



# The Immortalists

*Chloe Benjamin*

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## The Immortalists Chloe Benjamin

If you knew the date of your death, how would you live your life?

It's 1969 in New York City's Lower East Side, and word has spread of the arrival of a mystical woman, a traveling psychic who claims to be able to tell anyone the day they will die. The Gold children—four adolescents on the cusp of self-awareness—sneak out to hear their fortunes.

The prophecies inform their next five decades. Golden-boy Simon escapes to the West Coast, searching for love in '80s San Francisco; dreamy Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, obsessed with blurring reality and fantasy; eldest son Daniel seeks security as an army doctor post-9/11; and bookish Varya throws herself into longevity research, where she tests the boundary between science and immortality.

A sweeping novel of remarkable ambition and depth, *The Immortalists* probes the line between destiny and choice, reality and illusion, this world and the next. It is a deeply moving testament to the power of story, the nature of belief, and the unrelenting pull of familial bonds.

## The Immortalists Details

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Author : Chloe Benjamin

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# From Reader Review The Immortalists for online ebook

## Julie says

The Immortalists by Chloe Benjamin is a 2018 G.P. Putnam's Sons publication.

In a novel, so centered on death, there is a tremendous amount of life and living within these pages.

Beginning in 1969, the four Gold siblings boldly knock on the door of a fortune teller who then proceeds to impart to them the one thing nobody knows when they enter this world- the exact day you will die.

For better or worse, Varya, Daniel, Klara and Simon cope with this heavy information, but, their approach to life, their attitudes and actions could not be more different.

How will they decide to live their lives? By throwing caution to the wind, living every moment like it counts, or will they become a slave to the fortune teller's predictions? What would you do if you knew the exact date of your earthly departure?

Each of the siblings will have a segment dedicated to their life story, beginning with Simon, the youngest of the four.

Getting through Simon's story, the outcome of which is easy to predict, could make some readers a bit uncomfortable, as it is quite explicit. However, it is also very authentic and captures the era, the fear, the location, and atmosphere of the era perfectly. Simon's story sets the stage for a riveting family saga that prompts the reader to wonder just how much of our lives are controlled by elements such as pure luck or destiny and how much control we have over our own future. Can we help dire predictions along- force them to happen when they may not have otherwise? Is too much information advantageous or does it work against us in the end?

It's an interesting proposal and discussions about these concepts could be very deep, which would make this novel a fantastic book club read.

I did have some trouble with the plausibility or probability of certain events in the story, but looking past that, I was fascinated by the psychological effects obtaining information about the future had on the characters. The last segment is maybe the most revealing, and perhaps the deepest area of the story as the quest for longevity replaces the pleasure of really living one's life with gusto.

This story has some magical elements, but overall, it's a family saga, one that is perhaps a bit heavy, a little mournful, but not necessarily bleak.

I put this review off for a little while unsure of how to relay my feelings about the book. I'm glad I read it, as it did challenge me, forcing me to consider deep, philosophical subjects about life and death, faith, destiny, our susceptibility to suggestion, just to name a few. But, for me, the prose and characterizations is what really makes this novel stand out.

I'm not sure if this is a novel I would ever revisit, or if these are subjects I want to address frequently, but, anytime a novel can take me into an unknown realm, one that is a little out of my element or comfort zone, I

respect it, and give credit where credit is due.

4 stars

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## Carol says

### 3.5 Stars.

**BEWARE** the woman on Hester Street.

**As the story begins**, it's 1969 New York when four bored adolescent siblings....just for a bit of fun....pool their allowances and sneak out to track down a Seer they heard tell about who could predict the date of their **death**.

**What they discover changes each life forever.**

**One by one**, the individual stories are told, the dates of demise divulged as we follow a young Varya 13, Daniel 11, Klara 9 and Simon 7 throughout their often heartbreaking, challenging and tumultuous lives while experiencing the closeness of family, the devastation of loss and a uniquely plotted work of fiction.

