



The Heartbeat Thief

A.J. Krafton

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Haunted by a crushing fear of death, a young Victorian woman discovers the secret of eternal youth—she must surrender her life to attain it, and steal heartbeats to keep it.

In 1860 Surrey, a young woman has only one occupation: to marry. Senza Fyne is beautiful, intelligent, and lacks neither wealth nor connections. Finding a husband shouldn't be difficult, not when she has her entire life before her.

But it's not life that preoccupies her thoughts. It's death—and that shadowy spectre haunts her every step.

So does Mr. Knell. Heart-thumpingly attractive, obviously eligible—he'd be her perfect match if only he wasn't so macabre. All his talk about death, all that teasing about knowing how to avoid it...

When her mother arranges a courtship with another man, Senza is desperate for escape from a dull prescribed destiny. Impulsively, she takes Knell up on his offer. He casts a spell that frees her from the cruelty of time and the threat of death—but at a steep price. In order to maintain eternal youth, she must feed on the heartbeats of others.

It's a little bit Jane Austen, a little bit Edgar Allen Poe, and a whole lot of stealing heartbeats in order to stay young and beautiful forever. From the posh London season to the back alleys of Whitechapel, across the Channel, across the Pond, across the seas of Time...

How far will Senza Fyne go to avoid Death?

The Heartbeat Thief Details

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From Reader Review *The Heartbeat Thief* for online ebook

Lekeisha The Booknerd says

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How far would you go to avoid death? Would you make a deal with the devil himself? Drink some magical potion to live forever, never changing? Well, Senza Fyne makes one heck of a choice to avoid the thing she's most afraid of – death. I love the amazing writing of this story. And while I enjoyed that aspect, I was somewhat disappointed in the scarceness of Death himself.

Senza Fyne is a young woman of privilege in 1860 England. Beauty is as natural to her as green is to grass. She's about to make her debut to society, and in turn, land herself a husband who is worthy of her. Well, that's the plan her mother has for her only daughter. But when death is taking away the people she loves the most, she becomes increasingly panicked about dying. Enter Knell, the mysterious – yet handsome – stranger, and he has taken up residence in Senza's every thought. He knows her fear, and offers her an out of sorts, in exchange for her life force. By the time she realizes that all is not as it seems, it's too late to take it back. And so begins the life of thievery for Senza, in the stealing of heartbeats from unsuspecting folk. Her heart no longer beats, so she has to take those of another.

I really liked the mystery of Knell. He swoops in with his dark charm and takes Senza by surprise. She was a fool to fall for it. I wish there had been more of him throughout the story. Instead, we have Senza narrating her way through time, never aging, always the same. She meets some interesting people throughout the decades. I love the historical aspects, especially the time that Senza spent in Whitechapel. Hello, Jack The Ripper is running rampant and she is a young woman alone walking those dreadful streets!! And just when she makes a friend and is about to leave, death comes a knocking. Not for her, but for some very unfortunate people. I really loved that scene at the end of her stay in Whitechapel.

I really wanted this to be much darker than it was. It was dampened down by Senza's endless monologue about what was happening, had happened, or where she was. The book spanned more than 150 years, and there was city after city, country after country. The story is rather poetic, which I loved. The ending came as a shock. I didn't know how it would all wrap up, but I wasn't expecting Death to be so honest about why he chose Senza to begin with. It would have been nice to have more from his character throughout. Overall, I really enjoyed this book. It makes one wonder about living life and dying respectfully. Recommended!

Kirsty Bicknell says

The idea of taking something from a person to keep oneself animated is not a new one in the fantasy genre; vampires drink blood, demons suck souls and zombies eat brains!

The Heartbeat Thief is an original take on this idea as Ash Krafon's protagonist, Senza Fyne, pilfers heartbeats from those around her in exchange for her eternal youth.

At the beginning of AJ Krafon's new adult fantasy novel, I found it difficult to like Senza. She appears vain, conceited and uninterested. Despite this, I was still intrigued by the story, her relationship with Mr Knell and how her obsession with death leads her to immortality. As the story develops and Senza realises the consequences of her decision, including losing those that she loves and cares for, she ironically becomes more human to the reader. This is a clever move by AJ Krafon as we can now empathise with Senza's

loneliness, grief, hopelessness - and her relentless hunger for the heartbeats of others.

