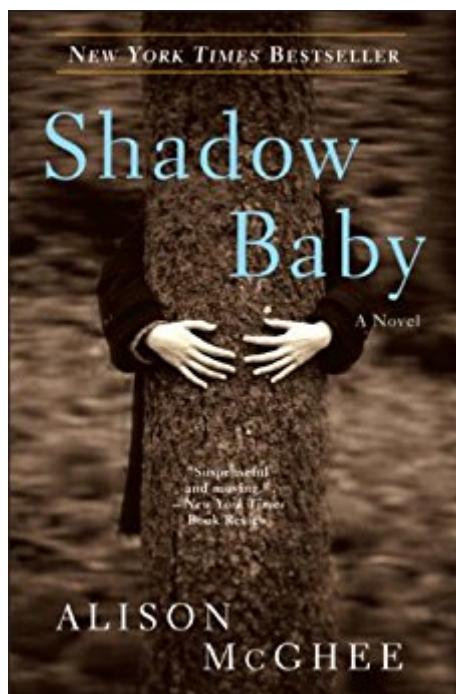


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Shadow Baby: A Novel



Synopsis

A young girl forms an unforgettable friendship with an elderly neighbor while searching for answers about her family's past in this national bestseller and Pulitzer Prize nominee. Eleven-year-old Clara is struggling to find the truth about her missing father and grandfather and her twin sister, dead at birth, but her mother steadfastly refuses to talk about these people who are lost to her daughter. When Clara begins interviewing Georg Kominsky, a lone old man, for a school biography assignment, she finds that he is equally reticent about his own concealed history. Precocious and imaginative, the girl invents version upon version of Mr. Kominsky's past, just as she invents lives for the people missing from her own shadowy past. The journey of discovery that these two oddly matched people embark upon is at the heart of this beautiful story about friendship and communion, about discovering what matters most in life, and about the search to find the missing pieces of ourselves. McGhee's prose glistens with shrewd truth and wild imaginings, creating a novel that will reverberate in the hearts and minds of readers long after the book is finished. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

What a wonderful, wonderful book! Clara winter (you'll see why she spells her last name without a capital when you read the book) is an 11-year-old girl you'll never forget. She is precocious in her wordminded-ness, yet naive and childlike in her propensity for fantasy. In Shadow Baby, Clara goes on a search for her own history--her dead twin sister, her MIA grandfather, her phantom father. This book is stunningly written, both hilariously funny and achingly sad. Truly a literary feat. Love it love it love it.

I found Shadow Baby to be a very engrossing story. Right from the very beginning, the "voice" of the little girl pulled me in. I wanted to know what happened to her baby sister, what happened to her father, grandfather...what would become of her friendship with "the old man". We find Clara winter, our narrator, a very unique 11 year old. Her thoughts and actions are really more that of a 18 year old. However for me, I didn't mind, I just accepted this and read on. Clara is a girl who is questioning life. She wants to know what happened to her twin sister who died at birth, what the real story was. She tries to get her mother to give her answers on that & other subjects, most of the time to no avail. So she develops a friendship with an older neighbor and this seems to give her a bit of an outlet and she begins making up stories about her families life, and his life. This book is unique in that it takes you on a journey, and you're not sure where this is leading a lot of the time. You want answers, the answers Clara is seeking, and you wonder if you'll ever get them. Or if you'll ever find out why Clara is the way she is. Over-all I enjoyed the "journey", I'm still left with a few questions...but this is definitely a book I won't forget any time soon!

In contrast to what a reviewer above said, I'm always really GLAD when someone else starts their review with a synopsis of the plot. Everybody's perception of what happened in a novel is a little bit different -- some people see one thing as the novel's focus and others something else. It can tell you a lot about a novel to read several different descriptions of the story (unless they're all swiping their descriptions from the book jacket!). So, here's the book that *I* read when I read "Shadow Baby": Novel about 11-year-old Clara Winter (who prefers having her last name pronounced without the capital letter -- "winter" -- which tells you quite a bit about her precocious character). When she is given a school assignment to interview an elderly person, she latches onto an old immigrant man living in a trailer, Georg. Clara's whole world is constructed of stories, so many of which she has invented herself that she can hardly remember what is true and what isn't. Through her friendship with Georg, Clara learns how to see the world in a new way -- to see everything without focusing on any one thing. And through that, she gradually begins to learn how to let go of her obsession with

the past. This was a very touching novel about both a girl coming-of-age and the wisdom one can find in the strangest places -- in an illiterate old metalworker and in a mixed-up 11-year-old girl. Recommended!

With the logic of Christopher from Mark Haddon's *Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Clara winter narrates her yearning for her grandfather and sister in a stark way that makes me sympathize with her more readily than I might had she used the cute attitude that weakens other child characters and sickens my stomach. She knows her situation and doesn't spare any punches when it comes to describing loneliness. This isn't to say she doesn't have her superstitions; she wears bungee cords in winter (which is never capitalized, for a reason she makes clear throughout the book) and dreams up imaginary lives for her absent family and Georg, the immigrant she befriends during a school project (who also plays a pivotal and touching role). But though her equipment and wordplay may at first seem trivial, they become a profound commentary on language, accepting relationships, and perception as, through a somewhat formulaic but honest and heartbreak ending, she learns that the implications of her words apply to her own growth as well. Clara is openly referred to as precocious and strange several times throughout the book, and I really like that. The author left her alone--she does sound similar to Chris, an autistic boy, but she is never labeled with any disorder. Too many times, I think, authors feel they have to tidy up characters' eccentricities by explaining them away as academically gifted or disabled. While it is good to gain insights about mental disorders etc., it takes courage to portray an atypical character whose eccentricities are bold, beautiful, and part of her, requiring no apology or diagnosis.

SHADOW BABY by Alison McGhee December 31, 2007 Rating **** (4 Stars) A wonderful story from the viewpoint of an eleven-year-old girl, SHADOW BABY tells the tale of a friendship between Clara winter (small W intentional) and the elderly Georg Kominsky (without an "E"). The two become friends after Clara chooses to use him as her subject in an essay she has to write for school. But after the assignment is over, she continues to see him, with regular meetings starting with Clara being dropped off by her mother. Clara spends time with Georg while he creates beautiful artwork out of metal. The story telling is the key to this book. The reader will notice a little at a time that Clara's truth and reality are not the same as the rest of the world's. It is clear that Clara's gift is that of a storyteller and writer. Part of what makes her tick is her need to understand what happened on the day she was born, a very cold and blustery night when something tragic happened, and while this event is hardly ever mentioned by her mother, Clara focuses on it every day to her mother's

frustration. Clara soon makes up stories about this event, and the reader will not be sure what is real and what is the imaginings of this very creative young girl. Readers will love the focal point, Clara's special friendship with Georg. Through her eyes we learn about his past, and again we aren't even sure at first what is real and what is made up. For me, SHADOW BABY was a very enjoyable story about a young girl who has a lot of questions about her humble beginnings, and will not rest until she gets some answers. At the same time, Clara grows up and matures under the tutelage of Georg Kominsky. The two share a very special friendship, one that we know will be treasured by Clara for the rest of her days.

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