



The Drowned Forest

Kristopher Reisz

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Losing Holly is the hardest thing Jane has ever had to endure ... until Holly comes back.

Best friends Jane and Holly have jumped off the bluff over their Alabama reservoir hundreds of times. But one day, Holly's jump goes wrong. Her body never comes up, yet something else does—a sad creature of mud, full of confusion and sorrow. It's Holly, somehow, trapped and mixed up with the river. And if Jane can't do something to help, Holly will take everybody down with her—even the people they love the most.

Blending *Looking for Alaska*'s theme of lost friendship with Stephen King's sense of small-town horror, *The Drowned Forest* is a Southern gothic tale of grief, redemption, and the mournful yearning of an anguished soul.

The Drowned Forest Details

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Author : Kristopher Reisz

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From Reader Review The Drowned Forest for online ebook

Karen says

1.5 Stars

This was one of those books that pretty much twisted what the book was about when it came to the synopsis on the back of the book. Yeah okay, that was in the book but that sure wasn't the focus of this book. Or at least not the focus I found the book to be about. This wasn't a Gothic horror story as much as it was a preachy book shoving religion down your throat. Normally when a book starts in heavy with religion I stop reading but I was intrigued by the synopsis. Shame on me for letting that suck me in. Had the shoveling of religion been left out of the book I feel this would have been a much better book. Not only was the religion portion preachy and unstoppable but it had it hypocritical moments as well.

Instead of possibly inspiring me it shoved me away. Don't get me wrong here I've read books and watched movies where characters are religious and did not have a problem with the book/movie or character. It was how the main character shoved religion down everyone's throat and in turn the author doing it to me as the reader that I had the issue with.

Rayne says

3.5 stars

This is a very difficult book to rate, because although I enjoyed it very much and thought it was incredibly original, I had some problems with it, mostly the preachy tone and religious edge to the book, and also the pacing. Still, this book turned out to be more than I thought it would be. I expected a simple horror story, but it ended up being a sort of coming-of-age type of story that had Jane, the protagonist, grow up quite a lot, and it also had a pretty nice cast of secondary characters. Not to mention that there was no romance whatsoever, which I thought a very refreshing change. It is certainly creepy and strange, while not exactly scary, but a worthwhile read considering how short it is.

Lisa says

This is a lightning-fast read, and a damn good thing it is, else I might not have been able to tolerate our narrator, who begins the novel as a prissy, holier-than-thou southern Baptist. But when her best friend's ghost sends her a plea for help, she quickly realizes that her church is unequipped and her own spirituality too one-note to deal with the haunting. Over the course of the novel, she becomes friends with people she once scorned. Her faith broadens to recognize the immense power of the natural world and the root-workers who interact with it. And her musical taste evolves from bland "contemporary Christian" to blues and rock n roll. I loved the music geekery.

As an atheist, I don't mind if characters are religious. And I thought this book did a good job of showing a realistic transition from the narrator's deeply ingrained but parochial viewpoint to a more nuanced one. From Christian muzak to Johnny Cash, if you will. But there was no suggestion of a religious element in the cover copy of the ARC I have, which cuts both ways: I wouldn't have picked the book up if I'd known just how "Christian" the main character was, which would've been a shame, but I know some readers were really

pissed off by the surprise.

Some nitpicks: I was annoyed that a teen with an autistic family member (or one with an intellectual disability?) relied on insults like "idiot" and "moron." There were missed plot opportunities (why did the parents not report their runaway daughter to the police?). The climax was funny in a way I don't think the characters really appreciated. And the ending was way too optimistic about her church's acceptance of new elements.

Still and all, glad I picked up the book.

Rashika (is tired) says

****This review has also been posted on The Social Potato*

Actual Rating 1.5

Are you religious? Do you think you're better than everyone else because you have 'faith'? Do you like preaching to other people? Do you like shoving your religious opinions down someone's throat? Do you like forcing your religion on to other people?

If that sounds like you, you'll probably enjoy this book. **If those things get on your nerves like they get on mine. Run. Run for your lives.**

This book is publicized all wrong. It's misleading and someone really should mention the religious aspect because I know a lot of readers will feel the way I do. Pissed off.

What's even worse is that this book had some real potential. It could have been great but it wasn't. It had the basis of good relationships and no romance and a somewhat creepy aspect but it all went down the drain with a nightmare of a female lead.

