



## Sweet, Hereafter

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Coretta Scott King Award-winner Angela Johnson concludes her Heaven trilogy with a poignant tale of discovering where—and with whom—you belong.

### **Sweet, Hereafter Details**

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Author : Angela Johnson

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## From Reader Review Sweet, Hereafter for online ebook

### Vickie Simpson says

The poignant conclusion to the acclaimed Heaven trilogy takes readers back to Heaven, Ohio, for a bittersweet tale of first love found and lost.

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### Laura says

It's interesting that this book reportedly took the author years to write, because it actually gave off the opposite vibe for me. It seemed kind of rushed! It was almost like a stream of consciousness, single sitting writing assignment. There were definitely parts of the book that I liked, but it went off the rails and became overly dramatic/unbelievable in the end.

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### Janet says

I heard Angela Johnson speak recently. She said this book took her five years and she didn't want to write it in the first place. **Heaven** was intended as a stand-alone; she got talked into **The First Part Last** and this, Shoogie's story, and - while far be it from me to second-guess the author's impulses - I'm glad she did.

**Sweet, Hereafter** certainly doesn't read like it took a long time to write. Johnson's writing is felicitous as always. But it takes a darker turn than the first two books. Shoogie, Marley's somewhat edgy and simmering friend from **Heaven**, moves out of the home where she has never felt at home, and into a cabin in the woods with a quiet ex-soldier named Curtis. There she finds the closest to happiness she's known, until the ugliness of war reaches clear from Iraq to Heaven, Ohio and shakes everything.

I encourage readers to read all 3 books in the unplanned Heaven trilogy, right in a row (the three of them together total less than 400 pages) but slowly, slowly. They can certainly each stand alone, but **Sweet, Hereafter** is quite different from the other two, so that I'm not sure I'd recommend it to a reader who loved **The First Part Last** if it weren't part of the same series! Oh, but just read them all.

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### Jen Bigheart says

3 out of 5 stars

Shoogy Maple lives in a cabin in the woods with no TV, no radio, and no computer. It is a quiet life that she has chosen after leaving her family home at 17. Shoogy and Curtis settle in to a routine of school, work and hushed meals. Life is going at a slow and steady pace until Shoogy reads a letter, addressed to Curtis from the Army Reserve. Shoogy learns Curtis has been ordered to return to active duty. Shoogy begins to understand why Curtis has been suffering from nightmares, yelling out in the middle of the night, and waking up drenched with sweat. Curtis must make a decision to return to war or possibly go to jail. Whatever his decision, Shoogy's life will change forever.

Coretta Scott King Award winner Angela Johnson gives us the final installment of the Heaven trilogy. Told from Shoogy's point of view (a supporting character we met in Heaven and The First Part Last), Sweet, Hereafter is a novel as quiet as the characters. There is sparse dialogue and there are no in-depth self reflections. Shoogy is a young African American female whose mother characterized her as "free" and "restless". Shoogy moves out of her home at a young age, but we do not quite know what finally led her to leave, and we do not quite know why she turned to Curtis. We are only told, "I left home on a sunny day." Curtis was a former neighbor, and the two had a few brief encounters in the last year or so. This adds to his mysterious quality. The reader is given no information of his background, military or family life, and we are left to assume he is an uncomplicated man haunted by war. When Shoogy mistakenly reads the Army Reserve letter intended for Curtis, they never discuss his choices. The reader is never positive whether Curtis knows that Shoogy read the letter. Although his decision is heartbreaking, it was really hard to connect with Curtis because the reader had no chance to get to know him.

This book is quite different from the others in the trilogy. Heaven and The First Last Part had a defining plotline of family. Young Heaven (Heaven) discovers her parents are not who she thought they were, and Bobby (First Last Part) is a single, teenage dad fumbling his way through fatherhood. Sweet, Hereafter is more subtle and nothing is told outright. Sure Shoogy chooses her family when she turns to Curtis, but we do not know why. Did she get kicked out? Did she leave in the middle of the night? There are no details and the story is very ambiguous. Sweet, Hereafter is more poetic and figurative than the companion novels. For instance, Shoogy refers to Alice and after a few minutes, you realize she is speaking of her truck, and not a person.

