



## **Pan's Whisper**

*Sue Lawson*

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**When you're fighting to forget, what would make you remember?**

Pan Harris is brash, loud and damaged. Ordered into foster care, Pan is full of anger at the mother who abandoned her, and the older sister who kept her from her father. Pan is certain that she knows the reality of her past – until she meets Hunter, the boy who understands her story better than anyone else, and who just may be the key to unlocking the truth of Pan's memories. But are some memories best left forgotten? And is Hunter worth Pan breaking her most important rule – Never. Trust. Anyone.

## Pan's Whisper Details

Date : Published October 1st 2011 by Walker Books

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Author : Sue Lawson

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## From Reader Review Pan's Whisper for online ebook

~Tina~ says

Touching. Emotional. Raw.

**Pan's Whisper** is another great Aussie experience!

These characters felt so real. Each and every one of them.

Pan's story is heartbreaking. I don't even blame her for being the way she is. If it was me I'd probably push away harder. I'm glad that she had good people to look out for her. You can't ask better then Rose and Ian or even Livia and Nate. Hunter is another one who could really relate to Pan's problems and for once I'm glad that this didn't focus on romance but more about friendship. It just wouldn't have felt right.

My heart went out to Zara even though she came late into the story, but her presence sure did make an impact.

Basically I really loved this one. It's both beautifully and hauntingly told, the writing was pitch perfect and the characters were made to be unforgettable!

An Amazing read!

(Special thanks to Flann for touring this and Arlene for sending it!)

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**Arlene says**

Let me just say upfront that I'm probably not going to have much to say about this book because I know I'll run the risk of sounding repetitive. Maybe I should qualify that statement by clarifying that **Pan's Whisper** is written by Sue Lawson, an Australian author. For those of you that know my reading preferences and the fact that I declared Aussie books as their own genre in 2011 that should say heaps about how I felt about this story.

I loved it to pieces! The characters felt real, the storyline was full of raw emotion, and right about now I miss just about everyone in this book.

I want to tell Pan she's not self-absorbed and her erratic jumping to conclusions is okay by me... I understand. I want to know that Morgan will be okay. I want to just say to Hunter that he's a great guy and an awesome friend to those that need him. I want to hug that little hurricane Zara and tell her to settle down and relax, she's safe. Oh! And I want to wish Livia good luck on her play. See, that's what Aussie books make me feel... connected to the story and **Pan's Whisper** is no exception.

A must read for those that love Aussie perfection. It was everything I expected and more. That is all...

Oh no! Wait! One more important thing....THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH Flannery for sharing this book with me. ((HUGS)):D

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## Shirley Marr says

*I was staring through the leaves at the only patch of blue in the sky, when this memory drops out of nowhere and smashes me right between the eyes...*

In ancient Greek myth, Pandora was the mortal woman who opened a forbidden box thereby releasing evil into the world - by the time she tried to close it, it was too late. Although if it was any consolation, she also found Hope lying at the bottom of the box. Modern day Pandora (who prefers to go by Pan) is a damaged girl hiding secrets. Ordered from a dysfunctional family into foster care, Pan carries on her physically, a cat-shaped pyjama case from her childhood, filled with bits & pieces that trigger memories within her and more importantly - the voice of her older sister which might be her one saviour. So Pandora in this story is literally the box, with a tragic story inside her that needs to be released if she wants to move on.

None of this is implicitly stated anywhere. I just made the connection while reading it and I just think this premise - which would make any publisher jump up and shout 'print that shizzle!' - is absolutely beautiful. In fact I am jealous 'cos I wish I'd thought of it!

Firstly, let me comment on Sue Lawson's writing. It's evocatively Australian in its simplicity and plainness. And there's something about it which is kinda daggy. But as Goodread's reviewer Reynje noted on her review of *Have You Seen Ally Queen?* by Deb Fitzpatrick, this is actually an Australian sign of affection. It's comforting in the same way that a daggy pair of worn slippers or an even daggier pot of chicken flavoured Maggi noodles is.

There is one reason why I have read every Sue Lawson novel to date (and will subsequently read anything published in the future) and that's because she writes emotion like no one else. I was crying by page 22. So even though her characters use endearingly outdated 'swear words' like 'mutant' and 'psycho' and fly unreasonably off the handle in moments a little too contrived, I'm so emotionally invested that I'm there till the end.

So subsequently, my favourite parts are actually the chapters where Pan's sister Morgan (full name Morgana - gahhh, I love the Arthurian reference too) drifts into Pan's sub-conscious, during moments that feel almost like magic-realism. Showing the reader the true fragments of Pan's broken childhood and contrasting them to Pan's own blinkered recollection. These totally broke my heart with their realism. Cue more crying.