If I didn't know that Jane was the female lead, **I seriously would think she was some sort of cult leader who would turn out to be an antagonist. I AM NOT EVEN KIDDING. She judges everyone around her using her religion as a basis**, because the fact she goes to church, like a good little girl, makes her better than everyone else. I bet if it were up to her she'd convert everyone. **She has no respect for other people's opinions.** When Tyler 'rejects' religion, she doesn't believe him and in her mind goes on and on about the time he was saved. **She also feels sad when she cannot feel God.** No I am not kidding. **Her inner monologue consists of how God loves everyone and that everyone can be saved.** Now I don't want to offend anyone who is religious, I wouldn't have minded the book so much had the religious aspect been moderated but as it is, I felt like I was being preached at the whole time I was reading this book. I respect other people's opinions and expect mine to be respected as well.

One of my biggest issues was that no adult gives them due credit, so like all the other teens out there, they solve the mystery on their own. YAY *sarcasm* **What is up with adults never understanding?** The parents aren't necessarily portrayed as the bad guys; which is appreciated, but why don't they ever listen to the kids?

The teens don't show an ounce of normality. You have goody two shoes Jane, sunshine Holly (well she IS

dead), shy but wonderful musician Tyler, rebel chick Leigh Ann who is sad she was thrown out of church for having blue hair. The characters actually listen to gospel music. Am I really supposed to believe that teens are USUALLY like this? I actually thought the author might go somewhere with this and give Jane a taste of her own medicine but no. **Everyone ends up happy happy at church. YAY.**

The relationships are surprisingly decent. You have a main character who **truly mourns her friend** instead of latching on to her boyfriend now that he is available. **The boyfriend actually loved his girlfriend,** they shared a good relationship and he mourned her. He was heartbroken. **There is no romance in this book,** it does have a good focus on relationships and sadly that happens to be the only positive thing.

The writing takes a little getting used to. Jane is always talking to her best friend, Holly in her mind. That's basically her inner monologue... it's definitely different and it doesn't always work but I can see why the author wrote it the way he did. It was to emphasize the friendship between the two.

The 'horror' part of this book is a complete and utter mess. It is all over the place. **There are no explanations.** Jane had a dream that told her where to find Holly's grandpa but there was nothing mentioned about the dream after that. For a while I even thought that the way Jane could feel God would lead up to something paranormal but it didn't. Even when it leads her to 'prophesize' so many things. I am surprised by how literally the main character takes the bible, like how she immediately jumped to conclusions when a fish coughed up Holly's ring and matched it up to some sort of prophesy. I am not sure she would survive in the real world. **This isn't some book that follows in the steps of Stephen King, in fact for the most part I wasn't scared. The horror was a fail. We know things but nothing really happens. Those incidents aren't connected in a way to give us a scary atmosphere.**

One of the biggest things that **pushed me from mild annoyance to full-fledged anger was the jab taken at other culture/religions.** Saying something like this (quote below) won't make me laugh. It may not cause direct offense to me but what is wrong with you?

“...Banned in all those Islamic countries 'cause women kept ripping off their Burkas and going wild and shit.”

Do I care that the person who said it was probably an immature little shit? NO I DO NOT CARE. **Saying things like that will not win you any points.**

So in conclusion, **if you don't like someone shoving religion down your throat, avoid this book.**

Melanie says

See more reviews at [YA Midnight Reads](#)

DNF at 18%

I don't even know anymore. Seriously, what the flip was this? The whole time I read this, I was thinking: no NO NO NOOOO. A complete disaster? Pretty much, seeing that I DNFed it and cannot think of one major likeable aspect. Not even a minor one. I'll say you're wasting your time if you try this. Though please, if you think you'll be satisfied in the end or are curious, go ahead. But I totally, **totally** warned you.

My first quibble with *The Drowning Forest* was the main character. Quite simply put, she's an idiot who legitimately does not know what to do with her life apart from preach to God. Sure, I have no issue with a book to have that, but every. single. chapter. preach. preach. preach. Girl, is there anything else you can do but complain and pray to God about Holly--your dead friend?

How could I spend hours praying and not sense one glimmer of [God]? Last Tuesday, I decided it must be a test. God couldn't really leave me; it was a test of faith. I knelt here for hours, Holly, not getting up for a sip of water, praying until my tongue got gummy and stuck to the teeth. Praying while the carpet chewed my knees raw, then offering the pain up as a sign of devotion. Tim was just worried about me, but when he wouldn't leave me alone, I threatened to push him down the stairs.

