



13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl

Mona Awad

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Growing up in the suburban hell of Misery Saga (a.k.a. Mississauga), Lizzie has never liked the way she looks—even though her best friend Mel says she’s the pretty one. She starts dating guys online, but she’s afraid to send pictures, even when her skinny friend China does her makeup: she knows no one would want her if they could really see her. So she starts to lose. With punishing drive, she counts almonds consumed, miles logged, pounds dropped. She fights her way into coveted dresses. She grows up and gets thin, navigating double-edged validation from her mother, her friends, her husband, her reflection in the mirror. But no matter how much she loses, will she ever see herself as anything other than a fat girl?

In her brilliant, hilarious, and at times shocking debut, Mona Awad simultaneously skewers the body image-obsessed culture that tells women they have no value outside their physical appearance, and delivers a tender and moving depiction of a lovably difficult young woman whose life is hijacked by her struggle to conform. As caustically funny as it is heartbreaking, *13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl* introduces a vital new voice in fiction.

13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl Details

Date : Published February 23rd 2016 by Penguin Canada

ISBN : 9780143194798

Author : Mona Awad

Format : Paperback 212 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Contemporary, Cultural, Canada, Feminism, Adult Fiction

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From Reader Review 13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl for online ebook

Emily says

This book was vile. Okay, track that back a bit. The sentences were well-written, and I actually liked the short-story-as-novel format. 13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl is not poorly written, but the content is awful. It is one of the most bitter, depressing books I've ever read. After I finished it, I looked at the quotes plastered all over it, promising its humor and wit, and could only wonder what the hell book the blurb writers had read, because it wasn't this. Elizabeth loathes herself, deeply and fully, and in that loathing, she can't dig up an ounce of sympathy or human connection for anyone around her. Her relationships with men are desperate and unfulfilled; her relationships with women are competitive and vicious, and she grows not a whit emotionally as her body transforms externally. Maybe I would have felt differently about this book if I hadn't read Dietland first, but having seen what a book like this *could* be, I couldn't help but hate what this book is. Elizabeth is trapped, unfulfilled, with only a breath of a hope that there is something beyond her petty, awful existence, but she is unable to grasp it. Even writing this review makes me want to grab a copy of the book and burn it so that other people can avoid its bitter poison.

Jennie says

I really, really, really disliked this book. I quit about halfway through it because I just couldn't take it any more.

As a big girl, I feel invested in how people portray overweight women in the media. And I just couldn't handle how stereotypical this damn book was. Liz is a big girl. She's also socially awkward, a poor educational achiever and had terrible self esteem. She's portrayed as being so desperate for male attention that she doesn't care how badly she's treated and is generally pathetic. To be honest, this fucking disgusts me. I am well aware that there are some overweight ladies who have a LOT of self esteem issues and self hate. There are equally a TON of big girls who have fabulous lives, loves and careers. I'm sick of stories only talking about the women who hate how they look and all the ways being fat fucks up their lives.

My own story doesn't include being dumb, struggling with school or being socially isolated. I've had times where I can't stand how I look (in fact, I pretty much always wished I looked differently), but it hasn't kept me from having real sexual relationships or a career or, frankly, being able to get laid when I want. And there are plenty of ladies out there who are bigger than I am who have smoking hot partners who are totally dedicated to them. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE stop portraying all fat characters as losers who hate themselves.

Theresa says

Not sure why "13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl" by Mona Awad has such harsh reviews, but I thought this underrated gem was fascinating, painfully raw, and brazen. Even though this book is marketed as a short story collection, this is actually 13 vignettes of the protagonist, Lizzie (some of the stories are from different points-of-view, a sleazy boyfriend, and her future husband). We get to see Lizzie struggle with her weight as a teenager, we see her lose the weight in her early adulthood, and we see her continue struggle with her

"inner-fat girl" throughout her entire life. Lizzie just broke my heart. Her self-esteem issues prevent her from having a full and satisfying life. She thinks her weight is what keeps her from having meaningful, lasting relationships, but really, it's the horrible way she feels about her self that keeps her from being truly happy and content. Even when she is finally at her goal weight, she still feels unworthy. Some of the vignettes were a little bit repetitive so I had to dock a star, but overall, I appreciated reading such an honest account of a woman on the brink of loneliness and self-destruction.

