



Beulah Land

Nancy Stewart

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Seventeen-year-old Vi Sinclair's roots run deep in the Missouri Ozarks, where, in some areas, it can still be plenty dangerous to be a girl who likes girls. Her greatest wish is to become a veterinarian like her boss, Claire Campbell. Fitting in at school wouldn't be so bad, either. Only one obstacle stands in the way: She may not live long enough to see her wishes fulfilled.

With help from her only friend, Junior, Vi unravels a mystery that puts her in conflict with a vicious tormentor, a dog fight syndicate, and her own mother. Vi's experience galvanizes her strength and veracity as she overcomes the paradox of mountain life, in which, even today, customs and mores seem timeless, and where a person can wake up dead simply because of being who she is.

Beulah Land Details

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Author : Nancy Stewart

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From Reader Review Beulah Land for online ebook

laurel [suspected bibliophile] says

3.5 stars

Violette wants nothing more than to graduate high school and become a vet, but being gay in the Ozarks might just be the death of her. When a local redneck threatens her life and that of her mother and sister, Vi takes matters into her own hands to figure out what is going on. Between death threats, homophobia and dog fights, Vi has a lot to handle.

I was certain this would be a DNF right up until the 25% mark. It launches right into the story, with little context or explanations of what is going on, why people dislike Vi, why this rando dude is threatening to kill her, and the conversations between characters are stilted, unnatural and filled with non sequiturs. Plus there are a number of things that I'm hoping were cleaned up in final edits.

The last three-quarters of the book pick up quickly, leading Vi onto a mystery to solve why the random dude wants her dead and how he and his friend are connected to the highly illegal dogfights. It's a vivid take on mountain life in a dirt-poor small town rife with homophobia and religion...and how family can still love each other even if they don't really accept each other. And Vi—despite being impulsive and rash throughout most of the book—is brave and willing to stand up for what she thinks is right.

I received this ARC from NetGalley for an honest review.

Heather says

I received a copy of this book from the publisher on Netgalley. All thoughts and opinions are my own.

Sometimes I think you only need to hint at a queer main character for me to pick up a book, because this is a prime example. The plot of **Beulah Land** is not one that I would normally be interested in. The main character Vi lives in a small town in the Ozarks, one where your family controls what happens to you, the law doesn't really matter, and there's basically no future but getting married and having kids. Vi wants more than that- she wants to be a vet, and more than that, she wants to be free to be who she is. Vi faces a lot of persecution for the fact that she's a lesbian, and everyone in town knows it, especially Dale Woodbine. When Dale starts threatening Vi and her family and no one seems to do anything about it, Vi decides to take matters into her own hands.

At the beginning of this novel, there's a note from the publisher. It talks about how they usually publish happy, gay romances but that this story was so compelling, and the character of Vi was so compelling, that they had to publish it. **There were also trigger warnings for homophobia, physical violence, the threat of sexual violence, and animal cruelty, which is a very long list.** I admit that this piqued my interest. But then there was also a letter from the author, talking about how this story was similar to her own aunt's story and that this book was written for her. I was officially in, all from the letters at the beginning.

I have to admit, the publisher was right: Vi was a really compelling main character. She was headstrong and smart, mature and strong-willed, brave and admirable. There were times when she made such stupid decisions that I was reading with my hands over my face, but I still couldn't help but root for her. You want her to win SO DESPERATELY and not because she's gay and "suck it homophobia!" (although that too) but

because she's such a good person at heart. Her complexity is astounding and I would love to meet someone like Vi in real life. Honestly, I could go on and on about how good a character she is.

In fact, I could do that about every character. Vi's mother, her sister Jess, her best friend Junior, the Doc, Vi's aunt and uncle, even the villain Dale. They are all real, all human, and even when you hate their choices you understand, or you at least know of someone who has done or would do these things. It was a breath of fresh air from the typical cast of one-dimensional characters.

That being said, I did give this book 3 stars for a reason. I thought the story was powerful but it also felt very rushed. This book is only 250 pages on Kindle and I felt it could have used at least 50 pages more. We jumped from scene to scene in a sentence, which was very jarring for a while and which I thought could have been handled better. A lot of the character development also happens very jarringly, with going from hatred to "everything is fine" in a moment. I wish more time would have been taken.