**Take note**, that the first story is particularly graphic (*and predictable*) but indicative of the times and a 1960's San Francisco. There are also a few other (*quick*) descriptions of bodily changes mentioned here and there that I found bizarre and rather unnecessary, **and**, last but not least, as an animal lover, 'part' of one storyline was quite bothersome.

**Overall though**, each story is an interesting tale in itself....with a message....that culminates into one thought-provoking read....**Would you want to know?**

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## Hannah Greendale says

Conceptually intriguing but lackluster in its execution. Benjamin's contemporary coming-of-age tantalizes with its premise of four siblings who encounter a traveling psychic who reveals when they will die but is feather-light in its examination of the line between destiny and choice. Despite mention of mysticism and psychics, gypsies and magicians, the prose is unadorned, and the brevity of each character's story evokes a perpetual sense of detachment. The fun of *The Immortalists* lies in speculating which characters will meet their demise and wondering, if they do, how will Death take them?

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## Annet says

The Immortalists....

Imagine you are a kid and together with your siblings you sneak out of the house to go see a gypsy woman who is said to be able predict the day you die... It's 1969 in New York City's East side, and word has spread about a mystical woman, a traveling psychic....You go to see her and all of you get to hear 'your' date.

You go home and then.... Life goes on. Will you believe this prophecy, will it influence the way you live? Will you be able to handle it? How will you live your life?

This is the story of a Jewish family in New York, featuring four siblings, Simon, Klara, Daniel and Varya, and their mother. Each chapter tells about one of the sibling's lives and how it progresses.

It was a tough read, a rough read, raw, I really had to stop every once in a while because it was just hard for me.

But... it's brilliant too, emotional (tears...), weird, human and it's about love. Wew.... This book really had impact on me.

Because of the pain of this book I thought about four stars, but really this book, and its impact, really needs to get the full five stars from me.

Seriously impressive. Beautifully written, from the heart. Not sure everyone can take it, I had a hard time, but it's worth the read. Recommended & more to follow.

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## Larry H says

I'd rate this 4.5 stars.

If you could know the exact day of your death, would you want to find out? If you did find out, how would knowing that information affect how you lived your life? These questions are at the heart of ***The Immortalists***, Chloe Benjamin's deeply affecting and beautifully written new book.

In 1969, growing up on New York's Lower East Side, the Gold siblings learn that there is a traveling fortune teller in their neighborhood who can tell anyone the day they will die. While not everyone is sure that this is actually true, the four children—straightforward Varya, bossy Daniel, impetuous, magic-obsessed Klara, and dreamy Simon—decide to find out.

What the woman tells each of them that day will greatly affect their lives, none more so than Klara and Simon. Klara, wanting nothing more than to pursue a career as a magician and illusionist, can't get out of New York and away from her stifling family soon enough, and she lets her younger brother Simon convince them that the two should flee to San Francisco after Klara graduates from high school. Simon knows he is different and dreams that San Francisco will be the place he can finally be free to be who he is, to find love and be someone other than the son destined to inherit his family's garment business.

Klara watches as her brother pursues his life with reckless abandon, and while she wants to pursue her dreams as well, she knows she must be the stable one for him. Both are driven by the fortune teller's prophecy, which causes them to be more reckless and impetuous than they should, but also to take chances they might not otherwise pursue, to truly live their lives to their fullest. And when Klara finally meets someone who can help take her to the cusp of the world she craves entry to, she envisions bringing her illusions and tricks to an appreciating public, no matter the toll it takes on her.

"Some magicians say that magic shatters your worldview. But I think magic holds the world together. It's dark matter; it's the glue of reality, the putty that fills the holes between everything we know to be true. And it takes magic to reveal how inadequate reality is."

Meanwhile, Daniel and Varya, both angry and envious that their younger siblings left them responsible for their aging, widowed mother, try not to focus on whether what the fortune teller told them will come true, yet both pursue more grounded, stable careers—Daniel as a military doctor responsible for determining which

soldiers are healthy enough to go to war, and Varya as a researcher determined to find the secrets of longevity. But each have secrets of their own, as well as the shared secrets which cause them increasing fear, anxiety, and guilt.

