



# **The Cure for Grief**

*Nellie Hermann*

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## **The Cure for Grief** Nellie Hermann

Ruby is the youngest child in the tightly knit Bronstein family, a sensitive, observant girl who looks up to her older brothers and is in awe of her stern but gentle father, a Holocaust survivor whose past and deep sense of morality inform the family's life. But when Ruby is ten, her eldest brother enters the hospital and emerges as someone she barely recognizes. It is only the first in a startling series of tragedies that befall the Bronsteins and leave Ruby reeling from sorrow and disbelief.

This disarmingly intimate and candid novel follows Ruby through a coming-of-age marked by excruciating loss, one in which the thrills, confusion, and longing of adolescence are heightened by the devastating events that accompany them. As Ruby's family fractures, she finds solace in friendships and the beginnings of romance, in the normalcy of summer camp and the prom. But her anger and heartache shadow these experiences, separating her from those she loves, until she chooses to reconcile what she has lost with whom she has become.

Nellie Hermann's insightful debut is a heartbreakingly authentic story of the enduring potential for resilience and the love that binds a family.

## **The Cure for Grief Details**

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Author : Nellie Hermann

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## Bruce Campbell says

In this beautifully crafted variation of the coming-of-age novel, Ruby moves from an idyllic childhood to a tortured young adulthood as her family is beset by challenge after challenge. The joy here is seeing how she meditates on the ways the events affect her interactions both inside and outside of her family. The characters (and the reader) experience grief but also see a path to the cure for grief. Highly recommended.

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## Joanna says

Not terrible but not great. There was just something about this book that was just so blah to me. It was well written and I wanted to like it but I struggled with the flip flopping of memories. At times I had to re-read sections because I wasn't sure if I was reading a flashback or not. I know I was supposed to be pleased with the ending as the main character had this great revelation but with the story line dragging out and bouncing along like a leaf in a breeze the end just seemed like too little too late. Did not enjoy this one as much as I thought I would.

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## Becky says

I'd rate this 3.5 stars if I could. I was interested in reading it after hearing the author speak. I enjoyed the book, but was able to put it down several times and finish other books without missing it or feeling the immediate need to finish it. I just didn't feel attached to any of the characters- not even the protagonist. I was glad I finished it, though, if only for this tiny nugget, which I'll copy here at the risk of it being a spoiler:

"where is the will, ever, in what happens to us? If we cannot control what happens, if we can only live through it and keep driving as long as we can, is this ever, in the end, enough? It is not enough; it is enough. This is the only answer. There is no control, there is no cure-- for grief, for loss, for the tendrils of illness, for loving the living and the dead."

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## Jenn says

There is no cure for grief in Nellie Hermann's "The Cure for Grief" but you will sure wish there was while you are reading it. Remember when you stopped watching Party of Five because you were like, how many more bad things can happen to this family? Or Six Feet Under? The Bronsteins are that kind of family. Mr. Bronstein is a Holocaust survivor, one brother suffers from schizophrenia and another from a brain tumor and we observe the family through decades in the eyes of its youngest daughter, Ruby. This novel is, in part, Ruby's coming of age story and while the first few chapters were hard for me to get through (not sure if that was because of Hermann's writing or because of the subject matter as I read the book in mostly one sitting), the end soars. When Ruby finally comes to terms with her past (and perhaps does find a sort of "cure for grief", at the very least, it's her own cure), Hermann dives into loss head first and the descriptions she comes up with of what it feels like as you and in the years after you lose a loved one send chills of universal

familiarity down my spine. As a first time novelist, the author plays with time and place in ways that I don't necessarily think need to be that way and I was going to criticize that along with her tense changes until I realized I did the same thing in my MFA thesis novel. I don't always believe some of the characters actions or dialogue but I recommend the book (especially the latter half) as long as you prepare yourself for, as the title indicates, a novel about grief.

