

# BOOK THOUGHTS

BATCH 18  
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BY LINDSAY WINCHERAUK  
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**BLUE = MEMOIR OR BIOGRAPHICAL**

**BLACK = FICTION**

**DARK RED = EDUCATIONAL**

**PURPLE = ESSAY OR STORIES**

**ORANGE = POETRY**

## BLUE SKY KINGDOM

BRUCE KIRKBY



*I fear for humanity. What are we racing toward?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

In “Blue Sky Kingdom,” Bruce Kirkby + his family take us on a breathtaking visceral ride into an accelerating world that is wiping out centuries of love + caring and perhaps, a better way of living.

Poverty isn’t a thing if everyone is living the same impermanent life. A blistering reality of ‘ways of life’ being erased by progress.

But you can’t stop progress – nobody wants to – there is no rewind button on the human race – it is an opaque fantasy few

of us are blessed with the opportunity to experience what was, and could be, for a better world.

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Thankfully, Bruce + Christine (Bodi + Taj) gave us a glimpse into a disappearing world – an unsustainable olden-world.

Kirkby’s family’s journey is unfathomable for most, fascinating – and hopefully, it doesn’t prompt other adventures to duplicate it.

Perhaps, we need to allow these centuries-old civilizations to live out their remaining time in the calmness and the impermanence the Kirkby family were fortunate to see firsthand.

The best thing the rest of the world could do for the Himalayas and Buddhism is just let it be.

On a personal note, the past week has been horrific. On December 12, as I was fighting back the emotions of the anniversary of my mum (Rebekah) dying, my last living sister (Sadie) died – “Blue Sky Kingdom” allowed me to escape my emotional turmoil for a much-needed break from my tears.

*That’s how the book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: December 17, 2021

## BEFORE THE COFFEE GETS COLD

TOSHIKAZU KAWAGUCHI



*Are you okay?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*Are you okay?*

I'm not. For the last two years, a seemingly endless torrent of challenges has been threatening to submerge me. For many, the previous two years have been harsh.

*Are you okay?*

A few days ago, a friend asked me those three words. My friend wasn't looking for me to pour my heart out. Nor did I want to. My friend simply noticed pain resting in my tired eyes, and acknowledged my upset, letting me know it's okay, not to be okay. For the rest of that day, I felt less alone.

**Before the Coffee Get's Cold** is a collection of four stories delicately interwoven together. The characters grow on every page. Toshikazu Kawaguchi deftly weaves these stories together, sharing the absolute beauty living within vulnerability, allowing us to stop (especially men) feigning strength by hiding inside the comedy of anguish. Kawaguchi's beautiful prose brought tears to my eyes on several occasions. Not tears of suffering. Instead, tears filled with hope because if we make minor changes to the lenses, we look at life through, we just might understand, the world is at times filled with love, empathy, kindness, and compassion.

This is one of my favourite books, a delightful read.

*That's how the book made me feel.*

*Are you okay?*

WRITTEN: November 30, 2021

# THE UNRAVELLING

DONNA BESEL



*Powerful. Upsetting. Important. Comforting.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

**Donna**

I hate your father. Long before he became a sick man and died, he was a sick, diseased man. It is a fine line between diminishing his vile actions by letting him off the hook with ill and diseased, and justice. I hope others hating him brings you solace and allows your energies to move toward warmer thoughts. When someone hurts me, loving friends do the hating for me – allowing me to pause.

I'm appalled at the disgusting behaviour of some of your family, who hid behind the insipidness of denial. Not only downplaying the impact on you but not understanding your lecherous father + enabling stepmother will haunt them for life, regardless of every "it's in the past" or "I choose to move forward." Those burdened in repudiation don't seem to understand you can't wash sexual assault away by closing minds. I was particularly disgusted by those whose lameness shone clearly in "I'm not as strong as you." Please.

A suitcase is delivered. *Every denial, blaming the times, not allowing you, the assaulted to express their tumult, specific dates on the calendar, fill the suitcase to the bursting point.* When we lose the safety of home coupled with being *ostracized by family, isolation, depression, suicidal thoughts, and fear of speaking up,* often arise. Delivering the ostracized and assaulted to silence when they most need to speak. The cruelty of dismissiveness permits the assault to live on in perpetuity. It's cruel. There is no closure. There is only heartache.

The suitcase begins to burst. How do we move on? We must.

