

THIS IS HOW IT ENDS VS HEFT

In need of an easy-to-read and charming novel? Two new releases fit the bill – but which should you choose?



HEFT

Stylist's publisher Glenda Marchant on why *Heft* by Liz Moore (out now, £9.99, Hutchinson) should be this week's literary winner

Liz Moore's *Heft* and Katherine MacMahon's debut novel *This Is How It Ends* (TIHIE) both have relationships at their core. *TIHIE* focuses on the heart-wrenching story of Addie, her close-knit Irish family and their American cousin Bruno. While Liz Moore's *Heft* with its two narrators – Arthur Opp, an obese former academic, and 17-year-old Kel Keller – shows how, through a variety of circumstances, life can become incredibly lonely. At first glance neither sounds like a barrel of laughs but both are well-written, easy page-turners.

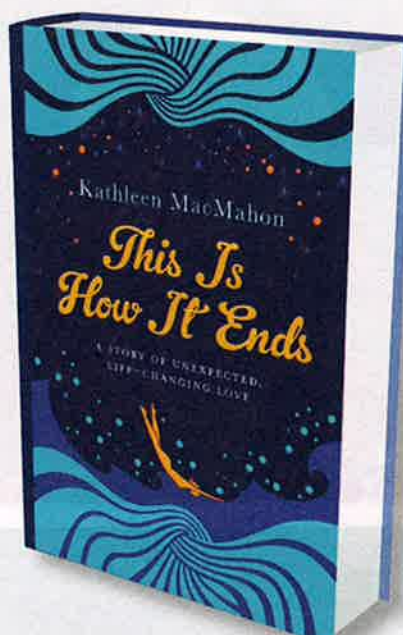
While I didn't love the book, all the characters in *TIHIE* are all fascinating (Hugh, Addie's insufferable father, is particularly well drawn). However, I'm someone who regularly embarrasses herself on public transport by sobbing quietly while reading but *TIHIE* left me strangely dry eyed. Maybe it was because I didn't care enough about the characters, or maybe because I guessed the ending very early on...

Heft, on the other hand, made me think. Former teacher Arthur Opp retreats inside his crumbling Brooklyn house on 9/11 and hasn't been outside in the 10 years since (Arthur is the "weird guy down the road" – the one we were all scared of but also intrigued by as kids). Twenty miles across town, Kel Keller is navigating life as the poor kid in a

rich school. Kel with little family and questionable friends is trying to cope with loss and failure, to understand who he is and what he might become. Their only link is Kel's mother Charlene, one of Arthur's ex pupils.

Moore cleverly weaves together the two disparate storylines keeping the outcome just the right side of schmaltz. Painting a portrait of Arthur as a sensitive and lonely individual who, prompted by a phone call from Charlene, has to learn to reach out to his fellow human beings again. Kel's search for his identity, and Arthur's re-emergence into the world teaches them both that having good friends is the most important thing in life – in fact, friends can be better than family. The result is a heart-warming tale that might just make you stop and talk to your neighbours more.

★★★★☆



THIS IS HOW IT ENDS

Stylist's publishing manager Jamie Klingler backs *This Is How It Ends* by Kathleen MacMahon (out 24 May, £12.99, Sphere)

Like Glenda, when I was reading *Heft* I really cared about Kel and his fight to fit in at high school while hiding a drunken, ill mother. However, I never really developed a tie with Arthur. Some pity came into play but he seemed an under-developed character to be honest. Happily, in *This Is How It Ends*, I was swept up in the lives of the two protagonists. While I was initially put off by the cover description: 'A story of unexpected, life-changing love' (I feared I was about to enter chick-lit territory), I found myself relating to

every character, charmed into enjoying their world and not wanting it to end.

TIHIE is essentially a love story between two distant cousins who were raised on opposite sides of the Atlantic. New Yorker Bruno, left unemployed by the Lehman Brothers collapse, decides to search for his roots in Ireland in the lead up to Obama's election. Being an American expat myself, this cliché of someone wishing to return to their homeland in order to claim their Irish heritage rang true (as did his distant Irish family's disdain for such an undertaking). Once in Ireland, he meets Addie, an unemployed architect currently caring for her injured father.

While both *TIHIE* and *Heft* alternate between the protagonists' voices I found MacMahon's characters far more recognisable – and therefore enjoyable. While I was reading it, I kept thinking about how much Bruno changed Addie's life; weeks later, the thing I remember most is how much Addie changes the worlds of those around her.

Reading this back, I realise it still sounds like total chick-lit, but what you actually discover are characters with nuanced voices, filled with insecurity, doubt, hope, and ambition. To be honest, it's really difficult to persuade you to read *TIHIE* without giving away too much. I've written and re-written this review but every version has felt like a spoiler. All I can say is that it's definitely worth reading (and I predict you will be recommending it to other people too...).

★★★★☆

THE VERDICT: READ *THIS IS HOW IT ENDS* FOR ITS CHARACTERS

This week was a particularly difficult Book Wars because it really did come down to liking the main characters – as in life, this can be simply down to personality and timing. *Heft* is garnering some amazing reviews for its heartbreaking portrait of misfits and is definitely worth reading, but it's *This Is How It Ends* that takes this week's title thanks to a brilliantly drawn, empathetic and believable cast of characters – a hard thing to pull off.

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