As you can see, Jane has pretty much become obsessed with praying. I'm not saying I am against praying--damn I pray as well but this is a novel! I am not reading a diary, I am reading a story. Where is my plot line? I don't want to be reading about praying for 80% of these 240 pages when I'm supposed to be reading a gothic-like setting along with a creepy tone and full of intrigue story line.

What you can also tell by the above quote, is that Jane likes to talk to her best friend Holly like she's an alive and living person. Constantly. It put me off and I did not see the point of it. Maybe because I only reached 18% in? Nonetheless, I have no effort left in me to urge through more of this book. Furthermore, that quote also presents of how ungrateful this protagonist is. She's gonna throw someone down the stairs because they are concerned about her well being. I mean, are you joking? I get it, your friend died but now you want someone else (a family member) to also die/get fatally injured when you throw them down the stairs? What a bitch.

Another reason why I hated Jane's guts was how so quickly she makes assumptions, gets so opinionated and really short tempered.

"Jane, give me the knife if you're not going to be careful."

"I'm being careful! You yell at me to come do this, then you hover over me like I'm six. Let me do it."

Mom reaches for the knife. "Jane, let me--" I jerk back. The blade skates across the edge of her palm, and Mom's yelp silences the chatter in my head. Clutching her hand--blood runs and smears--Mom glares at me like she hates me.

Apart from the rat Jane is, I must agree with her on one point. Why is her mom hovering over her like she can't cut tomatoes when she called Jane down to cut them in the first place? Just not logical at all. So in summary, I was not a fan of ANY of these characters--all were overly opinionated, short tempered and asses. Still wanna read this?

The Drowning Forest was a total disappointment--or should I say disaster. Even though this was a short novel, I couldn't delve any further even if someone gave me some chocolate ice-cream (hmm...actually I *might* consider that...).

~Thank you Flux for sending me this copy!~

Orrin Grey says

I'm an unabashed fan of the writing of Kris Reisz and have been since his first book, *Tripping to Somewhere*. I bought a story from him for Fungi. I think *The Drowned Forest* is almost certainly his most personal book to date, though I don't know that I'd call it his best. (That might still be the aforementioned *Tripping to Somewhere*.)

Just glancing down the Goodreads reviews, it looks like a lot of people had problems with the "religious" aspects of this book. Or rather, with the religion of the book's protagonist. Many reviewers say things like "if you're an atheist, this isn't the book for you," though that's not at all the message that I (as an agnostic, and not one with much patience for typically Christian fiction) carried away from *The Drowned Forest*.

While Jane is a very religious character, the story itself is balanced, not falling on the side of making the religious aspects too preachy or objectively "real," nor falling into the usual horror trap of making all the churchy folks hypocrites or monsters. It's more concerned with Jane's personal journey and her own relationships--with God, her church, and others--and with the power of salvation through music (whether spiritual or secular). It doesn't hurt that the book includes a pretty phenomenal ghost/monster.

Angie says

I received an ARC through NetGalley.

The Drowned Forest started off so fantastically! I seriously thought this was going to be the first 5 star book of 2014. But then it just kind of died somewhere in the middle and never picked back up. It was totally different than anything I had ever read before, and I was hooked from the very first paragraph. I read it straight through in one afternoon, hoping that the awesomeness of the beginning would return. Well, it started to pick up, but ultimately faltered.

The Drowned Forest is written as if Jane is speaking to her dead best friend, Holly. I absolutely love this narrative style, but I do think that the author had Jane use her friend's name way too often to feel natural. Holly had drowned a few months prior in what's known as the drowned forest. During a church function, a huge catfish appears in the river and spits up something shiny. It's the promise ring Holly's boyfriend, Tyler, had given her right before she died, but it has a new engraving on it: HELP. Jane and Tyler go to their pastor to ask him for help, but he tells them they're suffering from magical thinking, and Holly isn't really trying to contact them from beyond the grave. Not believing him, they seek out Holly's grandfather who has also noticed some strangeness in the river. The three of them go to the place where she drowned, grandpa played his guitar, and there she was. Except she's not really Holly anymore, but a kind of monster made from mud and roots. Creepy stuff!

