



# My Drowning

*Jim Grimsley*

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## **My Drowning** Jim Grimsley

Jim Grimsley returns to the Southern landscape evoked so powerfully in his previous award-winning novels, "Winter Birds" and "Dream Boy", to tell an unforgettable story of a woman's search for the meaning of a dream that has haunted her throughout her life. Ever since Ellen Tote can remember, she has dreamed of her mother slowly drowning. Now, with her own children all grown and her siblings long gone, Ellen journeys back to her childhood for answers. Piecing together her memories, she finally articulates a story so shattering, it had long been silenced by fear and shame. Both heartrending and life-affirming, this compelling portrait of a brave yet tragic woman celebrates the courage and endurance of the human spirit.

## **My Drowning Details**

Date : Published January 27th 1998 by Touchstone Books (first published 1997)

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Author : Jim Grimsley

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## From Reader Review My Drowning for online ebook

### Irina says

I regret not writing a review while my thoughts and feelings were still fresh, because it's a powerful read - heavy, sad, melancholic. Jim Grimsley is a brilliant writer, he captures the smallest but most significant details, and does it subtly and effortlessly. The 'simple' truth of Ellen Tote's abusive childhood is neither sugarcoated nor exaggerated. It feels so heartbreakingly real as if the author had experienced it all himself. I certainly couldn't help but hurt for little Ellie.

I was just glad to have read about her as a grown up woman beforehand so I could at least rest assured, she's made it through.

Wonderful writing, a very sad tale.

*Wouldn't have been able to go through that torture without my girl, though. Thank you, Sofia!*

\*\*\*3.5 stars\*\*\*

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### Moira Crone says

My Drowning is a wonderful novel in the Southern Gothic tradition. Dark, or darker, even, than *Bastard out of Carolina*, the novel is also more lyrical and evocative. Grimsley is wonderful in this genre and also in fantasy. He's a genius who understands so much about how to create a story that will keep you engrossed until the very last minute. Beautiful

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### Michael says

I only read this because it was assigned to a student I work with in class. It really blew me away. It's the story of a woman who describes her upbringing in a family of white sharecroppers in the early 20th century, told as she looks back on her life. I know - it sounds hokey, but as the story unravels, so does your perspective. Not only does it completely undo any romantic notions one might ever have of rural poverty, and deconstruct notions about the reliability of memory, but it helps to account for some of those basic values that you do hold despite yourself.

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### Bert Tomlin says

Love this first person recount of a hopelessly poor girl in a severely dysfunctional family. Loved the fact it was written by a man. Very sad and moving.

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### Tiffany says

This book is about a woman recalling her childhood and growing up poor in the south. I thought this book looked very interesting and couldn't wait to read it. Then I couldn't wait to not have to read it anymore. I kept waiting for this big "to-do" to happen or she reveals some major crisis she went through, but nothing. Just very boring all the way through.

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### **Diane says**

This is such a sad and moving book. A young lady has a reoccurring dream. The book is full of emotion. I should have read this when I wasn't so emotional. I might have enjoyed the book more.

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### **Martha Alami says**

Although the subject matter is grim, I enjoyed this book. The author succeeds in capturing and portraying the bleak, abusive life of Ellen, the main character and one of many children in a truly poor, destitute and dysfunctional home. The story is not new but the author pulled me in to Ellen's life and the despair she survived. I felt as if I understood her and the ignorance of her parents.

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### **Beverly B. Bright says**

#### **Very good read.**

Being the youngest of six children, I could think of many similarities in this book and my childhood and relationships. I would recommend this to all. Very well written.

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### **Sofia says**

Writing this a couple of days after finishing the book, the feeling of sadness has mellowed.

Ellen's story is one made up of memories, which are clear, elusive, slippery, truthful, false. Because can one be ever sure of a memory. Our brains work in mysterious ways. I found Grimsley description of the feelings invoked by the blue dress and the fate of the blue dress a perfect analogy of how memories are. The blue dress was perfection to one sister, then represented hurt and fear. It brought pleasure to another sister until it got tight and faded. It was just a torn, faded, play dress for the other sisters. So the same dress (memory) but different for all the different sisters. And it's just like this with memories. Perspectives, feelings they all have their own effect and how we remember the past is through these filters.

Through any which filters you wish to see Ellen's childhood story remains a sad, poor, hungry, unloving and abusive one. The story gets especially poignant when you consider the bits Ellen consciously or unconsciously does not remember. Ellen's being able to break that cycle and make a good life for herself is good to see. It made me think of my Mum, of the hardships she went through in her childhood and how she came through them to create a good life for us and how I being where I am is all partly due to her efforts.

BR with Irina

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### **Teresa says**

I enjoyed this book, but the story really didn't end. The family made me glad I didn't grow up like they did, or have such useless parents, but something just didn't go quite right with entire story.

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### **John says**

Grimsley is one of the best southern writers of this generation. His books are painfully beautiful.

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### **Sianeka says**

Another slice-of-life story from Jim Grimsley, again telling the story of a poor white family in a rural community. This time, the protagonist is Ellen Tote, who overcomes adversity and hardship growing up to become an independent and happy adult. Although it is never explicitly stated, I believe that the main heroine of this story is the same woman who is the mother in the Grimsley novel *Winter Birds*.

Although her story is compelling, drawing the reader through Ellen's life glimpsed through flashbacks and memories, like many such narratives, there is no real ending, and thus no satisfactory conclusion to the story.

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### **Lee says**

This book is Ellen Tote's reminiscing about her childhood growing up in extreme poverty with not enough money, a useless father and beaten down mother who is constantly pregnant. There's never enough food or enough heat and a lot of hard physical work to be done. This is a sad tale especially since you know reading it that although this is a work of fiction, there were and are families just like hers all over America and the world. Yet Ellen manages to get by and what little happiness she finds is all the more startling by how little it takes for her to be joyful. It's definitely a thought provoking book.

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### **Adrienne G. says**

Oh dear this book was sad. If you've read the 12 Tribes of Hattie and not wanted to rip your heart out with sadness and despair, then this one might do it for you.

This book flips around the memories of a woman who recalls, sometimes with accuracy, sometimes with nostalgia, her life growing up in the Deep South in abject poverty. The author managed to capture a female voice rather well, as well as a woman at various ages. The eyes of a child are a fascinating place to look through in any scenario, and this one is no different.

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Somehow, our heroine escaped poverty. Was it the aunt who looked after her? A neighbor and friend? Something pushed her into having a different life than the one that Grimsley captures. My grandfather was born dirt poor in Northern Alabama during the Depression-- many of the vignettes of this story remind me of stories of his life. Foraging for food, biscuits out of fatback and rotten flour...these are the tales of the South-- and they are hard to hear in our current era of so much wealth and excess.

This book was hard to read. It was sad. Looking through so many lenses-- racism, feminism, ableism, etc., this book explores a past many of us have forgotten.

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### **Ashley says**

Well, I finished it. This book resembled a Dorothy Allison novel in terms of its dark depiction of Southern poverty through the eyes of a woman looking back on her childhood as an adult, but the writing style is much more reflective and aware of the beauty in even the worst scenes. The title of the book refers to a recurring dream by the protagonist that she sort of resolves at the end. There are many interesting narrative repetitions in the novel as her memories overlap with memories she had in the previous chapters. The story unfolds as a mixture of reality and fiction that occurs in all "memory" stories, but the narrator is self-aware that her memories are not trustworthy. It wasn't a page-turner. I am left feeling a bit despondent about the whole thing, but I would recommend it to fans of Southern Gothic literature.

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