



Dietland

Sarai Walker

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The diet revolution is here. And it's armed.

Plum Kettle does her best not to be noticed, because when you're fat, to be noticed is to be judged. Or mocked. Or worse. With her job answering fan mail for a popular teen girls' magazine, she is biding her time until her weight-loss surgery. Only then can her true life as a thin person finally begin.

Then, when a mysterious woman starts following her, Plum finds herself falling down a rabbit hole and into an underground community of women who live life on their own terms. There Plum agrees to a series of challenges that force her to deal with her past, her doubts, and the real costs of becoming "beautiful." At the same time, a dangerous guerrilla group called "Jennifer" begins to terrorize a world that mistreats women, and as Plum grapples with her personal struggles, she becomes entangled in a sinister plot. The consequences are explosive.

Dietland is a bold, original, and funny debut novel that takes on the beauty industry, gender inequality, and our weight loss obsession—from the inside out, and with fists flying.

Dietland Details

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From Reader Review Dietland for online ebook

Liz says

It is jarring to me how many reviews of this book state that people liked the storyline about Plum when she was starving herself, hiding and ashamed of her weight, waiting for the day that she would one day be thin, but that once the book delved into some deep feminist terrorism territory, with the main character finally being able to lash out against the society that made her ashamed of who she was in the first place, Plum is then considered "unlikable". I think the point of this book may flown waaaaaayyyy over their heads. I, for one, relished in this no-holds-barred takedown of the beauty industry and rape culture.

Ilyssa Wesche says

Yeah that's right - five mother-effing stars. This book spoke to me for the obvious reason but I loved it beyond that. The two story lines worked so nicely together, and all of it made me think about what was happening/between the lines of the book even when I wasn't reading.

Time to buy some colorful tights!!

Rachel Watkins says

This is not the book you think it is. This is not a book about a fat girl. This is not a book about dieting. This is a book about societal change. This is a manifesto that should be read by every feminist, no matter their gender. This is a book that must be discussed. DIETLAND is disturbing. It's supposed to be and it's brilliant.

Chelsea (chelseadolling reads) says

DNF at about 65%. This was EXTREMELY well written, but I just don't think satirical novels really work for me. I appreciated what it was doing, but it was giving me some weird feelings regarding my own self-love journey and I just decided to put it down. I definitely still recommend trying this one out for yourself! It just personally didn't work well for me.

Eve says

"I hated it when others alluded to my size, despite the obviousness of it. It was as if they were confirming that there was something wrong with me when I'd hoped they hadn't noticed it." – Plum

I couldn't have read this book at a better time in my life, which is funny because I was meant to be reading Beautiful Bureaucrat, which was recommended by a friend, and confused the covers somewhere down the line. I am positive that what made this book so awesome was that I knew virtually nothing about the characters, themes or plot beforehand. If you decide to read this anytime soon, I recommend not reading too many plot heavy reviews; it will spoil the punchy message of the book.

Plum hovers around 300 pounds and lives a predictable life as a magazine columnist in Brooklyn, New York. A series of strange events force her out of the protective shell she's created for herself, and into the center of a feminist movement that's taking over the world. In a creative and outspoken voice, Sarai Walker expounds upon subjects like body image, the diet industry, sexism and the objectification of women in entertainment/media. I've never read The Feminine Mystique or anything in that genre, so this book was really fresh to me. It made me feel better about myself! I loved watching Plum transform from the inside out, and her final realization about her body made tears well up in my eyes. I think it's easy to forget that simple message, but it's one I will remind myself of constantly.

"I looked at my body, the body that had kept me alive for nearly thirty years, without any serious health problems, the body that had taken me where I needed to go and protected me. I had never appreciated or loved the body that had done so much for me. I had thought of it as my enemy, as nothing more than a shell that enclosed my real self, but it wasn't a shell. The body was me. This is your real life. You're already living it."

Thomas says

This book captured the glorious feminist spirit I wanted *The Power* to have but did not. In *Dietland* we follow 300-pound Plum Kettle, a fat woman who does her best to go unnoticed. All her life, people have judged, excluded, and harassed her because of her weight. So while she works her day job answering fan mail for a teen girls' magazine, she waits for the day of her weight-loss surgery, so she can finally begin her new and improved life as a thin person. Plum's plans get sidetracked, though, when she falls into an underground community of women who value empowerment and supporting one another. These women encourage Plum to confront her past and her beliefs about her weight. At the same time, a lethal guerrilla group called "Jennifer" has started to terrorize men who have mistreated women. This group's actions soon collide with Plum's life in shocking ways.