What didn't work for me as well is the "romance" plotline involving Pan and Hunter the boy she meets - with him set up as the key that will finally make her open her proverbial box. Don't get me wrong, I found the shy advances they made toward each other kinda yummy, but despite Sue Lawson's good intentions and Hunter being solidly enough written, he doesn't feel like he finds his place in this novel as either a friend or boyfriend. He kinda drops off before the heart-in-mouth pivotal scene at the end when Pandora confronts her past.

Overall, I really enjoyed this novel. The conclusion (with a twist) ends on quite the note and the novel packs enough emotional punch for it to linger for a while.

If you want a solidly written contemporary YA that falls in the middle - around age 14/15 - that deals realistically and tenderly with family issues and emotions, then I'd say you'll enjoy this. I read Sue Lawson

for the tear-jerking! She is sheer comfort food and writes what I call "chicken soup books" (good for the mind and soul).

PS - I am sorry Sue Lawson for calling Hunter an \*nsync member because he has blond tips. I have since been reassured he is supposed to be more Chase Crawford. If you think you want to challenge Shirley on her tastes in boys then please by all means read this book (and I'll meet you in the carpark afterwards)!

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### **Lilly-Anne Burns says**

I am extremely sad. Like too sad for words. Oh my lord am I sad.

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### **oliviasbooks says**

Loved it. Stayed up much, much too late to finish reading it.

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### **Watermelon Daisy says**

Pan's Whisper is possibly the most heart-wrenching book I've read this year.

The main character is a definite change from the Damsel in Distress females we see in YA. She, just like the description states, is loud and angry. But she has full right. Her story is one which I won't forget.

This book was skilfully woven because it carries a lot of different morals. For one, when you're trying to forget things, you truly do make up memories/avoid the bad parts and focus on the good. It's what our human mind perceives life as.

The ending was magnificent, because it showed great insight into the switching of roles between the two sisters.

To be honest, this kind of plot is one which can't be endured without reading about it. Like, if it said in big letters "GIRL NEGLECTED BY MUM" I would've scoffed. But I loved the back-story, and somehow Lawson made this a beautiful yet haunting story.

Oh, and though the pitch hints a strong romance aspect, this is untrue. There's no romance between Hunter and Pan –just friendship. So if you're a romance-lover, you might want to put this a little bit down your to-read list. But that's it: you simply must read this book.

Overall, a beautiful book. Pick it up today!

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### **Bohdi says**

4.5/5 stars. Emotional, powerful YA novel that tells a poignant story of finding one's self after losing one's self.

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### **Heather says**

I am a big fan of Sue Lawson. Her books are intelligent, complex and insightful, and she is not afraid to deal with big issues. "Pan's Whisper" focuses on mental illness, foster care, family relations and friendship. After a horrific accident, Pandora (Pan) Harper finds herself being moved from foster home to foster home, the latest being the McMinns. She is angry, confused, wary of kind advances, outspoken and a rebel, and it took me a while to engage with her. However, gradually the painful circumstances of her childhood are revealed and I found I couldn't help but empathise with her and feel her vulnerability. Morgan, Pan's older sister, is a wonderful character. She is generous and caring, trying to protect Pan from the neglect and dangers that faced them both as children. The reader learns about her through the letters Pan writes to her and through Pan's recollections, but it is only in the final chapter that we actually meet her. The reunion between the two sisters is incredibly touching. This is a great read from a wonderful author!

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### **Izzy Rizzo says**

yeah aunty sue

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### **L. E. Armbruster says**

I have to say, that I devoured this book quickly and without any hesitation and it was the structure and the way that the narrative was managed that really helped in this.

The structure is dictated by the relationship between the two girls and more importantly by the intensely incongruous images painted of Kylie. It isn't hard to piece together that the main difference was birth order and age, but because Pan controls much of the narration, I was always filled with a sense of anticipation and relief that her vague memories would be drawn out and explained by Morgan's insights. Especially when I realised that this was a recurring pattern. I think I would have lost interest, not to mention my sanity, if I only had Pan's fallible memories to help me construct the character of Kylie. She was, after all, tragically flawed but so revered.

I felt the main theme of memory and perspective were vital in the structure. The final few chapters had Pan's memories finally intruding into her narrative space pg 324- 327, and this almost feels like the build up of pressure leaking into her narrative. I applaud the way that Lawson utilises Morgan's narrative as a third person account because that way, we feel that her narration of objective and reliable, when first person is not. Pan mentions several times in her thought patterns about her lack of memory, and this also helps to create the three act structures because of the lack of detail we receive about Morgan. I was sure she had died and that

"visiting Morgan" that Rose keeps suggesting would be a grave. I was pleasantly surprised that she was still alive, albeit a vegetable. (Although I was not clear about how damaged she was and felt that this was dealt with too quickly. I mean, if she is going to recover well and be Morgan again, then it's a happy ending, but if she is permanently brain damaged or disabled, then I felt a real sense of rage towards Kylie, and I would like to know which one to feel)

In some dual narratives, one perspective seems to eventually take over the other (novels like Cormier's *After the First Death* and *We All Fall Down* are like that), so I was surprised that Morgan's voice never really dominates. Whilst I appreciate this, I feel that, in many ways, Morgan's story then is made less important than Pan's and I am not sure I agree with that balance.