*The Immortalists* is a fascinating book, one which was both surprising and predictable. Parts are truly moving and powerful—the first two sections, which focus on Simon and Klara, are much stronger than those which focus on Daniel and Varya. Daniel's section veers off-course with the reappearance of a character and a situation that seems entirely too pat, and Varya's section loses a bit of focus when it dwells in-depth on the science of her research, but the conclusion recaptures the passion, emotion, and beauty of the beginning.

Benjamin is a fantastic storyteller and she has created a tremendously thought-provoking book. Is our destiny really predetermined, or can we have a hand in changing what is destined? Does the idea of knowing how long your life might last encourage you to live life to the fullest, or does it instead fill you with more fear and dread than the unknown would?

I don't think I'll be able to get this book out of my mind anytime soon. The characters were so vivid, and even when the plot lost track, I was immersed in the story, which I'm being vague about because I don't want to spoil anything. I can't wait to see what comes next in Benjamin's literary career.

NetGalley and PENGUIN GROUP Putnam provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo....>

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## **Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says**

### **Live each day as if it were your last, while also not knowing it's your last day. ? 4.5 stars rounded up for *The Immortalists***

*The Immortalists* is a different sort of book. Hard to classify, and while it may not be for everybody, it was an addictive read for me. Four young siblings find out the date of each of their deaths from a gypsy fortune teller. The reader follows each sibling as "the day" edges near, and the way the stories were arranged and overlapped between each character added further interest.

Simon comes of age in San Francisco where he is free to be exactly who he wants to be. He lives a large and fast life. Klara becomes a magician and a mother, but has some deep internal conflict. Daniel follows what is expected of him and always seeks to protect his siblings. Varya becomes a scientist studying aging. Each storyline is fascinating in its own right, and the pacing was exceptional except for one section for me - Varya's. It moved a little slower, but it was still necessary for the messages of the book; which by the way, were profound.

This was a Traveling Sister read, and only two of us made it past the first section of the book. It was a pleasure reading and discussing this with Norma, especially how the book made us feel. I found this to be a special book with deep meaning. Check out the Traveling Sisters' blog for awesome reviews: <http://twogirlslostinacouleereading.w...>

Thank you to Chloe Benjamin, G.P. Putnam, and Edelweiss for the complimentary copy. *The Immortalists*

releases on January 9, 2018.

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## **Norma \* Traveling Sister says**

This was a Traveling Sisters Group Read, and only two of us were left standing in the Lush Coulee with the rest of the sisters leaving the coulee at or before the first goal of this book. Thank you to Jennifer for reading this one with me, it was a pleasure and I loved the discussion this book brought out.

4.5 stars! This was such a memorable and interesting read that had such a unique storyline with a profound and special message within the pages of this book that had us asking ourselves so many questions!

What if we could find out the date of our death? Would we want to know? Would it change the way that we would live our lives? Is it fate or do we have the ability to change our fate?

Love life for what we have and live it to our greatest potential as if it were our last, as we never know if we are actually living our last day!

THE IMMORTALISTS by CHLOE BENJAMIN is an interesting, entertaining, fascinating, and a different sort of read that had me feeling quite uncomfortable with some of the early scenes but then had me totally engaged and I needed to find out how this story was going to end. I thoroughly enjoyed following along the lives of these four young siblings who find out the date of each of their deaths from a gypsy fortune teller.

CHLOE BENJAMIN delivers a beautifully written, intriguing and captivating story here that was told in all the different perspectives of the four siblings as their date predicted by the fortune teller comes near. My favorite sibling was Klara, and I really loved reading her section and I really enjoyed the magical aspect to her storyline.

I would also like to mention that this book is not going to be for everyone. It's a thought-provoking book with a strong message that is for sure, but there were a couple of explicit sex scenes which I wasn't quite expecting and the descriptions were a little uncomfortable for me to read. I wish that I would have been forewarned about them so I would have been a little prepared before reading this book.

