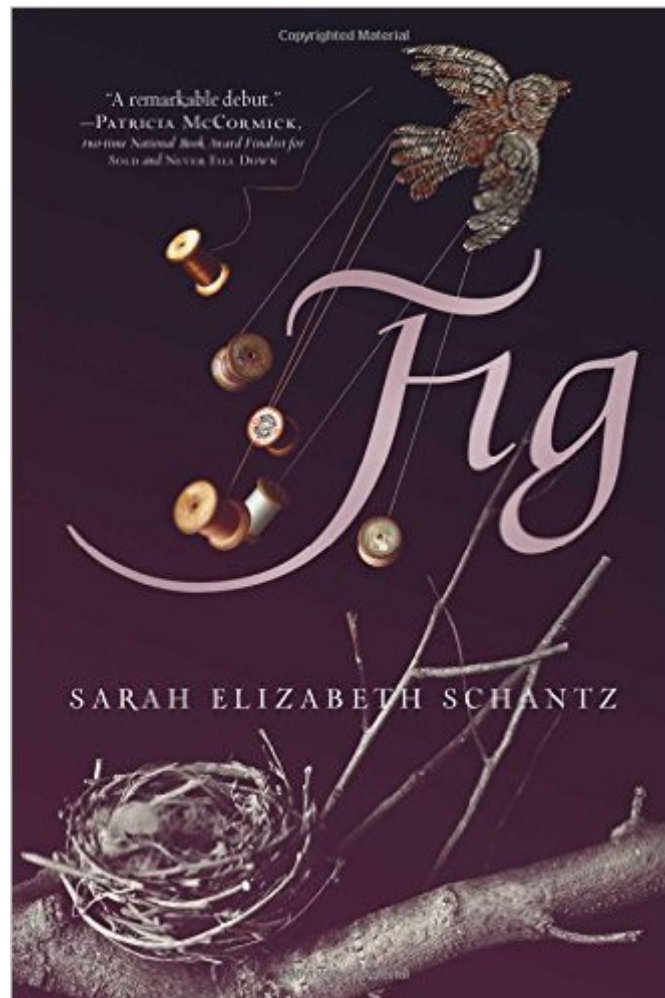


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# Fig



## Synopsis

An NPR Best Book of 2015 Love and sacrifice intertwine in this brilliant debut of rare beauty about a girl dealing with her mother's schizophrenia and her own mental illness. Fig's world lies somewhere between reality and fantasy. But as she watches Mama slowly come undone, it becomes hard to tell what is real and what is not, what is fun and what is frightening. To save Mama, Fig begins a fierce battle to bring her back. She knows that her daily sacrifices, like not touching metal one day or avoiding water the next, are the only way to cure Mama. The problem is that in the process of a daily sacrifice, Fig begins to lose herself as well, increasingly isolating herself from her classmates and engaging in self-destructive behavior that only further sets her apart. Spanning the course of Fig's childhood from age six to nineteen, this deeply provocative novel is more than a portrait of a mother, a daughter, and the struggle that comes with all-consuming love. It is an acutely honest and often painful portrayal of life with mental illness and the lengths to which a young woman must go to handle the ordeals "real or imaginary" thrown her way.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Fig's life starts to fall apart when she is six years old. Her mother --- a beautiful, fierce and independent woman --- has a schizophrenic episode and attempts to kill herself. After this, nothing is the same. Already an outsider at school, word about her mother and Fig's own actions prevent her from gaining any close friends. Fig's relationships at home also begin to

