-in for the great mass of humdrum, everyday people, but if that's the case, I'm not sure why I'd want to read about it. For the most part, though, I just wish that Kelman had committed to something here. Stream-of-consciousness is fine, and done well, it can be worth the effort. But this is just a mush. It's more than simply that it's written in third person; Helen's thoughts tend toward exposition, narrating for the understanding of a third party, despite the fact that the narration exists solely in her head. It's not all bad. There are moments when her thoughts thrash about, leaping from topic to topic in the space between her words, and she briefly seems worth overhearing. And perhaps I'm misunderstanding, and Kelman is actually merging an omniscient narrator with Helen (although, again, I don't know why). But if he wants to paint a vivid picture of Helen's world, he needs to step outside her head, and if he wants to paint a vivid picture of Helen's mind, I wish he'd stop explaining so much and let her thoughts speak for themselves.

Aside from the way he's written the book, I'm perplexed by what he's chosen to write about. For the most part, he seems fixated on the monotony of day-to-day life, hewing strongly to realism. Except of course, for the absurd coincidences which bookend the story, as Helen twice bumps into her long-lost brother. Either of these options could have worked, but together, they undercut one another. How can we find meaning in Helen's pedestrian life, when we're fixated on the extraordinary moments that seem so out of place in that

life? And how can we tolerate the book's tedious middle section when coincidence sets out a much more interesting place setting?

Honestly, reading this was a chore. I have worries enough without having to suffer through someone else's, and there's little here to make it worth my while to do so. And honestly, writing this review, I've talked myself down from a two-star rating to a one-star rating.

Cornelius Browne says

If ever a novel grew from the rib bone of Molly Bloom's soliloquy, this is the one. For twenty-four hours we share the life of Helen, a young Glaswegian working nightshift in a London casino, mothering her young daughter in the confined flat (the closet bedroom of the child is one you're unlikely to forget!) they share with her Muslim boyfriend, whose life becomes endangered when she encounters a homeless man she thinks may be her long-lost brother. *Mo Said She Was Quirky* seems to me almost as perfect as Joyce's famous *Ulysses* closer, and if I hadn't also read *War and Peace* and *Middlemarch* this year it would probably be my favourite novel of 2012. Since his debut in the early Eighties, *The Busconductor Hines*, Kelman has been as single-minded and uncompromising as any great artist, transforming working-class speech, Glasgow street language, into an exuberant, compassionate, poetic, down-to-earth, gut-wrenching literature. His mastery ranges from short stories but a paragraph long ("Acid" from the collection *Not Not While the Giro*) to novels of great length and complexity (*A Disaffection*; *How Late It Was, How Late*; *Kieron Smith, Boy*). His voice is as distinctive and instantly recognisable as Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Beckett or Faulkner. Alongside Alasdair Gray he has changed the landscape of Scottish literature from what he calls "the tartan-and-heather kind of bollocks" into the thriving scene we nowadays take for granted, replete with the likes of Irvine Welsh, Ali Smith, A.L. Kennedy and Alan Warner. The only English-speaking writers I can imagine deserving the Nobel as much are Alice Munro and William Trevor. Kelman won the Booker in 1994 (some bookshops refusing to stock the winning novel because of its profanity; its author dismissed as a "literary savage") but he remains seriously undersung.

Ian Sowers says

Kelman is one of my favorite writers, but I didn't like this one much at all. Written from the point of view of a female croupier in London, Kelman's insights all feel recycled from other sources: for once it seems that his ambitions exceeded his abilities. And if you're at all familiar with this kind of non-narrative literature, you'll know well in advance how the chance encounter that opens the novel will resolve itself.

Karen Linder says

Meh.

Paul says

I was absolutely gripped by this book, which covers 24 hours in the life of a Glaswegian woman, divorced and living in London with her daughter. The book is told from her point of view, and the pacing and diction

of the book for me perfectly captures the flitting, internal monologue of this anxious woman, Helen, who feels unable to control things in her life and struggles to trust the people around her. Her thoughts can at times be as claustrophobic as her cramped flat but there are many points where I was smiling in recognition, whether at her describing "life" as a sigh, to encouraging her daughter to eat her fish because it is brain food.

It has been described as one of his more accessible books, and reminded me at times of "A Disaffection" in atmosphere. I have also seen one review describe it as "political" which is curious, if describing someone's lot in life is deemed political, fair enough.