To sum it all up it was a fast-paced, heartfelt, powerful, thought-provoking, and a deeply moving story that was hard for me to put down. Highly recommended with caution!!!

Publishing Date: January 9, 2018

Thank you so much to Edelweiss, G.P. Putnam's Sons & Chloe Benjamin for the opportunity to read an advanced copy of this book in exchange for a review!

All of our Traveling Sisters Reviews can be found on our sister blog:  
<http://www.twogirlslostinacouleereadi...>

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## **Esil says**

I didn't love everything about *The Immortalists*, but I found it powerful in parts, and especially at the end. After giving it some thought, I'm comfortable with a 4 star rating.

The book focuses on four siblings. At the beginning, as children and young teens growing up in Manhattan, they visit a fortune teller who tells them separately and secretly the date they will each die. The rest of the book is broken into four parts, each part focusing on one sibling. It's not so much about whether the prediction is true or not, but about how the prediction affects how they live their lives.

In a way, it's a concept book. How would you live your life if there was a chance you knew the date of your death? But there's a lot more to the tale Benjamin weaves. These are complex troubled characters - affected by their time in history, their family background and their ties with each other. At times, I found that Benjamin pushed the internal and interpersonal drama a bit too far, but I still wanted to keep reading. And I'm glad I did because the end is perfect.

Some reviewers seem to be turned off by early graphic sex scenes. It's a very small part of the book — and in my view a necessary part of the story at that point — so it shouldn't deter anyone from reading further. (As an addendum, I should add that toward the end there are a few scenes that may be disturbing to people who have trouble reading about animals being mistreated -- they're not exploitative, but they may be hard to read.)

Thanks to the publisher and Edelweiss for giving me access to an advance copy.

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## **Elyse says**

Update ---I must add one more thought to this review: \*The-Book-Cover\* is not only lovely -- but now that I've read the book -- I recognize this 'perfect' design is symbolic to this story.

Jewish Kabbalists believe "The Tree of Life" to be a diagrammatic representation of the process by which the Universe came into being".

Jewish Kabbalists also don't envision time and space as pre-existing.

A wonderful -symbolically fitting book cover -- The mysticism of the fortune teller mixed with traditional Jewish beliefs - and the story told in this novel ---adds up to one thing: "The Tree of Life" -- Perfect!!!  
.....and "Beautiful"!

Wow....I thought this book was incredible- and I had many reservations about reading it: mixed reviews- etc.

I've lost HOURS of sleep - but this book took my mind off of concerns - and/or included them....which worked too.

To me this was so much more than, "would you like to know the date of your death?" - or even, "how you might live your life if you knew?" The story of Simon and Klara especially had me turning pages - and I became very interested in the birth of Ruby- wondering how she was going to fit into this story -given that she didn't see the fortune teller.

I didn't think a story could be more sad than Simon's ( the first story) - but not true - I felt the sadness for each one of them - be it regret - grief - fear - anger - guilt - etc.

These characters were distinctive. I felt as though I knew them.

So just spending time with each family member - getting to know them all - the relationships was enough to



keep me interested.

Plus, somehow I missed - or nobody mentioned to me - that this was a Jewish Family I learned things about Jewish Law that I had never heard before which was fascinating to me. I never knew the laws about suicide with burial accordance.

Plus I found it fascinating mixing the Jewish faith with a fortune teller — really opened my thinking.

This quote sums up ways I, too, was thinking while reading this novel...

It's an excerpt by the character Klara:

“Perhaps the point is not to resist death. Perhaps the point is that there's no such thing. If Simon and Saul are contacting Klara, then consciousness survives death of the body. If consciousness survives the death of the body, then everything she's been told about death isn't true. And if everything she's been taught isn't true, maybe death is not death at all”.

Personally - I think this is one of the best books I've read this year so far - and think it would make an excellent book club discussion pick.