Book Riot Community says

I don't often do fiction on audio, but I've been trying to squeeze in more leisure reading now that I'm in grad school and my walk to work in the mornings seemed like the perfect time to get a book in my ears. This book is a series of linked short stories centered around Lizzie/Elizabeth/Beth ("the fat girl") from adolescence to adulthood. It really digs into the concept of what it's like to be a fat girl and explores the ways in which it forms Lizzie's identity, even after she has lost the weight in her adulthood. The narration for the audio is excellent, as well.

— Amanda Kay Oaks

from The Best Books We Read In September 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/10/03/riot-r...>

Suburban girlhood into womanhood hounded down to the pique of humor, Awad has our body obsessed culture nailed. The opportunity and danger of the female body, the power and vulnerability is alternately humorously and scathingly examined in this debut novel. Lizzie and her best friend Mel navigate the male gaze, their own sometimes cartoonish desire, and weighing the shocking boredom of everyday life against the dangers of adventure. I am loving every minute of reading this book.

— Hannah Depp

from The Best Books We Read In March: <http://bookriot.com/2016/04/04/riot-r...>

Nikki (nikkitheknack's In the Stacks) says

From nikkitheknack's In the Stacks: <http://nikkitheknack.blogspot.ca/2016...>

Let me start off by saying, this wasn't what I was expecting. I was looking forward to a charmingly funny story about a big girl who's uncomfortable with her body at first, but learns to love herself at whatever size she is. This is not that book.

We see Lizzie through different stages of her life - when she's fat, when she's thin, when she goes by different variations of her name. Through much of 13 Ways, I found it hard to identify with Lizzie, but around the middle I started to get more into the story and was more able to appreciate it for what it is: a story about a human who has a hard time liking herself because of her weight and low self esteem, and how it affects all of her relationships - with herself, her female friends, her husband, and her parents.

I've seen this book described as "hilarious" and "funny" multiple times, but personally, I found the funny parts few and far between. And even then, I didn't find them so much funny as I did relateable. When Lizzie goes clothes shopping, for example, she searches for the items that are the "Least of All Evils". That is so incredibly true to life, and I couldn't help but laugh out loud when I read that. It's so hard to find plus-size clothes (although it's getting easier nowadays), that that's what I've personally been reduced to for most of my life, and I'm sure most, if not all, plus-size people would identify with that.

Mona Awad gets right some of the anger that comes with being bigger, as well as some of the hardships we face, including socially, societally, and personally. At the same time, I found it hard to identify with Lizzie for most of the book. I found that she had so much self-loathing, which I know is true of a lot of us fat people because the media and our North American society as a whole tells us that we're basically the opposite of the ideal, attractive body type. I was hoping that she'd gain some sort of self-confidence in herself somehow, but that didn't even happen when she lost the weight. She became obsessive in her diet and exercise, and she became so bitter - about herself, about other thin women, about fat women...no one was safe from her judgment.

I really liked how the author portrayed Lizzie's relationships, they were all really interesting. I found myself sobbing uncontrollably through one particular chapter, where we get to see more of her relationship with her mother. Her mother wouldn't tell her anything, but it was so clear that she knew she was sick and was trying her best to enjoy and absorb every moment with her daughter during her visit. She knew she wouldn't have very many chances to see her daughter anymore because Lizzie lived far away, and it was so heartbreaking to read.

I have a complicated relationship with this book. On one hand, I found it hard to identify with the sad, angry Lizzie, but on the other hand it's interesting to read how her relationship with herself affected her relationships with other people. This feels like something I would have read in one of my university English classes, and I did always enjoy dissecting these kinds of stories because they raise important and interesting issues. Ultimately, I found 13 Ways depressing, but it certainly made me think.

Nore says

Awad seems to have written this book to capture every single negative stereotype about women of all sizes in one fell swoop - fat women are all bitter, unhealthy, maladjusted try-hards; thin women are all vapid, or bitchy, or vapid *and* bitchy; those in between are frumpy, unattractive, pathetic things that are barely worth mentioning. To try and better yourself is pathetic and senseless, according to Awad, but to accept yourself and "let yourself go" is even more so.