Really loved this book....Love, love love!

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### **Amanda says**

Pan's Whisper by Sue Lawson is set in Melbourne. Pandora, preferably known as Pan, has been put into foster care after an incident involving her mother and older sister, Morgan. She has vague, and mostly happy, memories of her childhood but it's clear from alternating flashbacks from her sister, that her childhood wasn't as happy as she thinks she remembers.

I'd seen this book around on Goodreads and had assumed from the tiny cover image that this was a fantasy set in Asia. This book is actually a contemporary/mystery set in Australia but there was just something about those falling petals that made me think fantasy!

So, going into this I really didn't know what to expect and it ended up being quite an emotional read for me. The story is mostly told from Pan's perspective, but every now and then when she remembers something from her childhood, it's followed by Morgan's point of view of that event and it explains what really happened. Pan now has a court appointed social worker and has been placed into a foster home, where two other foster kids already live. She has been told she cannot go back to her mum for the time being and it's not clear what happened to cause this placement. Pan isn't the easiest character to like, she's whiny, defensive, suspicious, and self-absorbed, but after reading a few of Morgan's memories, it's clear that Pan has always been protected from her mother's highs and lows occurring due to her being bi-polar and in a way Morgan's protection babied her and I can't blame either girl for that. In fact, Pan often made my heart crack, because she kept refusing to let anyone be nice to her, so despite being quite abrasive, I wanted to protect her, too.

The secondary characters were also strong; The McMinns, her foster parents, were such good people and I loved them for never treating her in the way that she expected. Her foster sister Livia was a bit of a brat, but she was once where Pan was, and her foster brother Nate was so sweet. Hunter, the boy from school, was also really lovely and I kept wanting Pan to wake up and realise that he was hurting as well.

I found the pacing was perfect, I was enthralled by Pan's story and was keen to find out what had happened to her, her mother, and to Morgan. Slowly, her memories get closer to the incident and finally we find out what caused her to be placed in foster care. It broke my heart and I found myself crying for the last few chapters.

Pan's Whisper is a bittersweet story of a girl trying to recover from years of living with an abusive mother,

and the new family and friends trying to be there for her.

Thank you to the wonderful people at Walker Books Australia for my review copy.

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## Alexa says

My review can also be found on my blog Collections.

This book was so heartbreaking and beautiful. The summary makes it seem like it would be all about Pan's relationship with a guy named Hunter, but it's more than that. It's about her desperately trying to remember her past through the memories she has of her sister Morgan. Morgan was such an amazing person, and their relationship was precious, yet gut-wrenching because of their circumstance. Hunter was also a wonderful character. Sometimes a damaged girl like Pan needs a perfect guy who is patient and understanding. This book was another example of how great Australian YA fiction is, and I would highly recommend it to contemporary fans.

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## Reynje says

*“Seems to me, we all have these places, like rooms, deep inside us where we lock away everything we can’t or don’t want to face. Some of us have something so big, so terrifying inside us that it takes up a whole room. I reckon ignoring that thing only feeds it, making it grow so huge that it spills out of the room to search us out, sucking up all our light and joy as it goes.”*

We often talk about catharsis in terms of its benefits, and the good that comes of opening up things held tightly inside. We talk about the relief, the release, the freedom that comes with letting go. But we don’t always talk about the process, how hard it is to let things out, how it can feel more painful than anything else. We don’t always talk about how much it goes against the grain to fight our own defences, like resisting the urge to clamp down on a wound and watching it bleed out instead.

When Pan Harper arrives at her foster home, she is holding her past tightly inside, wrapped up in layers of anger, pain, and denial. She wears her distrust like armour, believing that to be open is to be vulnerable, to accept her situation is to negate everything she knows about her life. So she holds the world at bay with her aggression, her clothes, her black eye makeup. And she clings to her memories, or rather, the version of events her memory chooses to retain.

Pan’s Whisper is the story of just what it takes to open up, and to realise that the truth is not always what we believe it to be.

From the outset, Pan’s anger is palpable. Her voice is hard and clear in the short, blunt sentences as she relates her arrival at the McMinn’s home and her start at a new school. Yet from beneath this, through the fragments of information she reveals about her childhood, her pain seeps through, raw and stark. While Pan fiercely pushes away those around her, as a reader it’s hard not to want to draw closer, to sense that she is damaged and needs to be loved. Honestly, when Smocker makes his first appearance around page 21, I was



already fighting a lump in my throat and wiping my eyes.

