



# A Small Madness

*Dianne Touchell*

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Rose didn't tell anyone about it. She wondered if it showed. She looked at herself in the mirror and turned this way and then that way. She stood as close to the mirror as she could, leaning over the bathroom basin, looking into her own eyes until they disappeared behind the fog of her breath. Looking for something. Some evidence that she was different now. Something had shifted inside her, a gear being ratcheted over a clunky cog, gaining torque, starting her up. But it didn't show. How could all of these feelings not show? She was a woman now but it didn't show and she couldn't tell anyone.

A devastating, compelling novel that will get everyone talking, from the author of Creepy and Maud.

## A Small Madness Details

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Author : Dianne Touchell

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## **From Reader Review A Small Madness for online ebook**

### **Angel - Angel Reads says**

I received A Small Madness by Dianne Touchell from Allen and Unwin in exchange for a review. This has in no way influenced my thoughts and feelings about the book.

As soon as I saw A Small Madness, in the Allen and Unwin catalogue quite a couple of months ago, I knew I needed this book in my hands and boy I wasn't disappointed.

The synopsis of A Small Madness doesn't give too much away, but it gives the reader just enough so they are pulled right in.

I cannot explain how heartbreaking, enriching and beautiful this novel is. The way that A Small Madness is written is very unique. Rose the protagonist of A Small Madness is quite young, and you can hear it, in her voice. Normally I don't like that in a young adult novel, but it just adds so much complexity and makes an impact like no other.

I try not to spoil books in my reviews, but with this book it's really hard, I'm not spoiling the whole book so don't get worried, I'm just giving away something to me, is common sense.

So Rose is going through a teenage pregnancy, but not in the archetypal way. Rose just doesn't want to believe it, no matter, what and that is what makes the novel that much more emotional.

A Small Madness really captures the emotions of a pregnant teenager. It's heartbreaking really. It really challenges the beliefs of the reader and how they perceive teenage pregnancy.

Michael, Rose's boyfriend, friend, companion and father of her child, is very similar to Rose. They are both so 'innocent' and new to everything. But their love is simply beautiful and intimate. That even through hardship, they still love each other. It's incredible because sometimes most adults can't do that.

The title really does tell what is going on in Rose's mind; a small madness. Rose just isn't dealing with the pregnancy well, she is like a ticking time bomb. It's eating her up and throughout the novel, we see her change and it's heartbreaking. Her thoughts and feelings are turned and sometimes not for the better.

A Small Madness is very antagonizing. Let me tell you that right now. But it's also a beautiful, powerful novel that challenges the reader, and it will bring you out of your comfort zone.

Furthermore, Touchell's writing is incredible that just brings out all the emotions in the reader. But that is what makes the story that much more distressing and moving. Touchell also questions the reader. However, A Small Madness may be very confronting to some readers.

She asks the reader to be sympathetic to a dark deed and the flawed characters that committed it. She asks the readers to really question the idea that 'being damaged is very, different to being evil' – especially to be of that age.

A Small Madness is a beautiful, important novel that will challenge your beliefs and break your heart.

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### **Sally906 says**

Opens: He'd eaten an orange.

My Thoughts: I finished A SMALL MADNESS by Dianne Touchell a few days ago and have been mulling over my review ever since. I worry that I am not going to do it the justice it deserves, so in a nutshell – WOW, fabulous, thought provoking, confronting, heartbreaking, unputdownable, all in all an absolutely

amazing story about teen pregnancy, family relationships and mental issues. I have already earmarked as one of my top reads for this year, if not the top one!! So those few words that I jotted down while reading should cover my thoughts if the review doesn't do it justice!

A SMALL MADNESS opens as Rose and Michael have sex for the first time – they are in their last year of High School, in love and ready to go to that next level after dating for a while. Afterwards, Rose can't believe that no-one can tell that she has become a woman; that she has gone all the way. They didn't use protection – even though both of them were prepared – but hey, no-one gets pregnant the first time! Well she does, and this is where the bubble bursts and the madness starts as she is ill-equipped mentally to deal with the reality of her situation. A SMALL MADNESS is told in the third person of the main characters so you get to see why they do the things they do. Rose decides that the pregnancy isn't happening – that she has a virus. She is learning about viruses in Biology and viruses can be destroyed and go away. This sets her on the winding road downhill to madness as she decides if she ignores the reality and treats the situation as a virus, it will all go away and everything will be ok. As she is not pregnant she doesn't need help.