There isn't even a point to this. Awad isn't telling us anything we don't already know - that women can never do right, that there is no correct way to exist as Woman without the scrutiny of others - and she isn't offering a solution. No, she's reveling in this miserable pit of a story like Lizzie's mother accuses her of doing with her depression in her teenage years - she isn't confronting the way women self-objectify themselves, perpetuating the male gaze even in the absence of men. She isn't confronting the treacherous way women navigate self-image under duress in this day and age. She isn't confronting the fraught relationships women have with one another. I'm sure that's what she intended with this book, but what she actually did was simply show us a miserable, wretched woman who spends her life hating herself and every woman around her. That's it.

This is not a funny story. There is very, very little wit, and absolutely no "bright spark of humor." I don't know what book the reviewers read, because it wasn't the one I did - the only real saving graces of this book

are that it is mercifully short, and Awad's prose is smooth enough to rip through quickly. If I'd had to spend much longer on this, I would have simply put it down.

Cathrine ?? says

There's a lot of truth in this book, like it or not, but I did not find it "hilarious" nor did I find Lizzie "lovable." In this time of almost viral fat shaming and girls and women obsessed with body image it is certainly relevant to tell a story of one whose entire life has been defined by her weight and self-loathing. It was just such a dark read, though perhaps worthwhile for some needing to take a closer look at how they see themselves and others. I don't believe the subject matter should be funny but this was a mega downer with a mean-spirited character who was her own worst enemy unable to look beyond the fat. But I'll say it again, a lot of truth in the pages which just might help set someone free. As a woman I greatly admire once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Roxane says

This starts out so strong and so much of the prose is just gutting for anyone who has been or is a fat girl. Awad gets everything right and, throughout these interconnected stories, reveals how absurd our culture is about women and their bodies. Several sections had me in tears. The challenge is the second half of the book, when the main character, Liz loses weight. Awad again gets this right, the challenges of going from fat to skinny, the pressures, the self-obsession and the warped outlook, but the story becomes utterly stagnant and so much is left unexplored. Nonetheless, I highly recommend this one.

Nancy says

Utterly depressing. The protagonist is miserable and cruel when she's fat, when she's thin, and when she's in-between. She has no compassion for herself or those around her. While this might ring true for some readers, I found it bleak and hopeless.

Olivia Ard says

I've included a few spoilers in this review, but mostly they're thematic rather than details about the specific plot. Proceed at own risk.

My relationships with both weight and food have been complicated and mountainous for as long as I can remember, so when I heard about *13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl*, I couldn't have been more excited to read it. Whether you struggle with your weight or not, I'm sure you're familiar with the obsession our culture has with physical appearance. The way we view our bodies and reduce their value to the hypothetical sexual desires of others is quite ridiculous. I couldn't wait to see what Mona Awad had to say about the issue.

First and foremost, this book is well-written. There were several one-liners that, as a writer, I felt almost jealous that I hadn't come up with them myself, namely this golden nugget:

"My wide slash of bared stomach feels like an emergency no one is attending to."

I mean, how great is that?

Aside from the well-crafted language, the pacing was good. I liked that this was more a collection of vignettes from Elizabeth's life, rather than a straightforward narrative. Much like a struggle with weight, it was unpredictable and confusing. In that way, the organization was a real strength.

Mainly what I had a problem with was this hopeless despondency we are left with at the end. Everything our protagonist does to lose weight, she does for other people. She isn't trying to be happy, boost her health, or feel good about herself. She just wants strangers to approve of her appearance, for men she has no interest in to find her sexually desirable. She has no real friendships, no real career, and she lets the only successful relationship she has fall apart, all because she has entered indentured servitude to her Gazelle and her food scale.

I understand what it's like to be a slave to the calorie, I really do. I understand what it's like to have a metabolism that seems almost sentient in its attempts to screw you over. It isn't easy, by any stretch of the imagination, and Awad definitely captures the frustration, guilt, and self-loathing that comes with the territory, even though I think there are a lot of things this book gets wrong about being a "fat girl"--mainly, the weird sexual aspect of the story. I'm not squeamish when it comes to sexual themes in literature, but that element in this particular book was just bizarre and felt rather forced.

