



Hello Goodbye

Emily Chenoweth

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In a single week, a family leaves behind its past and a daughter awakens to the future in Emily Chenoweth's intimate and beautifully crafted debut novel.

In the winter of 1990, Helen Hansen – counselor, wife, and mother in the prime of her life – is diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. The following August, Helen, her husband, Elliott, and their daughter, Abby, a freshman in college, take a trip to northern New Hampshire, where Helen will be able to say goodbye to a lifetime of friends. Ensnared in a historic resort in the White Mountains – a place where afternoon cocktails are served on the veranda and men are expected to wear jackets after six – the Hansens and their guests must improvise their own rituals of remembrance and reconnection.

For Elliott, the trip is a parting gift to his beloved wife, as well as some needed respite from the caretaking duties that have become his main work. For Helen and the procession of old friends who come to pay their respects, the days offer a poignant celebration of a dear, too-brief life. And for Abby, still unaware that her mother's cancer is terminal, the week brings a surprising conflict between loyalty and desire as, drawn by the youthful, spirited hotel staff, she finds herself caught between the affections of two very different young men.

Heartbreaking and luminous, Hello Goodbye deftly explores a family's struggle with love and loss, as a summer vacation becomes an occasion for awakening rather than farewell, and life inevitably blossoms in the face of death.

Hello Goodbye Details

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From Reader Review Hello Goodbye for online ebook

Laura says

I had read such good reviews of this book, but was disappointed. It started out well, but then the pace of the book became so slow. It did not hold my interest, and the subject matter was very depressing.

Margaret Hanson says

Yikes. I always like to leave a short review with the books I dislike to give some reasons why. Needless to say, this book was a mess. If anyone has read it you'll agree. This writer needs an editor BAD.

Kate says

I've read far worse books this summer. I'd give it three and a half if that was available to me. Easy to read. Interesting characters. Just felt ordinary.

Kathy says

I would give this book ten stars if I could. Beautifully written, with gorgeous prose and deep emotion, it tells the tale of a woman with terminal brain cancer, and the struggle of her family to spend their last days together. A farewell gathering of old friends, wrapped up in the guise of an anniversary party, takes center stage as each person who knows and loves Helen says their goodbyes. Her husband and daughter each connect to Helen in their own way, and the emotion is so heartfelt and real. I am so impressed by this author's ability to walk a fine line between sorrow and reflection, making the reader realize how fragile life is, and why we should be grateful for the gifts in life we are given.

Athira (Reading on a Rainy Day) says

Helen returns back one morning from a refreshing run, looking forward to her day, only to get a seizure. This sends her off to plenty of hospital tests after which it is determined that Helen has inoperable brain cancer. The doctors tells her husband, Elliot, that she has 9 months, but Helen doesn't know that yet***, since it's her hope that's holding her so far. With just 3 months left out of the original estimated 9, Elliot plans to spend their wedding anniversary at the Presidential hotel in New Hampshire with a few very close friends. To him, this is more of a goodbye trip for Helen, although she doesn't know that yet. What follows is a way for each of them - Elliot, Helen, and their teen daughter, Abby, to come to terms with Helen's illness.

*** I didn't notice this at first, but after two readers pointed out, I realized that it is weird that Helen isn't told of her time left on earth. I could understand Elliot's reasoning - he wants to keep Helen's hope alive and wants her to keep fighting. What if...? But, I do know that the doctors (most definitely in the US) wouldn't hold back that information, especially to avoid lawsuits - that would also be the hospital policy. Now that I've reflected on it, it does sound very strange and the only way I can explain it out is that the doctors

probably didn't have time to spend with Helen because she was very ill. This definitely goes against what Elliot says about the doctors' reasoning.

This was a very different kind of book. It talks of a pending death due to terminal illness, but not in a depressing way. The author talks about death, and yet doesn't talk about it either, if that makes sense. It reflects the state of the characters - the illness is foremost in their minds but they try to bury it under several distractions. Isn't that how anyone tries to respond to a life-changing matter? Each character tries to address their fears and worries while still dealing with the usual yearnings of life.

I was most able to connect with Abby. It's not always that I can say that I connect with a teen, but Abby's emotions felt so realistic and vulnerable that it was hard not to relate. Seeing her mother as a shadow of her former self was stressing her out. Helen made simple spelling mistakes, was tired more often, acted childish sometimes and was so thin that her usual clothes could wrap two of her. This pained Abby a lot, but at the same time, she didn't want to acknowledge it, because then it would be more real than it is. She tries to find comfort in companionship. When a boy at the hotel starts showing interest in her, she feels special.

Elliot on the other side, made me feel deeply for him. Elliot and Helen were just in their forties, too early for death to claim either. When Elliot is with a group of couples having fun, he enjoys the company one minute and next minute, the realization that he will be alone soon shatters him. He feels terrible about holding the whole burden of Helen's time left, but he doesn't feel up to sharing with anyone.

