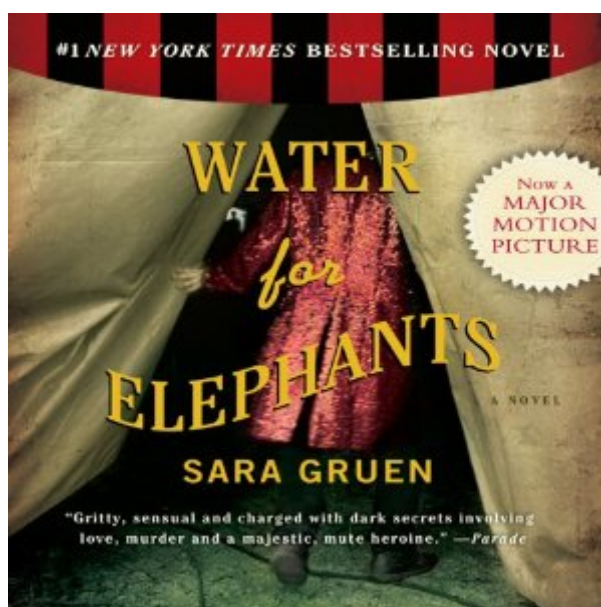


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# Water For Elephants



## Synopsis

As a young man, Jacob Jankowski was tossed by fate onto a rickety train that was home to the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth. It was the early part of the great Depression, and for Jacob, now ninety, the circus world he remembers was both his salvation and a living hell. A veterinary student just shy of a degree, he was put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It was there that he met Marlena, the beautiful equestrian star married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. And he met Rosie, an untrainable elephant who was the great gray hope for this third-rate traveling show. The bond that grew among this unlikely trio was one of love and trust, and, ultimately, it was their only hope for survival. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Stripped of everything after his parents' untimely death, twenty-three-year old Jacob Jankowski has failed to sit for his veterinary exams at Cornell, left with no home and no future, the country struggling through the Great Depression, bartering in goods instead of money. Hopping a train that by chance belongs to The Flying Squadron of the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth, Jacob hires on to care for the menagerie, his training an entre into this bizarre world; but as the novel begins, Jacob is an old man, restricted to an assisted living home, his memories sparked by a nearby visiting circus and a creeping helplessness that assaults his ageing body: "Age is a terrible thief. Just when you think you're getting the hang of it, it knocks your legs out from under you and stoops your back."The story is related in the somber tones of the Depression, the

hardscrabble and often unscrupulous business of a traveling circus and the heartless despots who make their fortunes on the backs of men who must do anything to survive. Star performer Marlena, an equestrian, is sensitive to the needs of her horses, although her mercurial husband, August, the trainer, is obsessively jealous and given to unspeakable cruelties. Uncle Al, Benzini Brothers circus owner-by-default, is a ruthless businessman who cares little for man or beast, engaged in a quest for fame to rival the great Ringling Brothers. With his advanced training in veterinary medicine, Jacob does his best to protect the animals from their harsh existence, especially Rosie, an elephant purchased to replace Marlena's lead horse. Jacob and Rosie share an affinity for one another, the huge creature at times almost human.

Although it is only April, I predict that *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen will be one of the best books I read this year. Gruen has proven to be an amazing storyteller. *Water for Elephants* is told in the first person but from two different perspectives--Jacob Jankowski at 23 years of age and again, at 93 years old. Gruen seamlessly weaves the chapters between past and present. Jacob at 23 is finishing up his last semester at Cornell Veterinary School when a family tragedy causes him to flee. He finds himself on a train for the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth in 1931. Needing a vet, the circus hires young Jacob to tend to their menagerie. Jacob at 93 resides in a nursing home where he laments the curses of old age, the passing of his wife, and the waning affection of his family. The arrival of a visiting circus triggers a flashback to his youthful circus experiences. 1931 is a hard time for almost all Americans, and the circus workers are as hard hit as any. Most are one step away from being homeless and jobless. Conditions on the circus train are harsh for most. Many workers go weeks without being paid, and they tend to disappear during the night when times are tough (management has them thrown off the train). The menagerie is often times treated better than the workers. But the circus does provide three meals a day and a place to sleep--even if it might mean a horse blanket on a train bed floor. Jacob discovers very quickly that he's just about the only advocate the animals have and he must battle a ruthless owner (Uncle Al) and a crazy animal trainer (August). Any circus has more than their fair share of interesting characters, and Gruen's circus is no exception.

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