AJ Krafon's writing is beautiful and the story flows seamlessly between historical time periods, from 1859 to the early 21st Century. AJ Krafon expertly captures these long years in Senza's life, whether by fashion, attitudes or events. Perhaps the most dramatic of these is the time Senza spends in Whitechapel in 1888. Not only is this the year of Jack the Ripper, but we witness Senza forge her first real friendship since leaving home, with the wonderful Mary Jane.

From this time, Senza's existence is filled with amazing highs and the most heart-wrenching lows, all of which lead to *The Heartbeat Thief's* remarkable conclusion.

I am a long standing fan of AJ Krafon, but for me her writing in *The Heartbeat Thief* is on another level, which makes this story totally irresistible.

Alissa says

Okay. I really wanted to like this book but I got half way thru and I wanted to throw it across the room. Except I was reading it on my ereader and I was on a plane. If I'd had it in physical form I would have looked at the end so I could at least pretend to have finished it but I could not.

This book had so much potential and then it was ruined by the main character and the fact that 151 pages in I could find the plot.

I finally realized that I could stop reading and almost cried in relief. I need to never see this book again.

Lisa says

I just finished reading this book ... i haven't even taken the time to reflect ... so this review is quite raw!

I very much enjoyed this story ... i felt many things for Senza throughout this literary journey. I was sad for her many times, often feeling so deeply that tears threatened and a lump formed in my throat.

The story was slightly dark but how could it not be?

The writing is brilliant and I am so glad I requested an advance copy for review.

this is not normally my kind of book but I took a chance and was rewarded greatly ...

i highly recommend it!

Ember Shane says

New Adult/Paranormal/Speculative Fiction

Up until I got to the very end of this book, I kept thinking a good way to describe it would be a YA/NA "alternate" vampire book. Senza Fyne is young and beautiful with her whole life in front of her, but that's not enough for her. After her grandmother and later, her best friend, die, Senza becomes terrified of death. Cue mysterious stranger who offers her eternal youth. Similar to a vampire, Senza must feed, but not with fangs. In order to sustain herself, she must steal heartbeats. One here, one there, not enough to be missed, but enough to keep her going endlessly through time.

The writing in this novel was superb. The story begins in 19th century England, one of my favorite settings,

and continues forward to a much more modern time in America. The only thing I wished there was more of in this novel was romance. There was one time period, fleeting as it was, where Senza finally has a real romantic interest, but I craved more. At the end of the story, some of my hard feelings toward Knell (the mysterious stranger Senza always pines for but doesn't connect with again) were greatly lessened. The reader goes through this long journey with Senza and sees how lonely it is and can't help but feel angry with him for leaving her alone year after year. I enjoyed the ending very much. Not only did you get the reasons for Knell's actions, but there's a satisfaction for how you believe Senza's storyline will ultimately play out.

Five stars, and I would definitely read something else by this author.

C.J. Anaya says

This story was simply breathtaking. Having read quite a bit of Edgar Allen Poe in high school and in college, I really appreciated the author's nod to his work, and the way she used so much imagery to allow Senza's growing fears of death to take on such a demanding physical presence as if it is truly a threat that lies in wait to capture unwilling victims without hesitation or even mercy. It's amazing to me that the author was able to take this fear of death and allow that internal conflict to carry the entire story. It affected every relationship Senza could have or would have had. Though it would be easy to dislike Senza for her childish vanity where her beauty and youth are concerned-these vanities are some underlying reasons behind not just her fear of death but her fear of growing older-it is obvious that her upbringing and the importance her mother placed on her daughters beauty is something we must fault the mother in and not the daughter. And even though Senza finally comes to understand the irrational fear of growing old and dying it is understandable that she might find the idea horrifying considering her worth was sacrificed upon the alter of all things superficial in nature. It helps the reader join in that journey of discovery on Senza's part though she spends much of it fleeing from a happiness that might have been all consuming.