I also thought the pacing was a bit off. I was going to say that I wished there was more down-time in this book, but what I actually think was that there was down-time, it was just all at once and then the action happened all at once. I wish it had been a bit more spaced-out. There were moments where I was like "nothing is happening! can we please move on!" and times were I wished I could take a breather.

Another problem was that there was supposed to be an element of mystery in this book, like why is Dale so set against Vi, but honestly I figured it out in a heartbeat. The "reveal" isn't very well done and I think it could have been so much better. I wish it was, and again I wish this book was longer because I really would have liked to explore Vi's reaction to that reveal more. It was explored just... not enough, I thought.

That being said, I thought this book was very good and very important. Not only does it have a lesbian main character, it's also set in a place we don't see very much in literature. And it felt authentic, like if I went to Missouri, this is the kind of talk I would hear. I really enjoyed that bit of representation that we almost never see in a positive light. I would highly recommend **Beulah Land** to anyone (provided they can stomach the trigger warnings, of course. No heroes!)

Jane Ellen says

Beulah Land, the debut Young Adult novel by Florida author Nancy Stewart, promises the reader a thrilling story and delivers. The heroine of Beulah Land is Violette Sinclair, soon to be a high school senior. Violette works for the local veterinarian, Claire Campbell. Violette is hard-working, motivated to succeed, smart, and gay. In the course of this fast-paced story, Violette's life is endangered by the actions of a bully who threatens not only Vi, but Vi's mother and sister Jess. Dale Woodbine's hatred goes beyond his hatred of those who dare to be different. Violette discovers the secrets behind his attacks and seeks to find a way to remove him from her life without starting a blood feud between the Woodbines and Sinclairs. It's a tricky business and getting killed where no body would ever be found is a distinct possibility.

Extremely authentic in her portrayal of young Vi and her backwoods Ozark culture, author Stewart weaves a tale that is believable and inspiring. Vi's courage, fears, and determination translate to worthy goals for all young readers. Readers don't have to be gay to find themselves rooting for Vi.

Sarah Meerkat says

Dnf 25%

Received and arc of this from Netgalley in exchange for a review

So part of this DNF is a mix of its me and its the book. I unfortunately didnt pay attention enough to the warnings on Netgalley. I do not enjoy queer suffering books very well. I also didnt realize that this is not in fact a romance but coming of age loosely based on the authors lesbian cousin who died. I am thankful for the warning and tags for the chapters at the beginning of the book and I truly tried but the homophobia combined with first person writing style was to much for me. I cannot continue for the sake of my own mindset.

Andy Harp says

This is an extremely hard review to write. I wanted to put the book down many times but I decided to continue reading to see what happened to Vi. This is a story of queer pain. There is no other way around it. Despite the authors attempt at making this book a literary learning experience, the narrative fell short and left me wondering why exactly someone would write this. I understand the need for authentic books about quiltbag people overcoming hard situations & as a lesbian myself I was desperate to see that in Beulah Land. I did not. I found a book about a young lesbian who is constantly mistreated, abused, extorted and even asphyxiated because she is gay. This girl is physically accosted because she's gay people. What the hell? Not only does the book center Vi's homophobic abuse but the reader is encouraged to see her as noble for forgiving her abusers and wanting to go back to them after being mistreated for years. This is victimshaming abuse porn for straight people to read and gawk at. It's a book designed to influence narrowminded het's and is NOT for queer people.

I would NEVER recommend this book to any young lesbian or young quiltbag person. I am very surprised to see it published by a quiltbag publisher. The editor even makes a note in the beginning of the book because they obviously knew this book was not suitable for young gay people and was homophobic. I'm disappointed and pissed off that I read this book. I hope no other teen lesbians pick it up. We don't need this bullshit anymore.

