

LoveReading Reader reviews of Black Dog Summer by Miranda Sherry

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Suzanne Marsh -

www.ireadnovels.wordpress.com

It felt like I was put under a spell, I just could not put 'Black Dog Summer' down.

What is more interesting is the fact that this unputdownable novel is Miranda Sherry's very first novel and I am very sure that this is going to be a best seller with her readers.

In this magical story we see that..

One day Sally a mother was living in her idyllic home then next minute she was shot dead. Gigi her daughter survived because she was not at home.

I really did feel for Gigi, I wanted to wrap my arms around Gigi and give her some kind of support and comfort.

After Gigi's mother had been murdered Gigi was so traumatized that she was put under sedation in hospital.

Gigi's aunt Adele never saw her sister Sally that much and her children Bryony and Tyler never knew their cousin Gigi.

Now with no where for Gigi to go Adele has Gigi come to stay with her family. This is her way of making it up to her sister Sally.

It seems Sally cannot die and she watches from heaven over Gigi.

A new twist in the story begins as Gigis cousin Bryony develops an obsession with African black magic, and events take a darker turn.

I loved reading Black Dog Summer. I recommend it! I hope all readers enjoy the story as much I have.



Elisabeth Thomas - www.listhebookworm.wordpress.com

A stunning and gripping debut novel.

“A vision of a black dog is a warning sign...but seeing the black dog in the clouds? That forecasts murder”.

Sally was living the perfect life on a South African farmstead with her daughter Gigi but one tragic afternoon that all changed when Sally was brutally attacked and murdered. Gigi is taken in by her Aunt's family but Sally cannot rest in peace she watches her daughter adapt to life with her new family. The murder of Sally stirs up long forgotten and deeply buried family secrets.

Sally cannot die and from heaven she watches over Gigi as she starts a new and very different life. Through Sally's eyes we watch Gigi settle into her new family, watch on as Gigi's cousin Bryony develops an obsession with African Black Magic. Can Sally stop tragic mistakes being made by those left behind before lives are destroyed forever?

I enjoyed this book so much I didn't want to put it down – the pace of the book kept me gripped from beginning to end. *I just loved the strong characters of Gigi and Sally and how the author brought alive the South African landscape. A highly recommended book for all fiction lovers.*

Barbara Middlemast-Neal

Astonishingly accomplished debut novel - VERY highly recommended for reader's of literate fiction.

Estranged from her sister Adele, and in love with Liam, Adele's husband, Sally escapes to the South African bush with her young daughter, Gigi. She stays at her friend Simone's family farm, which has been converted into a sanctuary for injured wildlife, close to the border with Zimbabwe.

Simone is called away to Scotland and, in her absence, men raid the farm and kill Sally and the two white men they find there. Gigi is discovered, hours after the massacre, cradling her mother's body and covered in her dried blood. She is taken to hospital and then – still traumatised – discharged into the care of her Uncle Liam and Aunt Adele and returns to their house to stay with them and their two children, Tyler and Bryony.

In vain, Sally's spirit tries to leave Africa, but her niece Bryony's story calls to her, drawing her back to the world of the living. She visits each person involved

in Bryony's story, reaching into their thoughts and sensing the bitterness of their grief at her loss and their anger at the manner of her passing. Bryony is in terrible danger – but from whence does the threat issue?

This is an astonishingly powerful and accomplished first novel, which will doubtless draw comparisons with Alice Sebold's "The Lovely Bones". The author's imaginative flare and gift for descriptive writing are nothing short of poetic. Each of the main characters in the book are beautifully drawn, their motivations believable and the final denouement is satisfying.

Emma Farragher

A tale of love, loss, guilt, growing up, facing your demons, and facing reality...

In this book South Africa is depicted in a trilogy of ways, rural outback farm life, a gated 'well to do' community, and the ancient heritage side of things, with the Sangosoma, or witch doctor... It is a heart wrenching story of grief, a young mother brutally murdered leaving behind a daughter. It flits between past and present to tell the stories of how our characters become who they ultimately end up. The paths their lives take, with our narrator (the murdered mum) following each thread of story to bring us to the climax. It is witty, and touching and the characters are all likeable and relatable, making it a very easy read. It is a love story at the core, a rift caused amongst family, and the guilt and secrets hidden. I was slightly disappointed in the ending but I say this only as I wish the story would of continued... All in all a solid 8/10 from me.