...I've worked it out. We won't tell anyone. No one could help us anyway. I can hide it. It's not real...These things go away all the time...

This denial of pregnancy is not as implausible as it sounds. In fact the idea for the plot came from a newspaper article that author Dianne Touchell read while in the USA – in an promotional interview she said “society gathered their metaphoric torches and pitchforks,” and assassinated the characters of the young couple in the centre of the uproar; her heart went out to the couple. A quick google on the subject of denial of pregnancy produces stats which indicate that denial of a pregnancy at 20 weeks' gestation or later occurs in one in 475 pregnancies. That is a lot, and they are not all teenagers, and they are certainly not bad women, they are women who need help so desperately, but don't recognise that they do.

...She was a good person. And she was as genuinely appalled as everyone else by speculative descriptions of the monster who must have done this dreadful thing in the bush. Because it wasn't her...

A SMALL MADNESS is not an easy book to read, but it is not heavy reading, if that makes sense. You know something bad is going to happen but it's like being a rabbit in car headlights you can't take your eyes off the pages. Rose and Michael are likable characters – despite what they did. They are emotionally fragile, rather than evil, and all I felt was sympathy and concern. The open ending worked for me because they are both starting out and once they have gotten over this huge bump in the road they will go on with their lives. The reader is gently brought to the realisation that life isn't black or white – quite often there is grey – and with the grey must come compassion. Although confronting, full of drama and angst, and not sugar-coated in any way, I cannot recommend this book more highly.

With thanks to Allen & Unwin and the author for this copy to read and review.

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**Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says**

**Actual Rating: 3.5**

This review appears on Happy Indulgence - check it out for more reviews!

A Small Madness packs a punch in its short length. Going into the book without knowing anything about it, really had me unprepared for the emotional journey ahead. This is not an easy read. But it's an important one.

It all starts from one small mistake: unprotected sex leading into teenage pregnancy. The book does not hold back on the gory details, and explores every single consequence right through to the end. What starts out as one innocent decision, will lead to a journey of heartache and change, and the story really jerked my emotions about. From the emotional turmoil of the teen parents, to their loss of hope for the future, to their withdrawal from everyday life and the desperation of their actions, A Small Madness clasped my heart and didn't let go.

There are themes in the book that will make you uncomfortable, from the awkward approach to sex, the gory details of pregnancy, to the slut shaming of Rose's best friend. This is a harsh, confronting novel containing bullying, teenage pregnancy, self harm, depression and mental illness. It's dark, it's edgy, and I felt like it would be relatable to those who have experienced a similar journey. I appreciated how it didn't sugar coat the details, and was somewhat horrified by what I found within it's pages.

The book has a strong focus on friendship and family as a support network, which was important to help the characters with what they were going through. It was refreshing to see Michael and Roses parents as a key part of their lives, even though they reacted in different ways.

Everything in the book is somber and depressing, with the consequences escalated to the very extreme. This made the book seem a bit too unrealistic and over-emphasised, especially towards the end of the book. It's filled with drama and emotional turmoil, and I think Rose's downward spiral illustrated the point perfectly. I did feel that the consequences of her actions became a bit too far-fetched, leaving us with unresolved discomfort at the end of the book. The ending kind of leads off abruptly, not in a satisfactory manner. But the story had been told by then, and the point was made.

Instead of subtlety, it likes to drive the point hard that teenage pregnancy has negative consequences. Teenage pregnancy is life-changing, but it's not the end of the world, like the book portrays. Where's the beauty in having a child? Where's the joy that you will feel upon being responsible for a young kid? None of this is mentioned. It's a dark and depressing read, that serves as a cautionary tale but not everyone will agree with it's approach.

A Small Madness is a raw, emotional and honest story of teenage pregnancy and the psychological consequences of it covering everything to its finest detail. It contains some very important messages in the book, that teenage pregnancy can happen to the best of us and it can have some very negative consequences.

*Thank you to Allen and Unwin Australia for sending me this book in exchange for an honest review.*

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**Taneika says**

**More of my reviews can be found at [Flipping Through the Pages!](#)**

This book is aptly named. It was a small book and it drove me mad reading it (and not in the "ohmygodthisbookiscrazyawesome way either").

