



## Promising Young Women

*Suzanne Scanlon*

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## **Promising Young Women** Suzanne Scanlon

A series of fragmentary tales tells the story of Lizzie, a young woman who, in her early twenties, unexpectedly embarks on a journey through psychiatric institutions, a journey that will end up lasting many years. With echoes of Sylvia Plath, and against a cultural backdrop that includes Shakespeare, Woody Allen, and Heathers, Suzanne Scanlon's first novel is both a deeply moving account of a life of crisis and a brilliantly original work of art.

## **Promising Young Women Details**

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Author : Suzanne Scanlon

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## From Reader Review Promising Young Women for online ebook

### Angela says

This was what Prozac Diaries should have been but wasn't. Little vignettes on the psych ward, all of them well-written and pungent. And she made it out and wrote this book, so they're extra-good and extra-pungent.

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### Laryssa Wirstiuk says

The book had a few brilliant shining moments, but overall I found the narrative to be forgettable. The fragmented episodes, in my opinion just did not work for this book, and I would have like to see some more substantial character development. I just don't feel connected to the characters at all and therefore cannot invest my emotions in them. The ending was particularly underwhelming. Also, I think the book trivializes mental illness. I kind of get that the author is trying to make a point about regular growing pains and grief being characterized as mental illness, but in doing so it seemed to me to be making a statement about all mental illness - that psychiatric drugs are just all good fun. I don't know if that's what the author meant to portray, but it came across that way. I just kept looking for something to grasp. I would not recommend.

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### Emily says

*"I saw the charts that noted what made a patient more or less likely to succeed. I read about the 'unexpected failures.' According to the book the 'unexpected failures' were those attractive, intelligent, promising young women who had, against all expectation, offed themselves in the years post-discharge.*

*I knew I shouldn't be reading but I couldn't stop. I read for clues to my own prognosis. It didn't look good."*

As this memoir-like novel begins, a narrator named Lizzie is recalling the time in her late teens she spent institutionalized for depression. She tells her story in a hypnotic, highly stylized manner she seems to have borrowed, along with a few memorable lines of description, from *The Bell Jar*. Unlike *The Bell Jar*, though, this novel's perspective eventually opens up, so that we see its protagonist and the people in her world from both inside and out. There is much more to the story than initially meets the eye.

Though Lizzie's hospitalization is set in the '90s, Scanlon evokes a disconcerting sense of timelessness, as though what happened to this "promising" woman has happened and is still happening somewhere right now. Scanlon weaves pastiche and cultural references about woman and madness into a vivid, expertly crafted novel that is almost impossible to put down.

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### Julie says

A disturbing, disjointed ride through one woman's survival of depression. I did not like the choice to make the last thing her suicide attempt that got her institutionalized. I would have liked more on how she coped and learned to deal with life.

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## **Parth Jawale says**

*"There is a kind of loneliness that comes from being with people. The kind that is more about a recognition of the failure of communication. The gaps."*

Suzanne Scanlon's *Promising Young Women* is about Lizzie, who keeps going in and out of mental institutions - much like its fragmented narrative which keeps folding and unfolding into itself. The prose has this innate ability to make sense of itself by referencing and re-referencing events, memories and changing perceptions. It's almost unbelievable that such writing is planned, and I believe it is.

*"She didn't look like she was at peace, but seemed to instead reference peace. What peace might look like."*

The prose moves through time freely and drops multiple clues for you to understand the period it corresponds to, and it works beautifully in its favour. For example, a chapter named "Heather" starts off with an elaborate reference to the movie *Heathers* and its release a few years prior to the current time in the novel. Her writing is very clever and at times too cathartic to keep reading at a stretch. At the same time, it's addictive and you just can't help but finish it in one reading.

*"If you were the one who didn't know how to live, if you needed to be taught, we'd look away, too. We wouldn't want to know."*

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## **Amy says**

Dorothy Publishing delivers again! This time, the story centers around Lizzie, a woman who goes in and out of mental institutions. The structure is not linear, and gives voice to some feelings that I think most women experience at some point.

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## **Full Stop says**

<http://www.full-stop.net/2012/12/07/r...>

Review by Eleanor Gold

Virginia Woolf, in *Orlando*, wrote about a proliferation of selves piloted by a Key Self that works to compress them into agreement, into a unity that can withstand the shock of the present. Perhaps this is the best way to understand Suzanne Scanlon's *Promising Young Women*.