I loved Plum's character growth throughout *Dietland*. As someone who had an eating disorder several years ago, I understand the difficult and oftentimes agonizing process of learning to love your body. Thus, I really appreciated Sarai Walker's portrayal of Plum and how she starts out so entrenched in diet culture and self-loathing. Walker shows how all throughout her life, Plum received scorn because of how she looked, how she dared to take up space in a society teaches women to shrink themselves - so how could she cherish her body in such a fatphobic society? Yet, she learns to treat herself with kindness and to fight for what she believes in with the help of the Calliope House, a group of women who live life on their own terms and support one another while fighting the patriarchy. I cheered for the Calliope House throughout the book, as it symbolized the empowerment and healing that can come from a feminist collective. This group of women contained so much compassion and hope and filled a void in Plum's life.

Given the strength and generosity of the women in the Calliope House, including Plum, I feel obligated to address the issue of "unlikability." As Plum learns to love her body, she also learns to recognize all the awful ways that men and society objectify and hurt women. Plum gets angry. And as Audre Lorde writes in "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", anger is a valid and necessary reaction to oppression. I feel grateful that Walker writes anger as a healthful, motivating force that emboldens Plum and the women in the Calliope House to assert themselves and create a better world for girls and women. To be blunt: if you find Plum off-putting or "unlikable" or if you preferred her more meek, self-hating side from the novel's beginning, you may want to examine what society has taught you about acceptable women's behavior, as well as tone-policing in general.

I also adored the inclusion of the "Jennifer" guerrilla group. On a stylistic level, these chapters added suspense and tension that intertwined well with Plum's plot which focused more on her self-discovery. More so, they raised thought-provoking and important questions about sexism, rape culture, and using violence within activism. Walker clearly has a background in women's studies - and I liked how so many of her characters do too - as she incorporates intelligent, fiery scenes that address violence against women, the ways corporations profit from women's bodies, and more. Another blunt point: if your immediate reaction is to judge the book for how it displays women hurting men who have hurt them, I would encourage you to think about how society normalizes violence against women so that we rarely question it, yet many of us feel shocked when women act up to defend themselves or prevent more harm.

Overall, a fantastic novel that integrates the punchiness of *Fight Club* with the feminism of Margaret Atwood's novels. The themes in *Dietland* reminded me of *Hunger* by Roxane Gay and *Appetites* by Caroline Knapp, two nonfiction books close to my heart. As you can discern from its low star rating, this is a controversial story people have very mixed reactions to. It is often uncomfortable, uncouth, and relentless in its take down of fatphobia and rape culture - which is precisely why I give it five stars.

Dee says

An overweight, ridiculed and insecure woman types away on her laptop at a cafe, writing advice to readers of a girl's magazine, before she notices that a punky type in bright tights and combat boots is watching and following her. Will this obese woman, whose short life has been defined by calories and diets, be pulled into some kind of underground, feminist commune, and what will she do and learn? The first few chapters pulled me in, especially after I read that this was considered a feminist novel by an author versed in that tradition.

It planted me into a place I hardly ever explored: the mind of an obese woman. It exposed a few anti-feminist notions of mine that I didn't know I had. I was often dubious about efforts to get obese women to love their bodies, because wasn't that encouraging unhealthy lifestyles? It was ok for me to accept my own, however, even though it was kept skinny partly through coffee and cigarettes. I also thought if women claimed that diet and exercise weren't working, they were probably just making excuses. A few weeks ago, I was surprised to discover a woman on youtube who could twist herself into difficult yoga positions because she'd been practicing with discipline for years. However, she was still overweight. So it's true that you never stop learning, and this book pushed me towards realising that not all obese women are unhealthy. And even if they are, they've still got the right to love their bodies and they should.

I love when a book comes along to make me reevaluate my worldview. This one did that, and it was also light enough to still be enjoyable and entertaining. Then about halfway through, it lost a bit of the suspense and tension that had pulled me in. I felt the author revealed a bit too much too soon. Several new characters

were introduced too quickly and weren't explored enough to give them depth. Some of the scenarios seemed a bit too unbelievable and concocted, and the book didn't quite live up to the promise that I saw in its opening.

Still, not bad for a debut novel and a good read that's both entertaining and thought-provoking.

More reviews on my blog.

Reed says

I completely disagree with all the reviews in which readers hated the second half of the book. OMG, the Jennifer activities/terrorist group IS the point! Also disagree that the characters are unlikable -- I was rooting for the women in Calliope House all the way. (How can you not love Sana?) If the book had simply addressed Plum and the fat issues, it would have been a much more comfortable book. The subversion lies in the "domestic terrorism" being aimed at men, instead of at women (which is routine). That's what makes it uncomfortable and, I would guess, why some readers hated it. This is definitely not a book for everybody. But I loved it.