disintegrate. Unable to understand his own daughter, Fig's father slowly becomes estranged from her, and Fig's overbearing grandmother cares only about turning her into a respectable young lady. Only Sissy Baxter, a girl in her class that works at a flower shop, and her uncle, Billy, provide Fig with any support as she watches the mother she once knew disappear. Over the next 11 years, Fig is determined to save her mother. At first, Fig believes that her mother will be cured if she can complete a list of ordeals. As Fig completes one ordeal after another, she begins to further distance herself from others around her. When her mother grows worse, Fig becomes self-destructive. The only thing that makes Fig feel like she is in control is picking --- tearing away old scabs and creating fresh wounds. After an accident with her grandmother, picking gives way to something much more dangerous. With the help of her uncle, Fig begins to attempt to heal herself, along with her mother. Thoughtful and moving, FIG is a dynamic novel that will have readers completely hooked from page one. Debut author Sarah Elizabeth Schantz does a great job providing an honest portrayal into life with mental illnesses and the lengths some will go for the ones they love. Told over Fig's life from ages 6 to 19, the novel details Fig's physical and emotional journey and the sacrifices she makes for her mother. The story is beautifully told with vivid and poetic language, and the reader feels pulled into Fig's world and her quest to cure her mother. Schantz does an excellent job of shaping the relationship between Fig and her mother and making the audience care deeply about them. Fig's unwavering love for her mother is awe-inspiring and, at times, heartbreaking. Even when she is just a child, Fig is willing to give up anything to have her mom be better again. The other characters are also a strong point for FIG. Billy, Fig's uncle, is a point of hope throughout the novel, always willing to support Fig. Sissy Baxter is also an interesting character, as her friendship with Fig consists entirely of the two girls sending each other messages through flowers. Completely human, the characters of FIG will have readers invested in the novel until the last page. While I loved both the story and the characters, I felt that the novel ended too soon. I wanted to know what happened to Fig and her family and the rest of the characters. Hopefully, however, this means that we will be seeing more from Schantz soon. Reviewed by Cheyenne C.

"Fig" is an extraordinarily sensitive and perceptive novel. Sarah Elizabeth Schantz treats the impact of mental illness on an entire family, their relationships and their resulting coping mechanisms realistically, without rendering judgment and without making excuses.

"Fig" is a character who will make an immediate impression on you and on your emotions. "Fig" is a novel that may be unforgettable. At the age of six, Fiona Johnson -

"Fig" begins narrating her own story and that of her immediate family. A child with an incredibly high IQ is still a child; her level of maturity does not always match her intellectual level. Fig's mother Annie suffers from schizophrenia; the condition seems to be hereditary, having symptoms that first manifest during the individual's nineteenth year. Even at the tender age of six, Fig understands her mother is not like other mothers. In one passage as she talks about sounding out words she does so because doing this will make Mama be a mother. Mama's response to many of Fig's requests is often "Maybe tomorrow." To a child, this becomes a promise of "normal," but it is only a promise. Her father, a sensible, responsible man, continues to care for Annie and to share the household responsibilities with Fig without recognizing that Fig has no traditional childhood. Her Gran is a cold, distant woman who is more concerned with social graces and the neighbors' perception of Annie's behavior than with Fig's well being. Only her Uncle Billy, the Johnson family's one-time black sheep, understands how different Fig's life is from her peers and tries to provide some balance in her life. The first person narrative strengthens Fig's immeasurably. Through the tone and concerns she expresses, the reader begins to understand the desperation of a child whose life is not normal, but who longs for a life that is. As Fig matures her story covers the ages from six to nineteen her narrative becomes more adult and more pragmatic. Yet, the bewildered child continues to express her fears and concerns, acting out and at times, hurting herself. Fig imagines Little Red Riding Hood asking her "Why did you cut me out? I didn't want to be saved." To which Fig wants to tell her "I didn't ask to be born." Mama believes rituals are important; this will affect Fig during the ensuing years as she attempts to ritualize various behaviors in order to exert control over the chaos that is her life. When Fig constructs her "Calendar of Ordeals," acts of contrition that she must perform in order to help Mama, she is unconsciously mimicking medieval Europe's trial by ordeal in which God performs a miracle on behalf of the accused, thus proving their innocence. For "Fig", the miracle would be Mama recovering and becoming the mother Fig dreams of having. This miracle would proclaim her innocence for and absolve her of the guilt she feels as she blames her own birth for Mama's problems. Realizing that some of her behaviors mirror her mother's bizarre actions, Fig subtly expresses her fear of schizophrenia affecting her "I am semi-Mama." In addition to the

carefully drawn portraits of the mentally ill and their affected family members, Sarah Elizabeth Schrantz paints exquisite word pictures of the landscape and household settings. Contrasts and comparisons are vivid; one can effortlessly visualize each scene. The use of a dictionary-style definition at the beginning of each chapter emphasizes Fig's intellect and curiosity; this is also a means of reminding the reader that Fig and Annie shared a special connection through the beauty of words. Fig is a moving, emotion-laden novel that addresses the effect of mental illness on the family as well as on the affected individual. Categorized as Teen & Young Adult, this novel does contain some scenes and details of some of the characters' actions that may be more intense than younger teens are ready to handle. Discerning adult readers who value fine writing and a relevant basis for a novel's theme will find this book a worthwhile read. Sarah Elizabeth Schrantz has written a novel that is unforgettable and created a character that will haunt you long after you reach the last page of Fig.

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