

Gentle Reader,

It has been truly surreal to write about a single parent in a fantasy setting, while also unexpectedly becoming a single parent in the real world.

When I first started drafting *The Book Eaters* some three years ago, I was married and middle-class, sharing a house with my husband and our two kids. By the time I'd finished writing in June 2020, I was separated and renting a semi-derelict flat in a struggling neighborhood.

The transition between those two points was difficult and bewildering. But in hindsight, it proved crucial for shaping my book. Up till then, I'd struggled to complete the novel, because I just did not know how to pull it together and give it a satisfying conclusion.

Making drastic changes in my own life became a catalyst for understanding how Devon, the main character, could make drastic changes in hers. A few months after separation, I finally had the clarity to type up an ending for Devon's story that did both of us justice.

I've never (yet!) set fire to a large Scottish mansion as Devon does, nor numbered my body count in the dozens as Devon has. (Though hope springs eternal, as they say.) But I did grow up reading fairy tales and believing in false happy endings, as she did, and my life has been irrevocably altered by parenting, single or otherwise, as hers was.

Out of personal apocalypse and a total collapse of hope, good things eventually came about—for me, and for Devon. Change is possible, Gentle Reader; life can get better. And the ticket to your future is always open.

*The Book Eaters* is both a love letter to fairy tales, and a critical examination of their flaws. It encapsulates the fantasy of eating physical books, and the nightmare of how that would alter us. Above all, it is a story about family love in the midst of ruination: how we define it and defend it, how we find it and fight for it.

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COMING 8.9.22