I picked this up as part of the Shattering Stigmas event hosted by the lovely ladies mentioned in this post. After reading the vague description on the back and seeing it had contacts for Beyond Blue and other helplines for pregnancy and depression, I didn't really have any idea of what to expect from this book, but it sounded interesting and seemed to fit the bill for what I was after. After skimming some reviews, I was expecting great things from this book but oh, how very wrong I was. This book was a fucking drag. I may have finished it in a couple of days, but this is because it was pretty easy to read and only has about 250 pages.

Basically, a teen girl falls pregnant to her boyfriend and they don't want to keep it. That's it. I understand what the author was trying to do, I really do. I appreciate that there was attempt to explore the importance of how teen pregnancy can affect different parties, that sometimes it can produce very negative results and how the mother in particular can be mentally affected. But, the execution was an utter fail.

The writing was an absolute bore to read, not to mention frustrating. You know those books that switches point of view every few paragraphs and it can get a little bit annoying if not done correctly? Well hold onto your seats because this book switches viewpoints every freakin' paragraph. I shit you not. Sometimes it even switches from one sentence to the next. I was just getting vaguely interested in what one character was thinking or doing and then it would just switch and throw me off completely.

Speaking of the characters, I despised all of them. I get that the two main characters (Rose and her boyfriend - can't remember his name) experienced something pretty horrible and terrifying, but you would think that something like that would make me care about them. Nope. Rose and whatshisface were so wrapped up in eachother they had no other characteristics that made me give a shit. Rose's bestfriend Liv is probably the only character I liked and she was the "school slut". Rose treated her like crap and Liv was constantly belittled by Rose's boyfriend and the rest of the character cast as well. We are CONSTANTLY reminded that Liv is a slut and it's implied she has daddy issues too (wtf?). Liv's mum was a sweetheart and I loved her but the rest of the parents were such arseholes to their arsehole children.

Now right around here I'd normally mention something to do with the plot, but there was no plot. I was so fucking bored. Rose fell pregnant to Michael, she doesn't tell her parents etc (understandably, it's kinda a scary situation), gets severely depressed about it, and the "twist"? Rose gives herself an abortion when she's almost due and then gets done in by the cops because her and her boyfriend buried it. Oh, and her depression is pretty heavy shit, but those important things are kinda shoved away to the side for a lot of it and instead we focus on how much of a slut her best friend is and when she's going to see her boyfriend next.

I did enjoy one thing about this book, and it was how it didn't gloss over the gory details. Like how bloody and painful a miscarriage might be and how teenage pregnancy can completely and utterly affect somebody still in high school. But it wasn't enough. The heavy themes were there and this book could have been so much more had the writing not been terrible and the characters weren't all scum.

Apologies for the swearing and ranting, but god, this was a waste of my time and money and I'm so angry.

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## **texbsquared says**

This was a strange, surreal, bizarre, fucked up kind of novel. Having said that, I think it wavers between a 3 and a 4 for me on the old star rating chart.

I can't exactly decide how to feel about it. It was like falling into this dark, twisted hole and not being about to get out again. Full credit to the writing -- you can definitely feel the mounting pressure and panic and all of it.

Very strange. Very scary. Brilliant writing in parts, though.

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## **Figgy says**

Rose and Michael are in love. They've been dating for ages, and they're in the final year of high-school. He's going to be a doctor, she's going to be an actress, and they already know they're going to get married.

Rose had been pretending to be someone else the day that Michael decided he loved her. She was in the middle of dress rehearsal for the school play, standing on the stage in the school gym, her voice ricocheting off the polished boards with an intensity that set his bones ringing like a tuning fork.

Which is why, despite their religious beliefs, they start having sex. They're going to spend their lives together anyway, so why wait?

He'd eaten an orange. His fingers were sticky with it and smelled strongly of that pith-muck that collects under your fingernails after peeling the rind off. She didn't care – they were in love. She let him put his sticky hands in places her own had never been.

The first two times they don't use a condom because they get caught up in the moment and forget, but they're careful after that. And it's not like either of them has been with anyone else before, so they're safe from diseases.

But then Rose realises she's been waiting for her period, waiting for months, and when it doesn't come, she knows what it must mean. The pregnancy test confirms her suspicion. But she can't be pregnant, it'll ruin all her plans. She's got year 12 exams to pass.