Selves abound in Scanlon's debut novel. The back cover identifies them all as "Lizzie," but don't be fooled. *Promising Young Women* is told through a multitude of voices that are young and old, male and female, empathetic and less so. Set mainly in the 1990s, the novel takes temporal leaps into the past, future, and a multiplicity of presents — often signaled through references to popular culture: "This wasn't like in the movie *Heathers*, which had come out a few years earlier"; "We went to a theater in Westwood to see *Postcards from the Edge*. . . . We saw *Crimes and Misdemeanors* at the same theater. It was my first Woody

Allen movie." Besides Carrie Fisher and Woody Allen, there are references to Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, William Faulkner, Walden, Girl, Interrupted — this is a novel that knows its context.

Read more here: <http://www.full-stop.net/2012/12/07/r...>

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### **Jeffrey says**

This book is beautifully written in a matter-of-fact tone about mental illness. It is a coming of age novel that take the main character Lizzie through her struggles with various stages of life--sexuality, career, and motherhood--at the same time she is struggling with mental illness.

Subjects like mental instability are very challenging to write about because they are so easily overdramatized. The last thing a thoughtful audience wants are histrionics. The sensitive, smart choices Scanlon makes in her writing--indeed there is also a lovely ironic humor--make *Promising Young Women* an enjoyable, insightful read that rewards you every step of the way.

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### **Michael Vagnetti says**

"Iatrogenic" is when the treatment does harm. Untrustworthy medicine, misunderstood brains: when you experience the personal and expanded import of this, it must be like being eaten by The Blob. What is moral courage? To express compassion after having been digested by the invalidating maw of medical-industrial phagocytosis: "It was far away, and it had nothing to do with me. Still, I couldn't stop thinking about it. What it would be like." (23) To still read faces, and describe what people are feeling.

To be on guard but to still speak. To let down the necessary guard enough. This is writing with a terse, well-guided economy, where poetry is = avoiding mundane diction fluff, but at the same time, convincing the reader that what the speaker is saying is important, no matter what it is. When the speaker plants the seed that "Language is a betrayal, after all," (31) and then, of course, continues speaking, words become mines. "She would deploy the facts." (39) The reader walks on words the speaker dislikes, and there are small, necessary explosions. They prune away directions not to follow, the make decisions about what we are saying and how it is hurting us. To know words are untrustworthy, and then, as if this wasn't enough, to start to lose them, and still speak.

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### **Jasmine Woodson says**

oh thank goodness I was afraid messy but promising tragic young white women narratives had been played allll the way out, but nope!

I LOVE the structure of the stories, though, how the narrative folds into and out of itself.

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## **Jen says**

Some really lovely stuff in here. I didn't think the structure of the book -- these fragments in chapters -- was used to its fullest potential. It feels almost as though the book could have gone a bit deeper into the editing process, made the fragments seem more intentional, less haphazardly collected together.

The chapter toward the end of the book called "The Other Story" was incredibly moving and well-written/structured and works really well as a standalone piece.

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## **Rebecca says**

I heard about this book on Sarah McCarry's blog *The Rejectionist* and, after seeing in the description on Goodreads that it's reminiscent of Plath, decided to read it: it was short and I had loved *The Bell Jar*. The book was almost too disjointed for me, with the chronology jumping all over the place so that I didn't really know what was happening when; each chapter (including a not-related but perfectly-written one called *Girls with Problems*) was a new story.

But the book is definitely worth reading, and this is why: it has lines like these:

"There was a day early on, before it got really bad--that feeling--I didn't know what to call it, because it wouldn't fit into words--which had me desiring a certain obliteration ... that made me want to stop eating, or to smoke lots of cigarettes, or to run, or to put on bright red lipstick and walk down the street until someone would touch me."

and "Everything Dread said was like a secret voice speaking out of my own bones."

and "'You look so pretty,' one or another said. This is what people say to little girls. This is not the only way we learn that pretty matters, but it is one way."

*Promising Young Women* is full of those sorts of sentences, the ones that are quietly true. It was a little too fragmented--but worth it.

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## **JSA Lowe says**

Oh HELL yes. I have a lot to say, but I'm reviewing it and another book for an Unnamed Journal, so nothing more from me for now, not a word. Only: you want this. Trust me, you do.

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## **Carrie says**

That the question that despair asks has no answer.

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## **Jan Stinchcomb says**

Lovely, literary and surprisingly optimistic. Structured in fragments that convey the mystery of perception and memory. Scanlon's description of childhood grief is fearless and on point.

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