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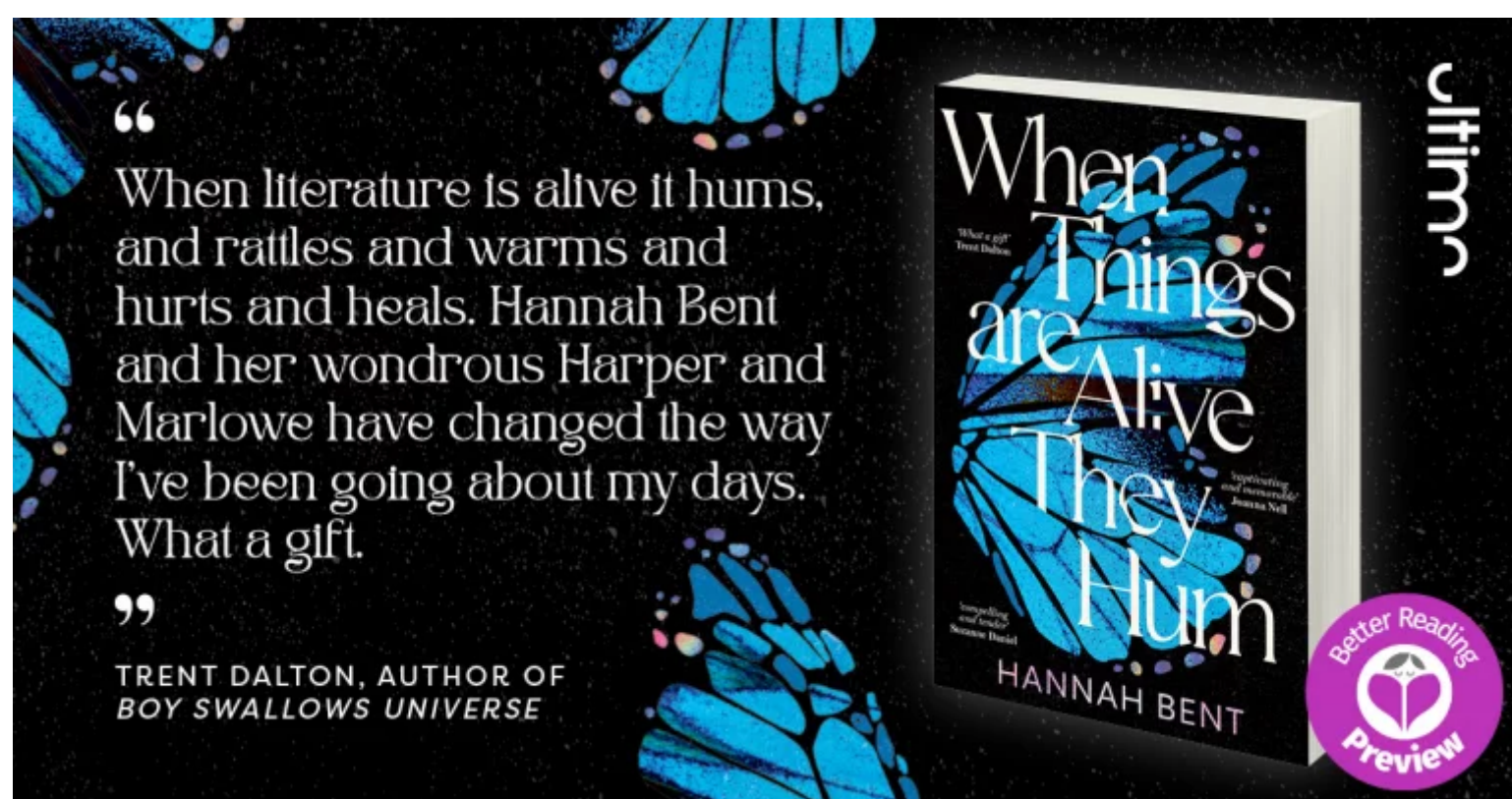
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**Review**

20 July 2021



Your Preview Verdict: When Things Are Alive They Hum by Hannah Bent



A beautiful, moving, wondrous celebration of life in the vein of *The Signature of All Things* and *My Sister's Keeper*.

Marlowe and Harper share a bond deeper than most sisters, shaped by the loss of their mother in childhood. For Harper, living with what she calls the Up syndrome and gifted with an endless capacity for wonder, Marlowe and she are connected by an invisible thread, like the hum that connects all things. For Marlowe, they are bound by her fierce determination to keep Harper, born with a congenital heart disorder, alive.