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## Navidad Thelamour says

**See my exclusive interview with Chloe Benjamin about her novel *The Immortalists* [here!](#)**

*“There are two major theories about how to stop aging...”*

*“...It sounds like you're saying we can choose to live. Or we can choose to survive.”*

Chloe Benjamin's *The Immortalists* is a thoughtfully executed novel written in simple, yet often poetic, prose that allowed the characters' voices at their most forceful to shine on their own past the narrative itself. More than that, it is a novel crafted around a question we all ask ourselves more often than we'd care to admit: **“Is it more important to truly live or to survive? To dare to dream at our grandest or to play it safe?”**

And, if you knew the exact day on which you'd die, would you live your life any differently than you would without that hateful knowledge?

In their youth, the Gold siblings follow a rumor to the home of a Gypsy fortune teller who gives them the knowledge they seek: the exact dates of their deaths. These prophecies propel them forward for the rest of their lives, influencing their decisions, changing the courses of their lives and plunging the question into the forefront of their minds forever: Was the fortune teller right, and, if so, can they change the course of their own fates?

It's an intriguing idea, we must all admit. A scary one. A downright chilling one. And the leitmotif Benjamin poses to her reader manifests itself throughout the novel with compelling force, from the exploration of God and country's place within our existence, to what the prophecy of one's own death does to such beliefs. Do we cling to such notions and ingrained dogmas all the way to the end, cowering under them safely like warm, childhood blankets, or using them to fortify us in our resolve and everyday decisions—or, do we slough off and away such religious and secular beliefs and become our own reason for living, our own life force, whether to our own detriment or benefit?

*The Immortalists* bounds along a timeline spanning five decades, trotting through the start of the AIDS

epidemic in San Francisco—

*“You weren’t terrified?”*

*“No, not then... When doctors said we should be celibate, it didn’t feel like they were telling us to choose between sex and death. It felt like they were asking us to choose between death and life. And no one who worked that hard to live life authentically, to have sex authentically, was willing to give it up.”*

—toward Las Vegas in the 80s and into the early years of this century, tackling tough questions, such as the logistics behind increasing the human lifespan—and the politics of attempting such a thing. For readers who enjoy novels of sweeping timelines, they’re sure to find a treat in Benjamin’s latest novel. The period settings weren’t quite as immersive as I’d hoped—the societal and technological differences in backdrop between the decades were noted but not submerging in a way that allowed me to really feel I was moving from decade to decade with true authenticity. However, what I did take from this book were lessons to carry with me, delivered by poignant phrasing that outshone the actual stories of the four siblings’ lives. And that resonated loudly enough to forgive such specifics.

I had an interesting relationship with this novel as I continued my reader’s affair with it. I could not relate specifically to any one of the characters in this book. I would not have been friends with any of them in real life, and I did feel that some of the plotlines were predictable. BUT, I learned a lesson from every single one of the siblings that I took with me until the end, and each of those moments of recognition were special.

*What do you want?...and if [she] answered him honestly she would have said this: To go back to the beginning. She would tell her thirteen-year-old self not to visit the woman. To her twenty-five-year old self: Find Simon, forgive him...She’d tell herself she would die, she would die, they all would...She’d tell herself that what she really wanted was not to live forever, but to stop worrying...”*

This is a novel with a strong core and a big heart, with a moral and a central theme to tie all the threads together. Chloe Benjamin’s second novel continued her thus-far-established trend of exploring existential questions in our everyday lives, creating a brand for her that is sure to glimmer and shine, attracting new readers from far and wide. 4 stars \*\*\*\*

\*I received a copy of this novel from the publisher, G.P. Putnam's Sons, via Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review.

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Exclusive CHLOE BENJAMIN INTERVIEW: Magic Meets Humanity, Resilience Meets Reality – Chloe Benjamin Tackles the Ultimate Life Question: How We Handle Mortality

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## **Jen says**

Would you want to know when you will die? It would give you a chance to live life to its fullest or could hang over you like a death sentence.

It's 1969 and the 4 young Gold siblings decide to chance it when a gypsy comes to town to find out when

their expiration dates are up.

