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# The First Time She Drowned



## Synopsis

The beautiful struggle of a girl desperate for the one relationship that has caused her the most pain—Cassie O'Malley has spent the past two and a half years in a mental institution—dumped there by her mother, against her will. Now, at 18, Cassie emancipates herself, determined to start over. She attends college, forms new friendships, and even attempts to start fresh with her mother. But before long, their unhealthy relationship threatens to pull Cassie under once again. As Cassie struggles to reclaim her life, childhood memories persist and confuse, and Cassie must consider whose version of history is real, and more important, whose life she must save. A bold, literary story about the fragile complexities of mothers and daughters and learning to love oneself, *The First Time She Drowned* reminds us that we must dive deep into our pasts if we are ever to move forward.

Praise for *The First Time She Drowned*: "Lyrical, emotional...resonant." --Entertainment Weekly "Beautiful and passionate . . . [Kletter is] a writer of great distinction and infinite promise." --Pat Conroy, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Prince of Tides* and *South of Broad* "[A] lovely and haunting keep-you-up-all-night heart-wrencher that is both beautiful and raw, painful and uplifting. It's utterly amazing. An incredible read." --Jennifer Niven, New York Times bestselling author of *All the Bright Places* "Sentence by sentence . . . one of the most lyrical novels I've ever read. Haunting and exquisite." --Nicola Yoon, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Everything, Everything* "The *First Time She Drowned* is an exquisite and masterful dive, a brave exploration into the complexities of family, and the saving grace of friendship. Kletter's writing is hypnotic, her characters alive, her story tragic, beautiful, hopeful. Simply put, this book is stunning." --David Arnold, critically acclaimed author of *Mosquitoland* "[A] beautiful, gut-wrenching ache of a story. If you are at all interested in books, this is required reading." --Becky Albertalli, author of the Morris Award-winning *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* "The best writers are able to tell the most difficult stories with the most empathy, and that's just what Kletter does in this haunting debut. Complex, affirming, and beautifully written." --Stephanie Kuehn, author of the Morris Award-winning *Charm & Strange* "Gorgeous, sumptuously lyrical, luminous...a feast for lovers of language. *The First Time She Drowned* singlehandedly shatters every argument that YA books aren't fit fare for adults." --Jeff Zentner, author of *The Serpent King* "[An] excellent debut novel....heart-wrenching....Readers who enjoy the suspense of unreliable narrators, as in Adele Griffin's *Loud Awake and Lost* or Stephanie Kuehn's *Complicit*, will appreciate this one." --Booklist \*STARRED REVIEW\* "This heartfelt, lyrical debut will strike a chord with older teens who appreciate contemporary fiction." --Kirkus Reviews "An absorbing read." --VOYA "Kletter's exploration of a dysfunctional family...is raw with emotion...a sophisticated read." --School Library

Journal"Emotionally devastating...a complex novel that ultimately uplifts." --Publishers Weekly

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I devoured *The First Time She Drowned* in two days. And, still, I'm sitting here, my jaw in my lap wondering how I go about describing something so ugly and yet so beautiful. Though fiction, this exquisite debut novel speaks of things that are so very palpably real. It could well be used as a guidebook to understanding abuse and depression and anxiety. And also as a means to achieve happiness even when you have suffered, repeatedly, at the hands of each of those horrific demons. Right from the outset, Kettler's words drift off the page with a subtle, poetic strength, like the mournful cries of an opera singer, taking root deep into the soil of the reader's soul. Each word, each sentence, wraps around you. Tight. Like a straightjacket. Not letting go until the very end. When you are finally ready. Finally healed. This novel is one big trigger, and those readers who have been the victim of emotional or physical abuse, who have been suicidal, or who are all too familiar with the dark endlessness of depression should take warning. Prepare yourself. Cassie's story will hit you. Like a cement boulder falling down from the heavens upon your chest. But what her story will also do is give you the strength to pluck that boulder off of you as if it were just a feather. It will peel away those dark glasses that cover your eyes and let you see the light that exists at the end of your very long tunnel. I can't recommend this book enough. To young adults. To every adult. *The First Time She Drowned* is about not only the devastating power of people's words and actions against others, but also about the incredible resilience of the human spirit. Kettler

has written a novel that now sits atop not only the list of my favorite books for 2016, but of all time. She is a writer of impeccable talent, whose eloquent prose, I know, will transcend time.

THE FIRST TIME SHE DROWNED by Kerry Kletter (by Sandra, not Adriana) This is a powerful, raw book that will both make you cringe and make you rejoice. The prose is exceptional; the pacing is taut. The protagonist Cassie has just turned 18 and is signing herself out of a mental institution that her parents placed her in as a warped type of punishment. Can she come to terms with the trauma of her childhood and reclaim her life? I must say that as a child of a narcissistic mother, there were so many scenes that struck chords in me. Like Cassie, I wanted more than anything to 'win' the love of a parent who was incapable of giving that love. (My childhood was considerably more violent. It's amazing that some children even survive to tell the tales in adulthood.) Bravo, Kerry Kletter, for taking on such an subject and handling it with such delicacy and heart!

THE FIRST TIME SHE DROWNED is easily one of the most powerful and poignant books I've ever read on dysfunctional families and toxic relationships--heartbreaking and hopeful all at once. Told through the gorgeous, haunting voice of Cassie O'Malley, Kerry Kletter has written a deeply moving, painfully honest, and aching beautiful story of love, loss, survival, and healing. No words that I write could ever do this book justice--it is one that is packed with such truth and raw emotion it simply must be experienced firsthand. THE FIRST TIME SHE DROWNED is an absolutely stunning debut that will stay with me. Forever. No question about it. Kerry Kletter is a force. Her talent is rare and immense--if this is what she is capable of in a debut novel, I cannot wait to see what she will do next!

Earlier this year, I read Joan Didion's masterpiece, THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING. When I set that down, I resigned myself to it being a very long time before I next encountered another writer who so thoroughly held language in her thrall. I didn't have to wait long. In fact, I found her in the very next book I read, THE FIRST TIME SHE DROWNED. This is a gorgeous, sumptuously lyrical, luminous book. I read it like it was a fire and I'd just been pulled from a frozen lake. It's a feast for lovers of language. The descriptions in it made me feel like I was experiencing the world for the first time. To this day, as a writer, I'll open this book at random to remind myself of the possibilities of the word. This book singlehandedly shatters every argument that YA books aren't fit fare for adults. It treats young readers with perfect respect for their considerable intellects. And it doesn't just treat young people as the intellectual peers of adults; it treats them as emotional peers. It tackles difficult

issues like mental illness, love, and dying with the same darkly lyrical grace and elegance as the book's prose. Kerry Kletter is a peerless writer and you have never read a YA book like this one. It has the air of a classic. Flawless.

I wish I could write the eddies and currents of emotion the way Kletter can. This is, on the surface, a story of a teenage girl who has been damaged almost beyond redemption by her narcissistic sociopath of a mother. It's told in waves, alternating between flashbacks to her dysfunctional childhood and a present in which she's released from the mental hospital where her family discarded her and is able to try to live a "normal" life in college. But Cassie is far from a normal girl, and until she fully faces the ugly truth of her past, she may never learn to swim through it and out the other side. Kletter does an amazing job making Cassie somehow sympathetic, even as Cassie does (almost) everything she can to sabotage herself. She also drags us under the terrible riptide of abuse and neglect that made Cassie this way, forcing us to experience the paradox of Cassie longing for her mother's love even as she recognizes that her mother is the person most likely to drown her--permanently.

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