Genevieve McAllister - @genmcallister

An assured first novel, beautifully written and capturing the mindsets and preoccupations of all the different characters perfectly.

Gigi arrives at her aunt and uncle's house in suburban Johannesburg in a state of catatonic shock following the brutal murder of her mother Sally at their remote commune farmstead. Her presence creates an uneasy reaction throughout the family and causes her Aunt Adele and Uncle Liam to re-evaluate their relationship with Sally over the years.

But Gigi's arrival also affects her cousin Tyler – courting with teenage hormones – and her younger, impressionable cousin Bryony. Bryony's open mind is vulnerable and the black dog of the title manages to charge in and take

hold of her. Both Bryony and Gigi are rocked off course by their uninvited guest and are terribly linked until the story reaches its conclusion.

Gigi and Bryony's state of mind even reaches out to impact on their next door neighbour, Lesedi, who's gifted spiritually and senses danger before anyone else. However, Lesedi must also come to terms with her own ancient calling and reconcile it with her life in modern Johannesburg.

'Black Dog Summer' is Miranda Sherry's first novel and she writes with assurance, capturing the mindsets and preoccupations of the different characters perfectly. While Sally is a character in Gigi's ongoing story, this isn't a ghost story, rather a sensitive portrayal of a family's relationships with each other. Miranda Sherry's imagining of Sally's presence after her death is beautifully written, linking Sally's story to the larger universality of Africa.

Lorraine Baker

Sally was living the perfect life on a farmstead in South Africa when she and other people on the farm were murdered. Her daughter Gigi survived as she was not at home at the time.

Gigi is traumatised and is taken to live with her Aunt and her family but Sally cannot die or get any peace and she hovers nears to her daughter and watches her deal with the aftermath. She does this through her niece Bryony and through her reaches into the thoughts of the people around her but Bryony is in terrible danger as she develops an interest in African Black Magic and events take a dark turn.

Can Sally stop mistakes being made and a tragic event before lives are destroyed?

An enjoyable read even though the subject matter is not light. **The characters are strong and believable and it is a book that was very difficult to put down as the story flowed along perfectly. A highly recommended read.**

Julie Bertschin

A hauntingly intoxicating story of how the spirit world entwines with the lives of those left behind after a family tragedy. A fascinating read which immerses us deep into the Johannesburg landscape.

I thoroughly recommend this book to readers who enjoy an

engaging and thought provoking story which immerses the reader in the setting of novel and pulls you into its centre. When a mother is brutally murdered her daughter is left with the brutality of the event hanging over her. The black dog is the darkness which invades her presence and dominates her personality after witnessing such a traumatic event. The Wildings take Gigi in not knowing how to deal with the shock and horror the girl has witnessed. How they cope with the fall out of this family tragedy makes for a very intriguing storyline. I loved it.

Jocelyn Garvey

Sally lives on a farm/Animal sanctuary in South Africa. She lives there with her teenage daughter Gigi, friend Simone, who owns the farm, and various helpers and animals.

One day their security is breached. A massacre ensues and all are slaughtered except for Gigi. She is found covered in blood lying by her dead mother.

Sally cannot completely die. She must watch over her daughter and try to help her adjust.

Gigi is sent to live with her aunt Adele and family in Johannesburg. This is all very strange to her and she is completely traumatised.

Sally floats over them all and relives her early years and relationship with her sister Adele and so the story unfolds. Sally is attached to them all by 'strings' which enable her to realise what is happening.

Bryony, Adeles daughter, who resents having to share her bedroom with Gigi, is interested in their neighbour and African magic. She resents her cousin, who she hardly knows and who is not able or willing to communicate, being foisted on her.

The story builds as everything becomes entwined.

An interesting book about a culture/place of which I have little knowledge.

Think 'Little Bones'. **It is well written and slowly unfolds to a dramatic conclusion. A good book by a new writer.**

Victoria Emerson

An excellent debut novel.

Black dog summer is a book about family, murder, love, betrayal and guilt.

Set in South Africa it is the story of a young girl, Gigi, whose mother is brutally murdered on their farm and how her remaining dysfunctional family deal with the aftermath.