I thank you for having the courage to share your story. I feel your pain. I do not understand the physical violence of sexual assault, but I know what being an outcast from family feels like. It's debilitating.

Your words will help many.

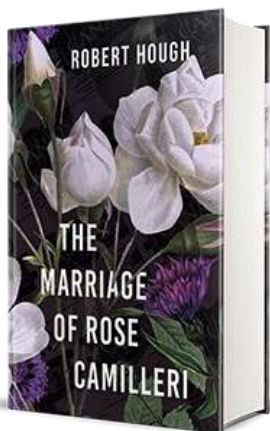
**Hugs**

*That's how this book made me feel.*

WRITTEN: November 25, 2021

## THE MARRIAGE OF ROSE CAMILLERI

ROBERT HOUGH



*Darn, it, I'm a grown man, why am I crying?*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

The first two-hundred pages of *"The Marriage of Rose Camilleri"* by Robert Hough are delightful. Scotty + Rose are an unlikely pair stapled together in a broken night of intimacy. We follow them on a journey through insecurity and unfulfilled desires as they attempt to piecemeal a life together.

There are sprinklings of subtly nuanced humour throughout the pages, instilling comforting tenderness in the reader's hearts. As more of their tumult and mundane existences are revealed, the pages begin to turn themselves as it becomes impossible not to find yourself in their struggles.

I arrive at the last fifty pages. I'm reading in an almost empty food court. Only one other table is occupied. A page turns. A tear rolls down my cheek. I'm transported to the day my (grand)father died; my (grand)mother reached for his hand, when they touched, he took his last gasp of life and for the first time, I saw how much they were in love. Another page and find myself alongside my (grandmother) the night before she died; she pulled me close and whispered into my ear *"Goodbye."*

Another page turns. I'm on a train with Rose + Scotty, their children, and a collection of strangers. Tears are pouring from my eyes. I can't breathe. I can't consume another word; I look over at the other patron of the food court—I need her to leave. She pulls on her Covid-mask. *Please leave.* She pulls down her Covid-mask; I weep. Finally, she leaves. I'm too heartbroken to finish. I don't want to finish.

There is a beauty that comes from the boring mundaneness of living when somehow, despite all odds, love is allowed to grow when unburdened by condition.

I finished the book the following morning. The tears returned. *Darn it, I'm a grown man.*

My heart warms. Love is possible.

*That's how this book made me feel.*

**Definitely Top 5!**

WRITTEN: November 18, 2021

# PACHINKO

MIN JIN LEE



*Devastating.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*Today I'm going to try to find the courage to phone my last remaining sister, who's dying, to say goodbye + to ask her if she can tell me who my birth father is?*

I know I will shake during the call. I will cry after.

What does this have to do with Pachinko?

*Everything.*

*"Pachinko"* by Min Lin Lee is an epic tale of culture + the devastation patriarchal societies has levelled on an infinite number of families since the beginning of time.

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Two women (Sunja + Kyunghee), burdened by the unbearable weight of being, forced to fight for every ounce of life – when their lives are shaded in a shame bestowed upon them by those controlling the narrative: men, and in this case, the oppression of Japan over Korea. It could easily be one neighbourhood versus another. History is governed by those dictating the times. The bleeping times.

The problem is when everything starts with a lie, no hiding, or denial, or the propensity to hide behind the shallow veil of deception – could possibly heal the suffering of those living the truth. Everything from the inception of the untruth (an unwed mother giving birth) is connected, and regardless of the well-meant intentions and their denial in believing they are doing the right thing – is nothing more than selfish.

I don't feel bad for Sunja + Kyunghee, and as much as I cannot understand the times – *I can* – or every decision they made was rooted in love, it wasn't. It was rooted in selfishness and shame, resulting in, at times, tragic consequences.

When life starts off with a lie, the lifelong pursuit of happiness becomes elusive.

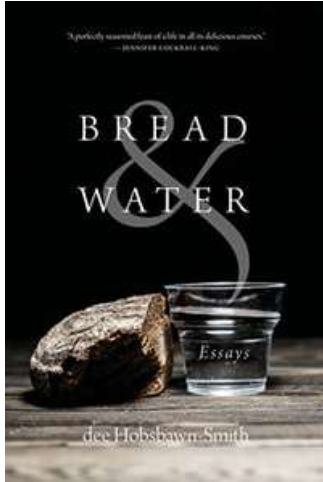
*I'm sixty-one. Today I'm phoning my dying sister to ask her who my father is?*

*"Pachinko,"* for me, was a devastating, heart-wrenching read.