I was hoping for a more uplifting message, one in which Beth/Elizabeth/Lizzie/Liz learned to appreciate herself and embrace being healthy, because when she is thin she is definitely not healthy, physically or mentally. Instead we are left to assume she spends the rest of her life alone, punishing herself for not being someone else's idea of perfect. She even begins to dehumanize other people who are overweight to make herself feel better! That's a very damaging idea, and really one I found off-putting.

I wish I could recommend this book, because as I said before it is quite well-written and the topic is both relevant and important, but the underlying message is just too disturbing to pass along.

I received a complimentary copy from the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

The cover of this book is BRILLIANT, and I didn't realize what I was looking at until I finished. Just as the main character moves between fat and not fat in the thirteen different sections of the book, the word "fat" in the title has been partially erased. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. Why? Being fat as a girl or woman is a heavy weight in our society (pun intended) - the assumption people make that fatness is the same as stupidity, worthlessness, lesser - we all do not want to believe it is there, but it is central. So anyone who feels fat (regardless of facts) is confronted with constant verbal and non-verbal messages from others, but even worse, from the inner dialogue, the one that has internalized the societal view of beauty and is every person's worst critic.

The central character of Elizabeth (who changes names as she changes size - Lizzie, Beth, etc) moves through life experiencing many of the aspects of this experience - relationships with inappropriate men, not knowing if they are just using her; the pride coming from a family member once the weight is lost (not realizing it wasn't there before); the anger from controlling your diet; the obsession of all of this and how losing the weight doesn't get rid of the negative feelings.... It's all there. It's honest, and imperfect, the way life is. Almost uncomfortably so. I would recommend this to every person who wants to see inside, and

maybe gain a little empathy. But it isn't a lesson book, and I don't want anyone reading this review to get that impression. Elizabeth doesn't "figure it out" and "move on with her life" - this entire issue taints her life, no matter her size. That's as close to reality as I've ever seen, but it's not necessarily encouraging or uplifting.

This is the author's first novel? I can't wait to see what she does next.

I received a copy of this from the Penguin First Flights program through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

J says

I got an advanced copy of this.

DNF @ 80

Ehhhhh... I was pretty excited to read this because I feel strongly about societal body-shaming and whatnot. I didn't like this really that much at all.

It's a collection of short stories revolving around the same girl/woman. But they feel very disjointed and the setting is very unclear. One was written from the perspective of another person, but most were written through the narration surrounding the main character.

I mean, some of it was a little funny (in that dark humor way), but overall... Not "hilarious." It was more just depressing.

I personally did not enjoy this, but some people may love it (and some people do, according to the reviews on the outside covers of the book). So have at it if it sounds interesting, but don't say I didn't warn you.

Megan Baxter says

This will be the 1000th post I've made on this blog. Happy blogiversary to me! There's a small part of me that is wistful that this doesn't line up with one of my favourite books of the year, that I don't get to gush over a book that you all totally need to read, guys. It's not a bad book, but I didn't love it, and for several days I've sat down to write this review and been absolutely stymied.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Kyley says

This book is sad and lonely and emotionally raw in a way that was beautiful and also, at times, uncomfortable to read. I can't imagine any woman reasoning this and not identifying with the main character at times (thus the discomfort).

My main critique is that first half is quite a bit stronger than the second half; the character's stagnation is a bit grating. Regardless, I highly recommend this book. I was really moved reading it.

Angie says

Posted On <http://readaholiczone.blogspot.com/20...>

Blog Posting Contains: Video, Cocktail Recipe, Cool Links, & a GIVEAWAY of the book!

What an amazing, unique read. It's written in thirteen individual short stories about Lizzie's weight influencing every aspect of her life. Starting with the title, the author never holds back creating a crude, brazen, enlightening look into the mind of a woman who from this reader's point of view loathes herself, no matter what. Having no self-esteem the author makes Lizzie's ways of getting attention repulsive and self-destructive. Whereas, the stories tend to be dark the comedy will make you pee your pants:

“Oozing from the V in the front and the V in the back, the volume of my ass threatening to crack the little bows along the fault line...Maybe if I wait long enough, if I am patient, I'll just ooze out. First the fat, then maybe we'll find a way to coax the organs...it'll be a slow process.”