Now 25, Marlowe is finally living her own life abroad, pursuing her studies of a rare species of butterfly secure in the knowledge Harper's happiness is complete, having found love with boyfriend, Louis. But then she receives the devastating call that Harper's heart is failing. She needs a heart transplant but is denied one by the medical establishment because she is living with a disability. Marlowe rushes to her childhood home in Hong Kong to be by Harper's side and soon has to answer the question – what lengths would you go to save your sister?

When Things Are Alive They Hum poses profound questions about the nature of love and existence, the ways grief changes us, and how we confront the hand fate has dealt us. Intensely moving, exquisitely written and literally humming with wonder, it is a novel that celebrates life in all its guises, and what comes after.

[Our Previewers loved this book so much that we sent out more books to review! Click here to read Part 2 of this Preview.](#)

Read some great reviews from our Preview readers here:

This book was one of the most captivating, engaging and enthralling books that I've read in a long time. It's a beautiful and thought-provoking text that takes the reader into the hearts and minds of two sisters with contrasting expectations of life, and the imperatives of love. Falling in love with Marlowe and Harper, this novel screams love, truth and tenderness and is a must read. **Lisa, SA, 5 Stars**

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This is an absolutely delightful book, the bond between Marlowe and Harper was so lovely. The joy that Harper found in the ‘ordinary’ was truly special. I’ll never look at the ‘up’ syndrome the same again. Sad, moving and joyous, I highly recommend. **Leesy, NSW, 5 Stars**

Wow — Hannah Bent, welcome to the literary world. *When Things are Alive They Hum* is an exquisitely written debut novel that sings with lyrical prose and captures your heart in the most profound way from the moment you’re introduced to its two protagonists, sisters Harper and Marlowe. Harper has Down Syndrome and a congenital heart disease, yet her voice throughout really does “hum” with her love for life. She is an optimist and her joyous wonder for the world is contagious. Marlowe is studying abroad, but she carries with her the heavy burden of grief over the loss of her mother and the guilt at having left her beloved sister behind. The two are reunited when Harper’s heart deteriorates and Marlowe, faced with the cruel reality of her sister’s mortality, returns home to Hong Kong, determined to save her sister’s life no matter the cost... The softly woven, magical themes about the wonders of life and the beauty of the family unit keeps this book from drowning in heartache, and instead this story beautifully explores the love between two sisters — their unbreakable thread... and a “hum” that flutters gentle as a butterfly and yet pulsates as strong as a heartbeat. **Linda, QLD, 5 Stars**

A memorable moving book about two sisters and their different life expectations. It is raw and honest and one you will fall in love with. **Vanessa, NSW, 5 Stars**

Amazing read, incredible story, I couldn’t put this down. Loved it, and have recommended it to everyone I’ve spoken to. **Jessica, NSW, 5 Stars**

A beautifully written, moving, and deeply engaging book. Complex family relationships, questions of responsibility and choice, disability rights, medical ethics, pain and grief and joy ... *When Things Are Alive They Hum* covers some pretty deep (and heavy) themes, but does so with a profound sense of humanity that is at times gentle, at others devastating. The characters were beautifully drawn, and it’s exciting to see a character with a disability like Harper given such a rich, complex, nuanced voice. I very much enjoyed the characterisations of many of the minor characters, particularly Harper and Marlowe’s father; while told only in snippets through each daughter’s first-person narrative, there was a lot of depth and subtlety to so many of the characters which made the book a true joy to read. **Sylvia, QLD, 5 Stars**

I would recommend this book to everyone to read its a beautiful story. I picked it up and finished it all in a day. Such a sweet book, it played with my emotions towards the end. The relationship between the siblings and family after loss and how everyone deals differently. It shows just how sweet and sensitive people with a disability can be and how they understand the world and take in information around them. **Beth, TAS, 5 Stars**

OMG! This is honestly the most heartfelt book I have read in a long time. You will fall in love with Harper’s innocence and the magical lens through which she views the world. You will be torn by the desperation of Marlowe and the lengths to which she will go to save her younger sister. This book will make you reevaluate your own life and accept that there are some things that cannot be changed no matter how hard we fight, it also serves as a reminder to treasure the time we have with those who are most important to us. **Catherine, NSW, 5 Stars**

Thanks Better Reading Preview for the opportunity to review this ARC. Let me just say that I struggled with this book... I struggled to PUT IT DOWN!! I struggled to get to sleep at a reasonable hour, as I just wanted to keep reading. I was a bit taken aback by how much I actually enjoyed this book, particularly as a first novel. Job well done Hannah Bent. I look forward to your future work, although this will be a hard one to beat. For those who cherish family connections and appreciate disadvantage you will truly welcome this story in your life. Marlowe & Harper are characters you can’t help but fall in love with. Harper’s optimism and innocence is hard not to be humbled by. I only wish the story continued... I wanted to know more. **Angie, QLD, 5 Stars**

