

EXCERPT

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Shades of Light A Novel

Available August 20, 2019 | \$18, 352 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4658-0

"Look for cameos by some of your favorite characters from the Sensible Shoes series in this quiet, honest story about the hallowing of the soul in its journey with Jesus through suffering. For anyone who has faced the darkness of depression or walked that road with a loved one, this is a beautiful, much-needed Christian vision of mental illness as both clinical (therefore treatable) and spiritual."

Sarah Arthur, Christianity Today fiction judge, author of *A Light So Lovely: The Spiritual Legacy of Madeleine L'Engle*

"Lighting Our Own Little Corner of the World"

It was the sighing, the news article read, the awful sighing that caught the woman's attention in the half-light of morning and led her down to the beach. She said the young whales were the worst, their splashing frantic, their moans tortured.

Wren Crawford closed her laptop and pushed her sandwich aside on her desk.

She knew better than to spend her lunch break reading stories about whales beaching themselves by the hundreds half a world away. She could barely manage her own daily intake of sorrow working with traumatized women and children at Bethel House. She didn't need to read about another potentially futile rescue mission. Her current therapist, Dr. Emerson, would agree: limit exposure to faraway tragedy and anguish as much as possible. Her job provided more than enough for anyone to absorb.

She fixed her attention on the many children's drawings and paintings taped to file cabinets and tried to shake the image, but it was no use. All she saw were the volunteers with their buckets, laboring to keep the survivors cool and damp by dousing them with water, desperately cooperating with a high tide to turn the creatures upright and coax them out into safety. Then they would form a human chain and try to keep the rescued ones from stranding themselves again. Already the carcasses were strewn for hundreds of yards along the New Zealand coast. It would be several days before they could assess whether any of their efforts had succeeded.

She picked up her phone to text Casey, her best friend since middle school. He might tease her for being sensitive, but he wouldn't condemn her.

Need a mental reset, she wrote.

What for?

Beached whales in New Zealand.

How about kittens somebody dumped in the alley?

Wren punched his number. "How many?"

"Three."

"Where?"

"Inside the dumpster. Heard them crying when I took out the trash."

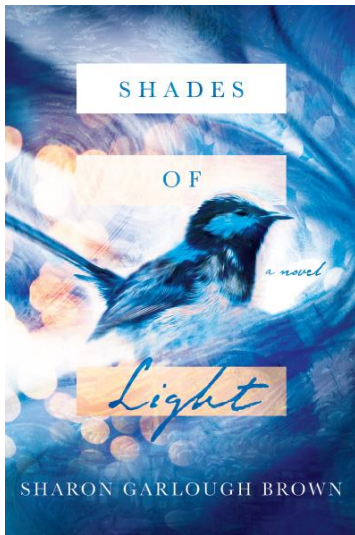


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She would never understand cruelty. Not to animals, not to children, not to any who were vulnerable. “Where are they now?”

“Playing with my shoelaces. And ow! Biting me. Hey, hey, Theo. Here—play with this.”

“You already named them?”

“Just one.”

“Does Brooke know?”

He laughed. “Not yet. Not sure how she feels about cats.”

Wren hoped his long-distance fiancée would approve. “Well, you’re a good man, Casey.”

“Or a sucker for cuteness.”

“Either way . . .” A coworker appeared in her doorway with the familiar *Sorry to bother you but there’s an emergency* look on her face. Wren held up a single finger to indicate she’d be there soon. “I’ve got to go. But maybe you can investigate whether there’s a no-kill shelter or a cat rescue agency? And they’ll probably need to go to a vet. What’s your schedule like? I’ve got to work late.”

“It’s okay. I got it. We’re not shooting anything today.” Casey, a freelance videographer, had been working for months on a project highlighting human trafficking in West Michigan. “But come by after work, okay, Wrinkle? I need to talk to you about something.”

“Okay.” She took one final bite of her sandwich. “But if there isn’t a safe place for them . . .”

“I know, don’t worry. Then I’ll keep them here until we can figure something out. And hope they don’t destroy my couch in the meantime.”

“Thanks, Casey. You’re a star.”

“Each of us lighting our own little corner of the world, right?”

Yes, she thought as she hurried down the hallway. In the midst of all that was crooked, dark, and despairing, *Shine*.

—Taken from the prologue, “February”

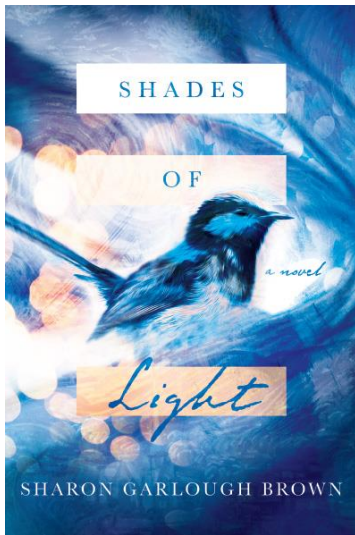


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ENDORSEMENTS



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Wren Crawford is a social worker whose struggles with anxiety and depression are starting to overcome her. She finds solace in art and spiritual formation along with traditional therapeutic interventions, but a relationship from her past threatens to undo her progress. As Wren seeks healing in this beautifully written novel, readers are invited to move beyond pat answers into an experience of hope that illuminates the darkness.