At around the halfway mark, *The Drowned Forest* lost me. We just witnessed a dead girl crawl out of the river, but Jane and Tyler run away from her. Then the story just focuses on the band that Jane is living with until she helps Holly move on. She learns to play guitar, and continues to question her faith in God. Tyler joins the band and struggles with their first live performance, and it just wasn't interesting. Your best friend and girlfriend is some kind of swamp ghou! Playing guitar sort of pales in comparison. Eventually, they do figure out how to help Holly's spirit move on, some more creepy things happen, and then it ends. I was a little disappointed.

As a whole, I did like *The Drowned Forest*. I found Jane to be an interesting character, and quite liked the religious aspect. The death of her friend has put a wedge in her relationship with God, but she still believes.

It was also interesting when the "river magic" started to come into play. I just wish there weren't so many chapters in the middle that only focused on the music. That really messed up the pacing and made me lose some of my earlier enthusiasm.

Read more of my reviews at [Pinkindle Reads & Reviews](#).

Angie says

This story beautifully captures a young southern girl growing up and experiencing a life-altering change in perspective. Keisz employs the drowning of her best friend to be the motivating force behind her change, in a most poignant and heart-breaking manner.

His writing style is perfectly fitted to the story, and I look forward to reading more of his work.

ps- i tend to forget the musical part when telling about what ive read. music of different kinds features prominently in this book, so how could I? Keisz paints a moving picture, so to speak, of rock, as well as gospel, and how the characters experience them in deeply meaningful ways. although classical is my real jam, i was able to appreciate the thrill of the other musical genres through his vivid descriptions.

Rebecca says

I picked this book up kinda randomly and it took me a couple years to get around to it, but it was both better and not at all what I thought, but I thought I would give a review, and try to be completely honest because I feel like this book gets judged pretty harshly. Is the book kinda preachy, yes, yes it is. Is it very much focused on religion? No. It's very much focused on how the world looks from the viewpoint of a very sheltered fifteen year old girl in Alabama who was home schooled and who's only social life came from church. So, her thoughts, judgements and viewpoints, and yes, how she deals with the struggles she goes through in the book are filtered through the strict Christian upbringing she's had. I myself am not religion, but I personally felt that the thoughts and actions of the main character were very honest for what they were. I've known people who looked at the world as she does and I was very impressed by the realness of it and how she slowly expands her world through grief and compromise to resolve what's happening. If you aren't easily put off by looking through someone else's(perhaps judgy) eyes, I would suggest this book.

Rose says

Initial reaction: I think I'm going to note almost verbatim what I said in my last status update. This ended up being a quick read, but for execution - this did not sit well with me. The premise promised one thing, but the delivery was off to another. It wasn't just the over religious focus, but the presentation of the story itself felt choppy and just not living up to the potential of what the book provided. I'll explain more in the full review, but I may be a minority opinion in saying that this was such a disappointing read.

Full review:

Not a review I like writing considering I love horror and mystery/suspense, even coming of age. But man - I keep thinking about "The Drowned Forest" and asking "What happened here?" And that's not in the sense of knowing what happened in the work, but the execution of the novel was so mediocre for the potential promise the story had. That cover actually helped draw me in as well (it's so pretty and eerie at the same

time).

But usually if you sell your novel with the promise of two major authors (in this case, John Green meets Stephen King), you're going to have problem if said story does not measure up to speed with those comparisons.

I actually didn't mind (too much) the religious backdrop nor the intimate perspective of the character with setting and place initially. I've read religiously centric narratives before (Christian, Buddhist, Islam, etc.) and usually the narratives draw me in when there's an interesting story to be had alongside the thematics. I only ask that as a reader, I'm able to follow it on my own, that it progresses with a natural rhythm, that it feels like I'm reading a personal narrative without being lectured or talked down to.

What I did mind in this story was the flip flopping of the narrative voice (went from general to direct address and back again), the hyperfocus on the religious references - to the point where it felt unnatural for the characters to reference them that many times, and the way this narrative seemed to talk down to its audience. It was too much and the presentation was so jarring. It felt like each time the narrative set up any amount of tension in the scene (i.e. a character death or something revolving around Holly's backstory) , it went on a long winded tangent that wasn't related to the tension established. It would go on for several pages before returning back to the point, and usually that was associated with trying to help Holly move on. But it took a long time to get there.

