

Breathings of the Moon

Byrd Nash

Rook and Castle Press

(290pp)

978-1-954811-32-4

Breathings of the Moon features fraught family dynamics, magical abilities, and those lost to history.

A wayward daughter works to uncover the truth about her family in Byrd Nash's steady novel *Breathings of the Moon*.

Zoe heads home to help her brother investigate their mother's death. Her desire to learn more about the woman whom she last saw as a child is tempered by her complicated feelings toward the rest of the family. For generations, they have lived in the same sleepy seaside town, serving as its protectors. They have magical abilities to read minds and charm others. In private, Zoe struggles to reconcile with those who love and suffocate her in equal measure.

The novel is moved along by a creeping sense that Zoe's family legacy is more than it seems. Zoe's search is further complicated by a handsome stranger who also seems to be investigating the family. Themes about women being erased from their rightful places in stories, about the ways families hurt one another, and of the supernatural make the novel rich and reflective.

Zoe is an endearing heroine who's driven by her connections to others, including the mother she lost. She works to reconcile her experiences with her family to her love for them. To solve the central mystery, she has to understand how her family members hurt themselves and each other and how their story is complicated by magic. There is a well-rounded list of suspects and multiple twists that complicate and refresh her investigation. Further, Zoe's position as both an outsider and a part of the family helps her to see people's motives with greater clarity.

At points, elements of the story are neglected, though, making some developments feel sudden, as with new details about how the family's magic works. Further, abrupt references to sexual and physical abuse and to Zoe's mental health struggles interrupt the book's momentum. Still, all comes together in the end, when Zoe's storyline is linked to her family's past in a way that strengthens the book's themes of change and reconciliation. The jumps through generations and timelines are made more navigable thanks to the family tree and maps at the beginning of the book.

In the exhilarating mystery novel *Breathings of the Moon*, a daughter pieces together her family history, exploring loss and the redemptive power of love.

KATHERINE WOODS (February 11, 2025)

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