“Beautiful and Haunting”

“This novel skillfully tackles the dark topics of depression and suicide as well as the often misguided way Christians treat mental illness. It asks the hard questions, such as how one should support a loved one who deals with this disease and what to do when our best intentions are ineffective in providing help and solace. Beautiful and haunting, *Shades of Light* is a heart-wrenching and necessary read that ultimately offers hope.”

—Elizabeth Musser, author of *The Long Highway Home*

“Sharon Garlough Brown uses the vulnerable, sensitive, compassionate, and creative character of Wren to sympathetically immerse the reader into her valiant struggles of coping with depression and anxiety. With Wren’s deep insights into the life of Vincent van Gogh, we are invited to participate in the illuminating potential of *visio divina* to experience the comforting aspects of Vincent’s art. Sharon succeeds in revealing what hides beneath the surface of the two wounded and kindred spirits—Wren and Vincent—namely, their compassion and their spiritual and intellectual depth. This is a book that compels us to be more compassionate and less judgmental.”

—Carol A. Berry, lecturer, author of *Learning from Henri Nouwen and Vincent van Gogh: A Portrait of the Compassionate Life*

“Sharon Garlough Brown’s *Shades of Light* is a rare and beautiful study in contrasts. Faith and doubt, control and surrender, acceptance and resistance—all are woven into the darks and lights of a story so real and provoking that you will find yourself aching, wondering, hoping, and even praying alongside her luminescent characters. The struggles of depression and anxiety, of parenting and being parented, of loving and losing aren’t tied up in easy answers or simple narratives, but are lifted up for what they are: the beloved brokenness where God’s light and love get in.”

—Tara Owens, author of *Embracing the Body*

“Christians have not done well with the subject of mental illness. There is a great deal of stigma around the therapy process, calling people’s struggles ‘a lack of faith’ or ‘sin in their life.’ This marvelous book courageously unveils the reality of psychological struggle even among people of faith, pointing us to the Jesus who keeps company with us in everything that is hard—a companion in sorrow. Thank you, Sharon, for this work that I predict will be healing to many.”

—James Bryan Smith, author of *The Good and Beautiful God*

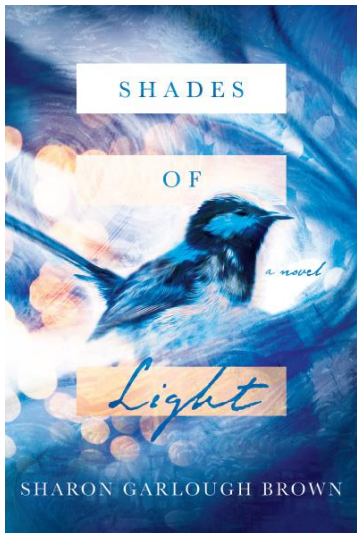


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“In *Shades of Light*, Sharon Garlough Brown draws us once again into stories of faith amid suffering and hope even in the darkness. Christians face mental illness like everyone else, but too often they wrestle alone and ashamed. As we enter Wren’s world of anxiety and depression, we are invited to join her muse Vincent van Gogh and the characters from the *Sensible Shoes* series as her ‘companions in sorrow.’ Sharon’s unflinching and compassionate portrayal of that sacred fellowship reveals Christ himself is with us on the journey, sharing our tears and holding us in love.”

—Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, author of *Glittering Vices*

“*Shades of Light* is a beautiful, moving story filled with Sharon Garlough Brown’s deep, spiritual insights. As a fan of artist Vincent van Gogh, I loved how the main characters, Wren and her mother, Jamie, drew from the faith this ‘companion in sorrow’ as they faced the challenges of Wren’s depression. Brown offers no pat answers to the questions raised by mental illness, but shows how joy and suffering are held in delicate balance through faith in the ‘Man of Sorrows,’ who is ‘sorrowful but always rejoicing.’ This is a powerful book, triumphant with hope.”

—Lynn Austin, author of *Legacy of Mercy*

“What a consolation this novel will be for those who have known the darkness! Too often church people approach mental illness with fear, simplistic theology, and useless spiritual bromides. By telling Wren’s story, Sharon Garlough Brown instead gently welcomes us into a companionship of sorrow where we can glimpse the dark beauties of grace. There’s bracing truth here about the stubbornness of mental illness, the spiritual and practical implications, the helpless ache of those who love but can’t fix. But there’s also beauty of soul, which emerges for readers through Wren’s sensitive dwelling in the paintings and writings of Vincent van Gogh. And as we learn to dwell in Wren’s world, to enter that circle of sorrow, we find at the center of it the compassionate, Gethsemane presence of Christ.”

—Debra Rienstra, professor of English at Calvin College, author of *So Much More: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*

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Sharon Garlough Brown is a spiritual director, speaker, and cofounder of Abiding Way Ministries, providing spiritual formation retreats and resources. She is the author of the bestselling *Sensible Shoes* Series, which includes spiritual fiction novels *Sensible Shoes*, *Two Steps Forward*, *Barefoot*, *An Extra Mile*, and their study guides. A graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, Sharon has served on the pastoral staff of congregations in Scotland, Oklahoma, England, and most recently in West Michigan, where she copastored with her husband, Jack, for many years.



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