Note: Just because you have a young character at the helm of the story who may be scatterbrained, doesn't mean that you should necessarily reflect that scatterbrained activity in the writing unless you have a purpose to it. Holding your reader and keeping them focused on the task and problem at hand is key. Otherwise, you may lose them. It's also a loss if you don't maintain some type of consistency or rapport with the narrative for identity - which I felt this narrative dropped the ball on several times. I tried to follow Jane and she lost me between the heavily religious dialogue and her brash assumptions. Not to mention taking several tangents away from the novel's central questions. We know that Holly, Jane's friend, was dead for a time after a jump that went horribly wrong. There was a ring of Holly's that was very distinct and identifying. Somehow that was linked to something in the swamp, and no one believed that Holly causing people to die or be destroyed when she touched them.

The adults in this book were just as insufferable because they kept trying to suggest that Holly and her friend Tyler were somehow mentally off or influenced away from their religious background for noticing the oddities of Holly's reappearance/grief/pain.

This book didn't really do a good job balancing the slice of life elements/coming of age with the dialect and suspense. The transitions were awkward, descriptions not so great ("Bile splashed the back of my throat...") and it was difficult to feel invested because of how much telling vs. showing went on. I didn't feel scared, nervous or on the edge of my seat. I didn't feel invested for some of the conflict because it was all so loose in its pacing. By the time I reached the end, it went to a noted conclusion, while I saw the development in the characters, I didn't feel invested in them, and there were too many holes in terms of expansion, even for the narrative feeling long and drawn (a bad thing in my eyes for this novel).

In the end, it just didn't deliver what it respectively sold, and I felt underwhelmed by it on many levels.

Overall score: 1.5/5 stars

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley, from the publisher Flux.

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: The worst 'scary' story ever.

Opening Sentence: But it's a beautiful day, Holly.

The Review:

Possibly the worst book I've read all year. Usually, by the time I've read about a third of any book I know how well I'll like the rest of the story. With *The Drowned Forest*, it started off incredibly boring with a whiny main character and unfortunately that impression remained until the last page!

Steve is wearing the same clothes he had on yesterday morning. Sipping an energy drink, he says, "So...what? You crashing here?"

I nod. "Holly's a ghost. Her soul's trapped in the river, and I have to stay here until we can free her." "Wow, that sucks. It won't keep you up if I play Xbox will it?"

Jane is the most irritating protagonist ever. I tried to cut her some slack because her friend died but seriously, her constant preaching drove me insane. Don't get me wrong, a little faith or encouragement to connect with an alternate being here and there can bring more life to a book, but this was different. Jane preaches in every single conversation, telling her friends off about not coming to church, and overall being far too judgmental. To make matters worse, throughout the story, Jane has a one-way conversation with her dead friend, Holly. It was sad at first, but when every thought of hers surrounded Holly, it became a leeeeeetle obsessive. It was no surprise that her parents thought she was losing it.

"Christian music isn't really a style of music like rock or the blues. It's really more of a song theme, like love songs."

"So?"

"So listening to it all the time and nothing else, it's like listening to love songs all the time and nothing else."

"So? Would that be so horrible?"

"Yes. Because nobody's in love all the time."

"So? Maybe we would be in love all the time if we listened to love songs all the time."

Tyler was a definitely more likeable than Holly, at least he had some semblance to reality! I might have actually enjoyed the story if it was told from his perspective.

The author tried to make this a scary story but it just came across as unrealistic. I couldn't imagine the scenes where Holly comes out of the lake without being skeptical; the writing just didn't draw me in. Maybe if there was less preaching and a different protagonist this might have been a halfway decent read.

Notable Scene:

But then you died, and God ran away. He's gone, and I don't know why. I kneel and bow my head and say the words, but they can't open my heart anymore. My heart is broken and useless like an old watch. It's a lump of rusted-up metal in my chest. All I do is kneel here and talk to you.

FTC Advisory: Flux provided me with a copy of *The Drowned Forest*. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Leigh Collazo says

More reviews at Mrs. ReaderPants.

