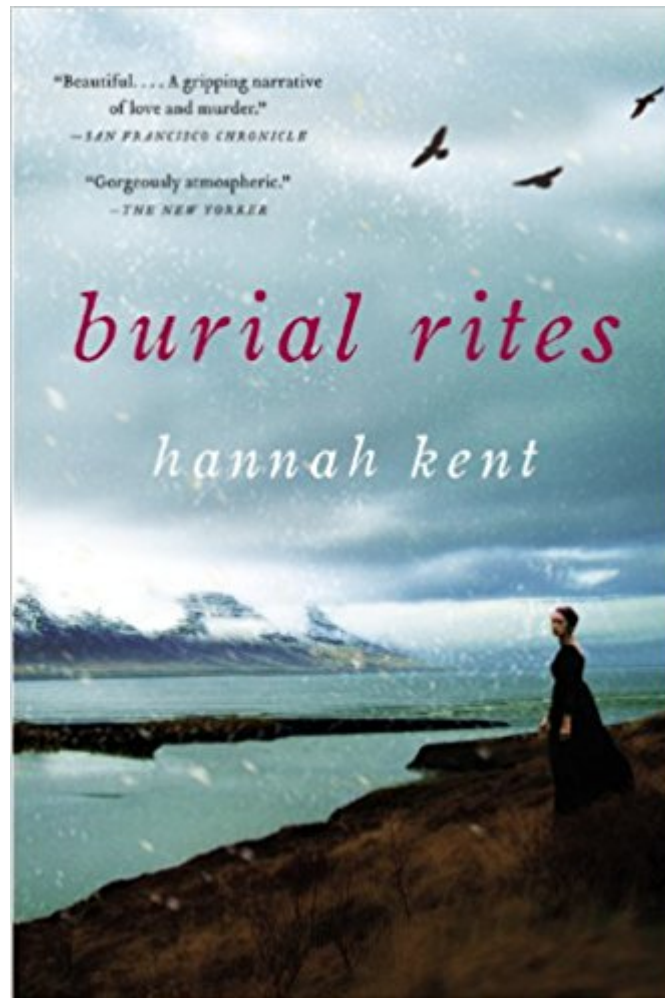


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Burial Rites



Synopsis

A brilliant literary debut, inspired by a true story: the final days of a young woman accused of murder in Iceland in 1829. Set against Iceland's stark landscape, Hannah Kent brings to vivid life the story of Agnes, who, charged with the brutal murder of her former master, is sent to an isolated farm to await execution. Horrified at the prospect of housing a convicted murderer, the family at first avoids Agnes. Only Tǎti, a priest Agnes has mysteriously chosen to be her spiritual guardian, seeks to understand her. But as Agnes's death looms, the farmer's wife and their daughters learn there is another side to the sensational story they've heard. Riveting and rich with lyricism, *BURIAL RITES* evokes a dramatic existence in a distant time and place, and asks the question: How can one woman hope to endure when her life depends upon the stories told by others?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've never known a book with such poorly-realized characters to affect me so much. There will be SPOILERS below: it's hard to spoil a book when the jacket copy tells you the ending, but I do my best. *Burial Rites* is a novel, based on a true story, about a woman awaiting execution. It's set in Iceland in 1829, which means it's always freezing and people live in squalid conditions and struggle to survive. It also means there are no jails, so after Agnes is convicted of murder, she's sent to live with a family as their servant while waiting to be beheaded. The family is understandably unhappy about this situation, especially since, as is typical, they and their servants all live and sleep together in one room. There's also the timid reverend, Toti, who is supposed to harangue Agnes into repentance but mostly just asks questions about her past. Naturally, much of the novel is spent in

flashback, as we learn about Agnes's hard life and the events leading up to the crime. Certainly a bleak story, but my primary problem is with the characters and their relationships: alternately inconsistent, unconvincing, and bland. For instance, take this exchange between Toti and a messenger: " `When he finished Blondal's letter, he looked up and noticed the servant watching him. `Well?' the servant prompted, with a raised eyebrow." `I beg your pardon?" " `Your response for the District Commissioner? I don't have all day." " `May I talk with my father?" "The servant sighed. `Go on, then." "That's how a servant behaves toward an (assistant) reverend? Really? Or take the scene where the District Commissioner himself appears at the family's home. The older daughter, Steina, has just been established as a cripplingly shy young woman of limited faculties.

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