I noticed a reviewer described the author's writing as boring and mediocre. I think this reviewer must not have been the right audience for this book, and simply wasn't interested in the subject matter because the writing is anything but mediocre or boring. Besides it being technically flawless in every way it holds so much symbolism within the prose as it gives a nod to Poe and the style of writing that requires a little digging within ourselves to pick out the message and theme interwoven within the lines of this truly poetic narrative. It's meant to not only entertain, but to give the reader a little food for thought which is something I loved about the literature I read in college. Thought provoking material that stretches you just a little should never be dubbed mediocre simply because a particular reader might have been looking for something light and fluffy.

Senza's development was memorable. She went from debilitating fear in the presence of death to complete acceptance of it when she had the opportunity to give everything she had to someone who was going to die either way. Such a selfless and self-sacrificing gesture she never would have considered previously, and though it took her quite some time to mature, her progress was obvious and measurable in a way that was both compelling and engrossing.

The secondary characters were beautifully weaved into the story, and I find it incredible that I was able to fall in love with every one of them even though many of them were only part of the narrative for a short time. It's the mark of a talented writer who allows us to care for so many characters in one book, especially when they play such minor roles, Mary, Piotr, that young man she finally opened her heart to...all of these people added to Senza's moment of discovery and helped to teach her some important life lessons. I was

delighted with the author's take on Jack the Ripper as well. Clever to weave that in, and so on point with the dark theme of the story. It was also a wonderful moment for Senza's courageous spirit and loving heart to shine through as she took care of Mary and then faced off with the Ripper. Good stuff, that.

I'll admit to wishing that more had happened between her and Mr. Knell in the end, but I think it ended exactly how it was meant to with a full life of love awaiting her and even more love to follow in death. I was pretty much rooting for Mr. Knell all along, never once believing he might be the villain he seemed simply because of his actions where Senza's well-being was concerned, and in the end he gave her one of the most precious gifts of all, that of perspective. An immortal life lived in fear shut off from the world around you can never be better than a mortal life filled with love, family and those every day activities that might not seem like much at the time, but collectively are so precious to everyone in the end. Basically, Mr. Knell is my new book boyfriend, and I kind of want a whole book devoted to him getting his own happily ever after even if it is dark in nature. I think his story would be the most fascinating one of all.

I loved this book, the author's voice and style and the author's mastery of such a difficult topic as death and what awaits us on the other side. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in a thought provoking fantasy with some wickedly entertaining paranormal elements.

Rachel McClellan says

For some reason, when I first started reading this book, I was reminded of a favorite painting of mine. There was something about the wording, sentence structure, description...it all just came together in one masterfully written novel.

The Heartbeat Thief is a timeless tale of endless beauty, love and loss, sorrow and joy. I loved following Senza's journey through time as she learned to cope with a gift given to her by a mysterious stranger. In a lot of ways this novel reminded me of The Portrait of Dorian Gray. Not because the stories are similar, but I think they shared some of the same themes.

I highly recommend this novel to readers of all ages. You will not be disappointed!

Ashley Nestler says

In my honest opinion, I feel like The Heartbeat Thief was written for me. It is right down my alley – a dark, historical fantasy – and it couldn't have been more brilliantly done. The originality was outstanding, and Ash Krafon's style added a perfect poetic feel to this novel – very reminiscent of Edgar Allen Poe.

First of all, the play on vanity in this novel is something that always fascinates me. Senza is a character perfect for today's times. She is obsessed with staying young and beautiful forever, and her fear of growing old and dying is a widespread fear for almost anyone. Krafon did a wonderful job of forcing the reader to face their fears, while adding fantasy elements that are extremely believable. Her novel didn't seem like it was worlds away; instead, it made me believe that the situations presented could happen to anyone. One of my favorite examples of Krafon's poetic writing style is seen below, and it is one of the best sentences I have ever read in a piece of literature:

“Moonlight spilled down its silvery veil upon the passengers in the Fyne family carriage, adding another sheen of splendor to their finery.”

I also found that the novel’s historical elements were accurate and realistic as well, which is always important when it comes to historical fiction. Every aspect of this novel amazed me, and it opened me up to a story much different than anything I have read recently, which was refreshing. I also fell in love with the cover of this book, and I felt that it complimented the story well.