When Things Are Alive They Hum is one of the most unputdownable books I’ve read recently. I cried my eyes out throughout the book: with sadness and with gladness, with wonder at the deepest naïve truth and with reflection onto my own journey and obstacles. Moreover, I read this book in a day. I could not put it down. I loved every single word of it. The language is flowing, dancing, poetic – just like the flight of the butterfly. The characters: two sisters and their families are so tangible and real. Marlowe and Harper two sisters born to Chinese-English parents in Hong Kong, united by birth and love for each other, separated by life, prejudices and cruel reality of fate. Marlowe grows up into talented scientist but is brittle and fractured inside due to the loss of her mother and loving burden of her sister. Harper is born with Down Syndrome and heart problems. But she does not let anything or anyone put her down. Seeing the best in people and circumstances, finding wonder and magic in snowflakes and glitter, loving just like Juliet and hoping just like a naïve child Harper has a lesson or two to teach the strongest and the bravest among us. *When Things Are Alive They Hum* is one big book with even bigger message that goes right to the heart. Hannah Bent needs to be congratulated. **Svetlana, VIC, 5 Stars**

When Things are Alive They Hum is a novel which celebrates life and the special connection between sisters Marlowe and Harper. The story is told by the two sisters in alternating chapters, and throughout the book the author takes the reader back in time to recall relevant facts which have shaped the girls. Marlowe was just eight years old when her mother died, and she vowed to protect Harper

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the full and celebrating meaningful relationships. Thanks to Ultimo Press and Better Reading for the advanced reader copy in return for a review. **Lesley, NZ, 5 Stars**

What a truly moving debut novel by Hannah Bent. Harper is living with down or ‘up’ syndrome as she likes to call it and relies on the help of her sister when her heart starts to fail. Hannah is coming from a strong background of understanding Down syndrome as her own sister has it. A brilliant first novel to read, one I thoroughly enjoyed and read late into the night. Look out for this on shelves in August. **Claire, VIC, 5 Stars**

What a heartfelt story of love and loss. It was like a breath of fresh air reading of Harper’s journey throughout life. It certainly made my heart hum. Thank you for sharing your story. **Tracy, VIC, 5 Stars**

When Things Are Alive They Hum tells the story of sisters Marlowe, following her dream and studying in London and her much loved younger sister 20 year old Harper who lives in their family home in Hong Kong with her father and grandmother, Wai Po. Harper suffers from a congenital heart defect, that has been a constant in her life as part of her Downs Syndrome, though she much prefers to see it as Up Syndrome. Fiercely protective of Harper, Marlowe has made the move to London after Harper has found love with boyfriend Louis and has been relatively stable healthwise. A turn for the worse sees Marlowe leave her new life and love Ollie, to return home when the news comes that Harper needs a heart transplant to survive, but due to her Downs she is repeatedly rejected. Told from both sisters’ viewpoints, this is a beautiful story of the bond between sisters, it also poses profound questions of how society perceives the worth of an individual, what we would do to save someone we love. I absolutely loved the characters in this beautifully written novel. I am definitely keeping this advance reader copy! **Juanita, NSW, 5 Stars**

This book left me humming. I was torn between joy at the innocent subplot and ensuing fairytale and heartbreak that came with the realisation the fairy tale wasn’t forever. What a beautiful story told from the heart and perspective of someone who knows. Wonderful. Loved it and didn’t want it to end. **Shelagh, SA, 5 Stars**

From the very first page, this book touched my heart. Harper’s thoughts are so poetic and she has a uniquely beautiful way of thinking, that constantly brought a smile to my face. The special relationship she has with her sister Marlowe and the infinite love for those closest to her is awe inspiring. Heavy themes of grief, loss, living with disability and society’s prejudice towards people with disabilities are explored but this is balanced by the author’s exquisitely evocative language. The story is told from the alternating perspectives of Harper, who is living with Down Syndrome, or “Up Syndrome” as she has named it and her sister Marlowe, who promised their dying mother she would protect Harper. The book looks at the emotional burden to siblings of a person with a disability as Marlowe feels like she has to care for Harper and put her own life on hold to do this. *When Things Are Alive They Hum* was so utterly brilliant that it squeezed every bit of emotion out of me and left me sobbing with sadness and joy simultaneously. This story will stay with you long after the last word is read. **Brooke, VIC, 5 Stars**