Pan's unfolding is told from her own perspective, the letters she writes to her older sister Morgan and fragments of the past where Morgan appears. The pieces come together gradually, the past layering with the present, to bring the full picture of Pan's history into focus. It's not always easy to read. It's occasionally confronting and often painful. But the clearer the image of Pan's life becomes, the more emotionally engaging the story grows.

One of the themes that runs throughout Pan's Whisper is that of family – what it means to us individually and how that definition can change and expand. This was definitely one of my favourite aspects of the story, especially how Lawson developed the relationship between Pan and Morgan through their respective memories of their Mum. The complex bond between the sisters rang true for me and was incredibly moving. Having two protective older sisters myself, the difficulty of Morgan's position and her courage was really resonant, along with Pan's need to reconcile the versions of Morgan that existed in her memories and in reality.

While the story is pretty emotionally intense, and deals with some tough subjects, it's prevented from being overwhelmingly heavy by the style it's related in. Lawson's writing is clear and understated, and the emotion bleeds through without the need for overblown emo-prose. Pan's voice feels authentic, and there is a distinctly Australian style to the dialogue and the interactions between the teenagers. While I occasionally find some high school settings in US YA hard to get a handle on, this felt familiar and realistic to me. A very small exception to this was the role Hunter played. I loved him as a character, and the subtle way Lawson approached the tension between he and Pan, yet I have to admit that occasionally I found the parallels in their situations to feel a little too.. coincidental? The fact that two people feeling similar pain might be drawn to each other is fair enough, but I don't necessarily think his backstory was pivotal to Pan's being unlocked.

That said, the climax and ending of Pan's Whisper were brilliant. I read the final few chapters with my heart in my throat, half afraid, half already heartbroken, completely invested. It was powerful and honest and basically the perfect note to end on.

Pan's Whisper is a strong, gorgeous book that backs quite the punch. This is contemporary Aussie YA on its game: honest and achy and unflinching. Read it.

*Thank you to the lovely Shirley Marr for proving a copy of Pan's Whisper. No vegemite scrolls or cat-shaped cakes were exchanged in return for this review Although I'm pretty sure she owes me a dink on her BMX.*

This review also appears on **Shirley Marr's supercool blog**, where a copy of Pan's Whisper is up for grabs! Go join the party!

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## Ernie says

Pan's Whisper  
by Sue Lawson  
ISBN 978-1-742032-06-1

Black Dog Books, 2012. 346pp

Pan (Pandora) is a very angry teenager dressed and made up as a Goth hiding a scar under her hair fringe and beneath threatening eyes. She is taken by a social worker into middle class suburbs which she scorns as Legoland where she is cared for by plastic people, experienced foster parents Rose and Ian who also have two other foster children, Livia, the same age and Nate who is in year 6.

Lawson gives her story the immediacy of Pan's first person present tense narration varied with her brief letters to her older sister Morgan which link with a third person narration of Pan's memories of her chaotic life with her mother, Kylie. The mystery of Pan's anger develops with problems in the new school where she seeks to hide herself between angry outbursts triggered by mistrust and misinterpretation of peoples' motives. This links with her intelligent responses to Romeo and Juliet with which she is familiar from her previous school but she can only see that she is fated to always stuff up her life.

Her talisman is a soft toy cat with a zippered pocket into which she has put the few toys and photos that had not been lost in the many house moves that her mother Kylie made in her manic-depressive mood swings. Lawson controls the pace of the revelations by making her character suppress most of her past so that clues given to the readers emerge from the various crises she suffers at school and in foster care. Detention with the art teacher who is painting the backdrops for the school production of West Side Story becomes the main support for her rehabilitation as younger readers might not recognise the skilful patience of the foster parents. Hunter, a talented musician in her class was too good a character for me but he provides another character who is rejected then gradually trusted and befriended.

Lawson mediates the chaos and violence of Pan's past life and the final crisis which took her away from her mother and older sister and into care. This I found totally believable and convincing as it encourages readers to interpret the younger Pan's experiences as she is protected by her older sister from Kylie and the men in her life.

The result is an accessible text that would appeal to most students in years 8 – 10. Wide reading links: families, kids as carers, living on the edge, friendship, outsiders, school life.

Ernie Tucker

Choices for English

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## **Sarah says**

Research indicates that this is yet another Aussie title not available in the US.

You know what would make a lot of sense? If there weren't georestrictions on ebooks. Because I would buy a hell of a lot more foreign titles if I could buy from ebookstores. I'm just way less likely to buy from Fishpond (which sucks ass) and wait a million years for the paper book to actually appear.

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