What I took away most from this book is that it shouted out a fundamental message to readers of all weights. If you cannot find peace and happiness on the inside you can be as big as a house or stick thin yet changing your weight will not bring you the happiness you are looking for.

“My wide slash of a bared stomach feels like an emergency no one is attending to, my feet like they're doing bad porn under the table”

This is Mona Awads debut book. Her writing quality blew me away by thinking outside the box and creating a read I will never forget. Do yourself a favor and start your spring reading with this book.

“I RECEIVED THIS BOOK FROM THE PUBLISHER BUT THE REVIEW & THE OPINIONS ARE MY OWN” (who else could come up with kind of crazy)

Samantha Price says

Well, that was NOTHING like I expected. I didn't know anything about this one going into it. From the first few pages the shocking and graphic content had me speeding through the chapters, disliking Elizabeth/Liz/Beth (depends on the point in time) until the very last page where I actually just felt so sorry for her.

She goes from an obese teenager desperate for attention (in forms of online dating and her 40 year old boss), to a thin young adult, obsessed with food and gravely unhappy.

I wasn't sure about this book while I was reading it - it's uncomfortable, to the point where it's not enjoyable. It's like an accident and you can't look away. You just keep staring, and in this case, flipping the pages. In retrospect however, it's pretty darn powerful. Anyone that's struggled with body image issues will likely

relate to at least one of the thirteen essays taken from different moments in Beth's life. The world is a scary place to live for young girls these days... And our minds? Even scarier.

Michael says

Originally this book had loads of potential in the beginning. I liked reading about Lizzie insecurities about her weight it made me sympathize with her insecurities. Between her and her self confident best friend, it was turning to be an interesting read. However, that gradually changed the more pages I read.

What exactly did this book hoped to accomplish? It went from talking about appearances to a bunch of irrelevant things that were not relevant to the plot. Terrible consistency, I shouldn't have to skim pages because of the mini plot holes.

Great idea but bad execution, it should have never drifted away from the synopsis.

Oh well, I call it like I seen it, disappointing read!

Dianne says

“13 Ways of Looking at a Fat Girl” consists of thirteen vignettes that are mostly narrated by Lizzie (the “fat girl” of the title) but a few of the stories are about Lizzie from another person’s perspective. The first vignette was uncomfortable and disturbing in an icky sort of way – I decided to read one more vignette to see where Awad would take Lizzie.

And.....thirteen vignettes later.....I found this collection to be extremely poignant, powerful and memorable. I got this from the library but I think I may purchase a copy for myself to reread and fangirl over later. Why on earth does this have such low ratings on Goodreads?

Lizzie, like her mother, struggles as a young woman with weight issues. Her lack of self-esteem is heartbreaking and leads to one cringe-worthy situation after another. Lizzie manages to shed her weight but becomes obsessed with what she is (and isn't) eating. She marries Tom and transitions into Beth and then Elizabeth, a bitter, judgmental woman consumed with her appearance, her diet and anger. So much anger!

I suspect women will relate to this book much more than men. All the burdens society places on women around appearance will feel very real. I think women especially understand how obsession with appearance can lead to obsession with food, how a lack of self-respect can lead to self-loathing. The tragedy is Lizzie/Beth/Elizabeth is unhappy from start to finish, from fat to thin – just unhappy in a different way. She is rarely “likable” but she always made my heart ache for her. Even though I haven't had her exact journey in my life, I feel as though I know her in my bones.

The writing is excellent, and Lizzie is a character you won't soon forget. If you do pick this up, the first vignette may make you question whether this book is for you. Trust me - read the second vignette. I dare you to put it down.

The Lit Bitch says

This book came across my desk for review a couple of months ago and initially I passed on it for review and agreed to do a special feature instead.

I wasn't sure that I could fit it into my review schedule and I wasn't sure it was something that I really wanted to read. However when I did the special feature, I completely rethought my decision!

After reading the discussion questions of the feature, I was intrigued. This book sounded like it was going to be raw, honest, and dark but yet poignant and meaningful. This book was all of these things and more!

