



Gem & Dixie

Sara Zarr

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Gem has never known what it is to have security. She's never known an adult she can truly rely on. But the one constant in her life has been Dixie. Gem grew up taking care of her sister when no one else could: not their mother, whose issues make it hard for her to keep food on the table, and definitely not their father, whose intermittent presence is the only thing worse than his frequent absence. Even as Gem and Dixie have grown apart, they've always had each other.

When their dad returns home for the first time in years and tries to insert himself back into their lives, Gem finds herself with an unexpected opportunity: three days with Dixie—on their own in Seattle and beyond. But this short trip soon becomes something more, as Gem discovers that to save herself, she may have to sever the one bond she's tried so hard to keep.

Gem & Dixie Details

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From Reader Review Gem & Dixie for online ebook

Tatiana says

I just can't decide if I liked this novel or not. There were parts in it that made my heart ache for Gem and her feelings of abandonment and neglect. Zarr had painted a family with a very specific, tragic dysfunction, and it affected me greatly to witness it. But then, there were long parts of the story that felt flat and underwritten and rambling, when Gem sounded not 17 but 10. Do all Zarr's books have this too-simple language? I've read them all, but I can't remember being bothered by this simplicity before. There is just something about Gem & Dixie that didn't work for me and I am failing to pinpoint what it is on my own.

Lola says

Gem & Dixie used to be thick as thieves. Always together. Had each other's backs. Laughed together. Cried together. But they're growing apart. What could possibly stop that?

When their father resurfaces in their lives, Dixie is thrilled. Gem, however, being the careful girl that she is, is suspicious of their father's reappearance after so many years.

And she was right to be. After all, he did leave a bag full of money under their beds. How did he get this money? Something smells fishy here.

Now they're on the run. Took the cash and left.

This is a moving story that depicts the bond between sisters during hard times. Gem & Dixie may have grown apart these last few years, but they know they will always have each other regardless. Whatever happens.

GEM & DIXIE also illustrates how a dysfunctional family can affect children. Gem was certainly not supposed to be the mature one in the family, yet their mother gave her no choice in the matter.

But most of all, this novel's underlying message is that no one is perfect. No family is perfect. No one has only good in them or only bad in them.

Their mother may not be the most responsible mother on the planet, and their father sure could have given them some support over the years, even from afar, but that doesn't mean they have bad in them only.

Being a parent is the hardest job, they say. What matters is that you keep trying and don't give up on your family.

Once again, very moving novel.

Zemira (Kylo Ren fangirl) Warner says

What a depressing book. I made the wrong choice to read this bright and early. There were moments when I wanted to stop reading and never think of this book ever again mostly because of the way Gem and Dixie were living. If you don't like to read about poverty and neglectful parents don't bother with G&D but if you love Sara Zarr's work, just like I do, then you know what to do.

Sarah says

(I received an advance copy of this book for free. Thanks to HarperCollins and Edelweiss.)

“Everything that happened. It was only because we wanted our parents to be better, to know how to take care of us.”

This was a contemporary story about two sisters, and their less-than-perfect home life.

Gem was an okay character, and I felt quite sorry for her when she was hungry and had no food to eat and no money to buy food with. I did find her plans a little lacking at times though, and it seemed a little foolish to splash out on doughnuts when she could have made the money last her longer.

The storyline in this was about Gem and her sister Dixie, and their life with their mother who wasn't very reliable. We had their father turn up unexpectedly, and try to insert himself back into their lives, and a big bag of cash that he brought with him which we never really got an answer as to where it came from. I expected this book to be more about the relationship between Gem and Dixie though, and they didn't really support each other that much at all. In fact, Dixie was actually quite unpleasant towards Gem at times, and poor Gem got the short end of the stick time and time again.

The ending to this was okay, although again it wasn't what I was expecting. I also thought there would be more repercussions about the money as well.

6.5 out of 10

Neil (or bleed) says

Not her best work, for me, having read all of her novels but it was good all the same.

