

*Memoir Magazine Book Review*

Reviewer: J. Reagon

*Tangled By Blood*

Rating : 4 out of 5 Stars

In Rebecca Evans' memoir, *Tangled By Blood*, she attempts to control the horrors of her childhood and the long-term effects of sexual trauma within the confines of the poetic form. The memoir consists of three sections and does not follow a linear narrative arc, but instead flows back and forth through the events of her life using different voices, perspectives, and forms.

The memoir raises the question of love and family and whether we are obligated to forgive our family when their aim is to destroy us? Evans, and her sister, are marked by the blood caused by the sexual violence committed against them by their father. One particularly heart-wrenching scene describes Evans hiding in her middle school listening to her classmates buzzing with excitement about the impending blood of their periods and their transition to womanhood. She hides because she is no longer a child nor a woman. She has already has blood on her underwear. Evans and her sister, survive on the fringes; they are outsiders as a result of the relentless violation of their bodies.

As deplorable as the acts of incest are, the betrayal of their mother seems to outweigh those acts. Their mother's silence provided permission for the atrocities committed against these small children. Not only does the mother's lack of response go against nature, but she justifies it by telling her daughter that "any man is better than no man." Later, she blames her daughters for the attention they receive, and her spiteful words reveal her jealousy as she tears them down with insults.

Evans' poems explore the ghosts of her past and how they have affected both her and her sister, Tina, and their relationships. She devotes the second part of her memoir to her sister, in which she makes Tina the central voice. So intertwined are their stories and their bond that the story can shift between speakers and remain the same.

The memoir uses different poetic styles ranging from stricter poetic forms to a checklist. It is an experience of sound, mind, and sight. Evans' careful construction and visual arrangement of her words allows her to rebuild the broken bodies of her and her sister with a new form.

While the memoir moves into the joy and redemption she finds from motherhood, it is a powerful and difficult piece to read. Yet, the work is beautiful in the way it defies traditional narrative form and allows Evans to tell her story of survival on her terms.