Even though the main character is African American, in my opinion, there are only subtle references to African American culture. We are told that Shoogy had a "curly 'fro", but if the author did not come right out and say it, we might never guess that Shoogy is an African American girl. The cover art is the only evidence. Her boyfriend Curtis is only described as having "the darkest eyes". In addition, there is no talk of religion, spirituality, celebrations, traditions or any other aspects that could be cultural markers. The language can be that of any teenager living in America today. Lingo used was something that any young person would say, and it wasn't on the heavy side. Sweet, Hereafter is a novel that blends in perfectly with other young adult fiction. Recommend for ages 13+.

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### **Anna Chappell says**

I liked getting into Shoogy's head and seeing what happened to her, but this one didn't speak to me as much as the other two Heaven books did. I think Curtis wasn't developed enough, and too much of Shoogy's story was wrapped up in his, I'm not sure.

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### **Donna Siebold says**

We met Sweet in the first book of the Heaven trilogy. There we learned how little she felt she fit into her family. In this story she has moved away from her family. She is living with a veteran, Curtis. She still is uncomfortable with her own family.

We learn how Curtis deals with the possibility of his returning to war and how it impacts their lives.

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### **Mary says**

Angela Johnson has an amazing ability to fill very short descriptive phrases or words with a huge amount of feeling and to imply plot with clarity and brevity. Her writing is amazing, and how it works is elusive - at least to me. Sweet moves out of her family's home and goes to live with Curtis, a former neighbor, and an Army reservist, who has served in Iraq, and who now lives in a small cabin in the woods. Sweet doesn't know Curtis very well, and he doesn't talk much, but living with him, she begins to know him better, and she is sure that she belongs with him. There is a feeling of loneliness that pervades this book, even when Sweet tells of times she spends with Curtis or with good friends, and maybe it should be a kind of foreshadowing, but the ending is still heartbreakingly unexpected.

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### **Sarah says**

Shoogy has left her parent's cold and constricting home to live with Curtis. The two find kindred spirits in each other. While Shoogy deals with the baggage her parents have given her, Curtis copes with life after being in Iraq.

I wasn't as connected to this book as I was to the others in the series. I felt that more could have been developed and added to story. I found myself confused by parts of the story because Shoogy seemed to be an unreliable narrator...though really she wasn't. The words were beautiful and there was potential to this story, but it didn't knock it out of the park like the others, for me.

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### **Julie Trapp says**

coming soon

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### **Damian says**

Sweet, Hereafter is about A high schooler named Shoogy who lives in a small town called Heaven. She lives with her parents and brothers. She is unhappy because she thinks they do not understand her. She couldn't talk to them and didn't find any reason to stay there. Curtis who is another main character is an Iraq veteran. He allows Shoogy to move in with him and she feels she can trust and depend on him. He is a lot like her because he likes to be alone and likes the quiet in the woods. She left home to move in with Curtis in a shack in the woods. Curtis loved the woods and the shack. He felt he had lost this kind of life because of his experience in Iraq. After she left home, no one came to look for her. This made her feel very bad, but it proved to her that they didn't care about her. Life with Curtis was good. Shoogy went to school and work. Curtis was very quiet, but they understood each other and got along. Sometimes the quiet bothered her but Curtis had a lot of books and she would read. Curtis did not talk much, but he did tell her he would probably have to go back to Iraq. He used to have nightmares about what happened in Iraq. They never discussed the nightmares, but she knew it bothered him. He did tell her that he would probably have to go back to Iraq, but did not want to. He eventually went AWOL because he could not bring himself to go back. The internal

conflict Shoogy had was whether she should go back home or not. There were times when she would drive past her home, but not stop. She missed her family, but had mixed feelings about going back. One day she received a letter from her mother that shocked her. The mother said how much she missed her and did not want her to leave. The mother said she knew she could not continue to hold on to her. She admitted that she never really never let go. She knew where she lived, that she was in school and working. She would watch her from a distance. She told her she loved her and that her father said she should make her come home. Her mother felt she could not do that because Shoogy felt she had to leave. She wanted her to know that she loved her and she would always be in her heart. This letter made Shoogy feel very unsure about her decision to leave home. She didn't know how her family really felt about her. This letter caused an internal conflict for her. One day when she came home, Curtis was gone. She looked for him in the woods, but couldn't find him. When she couldn't find him, she realized that he was not coming back. She felt very bad but realized that Curtis had given her a safe place, but that he no longer felt safe. She then understood that you could be gone in an instant, and that the only thing left were memories of what that person meant to you. The text-to-world connection in this story is that today that when some soldiers come back from the Army, they have difficulty adjusting. Because of what they have experienced in the war, some will volunteer to help others who are feeling like Shoogy. They give them advice about how to handle certain situations so their lives can be better. However, for some of them, they have not learned how to handle their own problems. His way of life had been destroyed and he could not bring himself to go back to Iraq. I rated this book a three because I don't understand why she left her safe haven (home) to go to the unknown.