Hannah Notess says

Totally bonkers in the best possible way! Feminist terrorist collective! Ridiculously named shades of nail polish! Mortifying letters from teenage girls (one of the best genres out there)! Horrifying medical procedures! And somehow this book is hilarious, entertaining, fast-paced, and thought-provoking.

You will like this book if you are a mild-mannered feminist who nonetheless cherishes a very dark sense of humor.

I would LOVE to have a book club conversation on this book; it would be a fantastic one to have discussion about.

Holly says

I wanted to like this book. The main character has potential, the message is a positively feministic one with the right underlying aura of needed societal change. However, the storyline was just too bizarre for me and the characters too outlandish. Everyone is the "nth" degree in personality or opinion concerning just about everything (and everything in this book comes down to the objectivization of women). The females were all too strident in their tone and all the men were lascivious animals. It was hard to take the message seriously with all these over-the-top characterizations. Sorry to be counter to many five star ratings but I just didn't see the allure of this novel and yet I read it until the very end thinking I was missing something. In the end it just wasn't there.

Hannah says

Once in a decade, a novel comes along with the potential to alter our perception of reality, to change how we see ourselves and to reveal new possibilities in how we can live lives of joy and freedom. For many readers, Sarai Walker's debut novel *Dietland* may be just that.

I am someone who rates reading right up there with breathing, eating, and loving, and who begins and ends her day with a book in her hand. But for me, the experience of reading *Dietland* has been something altogether new and different.

Dietland begins with Alicia "Plum," a fat woman whose life revolves around her efforts to become her true, thin 'Alicia,' self. Plum's plans are abruptly derailed when a mysterious girl named Leeta writes the word "DIETLAND" on Plum's palm.

What happens next to Plum is life changing, and nothing that she (or the reader) could expect. I read *Dietland* with very little knowledge of the plot other than what I've shared above, and I would recommend that anyone interested read it (at least at first) in that same, fresh, way.

What I will say for now is that I've struggled my whole life with the realization that I don't fit, and don't want to try to fit, in a culture which tells me to be smaller. *Dietland* is the first book to convincingly show me a way in which a life of freedom might be possible. I know I will read *Dietland* many times in the future, and hope I have the opportunity to talk about it with other readers.

Dietland is a book that is for all women, but it is also a book that is intensely personal. It is very funny, very smart, and utterly absorbing. It contains scenes of graphic violence, but left me feeling comforted and energized. Read *Dietland* as a love letter to all women, and to yourself.

I received an advanced review edition of *Dietland* from the publisher through NetGalley.

Paul Bryant says

Earlier this year a company called Protein World launched this advert in the London Underground

and over 50,000 women signed a petition calling for it to be banned for body shaming (and it was banned). The posters were defaced with *many* rude words. Other protestors offered alternative versions of beauty

Well, seeing as to how this is the Planet Earth and not the *Planet Disney*, you won't be surprised to learn that sales of Protein World's "Weight Loss Collection" products took off like a rocket after all the bad publicity. But that's by the bye.

So, you don't have to look far to find examples of the female body as a political and psychological battleground. This book is all about that. It's *Fat is a Feminist Issue* crossed with *Fight Club*. (Our author says this is pretty much a riff on *Fight Club* in her acknowledgements.) It's the story of Plum, a 300 pound woman who has spent her life wishing she was "normal"-sized. She's gone through all the diets, nothing has worked, and finally she decides to go for the stomach-stapling surgery. But before that happens she gets involved with a bunch of feminists, and then while we're following the detailed account of Plum's

consciousness-raising, a brand new terrorist group hits the headlines – it's called *Jennifer* and this part of the novel is a fantasy of feminist revenge, whereby porn barons and rapists are abducted, murdered and dumped in the desert. Oh, and their female aiders and abettors are killed too. It's all more than a little cartoony, but that was fine by me. I love a bit of revenge.

Along the way, we have accounts of Plum shoplifting from stores called *V--- S---* ... yes, like that. She says many rude things about *V—S--*. Well, I guess Sarai Walker was advised that if she actually said *Victoria's Secret* she may get a writ.

I didn't have a problem with this being an explicitly political and not very realistic wish-fulfilment fantasy. The problem with this novel was that it just didn't go far enough. To explain why will involve spoilers.

(view spoiler)

DON'T GIMME THAT FATTITUDE

In the end I needed *more* feminist terrorism, and particularly more investigation of the effects such a terrorist group would have on society – for instance, they issue a "Penis Blacklist" featuring the names of 50 misogynists – any woman having sex with any of these men will be killed, they say. Well, I want to know what happened then! What a luridly interesting idea! But it's just kind of tossed off, if that's not an inappropriate phrase.