When Things Are Alive They Hum, brings together the dynamics of love, life, family, disability and the remarkable bonds of sisterhood. Through the eyes of Harper and Marlowe the book comes alive. As a teacher of students with additional needs this story touched me and as each chapter unfolded I became more and more outraged of how people are treated in society. As I work in the area of disability I could relate on a personal level and I become angry as the characters did throughout the book. Harper supplied excellent insight into the challenges faced by all those who are not considered ‘normal’ in this ‘perfect world’. It examines the right to self-determination and self-advocacy and illustrates to us how often this is ignored. Secrets are held from the most important people in everyone’s lives, family and friends. If they would just open up to each other and share the pain, life would be so much easier. Incredible and brilliant journey as we read about two sisters that embark on a passage of self-discovery. With an ending that was unexpected and left me wanting more... **Kerry, VIC, 5 Stars**

This book is about many types of love, what it means to love and be loved, understanding and accepting love, and what lengths you would go to to protect the ones you love. Predominantly it is the love of two sisters, and the choices they make as one of them is dying. Told from each of their points of view, this book makes you consider both sides of the story. The emotions depicted feel genuine and will pull at your heart strings. This is a fantastic read. The story of Harper and Marlowe comes alive on the page and “hums” around in your head and heart for days to come. Thoroughly recommend. **Samantha, QLD, 5 Stars**

Hannah Bent’s debut novel will make your heart sing. It is the story of Harper and Marlowe, two sisters, brought up in Hong Kong. Harper has down syndrome which she calls ‘Up syndrome’ and lives in her happy place where she is full of positivity and acceptance of others moods and needs. Marlowe follows an emotional rollercoaster in an effort to save her sister when Harper becomes gravely ill due to her congenital heart disease. This book is thought provoking as the story is told by both sisters in a way that the reader clearly sees the different needs of both Harper and Marlowe. I feel this book has helped me be more understanding of the wants and needs of my elderly parents. Thank you to Ultimo Press and Better Reading for an advance copy in exchange for my review. **Vicki, QLD, 5 Stars**

Could not put this book down. I love the way each sister had a chapter each, back and forward though the whole book telling their own story. It gave me an insight into the mind of a Down Syndrome child. An experience money can’t buy. **Karen, QLD, 5 Stars**

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they made me smile, laugh and gave me all the feels. This book really makes you appreciate the little things in life and to hold close your nearest and dearest. I can't fault this book, I absolutely loved it and I highly recommend it. **Danielle, VIC, 5 Stars**

This was a beautifully written book. This was the story of Harper, young girl with a sick heart, and her sister, Marlowe, who does everything in her power to save her sister from death. Harper's view and take on the world, life and death are truly beautiful. She sees beauty in everything all around her. It is a powerful story of love, grief and life in general. Following Harper's thinking we should all stop and listen to the hum of life while we can. I would recommend this book. **Renee, QLD, 5 Stars**

Deep, heavy going, brutal, life changing, I don't have a sister and makes me wonder what life would have been like with one. Don't binge through it, devour every page, every word, read a chapter and let it sink in. **Louise, NSW, 5 Stars**

Hannah Bent's writing in *When Things are Alive They Hum* is superb! The story will "hum" in your head and in your heart for days. It is a raw and empathetic exploration of family, grief and sisterly love. It offers both heartache and despair but also joy and strength. The story tells of the relationship between two sisters, Marlowe and Harper and how they ensure much more than the usual. It is told from the perspective of each sister with alternating chapters. I found this style helped me form a appreciation for each sister individually and consequently understand both of their personalities and accept their different thoughts and feelings. Marlowe and Harper each have their own expectations of life and it is touching to examine the reasons behind their difference viewpoints. It is more than a work of fiction because the story comments quite strongly on issues of discrimination, acceptance, disability, loss, grief and equality. It explores how issues can change us and how people confront the hand of fate that is delivered to us. It is an intensely moving, beautifully written and emotional read that really is a celebration of sisterly love. **Samantha, QLD, 5 Stars**

I cannot recommend this book enough. This story was a lesson in gratitude, optimism and hope. Fans of Jodie Picoult will love this book. Thank you for such a wonderful novel Hannah Bent...you made me laugh and cry all at the same time. **Justine, NSW, 5 Stars**

As I began reading *When Things Are Alive They Hum* by Hannah Bent my heart was captivated by such a diverse and expressive literary trip which took me on a journey of love, the importance of family and bonds/connections between people. It was engaging and fascinating while being deep and moving showing hardships and determination. The themes I could imagine from the descriptive nature and each character played such an important role throughout – the book allowed us to wonder, explore and left me on the edge of my seat ready and keen to turn the next page. It is a masterpiece, I highly recommend and I know reading it has truly changed my life. **Kylie, QLD, 5 Stars**