'I have plans, too,' Rose reiterated. 'I have a future.'  
And Liv said, 'Not anymore.'

Thus begins the tale of one girl's unplanned pregnancy and her descent into unhealthy denial, and a kind of madness.

**The rest of this review can be found here!**

Hmm, so apparently the link had an issue. Fixed now!

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## **Liz says**

2.5 stars

The first thing I thought a couple of chapters in was 'seriously have these kids been living under a rock!?' Most kids of my generation and younger have safe sex drilled into them from a fairly young age. It just did not convince me. I'd maybe understand the events if the characters came from a strict religious background - and they do go to church - but they are by no means strict about it - I mean they swear and have sex so I didn't find the weekly church going very plausible. In fact I didn't find much of the book or characters very plausible at all. I thought the characters were poorly developed from the start - I mean I felt like I didn't really know the characters before the action started and they felt very one dimensional. Secondly none of the characters were very likeable - except maybe Liv - and I also found some of the dialogue quite contrived. So no I didn't really enjoy this book. I feel harsh saying that, but it just seemed floored to me. I originally thought it was going to be about mental illness/depression and I suppose it is to an extent but not in the way I had expected.

Despite this though, I'm sure younger readers will be less critical of the writing than me and still be drawn in by this book and it's dark subject.

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## **Suzanne says**

A Small Madness, Dianne Touchell's profoundly honest novel about a teenage girl and boy struggling to conceal pregnancy, targets young adults while reminding older readers of their own unwanted pregnancies.

As I read it, so much of what she writes taps into my own experience of being pregnant at fifteen, as it does the final lines in 'Honesty', the first poem in A Circle in a Room Full of Squares (2003), a collection of students' poetry, short stories, art and photography that I collated and edited. The girl, writing about her school life, what it's like to speak her truth, ends her poem with, 'Life is not about honesty. It's learning how to lie.'

Touchell can never be accused of this. She writes with deep compassion and stark insights, presenting us with two beautiful teenagers raised with Christian ethics, both respected amongst their peers, both committed to doing well at school, both with big dreams for the future.

Reminiscent of teenagers I know, they fall in love, the end result being tragic. Fearing the consequences of the pregnancy being discovered, they both hide the truth, both do all they can to spare, not only their parents' shame and embarrassment, but also their own.

No doubt, the gatekeepers of ignorance, those who'd prefer teenagers to read paternalistic claptrap designed to soften truths about growing up, protecting teenage sensitivities with simplistic, distanced, happy-ever-after stories, will reel in horror when reading A Small Madness.

The conclusion leaves readers to contemplate what might happen to these two beautiful characters, as they



also pause to think about parents and a society that frowns upon teenage pregnancy, frowns upon such young people who love one another because they believe young, real love is not possible.

I only wish a young woman I knew had read this in her teenage years. Also raised within a Christian family, she was forced to abort her child to prevent family shame. She saw herself as a murderer, suffered dearly and, tragically. She was murdered in her early twenties by two of West Australia's most notorious serial killers.

Reading *A Small Madness*, may well have saved her.

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## **Catherine says**

*A Small Madness* by Dianne Touchell begins with a fresh beginning for Rose, a teenager in her last year of high school. A new sexual experience has her feeling like a woman and she looks over herself to see how much she's changed because of it. She and her boyfriend Michael have each made plans for their own future. Her intentions are to become an actress and he is looking to become a doctor. So, when she's pregnant, she doesn't want her life to change and she refuses to believe any of the evidence. However, people around her start noticing the changes. They notice that she's not looking well, that her personality and behaviour has changed. The same can be said of Michael. Though he doesn't experience the physical changes, he becomes worried for her and finds that he has a new outlook towards his whole life. For Rose, she realises that she needs to make some choices about this pregnancy. Just a warning for some of you: it's not a happy book and a lot of people might find the content to be kind of disturbing. There is bad language and sexual references as well, just to let you know.

Though I didn't necessarily like all the characters, I felt that they were all somewhat understandable. The way the book is written, you can see the motives of all the people, their feelings about each situation and many of the choices they make. I think I liked Liv the most. Though she was treated somewhat poorly in the book, I think that her motives were the most clear and natural. I think the most interesting perspective was to read about how the parents were dealing with the situation. Though they didn't know the particulars of what was wrong with their children, it was certainly good to read about the way they tried to deal with each problem- what they thought might be wrong.