Krafton is one of those rare authors who possesses the techniques of some of our world’s great authors, and reading her novel was like reading a classic. If you are looking for a novel featuring elements of the great authors of our time, such as Jane Austen, then *The Heartbeat Thief* is perfect for you.

Tracey says

This could have been spectacular. It missed some amazing opportunities, though, and was poorly written, and unfortunately that impacts my rating and opinion of the book. Along with the ending.

Unless it is based in some mythology or folklore I've never heard of, the author created a new kind of vampire. Dead/undead, unkillable, stealing heartbeats from others to take the place of those no longer stirring her own heart, Senza Fyne is perpetually eighteen years old. Once so afraid of death that she agreed to this still-hearted existence, now she avoids staying in one place for too long and watches as those she loves age and die.

The initial problem I have with this really terrific premise is ... it simply takes too long to manifest. For nearly a third of the book (29%, thank you Kindle reading progress counter) Senza is battered by first the death of a favorite grandmother and then of a friend, and – along with her mother's constant badgering that she needs to snare a husband before her great beauty fades – that is supposed to be the reason she is so terrified of death. It doesn't work. She meets with the mysterious Mr. Knell quite some time after the second death in her life, when she seemed to be beginning to recover. If at that point she had, say, witnessed a child run over in the busy street or something of the sort, I could understand her worry blossoming into a full-blown obsession. Or if another adventure in the story had been the focus of the beginning, I would have bought into the whole plot much more readily.

The adventure I refer to there is Senza's involvement in the Jack the Ripper murders. Without spoilers, I will say that it felt wildly implausible; for one thing, there's no historical basis as far as I know that all of the Ripper's victims knew each other. I think that would have been counted as evidence. Late nineteenth century police work was primitive, but even then something like a common pimp or customer among the victims would probably have come to light. And quite simply the depiction of the victims in this book is historically inaccurate, and served to make me less than trusting of pretty much the rest of the author's research. (For one thing, the final victim was blonde.)

At least Senza didn't become a gorgeous female Forrest Gump, inserting herself into historical events at every turn, and I'm grateful for that. Her peregrinations take her out of history, which actually makes the Whitechapel events stand out even more – not in a good way.

Senza is gorgeous – stunningly gorgeous. And the reader is never allowed to forget it, not for a moment. Tight third-person perspective or no, her astonishing beauty is kept at the forefront. (“I can’t imagine you

ever looking less than perfect.” She dropped her gaze. She couldn’t imagine it, either.) Oddly, it's never made out to be a burden as I've seen elsewhere; the only reason it's not an asset is that, as her mother does keep reiterating, beauty fades. But Senza has a brain as well, and reads constantly – especially Shakespeare. This should have been endearing, for me. It wasn't, merely because it all comes back, as so many things do, to "show and tell". No matter how many times I'm *told* that Senza is ever-so-clever and knows Hamlet by heart and can out-argue philosophers and scholars ... I was never shown it. There are very occasional scenes in which she is shown reading – or, rather, sitting somewhere with a book and thinking about Mr. Knell or her troubles; she quotes Shakespeare once, to my knowledge; otherwise her dialogue and behavior show no indication of all those brains.

One major area where the unique and fascinating premise of the book is simply let down is in the way it is dealt with in the narration. By this I mean: The book is told from the point of view of Senza, the thief, whose existence is turned upside-down by this "gift", and who – at a sheltered and innocent eighteen – has to learn how to manage the new facts of her life. An incident is described from the first days of her altered state – but apart from her awareness of the need to avoid another such incident, there's not really anything here about *how* she avoids it (does she lock her door at night? Use a doorstep? Claim to kick and snore in order to avoid bedfellows?) The mechanics of stealing heartbeats are glossed over, but more would have been better: I would have preferred less buildup to the change and more on her learning curve. And at certain points the stolen heartbeats are described as having a flavor or weight to them – but again there is little more than that provided. Again, in a tight-perspective narrative, where POV never leaves the main character and where that character's entire existence centers around others' heartbeats, I expected there to be more color, more data. What do they taste like? How do they have weight? What are the mathematics to their being used up? How does she work out her routine of where and from whom they're stolen?