Alysia Constantine says

There is something about a tough, smart girl in fiction or film that just melts me. Perhaps it's because I always felt scrappy inside, but was never that brave. Perhaps it's because every young lesbian girl like me grows up knowing she will have to fight just to keep herself intact—this feeling is acute and transforming, whether or not that fight ever comes. One feels oneself always endangered. For that matter, most “normal” girls do, too. Whatever it is, Violette Sinclair feels like my better self.

Violette is the voice of BEULAH LAND, and it's her story. She's too smart and too gay to be growing up in the small Ozarks enclave she is—a place where the ruling clan of nasty, dog-fighting, gun-toting jerks is related to the sheriff and there's little hope of a girl like her surviving. Beulah Land might be a young adult novel, but like the best of those, it makes for good adult reading as well.

Violette has not only her own toughness but the backup of a popular, football-star best friend to help her out. Not only is she bent on rescuing the dogs abused and discarded by the semi-secret dog-fighting ring, but she

needs to discover and fix her own family: her father was murdered when she was younger (and she needs to know what), her mother has a secret past (Vi wants to learn what it is), and her sister is resentful and sometimes cruel to her (one wants a tearful apology and reunion).

The story is told in the voice of Vi, who is determined, tough, take-no-crap and smart. Hers is a great voice to guide us through her own story, and it's satisfying that she gets to have that control. There's a comfort, too, through all that awfulness, to know she comes out well enough to tell us the tale.

This is a coming-of-age story in which the coming-of-age is rougher than the one most people experience. All the elements familiar to most of us—secrecy, trauma, helplessness and fight—are there, just writ larger and more dangerous for Vi. It's about a girl coming to own herself—she's a lesbian and an animal lover with a strong sense of justice, and all of that gets her in trouble in her small neck of the swamp. One gets the sense that she's loved despite these things instead of because of them. But she fights on to find happiness and peace, not only for herself but for those she loves. This is no small thing for us queers, and we need narratives that give us this.

When I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, there weren't narratives like this available to me. As a young girl, I didn't even know what a lesbian was, because nobody spoke of it... ever, anywhere. There were no lesbians on TV, or in the movies outside of porn (and porn didn't really present a real picture, I knew), or in novels available to me as a kid. In college, I found *The Well of Loneliness*, *Stone Butch Blues* and *Mrs. Danvers*, none of which gave me very much hope. As a result, it took me longer than it might have otherwise to recognize myself and come out as queer. I knew I was different, and I figured there was something wrong with me because I could not feel complete, deep love for my boyfriends. I have a feeling this story is not uncommon. I felt fight in me, and wildness, and passion, but had no way to express it in the real world. I wish there'd been a *Violette Sinclair* for me to find. I'm glad there is now.

Diana Sharp says

Beulah Land is a can't-put-down novel from the very first chapter. Honest and haunting, the novel features *Violette Sinclair*, a 17-year-old born and raised in the Missouri Ozarks. Vi is a headstrong young woman who loves animals and revels in the beauty of the mountains, even as she despairs of the undercurrent of cruelty and injustice that runs through the town from some of its most powerful residents. When violence turns toward her and her family, she is forced to unearth painful secrets that place her and those she loves in constant danger.

Complicating Vi's attempts to search for the truth is the discomfort that those around her feel as they wrestle with their traditional beliefs about sexuality. Vi refuses to apologize for being gay – something the whole town learned about when she was discovered in a compromising situation with another girl years ago, in middle school. In the years since that incident, Vi has mainly kept to herself, with the exception of her best friend, Junior. A member of the football team, Junior doesn't always understand Vi, but he loves her with the depth of a friendship that is enduring, protective, and courageous. Their friendship is just one of the shining examples of humanity brought to life in *Beulah Land*. Though the book's scenes of violence are harsh and chilling, the depictions of family reconciliation, friendship, and natural beauty are detailed and lovely. There's even a dog named *Victory* that will steal your heart.

Morgan Smith says

Hey Guys! Beulah Land by Nancy Stewart is so out of my regular genre, which is why I am so pleased today to recommend it. Nancy Stewart is an incredible writer. Her insight into the human spirit is relatable to anyone, no matter how far from the Ozarks you may be.