WHAT I LIKED: Honestly, not much. The setting is nice and creepy, with well-written descriptions of the small town and its deep, dark river with no-telling-what lying in wait at the murky bottom. I like that it is only 240 pages; at least my misery was short-lived.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE: The narration. Jane narrates the story as though she is speaking to Holly. It's a weird kind of second person narrative that is unique, but for me it was just awkward. I kept forgetting that Jane was talking to Holly when she said "you did this" or "you remember that." I have never liked second-person narration, and even though this was technically first-person with Jane telling the story, it reads a lot like second-person.

The scripture. This book contains SO. MUCH. Scripture. And though I didn't go back and count them, I would bet money that there was at least one bible reference or quotation on every single page. While I am not personally a very spiritual person, biblical references and scripture from time to time in a story do not bother me. I've read (and enjoyed!) several Christian Fiction novels for teens (here, here, and here) so it is clearly not the mere presence of religion that bothers me. But in *The Drowned Forest*, the scripture is just overwhelming.

The slow-pacing. Seriously, you have a few major events with a LOT of internal dialogue (Jane talking to Holly) and thinking and praying and quoting of scripture in between. "Holly" is not so much scary as she is sad, and while some might find the lack of romance refreshing, I wanted to see more romantic spark between Jane and Tyler.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Clearly, I did not like this book, and I don't recommend it.

STATUS IN MY LIBRARY: We don't have it, and I would only get it if students requested it.

READALIKES: *The Well* (Whitten), *Cryer's Cross* (McMann), *Paper Valentine* (Yovanoff)

RATING BREAKDOWN:

Overall: 1/5

Creativity: 3/5

Characters: 2/5

Engrossing: 1/5

Writing: 3/5

Appeal to teens: 1/5

Appropriate length to tell the story: 5/5

CONTENT:

Language: medium; includes fu** and sh** (not gratuitous)

Sexuality: none

Violence: none; it's just creepy

Drugs/Alcohol: mild; references to cigarettes and alcohol

Kat says

(I'm going to apologize in advance for how harsh I'm going to be. You guys should at least pick up a copy before banning it from your To-Read list forever. This is just my opinion on a book I didn't like very much)

Jane and Holly are- sorry, were- the best of friends, until that one faithful day. When Holly jumped off the Alabama reservoir and into the water below, an act she and Jane have done a thousand times, everything seemed fine. That is, until Holly never came back up. A funeral, some tears and many, many prayers later, Holly comes back. But not as herself. Instead, a sad, hopeless creature of mud and plants rises from the river and puts everyone in danger, because if she goes down, everyone she ever loved goes down with her.

Let me tell you two things right now. One, I am the kind of person who almost never drops a book. You can ask Farah and Juhina of Maji Bookshelf, a.k.a my cousins, because they know first hand that I will complain about the book, but I'll always finish it (Sorry about the complaining guys). Two, if you're an Atheist, or don't like really religious books, this one is definitely not for you. Not at all. I kid you not, there is a passage in this book where Jane prays for hours on the carpet until "My tongue got gummy and stuck to my teeth." and "while the carpet chewed my knees raw,". I have no problem with religion, as I am religious and all, but I mean, I want to read a novel with a plotline. This book seemed more like a journal than a story. Also, Jane talked as if Holly was still there, making me feel like she was going slightly insane. (It actually could be interesting to read a book like that, hmmm...) Sure, I totally see why the author would choose to write like this, because it shows how deep the relationship between Jane and Holly was, but it was a bit unnerving. I didn't really like Jane that much. She was opinionated and short tempered, threatening to push her brother off the stairs after he asked if she was okay and slashing her mother's palm with a knife. How ungrateful. I mean, her younger brother was asking about her wellbeing, and she threatened to push him down the stairs? I have a few words for this girl, although I'm not allowed to say them.

I could not finish this book. I really tried, I did, but it was just physically impossible. I think I got to about 23% before it was just too boring to handle, and I kept finding excuses not to read it until my lending period expired. Yay. I don't really know if the book gets better later, but by the looks of it, it didn't change too much. The Drowned Forest was supposed to be a gothic, small town horror story, and I've never read a book like that, but no. It was predictable and not scary at all. I even tried breathing faster to pretend it was scary, hoping it would kick start whatever organ that creates fear, but my brain was just like "Nope." So if you don't like the sound of a super religious, overly opinionated short tempered little brats, then run. Run for your life, and never look back.

Alexia Purdy says

This is so different from anything paranormal that I've read lately. It's hauntingly beautiful in descriptions and weaves the backstory into the plot easily so that you get a sense of the superstitions and a time long

forgotten where not only is the land a living entity with a very real life of its own, but it pulls at the people with its restless call.