So, the idea was terrific, let down by execution – and by the writing. For example, the author has a strange disconnect with gender in her vocabulary, which perhaps will be fixed for a final draft. The mysterious Mr. Knell constantly calls Senza "bien-aimé" – the masculine form of the endearment; a man's hair is described as "blonde", commonly the feminized form of the adjective.

And then there are ... all the other problems. "The captivating woman with the eyes that never stopped." Sentence fragment - and... stopped what? "Most interesting was the fact that the fan, once the ultimate female weapon, had been replaced by the ever-useful garter belt and the secrets they concealed." What secrets, and how big is her garter belt? And how did garter belts replace fans? Are ladies waving garter belts about in public? "Exploring the costal colonies—states, she'd remind herself" – aside from the typo, Senza wasn't so old she'd be thinking of the states as colonies. This is ridiculous.

I had an issue with the idea of a love interest being named Gehring. Sorry – whatever the spelling, too many evil echoes.

And yes, I am aware that at least some of the problems I saw might have been resolved before the book's final release; this was, after all, a Netgalley ARC (thanks to them and the publisher for a free copy for review.) Things like a move to France with no mention I could find that Senza ever learned to speak French. Things like a fairly important character (the innkeeper) who is never given a name. Things like "too" and "as well" being used in the same sentence; "everyone ... were"; "laying" where "lying" should have been used (this is becoming more and more common); things like part of a sentence being in the present tense and the other part in the past; things like someone "knicker"ing to a horse (which is wrong in so many ways). Et cetera, et cetera... I did a lot of highlighting. ("His heart banged like a bull"?)

Speaking of horses, the line "And she had no interest in being sold off, ridden for sport, or put out for stud"

irked me deeply. *She* is rather unlikely to be put out to stud, no?

Speaking of horses some more: "He grasped her hand and tugged it toward him, reining her in like a yearling." What? I'm sorry, anyone who's reining in a yearling needs to be reported to the RSPCA. And ... I just don't see the simile. (It's far from the only bad simile – I just don't want to make this a ten-page review.)

And still speaking of horses and being deeply irked, "the master's quarter horse". As with verbal anachronism, I have absolutely no patience with horse-related anachronism. The odds of someone having a quarter horse – which is a specific breed, not something more vague – in 1921 France is just short of impossible. I should just write and save a diatribe to cut and paste into reviews for books like this: it's so easy to avoid stupid mistakes like this which only serve to rile people who know a little. Research. It took me less than five minutes to confirm my strong hunch that this was totally wrong. Why did I have to?

Sadly, this is one of those times that upon working through my notes and beating a review into shape, my rating for the book goes down. I'm leaving it with two stars simply because the idea was so very interesting. But I'm tempted to take one away because it was just badly done.

And the ending was dreadful. What an absolutely terrible idea - almost bad enough to completely negate the original concept. Pity.

Camly Nguyen says

Sensa Fyne hates death up to the point where she would sell her soul to avoid it. After living for about a hundred years and looking forever 18, she realizes that she's lived for long enough and accepts death. Thanatos then brings her back in time and she lives her life like a normal person without her fear for death.

Welp, that's the summary of this approx. 300 paged book. I thought it was a little boring and extremely slow. Nothing happened really. I was always hoping for something big to happen but nothing ever came up. Kind of disappointed. Throughout the book, I remembered that I was always searching for the inexistent plot.
sigh

Overall, it's a book FILLED with FLUFF and please don't tell me that the importance of the book is the message that it wants to share: to live to the fullest. Because bro, I already know that. I don't have to read this book.

Verdict: don't be fooled by the summary written on the book. It's not that good.

Michelle Willms says

Occasionally, a book is written that not only tugs at your heartstrings, but also squeezes your brain. This is one of those books. Instead of being a light fantasy, filled with frivolity and quests, this is a deep look at death, its dark doorways, never-ending paths, and painful connections. This is a book that addresses not only the fear of dying, but also the consequences of living. It is beautiful, thought-provoking, heart-ripping, and is so visceral it will stay within your own heartbeats for many years to come.

