



## Winter Loon

*Susan Bernhard*

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**Winter Loon** Susan Bernhard

**A haunting debut novel about family and sacrifice, *Winter Loon* reminds us of how great a burden the past can be, the toll it exacts, and the freedom that comes from letting it go.**

Abandoned by his father after his mother drowns in a frozen Minnesota lake, fifteen-year-old Wes Ballot is stranded with coldhearted grandparents and holed up in his mother's old bedroom surrounded by her remnants and memories. As the wait for his father stretches unforgivably into months, a local girl, whose own mother died a brutal death, captures his heart and imagination, reminding Wes that hope always floats to the surface.

When buried truths come to light in the spring thaw, wounds are exposed and violence erupts, forcing Wes to embark on a search for his missing father, the truth about his mother, and a future he must claim for himself—a quest that begins back at that frozen lake.

A powerful, page-turning coming-of-age story, *Winter Loon* captures the resilience of a boy determined to become a worthy man by confronting family demons, clawing his way out of the darkness, and forging a life from the shambles of a broken past.

## Winter Loon Details

Date : Published December 1st 2018 by Little A

ISBN :

Author : Susan Bernhard

Format : Kindle Edition 325 pages

Genre : Fiction, Young Adult, Coming Of Age, Mystery

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## From Reader Review Winter Loon for online ebook

### Lisa-Books Smiles says

3.25 stars

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### Lissa Franz says

Susan Bernhard's WINTER LOON is a gorgeously lyrical coming of age ballad—a soul reckoning exploration of familial ties and the hard fight to make your life your own. Wes Ballot's childhood ends when he witnesses a tragedy. Forced into the hard, mean life of his grandparents, waiting for his father to rescue him—a drifter whose definition of manhood Wes wrestles with throughout the novel—Wes must confront his mother's secrets. Wes casts about for role models in this tough world and finds it in the Hightowers, a family he loves nearly as much as their adopted daughter Jolene. It is here he learns love and loyalty. Bernhard is deft with the trials and alienation of loneliness. She writes beautifully of hardscrabble lives, and with perfect pitch about adolescence, resilience in the face of tragedy, and what it means to transcend a legacy and emerge with an honest, fearless, independent life. A soaring and luminous debut.

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### Rachel says

Stunning. Heartbreaking. Couldn't put it down.

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### Ginger says

#### Reality

It has always amazed me how strangers can treat you better than blood, but for their loss, we do become better people.

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### Michele Ferrari says

A haunting coming of age story about a boy who struggles to move past the pain and tragedies of his parents and grandparents to become his own person. Wes is a character who you grow to love and want to protect as he confronts the challenges of adolescence in the shadow of his mother's death and violent life. Susan Bernhard is one of those rare writers who is able to use language in completely unique and lyrical ways while keeping the story in the voice of her young narrator. A complex story beautifully told.

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### Crystal King says

Winter Loon is a gorgeous, emotionally wrought, coming-of-age story about a young boy who watches his

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mother drown and then must endure the aftermath of her death--a father who abandons him, moving in with his abusive grandparents and falling in love with the beautiful Jolene. The novel is heart-wrenching, gritty, and at times troubling, but one thing that you cannot escape is how you will feel about young Wes Ballot as he tries to figure out his new place in the world. This is a brilliant debut and I can't wait to see where Bernhard will take her readers next.

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### **Glenna Pritchett says**

Five humongous, glowing, golden stars!

Once in a while a debut novel will knock off my socks. This one did, so I'm going to follow this author and wait impatiently for her next one.

I am a rank amateur at reviewing books, and this one is too good to suffer such an injustice. So I'll say only that you simply must read it.

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### **HollySykes says**

"Winter Loon" doesn't read like a debut novel. Bernhard writes with incredible beauty that leaves you breathless and shivering. Wes Ballot, after witnessing his mother's death, is shunted through his family to land with his cruel and horrifying grandparents. They are easy to dispose of at first until their own horrific and terrible lives come to light. Bernhard explores the bitterness a person can harbor in their lives and how one people let it lash out on others in the world and some limp on, determined not to become the people that wounded them. In the age of noisy adventure novels and sweeping political metaphors, Bernhard reminds us that sometimes, sometimes people's lives are just quietly shitty, with no conspiracy or reason, without any real institution that can be boycotted or revolution that can be founded. Wes' story stands as a testament to making a choice between allowing the bitter cycles of family and history swallow you and fighting the current, refusing to let them drag you in with them. Throughout the novel, I kept hoping for good things to come to Wes, for his life to have beautiful moments of stillness and rest despite the constant unearthing of painful memories and truths that revealed not only the motives of those he was with, but also of those he'd lost. "Winter Loon" is a novel of unangling and of deciding when to reach for the scissors. Sometimes it hurts to be reminded that someday, everything will be ok. I loved reading this book and winning quiet battles in the depth of winter in Minnesota.