Heart in right place, keyboard not quite there yet.

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

Before I go all ranty and piss everyone off, I will say the first part of this book is really good.

Plum is overweight. That pretty much defines this girl's life. She keeps telling herself that her "real life" will begin as soon as she has weight loss surgery and becomes thin. Of course, that's bullshit. But it's what society has taught Plum to feel about herself.

She works from her computer for a teen fashion magazine, giving advice to young girls who write the editor of the magazine. Dear Kitty, Dear Kitty handles some of a girl's life issues that are pretty hard subjects. Plum handles them in a way that made me love her character....at first.

You get the past life that made Plum who she is from growing up in a house that a famous actress had lived at (Plum felt she was always on display to the tourist sneaking pictures) and her try at the weight loss clinic.

The weight loss guru who started the program lost weight after having a child and it's one of those that supplies you gross food so that you never have to step foot in a grocery store. Weight loss guru's daughter steps in and shuts down the franchise and poor Plum is crushed. Fast forward to where she is now, working the Dear Kitty advice column and hiding from real life.

Then:

I don't know what the fuck happened to the second part of this book. At feminist militia group named "Jennifer" pulls Plum into it's clutches.

Okay, so here's where I piss people off. These feminists really went over the top for me. I get that women should not be fat-shamed, women should not be abused because "they were asking for it", the porn industry..well I hate that shit so I'm not going there.

This book only shows the hate part. Woman power is fine. I get that. I'm a woman. But honestly people it can be carried too far. There is men being executed in the book and everyone feels fine with it.

Men get fat-shamed too.

What about that bag of tricks? Not mentioned here though.

The book turned Plum's character into a hateful bitch. I mean at first she was so like-able and then she went there? I don't get it. Why not turn her into someone smart that showed that all people have rights?

I hated it. HATED it. I would have one starred this shit storm if not for that awesome beginning.

Oh, for the trolls that will probably come because of course the masses love this book. Guess what? I'm an asshole. It's my opinion. Go write your own review.

Dana says

Well...this was super weird. Dietland felt like it didn't know what kind of book it wanted to be. On one hand it was focused on an overweight woman struggling with her life and the decision of whether or not to get weight loss surgery. On the other other hand it was about a Neo-Feminist vigilant group that's on a killing spree. The second part came out of nowhere, and we never really know what is going on...and not in an "ooooo mystery!" kind of way, more like a "wtf?" way.

It didn't help that the main character was so abrasive. While I do think there were some amazing feminist tidbits in this book, overall it just went to too many extremes, and for me that ended up making the story a bit of a joke.

2.5 stars, but I'm rounding this to three because even though I had issues with this book, I still really appreciated the spotlight on the objectification of women. I think at times I can be a bit blind when it comes to sexism in society, and this book really makes you open your eyes and realize that this behavior should not simply be considered normal.

Buy, Borrow or Bin Verdict: Borrow

Note: I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review.

Theresa says

"Dietland" by Sarai Walker was one of my favorite novels I read last year. This book is tasty, wicked, bizarre, disturbing, and highly entertaining. The protagonist of "Dietland" is a 300+ pound woman named Alicia (Plum) Kettle. Plum has lived a life of extreme self-hatred and loneliness. She doesn't have many friends, she's never been in a serious, romantic relationship, and her job is anything but glamorous. She also has clinical depression. Plum has always struggled with her weight since she was a kid. She believes she will achieve true happiness if she undergoes gastric bypass surgery. While waiting for her upcoming surgery, Plum keeps running into a very strange and colorfully dressed woman. Is this woman deliberately following Plum, or is it just her imagination? What makes this novel so crazy and unique is the unexpected plot twist. There's an all-female terrorist group (called "Jennifer" of all things) wrecking havoc and "sweet revenge" upon sexually abusive men. This book is extremely difficult to review because it's basically a story within a story. Plum's journey of self-acceptance is completely separate from the "Jennifer" storyline. Towards the middle of the book, everything starts to blend/weave together and that's when the plot really comes alive. This book deals with some heavy topics such as: eating disorders, fat shaming, sexual violence, pornography, guerilla warfare, and misconceptions about body image/sexual attractiveness in the media. Keep in mind, this book is a satire. It's definitely not meant to be taken seriously. But you'll definitely need to have an open-mind while reading "Dietland". It's a brutally honest account of how beauty in America (and around the world) is a powerful tool and also emotionally crippling to the female psyche. Don't let the glossy cover of this book fool you - it's a killer. Plum Kettle for President! :)
