

Water for Elephants

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"Water for Elephants"
by Sara Gruen
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From the Publisher...

From the acclaimed author of *Riding Lessons* and *Flying Changes* comes the beautifully written story of a dangerous romance. Jacob Jankowski, a young man suddenly adrift at the height of the Depression, enters the world of a second-rate circus struggling to survive through one-night stands in town after town. Working in the circus menagerie, Jacob meets Marlena, the beautiful star of the equestrian act, and her husband, August, a charismatic but cruel animal trainer. He also comes to know Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable—until Jacob finds a way to reach her.

Water for Elephants is a dark and beautiful tale of life, not just among the colourful characters of the circus, but also during the lean years of the Great Depression. Sara Gruen writes with humour and humanity, warmth and whimsy, depicting a world where even love was a luxury few could afford.

The story of this book is absolutely engrossing. And I understood why I chose to read it just after *Rush Home Road*.

Both of these books are "the same" in that the main character, while struggling with the issues of his/her daily, advanced age life, recounts the story of his/her life. And, both characters were young in the same time period. In *Rush Home Road* the main character is the beautiful Addy and in this book the character is Jacob, I think. In both books both characters work oh so very hard to just keep going. And both books are oh so very different beyond that.

Again the story of this book -- a fictional look into circus life -- is absolutely engrossing. I kept reading and reading and reading in order to find out what happens next. But there were two things about the writing that made it impossible to connect with any of the characters or the events of the story.

The first thing that struck me was that I felt I was reading the word version of a film. Odd to write maybe, but true. I actually felt as though I had missed a good film and that reading it was second best.

The biggest thing though was that the writing of the main character -- a "he" -- felt like a "she's" description of this "he". This gap made "him" unreal, kept him at a distance and although I cared about the story and the characters of the story, I didn't feel as though I got to know any of them beyond "the facts". And maybe this was what made it feel like the word

version of a film where all of the really good stuff comes with the acting.

So... all of that written... I give this book a three out of five hearts in my scale. The story is actually much higher than that (probably a high 4) but the writing is around a 2.