Beulah Land follows Violette and Junior, best friends tasked with saving the Sinclairs from a violent clan rivalry. When Dale Woodbine starts stalking Violette to her work as a vet, his words turn from insults to threats. Meanwhile, murmurs around town start attributing Dale with the death of Violette's father.

Vi comes up with a plan: to catch Dale in an illicit dog-fighting ring and send him off to prison forever. To win her and Junior will have to gather information from the Sinclair clan leader who hates Violette for being gay, a mysterious but kind farmer, and Vi's own mother. The secrets of the Sinclari family that hide the origins of Dale's hatred, drawn into a complex chain of secrets all tied to Vi's mother.

This book managed to draw me, a stay-inside-all-day bookworm, into the rugged world of the Ozarks. Beulah Land is tautly plotted and well written, managing to quell even my most inborn skepticism.

Violette Sinclair is an incredible woman (and protagonist). She perseveres against the violent homophobia she faces from the town. Yet, when her family is involved, even when they are unkind and homophobic too, nothing is able to stop Violette from protecting the people she loves. I cannot say enough about Violette's all-in spirit. The loyalty that she shows to her family, even the ones who despise her, is unfaltering. That takes a giant store of courage and perseverance.

Furthermore, the relationships in this book are just so sweet to watch. Violette and Junior share a bond as best friends that partners them in the face of immense danger. Violette and her sister turn from rivalry to genuine love when Jessie begins to understand the sacrifices her older sister is making for her safety. Violette and her dog, Victory, have love made unbreakable by shared pain.

If mountain life isn't your usual read, then maybe clan rivalry, dog-fighting, and vigilantism will be. This book inspired me and it was, not to mention, a beautiful read. I give this book a wholehearted five stars, and would recommend it to anyone who loves stories about brave young women and the ties of family.

I hope you all are having a wonderful Fall (it just started to get cold here in Virginia), and, as always,

Happy Reading!

Laura says

DNF @ 33%

Trigger warnings for Beulah Land: violence against women, homophobia, animal cruelty.

This book is very hard to read - the author even acknowledges as such in her author's note at the beginning of

the book.

I really tried to read this book - especially after I read the sad author's note - but I couldn't get past the overt, descriptive violence against women and the cruel homophobia. These issues are, of course, part of the plot of *Beulah Land*, and issues that are rampant across America (and the world) today, but I couldn't bring myself to continue reading it. It made me uncomfortable, which was the point, but more than that it made me feel sick, anxious, and panicky.

I read up to chapter 14, and even I can tell that Violet is an interesting character. Maybe one day I might feel compelled to finish this book, and it will probably be because of Violet.

I do appreciate that Nancy Stewart wrote a novel like this, but I especially appreciate that she included trigger warnings at the beginning of the novel, which had the corresponding chapter numbers in the warnings.

I think *Beulah Land* is an important novel, but unfortunately it's one that I just can't read because it hurts too much.

Naomi Tajedler says

Never have I read such a book, on a subject so far from my own experience of Life as *Beulah Land*.

While I couldn't relate to the protagonist's upbringing and life approach, I related wholeheartedly with her fire, her need to do good and to leave a positive imprint on the world.

I particularly appreciated Nancy Stewart's ability to make her reader experience the surroundings with all of their senses: I could smell the woods, feel the heat of the Summer, hear the rustle of a breeze into the leaves, ..., as if I was standing by Violette's side.

Which I wish I did, if only to provide comfort and support through the whole story.

And that's the strength of this novel: no matter how far I was from knowing what it was to be in Vi's world, I was immersed and absorbed in it, 100%.

I honestly cannot wait to see where Nancy Stewart will take me next!

Bri Munteer says

Wow! What a book. LGBT character? Check. Family you're born with and family you choose? Check. Dogs? Check!

This book is seriously amazing. It reads as insanely true to life, including all the messy parts and uneasy answers that life hands you. The main character, Vi, is such a well written character and the resilience that she shows over and over and over is awe inspiring. Don't forget her best friend, Junior! Showing how supportive friends can become our family in the best ways. Definitely pay attention to the warnings at the beginning of the book but I highly recommend picking up this book!!