For me, this book was much more sad than funny. Lizzie has a very honest voice and I loved that about this book. I never felt like she was trying to hold anything back or manipulate the situation for the readers benefit and comfort. This was a book that was completely honest about the struggles of women. While I wasn't always able to relate to Lizzie, I think that her experiences were so honest that I felt her pain and struggles acutely.

I personally liked the parts of the book about her struggles with weight and body image which took up the first half of the book. The second half was about her weight loss and for me the first half was much more raw and sad. I thought many times 'finally, someone who is willing to address the pressures that women/girls feel about their bodies' but then the second half didn't quite do that for me as the first half did.

That said, the writing is still powerful and engaging, I just felt like the first half was much more strong and alluring to readers. The first 'story' really hooked me and I hoped that each chapter would follow a similar pattern. And thought they didn't always follow the same structure, each 'story' was important and advanced the plot in some way.

I liked that this book made me slightly uncomfortable as a reader. The whole time all I could think of was 'somewhere out there, there is a girl going through this exact situation' and it made me so sad. I think almost all women can relate in some way with the struggles of body image and the demands of society. This is a raw, honest look at society and body image and it definitely makes the reader uncomfortable but it's so hard to ignore the blatant honesty in the pages.

This story didn't have a conventional plot, climax, and resolution that many readers might expect. It didn't have likable characters or a happy ending either but I felt satisfied with how the book ended. It gave me a lot to think about and digest long after it ended. I like book that make me sit up and think and hit me with a raw honest voice. This book did just that, not to mention it read quick so I didn't feel trapped in the story. I was able to finish it and continue to think about things and issues raised by Lizzie.

This is not the kind of book that I normally read but when I find books like this I think they are hidden gems in the literary world!

See my full review [here](#)

Laurie • The Baking Bookworm says

From the reviews and accolades that I've read about this book I was expecting a light hearted 'Bridget Jones-type' read with funny bits, a quirky protagonist and a good overall message about weight and learning to love oneself despite not being a size zero.

Others described the book as 'hilarious' and 'sparkles with wit' but I had a very different experience with Lizzie's journey. I actually found Lizzie to be quite sad and depressing. There were some rather funny descriptions thrown in throughout the book but overall this was a sad read for me because Beth/Lizzie/Elizabeth (or whatever moniker she's using) comes off as an unlikeable, sad and lost character that I couldn't relate to. By the end of the book I still didn't feel like I knew Lizzie and that was disheartening.

It was hard to like Lizzie. Even when she does lose weight she still lets the weight issue control her view of others as well as herself as she continues on her path of self destruction. Whether she's fat or thin Lizzie doesn't like herself. She will always be, in her own mind, the fat girl no matter what she calls herself or how much weight she loses which is an interesting look at self-esteem/weight loss but not an easy one to read.

I also wasn't fond of the short story/vignette format (which isn't alluded to in the book description). It took me a bit to figure out that the author was using this brief snap shot format instead of a more linear story line and that definitely affected my feelings for the book. I also found it hard to determine the time frame for some of the 13 stories that illustrate Lizzie's struggles. In one provocative sexual scene I initially thought Lizzie was a tween (thankfully she turned out to be older) but I didn't get that understanding until much later in that vignette. Unfortunately this short story, choppy method of storytelling didn't help me feel grounded in the plot and gave the book a disjointed feel that I didn't enjoy.

Readers get glimpses into Lizzie's life but, like I just mentioned, there are some rather odd and uncomfortable sexual situations thrown into various stories which, I feel, took away from the overall message. I think the message that obsessing to fit into society's view of what a 'perfect body' isn't the road to happiness is a good one but these provocative sexual scenes happened with more frequency than I was comfortable with.

This book follows the life of a young woman with severe self-image issues. What I'll take away from this book is the idea that a happy life and self-esteem aren't a guarantee once you fit into a pair of size 4 jeans. You have to be happy with who you are - weight be damned. Unfortunately I didn't find reading about Lizzy's continued journey of self-loathing an enjoyable read. Other people may get more out of this book but for me this was a miss.

My Rating: 2/5 stars

Disclaimer: My sincere thanks to Penguin Canada for providing me with a complimentary paperback copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.