Gem & Dixie has the same emotional tone with Sara Zarr's other novels.

Which I like.

Which always gets me.

No wonder I consider her one of my favourite authors.

Gem & Dixie is about the complex relationship between two sisters from a broken home. It is about Gem, in particular, as she steps up for her family amidst her jealousy for Dixie, her personal problems and her issues with her parents. It shouldn't be like that but Gem has no choice.

It is a well-written novel that shows how strong and mature Gem was and also shows the opposite. Her uncertainty and indecisiveness. Her petty actions and impulsiveness.

More importantly so, I loved how realistic this novel feels from the setup to emotional stress it brings. I think it shows and even captures one of the possibilities of how life goes in a broken home, in a broken family.

Rose says

Quick review for a quick read. Another emotional and engaging read from Sara Zarr. "Gem and Dixie" is a story of sisters as well as knowing when to let go and grow. I enjoyed the journey, though the story had more compelling points in certain turns than others. It got a little muddled in the middle trying to march itself towards the ending, but still pulled at my heartstrings for showcasing the relationship between the characters.

Gem is four years older than Dixie and has been tasked as the responsible figure in a complicated household. Gem and Dixie's father is often absent from their lives, and usually when he returns, it's never for good reasons. Their mother can barely keep food on the table and while she's present in their lives keeps her own distance from taking on responsibility due to a number of vices. Gem has always tried to help and protect her younger sister, but even as they've grown older, their relationship has become more distant, with Dixie wanting to hold on to memories they used to have while Gem is ready for something more, something better.

The two have a rather unique opportunity to get away when their father returns to their lives, leaving a questionable amount of money of undetermined source under the bed. Gem asks Dixie to get away for a short time - just to "let loose". But their journey from that point is a series of encounters that have the girls meeting mishaps and discovering each other in a way they hadn't had opportunities to do before. I think the first half of the novel had me in its compelling portrait of the girls' broken home, while the latter part had some moments of emotional connectivity, but the pacing and grip loosened a bit up until closer to the end when the girls have to face the reality of their situation and Gem has to make a decision for herself rather than for the inclusion of her and her sister. In the end, it's a solid read - probably not my personal favorite from the author, but well included among her potent stories in contemporary YA and dealing with difficult issues.

Wonderful audio narration by Julia Whelan as well.

Overall score: 4/5 stars.

Chelsea (chelseadolling reads) says

Fine but forgettable tbh.

Rebecca McNutt says

Gem & Dixie is a good book that shares the story of a dysfunctional family and the desperate lengths the main character goes to, but Dixie was often very awkward and sometimes even mean to Gem, making it difficult to view them as realistic characters.

Lala BooksandLala says

I've read a lot of books with this narrative, and it didn't really do anything new or outstanding for me. The characters felt real and were well developed, it had some solid quotes, good messages, but it fell apart a little by the end and overall there was nothing overly impressive or memorable about this.

This book comes out in April- an early copy was provided by the publisher.

Roshni Ajmal says

i am sure about the waterfall this book is going to cause my eyes.

Sara (A Gingerly Review) says

This story hurt my heart. I felt so much for Gem. I wanted to give her a hug, I wanted to sit and talk to her, I wanted to do so much for her. This hit me in the feels. Damn you for making me feel, Sara.

Full review can be found here: <https://agingerlyreview.wordpress.com...>

Holy crow my heart hurt with this story. I knew it was about sisters but this felt deeper and more powerful than just that.

Short recap: Gem and her sister, Dixie, have not had an easy life. Their father left when they were young and their mother all but gave up on them. Gem does the best she can to take care of herself and Dixie, even if that means doing what is not right.