At times I did find the story a little slow, but on the whole it is a very good debut novel.

Annette Woolfson

*I was somewhat wary of this book when I read the blurb 'a murdered woman watching from the heavens as her traumatised daughter adjusts to life with a new family'. I was really hoping that it wasn't going to be a rehash of Sebold's 'The Lovely Bones'. Rest assured, **Miranda Sherry has woven a tale of horror, magic and ultimately, love that makes this a thoroughly memorable read.** The characters are wonderfully created and her descriptions of the sights, sounds and smells of Africa are first-rate. Miranda is definitely an author I will look out for in the future.*

Sarah Harper

A really exceptional debut novel, 'Black Dog Summer' transports its readers directly to South Africa. Although it is a world away in terms of culture and beliefs, the author evokes the country beautifully. Smells, sounds and the feel of the earth itself all paint a detailed picture of Gigi, her life there and those of the friends and family which surround her. And the beauty of this story really is in the millions of exquisite, tiny details which bring it all to life, without being overly verbose or detracting from the plot at all. The character's emotions following the brutal murder of Gigi's mother, Monkey, are totally believable and as complex, raw and palpable as if we were experiencing them first hand.

As Monkey follows her daughter's progress from her place in the spirit world, we are able to observe events as they unfold, at the same time as piecing together the past. Gigi must leave the once safe refuge of the animal sanctuary where the farm murders occurred and move in with her aunt, uncle and cousins in their suburban, gated community. Understandably she finds it hard to adjust, as do her new family. Her presence brings Monkey's past relationship with Gigi's uncle to the fore and stretches a grieving family already at breaking point. And there's also the dark, foreboding shadow of the black dog which has been cast over them and which is observed by their neighbour, Lesedi, a sangoma or South African shaman. As the climax builds, Monkey must reach

out to Lesedi in order to save her family but will she be able to act in time?

A fantastic, totally unique book. Brilliantly written, I savoured every moment and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Amanda Keeling - @pikalili

A different perspective on death and what comes afterwards.

*I liked the theme of this book and the watchfulness of Sally after her passing, it was comforting to know that even though her Daughter, Gigi, was struggling she was still present in her life. Reading the different perspectives on such a huge change to a family's life was interesting, **I enjoyed this book very much. I shall be looking forward to reading more from Miranda Sherry.***

Edel Waugh - <http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/>

A completely engrossing first chapter that just got better and better.

The story begins with the tragic and grizzly death of the main character Sally who we never meet while alive. When Sally dies she leaves her daughter Gigi behind her and Gigi is devastated and tortured by her mother's death but thankfully her aunt takes her in to live with her and her family. Sally still feels a connection to her family and is unable to move on to wherever dead people are supposed to go.

My heart went out to Sally's daughter, the details of her mother's death were heart breaking and you really sympathise with her especially as she has to start a life with her aunt's family afterwards. I just wanted to hug this character, she was so lost and in need of care.

From the opening chapter this was a gripping story that you never quite know how it is going to go. If you love a story with secrets and friendships and hope then this is the story for you.

Neil Beattie

The story opens with Sally and then rest of the commune being murdered by persons unknown. Gigi (Sally's daughter) who is not present at the time and arrives afterward is sent to live with Sally's sister, Adele, her husband Liam, and their children Tyler and Bryony. How will Gigi deal with the loss of her

mum? How will Adele deal with the loss of her sister? How will Tyler and Bryony deal with Gigi's arrival?

I enjoyed this book. Although it didn't grab me at first the story does bubble along quite nicely. The author's excellent use of flashbacks, as well as filling in the back story of each character, also helps to break the narrative up. The flashbacks also show the relationships between different characters and how they change within the story. Certainly towards the end I was grabbed by the story as it reached its climax. The characters are well written. An excellent idea for a story and a book that shows that the author has taken the time to research the subject matter before starting. I have already told my friends to watch out for it. Her next book sounds equally as good.

A very good debut novel from a writer who could become quite big.

Ian Tyreman

*A touching and emotional story told from differing view points, showing the writers creative skill in swapping between characters. A story that brings South African tradition into a modern context and also touches on the political history of the country. **A sweeping tale leading to a dramatic climax taking the reader through a journey that will not be forgotten.***