



The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake

By Aimee Bender

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On the eve of her ninth birthday, unassuming Rose Edelstein bites into her mother's homemade lemon-chocolate cake and discovers she has a magical gift: she can taste her mother's emotions in the slice. To her horror, she finds that her cheerful mother tastes of despair. Soon, she's privy to the secret knowledge that most families keep hidden: her father's detachment, her mother's transgression, her brother's increasing retreat from the world. But there are some family secrets that even her cursed taste buds can't discern.

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The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake By Aimee Bender Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Taking her very personal brand of pessimistic magical realism to new heights (or depths), Bender's second novel (following *An Invisible Sign of My Own*) careens splendidly through an obstacle course of pathological, fantastical neuroses. Bender's narrator is young, needy Rose Edelstein, who can literally taste the emotions of whoever prepares her food, giving her unwanted insight into other people's secret emotional lives—including her mother's, whose lemon cake betrays a deep dissatisfaction. Rose's father and brother also possess odd gifts, the implications of which Bender explores with a loving and detailed eye while following Rose from third grade through adulthood. Bender has been called a fabulist, but emerges as more a spelunker of the human soul; carefully burrowing through her characters' layered disorders and abilities, Bender plumbs an emotionally crippled family with power and authenticity. Though Rose's gift can seem superfluous at times, and Bender's gustative insights don't have the sensual potency readers might crave, this coming-of-age story makes a bittersweet dish, brimming with a zesty, beguiling talent. (*June*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Surprisingly, only a couple of critics mentioned that *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* is a derivative of *Like Water for Chocolate*, though Bender reverses Laura Esquivel's premise. But even those who noted the similarity praised Bender's original take on love, sorrow, and relationships and her surreal, sumptuous writing, particularly in her descriptions of food (only one critic faulted some awkward prose). Still, the novel garnered mixed reviews. Some critics disliked Rose's brother's characterization and the novel's lack of emotional tension, despite its plot. And many felt that the second half of the novel lacked direction and failed to take the fairy-tale elements to a deeper level. Readers willing to suspend their disbelief, however, will find much to enjoy here.

From [Booklist](#)

Eating the cake her mother has prepared for her ninth birthday, Rose Edelstein discovers she has a gift: she can taste her mother's emotions in the food she prepares. Soon, every bite Rose takes is filled with feelings—not just her mother's but those of other people as well—and what might have been a gift becomes a burden and then, perhaps, a curse. Because this is a novel rooted in family, Rose will learn that she is not the only Edelstein with a peculiar gift or burden. How she and others learn to cope—or not, as the case may be—is the small, sad story Rose shares. Bender's earlier work has often been described as surrealistic; however, this novel seems more informed by a kind of magical realism that struggles with transformation and sometimes—fleetingly—succeeds, as in the case of the novel's vividly realized Los Angeles setting. But the effect soon fades, and the reader is left only with a lingering feeling of emptiness and the realization that sadness tastes a lot like bitterness. --Michael Cart

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas Stewart:

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