I loved this book! It was so engaging and heart wrenching, I read it in a day. I could not put it down. I was angry and sad and frustrated and heart broken all at the same time. What an awesomely real and moving tale. Loved it. **Sheridan, SA, 5 Stars**

I was lucky enough to be given an advance reading copy of this stunning novel. Born with Down Syndrome, which is a serious fault in China (or Karma as one neighbour reckons) Harper's views of the world is magic. She calls it Up Syndrome and pretty much sees the good thing in the people around her and life in general. Her relationship with Louis is fairy tale like. She understands his requirements and their love is simple and beautiful. They love each other so do anything to make each other happy. Harper's sister Marlowe leaves England to be with her little sister and then gets sucked into a downward spiral by trying to get Harper a transplant in China, as Hong Kong hospitals will not consider Harper for this treatment due to her life expectancy. Marlowe is consumed by saving her sister, even trying to buy a heart and lung transplant from an executed prisoner, ignoring Harper's wishes that she wants to keep the plum heart she's got. Wonderful writing, what an uplifting book. **Sandra, NSW, 5 Stars**

When Things Are Alive They Hum is a story about two sisters, Harper and Marlowe and the love and bond they share. The story is so moving and captivating. I absolutely devoured this book and can not praise Hannah Bent enough for forever having an impact on me with this beautifully written story. **Trudy, SA, 5 Stars**

I picked up this book and was taken into a world of both heartache and wonder. Sisters Marlowe and Harper share a deep connection. Marlowe has left their home in Hong Kong to pursue studies in the UK. Harper, born with a congenital heart defect, lives with their father and 'stepmonster'. Marlowe returns home when she receives the news that Harper's heart is failing. She will do anything, everything she can to save Harper. Harper is ruled ineligible for a heart transplant because of her disability, but Marlowe cannot accept this. Marlowe and Harper tell their story in alternate chapters. Marlowe's distress is heightened by Harper's quite different perspective and her wonder about the world. Harper has a story to tell, of life with what she calls 'Up Syndrome'. She and boyfriend Louis have their own special place in the world. This is a beautifully written story, which demonstrates both the power of love and the need for acceptance. **Jennifer, ACT, 5 Stars**

When Things are Alive they Hum is a moving story that touched my heart beyond belief. Marlowe and Harper are sisters. Their connection is beautiful and their love for one another is strong. Hannah Bent's writing is superb. The story is told from the perspective of each sister and allows the reader to closely understand the characters' thoughts and feelings. In reading Harper's words, I gained an understanding of how this young girl with down syndrome and a congenital heart disorder lives out her daily life. Harper is extraordinary. Her love for life, her family and her boyfriend is pure. Harper is an inspiring character; how she views the world. Readers

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What a beautifully written book! I thoroughly enjoyed this book which took me on an emotional journey reflecting on my own relationships in my family. The bond of siblings is truly a gift and the author has perfectly captured this, along with the struggles life can thrust upon us. This was an absolute pleasure to read. **Emma, QLD, 5 Stars**

Beautiful Hannah Bent has written a truly beautiful book. This story is about sisters Marlowe and Harper and the love they share for each other. Harper is very sick and needs a heart transplant and Marlowe goes to extraordinary lengths to try and save her. The ending is so touching with Harper and Louis (no spoilers), truly beautiful. **Deborah, NSW, 5 Stars**

What a powerful book, I work in disability so this was a powerful read and heartfelt book to read. Please take the time to read this amazing book. **Yvonne, VIC, 5 Stars**

Amazing story, the book had me blown away from beginning to end. It was an incredible story of the bond between two sisters, I had this tale stay with me for days after I finished it. Highly recommend. **Jessica, NSW, 5 Stars**

Oh my goodness, what a beautiful book this is. The relationship between Marlowe and Harper is loving and sweet and endures more than sisters should. The story is told in alternating chapters from each sister’s viewpoint. Harper has Down Syndrome, and the cultural issues this raises being Chinese and living in Hong Kong, are handled with grace. The way Harper sees the world is so pure and refreshing. This is a beautifully written book that had me from page one. **Michele, NSW, 5 Stars**

It’s heartbreaking and will leave you traumatised but a fantastic read. **Penny, NSW, 4 Stars**