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### **Suanne says**

Wes Ballot watches his mother die in a frozen lake in Minnesota. After that horror, he is abandoned by his father and forced to live with his chain-smoking, alcoholic bitter maternal grandparents who kept his mother's room unchanged for years—hiding truths better left buried—but can't open their hearts to her son.

Everyone Wes comes into contact is the worst possible role model for a parentless child, yet somehow he finds just the right person to help him heal and move on. Despite the stark emptiness of his life, Wes nearly finds a "real" family when he starts seeing a Native American girl. Eventually he loses even her but has a chance to form another family. Wes's growth from adolescence to manhood is extraordinary, heart-breaking, yet inspiring.

A brilliantly-written coming-of-age story, Winter Loon has taut yet lyrical prose that put me in mind of Louise Erdrich, words which one doesn't expect from a debut author. I particularly enjoyed her recurrent use of the winter loon, weather, nature, and Native American myths to reflect and contrast with her characters.

Winter Loon is not a vapid read, but underlying the central dread and misery, an uplifting redemption filters through like sunshine through leaves. Watching Wes become a better person than anyone in his dysfunctional family is haunting and magical. Several times, though moved to tears, I was forced to continue reading Bernhard's elegant prose.

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### **Katie B says**

This was such a heartbreaking story and one in which you feel so emotionally invested in the main character. Fifteen-year-old Wes Ballot is living with his alcoholic parents in Minnesota when his mother drowns in a lake. His father sends Wes to temporarily live with his grandparents who aren't exactly warm and welcoming. As Wes waits for his father to return, he meets a girl who is also dealing with the death of a parent. This is the story of a boy who will learn long-buried secrets about his family history and will have to forge his own path in life.

Even though this book has such a sadness to it, in some ways it is uplifting as you watch this young boy deal with the crappy hand he was dealt and slowly develop into a man. While you are reading you just feel protective of him and want to shelter him from any pain or hurt. Haunting is a good word to describe the story as so many things about his family's past that he has no control over are affecting him in the present. And that's why Wes is a character to root for because in a way he's having to fight other people's demons and how could you not want him to find happiness?

Definitely recommend as a good coming of age story. This is one of the better Amazon Kindle First selections I have picked in recent months.

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### **Debi Hawkes says**

"I let my eyes rest again on the craggy spot, dark as spilled ink and barely out of my reach, where the ice had given way and the hungry lake had swallowed my mother whole."

A truly wonderful novel. Thoughtful and thought provoking.

Wes, the main character was so completely realized, my heart broke for him, over and over.

My running thought while reading ... Such broken people, striving so hard to break the cycle....

"Sometimes it's easier to build something new than it is to fix something broken."

This is so well written, very talented. Definitely an author to keep on my radar.

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### **Phyllis says**

This is the story of Wes Ballot, a fifteen year old boy who witnesses the death of his mother when she falls through the ice on a Minnesota lake. His father sends him to live with his grandparents and stays in his mother's old childhood bedroom. It is a coming of age story of abuse, dysfunction and heartbreak. It's a well written page turner and I understand a debut novel. Susan Bernhard is a very talented writer.

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### **Michelle Hoover says**

This is a beauty of a page-turner, dreamy, disquieting, and uncompromising to the end. Against the tide of the wandering heart, the novel tells us, only love can offer us a place to rest—and only if we let it.

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### **Kathy says**

Compelling, beautiful, coming of age novel. I was so moved by Wes's story.

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### **Emilie says**

This book is beautiful. The prose is elegant and, though it took me a moment to become fully immersed in the story, the characters are rich and the setting tangible. It's a story of loss and finding and wrought with love and comfort. This books wraps around you and I can't wait for it to be released and shared with the world.

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