

What Remains of Elsie Jane

Chelsea Wakelyn

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In Chelsea Wakelyn's discerning novel *What Remains of Elsie Jane*, a widow explores single motherhood—and the possibility of interdimensional travel.

After her husband Sam's sudden passing, Elsie becomes robotic, rotating through her motherly duties, crying in the office bathroom, and talking to ghosts. Her resentment over Sam's alcoholism and deception creeps into her routine, too. She is depressed, sleeping most of the day, and just managing to provide for her children. She sleeps with old acquaintances and joins a myriad of dating applications to fill the lover-sized hole in her life.

During her insomniac nights, Elsie reads emails Sam sent to her throughout their relationship; these become windows into the couple's lives. Then she becomes obsessed with an unknown woman's death on the same day that Sam died; she begins to think that the woman is her, from another timeline. Elsie seeks the help of a wizard to be her timeline travel guide in the hopes of convincing Sam to attend rehabilitation.

The novel handles the complexities of grief through sarcasm and Elsie's personal thoughts as she attempts to regain control of her life. Its narrative is internalized; Elsie has few conversations with others while she deals with her personal and emotional obstacles. Indeed, it's her obsession with her fantasy that helps Elsie to stay afloat. The potential of having Sam back in her life—of embarking on a different, healthier path—allows her to make dinner for her children and return to work, but it is still false. Her grief is processed through interdimensional travel, but she can only recover from loss when she returns to reality.

What Remains of Elsie Jane is an emotional novel in which a grieving widow dreams of traveling to another timeline and uses her grit to stay afloat.

ADDISSYN HOUSE (January / February 2023)

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