I loved the addition of the close friends to the story. On one hand, it livens up the story, on the other, it makes the stark contrast between Helen's family and the other families even clearer. Even though they are their closest friends, with whom they have spent many a vacation, in matters of illness and death, one is still alone. There were times when I felt there was an excess focus on the trivial matters, but I still enjoyed the character focus these sections brought about.

Despite the depressing matter of death, this book hardly felt depressing. Mind you, I was reading this one at a time when I was feeling pretty low myself, and yet I was able to read it without feeling depressed. A few months back, I read a memoir about a person trying to come to terms with her mother's death, and finding it a near-impossibility. *Hello Goodbye* is from the other side - the whole period of anticipation, and how that can still never get you ready. You start hoping for miracles, or even buying and trying out the so-called "miracle cures" that never work. Although I have never been through either experience, I felt I could understand both at a very deep level, since I have been through similar feelings because of something terrible that happened last year. I found the reactions of the characters very realistic, and it always amazed me that the person actually going through the illness-death process is the most accepting of all.

Hello Goodbye is written in a quick fast-paced style that I found easy to read anytime, anywhere. Also, the prose was split into very short chapters. I found this a plus so far as reading was concerned, but I also thought it matched the state of the characters, in which they all dwell on the same subject and yet switch topics in their head quickly.

Overall, this was a really wonderful read, one that I would recommend. I didn't love this book, but I definitely enjoyed reading it, if that is the right choice of word here. I thought there were some parts that felt a little too convenient, but I was willing to forgive those, because I was more interested in the mental/emotional journey of the characters.

Heather says

I did not enjoy this book. This was a book I started reading with the hopes of it getting better and by the time i was halfway through it I wanted it to be over. I found it very slow moving with little hills throughout. something small would happen and then you would be back to mundane everyday living...something small...back to everyday living, etc. The positive in this book is I do think it did well touching on the characters feelings about death and showing how each dealt with it. However, I just thought it was lacking overall.

Saleh MoonWalker says

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Robin Rountree says

There wasn't anything I didn't like about this book...but I just don't think it will stick with me. Well written characters, especially the teenage daughter. However, this is a book more about a weekend and how a terminal illness effects the people involved...not a lot of "plot".

Wendy Stockard says

I had no expectations, and it finished well. The prose was meandering, however, and I didn't connect with any of the characters. The author did a lovely job of showing the vulnerabilities and awkwardness of each character, and it should have warmed me. I guess I am not in the right mindscape to read about a dying mother and the legacy of love she is leaving. I might revisit it at another time.

Walter says

This novel received good reviews, and was, indeed, a solid effort. It contains some lovely passages and nicely identifies some truths.

However, overall the novel is trapped somewhere between an awkward young adult novel and an unsatisfying novel for adults about a family's grief. For as many passages that pleased there were an equal number that caused a grimace ("the rustling leaves said, Hush, hush," and "In her chest, a box opened and something fell out").

The contrast between the very good versus the borderline maudlin passages made for interesting if not always enjoyable reading. Hopefully, Chenoweth's next effort will shed some of this novel's clumsiness and do a better job of showcasing her talent.

Laurie says

Helen gets back from a run and while making coffee has a seizure, she is diagnosed with brain cancer. The book is told from the viewpoints of Helen, her husband Elliot, and her college aged daughter Abby. Elliot plans a week vacation at a historic beautiful hotel in New Hampshire to spend quality family time as well as invites some of their closest friends as both an anniversary party and a way for them all to be able to say goodbye to Helen.

Having gone through a similar experience at the same time in my life as Abby there were many moments that hit me hard. At the same time, I felt a lot of the book just kind of dragged along. It's a hard book to rate but I'm glad I read it.

Marti says

Well written & very sad.

Wavelength says

If it weren't for the emotionally difficult subject matter of this book, I would classify it as breezy summer reading. The author didn't delve deeply into any of the characters. Usually, I read every word in a book and often go back to re-read entire passages. I found myself skimming over entire pages and feeling like I hadn't missed a thing.

Liberty Abbott-Sylvester says

I honestly don't know where to begin. This book was a very emotional read for me. I wouldn't say the book is full of sad moments, it's not. I think it's because my personal life is experiencing a similar situation. This book made me cry. It made me laugh. It made me shake my head. I connected with each and every character presented. In my opinion, this book was real. It was raw. It was fantastic.

It tells the story of Elliott, Helen and Abby. Helen, the mother has been diagnosed with a terminal brain cancer. She has only months to live so Elliott puts together an anniversary party and invites all their friends. It's said that Helen isn't told she is dying but throughout the story it seems to me as if she does know. It's as if Helen is giving her family what they need instead of vice-versa. I love that the story explores the feelings of Elliott, Helen, Abby and their friends. When we are experiencing something traumatic we sometimes forget how it affects others. As a daughter, I especially loved Abby. 18 years old. Coming into her life as her mother leaves hers. A wonderful heartwarming story.

Wendy T says

This was such a sad but beautiful story about how illness effects one family.