WRITTEN: November 10, 2021

# BREAD & WATER

DEE HOBSBAWN SMITH



*I swear I could smell the aromas wafting from the pages.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

I turned sixty-one this July. OMG. At the start of Covid, my lengthy career had been subtracted from my life as greed + entitlement placed me on the chopping block and fired me out into the aether, forcing a late (mid) life reinvention. Fortunately for me, I write. At sixty-one, my life experiences are all I have – I must share them.

Thankfully, Hobsbawn-Smith has chosen to share as well. A remarkable thing happens when you aren't born into privilege and entitlement – you must become well-rounded. It torments you from time to time as it can feel rudderless, but it's not.

*"Bread + Water"* is a collection of essays from Hobsbawn-Smith's life, but it's not; it's much more. It is a memoir inviting readers into a life full of love, challenge, understanding, kindness, and hope. It shares Hobsbawn-Smith's beautifully visceral vulnerability, with the words singing off every page with her effortless command of vocabulary, not a single word out of place. With each page turned, whether riding in the vestibule of a railcar or searching for a beloved pet, I could not help but feel I was inside the page myself. When the author writes about food, I swear I could smell the aromas wafting from the pages, causing my mouth to water.

Mothers nurture us, nourish us, and help us become who we are, but in a misogynistically conditioned world, must overcome much, at one time allowed to be cooks, not chefs – unfair, cruel, needing to change by starting a dialogue.

I thank Hobsbawn-Smith for sharing her journey, in this glorious story with love emanating every step, run, ride, along the way.

I turned sixty-one in July. Hobsbawn-Smith and I are in the same demographic as we drive down the grid roads of life, tires crackling, what's behind us simmering in the rear-view mirror is a warm broth as we reduce the regret and work toward reinventing whatever comes next, trying to make the world a little better along the way.

I am not a good cook or even a cook at all, but I leave the author an open invitation to dine with me the next time she's in Vancouver. I'll try; all she has to do is enjoy. I'm no James Barber.

*"Bread + Water"* will leave readers, all readers, pondering what matters in life: love, kindness, humanity, and the necessity to respect the planet we are revolving on together.

WRITTEN: October 29, 2021



# IN SINGING HE COMPOSED A SONG

JEREMY STEWART



*A powerful look at the damages caused by labels.*

*How did the book make me feel/think?*

*“In Singing - He Composed a Song” is a lyrically beautiful, experimentally dark, short book hitting heavy themes.*

John is a child, fifteen-years old. Gifted. Disturbed. Not from entitlement. Those tasked with looking out for him judge him because of where (?) he’s from, watching him through a clouded lens. He’s labelled. The labels adhesive is unbreakable. He’s institutionalized, deemed a hazard to himself and to others. *He’s just a child.* We’ve all appallingly whispered gossip about those like him we’ve encountered in our lives. The labelling for him and those like him follow them throughout life as rumours like a violent tornado swirled only a few steps behind. He doesn’t have a chance.

My mum was labelled an unfit mother by religion + community. Her label was slapped firmly on her when she was forced to birth me in a place of disgrace, sanctioned by religion, where the unfit mothers (out of wedlock) gave birth, only to have their babies ripped out of their arms and then adopted out or sold – if the babies survived. The mums were to be fixed to become marriageable. The babies were never to be spoken of again.

I found out by accident, at age forty-three, my mum, who I had watched die when I was twenty-seven, wasn’t my birth mother, and my birth mum, the one labelled unfit, had hung out in the background of my life, playing a different role.

In 2016, alongside my birth mother’s deathbed, my mum told me, *the night before they were coming to take me away, she pleaded with my mum(grand) to keep me.* My labelled unfit mum lived with the burden of the secret her whole life – my entire family did. And I have now lived with the label of being a child whose birth brought shame, ever since.

A label’s adhesive is corrosive. It eats away at those of us who’ve been labelled, following vehemently behind.

For me, when I mention my story to others, I am often met with, *“It was the times”* or *“A lot of people were adopted”* or *“A lot of people come from screwed up families.”*

*“Shut up”* would be kinder.

*“In Singing - He Composed a Song” is a powerful look at the damage labels cause. For those of us who are labelled, how could we ever be, okay?*

WRITTEN: October 20, 2021