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## **Chad says**

The Cure for Grief, Nellie Hermann's impressive debut novel, explores grief as an issue of gender and age. Ruby Bronstein is witness to a series of family tribulations, each more devastating than the last. Ruby is the youngest of four children, and all of her older siblings are boys. Growing up, Ruby hovers on the periphery of a fraternal circle, and Hermann subtly shows the exclusion Ruby feels because of her gender. As the novel progresses, Ruby watches one of her brothers disintegrate into serious mental illness, and both her father and another brother die from a rare form of brain cancer. Ruby survives by compartmentalizing her life: "She learned to distance herself, to make two Rubys: the Ruby at home and the Ruby elsewhere; the Ruby who saw sad things and the Ruby whom the world saw." She learns that men are reliable only in their absences. Aaron, Ruby's "healthy" brother, is away at college during much of the illnesses. Therefore, Ruby absorbs the family tragedies, internalizes them, and suppresses her own feelings of sorrow and anger. Ruby's grief stunts her emotional development, and her personal life always takes a backseat to the familial disasters. Because she is placed in the unique role of observer/survivor, Ruby possesses a narrative voice that is mature beyond its biological years. In addition, one of the most powerful aspects about The Cure for Grief concerns how Hermann seamlessly juxtaposes the "ordinary" details of Ruby's life with the family's omnipresent misfortunes. This is best exemplified in a chapter when Ruby attends prom. Hermann's sharp eye for details captures it all: the sexually charged awkwardness, the dresses and cheap decorations. While Ruby wants to immerse herself in these intricacies, she cannot. Nathan, her older brother, is lying in a coma in a hospital, and soon he, too, will die. This creates a heart-breaking fracture in Ruby's character, and the result is that Ruby is detached---a narrator who relates her story from a house synonymous with mental illness and death. Too often, novels with detached main characters can result in prose that is either sensationalized or too vague, but Hermann's attention to detail carries her story. She creates an intelligent, moving narrative that never strays into the sentimental. Instead, The Cure for Grief focuses on how multiple tragedies can affect the daily lives of a young woman and her family. As Ruby states toward the novel's conclusion, "If there's anything certain about the future, it is that it will hold more loss."

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## **Dagmar Cunningham says**

interesting beginning and then slow read. The characters never fully materialize. One wants to push the protagonist Ruby to live and do something, which she does in the end. The conclusion is fine. Over all a bit claustrophobic.

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## eb says

Some interesting deep thoughts here, but the writing is dull, and the story reads like an expanded piece from a college writing workshop.

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## Hannah Garden says

This book is kind of blowing me away. I am nervous to finish it, in fact, for fear it will not be able to continue to.

**\*\*Having finished, I'll say: 1. I stand by the "blowing me away" part, but also that my fear that it wouldn't sustain was at least semi-well-founded. The kind of slow, ponderous, elegiac prose style begins to feel cramped after a while, as, while the events described are harrowing, there's only so much wet reveling I'm built to tolerate. Not that it wasn't an excellent book. Just that it took itself a hair more seriously than it is my taste to adore.**

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## Amanda G. Stevens says

"It can't happen again, can it?" Ruby says to her mother when the second family member is afflicted with the same kind of brain tumor that killed the first (after yet another family member experiences a mental breakdown). I was hoping the same thing, but on a story level. At some point, the author would run out of tragedies to lob at her protagonist.

Or not.

Am I saying no one in reality has experienced this much darkness? Of course not. But the fact that "it happened to somebody once" doesn't make "it" credible in fiction. What we accept as truth in the news, we don't necessarily accept as plausible in a novel. In the case of this one, I can't suspend my incredulity, especially not long enough to care about this character's really-really-awful life.