A considerate story that encourages us to stop for a moment and listen carefully to the beating heart of life or ‘hum’, this is a unique read. Following the lives of two sisters, who at first seem very different, but they are clearly in tune with one another implicitly, Bent’s debut leaves an impression on the reader. Providing commentary on intellectual disability, terminal illness, heart disorders, transplant procedures, love, friendship, family tensions, grief, loss, sisterhood, care, ethics, morality and mortality, Bent’s novel is a stimulating read. The shadow of the Hong Kong backdrop draws in influences such as authority, culture, society, morals, laws and economics, exposing a flawed system where to save the person you love, you ultimately need to sell your soul. For me, the stark contrast between the two very different sisters made this book a very special read. I loved Marlowe’s viewpoint, loyalty to her sister and passion for her studies in the rare butterfly species field. Harper is a remarkable woman who sees her ‘up syndrome’ as an opportunity to share her wide eyed and infectious love of life, her family, friends and partner, until the very end of this sad but uplifting tale. **Amanda, WA, 4 Stars**

A story which asks confronting questions about love, existence and how we handle challenging situations. This a story of 2 sisters, one with a disability, and how they handle challenging situations and the impact of the decisions made. A beautiful story. **Heather, NSW, 4 Stars**

This book was quite an emotional one. The two main characters are great. The writing of the book is very poetic and rhythmical, which is probably why it has its name! Its great that a person who has a disability is one of the main characters, and the book highlights the challenges people can go through with a disability. The challenges are even harder when you are looked down on in other countries which have different social attitudes. This book is a great book everyone should read, but it is also a tough book on your emotions, so have some tissues on the side. **Ray, WA, 4 Stars**

This was such a lovely book. Tender and heart-warming, *When Things Are Alive They Hum* is a moving story that touches on issues of disability, grief, love, family, discrimination, equality and acceptance. Told from the perspectives of two sisters, Harper and Marlowe, the story centres around the devastating illness of one of the sisters and the lengths you would go to for family and those you love. Haunted by the death of their mother in childhood, Marlowe relives the memories of her past and learns to deal with her emotions and grief when reunited with her family after studying abroad. Her sister, Harper, a young girl with Down Syndrome (Up Syndrome as she calls it), has been battling a heart condition her whole life but has such a magical and positive outlook on the world and the reader gets a beautiful glimpse into her thoughts and feelings. The sisters love and strong bond with one another is highlighted throughout the story and we are shown their journey together as they navigate love, loss and life. Beautifully written and an uplifting story, filled with love and hope. This page turning novel kept me reading and engaged in what would unfold for these sisters. The characters draw you in and you can relate to the dilemma Marlowe is faced with in wanting to save her sister. The short chapters and writing style made it an easy read, which meant I flew through the book. Highly recommend. **Melissa, VIC, 4 Stars**

This book was both beautiful and challenging. It took you through the complex relationship between two sisters journeying through grief of their mother and how this impacts on critical decision making. Harper who has Down Syndrome (or should we say up syndrome) & Marlowe (a PhD student living internationally) grapple to find out what life means to each other and when to let go of what we may think of as love. **Nicole, VIC, 4 Stars**

What a beautiful story. I loved the connection of the sisters but felt the heartbreak of Marlowe trying to keep it all together but respecting Harper’s wishes. I loved Harper’s writing, her words were innocent but so true in what she was feeling about what she wanted, what she didn’t want and how she was feeling. A lovely story about three generations and how honesty and kindness can

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A powerful and at times heart-breaking story of the special bond between two sisters. Marlowe and Harper have been through a lot together and think they understand each other perfectly. But do they? I found this book a joy to read even though there were quite a few tears shed along the way. It provided a new awareness to the challenges, insight and depth of love of a delightful Downs Syndrome young woman living in Hong Kong and made me question how far I would go for my own sisters. As well as inspiring me to find a recipe for egg tarts! **Jodi, QLD, 4 Stars**

A beautiful story about sisters having very different lives but just how strong their love is and what lengths they will go to for each other. It was hard to put down and I really enjoyed the way it was told back and forth from each of the sister's viewpoints. Needed the tissues in a few places. A really good read. **Katrina, VIC, 4 Stars**

The story explores the bond between two sisters – Marlowe and Harper, in the context of the lengths we go and the sacrifices we make to protect those we love. The story is told alternately by Marlowe and Harper and the style of narrative gives us a deep insight into each of these characters, their strengths, their fears and their personal challenges. Marlowe has been a fierce protector of Harper since the age of 8, when their mother died and their father became emotionally distant through his struggle with grief. Harper has high functioning Down syndrome and the chapters narrated by Harper are heart-warming. She has a wonderfully positive outlook on life and she sees the beauty in everything and everyone around her. Harper's situation makes us think about the right of individuals with disabilities to be heard when it comes to medical decisions, quality of life decisions and end of life decisions. A thoroughly enjoyable and thought provoking read. **Bree, NSW, 4 Stars**