As for the plot, I think it was fairly interesting. The topic of teen pregnancy has so many aspects to it and the author could have gone in any direction. But, I think the way they went seemed suitable. The book had a strong structure and many of the peaks happen at important points of the pregnancy; the first missed period, the first biological changes, and other such things. Obviously it's not going to be an action packed novel, but there is still a lot of drama. Most of that revolves around the emotionality of the characters, arguments and the like. I felt like the book could have been longer, with more portions explained further; in some points it just seemed like bits were rushed through. For example, we didn't see much of how the pregnancy changed her school and drama work in a lot of portions. The same for Michael; though he experiences a lot of emotional trauma, there are a lot of bits in his life that we miss out on. There are background characters, who ought to be important, that kind of get lost. For example, Rose's father. It's understandable that he's not around much, but I kind of wish that he had more of a part to play.

Overall, I think it was a fairly good book. It explored a lot of interesting points about teenage pregnancy and how it changed people. The characters are interesting and the author got through many months of the book in

an interesting manner, with little back stories and things that made each character quite unique. However, the long time span in a short amount of words didn't necessarily work the whole time; many portions could have been explained more. It was a pretty good read and, though it was somewhat sad, I think it's the type of book that really makes you think.

I was asked to do a review of the book for a family friend and was loaned a copy.

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## **Olivia (Bookcomet) says**

My head hurts so badly right now. It's expected since it was ONLY TWISTED TO EPIC PROPORTIONS.

There just aren't words for what this book made me go through. Thank goodness for that, actually.

A Small Madness tells the story of a girl named Rose. I will warn you, that if you are really uncomfortable with the topic of teen pregnancy or particularly, sex, in books then I'm telling you now that you will not be comfortable with this book. This is a raw, gritty portrayal of teen pregnancy and the author doesn't gloss over anything.

But that's one of the reasons why this book really touched me.

We see how the way that the main character, Rose, is forced to deal with her pregnancy and how it transforms her. *The things she does*. I can't even. It's so heartbreaking and really does bring up themes that really aren't dealt with enough in YA.

There are many reasons which drew me to this book. The initial being the both the topic and the writing style. I've never read anything before on teen pregnancy and I was pretty curious. Also, from the synopsis I could tell I would like the writing style (I love books written with that kind of detached but yet very intimate and descriptive style). I also love reading books by Aussie authors and the cover is stunning. And totally suits the tone and mood of the book. And this is weird, but it actually feels really nice.

So when I completely (unexpectedly) got this in the mail for review I completely freaked. And I may have ditched the book I was reading in favour of A Small Madness. I know. Terrible. I had just really, really looking forward to reading this ever since I first heard about this, ok? So I sat down and read, starting it late on a school night (with not much time left after homework before I actually had to go to bed) and finishing it within half an hour the next morning. I was just so, so into the story and needed to know what was going to happen.

I also read with my mouth gaping open for a short while. True story.

I just had this feeling of complete and total dread as to what was going to happen (which was thanks to the author's brilliant writing) and knew that I wasn't going to be completely with it until I knew what was going to happen to the characters.

Although I was not a fan of the ending. It was a little too open for my liking. I just think that while open endings can work, in realistic fiction it is particularly important to wrap-up the story and preferably provide closure.

If all Dianne Touchell's books are like this, then I really need to look into reading them.

4/5 comets

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### **Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says**

*"The heat was over, along with summer. They walked the dunes in a flush of new shyness, talking of the beginning of their last year of high school."*

Rose and Michael have just had sex for the first time, they are in love and shyly thrilled with their new intimacy. In the heat of the moment they forgot to use a condom, just twice, but as each others first, Michael's older brother assures him, at least they don't have to worry about disease. Two months later, Rose counts the days in her student diary - her period is 61 days late and a pregnancy test, obtained by her best friend Liz, shows two bold pink lines.

*"I've worked it out. We won't tell anyone. No one could help us anyway. I can hide it. It's not real....These things go away all the time."*

With compassionate insight, Australian author Dianne Touchell explores Rose and Michael's responses to their unplanned pregnancy in *A Small Madness*. Ill-equipped to deal with the reality of their situation, Rose and Michael take refuge in denial that only grows deeper as time passes, leading to horrendous consequences.