Jane isn't dealing well with losing her best friend. Holly drowned after jumping off a bridge they'd jumped off a thousand times. In a place known as 'The Drowned Forest', she never surfaces. One day, a catfish coughs up Holly's promise ring from Tony onto the river banks and the word 'Help' is inscribed on it. Together with Holly's brokenhearted boyfriend Tony, Jane must find a way to save Holly's soul, which haunts the riverside as a mud filled rotten thing and kills everything she touches. Holly doesn't know she's dead, but knows she's lost. Will Jane's strong faith in God be enough to save her friend from an eternal hell trapped in the forgotten trees under the lake? Or will she lose her mind and succumb to the call of the river?

I absolutely loved this story. It was so stunning and visually brilliant that I felt I was there alongside Jane as she runs away from her church going environment to discover a way to help her friend. Her love for her Holly and her strong faith in God are challenged in every way possible when things that shouldn't be able to happen or even exist, threaten her life in every way possible. Out of her normal environment, Jane befriends a group of friends in a band who are Tony's friends, learns to play the guitar and finds there is more to believing in God, love and what is right than she previously believed. The world is filled with the supernatural, alongside the contrast of faith and God. The fantastical story telling draws you into the fanatical state of Jane's mind and the absolute terror she and her friends experience from the horror surrounding the very much alive river of the 'The Drowned Forest'.

Brilliant! I highly recommend this unusual tale of ghosts and folklore. It's very much rooted in religion and may be off putting to some readers, but I felt that the religion itself was a very active character in this story and a strong influence on the entire plotline, which makes it even more hauntingly beautiful to read.

Thank you to the publisher for providing a copy of this book via Netgalley for an honest review.

Kirsty-Marie Jones says

Right, I am just going to say it and get it out of the way.

I'm not religious.

When requesting *The Drowned Forest*, from the blurb I had no idea that it was even A) Religious and B) Focused on religion.

And it did, focus on religion, a lot.

Personally, if I'd have known I wouldn't have requested it, since I'm not really into reading that type of thing, and I was expecting this creepy thriller and ended up feeling like I was being preached at.

I would've avoided it and I wouldn't be sorry for it, and because of that I'm rating it out of my preference, and felt like it should've mentioned the heavy religious aspect so you know what you're getting yourself in for.

But I'm not going to apologise for being something I'm not, and with religion and especially inside of this novel, I found it to be a little judgemental and condescending. Or rather, I should say I don't find religion judgemental because people are judgemental, but I hate when just because someone is religious they don't think they're being judgemental just because they are religious.

Our MC Jane, is to put it nicely, a hypocrite. She judged several people based on the fact they're in a band, dress grungy and don't go to church, and she thinks it's okay to judge them like that, and laugh about it. And I'm not going to lie, I was glad when she had that blown up in her face.

There is character development and she gets to see things through new eyes, and live on the other side for a little bit, and though she was still a little harsh and a little unlikable, she's not the Jane we started with. She's born again, and not exactly in a religious way. What she goes through and what she has to do gives her a different view, and she was better for it.

You're probably thinking I didn't like The Drowned Forest, but actually, I did. Despite the preachy aspect in the beginning, the writing was addicting and engaging, and though we're being told through Jane talking/writing to Holly you'd think you'd feel a bit isolated, and wouldn't connect to it as easily, but you get a real sense of being there, which was surprising.

What also was a surprise, was that it is pretty dark and quite gruesome, and deal with other aspects of hoodoo and spiritualism, and the preconceived ideals of it.

***Many people incorrectly believe that Spiritualism is Hoodoo but the two are not the same.
There are many Hoodoos who are devout Spiritualist Christians.***

You see that in The Drowned Forest, with the congregation and others speaking of it as witchery, and then there's the others who believe in how beautiful things can become twisted. The diversity of characters, that are all at different times in their lives, trying to do the best they can, and the friendship between them is very realistic and genuine.

The Drowned Forest isn't an easy read, it makes you think, and you definitely come out of it different than you started. I'm still glad that I read it, because beside it being about religion, it's focus point is on life, love, faith and friendship, the trails of loss and trying to go on without that loss. How to learn to carry it with you without it breaking you.

~~A copy was provided by Flux via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.~

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