Dhfan4life says

Not sure if it's because I'm going through the ebbs and flows of finding myself after my own mother's death. But I really enjoyed this philosophical take/spin on discovering what it means to live your life to the fullest and to not be afraid of Death in the end. And have to say that the heroine more than learned about that particular lesson. Because once she achieved her "Dorian Grey-esque" dream of evading death and remaining young and beautiful forever. She realized just how even more trapped and confined she really was in her own fears. Truly a thought provoking gem for those that ponder the meaning of life and death.

Karissa says

I got a copy of this book to review through NetGalley. I really really loved this book. I enjoyed the Victorian setting and the beautifully flawed characters, as well as the premise behind the story.

The story is set in Victorian times and is about an 18 year old girl named Sezna who has everything but is absolutely terrified of death and losing her beauty. Then a beautiful stranger strikes a deal with her...he will give her the ability to stay young and beautiful forever, the catch is that she must survive off of the heartbeats of those around her.

I came into this expecting a YA paranormal book, but ended up with a story that was so much more. The story takes place across many many years (we are talking over a century here). The premise makes Sezna sound shallow and selfish, but she doesn't come off as that way in the story. Sezna has had a number of people close to her die and this had made her terrified of the idea of death. In addition to that her mother has drilled into her over and over again that Sezna's only worth is in her beauty. Sezna is also smart and witty but she has been brought up to believe that those traits don't have any value.

I absolutely loved the premise of someone living off of other people's heartbeats. It is fairly vampiric but I love the subtlety and poeticness of it all. Just a gentle brush here or there is all it takes for Sezna to steal a heartbeat.

The story is beautifully written. I love how our heroine is flawed and makes mistakes only to change her situation and make new ones. She does learn, but she learns slowly and over many many decades. It is a bittersweet story with an amazingly hopeful ending and both gothic and romantic overtones to it.

I loved how the story spanned the ages and we constantly get to see Sezna living in new times with new people and still having similar problems. The big reveal of who the mysterious young gentleman was was incredibly predictable...but that didn't make it any less sweet.

Technically this book is being marketed as New Adult, but I didn't really read any parts in here that weren't YA friendly. The heroine does "age" and get older in a maturity sense, but she remains forever locked at eighteen.

Overall I absolutely loved this book. I loved the premise and the main heroine and how the story spans a vast amount of time. The book is well written and engaging and the main character is captivating both in her

vulnerability and her selfishness. I would definitely recommend to fans of Victorian or gothic YA literature with a bit of a paranormal twist to it.

Bobbi says

I love how this book gives you a piece of history with every turn of the page along with Senza's life starting in the 1800's all the way to the 80's. I couldn't imagine living that long watching everyone I know pass right before my eyes and never being able to touch someone intimately or lovingly. Never growing old or having a family of her own, I'm not sure how she endured it. This book is packed full of love, loss, and loneliness. A.J. Krafon did an excellent job bringing this book to life.

I received this book for an honest review.

Tricia Schneider says

A darkly beautiful tale!

Writing dark, poetic masterpieces is AJ Krafon's specialty. I was captivated by Senza's tale right from page one! But, beware, this story is not for the faint of heart. In fact, I had to put the book down for a brief time because it was so bleak! My absence didn't last long, however, since I couldn't get the characters out of my mind and I just had to know what happened next. It's a compelling, mournful story. Ms. Krafon's writing is filled with luscious detail and vivid descriptions combining to portray an emotionally haunting story. Her writing is emotionally haunting. Senza is filled with curiosity, melancholy and a driven determination to not live the life her mother has chosen for her. With the assistance of the mysterious Mr. Knell, Senza becomes what I like to call, a vampire-like creature, who feeds off the heartbeats of others to survive. It's a unique concept, which I truly enjoyed reading. And personally, I connected with Senza on her obsession with death. It may be one of the reasons I needed to step away from this book. I don't admit to many, but death lingers often in my thoughts because I lost my mother at a young age. I understand that mortality is fragile and brief and those who are left behind are the ones to suffer. If only there was a way to cheat Death, to live forever... Although, Senza's particular thoughts and actions might have been different than my own, I could definitely sympathize which made my reading this story so much more raw and heartfelt. This one is, by far, one of my most favorite and memorable books written by Ms. Krafon!

P.S. I just LOVE the artwork on this cover! It's gorgeous!
