A mother's search for her lost son leads her to an almost mythical California desert town.

Nestled in a hidden valley, Lágrimas is the last stop for a host of eccentric and questionable souls. When Joyce arrives looking for her son on a tip from a hitchhiker who claims to have seen him there, she settles in a bit too quickly for the locals' comfort. Much to her crushing disappointment, the boy she's been led to is not her son, but an emotionally battered teenager who communicates solely through lines from The Tempest. The locals, suspicious of Joyce's intent, believe that she has brought with her the forces of the Owl, a devastating storm that threatens to demolish Lágrimas once every decade.

Like a storm, the histories of Joyce and all of Lágrimas' inhabitants come raining down over the course of this riveting novel. Emotionally wrought and ultimately redeeming, Ordinary Monsters is a remarkable story about the sorrow of loss and the gift of healing.

My Personal Review: I'm very much shocked that there aren't more reviews or even ratings for this book. In fact, there's not many reviews or ratings for ANY of Karen Novak's novels and I can't imagine why because they're utterly fantastic and well written and engaging on every level. Five Mile House and Innocence are fantastic stories featuring the same character but are two very different tales. Both are great. Ordinary Monsters is no exception.
I admit I'm not an expert but I'm familiar with 'The Tempest'. In essence that's what this book is, The Tempest but a contemporary version of it.

The book begins telling the story of Joyce, a mother looking for her son who ran away from home. Her search could also be called a flight. A flight from her past mistakes, her broken marriage. A twist of fate leads her to a sparsely populated desert town in California where she has hopes of finding her son but who she meets immediately upon entering the town are a very odd community of people, people who she has more in common with than she knows. The town is populated with people who have ended up there as a result of their own personal flights, it's where they ended up because they had exhausted their options.

While in town Joyce meets and becomes attached to Danny, a strange teenager who happened upon the town at one time and was taken in by the community, but he happens to only speak in likes from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. She starts to treat him as a surrogate son, a replacement for the one she's lost and is searching for.

During the course of the book, more is revealed about Joyce's past as are the histories of several of the other strongly supporting characters in the book. Each one is sad in their own way but each one is completely and utterly engaging.

The book is rather short at around 270 pages, but it's so rich and well written that it doesn't feel rushed. It feels FULL. Full of the characters that Novak artfully crafts over the course of each page.

I recently purchased her last Leslie Stone novel, The Wilderness and I look forward to getting into that one because I find Karen Novak to be a supremely talented story teller. I noticed that it was published about five years ago and have no idea if she's still writing or not, but I honestly hope she does. If the Wilderness is half as good as her previous books (ORDinary Monsters included) then I hope to enjoy it as much as those.

Ordinary Monsters should definately be read by more people, it's too good to miss.

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