From the very start, I was cheering for Gem. This girl had been dealt a crappy hand by the universe. Her mother is practically worthless and blames Gem for everything. Dixie, the youngest daughter, could do no wrong. Gem is the one fighting, working, and sacrificing to keep the family together. Their dad left years ago for the next million dollar idea and easy girlfriend, leaving behind the family he shattered. How can I not have my heart torn to shreds after a premise like that? Gem was such a strong character and I adored that. She pulled herself up by her bootstraps and did what needed to be done, even when she didn't want to. She felt responsible for keeping what was left of her family together. She was constantly met with a disapproving mother and sister that thought she was overreacting. As for Dixie, I did not like her. She walked around

oblivious to their reality. Dixie always thought her dad would come home and everything would go back to the way things were. She was living in a fantasy and it wore on my nerves. I wanted to slap her so hard. She was a bitch to Gem every chance she got and always took her mother's side. She even bought her mother pain pills from kids at school so she could get high. What daughter does that?! The girl had a subscription to her issues. Their parents (I use this term loosely) were just as bad. Mom was in denial and blamed Gem for everything, whereas Dixie could do no wrong. Their dad comes back but only talks to Dixie because he is a con artist and knows how to pick his victims.

The plot of the story was a pretty good one. I was intrigued by the idea of their deadbeat dad leaving a backpack with thousands of dollars in cash under Gem's bed. Gem wants to take the money and run but Dixie, being the brain dead twat that she is, wants to tell her parents. Are you mental, Dixie?! What a stupid idea. They should have just made a run while they could. Instead, Gem treats Dixie to a night away from home. They go to a hotel, order room service, watch movies, and just have fun. The entire time Dixie has a massive guilt complex and keeps wanting to "check in" to let her mom know she's okay. Traitor. Idiot. Judas. She was the weakest point of this entire story. Everything she did went against what Gem was doing. It felt like she was pulling the entire story down with her, "*sobs* I just want things to go back to the way they used to be! *sobs* bullshit. That got old fast. I kept wanting and hoping that Gem would drop her sister like a bad habit and move on. Did she? ... I won't ruin the surprise for you. But when you read this, or if you have already, come back and talk to me. We'll trade frustrations. The ending did feel a bit rushed. The last 15% of the book was a whirlwind as Zarr tried to wrap everything up. I'm not the biggest fan of when authors do this.

I will leave you with this: this was a heartbreakingly real story and a hard reality for the way some families live. I believe this story needed to be told. There was a harsh realism to the struggle of kids today trying to find money for one meal a day thanks to less than interested parent(s). The reality that sometimes one meal a day is all kids will get. Or that they are forced to grow up far too quickly in order to save themselves. This story will kick you right in the feels so don't go into this thinking it is a feel good story. I do hope people will give this a chance because it is a heck of a powerful reality check.

Trevor says

This was alright...I think I was just hoping for a more gritty tale. From the premise, I thought the story had a lot of potential but was severely underwhelmed after finishing. I've never read any of Zarr's previous works but the prose is just so simple, it feels completely wrong for the "hard-hitting" story trying to take place here. For a book under 300 pages it took me longer than usual to complete; to be honest, I was annoyed at some points where "showing not telling" became blatant & lost interest. If the goal was to create a "deep, meaningful look between the complexities of sisters", GEM & DIXIE fell short. It's unfortunate because there was a lot more that could have been done with the storyline, but the simplicity of the writing got in the way so much it eventually overshadowed the entirety of the novel.

The relationship between Gem & Dixie didn't bother me. In fact I had no problem with either sister & liked how hard Zarr worked to make their different personalities noticeable. I believe it's worth noting when an author takes the time to create opposite characteristics because it's too often MCs become interchangeable with each other. Having a younger sister myself, I could relate with Gem's burden of taking care of Dixie & feeling like she's responsible for everything. So in this aspect the sister dynamic really worked. I could also feel anger towards their parents & empathy for the girls. All of this could have turned into something more, if I hadn't been so off put by the writing style.

The pacing for the book also felt disjointed. There were many times I'd have to reread a sentence because the setting would suddenly change. I was hoping this would be a continuous flow for me, especially since it's such a short book, but it stopped & started for me too many times. As stated I lost interest multiple times but finished because I didn't find anything in terms of plot insulting/just wanted to see how it'd end. The last 15% of this comes to a rapid conclusion & I wish more time was spent with Gem trying to come to terms with herself. I also wish the interaction between the sisters was more "final" per se, but life rarely offers satisfiable conclusions.