Rose and Michael are 'good kids' from middle class families who regularly attend church, gets good grades and have plans for their future. I can't profess to understand their behaviour, but I feel that Touchell communicated her characters rationalisations well and my sympathy was stirred for both characters despite their egregious mistakes.

*"She was a good person. And she was as genuinely appalled as everyone else by speculative descriptions of the monster who must have done this dreadful thing in the bush. Because it wasn't her."*

The premise of *A Touch of Madness* may seem far fetched to some, but it was inspired by an American case reported in the media. I was curious to know just how common Rose's denial of her pregnancy is. I was quite stunned to learn that it happens in about 1 in 2,500 cases, and less than half the instances involve teenagers.

An emotionally powerful and provocative cautionary tale for both young adults and their parents, *A Small Madness* is beautifully written examination of a complex issue.

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### **Rebecca says**

Read this review and more on my blog

**Actual Rating: 2.5**

**In a nutshell:** A Small Madness is a confronting and powerful story that really will get people talking, but I don't think that it was personally my cup of tea.

Honestly, this is going to be one of the most difficult reviews I've ever written. It's been a few days since I finished reading A Small Madness but I'm still so conflicted. On one hand, I appreciate what the author did and the powerful themes of the book. Yet I also felt quite uncomfortable reading this and I'm not entirely convinced that I liked it. I don't think it was personally the book for me.

**If you would rather go into this book without knowing ANYTHING about it, I'd suggest that you stop reading my review now. I don't feel like I can discuss my feelings properly without going into what it is actually about, though I will avoid details and spoilers.**

When I first came across A Small Madness, I was intrigued by its vague summary. I honestly had no idea what to expect so I went into it blind, but I was still quite surprised by the kind of story it was. It is about teen pregnancy. This is something I've read about before, but I've not come across a book that has handled it in the same way that this one did. There are two things that make it stand out to me: 1. It felt real and 2. It's not necessarily the most traditional or usual representation of teen pregnancy.

Something I appreciated about A Small Madness was how realistic it felt. While I didn't feel much for the characters, they felt like real people and it felt like a real scenario. Obviously all YA contemporary/realistic novels are going to have a sense of reality to them, but it didn't feel like a glamorised and false version of reality. The characters were authentic and things weren't all sunshine and rainbows. In fact, things were quite bleak.

This is where things get complicated for me. I always admire when an author takes risks and writes about a serious, intense or controversial subject. In A Small Madness, Dianne Touchell really focused on the psychological impact of an unexpected pregnancy. I liked the role of relationships in the book, though I did struggle with how the pregnancy itself was handled. It was unhealthy both physically and psychologically, which I do understand is the point. It demonstrates the extent of what the protagonist was going through and how she responded to her pregnancy, which obviously was her choice as it's her body. The outcome is quite different to what I've read before in other YA books.

It's a very confronting novel and I actually felt quite uncomfortable while I was reading it. I've read books that are far more intense, including ones that actually resonate with things that I've experienced in my own life, and loved them. For some reason, this book got to me and I don't entirely think it was in a good way. At the very least, it's the kind of book that will inevitably provoke some really interesting conversations but my conclusion is that it's simply not for me.

**Source:** Goodreads First Reads

*I received this book from the publisher via a Goodreads giveaway*

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## **C.G. Drews says**

**This book is equally beautiful and confusing.** It's got one of those maddeningly open endings. Like to the point of my sitting here going "Did they forget to finish printing a chapter?!" IT IS SO VERY OPEN! I'm usually a fan of open-endings, but I would've liked a touch more finality here (just to know what the heck was going to happen to the characters).

\*deep breaths\*

**It's about teenage pregnancy, but it's not your average book.** It's a grisly mess from beginning to end. I actually loved how HONEST it was. Most books that deal with pregnant teens seem slather the tale in pretty glitter. But this? Nope. This is bloody and wet and sad. Rose is hiding the pregnancy, basically denying it exists. The only people who know are Michael (the father) and Liv (the best friend). It's not a complicated tale, but it's totally suffocated in lies and secrets.

**My biggest peeve, besides the ending, was that it switched points-of-view ALL the time.** And it wouldn't be per chapter...you could literally be in ANYONE'S head at any given moment. I really hate that. It's like an omnipresent perspective. I don't mind lots of POVs but I like them to be defined in a chapter at least.