If you haven't read a Kelman book before give it a go. Make your own mind up.

Greg says

I didn't love this book, which is kind of a shame, because I want to like James Kelman. A few years ago I read *How Late It Was, How Late*, and I don't remember much about it, just that I was excited to read it and then I was kind of disappointed. Unfortunately, I opted not to write a review for the book so I can't remind myself of what I actually thought of the book.

I rely on the internet too much as my memory these days.

This book is sort of about memory, among other things. It's almost entirely a rambling interior monologue of a Scottish woman who works as a black-jack dealer in a London casino. After she thinks a homeless man who walks in front of her cab in the early morning after a night shift is her estranged brother a torrent of memories and thoughts occupy her for the next twenty four hours. Those thoughts make up the bulk of the book, at times broken up with her interactions with her daughter, boyfriend or co-workers, but mainly the entire book is what's going on in her head. And as her boyfriend Mo says, she's quirky.

Memory is of course a fickle thing, and it's difficult to know if what she's thinking is how things really were or her own warped version of the past. Every now and then when the interpersonal world intrudes on the narrative the reader gets a view of what the world around her is like and that world and the world inside her head don't always match up. This leads to some tantalizing possibilities about what is true and what isn't in the story, but those questions are mostly just thrown out to the reader as her thoughts keep trucking along.

There wasn't anything wrong with the book, I just couldn't find myself getting too engaged in it. Maybe it was that too much shit in my own life was getting in the way, or maybe it's just that I am increasingly become less and less of an ideal reader for any book that doesn't involve a fairly straight forward narrative structure.

Louisa Wood says

Must confess I just never got into this book, I found the stream of consciousness - while an interesting literary achievement - really frustrating. I actually gave up reading, which I rarely do...

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Why oh why did I finish this book. I took a break 20% in, but decided I needed to keep going. After all, this is the author of the brilliant *How Late It Was, How Late* It lacks the Scottish brogue of *How Late*, but does have some fun slang words and UK spellings, like brolly, groo, kerb, and so on.

I guess I was hoping it would get better. It kind of did. Helen tells us every thought in her head during a 24 hour period, starting roughly when she thinks she sees her brother in the face of a homeless man during a cab ride home from her night-shift job.

And I do mean every thought in her head. The way that thoughts break off halfway through and repeat and transition into other things. The only reprieve is the occasional moment where Helen gets to interact with other people - her 6 year old daughter, her friend, her boyfriend Mo. However because of her third-shift schedule and her obsessive tendencies, Helen spends the majority of her time inside her head.

Helen worries a lot. She frets, and it seems so annoying, but by the end you wonder if she isn't right to fret. Just because she's obsessive doesn't make her wrong. I felt sorry for her and didn't want to, but I don't know that there is any other way to feel. She doesn't have the power to make her life better, nor really the desire.

This passage reflects Helen's fretting and is also a great example of the writing style that permeates the book:

"Helen was not a brooder. Her ex called her that. Brood. Like a big hen. A woman was a big hen. A woman brooded and had a brood. A word for a woman but not a woman's word. It was like 'women's work', even to say it: women's work. Every week was every week. A brooder. Who did the ironing? Who did the washing who did everything what did it matter... Mo and his criticisms about her worrying all the time. He didn't know, he really didn't. What world did he come from that people worrying was news? Men didn't understand."

Phew, see what I mean? Being Helen is exhausting. I grew physically tired reading this book; it would just drain the life out of me living in her shoes.

The abrupt ending might sway me into thinking this was a brilliant book after all, but I'll have to think about it.

A few little bits:

"Families don't finish. You run away but they catch you up. Families are ghosts."

"Imagine living forever. My God."

Ginny says

I had great difficulty with a star rating for this book, but completely concur with the goodreads comment "It was amazing." I heard James Kelman read from Kieron Smith, *Boy*, a book I loved and brought my copy from Canada to Listowel, Ireland, for him to sign. He was gracious and funny, giving me more appreciation for this book and making me a firm fan.

I wanted to love this book just as much, but found it, although fascinating, frustrating. The real mystery for me is in Helen's past, and the childhood she repeatedly refers to but never literally describes. She is so locked

into her past traumas that she cannot really communicate with anyone in her immediate life. I don't often want a sequel to a book, but this time I really want to know more of Helen--both her past and her future. For now, I must imagine it for myself.