These prophecies dictate how their lives unfold because as much as they don't want to believe, their own self fulfilling prophecies will lead them down a path: Simon, the youngest, lives his life recklessly trying to fulfill his dreams at the cost of losing his family; Klara, the magician, thinks she is invincible of death and will outlive it, but the memory of the prophecy overshadows her life and she takes up alcohol as a way of coping. Can she magically will away her time? Daniel, the doctor, believes in science rather than the prophecies of a witch. But when his day comes, does the science prove truth over the reality of the words spoken to him as a young boy? And Varya, the eldest who is to live the longest. She dedicates her life to studying primates and their longevity; opting for science rather than the irrational. But longevity doesn't equate to living. All siblings influenced by the psychic's premonitions - True or false they padded the paths each child followed. The tragedies that may have been avoided.

Themes of religion, sibling rivalry, family and regrets, abound in this exemplary story that spans 3 centuries. And a totally cool cover makes this a 5?? read.

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## **Paromjit says**

Chloe Benjamin's epic *The Immortalists* has us considering some of the most fundamental and complex questions about life and how we live it. It is thought provoking as it asks does knowledge of our mortality make us live our life to the utmost or makes us fearful, guilty, and seek to outwit death? It is 1969 and in Manhattan, New York, the 4 Jewish Gold children seek a light hearted encounter with a gypsy psychic, who tells each of them their prophecies and their date of death. They cannot break free of this knowledge which shapes their futures for the following five decades. This is a story of family, loss, secrets, regrets, sibling relationships, death and above all else, about life.

The lives of each of the children is followed to the last moments in their lives. Klara and Simon are close as siblings, Simon cannot wait to leave home, this culminates in the two of them escaping to San Francisco. The prophecies determine that they live life to the max and at the edge. The gay Simon embarks on a search for love, plunging into life with abandon, displaying a reckless disregard for his own safety in his actions, ignoring all warnings. Klara pursues her obsession for magic, ignited by her grandmother, as she becomes a magician, *The Immortalist*, playing with ideas of reality. Daniel and Varya are resentful at how they have been left behind with their mother. Daniel becomes a military medic whilst Varya seeks the answers to living longer as a researcher. Their lives are considerably more stable but more strewn with guilt and fear.

Benjamin writes in beautiful vibrant prose, creating a compelling and philosophical narrative that draws in the reader effortlessly. The debate as to whether our lives can be foretold, our destiny written in the stars, or

can we be architects of our future, determining the paths we choose to take, is the *raison d'être* for this novel. Do we burn brightly in the lives we live in the full knowledge we are going to die, or do we allow ourselves to fall prey to our insecurities, guilt, and fear as the consequent possibilities that life offers shrink? There are the inevitable questions of how this has an impact on how religion and country can come to be viewed. This is a profoundly moving book, although uneven on occasion, with disturbed and complicated characters pushed into confronting their mortality from a young age. I much preferred Simon and Klara to Daniel and Varya as they exuded a greater hold on my imagination. This is a perfect read for those wanting to explore ideas and concepts through a fascinating and memorable collection of siblings living through a significant and turbulent period of history. Highly recommended! Many thanks to Headline for an ARC.

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### Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

3.5? 3.75?

I actually ended up liking this more than I expected!

The premise was very intriguing. Four siblings meet a psychic who tells them the exact date they will die. It tends to influence how they choose to live their lives.

This felt more like a historical fiction/contemporary than fantasy/sci-fi so be warned!

It's definitely a slow burning story where you follow each character throughout their struggles.

I enjoyed it!

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### Emily May says

*"And what if I change?" It seems impossible that Varya's future is already inside her like an actress just offstage, waiting decades to leave the wings.  
"Then you'd be special. 'Cause most people don't."*

2 1/2 stars. I have a lot of mixed feelings about *The Immortalists*. Though there were parts I enjoyed, I was left feeling underwhelmed and like I'd recommend many other similar books before recommending this one.