An extraordinary tale of the fragility and preciousness of life told in the voices of two vastly different sisters. The fact that Harper insists that she has Up not Down Syndrome speaks volumes about the optimistic and poetic way she sees and describes the world around her despite her declining health. In contrast Marlowe, a prominent scientist studying endangered butterfly species, is anxious and hell bent on helping save her sister's life even if her schemes go against Harper's wishes. The author, who's sister in real life has Down Syndrome, is teaching us an important lesson here about the rights of those with different abilities and how their beliefs and wishes are often not valued or acknowledged. Both sisters are involved in loving relationships with their long-suffering loves, Olly and Louis, patiently navigating their way through these difficult times. The gentle pace of the book picks up tempo when Marlowe, going against the wishes and advice of all those around her, takes the situation into her own hands and with her steely determination places herself and Harper in a perilous situation. This book will take you on ride which will linger long in your thoughts after reading the final page. **Michelle, VIC, 4 Stars**

This was a lovely book. There are a lot of raw emotions on display, as we navigate some challenging family situations. There are some interesting insights into the thought processes of both Harper and Marlowe when faced with illness and mortality. It is a book which inspires much consideration, long after the reader has finished reading. Well worth reading. **Karen, VIC, 4 Stars**

Marlowe and Harper share a bond deeper than most sisters after losing their mother during childhood. Harper having been born with what she calls Up Syndrome and a congenital heart disease. for Marlowe they are bound by her determination to keep her sister alive. Marlowe has taken on the responsibility of he younger sister and now at age 25 is finally living her own life abroad. But then she receives the devastating news that Harper's heart is failing and she needs a heart transplant. Marlowe rushes home to be by her sister's side. This is an enjoyable, easy read, tinged with love, sadness, beauty and humour. Harper is a delight. **Carolyn, WA, 3 Stars**

So picking up this book, the title made it sound like one style of story, however, once I began reading through the pages, it was clear it wasn't anything like I thought it would be. Two sisters, bonded by indiscriminate and unconditional love for one another, tell their own story of how life travels a very difficult path, when one has Down Syndrome or 'Up Syndrome' as Harper calls it. With their mum passing away and a dad doing all he can to give them a good life, Marlowe and her sister Harper, tell their own life stories throughout the book revealing how each others lives have impacted their own. The pages read of sorrow, heartache, desperation and most definitely love at its greatest. I felt that the style in which Harpers character was written, was really well done, realistic and true. ***When Things are Alive They Hum*** was an easy read, not something I would choose from the bookstore shelf, but it had its warm and fuzzy and its what will happen next moments, which kept me turning the pages. **Suzie, WA, 3 Stars**

Marlowe has a younger sister, Harper, who was born with a disability and a medical condition which sets the storyline. They love each other unconditionally. Marlowe will do anything to keep her sister from succumbing to her health problems, whilst Harper, aware of her condition and in love, doesn't want interference from anyone in her family despite all the good intentions. The book is written through the minds and eyes of both girls, with a lot of reminiscing about their mother, what they are currently experiencing, and what will eventually be their future. **Marice, NSW, 3 Stars**

I loved Harper and enjoyed everything from her perspective – poetic, real and beautiful, if only we were all like her. I enjoyed this as a debut novel however at times felt the story line suffered and left me feeling I wanted it to flow together better than it did. **Debbie, VIC, 3 Stars**



**WHEN THINGS
ARE ALIVE THEY HUM**
Hannah Bent



Marlowe is concerned when a courier, instead of the post, delivers a letter in the early morning cold of London. It's from her sister, Harper, in Hong Kong. Upon reading the letter Marlowe's sense of dread is confirmed. Harper is sick again, her heart is failing her.

Harper was born with Down syndrome and a congenital heart disorder. Marlowe promised their dying mother that she would always look after Harper. Quashing the guilt that she was born healthy, that life was a myriad of possibilities denied to her sister. Marlowe looked after Harper until Louis came into Harper's life. Louis also has Down syndrome and is Harper's 'love of her heart'. With Louis' arrival, Marlowe moved to London to complete her PhD, leaving Harper in the care of her father, grandmother, 'stepmonster', and Louis.

Until the letter, Harper had led an ambulatory life of travel back and forth between home and hospitals, but she always pulled through. But now her condition and heart are both failing and, because of the Down syndrome, four hospitals have refused to even add Harper to the transplant list. Marlowe, plagued by her promise to her mother, decides that the only possible chance Harper has is to obtain a heart on the black markets in China. Diving into this dark world alone, Marlowe is so deep and lost, she is drowning, no longer able to see the surface, and yet she is Harper's only chance.

The narrative structure alternates between the two sisters' perspectives. The chapters are short, enabling the story to move at a fast pace, drawing attention to the urgency of Harper's condition. It also dips back in time providing history of the sisters when they were young, and their powerful bond.