**I also like how the story isn't just about Rose.** There's a lot about Michael and his messed up family (they play "perfect family" but the dad is really super controlling, scarily so). And there's Liv's life...who, for being nominated the school "slut" really has got it together. She's like the sweetest person, and Rose treats her like DIRT. It's infuriating. I try to understand where Rose is coming from but arghhhh. She's so cruel and bitchy to Liv. Liv has the nicest mother, as well.

I feel like the book really underlines the fact that **you can't pretend be in control of your life.** And I also loved that the person people most expected to be a mess (Liv) was actually the person with the most sense and understanding.

**This was a really beautifully written, but sad, book.** I loved the gorgeous writing style and the unique plot. It gives details and shows you the gritty side without being too graphic. **But daaaaang, it's sad.**

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### **Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says**

[If you've recently given birth, miscarried or trying to start a family, then look away now. This book needs to come with a warning. It's horrific, it's disturbing and sadly, also realistic. Told as a narrative, it follows the li

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### **ALPHAreader says**

'A Small Madness' is the new contemporary young adult novel from Australian author Dianne Touchell, whose debut novel 'Creepy & Maud' was CBCA-shortlisted.

I'm sort of going to tell you what this book's about. It's not really clear from the blurb or cover ... but I don't know how to praise it without telling you a little bit.

Rose and Michael started dating, "almost by accident," but when we first meet them they're having sex for the first time because they're in love and ready. Afterwards Rose can't believe that nobody can tell how changed she is, now suddenly a woman. Michael wants to know when they can do it again.

And then Rose starts watching the calendar; "*she was watching the calendar the way you watch a spider in the corner of a room you can't leave. Each day that passed was a spider leg twitching ...*"

This is a book about Michael and Rose's journey down a winding road they can't seem to find their way back from. It's about how one small madness leads to a mistake, then an accident and then something more monstrous.

When I received this book from the publisher, the press release included a few paragraphs from Dianne Touchell on her inspiration for 'A Small Madness'. She said that while living in the United States a few years ago she was "moved and disturbed" by news coverage of a particularly awful discovery, and it had stayed with her ever since. Touchell said that while "society gathered their metaphoric torches and pitchforks," for this couple who had done a very bad thing, her heart just broke for them. It was that news story that led to Touchell exploring similar themes in 'A Small Madness', particularly this idea that; "*being damaged is very, very different to being evil.*"

I adore Touchell's writing. I fell in love with 'Creepy & Maud', and 'A Small Madness' has gone and broken my heart again. It's not an easy book because I don't think Touchell has it in her to write an 'easy' book – it's sad and bleak in parts, the characters read a bit like careening cars you know are going to crash but you can't take your eyes off of ... the writing is lyrical;

*He recognised the madness within himself that Sunday. Recognised its little tap dance on his heart and on his tongue. But he couldn't let it loose again.*

And these characters, for all their bad deeds and mistakes, are portrayed so tenderly and with a fragility that almost belies their actions. But that's the whole point of the book – it's to stay with Michael and Rose from the beginning of their madness, following what leads to their actions ... Touchell unravels them masterfully. The book is told in third-person, so on one page we at once get Rose's mindset on their situation;

*Rose was learning about viruses in Biology. Virus: a submicroscopic particle of a nucleic acid surrounded by protein that can only replicate within a host cell. They only function inside the cells of another living thing. A virus is a parasite. Viruses are not considered to be independent living things. And they can be flushed out.*

... and then we're also given insight into Michael's similar hard place;

*'We should tell someone.' Even as Michael said it he wasn't sure he believed it. Telling someone else, anyone else, would be an extension of the shame and he was stretched to capacity as it was. His parents had always been there for him. They loved him. He didn't doubt that. But isn't love based on belief? And isn't belief just expectations all dressed up for opening night? This was his last year of school; the opening night of the rest of his life was only months away. His mum and dad had bought and paid for their expectations. What happens when someone loses that? What happens when someone stops believing in you?*

This is a book full of black, white and grey. Touchell asks readers to be sympathetic to a dark deed and the fallible characters who commit it – she asks that we examine this idea that "being damaged is very, very different to being evil." Here is a deliciously disturbing book; dark, lyrical and with a sharp complexity that will push readers out of their comfort zone. Must read.

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