GEM & DIXIE just wasn't for me, but I can see it being enjoyable for those who have sisters or just like a good sibling tale in general. Although I was really surprised at Zarr's writing (it seemed like this was geared for the younger YA audience minus the multiple profanities), if you're already familiar with her style I don't think there will be anything unexpected. This is an important story to tell- I just wish I had enjoyed it more.

Elyse Walters says

Two sisters -

Gem 17....Dixie 14

The sisters didn't have a charming - faithful mother -or a strong benevolent father.

Adria is a mother who self medicates.

Russell, their father - into other women- had been gone for years - but then comes back. Russell brought back with him a backpack filled with cash.

With unrelenting poor living conditions--Gem 'especially' felt the burdens being the older sister from so much neglect and abandonment. She also remembers more... and is most suspicious of her father and his 'cash' when he returns.

Gem is a buffer - in ways for Dixie. They grew up in the same household- but felt things differently- and were different in personalities. However - they each must find ways to survive and cope.

Dixie tends to act older than she is - is more outgoing- flirtatious-and is aware of her beauty. Gem is more a loner. She is also often in her school counselors office - seeking advice.

In time... Gem convinces Dixie that they should split....leave their parents - leave their Seattle home - take their father's cash and just leave.

Survival only gets harder on the sisters adventure. These two sisters know each other and where they each came from better than anyone else in the world....

but they don't hold onto to each other as if they are all that matters.

They were taught 'disconnect'.....and in time that's what begins to happen to them: they disconnect.

There were some very realistic situations in the ways each sister responded to their mother. Dixie, the youngest got along with her mother --she wished for peace between her mom & Gem.

However... Gem carried the heavier baggage of knowledge of things that just were not right. The conflicts between the sisters - were in part - 'because' of there different ways of relating to their mother.

I thought of my older sister Gail. Gail is 5.5 years older than me. She was almost 10 when our father died. I followed her around like a favorite stuffed bunny whenever possible after our dad died. I loved everything about her...but she often bolted herself. She was angry at our mother's behavior... for leaving me home alone at night at 5.... and for not being a more 'cozy' type of mother. My sister was angry at my mom for not taking me to the doctor when I was sick. (and I turned out to be very sick in 8th grade).... My sister was mad at 'me' for defending mom - and not her. For not cooking...for lists of things. I was just sad that everyone was

leaving -or dying.

By age 15... my sister was almost never home. Our relationship suffered for many years. She was angry at me because I wasn't angry at our mother 'with' her. I didn't want to be angry at my mom. I figured I already loss a dad - and my sister was running away. I was hoping for 'somebody'.... even false hope was better than nothing. BUT ... years later - I fully understood things which my sister was dealing with - trying to be the adult - and getting no agreement or validation. It must have been the most lonely experience.

A few years after my marriage-- my sister and I began to 'returned' to each other. The day our mother died... [11 years ago]....my sister and I re-built our relationship. I held onto my sister - like a lifeline. I wanted my relationship with her more than ever.

She still was never able to forgive our mom... but she understands why I held on 'wanting' a mother - even if most would say she was unfit.

My sister and I ARE very close today. I treasure her more than life itself.

This book had 'many' of those same 'older/younger' sister elements I experienced ---

It's not an award Pulitzer Prize book - but for the 'sisters' of the world - it has elements in here which I think many will relate to. NOT PERFECT ... There are better written books- but--- I liked it for what it was!

This is a Young Adult book - heartfelt- tender. The resilience of Gem and Dixie is moving.

3.5

Thank You HarperCollins and Sara Zarr

Jessica says

Every new book by Sara Zarr I think, It's not possible, but this one was EVEN BETTER than the last one! So guess what? GEM & DIXIE was even better than the last one!

How does she keep doing it? Is it . . . a secret voodoo ritual? Do I even want to know? Nah. I will approve any black magic that continues to bring me books like these.