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### **Susan says**

Having read the other titles in the trilogy, I think Sweet, Hereafter is a deft closing. This final installment is about Sweet, a young girl we meet through Marley in Heaven. Sweet is odd; she wears knee high rain boots, isn't obsessed with ipods or Facebook, drives a truck dubbed Alice and likes feeding ground hogs apple peels. She doesn't fit in with her perfect, beautiful family. In this closing book, it's a few years later and Sweet, a senior, is still odd but popular. When her relationship with her family reaches her breaking point, she moves in with Curtis, another quiet but friendly young man enlisted in the Reserves home after one tour in Iraq. Their connection is both tender and tenuous.

The story unfolds slowly. The commentary is sparse and even the most dramatic scenes are subdued. This is however a poignant read. Johnson renders a short, but memorable story about how we find meaning and make connections in the lives we lead. There's no happy ending but there is resolution. I think there is some peace. To paraphrase one of the characters, there is enough. We don't get a lot of time with the characters, we don't get lengthy histories or long passages of dialogue but we do get enough. We get a mother connecting with a daughter in a way I think the daughter understands. We get a young girl and young man loving for a time. We see friends doing what they can. We get enough.

In a culture where communication is a juxtaposition of multi-tasking and texting, I think this kind of brevity matches teens' modern sensibility without compromising the art. This is life distilled in a meaningful way.

The length of the book works. This book is small but powerful. Yes, it is a good for a reluctant reader and a broader audience as well. My experience is that most teens want everything from food to entertainment to get to the point and get there fast. No, we don't get 400 pages of pining or violence. It's not an epic tale of adventure. It is what I think the author intended: an intimate close to a series that has looked at relationships the way they really happen.

For me the read is seamless; elegant in sparse prose lines that feel like poetry. The depth of the work is understated but potent.

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### **Sylvia says**

This was an excellent narrative although I think this trilogy could have been one book about three different kids dealing with different problems. This story was actually truly beautiful in my mind.

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### **Jessica says**

Honestly, until I read the last third of this book, I hated it. The writing style is very amorphous and jumps time a lot, so it's difficult to figure out if you're reading about something happening now, or that happened in the past. There's also a lot of characters thrown around that don't play any significant role and I started confusing who was who. And the main character, who I thought was named Sweet but is named in the inside cover Shoogy, is not very sympathetic. She insinuates that she has this terrible life, but it was mostly her own choices that led her to this point.

However, about two-thirds into the book, it changes. The timeline becomes linear, so I was able to figure out what was happening, and the plot finally becomes clear, the plot described on the inside cover flap that I'd been waiting for the entire book. The emotions are real and tangible, and readers finally start to connect to Sweet and her situation. I hated the ending, though. I thought that it could have been handled differently so it didn't create such a flop of a resolution.

Warnings (on a scale of 1-5):

Language: 3 This book is written in first person, and Sweet, the narrator, uses a good amount of language for no real reason.

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### **Jacki says**

Summary: Shoogie moves out of her family home and into a cabin in the woods with a former soldier. They share a sweet but tenuous connection until tragedy intervenes.

Verdict: Confusion.

Yay!: The book is short and easy to read, which makes it great for reluctant or slow readers, but also deep, which gives it broader appeal. Dreamy prose and a pared-down plot let Shoogie's emotion float to the surface. Johnson's writing shines.

Nay!: I haven't read all three books in the Heaven trilogy. Apparently Shoogie is the friend of an earlier heroine, and if you haven't read that book, you've missed a lot of her backstory. I felt a little confused. I understood that she left home because she felt out of place, but that part of her story wasn't developed much

here. I never felt connected to either of the main characters, perhaps because their relationship was so new and neither felt chatty.

Shameless plugging of a favorite: Have you read The First Part Last? It's terrific!

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### **Lilian martinez says**

This book is about Shoogie a high school senior who lives with her boyfriend Curtis who's an ex soldier that fought in Iraq. Throughout the book Shoogie describes her relationship with Curtis as a place where she belongs, yet he's always so distant. Disaster strikes when curtis receives the news that he has to go back into the army. It takes you through the journey the two have to face together. This book is a quick read, but compared to the other two books in the heaven trilogy it was not as good. At times it would get really dry making it hard to finish.

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