Interestingly, Ruby (or perhaps Ms. Hermann?) seems to sense my skepticism. On p. 201, the following exchange takes place:

Secondary Character: **"I really just can't believe your life sometimes."**

Ruby: **"I know. I can't believe it either."**

SC: **"And the way you speak about it ... You sound like you're in a play or something."**

R: **"Well of course I do! It's f\*\*\*-ing ridiculous! Of course it would sound like a play--it certainly doesn't sound real."**

Granted, dissociative behavior is a common defense mechanism, but to my knowledge, someone utilizing it is more likely to say, "Dissociating? What are you talking about?" The above conversation comes across more as a defense mechanism for Ms. Hermann, as if causing her characters to acknowledge the implausibility of events will suddenly make them more plausible.

So, could this book have pulled me in with one fewer tragedy? No, because I never get to know Ruby

beyond the broad strokes: she's sensitive, observant, and thinks deeply and poetically. Grief has shut her down for a good portion of her life, but she is now on the other side of that. There's not much else to her character, certainly nothing to make her vivid or memorable. And here, again, lies the chasm between fact and fiction: if we hear about this story on the news, we sympathize with the person we know is out there somewhere living this story. If we read about it in a novel, we first have to be convinced that the character living the story is a person. Ruby never convinced me.

In addition, some reviews have praised Ms. Hermann's reliance on flashbacks. I found it frustrating. Far too many scenes are told in retrospect, rather than being shown in "real time." For example, on p. 68, Ruby sits on an apartment windowsill and muses the following:

**"They hadn't fought over anything important--it started with the guidebook ... [Ruby's father] said he was tired of that guidebook, he was tired of [Ruby's mother] being so married to that g\*\*-\*\*\*n guidebook ... Which was a fair point, Ruby thought ... but her father was mean about it, and he snapped, and her mother was hurt and defensive ..."**

Why on earth didn't Ms. Hermann just write the scene as a scene, show us the dialogue as dialogue, show us the characters' body language as they quarreled in the public square? Other places in the book, she drops a "shocker" line to keep us reading ("Three weeks later, [Character #1] was diagnosed with the brain tumor," "They knew about [Character #2]'s tumor for only three weeks before he hemorrhaged and entered the coma"), only to bounce to another point in time and leave us disoriented. I'm amenable to non-linear plotting when it serves a purpose, but this simply doesn't.

Between the unbelievable abundance of tragedy, the protagonist's lack of personality, and the author's insistence on scene-deadening flashback, I felt not one twinge for all that Ruby endures.

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### **Amy says**

This first novel is a bit rambling and introspective, but overall well-written and poignant. My favorite lines are from very close to the end: "How strange, the way moments can feel huge while they're happening...and then turn small, only to become weighty again. how can you ever know which moments matter, if they shift in potency over time?"

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### **Tracy says**

I saw a this book on in an article titled "What to Read When You Are Grieving" or something to that effect. As mentioned by several other reviewers, if you are suffering through a loss or grieving, it will resonate with you more than if you are reading it purely for entertainment.

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### **James Henry says**

The story itself was engrossing, but I think what really sold this for me was Nellie Hermann's writing style. She somehow manages to craft a compelling narrative out of fragments of events and the feelings and thoughts of the main character. It often felt like the literary equivalent of a film montage, a collection of

fragments and ideas that add up to something greater than the sum of its parts.

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### **Lauren Albert says**

Beautiful. That fear of loss can cause a person to close up is well known. But Hermann makes this understanding vivid and new in her portrayal of Ruby Bronstein. Ruby cannot express her fear and rage about what she and her family have endured but this repression shuts her down emotionally. "She is afraid for the loss of everyone she has left, of everyone she will ever love." But eventually she is able to truly hear the voice of her father--a man who lost everything but life in the Holocaust--when he told her "Life is the highest good, whenever it is possible, choose life."

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### **Danni says**

I found the prose in this book tedious, and the plot left much to be desired. However, the concept was somewhat interesting and I feel like the author has potential to be good. This just felt like she was trying too hard.

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### **Kelley says**

The book that never ends. It just kept going and going but not much happened. I had a hard time caring about the character.

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