Also, every time she has tackled a topic that could be too sad, or too embarrassing, or simply too raw to make the book enjoyable. Like abuse, teen pregnancy, abduction, addiction, loss of faith, loss of family, loss of reputation. But, although she pulls no punches, and her books are incredibly naked and heartfelt, I've never thought, Whoa, she crossed a line! Or, I really hate this!

No, I love it. I laugh. I cry. I see myself and others that I know and love in her characters. She brings about understanding. She makes you see and feel what these lives are like, she makes you walk in these shoes that you never thought you would care about. In short, Sara has an amazing gift, and the fact that she is sharing that gift with the world is an amazing thing.

GEM & DIXIE is about sisters, and it's about childhood, and well, not having a childhood.

When is a kid considered "at risk?" When does the school qualify them as "in danger?" How bad do things have to be? What if you're not abused, what if you're not homeless, but you've just had enough? You're just close enough to poverty, you're just close enough to not having food, that you try and pretend things are okay, and the adults around you pretend it too? How long can a teen girl go, being the only one in the family

keeping it all together, before she cracks? What are the actual duties of a big sister, and how much of herself does she need to sacrifice?

This is a beautiful, fascinating look at these questions. I'm a little sister. I went to the book launch with my big sister. Our childhood looked nothing like the one in the book, yet I can see so much of myself in both these girls. This is a gorgeous, honest book, and one that I am pleased to tell you, also contains a great deal of hope.

Read this. Read it now. Then, if you haven't, go pick up literally any other Sara Zarr book. You're welcome.

may  says

full review posted

If I had judged this book based on the first few chapters, I would have instantly gave it 5 stars. Legit one of the greatest, most **realistic** contemporaries beginning I've read. ~~and then I reached the halfway mark and it all went downhill but shhhh, im trying not to think about that~~

Pros

- The first half of this book was absolutely incredible to me. Not only the amazingly realistic portrayal of neglect but also the characters were real as hell
- Take this quote for instance:

Sometimes, at our appointments, I'd tell him a lot, and it felt good in the moment, finally saying the things I'd had stuck in my head all that week. But then I'd be in bed those nights, and a smothering kind of panic would settle on me that I'd said too much. Like I'd given away something I needed and couldn't get back.

- Let's address the neglect part.
- So gem and dixie are sisters who have grown apart with age. Ever since their father left and their mother had to provide for them, they've been struggling in so many aspects, mainly finances i.e. there is NEVER food in their house and we see gem struggle with this right from the beginning
- **BUT WHAT'S AMAZING ABOUT THAT YOU ASK**
- Their mom isn't portrayed as a **demon, monster, evil witch lady** who hates their existence and purposely starves them and is totally unrealistic. NO. there are moments when she is so tender and caring for them and jokes around with her daughters that will momentarily see through her neglect and that just MAKES IT SO MUCH MORE REAL
- I love three dimensional characters and that's exactly what we got.
- Humans aren't one cut, good or bad, and seeing that in fiction makes me so fjdafhkafhkas
- We also got to see these kind of tendencies with their father tho it was easier to see through
- Moving on, there was no romance, which isn't really a pro or con for me, I don't mind either way but I found it quite refreshing to see in YA
- The sisterly relationship!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- The ending was realistic and positive and im very pleased with it

Cons

- So, after the second half mark, the book kinda went all over the place (in my honest opinion)
- Where the first half was very structured and easy to follow through, the second half left me feeling like 'whats the point this book is serving anymore?'
- That's never a good thing
- It just felt really disorganized and messy and unnecessary like I get the characters had to take certain actions but why'd it have to be so....monotone??
- Also a lot of the decisions they made were strange and irrational, which is expected from teenagers but it just felt like it didn't belong to the first half of the book ;-;
- It just wasn't a memorable book for me

In conclusion, dis a good book.

"Everything that happened. It was only because we wanted our parents to be better, to know how to take care of us."

3 stars!!