Harper is the star of the novel. She has a beautiful, simplistic, innocent look at life. She sees the positive in every situation, changing the word 'Down' to 'Up' syndrome. We realise that Harper understands everything that is happening. Marlowe sums up Harper in two simple sentences, 'You are magic. Very few people will ever be able to see the world like you do.'

Harper may have Up syndrome, but she sees the world, and everything in it, the way we would all love to. Sometimes the brightest stars burn out the quickest. A simply beautiful novel.

★★★★★ BC Ultimo Press \$32.99

Reviewed by Neale Lucas

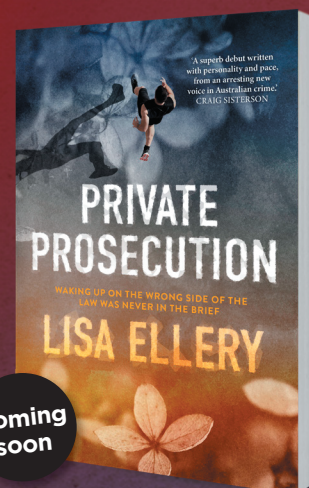
RIVETING READS



When Australian expat Simone moves to London to start a career, having a baby is not on her agenda. Now a new mum fighting sleep deprivation and a rising sense of unease, Simone begins to question the motives of a house guest who overstays her welcome.

**'So intense that you
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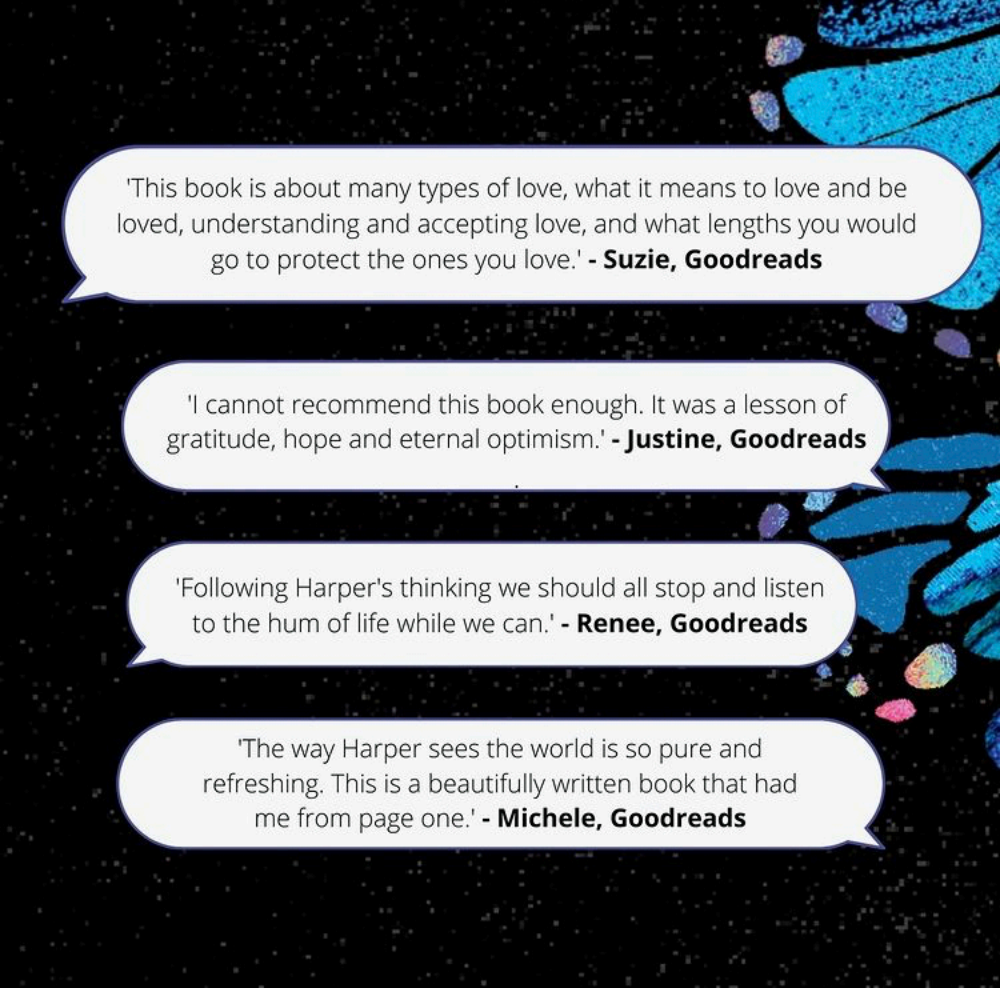
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