You should be aware that this is **literary fiction** and focuses in depth on the lives of four siblings. The enchanting premise that seems to promise elements of magical realism and the fantastical is a little misleading, as there is very little about prophecies and destiny. Though, personally, this didn't bother me so much. I really enjoy reading about families and the dynamics between them, especially when spread over many years, and I found it interesting to explore how each sibling deals with knowing the date of their death.

It begins with the four siblings visiting a psychic as children, near their home in 1960s New York City. This woman tells them - Simon, Klara, Daniel and Varya - the exact date of their deaths. The book then goes on to consider how this information will affect their lives and the way they live them. The sci-fi/fantasy aspects are waved aside quickly. While there are some brief mentions of fate vs. self-fulfilling prophecy, the author

never attempts to offer answers.

This is not a problem. My problem is that there are so many books about families with **more memorable characters, fewer predictable plot points, and less trite messages**. The classic stuff - East of Eden, Roots, Gone with the Wind, The Thorn Birds and The House of the Spirits, and the more recent stuff - Little Fires Everywhere, This is How It Always Is, Sing, Unburied, Sing and Pachinko.

The characters here didn't quite grab me like so many did in the aforementioned books. Some moments that should have been fraught with emotion seemed obvious and manipulative - (view spoiler) The first two stories - that of Simon and Klara - have very little in the way of family dynamics, as Simon's story mostly consists of dancing in a San Francisco gay bar and meeting his new beau, and Klara's takes her to Vegas to be a magician. Secondary characters roam into these first two perspectives, but none of them make much of an impact.

The second two stories are better. Daniel becomes a doctor in the military and his job leads him to discover something about the psychic who predicted the siblings' deaths. Though my favourite was the last - Varya's. She is now a longevity scientist doing experiments on monkeys. I thought her perspective was well-researched and thought-provoking, and it was easy to imagine someone becoming obsessed with aging when they know their own expiration date.

The writing is just okay, which maybe contributes to making the characters less memorable. Benjamin also occasionally falls prey to the - increasingly more common in modern fiction - **random sexual references**. This is something that always baffles me and it's not easy to explain because it's not about sex, exactly. It's like there'll be a scene where a character is washing the dishes and the author will suddenly mention his penis hanging limp between his legs. His penis has nothing to do with anything in that scene - the poor dude is just washing some dishes! - and yet, there it is. Here, the author introduces thirteen-year-old Varya by the "dark patch of fur between her legs" in *the second sentence of the book*. I just... why?

Overall, though, this is a mixed bag of interesting ideas, steps in the right direction that halt too quickly, and a somewhat pedestrian account of the characters' lives. **I felt like The Immortalists struggled to live up to its premise.**

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## JanB says

2.5 stars

What a unique and compelling premise. Would you want to know the date of your death? And if you did, how would that knowledge change the way you lived? If you change your life could that be the very thing that might hasten your demise? Or would you just try and make the most of every day?

The book opens with 4 siblings visiting a fortune teller who tells each of them the exact day they would die. After this intriguing beginning, the story is broken into four parts, one for each of the siblings. As we follow them throughout their lives, the stories were uneven. Several I liked and a couple I intensely disliked. Klara's in particular I struggled to get through, mainly because I don't like or care about the lifestyle of a magician/illusionist. Varya's story was the last one to tell. She is a research scientist and, unfortunately, there

are scenes depicting lab studies done on monkeys, that I found disturbing and heartbreaking. I could have done without poor little Frida's story. Of the remaining two siblings, one was far-fetched and the other unnecessarily graphic.

I thought there was a missed opportunity to explore the subtleties of the conundrum of fate vs self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead it reads like a family saga with very unlikable characters. Likability is not something I demand from my fictional characters. In fact, I usually love a fun, dysfunctional family story. But this one just didn't deliver.

In the end I was simply underwhelmed. Other reviewers seem to love it so this is probably a case of the wrong book for this reader.

\* Early in the book there are several graphic sex scenes between two gay men. It may be off-putting to some, but it's easily skimmed. I didn't feel it was gratuitous since it fit into the story line, but I do think it was unnecessarily graphic.

\*I received an e-galley of this book for review via Edelweiss

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